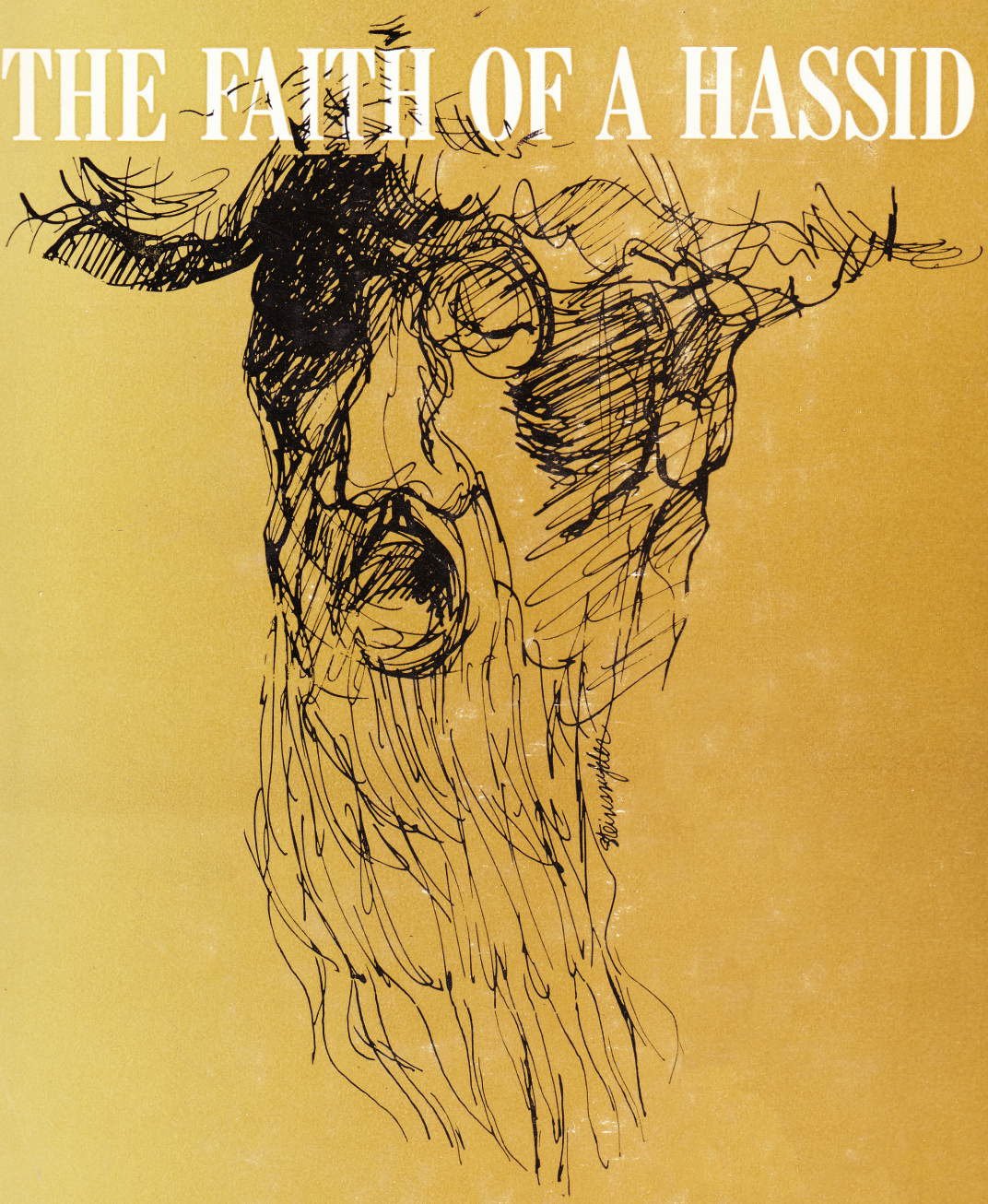
THE FAITH OF A HASSID



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THE FAITH OF A HASSID

Max A. Lipschitz

Today's religious renascence has also inspired the revival of Hassidic spirit and thought.

Dr. Lipschitz, who himself is a descendant of Hassidim, captures the joy and ecstasy of this pietistic movement which has attracted millions of Jews in the last two centuries. The story, told in a simple but literary style, reviews the history of Hassidism and its founder, the Baal Shem Tov, but presents for the first time in English the contributions of the Gerer Rabbis, the Rym and Sefath Emeth. Although originally written as a doctoral thesis, the manuscript was completely revamped so that it might serve as a comprehensive primer in Hassidism, describing in detail all the elements that gave the movement its beauty and vitality. Fascinating stories, parables and original interpretations make the volume exciting reading not only for students of history, religion and homiletics, but for all who are interested in an exciting and mysterious movement in Jewish life.

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THE FAITH OF A HASSID

by MAX A. LIPSCHITZ

Illustrations by

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THE FAITH OF A HASSID



DEDICATED TO

My beloved wife MIRIAM

My loving children SANDER, ROCHELLE and FAYANNE

and

In affectionate remembrance of my late parents,

MALKA LIPSHITZ, a Zadeiketh and

RABBI MAILECH LIPSHITZ, a Zaddik and

Hassid of Gur

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THE FAITH OF A HASSID

Preface

This writer has been particularly interested in Hassidism since childhood, having attended a Hassidic elementary school in Israel for three years, and having been nurtured in a Hassidic environment at home and in the synagogue. The Hassidic school of Gur in Poland and its leaders have had a singular appeal for the writer because his father is a Hassid of Gur, and, in 1927, was sent as an emissary to America by the *Yeshivah Sefath Emeth* in Jerusalem.

Despite the existence of many short essays on Hassidism, there are few definitive studies in the English language. To this writer's knowledge, there are no English studies of the school of Gur, which, at the peak of its popularity, claimed 30,000 adherents, nor of the *Zaddikim* of Gur, Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905), and of their court of Gur in Poland, and his successor and grandson, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Alter (1799-1866), founder of the contributions to Hassidism, to religious thought, and to the Jewish people.

Jacob Minkin writes in his basic text on Hassidism: "A writer of the fine arts made the qualities of stability, utility, and beauty the test of great architecture. An edifice, he said, must possess the elements of permanence, service, and grace, in order to be classed as fine workmanship."

Minkin continues to show that the Hassidic movement passed these three tests: it is stable, because it is not a temporary infatuation; it is utilitarian, because it brings the gifts of joy and hope to thousands; it is beautiful, and not crude as the critics claimed, because it brings a finer artistic expression into Jewish life through its music, dancing, and mysticism.

Minkin's thesis and analysis will be, for the most part, substantiated by the material presented in this book, which will concentrate upon the basic concepts, religio-philosophy and writings of the court of Gur. The mystical and esoteric aspects of Hassidism, however, will be avoided, as the writer believes that the complexities and other-world considerations of Kabbalah did not concern the average Hassid.

The creation of the State of Israel and the growing interest in the unique social, religious and political motivations of its society, as well as the need to reevaluate the concepts of Zionism and *galuth,* warrant an investigation of the historical Hassidic views on the Holy Land and on the redemption of the people of Israel and of humanity. A related study concerns the contribution of Hassidism to contemporary Jewish questions, now that the movement has, in the main, been transplanted to Zion.

Lastly, does Hassidism generally, and Gur in particular, have any real meaning for contemporary religious thought? Can some aspects of this popular pietistic movement be incorporated into today's American religious renaissance? In a word, has Hassidism a chance for revival and survival? Some conclusions may be drawn from research into contemporary religious literature on Hassidism as well as from our investigation of Gur.

Thus, to sum up, the following are the objectives, purposes, and aims of this book:

1. A study of the lives, works, and influences of the first two *Zaddikim* of the city of Gur; Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Alter, known as the Rym by the initials of his name; and Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, commonly called the Sefath Emeth from the title of his commentary.
2. A critical and impartial examination of Hassidism, with major emphasis on the Gerer *Zaddikim's* Hassidic thinking.

Research for this volume was undertaken at North Miami Beach, Florida, using the writer's own extensive library, the libraries of Temple Emanuel and the Bureau of Jewish Education in Miami, as well as the Library of

Congress. A bibliography, and a glossary of Hebrew and Hassidic terms, are appended to the text.

The author expresses his indebtedness to Yitzhak Alfasi, whose work on *Gur and its Founder, the Rym,* was the major source book for the information on Rabbi Yitzhak Meir. Abraham Yitzhak Bromberg's little book on the Sefath Emeth also proved most helpful.

Any student of Gerer Hassidism must indeed be grateful to Abraham Yissachar Alter whose compilation of stories and episodes concerning Gur in *Meir Einei Ha-Golah* makes research into this often under-estimated school possible.

Special gratitude and thanks are expressed for the guidance and inspiration of the writer's revered father, Mailech Lipshitz, and the counsel and encouragement of Menahem Mansoor, Chairman, Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies at the University of Wisconsin.

Aryeh Leib Heine of Jerusalem, editor and compiler of many works by his namesake, Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, was most obliging in supplying additional material relevant to this study.

TRIBUTE TO ARTISTS

The author expresses both his personal appreciation as well as the gratitude of the readers of the book to our artists, Jane Steinsnyder and Regi Yanich of Miami, Florida, who captured, in their magnificent pictorial interpretations, the spirit and ecstasy of Hassidism.

I

BASIC HASSIDISM



Chapter One

The Origins of Hassidism

The Hassidic movement was conceived in the first part of the 18th century by Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), known as the *Besht* (a name formed from the initial Hebrew letters of the words Baal Shem Tov). For 200 years the movement was the subject of vigorous controversy. Hassidism was initially opposed by many Orthodox Jews who were called *mithnageddim* (opponents), because of their antagonism to the movement. Hassidism was also derided and satirized by members of the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) movement, who were called *maskilim* (the enlightened), although it was later defended by scholars such as Moses Hess and Eliezer Zwiefel.

Today, poets, scholars, philosophers, dramatists, musicians, religious thinkers, mystics, and writers of fiction have discovered the affirmative values, rare beauty, and stirring appeal of Hassidism. Historical and critical studies of this popular movement—which in 1850 included almost half of Diaspora Jewry—have of late been quite numerous. Shimon Dubnow[1] and Samuel A. Horodezky[2] are credited with the popularization of the movement, the former being the authoritative Jewish historian, and the latter the great apologete and the first to suggest the philosophical and theological implications of Hassidism.

These theories found many adherents in the persons of Solomon Zeitlin, Solomon Schechter, Martin Buber, Paul Levertoff, Lazar Gilkowitch, Torsten Ysander, Hillel Zeitlin, Abraham Kahana, Aescoly Weintraub, Eliezer Guttman, Eliezer Steinman, Yitzhak Alfasi, and others. Most of their

works were written in Hebrew and German, although some have been translated into Yiddish and English.[3] Disciplined research in this vast movement or into the life and thoughts of one *Zaddik*[4] is difficult, since the leaders of Hassidism by the nature of their way of life and philosophy were concerned less about posterity and more about the immediate problems of their adherents; less about disseminating their gospel through the medium of the written word—through which direct influence is impossible—and more about personal contact with their own disciples, the Hassidim. They have, therefore, left few manuscripts, and their teachings have been transmitted through secondary sources.

The *Zaddik* preached on the following occasions: on the Sabbath, usually at the *tish*[5] (table) on Friday night or at the third Sabbath meal on Saturday afternoon in brief private discourses, in public addresses, and on other relevant occasions. At times, the more literary-minded disciples would take notes after the Sabbath, usually in an incoherent fashion. Not all *Zaddikim* were fortunate enough to have even such self-appointed secretaries who were very seldom actually commissioned to "write" for the *Rebbe*[6] (rabbi—*Rebbe-im,* plural). To differentiate an authentic tale from hearsay report, Buber introduces the latter by the phrase "it is told." Thus, study of many aspects of Hassidism, especially, the biographies, philosophies and schools of the many *Zaddikim,*[7] has suffered from a lack of critical and impartial examination.

But even before one can begin an investigation into Hassidism, one must study the historical milieu from which it sprouted and in which it flourished.

In the period preceding the birth of Hassidism, Jewish life in Poland reached its spiritual, cultural, social, economic and political pinnacle. For 150 years, as Jewish scholarship recaptured the stature it had reached before the Inquisition in Spain, education flourished and rabbinic scholars formed a kind of intellectual aristocracy, recognized as the leaders of the country.

Socially, the Jewish community of Greater Poland,

which included Poland, Lithuania, Eastern Russia, and the Ukraine, was centralized in the *Vaad Arba Ha-Artzoth* (Council of the Four Lands). Though its official function was limited to collecting taxes levied by the respective governments on the Jewish committees, the *Vaad* extended its activities beyond the office with which it was charged. It established official communal boundaries and judged inter- and intra-communal disputes, usually in the months of Adar (March) and Elul (September). The Council also concerned itself with education, both religious and secular, but primarily with the former.

Briefly, the *Vaad* governed the Jews of Greater Poland, a sort of political entity within the Polish government and a liaison between Polish Jewry and the monarchy.

Polish Jewry received due recognition for its role in the financial growth of that country during this era. Jews were engaged as common laborers, merchants, exporters, physicians, attorneys, and bankers, developing a prosperous middle-class society.

Unfortunately, the political, social, and economic status of Polish Jewry began to wane in the following one hundred years, 1640 to 1740. Firstly, anti-Semitism asserted itself, and the history of Jewish oppression began to repeat itself. The persecutions reached their climax with the insurrections and massacres of Chmielnicki in 1648-49. The toll of Jewish lives during the decade from 1648 to 1658 was estimated as 100,000 at the lowest. As a direct result Jewish refugees were to be seen all over Europe and Asia.

As the Jews were forced to leave their rural villages and take refuge in the safer larger cities, their economic condition degenerated. The general political and economic condition of Poland worsened, affecting all of Polish Jewry. Competition increased as the cities, especially those of the Ukraine, became more heavily populated by the stream of Jewish refugees pouring into them. Jews, of course, were blamed for the economic depression and it became increasingly difficult for Jewish merchants to sustain themselves. Many Jews had no alternative but to return to the villages of the Ukraine and engage in other occupations, mainly as



Depressed religious, political and economic milieu in the shtetl.

innkeepers and share-croppers, leasing lands from the so-called *pritzim* (wealthy landowners). In Poland, only 3% of the Jewish population was engaged in these occupations, compared to 90% in the Ukraine.

Economically and politically, these 100 years (1640-1740) can be considered the black years in Polish Jewish history, exclusive of the recent holocaust. In addition to constant harassment, discrimination, and physical persecutions, the Jews became poverty-stricken, whereas in previous years few Jews lacked sustenance.

It was at this time that the fearful poison of Sabbatianism pervaded Polish Jewry. Messianism is always born during periods of destruction and holocausts, persecutions being interpreted by Jews as pre-messianic woes. Even after Sabbatai Zvi (1626-1676) and later Jacob Frank (1726-1791), were proven to be frauds, there were still many who refused to relinquish this source of comfort and hope for survival, a tenet of faith resulting in cleavages and tragic disputes within the Jewish community.

In the year 1731 the justified antagonists of Sabbatai Zvi persecuted the *Ramhal* (*Rabbeinu* Moshe Hayim Luzzatto) (1707-1747), author of the popular ethical treatise *Mesillath Yesharim,* fearing his increasing popularity among the masses as another messiah. At this time Luzzatto disassociated himself from the Sabbatai heresy.

A second important pre-Hassidic event was the famous debate between Yaacov Emdin (1697-1776) and Yehonathan Eibeschutz (1690-1764) in the year 1750, ten years before the death of the Besht.

Sabbataism and the schism it created within the Jewish community, in addition to the waning influence of mysticism and other esoteric philosophies, contributed to the general antagonism to the new semi-mystical movement of Hassidism.

It is of the utmost import to remember the general truncated and degenerated state in which Jewry and Judaism found itself before the birth of Hassidism. The oppressions, economic depression, and the tragic consequences of Sabbataism resulted in a despirited community uninterested

in scholarship or scholars. Many *talmidei hakhamim* (rabbinic scholars) emigrated from Poland to Germany to accept rabbinic posts. An educational lethargy existed in Poland prior to the rise of Hassidism. Scholars were persecuted not only by the Jewish masses but also by lay leaders who sought self-aggrandizement and considered the rabbis dangerous to their self-appointed positions. As could be expected, these communal leaders were the first to wage a strenuous battle against the founders of Hassidism and their disciples.

Hassidim consider the following historical incident as the will of providence paving the way for Hassidism. The Council of the Four Lands, the *Vaad,* had originally been established to collect taxes, although it had gradually widened its area of activities. When, in 1764, the government of Poland levied a per capita tax of two guilden, relieving the *Vaad* of its duty to collect communal taxes, the Council disintegrated. This incident, coupled with the emigration of rabbinic leaders, created an administrative void which Hassidism and the *Zaddikim* began to fill. The *Vaad,* no longer functioning as a body, was unable to oppose Hassidism publicly.

The economic, social, and political conditions which created a society of share-croppers and innkeepers, also mitigated against Jewish education. For the first time in many centuries, ignorance bordering on illiteracy was rampant. Certainly, estrangement from religious studies became the rule rather than the exception. When a people is concerned primarily with survival, its concern for education is only secondary.

Since religious scholarship and Torah learning were always the *raison d'etre* for Jewish existence, there was a danger that the Jewish masses, recognizing their ignorance and their failure to attain their former intellectual prominence, would no longer feel fully identified with *Klal Yisrael* (community of Israel at large). They had failed their God, their teachings, and their children, and the negative attitudes reflected by their rabbinic leaders towards them increased their despondency and spiritual depression. Their

religious feelings, however, found some fulfillment, if not in learning and the study of law, then in mysticism and superstition.

This was the milieu in which Hassidism was born. Hassidism may be translated as "pietism," and is derived from the word *hesed* (piety or loving kindness). The movement arose first in forlorn Podolia where Jewish misery was at its worst, Jewish scholarship at its lowest ebb, and where religious feeling vied with ignorance and superstition.

In this dispiriting climate, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov came forward as a pastor, confidant and preacher, to expound a new but simple philosophy of Judaism.



The Master of the Good Name

Chapter Two

The Founder, Israel Baal Shem Tov

A book touching upon any aspect of Hassidism would be incomplete without both a discussion of the inception of the movement and a review of the life of its founder, Israel Baal Shem Tov (or by abbreviation, Besht).

Israel Baal Shem Tov was born in 1700 (exact date unknown) in the city of Okopy (Tlust), Podolia, on the old Polish-Turkish border. He was a simple villager, son of simple peasants of meagre learning and means, whose family lineage is unknown. His mother was known to be a midwife. His parents died while he was yet a boy, and Israel was cared for by a few well-meaning friends of the family. He rejected opportunities for formal education and was often found in the forest meditating and praying. Israel undoubtedly felt insecure in a society of strangers whose sincerity and motivation he doubted.

During these lonely meditations in the woods, Israel already sought to find the essence, truth, and *raison d'etre* in life. He felt a calling to discover the answer for himself and his fellowmen. Already as a child he exhibited the traits which marked out the man. He was confident of his mission and was encouraged by the testament of his father: "That he must be a light radiating to all Israel; he must always remember that God is with him; and, therefore, must fear nothing except God himself."[1]

Israel became an assistant teacher in a *heder* (private Hebrew school), where his duties consisted primarily in taking charge of young children. He then became an assistant sexton in a synagogue, where he distinguished himself

by his piety but also by his unwillingness to mingle with adults, keeping aloof and distant most of the time.

He was married at the age of fifteen, but his wife expired soon after. He left Okopy for a small town near Brody in Eastern Galicia, believing that once away from his native town, he would be fully emancipated, free as the birds, flowers, and trees in his childhood haunts. Again, he returned to teaching and was especially adept at handling small children. It was there that he married Hanna, a pious and dutiful daughter of Ephraim, father of Rabbi Abraham Gershon Kutover of Brody. The good rabbi did his utmost to improve his brother-in-law's neglected education, but failed.

Living on the fringe of the Carpathian Mountains, he was inspired by the natural scenery and spent many days in total solitude, dreaming and singing strange and fantastic songs. It was in the solitude of these surroundings that Hassidism was born. It is told that he studied Torah alone at night and during the day feigned ignorance. Eventually, the fame of his strange, holy, and enigmatic ways began to circulate.

In the thirty-sixth year of his life, in 1736, the time for his *hithgalluth* (revelation) had come "for so was it ordained in the Heavens." He gave up his teaching and became a *Baal Shem,* (a healer) of the sick and a miracle worker through the Name of God. He was successful in his vocation and the number of his patients grew. There were many such *Baalei Shem,* but he was referred to as the *Baal Shem Tov,* Master of the Good Name, for he was of good and godly repute. The Besht, as he was called (after the initial letters of *Baal Shem Tov*), impressed his contemporaries not only by his piety, but especially by the religious enthusiasm expressed in his mode of prayer, his generosity, compassion, and simple teachings.

In 1745 the Besht settled in Medzhibozh in Podolia. It was here that the new movement, Hassidism, was officially established, announced, and became quickly popular. His adherents increased rapidly as people from far and near came to him. He was not only a healer of bodily ailments

but also a physician of the soul. Though primarily intended for the less learned, his new gospel attracted many scholars and noted rabbis who later became the apostles of the movement. For eleven years he was their guide, mentor, counselor, and *Zaddik.*

He wrote no books, but taught orally through pithy sayings, homilies, and parables, which were somehow retained by succeeding generations and finally put into writing by his successors and their secretaries.

The Besht was not a Lurian mystic, nor did he ever reflect any messianic pretensions. Legend, of course, exaggerated his actions, powers and teachings. The Hassidim's prolific imagination attributed to the Besht the ability to work wondrous miracles, to prophesy, travel long distances in a few minutes, and even to resurrect the dead. Despite these exaggerated beliefs in the Divine powers of the new Master, he was never portrayed as a saint whose life was distant and aloof. On the contrary, his powers lay in his full participation in the affairs of men. He was a man of the people who mingled freely with his flock, in the main common people—farmers, innkeepers, brewers, and tradesmen.

His scholarship was questioned by both protagonists and antagonists, but his full knowledge of Talmud and Rabbinics was reflected in his quotations and discussions. The Besht openly rejected keen analytic study known as *Pilpul,* being more inclined to *Kabbalah* (mysticism). Even in this area he did not imbibe of its speculative depths. Nor did the rationalism of the philosophers attract the Besht. There was no intellectual gulf between Rabbi Israel and the people he helped. He shared their beliefs, views and superstitions. The primary belief of the Besht was that any man can find God, for He is diffused through all creation. Even an animal serves Him to the extent of its powers. Every human occupation was an act of worship, for God has willed it that man should serve Him in all manners. One need not be learned to serve the Lord. Sincere and devout prayer uttered with *kavanah* (deep concentration) and ecstatic joy was an

equally important medium through which one could attain a closer proximity to God.

The point is illustrated in one of the more popular stories told about the Besht. A young illiterate lad, sitting with his father in the synagogue on the Day of Atonement, became fretful and impatient with the length of the service. Suddenly, during the *Neilah* (closing service), he took his little whistle and let out a shrieking sound. Rabbi Israel, noticing his father's embarrassment, consoled him with the statement that all the prayers pronounced by the worshippers all day did not contain the sincerity and simplicity of the young lad's whistle. Perhaps the child's manner of expression would open the gates of penitence.

Indeed, the masses' hunger for pure and simple faith, unaffected by Talmudic casuistry and complex *Pilpulism*, was satiated by the religious passion of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov.

Furthermore, the dejected and rejected Jew, disassociating himself from Torah, God's revealed Word, had begun to feel God's absence. Could it be possible that God's presence was extended beyond the pages of the Talmud and outside the domain of the synagogue? Surely, He would not reveal Himself to the farmer in the unclean fields, or to the inkeeper!

Rabbi Israel, who worshipped God in the wilderness of the Carpathian Mountains, replied without equivocation that God's glory fills the universe and can be experienced, at times, even more profoundly and more passionately outside the walls of the house of study and house of prayer. Indeed, wherever man chooses to serve God in deep humility and with utter simplicity, in all the multi-faceted activities of the day to day living, he can elevate himself from rung to rung on the ladder leading to the throne of the Almighty.

Jacob Minkin, author of *The Romance of Hassidism*, claims the Besht to be a Spinozan pantheist without knowing it: "It came to him simply and naturally from his profound love and knowledge of nature. God did not create the world and then withdraw from it, but creation is continuous, progressive, unending."[2]

Unlike the God of Rabbi Luria, who was a solemn and melancholy Deity demanding asceticism, tears, and self-mortification, the God of Rabbi Israel was happy and joyously real, insisting upon being worshipped through song, joy, and ecstacy. "No child," said the Besht, "is born except through pleasure and joy. By the same token, if one wishes his prayers to bear fruit, he must offer them with pleasure and joy."[3]

Rabbi Israel drove out the melancholia, fear, and depression from the hearts of the oppressed Jewish masses. He constantly admonished his disciples not to weep in prayer, but to worship God in joy. Thus did Israel bring to Judaism a new joyous spirit immersed in the all-pervading, ever-present God-head.

Moreover, in contrast to the *Kabbalists,* the Besht encouraged the gratification of the appetites and senses, for man may serve God with his body as well as his soul. When he heard that one of his disciples was following ascetic practices, he wrote to him: "I hear that you think yourself compelled from religious motives to enter upon a course of penance and fasts. By the counsel of God I order you to abandon such dangerous practices, which are but the outcome of a disordered mind. It is written: 'Thou shalt not hide thyself from thine own flesh!' Fast, then, no more than is prescribed; follow my command and God will be with you."[4]

Rabbi Israel's religious feelings were exceptionally deep, as the Psalmist's words, "I place God before me always" (Ps. 16:8) were practiced literally by him. He spoke of cleaving to God and desiring to be in *dveikuth* (perfect union with Him). He employed the means of concentrated thought, devotion, study, and prayer to perfect that union.

His love of Israel was only secondary to his love of God, and he loved not only Israel the "people," but every Jew individually, great or humble. He was especially empathic with the downtrodden, the poor, and the oppressed. It is known that as his following grew, Rabbi Israel gained wealth, but dispersed all his money to the poor.

He often spoke of prayer as the food which sustains the

angels and creates spiritual values. But these prayers must not be offered in a perfunctory manner, for then they become mechanical and lifeless. He often castigated worshippers for reading in a hasty mumble without feeling: "I cannot pray here. Those prayers are dead prayers. They have no strength to fly to Heaven. They are crushed; they are one on top of the other; the house is filled with them."[5] The external forms of prayer do not matter, and time and place need not interfere. Being reproached for praying long after the limited time for worship had passed, his answer was, "Can a child be told when he may approach his father?"[6]

Rabbi Israel passionately despised pride and arrogance, which he described as idolatry in disguise. Nobility was important but humility was no less important. "Vanity," he said, "has the effect of crowding out the *Shekhina* (God's in-dwelling spirit) from the world." "There is no room for God in him who is full of himself," he was quoted as saying. The true test of prayer is the feeling of humility it leaves behind.[7]

Though the Besht did not penetrate into the mystical depth of *Kabbalah,* he dabbled in its more practical and spiritual elements. He held that the soul of man is his crowning glory, for it contains the indwelling spirit of God and is part of His essence. All the souls will return to the Universal Over-Soul (God) when the messiah will arrive.

The ideal of the *Zaddik* evolved from the Beshtian ideal that man must emulate God and manifest His Truth on earth. Jacob Minkin coined the phrase "Man-God" as a first reference to the *Zaddik,* and called it the most daring innovation of Rabbi Israel. The Besht believed in the efficacy of the *Zaddik* whose primary motive for living is union and communion with God. If this union is perfectly accomplished and man is as near to God as any human can be, he attains the power to perform miracles and wonders. "To him there were no fixed forms of nature, all being the expression of the will of God. It is therefore not to be marvelled at that things could be changed at the behest of that will."[8]

The Besht preached unquestioning love for the *Zaddik,* for the eyes of God are always upon him and in him there are the largest "sparks of divinity." The most important preparation and prerequisite for the development of the *Zaddik* was his eternal love for his people, especially the individual Jew. He bade the *Zaddik* pray not only for his own devotees, but for all Jews and Gentiles.[9]

Thus, did Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov inaugurate teachings which, though not far removed from basic and ancient Jewish ethics and practices, nevertheless injected a new "reform" into accepted Jewish traditions and concepts. The antagonists to Hassidism suspected a complete reformation of long established practices and rituals. They feared that Torah scholarship, which they claimed was belittled by the Besht, would rapidly decline because greater emphasis was placed on prayer, pleasure, and piety. "Yet, how can piety not include penitential exercises and fasting? If prayer was essential why not offer it at the appointed hours?" asked his opponents.

Contemporary rabbis ridiculed the quaint gesticulation of the Hassidim and their strange motions and shouting during prayer. They accused the Besht of reverting to the heresies of the false messiahs, and laughed at his simple dress and uncouth appearance. They publicly announced that he was an *am ha-aretz* (ignorant one) who was totally unfamiliar with Talmud and Rabbinics.

As the Besht's popularity increased, a vile campaign was launched against him, consisting of open slander and accusations of vulgarity, incontinence, and drunkenness. The attacks did not provoke the Besht to reciprocate with any defense, believing as he did that the *mithnageddim* (antagonists) were bringing about their own destruction. Indeed, nothing retarded the progress of the movement which, even before the Besht's death, became the faith of thousands in seven provinces of Eastern Europe.

What were the major objectives of the Besht? The name adopted by his adherents, "Hassidim" (pious ones), reflects his basic aim. Like the Hassidim in pre-Maccabean Palestine, they, too, organized to spearhead a defense against

those who desired to undermine basic Judaism. Despite the accusations against them, these "modern" Hassidim turned to Torah, appreciated Jewish Law, and rejoiced in the study of Bible and Midrash. The Besht did oppose the casuistry and *pilpulism* of the rabbis and their complex legalistic interpretations, but did not endeavor "to free the common folk from the yoke of haughty scholars," as is often asserted. Various scholars affirm that the Besht did not seek to break down the adoration which the masses cherished for their rabbinic leaders; nor did he run counter to legalism, inasmuch as he and his disciples added new regulations beyond the requirements of accepted codes in order that their adherents might be true *Hassidim* or "Pious Ones."[10]

Most historians agree that the Besht never dreamed of establishing a new and different faith, nor ever expected to attract thousands of followers. He probably intended to form a small sect of highly sensitive men who would become an exemplary, religiously elite group, upon whom God would vouchsafe His Holy Spirit. The sect would challenge the religious sensitivities of all Jews and would inject a new spirit of hope and joy into a people who were at that time dejected and depressed. The Besht's initial aims undoubtedly changed as the movement spread to the masses, and as his own new "powers" were recognized both by his adherents and himself. In a sense, the Besht is responsible for both the success and failure of Hassidism, since he did inject forms of magic miracles and hero-worship into his practices.

Like his life, Rabbi Israel's death is also steeped in legend. It was said that he was destined to make his Ascension in a fiery chariot, like the Prophet Elijah, but his generation was not worthy of such a miracle! He was stricken on Passover, and died on the Feast of Shavuoth in the year 1760. He did not reflect fear at his death but instead comforted his disciples, "I can see a door opening while the other is closing." Hassidim are convinced that the door to eternity opened wide for the Besht who awaits

their entry, and who will receive them with the same love, joy, and compassion exhibited during his lifetime.

It is the writer's opinion that the Besht did ardently espouse the kernel of an old-new idea which would have had a lasting influence upon Judaism. Unfortunately, his method of personal *hithgalluth* (revelation), and his position as a *Baal Shem,* as well as his over-emphasis on piety rather than intellectuality bore the seeds of the waning influence of the movement.



Intention—Cleaving—Ecstasy

Chapter Three

Basic Principles of Hassidism

What is Hassidism? Is it a new way of life, a different *Weltanschauung,* a national movement, or a new covenant for the individual man? Was it intended to be a new testament or just another commentary on traditional Judaism?

Further, wherein lies the movement's major emphasis: upon the *niglah-nistar* (revealed, or hidden), on mind or heart, on the study of Torah, or on the study of the way of life which it teaches?

Students of Hassidism agree that the Besht had no intention of revolutionizing Judaism or rebelling against its basic precepts. The proof lies in the fact that Hassidism never "destroyed the law," nor did they remove one "tittle" from the letter of the law in their observance of and adherence to rituals and traditions. Neither did they object to the additional restrictions imposed by the rabbis.

Admittedly, unlike the rabbinites who encouraged additional prohibitions as a fence to protect the inner law, Hassidim were inclined to reject mere observance without deep concentration and zeal. The movement, despite its constant emphasis on observance, did not add restrictions but rather injected the prerequisite of *kavanah* (sincere intention) for its ideal performance. They were more concerned with the positive commandments, the "Thou Shalts" than with the "Thou Shalt Nots."

Hassidism, which captured the allegiance of thousands and inflamed the imagination of the masses, concerns itself mainly with man's life in *olam hazeh* (this world). Its cornerstone was God and man's service to Him. Its purpose was to teach the Jew how he could best serve God for his

own spiritual elevation. Whereas the mystics attempted to reveal the ethereal and transcendental aspects of the "upper" worlds and cosmic "lights," which is often beyond the ken of mortal mind, Hassidism revealed the transcendent God and brought Him down to earth, especially to His more lowly creatures.

The concept of God and His relation to the world forms the axis upon which Hassidism moves. Said the Besht: "The *Shekhina* permeates all four orders in nature (lit. *olamoth* —worlds) : the inanimate things, the plants, the living beings, and man; it is inherent in all creatures in the universe whether they are good or bad." Also, "God, blessed be He, fills the entire world with His glory, and every movement, even every thought comes from Him."[1]

Whether the Besht was a pantheist is debated among historians and philosophers. Jacob Minkin bestows that title upon him; Meyer Waxman rejects this view on the grounds that such a belief would involve the Besht and his followers in a denial of creation or in speculations too subtle for them. God does not relate himself to the world through nature, but is in direct and immediate contact with it. God's *Shekhina* is actively manifested in every part of the universe. Hassidism attempts to teach and emphasize that man is always in the presence of God, who is omnipresent. God is more than a first cause, as pantheists would believe; he is active in the world and participates in the affairs of history and man.

This view is complemented by the view on providence. Every action of man is done through God's providence, and there is a divine manifestation in all human deeds, even in the evil ones. It therefore follows that sin, committed with the aid of God, must also be forgiven by the same Deity. This does not sanctify transgression as some neo-Hassidim believed, but rather sanctifies human life by giving the lowly sinner reassurance that he too is not forsaken by God.

It is important to emphasize that Hassidism is not a philosophical system, nor does it attempt to resolve logical

contradictions or theological dilemmas. Its intent was to make man more aware of God's presence and providence.

Recognizing God's immanence, man must strive to perfect a closer union with God, reaching the very source of life. What means shall man employ to attain this union? The answers to this question form the crucial and cardinal principles of Hassidism. Man can accomplish this union through *tefilah* (prayer), *hithlahabuth* (ecstasy), *kavanah* (intention), *shifluth* (humility), *dveikuth* (cleaving), *hithbodeduth* (private meditation), *avodah* (service), and the *Zaddik.*

Prayer has taken many forms throughout religious history, though the object to which it is directed has always been a deity or deities whose will could be bent and directed toward the worshipper's desires. The Talmud, however, defines the basic role of prayer, "to render praise to God for His beneficence" (Berakhoth 32a). This was evident in the format of prayer from the period of Ezra the Scribe and men of the Great Assembly.

The early mystics, interpreting additional talmudic passages, extended the purpose of prayer, "to direct one's heart to prayer" (Berakhoth 30b). The word *kavanah,* or concentration, was employed. They thus maintained that the worshipper's primary task was to remove all other thoughts and expend all his mental faculties and powers of concentration towards the words and meaning of the prayer. In every word, even in every letter, claimed the Kabbalists, lies the esoteric thought that can only be derived through *kavanah,* constant, profound, and uninterrupted concentration on a word or a name.

The *Zohar,* in its introduction, goes so far as to claim that the hundred blessings composed by David are associated with the hundred *Sefiroth* (God's Emanations), and the eighteen blessings of our liturgy are related to the eighteen worlds and planets.

Methods and means of concentration were delineated by the Kabbalists, so that even the common unlearned worshipper would be divinely touched during his intercourse with God. They remonstrated against those who were not

familiar with these powers of concentration, and suggested that no prayer is effective without *kavanah.*

Hassidism inherited this aspect of Kabbalah, adapted it to its philosophy, but rejected its more mystical elements. "*Kavanah* is the essence of prayer," said the Besht. "All earthly and material thoughts must be removed, or a formidable wall is erected between God and the worshipper. The prayers will fall on a deaf ear."[2]

Concentration requires comprehension of the prayers. The Besht was the first to suggest that many prayers be offered in Yiddish, the vernacular. Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev composed many prayers in Yiddish and held his famous dialogues with the Almighty in the language of the common man.

Dveikuth and *hithlahabuth* are two additional prerequisites to successful prayer. Upon entering the gate of prayer the worshipper must immediately recognize his Maker and completely ally himself with and cleave unto the object of his service. This is *dveikuth* or "cleaving" unto God. *Hithlahabuth* is the zeal, fervor, ecstasy and joy with which prayer is offered. If the worshipper succeeds in experiencing this religious moment in prayer through the process of *kavanah, dveikuth,* and *hithlahabuth,* he establishes an intimate I-Thou relationship and a personal dialogue with God Himself.

Full, uninterrupted, sincere concentration in prayer is religion's most arduous task, and requires *hakhanoth* (prior preparation) and *hithbodeduth* (private individual premeditation).

During this hour of preparation, the worshipper considers creation and Creator as he encounters the expanse of the universe, the perfect order of creation, the seed sprouting its fruit, and the wonders of animate and inanimate nature. These meditations prepare him for the "encounter," and remove all impure thoughts from his mind and heart. Only now is he prepared to offer the Service.

It is said in the name of the Besht: "Man must concentrate his entire heart and mind on his prayers and he must

immerse the very life of his soul in each word he pronounces."[3]

The *Maggid* of Mezeritch once called prayer a union with the *Shekhinah* and he taught that one must rise to such a degree of ecstasy while praying that he becomes entirely forgetful of his cosmic reality. This kind of prayer elevates man and brings him nearer to God.[4]

Hassidism insists that comprehending the meaning of the words in prayer is not as important as depth and intensity of feeling expressed in worship. Thus even the common or ignorant man could approach his Maker. Hassidic literature is full of many stories pertaining to the prayers, offered even by the illiterate, which penetrated the upper worlds. But the worshipper who offers his prayers must achieve great ecstasy and fervor by exerting himself in bodily movements and gesticulations, in song and in dance.

Prayer not only achieves communion with God but should also exert a lasting influence on human life. Hassidism places great emphasis on the power of man. He is not innately weak, neither is he basically a sinner. Man is sufficiently powerful to effect changes in the world by his conduct. With sincere and intense prayer he can change the life of every man. He can cure the sick, bestow riches upon the poor, and avert severe decrees. But these things can only be accomplished by those select few, the *Zaddikim,* who attain a high degree of communion with God.

But whether one is a *Zaddik* or a Hassid, one has to serve the Lord with all his heart, soul, and might. This is true *avodah* or service. As Buber expresses it: *"Hithlahabuth* is embracing God, in time and space. (*Avodah* is the service of God in time and space.) *Hithlahabuth* is the mystic meal. *Avodah* is the mystic offering. . . . *Hithlahabuth* is silent since it lies in the heart of God. *Avodah* speaks, 'What am I and what is my life that I wish to offer you my blood and my fire.' "[5]

Service cannot be half-hearted and confused. The act may be outwardly slovenly and unattractive, but if it is performed with intention and sincerity it is acceptable be-

fore the Lord. It was said of one *Zaddik,* "With Him, teaching, and praying, and eating, and sleeping are all one, and He can raise the soul to its root." God desires that one serve Him in all ways.[6]

Service is no longer prayer alone but is extended far beyond its original narrow concept. *Avodah* is service of the Lord in all ways, ecstatic prayer, sincere deeds, moral conduct, charity, and humility performed in the manner best suited for the servant. Any service which proceeds from a simple or a unified soul is sufficient and complete.

Shifluth, humility, is one of the most important prerequisites for sincere service. "If messiah should come today," a *Zaddik* said, "and say, 'You are better than the others,' then I would say to him, you are not messiah." An arrogant person cannot serve with sincerity and *hithlahabuth,* because his actions would not emanate from pure intentions. To walk in true humility is the first duty of every Hassid. "Humility," said the Besht, "leads forth to love of man and love of God, for the truly humble in heart does not feel it a hardship to love the wicked and unthinking. For all his wickedness, he is better than I am." Only the lowly ones can truly understand God and His Torah, for if Torah is not studied with a humble heart it cannot permeate the student's mind."[7]

Said the first Gerer *Rebbe:* "Every virtue is subject to the Lord's command. King Saul hid himself among the vessels from a sense of humility (*geiuth*—majesty) but the Lord had already commanded him to rule over Israel. Hence his humbleness was out of place, and for this reason his reign was unsuccessful." Humility, therefore, is not when one lowers himself too much and forgets that man can bring overflowing blessing to all the world through his deeds and action. Humility is not self-deprecation, for man must consider that in his qualities he is unique in the world. "The greatest evil is when you forget that you are the son of a king." Said Rabbi Bunam: "The haughty and the arrogant fill their minds with selfishness, leaving no room for holiness. The lowly and the meek have adequate room for holiness and should strive to fill their minds with it.

Of what use otherwise is their weakness?" Thus Hassidism strove to give confidence to the lowly, common, average man by showing him the simple ways he could serve God. As a matter of fact, he had a head start through his "weakness," i.e., because of his lowliness and humility, he has more room for holiness.

Hassidism appointed the *Zaddik* to be the head-master, to teach men the true meaning of service, *hithlahabuth, kavanah* and *shifluth.*

Zaddik in Hebrew means a righteous man. The Talmud (Moed Katan 16a), endowed the *Zaddik* with great power, saying: "God issues a decree, but the *Zaddik* can annul it." The Kabbalists bestowed upon him great and mysterious powers. But in Hassidism, the *Zaddik* reaches the highest rung. "The *Zaddik,*" said the Besht, "is the messenger of the *Shekhinah.*" The *Zaddik* is thus the patron, the mediator, the intercessor between God and man. Those who cleave to him receive special favor in his merit. The entire world receives sustenance on his account.

The *Zaddik* discovers in Torah the hidden light and can behold the entire world in this light. He possesses a share of the divine spark which relates to the very root of man's soul. The powers invested within the *Zaddik* also impose upon him great responsibilities. To retain that elevated and exalted state he must practice extreme piety and cautious speech, and must constantly strive to improve himself.

Despite his exalted position, "the *Zaddik,*" said Rabbi Jacob Joseph, "must himself possess a particle of *tum-ah* (uncleanliness) so as to be able to join with the common and gross man in order to raise him to a higher state." On the other hand, the more righteous the *Zaddik,* the more righteousness he beholds in his fellowmen. *Ahavath Yisrael* love for Israel, for the people, is a natural consequence of the *Zaddik's* love for God, for God loves Israel and the *Zaddik* always emulates God. With love and empathy he influences the faith and mind of the Hassid as the latter's senses are perfected through physical nearness to his master. The emphasis is not on what the *Zaddik* teaches but rather

upon his mere presence, not only on extraordinary occasions but on the ordinary and mundane days.

The *Zaddik's* mere existence, however, was insufficient to influence so many devotees. He had to become their intimate pastor, confidant, and friend. He had to mix with the people and lower himself to them in order to uplift them to his elevated rung. If a man falls into the mire and his friend wants to pull him out, he must not hesitate to get himself a little dirty.

Hassidism adds an important principle, namely that the *Zaddik* needs the Hassid too, for he must have a disciple to teach. "If the *Zaddik* serves God," said Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, "but does not take the trouble to teach the multitude, he will descend from his rung." The *Zaddik* and Hassid are dependent on one another. Thus the *Zaddikim* need the multitude and the multitude need the *Zaddikim*. "The teacher helps his disciples find themselves, and in hours of desolation the disciples help their teacher find himself again," writes Buber.[8]

Paradoxically, the institution of *Zaddikism* was responsible for both Hassidism's progress and its decadence. Eventually the *Zaddik* became a man-God and a spiritual aristocrat, and the Hassid began to cling to a person rather than to an idea. Hassidism made *Zaddikism* hereditary, bestowing the title upon the descendants of righteous men, but did not impose upon the heirs the same high qualifications. Many such "heirs" degraded the teachings of their masters for personal gain. "Almost entirely divested of human qualities, the *Zaddik* became a saint, a savior, a superman, a Buddha and God incarnate,"[9] says Minkin. The Besht was not the principal offender, nor even his own disciples and followers who came directly after him. This was a development of the second period of the late masters, as the *Zaddikim* became princes and potentates who "received their sceptors from God Himself."[10]

Because *Zaddikism* became a hereditary institution, the number of Hassidic courts increased and several dynasties were set up in almost every city. Rival sects and their

masters each claimed spiritual superiority, and the resulting conflicts were long and destructive.

The cult of *Zaddikism* as well as the ensuing rivalries strengthened the hands of the *mithnageddim.* Historians are not sure when this term originated. Most likely it was used by Hassidim to exclude all who were not members of their movement. The strife which lasted for thirty years created a schism in the Russian-Polish Jewish community. In 1772, a *herem* (ban) was ordered by the community of Vilna in Lithuania against the Hassidim who were accused of slandering Elijah Gaon (1720-1797), the head of Lithuanian Jewry. They were further accused of introducing changes in ritual practices and in the accepted versions of the prayerbook. The *mithnageddim* also scoffed at the bodily contortions of the Hassidim during prayer, and at the displacement of the scholarly rabbi by an unlearned *Zaddik.*

In 1780, the first classic book of Hassidism, *Toldot Yaakob Yosef* by Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, a disciple of the Besht, was published. The book declared Hassidism's disregard for scholarship, and it spoke disparagingly of the rabbis and scholars. In 1781, the Vilna Gaon endorsed a ban against Hassidic followers, ostracizing and even persecuting them.

After the death of the Gaon of Vilna, the strife was further intensified when a group of Hassidim allegedly exhibited great joy at the death of Rabbi Elijah, provoking even deeper resentment in the hearts of their opponents. Revenge was taken by informing on the Hassidim to the government authorities, charging them with heresy and political sedition. Shneur Zalman of Ladi, the leader of the *Habad* was apprehended twice, in 1781 and in 1800, but later released and exonerated by the government. His sect was even legalized by the government. This incident put a stop to further persecution.

Though not defending the fanatical zeal of the *mithnageddim,* historians do see some justification for it. Elijah Gaon did not openly oppose the ritual or liturgical emendations of Hassidism but suspected its over-simplification of God, its quasi-pantheism, its de-valuation of scholarship,

its over-emotionalism and the resultant cult of *Zaddikism.* The hoax of messianism in the persons of Sabbatai Zvi and Jacob Frank had made the rabbis especially cautious and suspicious of new movements which attempted to idolize human beings.

Historians and even modern *mithnageddim* do not overlook the "good" which Hassidism did contribute in its prime. It uplifted the common unlearned Jew and injected a new spirit into his life. It gave him a simple faith to hold on to, and prevented the further spread of heresies. The masses were economically, politically, and religiously depressed and persecuted. Hassidism did encourage their return to Judaism and renewed their confidence in God and in His compassion.

Minkin contended that the movement contributed little to literature, but this is quite exaggerated. Waxman, for example, argues that "indirectly the qualities of enthusiasm and deep emotion . . . found expression in creative productions in modern Jewish literature." Buber's works on the parables and stories of the masters contain the written and oral transmissions of the *Zaddikim.* While their literature was unformed, it was there, and Buber admits in his *Early Masters:* "This book contains less than a tenth of the material I collected."[11]

Even the institution of the *Zaddik* benefited European Jewry, as it fostered solidarity among them. It further established a spiritual model for the Hassidim to emulate, inevitably stimulating many Jews to self-improvement. Moreover, Hassidism did develop noteworthy leaders and scholars whose spiritual influence, wisdom, and religious conduct not only fortified Jewish life in their own day but have had a lasting effect ever since.

Unfortunately, supernaturalism and superstition, the seed planted by the Besht and nurtured by his disciples, destroyed the lofty ideals of Hassidism. Although the movement intensified religious fervor, it also encouraged religious extremism, bordering on the fanatic.

Chapter Four

The Influence of Hassidism on Modern Jewish Thought and Movements

There are a number of Hassidic sects still in existence, among them the school of Gur now led by Rabbi Israel Alter in Jerusalem. From "millions" (number unknown) of Hassidim of all sects, the number has declined to a few thousand, mostly residing in the State of Israel. Will the practice of Hassidism now be confined to these "few," or will the movement attract more adherents? Can the ideals and philosophy of the original movement bear any kind of influence upon the people of Israel living in the diaspora, and the forms of Judaism they practice today? What elements can be bequeathed to a modern generation whose faith has been revived in recent years, but who still look askance at the "old" school of Jewish thought? Can the spirit and intent, if not the practices and traditions of Hassidism be revived? Is there hope for a renaissance of Hassidism even in a modified form?

If, as we shall see later in this book, Gur succeeded in many instances in casting aside some of the destructive and decadent elements of Hassidism and *Zaddikism* (though also guilty on many counts), while retaining its spiritual and moral elements, can the present court and the Yeshiva Sefath Emeth in Jerusalem hold fast to these elements and directly or indirectly make its contribution to Judaism, Jewish thought and culture, the people of Israel, and the State of Israel?

These questions are being asked today not only by stu-

dents of Hassidism and devout Jews, but by many men of letters in all disciplines of Jewish thought, as Hassidism continues to win the increasing attention of scholars and the general public, and becomes a subject of enthusiastic study in many rationalistic circles.

Critics and opponents of Hassidism will answer the questions posed in the negative. They object to the inner and outer form of the movement, and continue to fear its de-emphasis of scholarship. They continue to be repelled by the segregation, appearance, gesticulations, and general behavior of today's practicing Hassidim. They cannot accept the over-simplification of Judaism, and insist that Judaism is far more profound and intellectually sophisticated than is portrayed by Hassidic literature. The old accusations can still be heard among non-Hassidim today, namely, that if permitted to flourish again, Hassidism would foster religious fanaticism, encourage miracle-working and superstition, impede the spread of enlightenment among Jews by encouraging hostile attitudes to learning and to progressive movements, and lastly, would continue the hero-worship of the *Zaddik*. In the sects transplanted from Europe to Israel and America, the same degrading and decadent elements of the old Hassidism are still present. The *Rebbe* is still the banner around which the Hassidim rally; they still submit the *quittel* to him, beseeching him to intercede on their behalf before God. He remains the autocratic and final arbiter not only on questions of law but in every area of life in which they are associated. The Hassidim still foster bigoted and narrow fanaticism, segregate themselves from the community at large, and remain intolerant to the views of others, even casting stones upon their co-religionists who desecrate the Sabbath. Their *yeshivoth* continue to stress everything but scholarship, producing very few scholars. They remain obstinate about the old deviations from ritual practice introduced by their founders. (The court of Belz in Israel, for example, still offers the Saturday night *Maariv* (evening) service on Sunday morning.)

Perhaps these fears and accusations do not reverberate as loud and clear as in former days, but they are neverthe-

less felt by Jews whose ancestors engaged in a bitter struggle with the old Hassidim. Orthodox scholars still belittle the "Torah" of the *Zaddikim,* and do not approve of the Polish Hassidic *derekh* (method) of talmudic studies.

The first day of the Festival of Shavuoth, in 1960, marked the two hundredth anniversary of the death of the Besht. That year was observed both in Israel and the Jewish world by lectures, articles, sermons, and dialogues on the Besht and Hassidism. As the observance was coming to a close, Shlomo Shamir, a reporter for the Israeli magazine "Panim El Panim," interviewed noted scholars, religious leaders, and *Admorim,* and asked whether it is possible to bequeath the values of Hassidism to the young generation.

Professor Samuel Hugo Bergman of the Hebrew University saw the primary worth and importance of Hassidism to be its ability to inject a vital and refreshing spirit into both the religious and secular lives of his co-religionists. "There is always the danger in Judaism," Bergman said, "that Jewish law will become arid, lifeless, and cold. There always remains a fear that the live current which created *halakha* (Law) will no longer be creative. The danger lurks in the not too distant future that religious life will be completely eradicated unless a new life is injected into it. These perils jeopardize not only all religious life but especially Judaism which is founded on the practical and ritual applications of theological principles. Here, I believe, lies the greatness of Hassidism. It transforms the deed (*mitzvah*) into a vibrant and living act, and fills the law with life and meaning."[1]

One notes here the recognition of Hassidism's most important contribution to religious life, as expressed by a non-Orthodox scholar: namely, it removed the sterility of Jewish law by infusing into it an ecstatic and zealous virility. It brought *halakha* down from the heavens into the grasp of the common man, who was less concerned about "passing an elephant through a needle's eye" and more about the practical question of how to treat the animal with greater compassion.

Said Nathan Ziprin in a nationally syndicated column in 1963: "What was the force behind the unique burgeoning of this mystic movement? By placing exultation above learning, it laid the foundation for democracy in Jewish life. By making prayer a matter of the heart rather than conformity with a set standard, it attracted the untutored, the unlearned, and the infirm. By bringing gaiety and song into worship, it brought uplifting of spirit and soul. . . . Catastrophe has decimated the area of Europe where Hassidism thrived. Hitler slew Hassidim and *mithnageddim* alike. But a living movement, like a root, knows no obstacles. The root has now spread to Israel and America with deep promise in both lands."[2]

Even Minkin in his provocative and critical examination of Hassidim and especially its leaders, admits that "there is much in Hassidism that can revitalize the life of the Jews today, much that can be utilized for the artistic and spiritual creativeness of the Jewish people. . . . It has spread a glamour of romance and poetry over a life that was cold and prosaic."[3]

Louis Newman, a Reform rabbi, adds: "The movement of Hassidism is one of the most remarkable manifestations of the religious spirit in modern times. . . . Hassidism is Judaism with particular points of interest, emphasis, and practice; it is a free and intensely emotional expression of Judaism adapted to the common people. Out of the experience of multitudes of Masters and Disciples for nearly two centuries has emerged a vast, many-sided, and fascinating literature, from which it is possible to cull masterpieces of spiritual and ethical insight. Hassidism is more than a cult; it is a culture. While it has a unique message, it is as complex and varied as the life and outlook of the millions who have been its adherents."[4]

Is this "root" really spreading to Israel and America, and what is that deep promise? What is there in Hassidism that can revitalize the life of the Jews today? How can we cull "spiritual and ethical insights" from it? What form must the movement take today, and what elements does it

have to discard in order to influence Jewish thought and life in our time?

In answer to the last question, Prof. Bergman replies candidly: "I am not greatly optimistic about the ability for Hassidism as it is practiced today to penetrate the minds and hearts of the people. Is Hassidism as it is observed today—at least, as much as I read, hear, and know about it—sufficiently effective to resolve the questions of the religious life for the Jewish people? For one thing, Hassidism looks intolerantly upon the other nations and religions. This attitude may be justified in light of the mistreatment and persecution of the Jew in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, it is difficult to accept and justify this view, for we are today inextricably tied to every nation in the world. We cannot accept their opinion of the non-Jew. Hassidism in our day must be able to answer the question: what is man as a human being? Until Hassidism is able to offer an intelligent answer to this question, especially for Jews living outside of Israel among non-Jews, it will not be able to satisfy the religious yearnings of the Jew and will remain as an obstacle to the revival of Hassidism anywhere."[5]

The intolerance of Hassidim towards the non-observance of their fellow Jews is of particular concern. If Hassidism's ideals of compassion, joy of life for the common man, democracy and brotherhood between the rich and poor are to influence thinking Jews today, its followers must discard their fanatical zeal and open antagonism to the *Yiddishe Goyim* (Jewish Gentiles), and became more understanding of the religious quandary in which Jews and Gentiles find themselves today. They had better emulate the ways of the *Zaddikim* who succeeded in bringing the masses nearer to Judaism and saved the lower strata of Ukranian Jewry from spiritual degeneration, not by insolence, recriminations, and open attacks, but rather with kindness, understanding, and warmth. The Lubavitcher Hassidim and their leader today, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson of Brooklyn, should be commended for the manner in which they are spreading the message of *Habad* Hassidism throughout the diaspora. They "missionize"

with fervor, sincerity, and great zeal, emphasizing the importance of Jewish learning and traditional observance, establishing *yeshivoth ktanoth* (elementary schools) in cities in America, Europe, South America, Australia—everywhere Jews reside. Their department of education *Merkaz Leinyanei Hinnukh,* publishes books, pamphlets, and texts containing a decidedly religious and Hassidic orientation. Their *Zaddik,* Rabbi Schneerson, speaks out on current social, religious, and political issues, as he did recently, opposing the Supreme Court decision on the Regents Prayer in the State of New York. Their students and adherents go out of their way to mingle with the non-observant, to enable them to preach and teach their gospel. They have succeeding in "converting" many young Jews to observance and Hassidism. They hold their bearded heads high with dignity and pride because of their zealous mission, and are respected for their views and their tolerance.

The school of Gur, which in many aspects coincides with *Habad,* can, if properly guided, exert a similar influence upon the Jews of Israel. Gur's insistence on scholarship coupled with observance, its universalistic views on redemption, love for man, *ahavath Yisrael,* and the land of Israel, its emphasis on the singularity of every individual, and its democratic preachings and teachings can now be put in practice in the new state. Its court, centered around the Yeshiva Sefath Emeth, could expand to every village in Israel instead of being confined.

The ghettoization of Hassidic courts is Prof. Bergman's primary fear. In answer to Shamir's query, "In what way can Hassidism penetrate the mind and heart of the people within Israel?" Bergman answered: "This is the crucial but difficult question, for I do not know how Judaism generally, let alone Hassidism, can have a more positive influence upon the youth. I do believe, however, that initially, Hassidim must become interspersed with all segments of the people if their sphere of influence is to expand. Presently they confine themselves to their own neighborhoods and villages to save their own souls. As for the rest of the nation, let them continue to walk in their own secular ways.

They make no attempt to engage in a dialogue and conversation with the rest of Israel's Jewry. This kind of enclosure in a Hassidic-religious ghetto is fraught with danger. They would do well to live among the unobservant, to intermingle with them, and set a humanitarian and tolerant example for them. . . . I am personally aware of a group of young students and *yeshiva* men who organized a small group in Jerusalem, called *Shalheveth Yah* (a mighty flame of God), for the purpose of going down to the Negev to serve as teachers and educators in small villages, spreading the message of Hassidism. The hope of Hassidism lies in the willingness of Hassidim to live side by side with their co-religionists."[6]

This writer hopes, together with Bergman, that a less chauvinistically narrow and confined *weltanschauung* will be adopted by the Hassidic sects, especially in light of their diminishing numbers and the generally waning influences of Orthodox Judaism. It is hoped that the current fourth *Rebbe* of Gur will also emulate the communal leadership of his predecessors, become a spokesman for his movement, take a more active part in the *Agudah* and religious parties in Israel, and participate in the social, political, and religious progress of the young state. Gur, noted for its democratic outlook espousing love, unity, and harmony among all Jews, should be the first to heed Bergman's warnings by extending beyond the ultra-Orthodox *Mea Shearim* quarter in Jerusalem to every nook and cranny in the state. Then and then only can it be more than a cult and become a universal culture.

This view is in contradistinction with the views held by many *Zaddikim* today who believe that there must first be a religious awakening among the people before they can be ready to accept Hassidism. "There is no need to find new ways and means to disseminate the teachings of Hassidism," says the *Admor* of Stratin, Rabbi Yehuda Zvi Brandwein, in the "Panim El Panim" article. He believes that the nation will reach an impasse and will then seek a different and new philosophy. Hassidism will then have its day. Rabbi Brandwein has complete faith that Hassidism

will grow and attract many adherents, for he believes that in the realm of the spirit nothing is ever lost forever. "When Hassidism was born," he adds, "it was destined to survive forever. But there must first be an inner desire by Jews to accept Hassidism."[7]

But, one asks, how can that now dormant desire be awakened if the movement is confined to a comparative "handful" of Jews now officially allied to Hassidism. Rabbi Brandwein offers a partial answer. "Firstly," he emphasizes, "it is erroneous to view Hassidism as a separatist movement within Judaism. Hassidism and Judaism are one and the same. It is not and never has been a different and new 'plant' in the vineyard of Israel. The Besht simply expanded and intensified what already existed in Judaism." He cites the Besht himself: "Whoever considers my way new in faith and service is greatly mistaken. For in truth there is nothing revolutionary about an attempt to awaken the Jew from his spiritual lethargy and urge him to return to God. This has been the basic teaching of our sages and ancestors. Our intent is only to remind and to strengthen the faith which today in our critical times, has been slightly forgotten and depressed." It is upon this assumption that the Rabbi bases his opinion that since Hassidism is Torah, it will never be destroyed nor forgotten, for the Torah is eternal. He further suggests that Hassidism can have a wider scope of influence through the study of the *Zohar* attributed to Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, which forms the basis for Hassidism and the teachings of the Baal Shem. It is this composition with its "hidden secrets" which will eventually redeem Israel from its spiritual exile, claims Rabbi Brandwein.[8]

The *Zohar* was the source book for the *Zaddik,* and he often quoted from it. Hassidim were the only group who still studied the *Zohar* as part of their curriculum. Yet they were able to talk about the enigmatic and mystical elements of the book without outwardly practicing them. They were surely not Lurian mystics and for this reason again their teachings remained within the grasp of the average man. Yet the *Zohar* was dear to them, and they

can be credited with keeping alive Jewish interest in mysticism and the "hidden" Torah, as they called it. The fact that interest in mysticism is growing in Western schools and seminaries, and that universities have established chairs and professorships in this subject, lends some strength to Brandwein's contention. Since Hassidism's approach is semi-mystical, if this area is better understood, the ideals of Hassidism can establish a more grounded foothold.

Prof. Gershon Scholem maintains that Hassidism represents an attempt to preserve those elements of Kabbalism which were capable of evoking a popular response, while stripping them of their messianic flavor. "Hassidism," says Scholem, "tried to eliminate the element of messianism—with its dazzling but highly dangerous amalgamation of mysticism and the apocalyptic mood—without renouncing the popular appeal of Kabbalism. Perhaps one should rather speak of a "neutralization" of the messianic element."[9]

Scholem makes it very clear that the messianic hope and belief in redemption did not disappear from the hearts of the Hassidim. But he is convinced that these concepts were not central to their religious life and thought. Founded on mysticism, Hassidism did not produce original Kabbalistic thought. The best attempt was made by the school of *Habad* which gave a new emphasis to psychology rather than theosophy. "Hassidism is practical mysticism at its highest," claims Scholem. "Almost all the Kabbalistic ideas are now placed in relation to values peculiar to the individual life, and those which are not remain empty and ineffective. Particular emphasis is laid on ideas and concepts concerning the relation of the individual to God."[10]

Scholem's views are mentioned here briefly to suggest that if this last phase of Jewish mysticism, i.e., Hassidism, is studied and re-evaluated, and if its cardinal ideals are popularized and taught, then the Kabbalistic heritage with its mystical overtones can once again become the source of individual ethical values as it was when Hassidism was in its prime. The study of the *Zohar* may be the first step, as Brandwein suggests.

It is generally agreed by non-Hassidim, as well as by some "enlightened" Hassidim, that the adherents will have to discard some of their outer forms, along with their ghettoization. Even the *Rebbe* of Stratin, Rabbi Yehuda Zvi Brandwein, concedes that Hassidic attire is only an external form which Hassidism insisted upon in former days because of the fierce antagonism arrayed against it. "Today, these symbols have lost their purpose and are of no value," says the *Rebbe*. "Hassidism's inner content must be reintroduced, *i.e.*, the study of Torah, love and brotherhood between God's creatures, unity and peace, and other Hassidic values." Despite Rabbi Brandwein's suggestion, it is seriously doubtful whether he would suggest the casting off of kaftans, earlocks, and *shtreimelekh* (fur caps) by his own followers. Hassidic dress has too long been associated with the movement and strongly defended by it. The *Zaddikim* of Gur fought bitter and courageous battles against governmental decrees prohibiting their peculiar attire. Yet, if Hassidism is to have any lasting influence on the modern Jew, it must unquestionably modernize its outer garb.

"This is an absolute prerequisite," agrees Dr. Elimelekh Rimlat, author, teacher, educator, and chairman of the educational committee in the *Knesset*. "I believe," said Rimlat, "that Hassidism's potential for young Israel is enormous, especially in our generation. . . . Only Hassidism can fill the void and emptiness, the apathy and aimlessness which has penetrated the lives of our young people. Only Hassidism possesses the power and means to oppose Sartre's existentialism which teaches that life is purposeless, irrational, and desultory. Hassidism teaches the joy of life and points the way to ecstasy, meaning, and the fullness of life. But upon one condition—" Rimlat is quick to add. "Hassidism must adopt a new form, new look, and new dress. I do not believe that a generation growing up in Israel can make peace with the Hassidism that is known and recognized by us. . . . This will be entirely unacceptable not only by the youth of Israel but by any observant Jew."[11]

In addition to its new garb, Hassidism must also adopt

a new look in its manner of teaching and presentation. Firstly, one can ask, is the *Zaddik* still the necessary leader and teacher? Can the Hassid remain without a master? Rimlat implies that the ideas and ideals of Hassidism can thrive without a *Rebbe* or one particular leader within a sect. He urges a Hassidism of comraderie, a collective brotherhood which will succeed in attracting a large number of young people. The youth of today cannot make peace with the idea of a *Rebbe*. "With due respect to contemporary Hassidim . . . if we are talking about the expansion of Hassidism into a mass movement . . . it will have to cast aside these traditions. Every generation adopts that portion of any spiritual force which is compatible with its own spirit. So shall our youth draw from Hassidism the following concepts: democratic fellowship, spiritual sensitivity, joy of service, ecstatic melodies, and its moral tales. There is no doubt that Hassidism will receive a new form which contemporary Hassidim will reject. But this is the fate of any movement whose founders are unable to predict and foresee what development and form it will take in the future. This may sound like heresy but I believe in this unequivocally."[12]

The crucial question is the significance of the *Zaddik* in the Hassidic scheme. Here, it appears, one is confronted with two diametrically opposed views. For the purpose of brevity only two opinions will be cited.

Minkin claims that: "*Zaddikism* is the ill-begotton child of Hassidism . . . that sucked the blood of its parent." Conceding the lofty intentions and noble ideals of the Baal Shem Tov and the followers who came directly after him, he places the blame for the decadence of the movement on the unprincipled "charlatans and demagogues" who followed. Admitting that the *Zaddik* was the necessary and logical result of the spirit which Hassidism stirred up in the life of the Jew—and in many respects he fulfilled the high function for which he had been created—he insists that the movement collapsed because of this institution. This implies that though a leader was necessary, especially in the form of a pastor, friend, and companion, the *Zaddik*

enthroned as a man-God was foreign to the nature of Hassidism.[13]

Gershon Scholem takes a strong exception to this view. "Nothing is further from the truth," says Scholem, "that one must distinguish between the 'pure' Hassidism of the Baal Shem and the 'depraved' *Zaddikism* of his followers and their followers. This simon-pure Hassidism never existed because anything like it could never have influenced more than a few people."[14] Scholem insists that the originality of Hassidic thought is to be found in the substitution of Kabbalistic doctrine for the personality of a man whose character is more important than his learning. "I did not go to the *Maggid* of Meseritz to learn Torah," said a Hassid, "but to watch him tie his boot-laces." The *Zaddik* in Hassidic thought is the living incarnation of the Torah, and his life lends a religious value to his personality. Thus, according to this foremost scholar, the essence of Hassidism, as conceived by the founder and all *Zaddikim,* "pure" and impure, is contained in *Zaddikism.* Remove this concept and you are left with a different movement whose idea is no longer the relationship of the true illuminate to the believers whose life centers around his religious personality.

Perhaps it is within a "different" movement whose leaders will *remain* pastors, teachers, counsellors, and friends that the future of Hassidism lies. And Hassidism it will remain. In later chapters we shall see how the *Zaddikim* of Gur led their courts, not as idols, overlords, or man-Gods but rather as spiritual leaders. True, they permitted their followers to hero-worship them, but in general they rejected the idea of the *Rebbele* and his self-aggrandizement. Gur could never have developed in depth, scope, and numbers if it were not for its *Zaddikim.* Movements are still established and maintained by leaders.

This writer, a "modern" Hassid and non-mystic, a student of Hassidism and a disciple without a *Rebbe,* contends that Hassidism can survive, not in its original form but by diluting and minimizing its mystical aspects, while retaining the *Zaddik* as a venerable, understanding and warm spiritual leader. Hassidism can make its primary contribu-

tion to the religious life of Jews by establishing a pastorate of scholars in the Gerer, Kotzker, and Sochochover tradition and at the same time retaining the pastoral functions of the *Zaddik* as religious guide, *seelsorger* (one who concerns himself with souls), friend and confidant.

The "transformed" *Zaddik,* if he is to affect others outside of his court, must utilize the self-same techniques and approach of his predecessors: namely, fervor, imagination, *hithlahabuth,* joy and spirit, rather than logical and *pilpulistic* rationalizations. "Today, one may approach an irreligious youth and command him not to ride on the Sabbath," says Rimlat in the Shamir interview, "because the Torah so ordained it. But you have not impressed upon him that the Torah is sacred. You approach him with an 'authority' with which he is totally unfamiliar. Hassidism, however, can come to these young people and suggest a more inductive approach . . . it will not propose an authoritative command—an order—but rather investigation. . . . A religious narrowness will not influence young people; the spirit of Hassidism will . . . the objective is victory. The approach towards the goal is of the utmost import."[15]

That approach must contain a synthesis of scholarship and elementary Hassidic techniques, which was basically the philosophy of the school of Gur. Gur and Lubavitch must counteract the more zealous and conservative sects of Satmer, Belz, Vizniz, Levov and Kloizenburg. It must understand that a movement does not mature and grow if it must remain within its original *gestalt.* The new Israeli Hassidism must don a new outer look and acclimate itself to the more sophisticated intellectual atmosphere. It must be able to communicate with Israeli youth on their level and in their language. The *Rebbe-im* and their followers must preach and teach in a fluent Hebrew if they are to be understood either by the *Sabra* or by the near eastern Jews. Hassidic song and dance, the traditional practices of the *tish* and *shtibbel,* the pilgrimages to the court, the spirit of brotherliness, the intimate *Rebbe-Hassidic* relationship—all can be retained, but presented in a more dignified, elegant, and palatable manner, so that Hassidism will

grow and become a salient and influential movement in the State of Israel.

WHITHER HASSIDISM IN AMERICA

Hassidism outside of Israel must undergo an even more radical transformation if it is to penetrate and influence religious thought and movements. The climate and community of Jews in the *galut* is unique unto itself, and its religious problems are also different. Despite their more tolerant attitudes, American Jews would look with great disfavor upon the European type of Hassidism—the *Zaddik* and court with all their appurtenances. They would disavow cloistered and ghettoized sects and would therefore reject even their more beneficial elements.

Many *Rebbe-im* have established *shtibblekhs* in various cities throughout America. Most have conducted themselves more as "rabbis" and leaders than *Zaddikim.* They perform the same function as their rabbinical colleagues both in the synagogue and community at large. They no longer bequeath their positions to their children, who choose to become rabbis, teachers, scientists, or businessmen. They may have established a more intimate relationship with their congregants. They are still called to intercede on behalf of their flock in a time of illness and distress. They may still wear the *shtreimel* on the Sabbath, and at times conduct a *tish.* They continue to lead the Hassidim in old as well as new Hassidic melodies, and lead the dancing on festivals, Simhat Torah and special occasions. They prefer to include the parables, aphorisms, and interpretations of the old Hassidic masters in their sermons. Some may still accept *quittels* (prayer notes) and *pidyonoth* (redemption of the *quittel*). But the image of the *Zaddik* has drastically changed. He is no longer the autocratic arbiter, the saint and holy man, the miracle-worker and *baal shem.* He is a 20th century rabbi garbed in Hassidic attire. Perhaps the statement should be reversed; the 20th century rabbi is a Hassidic *Rebbe* with a more modern and sophisticated orientation. He is combining the functions of both Priest and

Prophet, teaching the Law, and directing and guiding the lives of his constituents in everything that affects their immediate daily lives. He too, like the *Zaddik* of old, is their pastor, confidant, spiritual mentor, and counsellor. The rabbi would do well to emulate the *Rebbe* of old in many aspects. The rapid progress of Hassidism has taught the rabbi of today the weaknesses and pitfalls of rabbinism with its emphasis on the priesthood of learning, in whose presence the masses were awed and chilled. The modern pastoral approach in the ministry may have been indirectly influenced by the *Zaddik*.

In what other areas can Hassidism impress and affect American Judaism? It appears that it has already made its impress upon Jews quite distant from the real spirit of the movement. Reform and Liberal Judaism has in recent years taken an increased interest in Hassidism. Based upon the response of over twenty Reform rabbis to a written questionnaire, it can be noted that rabbis within the Reform orientation, if not the movement *per se*, are inclined towards a less rationalistic and ideological approach, and more towards a spiritual, emotional and human philosophy geared to capture the heart and spirit of man rather than his mind. They detect in classical Hassidism a rebellion against the arid and lifeless legalisms of Jewish Law and even tradition. They are impressed by the manner in which joy, love for life and man as practiced by the *Zaddik*, captured a spiritually parched generation. They insist that Reform Judaism, like Hassidism, is also not a new faith but rather Judaism with a more modern orientation. They foresee even greater success in their movement if their leaders become *Zaddik*-like and establish a more loving rapport with their constituents. Hassidic emphasis on ethics and morality, love between man and man, and all the lofty ideals promulgated by the prophets of old, is the answer to the curious and inquisitive scientific mind. Generally speaking the method of scientific inquiry is not appropriate in the discipline of religion, which is mainly deductive, authoritative, and intuitive. Maimonides' "Guide" will further perplex the skeptic who in many instances can refute philos-

ophical and theological arguments. Hassidism's positive and joyful approach, on the other hand, would be far more appealing than the rabbinic and classical orthodox framework.

The Reform view is best summed up by a Reform rabbi who appended a personal letter to the questionnaire:

> "I am not only familiar with Hassidism but consider myself a student of same. I feel that Hassidism tried to do in its time what Reform Judaism is doing today (or what Reform Judaism has done in the past fifty years). Hassidism was an attempt to show that the important aspect of religion was the personal relationship of the individual to God and to a fellowship of sympathetic people. Its main emphasis was on the meaningfulness and the uniqueness of the life of each individual in relation to God.
>
> "It further stressed the importance of religious action for the real needs of the average person. Each of these things are vitally meaningful for us today, and I stress each of them in my ministry. I do not hesitate to show that the source for this emphasis is Hassidism."

The schools of Lithuanian orthodoxy transplanted to American soil are reflecting Hassidic influences. One can note the gradual transformation of spirit within a number of Lithuanian-oriented *yeshivoth* in Detroit, Chicago and New York, from an austere, rigidly scholastic attitude to something more ebullient and happy. Hassidic songs are popularized at the *yeshivoth.* Wedding ceremonies and parties in which *yeshiva* students participate feature, in the classical Hassidic manner, rapturous and exhilarating songs and dances before the bride and groom. This custom was not very prevalent in the early 1940's, but has spread widely in the past fifteen years.

This does not imply that Hassidism will be well-received in its original form; the basic antagonism to both its inner and outer form still prevails. But Rabbinism is now making its outward peace with Hassidism, and is prepared to assimilate its spirit, song, dance, and joy.

As a foremost talmudic scholar, rabbi, philosopher and non-Hassid said upon visiting a middle-western American *yeshiva:* "It lacks spirit. The place is too solemn and austere. The students never smile. The *yeshiva* could well use a course in Hassidism and a few Hassidim to engender its spirit."

One also deduces an interest in Hassidism from interviews and questionnaire responses from Conservative Jews and their rabbis. Conservative rabbis are greatly inclined to employ similes and parables found in Hassidic literature. Songs and dances are beginning to invade the assemblies, youth conclaves, and weddings of Seminary (Conservative) students. Yet, Conservative Judaism is not quite ready to by-pass the rationalistic views of Maimonides, Saadia, Gersonides, or Albo. A movement which speaks of *Judische Wissenschaft,* or the scientific study of Judaism, is not yet prepared to discard the need for a rational "Guide" for religious ecstasy and emotionalism. It is, however, impressed by the multi-faceted culture which Hassidism embraced, for the Conservative movement agrees that Judaism is more than law, more than creed, dogma and ritual; it is a rich, varicolored culture or civilization. Hassidism has given a sense of beauty to thinker, artist, and poet, and even in its primitive crudeness, "genius discovered a fertile field for artistic expression."[16]

Jewish drama, music, art, dancing, and all the fine arts received inspiration from Hassidism. Adds Minkin: "There is much in Hassidism that can revitalize the life of the Jews today, much that can be utilized for the artistic and spiritual creativeness of the Jewish people. . . . It has uncovered cultural vistas that were hitherto closed to them. It has spread a glamour of romance and poetry over a life that was cold and prosaic."[17]

Conservative Judaism, as well as many so-called *kultur* Yiden (cultural Jews), looks to Hassidism, even in its present blurred form, for its cultural as well as its religious inspiration.

Conservative Judaism desires the unity of *klal Yisrael.* Dr. Solomon Schechter expressed the hope that the Jewish

Theological Seminary might become a force for reconciliation in Israel. Its unformed philosophy, uncertain theology, and its great diversity may be both its greatest weakness and perhaps its strongest virtue. It has succeeded in congregating many diverse segments within the community of Israel under one banner. It remains to be seen whether the rightist, centrist, and leftist groups within the movement will be able to accept the differences among them, live with them, and, with the aid of the democratic process, try to resolve all conflicts. There may not have been as much theological or ritual diversity in Hassidism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but there were sufficient divergencies in thought, practice, and ideas to be responsible, paradoxically, for both its success and decadence. Will Conservative Judaism consider this paradox before deciding whether or not to encourage this unity in diversity—or to evolve a more monolithic type of thought and practice?

II

THE SCHOOL OF GUR AND THEIR RABBIS



Can a child be taught when he may approach his father?

Chapter Five

The Development of Hassidism in Greater Poland

Among the first to disseminate Hassidism in Poland were two brothers: Rabbi Samuel Shmelke of Nicholsburg (1726-1778) and Rabbi Phineas of Frankfurt (1730-1808), who were considered to be among the outstanding scholars of their generation. Their great devotion to Hassidism was responsible for its progress in the urban areas where they first practiced the Rabbinate at Britsheva and Belkovitz. Because of their Judaic scholarship, in addition to their knowledge of Hassidism, they gained the favor of Elijah Gaon of Vilna, a violent opponent of Hassidism. In reference to them, the Gaon said: "To all of them, *i.e.*, the Hassidim, there is an objection, except for Samuel Shmelke; and as for Phineas of Frankfurt, he is synonymous with Elijah with whom no question goes unanswered."[1]

Upon the counsel of their revered teacher, Rabbi Dov Ber, the preacher of Mezeritz, they traveled to other cities outside of Poland to teach Hassidism. Rabbi Samuel settled in Nicholsburg and Rabbi Phineas in Frankfurt. A friend of theirs in Mezeritz, Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizensk, accepted the task of developing and disseminating Hassidism in Poland.

Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizensk waged an unflinching and courageous battle against the *Mithnageddim,* whose opposition and denouncements resulted in the excommunication of some Hassidim in Brody in 1772 and Cracow in 1786.

Despite this opposition, Rabbi Elimelekh was successful in gaining supporters for his movement, and his influence

spread to all of Poland. His work "Noam Elimelekh" is a basic text for the understanding of Hassidism. In his theology he emphasized *ahavath Yisrael* (love for Israel, the people), companionship, fervent prayer, righteousness and *yir'ah* (reverence for God), many concepts later espoused by the school of Gur.

His three outstanding students, Rabbi Jacob Isaac Hurwitz (d. 1815), known as the Seer and Preacher of Lublin, Rabbi Israel Hopstein (d. 1814), the *Maggid* (preacher) of Koznitz, and Rabbi Mendele of Rimnov (d. 1815), were known as the founding fathers of Hassidism in Poland. These three friends from youth, students in Nicholsburg and Lizensk, enhanced the gospel of Hassidism through their own religious demeanor, as well as their direct influence on thousands of disciples in Poland.

According to Hassidic legend, upon Rabbi Elimelekh's death he bequeathed each of his students a spiritual legacy: to the Seer of Lublin, he left his keen perception and foresight; to Rabbi Hopstein, the strength and endurance of his heart; and he willed his mental and spiritual powers to Rabbi Mendele of Rimnov.[2]

The first of the three, Rabbi Jacob Isaac Hurwitz, was born in 1745 to Rabbi Abraham Hurwitz of Josefef, Poland. In his youth he was impressed and influenced by the Preacher of Mezeritz. Upon the death of his teacher in 1773, he traveled to Nicholsburg. After the demise of his revered teacher, Rabbi Shmelke of Nicholsburg, in 1778, he departed for Lizensk and the school of Rabbi Elimelekh to advance his talmudic and Hassidic studies. After "interning" in several Hassidic communities with much success, he finally settled in Lublin, where he became known as the Seer of Lublin.

In the beginning of his career at Lublin he was under great stress, encountering obstinate and vehement opposition from the *mithnageddim,* led by Rabbi Azriel, called "Iron Head." Despite the antagonism, he attracted thousands of followers and his reputation was that of a man of great wisdom and keen foresight, and a master of parables. His attitudes, endearing modesty, and enduring patience

resembled and reflected the demeanor of his teacher. Finally, after much perseverance, he established a leading Hassidic center in Lublin and then trained many future leaders, scholars, and disciples of Hassidim.

The second of this triumvirate of Hassidic leaders was Rabbi Israel Hopstein of Koznitz. Israel was born to Rabbi Shabtai Hopstein, a Polish binder, in 1737. He was a contemporary of his namesake the Besht. From his youth he displayed a keen and scholarly intellect, studying with Rabbi Samuel of Nicholsburg, who once exclaimed: "This small one is among our foremost scholars!" Completing his studies with the Preacher of Mezeritz, he journeyed to Lizensk where he became a member of this unique association of Hassidic masters. His first and only rabbinic post was at Koznitz where he established one of Poland's most renowned Hassidic courts. Rabbi Israel was noted for his affection and unusual love for his co-religionists, his distinct philosophy of prayer, and his pastoral counseling. Koznitz was a small village but its population grew and attracted thousands of devotees. His most renowned student was Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Alter of Gur.

The third member of this group, Rabbi Mendele of Rimnov, whose powerful influence extended throughout Galicia, was a disciple of Rabbi Samuel of Nicholsburg and of Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizensk. His father was Rabbi Joseph Tumim. In his youth he studied in the school of Rabbi Daniel Wolfe in Berlin. He taught at first in Pristuk, then in Rimnov, returned once again to Pristuk, but finally accepted Rimnov as his permanent post until his death.

These three "fathers" of Hassidism reflected the *derekh* (methodology) and religious views of the school of Lizensk, *i.e.*, utter simplicity in Hassidic thought and practice. Rather than emphasize the theoretical and abstract values of Hassidism, they concentrated upon the more practical and realistic application of these ideals. Through this system the attributes of modesty, love among Jews, and the essential ethical virtues became integral parts of the Hassidic personality. At the pinnacle of this ideal stood the

Zaddik, the pious leader whose Divine gifts of loving-kindness and charity were to be shared by all Jews.

With the demise of these three contemporary leaders a salient Hassidic era ended in the year 1815. During their lifetime Hassidism spread quickly and successfully to many Polish communities. But at the same time, there was an undercurrent of antagonism and dissatisfaction with the view of the "fathers" of Hassidism in Poland. A system which emphasized acts and deeds more than thought, contemplation, and study became unacceptable to the more sophisticated Jew, who felt that knowledge of God and some speculation about Him could establish a closer relationship. Thus, the setting was created for the appearance of the "Yehudi" who revolutionized Hassidic thought in Poland.

Rabbi Jacob Isaac was born in 1766 to Rabbi Asher Rabinowitz, the preacher in the town of Peshedaburz. He studied in this town in his youth and then went to Apte where he married. Here he received a position as a lecturer in the local *yeshiva* but still had no contact with Hassidism.

Rabbi Jacob Isaac Rabinowitz was recognized as a leading scholar with a keen and profound mind. During his tenure in Apte he met Rabbi Moses Leib of Sesob, a "missionary" of Hassidism, whose gentle demeanor and love of every creature created a powerful impression on Rabbi Rabinowitz. The young rabbi exposed himself to the Hassidic religious experience and was "converted" to this flourishing movement. He then resigned as lecturer at the *yeshiva* in order to expend all his efforts and time on the study of Hassidism's thoughts and ideals.

He spent much time in seclusion from the community until he had developed a unique religious character. During his wanderings, seeking a wider and more varied exposure, he met Rabbi Mendele of Levov, a student of Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizensk, whose demeanor of love, compassion, and empathy greatly affected him.

Finally, Rabbi Jacob Isaac went to Lublin where he studied with the Seer of Lublin, Rabbi Jacob Isaac Hurwitz. After the death of his teacher and master, Rabbi Jacob

Isaac Rabinowitz assumed the spiritual leadership of Lublin and was affectionately called the *Yehudi Ha-Kadosh* (the Holy Jew), perhaps to distinguish him from his teacher, the Seer of Lublin, who was also named Rabbi Jacob Isaac. His name may also have reflected his unique personality, *kadosh* meaning "holy." In Lublin he gained the respect of the great scholar and *mithnaged,* Rabbi Azriel Horowitz, who was greatly impressed with his keen mind and novel intellectual approach to the Hassidic movement, which at first he violently opposed.

Rabbi Jacob Isaac revolutionalized Hassidism by emphasizing thought and Torah learning as the basic prerequisites for the understanding of God and Judaism. Man must strive to develop spiritual perfection through the study of Divine attributes and the intent of the commandments. Perfection could not be achieved by superficial adherence to all ritual or by symbolism alone. It could be attained only through study of Torah, both the written and oral law.

Although Rabbi Jacob Isaac attracted some *mithnaged-dim* with his emphasis on study in contradistinction to prayer and deeds alone, he was opposed by many Hassidim. These men felt that scholarship *per se* could not be united with prayer in the service of God—it was either one or the other—and they believed that *ma'aseh* (deed) and prayer were of greater import than *midrash* (study). Interestingly, the Seer of Lublin once said: "The system of Hassidism employed by the *Yehudi* is better than mine, but waht can I do, since my thinking was so greatly influenced by Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizensk."[3]

Rabbi Jacob Isaac succeeded in attracting young devoted scholars to his city, Pshykhse. Due to his unique practices and personality, the city soon became a center of Hassidism, despite the controversy over his methodology and philosophy.

Rabbi Jacob Isaac believed that Hassidism would never survive unless his approach were adopted. But, to pacify his opponents, at first he officially recognized the Seer of Lublin as the foremost authority. When the dispute con-

tinued, he traveled to Rabbi Mendele of Rimnov and Rabbi Hopstein of Koznitz for mediation but to no avail.

The controversies in which he was involved, in addition to his strenuous journeys and missions throughout the land, brought about his untimely death in 1813, at the age of 47. He was mourned by friends and opponents alike, and was posthumously recognized as one of the most courageous and enigmatic Hassidic leaders since the Besht.

Rabbi Jacob Isaac's outstanding student was Rabbi Simha Bunam, who emulated his master in thought and deed. He was born in 1765, son of the *Zaddik* of Vedeslov, and received his early education at home, but later journeyed to the Yeshiva of Metersdorf of the school of Rabbi Mordecai Bennett, chief Rabbi of Nicholsburg. When he returned to Poland he became influenced by Hassidism, then in its early stages but already popular in many schools and cities. He traveled to the Hassidic leaders of that generation: Rabbi Moses Leib of Sesob, Rabbi Hopstein of Koznitz, and the Seer of Lublin. He became renowned for his amazing wisdom and wit. In his service to the wealthy Bergeson family, he often traveled to Danzig and Germany where he became familiar with many European languages and secular knowledge.

Concerned with earning his livelihood from a more "honorable" profession, Rabbi Bunam studied pharmacy and received the diploma of a certified druggist. He opened a pharmacy in Pshykhse and taught his students this profession.

Rabbi Bunam was dissatisfied with the lack of real intensity in the study of Torah among the Hassidim of Lublin, and he became a disciple and firm devotee of Rabbi Jacob Isaac. He was eventually chosen as the latter's assistant dean, and after Rabbi Jacob Isaac's death, his students appointed Rabbi Bunam as their teacher and leader. Like the *Yehudi Ha-Kadosh,* Rabbi Bunam engaged in battle with the conservative element of Hassidism. Renowned for his brilliance in the disciplines of Scripture and Oral Law, he gained many disciples.

His outstanding student, Rabbi Mendele of Tomshov, later to achieve renown as the Rabbi of Kotzk, brought many young scholars to Pshykhse. Among the students whom Rabbi Bunam attracted was an exceptionally gifted young scholar, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Alter, destined to become the leader of the school of Gur.

Chapter Six

The City of Gur and Their Zaddikim



In Jewish communal life, a city or even a rural district becomes renowned because of a sage who resided there or a school that was established within its boundaries. Thus, Vilna in Lithuania brings to mind profound rabbinic scholarship, because of its Vilner *Gaon* Elijah, and its *Yeshivoth*; Safed in Israel is known as the seat of *Kabbalah* and Jewish mysticism; and Berditchev became famous because of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak.

The identification of cities with their foremost scholars was distinctively true of the places where the *Zaddikim* established their Hassidic courts. Disciples may never have known their teachers, not even their given names, but who could not repeat a parable uttered by the *Koznitzer Maggid,* or the "Pshykhser," or the "Kotzker," or the Seer of Lublin? In most cases, it was their sages who put these small, probably unincorporated, villages on the map.

The city of Gur, about four miles away from Warsaw, merited universal renown due to the three generations of Hassidic Grand Rabbis, the *Admorim,* who bore the family name of Alter: Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib and Rabbi Abraham Mordecai. They ministered in the city of Gur for eighty-four fruitful and memorable years, from 1859 to 1943. Thus they are referred to as the Gerer *Zaddikim* or *Rebbe-im.*[1]

What's in a name if it bears no fruit and leaves nothing for posterity? It is not important what a man has, but rather what he does and what he is—that was the prevailing Jewish view. Thus the title of one's writings was reflected in the name of the author. The commentator Rabbi Shabatai Ha-Kohen was known as the "Shakh," which was a combination of the first Hebrew letters of the words *Siftei Kohen,* the book he wrote.[2]

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, the first to establish the Hassidic court at Gur, was better known as the "Hiddushei Harym," after writing a commentary on the various Talmudic tractates. The title means the *Hiddushei* (Creative Writings) of *HaRav Yitzhak Meir* (*Rym*).

His grandson who succeeded him in the Hassidic ministry at Gur, Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, left commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, entitled *Sefath Emeth* (The Language of Truth), and consequently, he is referred to as the "Sefath Emeth."

His son, the last to live in Gur, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai Alter, escaped from the Nazi holocaust and established residence in Jerusalem near the Yeshivath Sefath Emeth, the Seminary still in existence today in Mea Shearim, the ultra-orthodox section of Jerusalem. He died there in 1948,

leaving the legacy of Gur Hassidism to his learned son, Rabbi Yisrael Alter.

Why did the Rym leave Warsaw, the hub of Jewish life, for the small town of Gur? The *Rebbe* had already gathered many young disciples in Warsaw. He was deeply concerned about the deleterious influences of the large metropolis, the crass materialism of the market place, and the circle of *maskilim* (the enlightened). He was determined to transform Gur into a center of Hassidism and he eventually succeeded.

The Rym's father, Rabbi Israel Rothenburg, had ministered at Gur as Rabbi, and was succeeded by Rabbi Jacob David Kalish, son of the *Rebbe* of Wurke. When the latter departed, Gur was left without a spiritual leader and this vacancy prompted the Rym to settle in his native city.

Gura Kalawarja, as the city was called in Polish, was four miles from Warsaw. Before the Rym came the only means of transportation were horse-drawn carriages, but later there were *kulaikoth* (small trains), and in more modern times buses were added.

It was told in Gerer circles that Gur was spiritually barren and defiled and a center of Christian missions in the sixteenth century. The Besht tarried there to induce a converted Catholic Priest to return to his former Judaic faith, but Gur was so defiled that the Besht refused to pray there, worshipping instead outside the city. Until recent years a stone marked the historic site where the Besht prayed.

When the small town of Gur gained pre-eminence as a flourishing Hassidic center, it merited a chartered train from Warsaw, on which hundreds of the *Rebbe's* Hassidim journeyed from their homes to spend the Sabbath or a pilgrimage festival with the *Zaddik,* returning to their secular and miserable lives with their will to accept God's judgments strongly reinforced.

During the days of awe, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, Gur burst at its Hassidic seams, for it was then that the devout disciple felt it absolutely mandatory to go there to cleanse his soul and beg forgiveness for his misdeeds in the

undefiled shadow of the *Zaddik,* convinced that if the *Rebbe* could not intercede on his behalf before the throne of the Almighty no other mortal being could. Moreover, it was only the most prosaic and unbelieving *mithnaged* or *maskil* who could not sense the very indwellings of God's *Shekhina* in the vicinity of the Gerer *Zaddik's* court, where, unlike the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, the *Rebbe* of Gur prayed for his Hassidim before he prayed for himself.[3]

The court of Gur extended its spiritual wings over the length and breadth of Poland and surrounding territories, numbering "thousands" of devout followers. (There is no accurate count. Scholars concede, however, that the court of Gur enjoyed a wide reputation for "thousands upon thousands" of disciples, probably over 30,000.) Yet how strange that the more popular literature on Polish Hassidism fails to indicate that Gur was the veritable reservoir of this orthodox movement which flooded the terrain of Eastern Europe. It is told that Gur Hassidism was especially blessed both in essence and numbers. The cream of orthodox disciples, those rich in scholarship, paid visits to Gur.

Unfortunately, historians of Hassidism measured the *Zaddik's* greatness by his witty maxims and popular parables rather than by his sphere of influence, or even his scholarship. For example, Rabbi Abraham of Sochochov, probably the most learned talmudic giant of his day, is mentioned only in passing by Buber, although men of lesser scholarship are popularized. This was also true of Rabbi Yitzhak Meir and Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib of Gur, despite their learning and wide sphere of influence. Most of their poignant parables and moral sayings have been included in anthologies.

Though it was true that the Jewish residents of Gur did not enjoy material wealth, their darkened lives became more radiant from the spiritual effulgence of the "Holy *Zaddikim.*" The lives of the citizens were anything but monotonous and mundane, with the *Rebbe* in their midst and his Hassidim debating the *Dvar Torah* expounded by

the *Rebbe* upon their return to their second homes, the Sabbath boarding houses.

In 1961, the writer met a former resident of Gur who had lived there for the first twenty years of her life. She described the exhilaration and joy that permeated the town because the Gerer *Zaddikim* saw fit to establish residence there. All the town's activities as well as the Jewish economy centered around the *Rebbe's* court. Families did not sleep in their own beds on weekends and the holidays, giving up their rooms to boarding Hassidim. The *boidem* (attic) was their temporary abode, and they were thrilled to undergo this inconvenience both for economic and religious reasons. The citizenry was affected by the *ru'ah* (Hassidic spirit), emanating from the *Zaddik's* residence. The Hassidim, she remembers, came in throngs—literally thousands. There was dancing in the streets on various holy days, particularly on Simhat Torah when Jews rejoice over the completion of the annual reading of the Pentateuch. A city usually objects to over-boisterous and noisy tourists, especially if they become intoxicated. But not the residents of Gur, who looked forward to the ecstasy and joy created by the visitation of the Gerer Hassidim.

Educational training at Gur suffered from a disorganized curriculum and a general lack of supervision and guidance. However, despite this handicap, the diligent Hassid at Gur was inspired to become learned, and many disciples later ministered as rabbis, *shohtim* and teachers. The writer has met many Gerer Hassidim, and apparently they are well versed in the Bible, Talmud, Midrash, and related subjects.

The City of Gur is no more, destroyed by the ravages of Poland's enemies. It is possible that a few of its war-torn houses, the *Rebbe's* synagogues and the desecrated cemeteries still remain. But even if its buildings still stood, without its *Zaddik,* without its teeming and vibrant Hassidim, without its ecstatic prayers that rose heavenward from hundreds of houses, glowing, vibrant, powerful enough to shatter the gates of Heaven, Gur would be dead,

for what is a city without its reason for being? Can a city exist without a soul?

What of the Jewish population? Like their brethren, the few whom the Nazis were not quite efficient enough to destroy, they have once again taken the wanderer's staff. Former Gerer Hassidim are to be found wherever Jews reside, most of them in the Holy Land, near the Holy City where the fourth generation of Gerer *Zaddikim,* Rabbi Israel Alter, now resides and where the *Yeshiva Sefath Emeth* retains the spirit and tradition of the Grand Rabbis of Gur: Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib, and Rabbi Abraham Mordecai Alter.

Chapter Seven

The First Zaddik of Gur, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir

HIS LINEAGE AND EARLY EDUCATION

The old debate on what molds the personality and character of an individual—environment, heredity, or both—still rages. Whereas twenty years ago psychologists and physiologists were inclined towards a completely behavioristic approach, today most agree that both innate genetic factors and environmental stimuli develop personality and character traits.

In nineteenth century Europe (and in many circles today), both Jews and non-Jews, Hassidim and non-Hassidim, attached great importance to family background and ancestry for a man's scholastic and religious potential. The concept of family *yihus* (good ancestry) has its origin in talmudic and even biblical times, but became especially significant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Yihus was of great importance among *Zaddikim* and Hassidic families. *Shiddukhin* (match making) was prevalent for this very reason, namely to assure the union of two illustrious families. A quick glance at the biographies of *Zaddikim*—and the first information given about a *Zaddik* in any biography is his lineage—will indicate how interrelated so many of them were, most claiming to be descendants of the *Baal Shem Tov*.

This is, of course, also true of Rabbi Yitzhak Meir. Although to claim that he received his scholarship and piety genetically would be potently absurd even to the believing Hassid, it is plausible to attribute his genius and

innate intelligence to his forefathers. To add that he was inspired and encouraged by the knowledge of his excellent hereditary background is assuredly a truism.

Biographers trace Yitzhak's family back to the renowned Rabbi Meir Rothenburg (b. 1215), who was one of the last *Baalei Tosefoth* (commentators) on the Talmud and one of the most brilliant scholars of his generation. His outstanding student was Rabbi Isaac of Vienna, teacher of Rabbi Asher of Toledo, whose famous commentary on the Talmud, the "Rosh," is still studied today. Rabbi Solomon Luria once described the personality of Rabbi Meir Rothenburg as follows: "A modest and pure man, the like of whom could not be found among the *Baalei Tosefoth*."[1] Rabbi Meir, whose family name was derived from the town of Rothenburg where he lived, was the first Chief Rabbi of German Jewry.

The government once issued a decree to jail Rabbi Meir on the charge of blackmail. He managed to escape, and intended to journey to Israel. However, in Rome, Rabbi Rothenburg was recognized as a fugitive and in 1286 he was returned to Germany. Although the German Jewish community had collected a large sum to free Rabbi Rothenburg, he preferred to be jailed lest the government continue the practice of blackmailing Jewish leaders on false charges. While in prison, he sent his responsa on Jewish law to all corners of the world. In 1293, seven years after his imprisonment, he died. Thirteen years after his death his remains were interred in the Holy Land.

Yitzhak Meir's grandfather, Rabbi Meir Rothenburg, also a leading scholar and rabbi, held many positions in the district of Zelehov. His uncle was the famous *Maharam* of Rothenburg, Rabbi Moses. Their genealogy can further be traced to Rabbi Mordecai Suskind Rothenburg who ministered in the pulpits of Attuna, Hamburg, and Wendesbeck.

Yitzhak Meir's father, Rabbi Israel enjoyed an excellent reputation as scholar and Hassid, being one of the first rabbis of Poland to join the Hassidic movement. The family was related to Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev and Rabbi Israel Hopstein, preacher of Koznitz.

Yitzhak Meir's mother, Haya Sarah, was also descended from a scholarly family. Her father, Rabbi Jacob Ha-Levi, was the son-in-law of Rabbi Naftali Hertz, who achieved renown as an excellent and accomplished scribe. Rabbi Hertz was the son of Rabbi Jonathan Eyebeshutz, Rabbi of Drabnin. The father of the Eyebeshutz family was Rabbi Nathan Nuta, whose grandfather was the author of the famous kabbalistic work *Megalleh 'Amukot.*

Orphaned while still a young child, Haya Sarah was raised in the house of her relative and guardian, the preacher of Koznitz. When the time approached for her to be married, she refused all offers. Finally, upon the advice of the preacher of Koznitz, she decided to marry Rabbi Israel Rothenburg. Rabbi Rothenburg accepted a rabbinical position in Megenshov and found it so difficult to earn a living that his wife had to travel to nearby Koznitz to obtain food for the family. On one of her frequent visits to Koznitz she visited the *Maggid,* the preacher of that town, her relative and guardian. When she entered the house, he arose as was befitting an honored guest and exclaimed: "Let it be known that it is not because of you that I have risen but because of the child in your womb whose soul is very great, and for a hundred years there has never been another soul like this in the world."[2] Haya Sarah returned home to Megenshov and told this to her husband, Israel.

The child was born in 1799 and was named *Meir* (giver of light), based on the promise of the preacher of Koznitz that the child would illuminate the world of Torah with his knowledge. It is related that the night before the birth of the child, Rabbi Israel's teacher, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, appeared to Rabbi Israel in a dream and requested that the child be named after him; hence the child's name of Yitzhak Meir.[3]

When the child was still a toddler, his intelligence was already recognized by his parents and the Koznitzer. When Yitzhak Meir was in the presence of an assembly of guests, the Koznitzer displayed his love for the child, and proclaimed: "If no ill befalls this child, he will be able to

return the hearts of all his people to their father in Heaven."[4]

As Yitzhak Meir grew older his talks with the preacher of Koznitz dealt with difficult problems in the Talmud and passages in Maimonides' Codes. Once when the preacher was troubled, he called for the child to explain a problem in the Talmud. During several hours of examination the youth discussed all the diverse viewpoints, thus resolving the contradiction.

The talmudic prowess of Yitzhak Meir became known throughout Poland. Rabbi Moses Halfen, seeking a suitable mate for his daughter, visited the Seer of Lublin. The Seer advised him to go to Koznitz where no doubt he would find a suitable scholar for his young daughter. When he arrived in Koznitz, he was advised that his daughter should marry the young Yitzhak Meir Rothenburg. In order to test the validity of the reports concerning the child's genius, he asked him a complex Talmudic question which the nine-year-old answered immediately. The betrothal was pledged in 1808 and was consummated in marriage rites in 1811, when the boy, being thirteen years old, was of legal age. Rabbi Halfen gave his brilliant son-in-law a large dowry and asked that he study in Warsaw, despite the wishes of the preacher of Koznitz that he remain in his own court.

When the young lad parted from his revered teacher, the preacher of Koznitz, he was asked to fulfill three commitments: to find *hiddushim* (new ideas) daily in his studies; to pray and meditate fervently and often by himself; to delve into rabbinic commentaries on the Talmud and to discover cogent arguments against the commentary of Nahmanides entitled *Milhamoth Ha-Shem.*[5]

In Warsaw, Yitzhak Meir acquired a new title, *Der Varshiver Illui* (the genius of Warsaw), as his scholarship and intellectual depth was recognized by rabbis and students. He studied briefly in the yeshiva of his renowned cousin, Rabbi Aryeh Leib Zinz. After a short stay, he no longer felt the need for formal schooling and a teacher, and began to study alone, the usual procedure for advanced students.

Because of parental influence, and the inspiration of the Koznitzer *Zaddik,* Yitzhak Meir possessed a love for the study of Hassidism. He made regular journeys to the court of Koznitz, and there intensified his feelings and attitudes towards Hassidism, convinced that the regeneration and renascence of Judaism and its inner spirit lay in the Hassidic "way."

HIS ASSOCIATION WITH KOZNITZ, PSHYKHSE, AND KOTZK

As the Rym's scholastic pre-eminence grew and as the schism widened between Lublin and Pshykhse, an increasing number of scholars and disciples congregated around him. The Rym, however, paid little attention to the controversies between the more liberal and intellectual school of Pshykhse and the conservative approach of Lublin.

Accepting the counsel and influence of Rabbi Shragai Feivel Danziker and Rabbi Alexander Zushe of Pluzk, two of his devoted colleagues in Lublin, the Rym finally consented to visit the Seer of Lublin. In the Rym's waning years he admitted being a disciple of the Seer who, to quote a Lubliner Hassid, was "everyone's *Rebbe,*" but these brief visits to Lublin did not markedly influence the Rym, and he continued to show his allegiance to Koznitz.

Pshykhse had also made a strong bid for the Rym's affection. The Yehudi Hakadosh of Pshykhse was most anxious to meet Rabbi Yitzhak Meir and sent his personal emissaries to him and to the Rym's father and father-in-law, both loyal to Lublin. Fearing that the Rym would be attracted to the scholarly Yehudi, they discouraged the meeting. Gerer disciples believed that their *Rebbe* had always regretted this and bore some resentment against both his father, Rabbi Israel, and father-in-law, Moshe Halfen. He was once quoted: "I must perforce forgive my father but I cannot forgive my father-in-law."[6]

The Rym often declared his reverence and respect for the Yehudi Hakadosh and praised his genius and piety: "As Rabbi Akiba was the genius among the *Tannaim,* the

Yehudi Hakadosh was the great intellect among the *Zaddikim.*"[7]

It was the Yehudi who really established the school of Pshykhse. Rabbi Uri of Strelisk, the "Seraph" said of the Yehudi: "He wanted to bring a new way down to men, to fuse teaching and prayer into one service."[8]

The Yehudi was undoubtedly Hassidism's most mysterious personality. Even in his youth, he did not pray in the congregation nor at the appropriate time. He did not take the bath of immersion with others, but was often found asleep over the *Zohar* and studies of the Kabbalah. "For many years he taught children in various villages. Then he was filled with a yearning for death which he regarded as a perfection of being. He did not know whether this yearning was divine truth or self delusion."[9]

His entire demeanor was shrouded with strangeness and enigma. Perhaps it was his incomprehensible "way" and his total unorthodoxy in prayer, study, and general behavior that caused his conflicts with the Seer of Lublin. He believed that redemption was near at hand, that man had to "turn" immediately "for there is no time for new migration of the soul." Penitence had to take place at once, for the redemption was imminent and man had to prepare himself.[10]

As for prayer, the Yehudi was accused of scoffing at the idea of a prescribed time for offering service to the Lord. According to him prayer was an expression of the soul and had to come about spontaneously when the worshipper was filled with the desire to pray.

His death as well as his life is enveloped in mystery. He died at the age of 47, passing on to that world for which he yearned in his youth. For him death was the highest "unification."

These departures from orthodoxy on the part of the Yehudi, along with his peculiar manner of conducting his court may have been some of the reasons Pshykhse remained the object of derision and misunderstanding. The Rym, for instance, was known to have shunned any association with

the adherents of the Pshykhser, even after the Yehudi had expired.[11]

Hassidism was dealt a serious and tragic blow with the untimely deaths of three of its foremost masters in 1815. On the eve of Sukkoth in 1815, the Preacher of Koznitz expired, and his orphaned disciples journeyed to Lublin, reflecting their loyalty to the Seer and disassociating themselves from Rabbi Moshe Elyakim, son of the Koznitzer. The Seer of Lublin, however, was reluctant to accept them, encouraging their return to Rabbi Moshe in Koznitz.

Rabbi Moshe proved to be a most noteworthy leader and eventually succeeded in retrieving his father's devotees. Among his most praiseworthy followers was Rabbi Yitzhak Meir who still chose to remain in the court of Koznitz.

In that ominous year, 1815, another foremost *Zaddik*, Rabbi Mendele of Rimnov passed away on Lag B'Omer and on the ninth day of Ab, the Seer of Lublin died.

The remaining Hassidic sects, desiring to expand their dynasties, fought fervently to attract the master-less Hassidim, especially the Rym, to their own courts. The Rym, the most-sought-after Hassid, failed to yield to their enticements, choosing to remain loyal to Koznitz.

Rabbi Simha Bunam, the Yehudi's foremost disciple, who succeeded him in Pshykhse, had attempted to contain and decrease the schisms between his own court and Lublin as long as the Seer was alive. But immediately following the latter's death, Pshykhse commenced a concentrated campaign to attract the unaffiliated, especially young scholars.

Rabbi Simha Bunam received the Hassidic truth from the *Maggid* of Koznitz whom he frequently visited. He then journeyed to Lublin and there the "truth" was intensified. He finally found his place as the Yehudi's most faithful student. At first Simha was a lumber merchant, copyist and pharmacist, but afterwards launched his Talmudic studies in Hungary.

One can say that Simha was not adequately prepared for his post and found it difficult not only to succeed the Yehudi but generally to practice his new vocation. Buber agrees however that "once he seriously began to teach,

teaching became his most vital function and one he discharged with a strong sense of responsibility. He shook and revolutionized the entire lives of the young men who came from everywhere and begged permission to remain near him."[13]

Buber suggests a number of objective reasons for the enmity expressed against Rabbi Simha by rival sects. First of all, many youths actually left thriving businesses and their families to be near him. He was accordingly accused of inducing them to sever relations with their families and devote themselves wholeheartedly to him. *Zaddikim* were also hostile because of the manner in which he attempted to lead his Hassidim along the lines of the Yehudi, who had already created his own share of opponents.

Rabbi Naftali Roptchitzer, who fought vehemently against the Yehudi, once told a young man who came to receive his blessings upon his forthcoming marriage to a girl from the village of Pshykhse: "I am not saying anything against the rabbi, for he is a *Zaddik,* but his way is dangerous to the disciples who follow him. We serve so many years to arrive at the power and fervor they acquire in so short a time."[14]

Did Simha succeed in emulating his predecessor? It appears that he tried to reach a compromise, for he refused to believe that the *ge-ulah* (redemption) was near at hand and that one had to launch his preparation immediately. Moreover, the Yehudi had subjectivized prayer and made it a very personal experience. Simha made prayer secondary to teaching and made the school superior to the congregation. To quote Buber: "His profound table talk and crystalline parables bear powerful witness to the religious truth, but he cannot be regarded as the body and voice of the religious spirit. . . . Wise Bunam was known as 'the man versed in the mystery,' but he was no longer close to the mystery itself."[15]

Despite his deviation from the Yehudi's way, his school was still the object of jealousy and dispute. Whether this hostility was strictly a petty personal feeling engendered by the *Zaddik* or his Hassidim, or whether the rival sects

were sincerely concerned with the theology or practices of Pshykhse, is debatable. Here we are inclined to agree with Minkin that most disputes were born neither of sincerity nor conviction: "Religious squabble may be condoned when motivated by convictions deep and genuine; but the feuds that set large sections of Jewry against each other had no such excuse. They were cheap and paltry, vulgar and material. . . . They were inspired neither by God nor the Torah."[16] The fact that Pshykhse was eventually vindicated at Apte is a proof positive of the lack of sincere motivation on the part of their antagonists.

Rabbi Simha Bunam personally set out to induce the Rym to ally himself with his court. Hassidim relate the first discussion held between Rabbi Simha and Rabbi Yitzhak Meir. The *Rebbe:* "Who are you and where are you from?" The Rym: "Yitzhak Meir of Warsaw." The *Rebbe:* "Why did you not come to Pshykhse?" The Rym: "I am a Hassid of Koznitz, and there we choose to pronounce the blessing: 'Blessed is He who has not made me a Pshykhser Hassid.'" The *Rebbe:* "Yitzhak Meirel, by your life, you will one day come to me in your stocking feet."[17]

When Rabbi Simha Bunam once attended a wedding at Koznitz, he challenged the Rym to a "friendly" Talmudic debate. Hassidim relate that the Rym was so profoundly impressed with the depth and scope of the *Rebbe's* knowledge that his allegiance to Pshykhse was then and there established, though not publicly announced.[18]

The Rym's first son was born on the 19th day of Shevat in 5576 (1816). He was given the Hebrew name Abraham Mordecai, and later distinguished himself as a Talmudic scholar. It was at this time that the Rym felt that his continued association with the *Rebbe* of Koznitz retarded his spiritual and intellectual growth. The relationship was too convenient and there was no further intellectual stimulus. The Rym felt the need for a more rigorous task-master as teacher. His decision to sever the relationship with Koznitz may be considered one of the salient turning points in his life and one which caused him much suffering.

As the news of the Rym's disassociation with the Koz-

nitzer was received by the various Hassidic sects in Warsaw, the battle to solicit his allegiance raged once again. Rabbi Yitzhak Meir chose at first the court of Apte and its Master, Rabbi Meirel, who was recognized as the Seer's most distinguished disciple. His treatise *"Or La-Shamayim,"* is one of the basic texts of classical Hassidism. Perhaps Rabbi Meirel would help him find himself in the maze of his spiritual dilemma. Perhaps this master would strengthen his faith in Hassidism as taught by the Yehudi Hakadosh. He was, of course, received with great honor, and profound joy permeated the very atmosphere of Apte as it claimed Hassidism's most distinguished son.

Rabbi Meirel expended all his time and effort to impress the Rym with his own scholarship as well as with the *ru-ah* (spirit) of his court, but without success. The Rym continued to feel a spiritual void and intellectual vacuum and he reflected his dissatisfaction publicly. Finally he announced his decision: "I cannot remain in Apte. My place is in Pshykhse."[19]

There was fervent joy among the Pshykhser Hassidim visiting Apte, and their good fortune was quickly announced in almost every *shtibbel* in Poland. On the Rym's journey to Pshykhse hundreds of Hassidim left their homes to join the pilgrimage and to witness the ecstatic joy in Pshykhse when the Rym entered the city. As this great mass of Hassidic humanity entered the city, the Rym was pressed forward by the mob, losing his shoes in the melée. He was suddenly confronted by the *Rebbe,* Simha Bunam, and as they embraced, the *Rebbe* looked at the young man, and with his endearing smile reminded him that his former prophecy had now been fulfilled, *i.e.,* "Yitzhak Meir, you will one day come to me in your stocking feet!"[20]

"It was no easy task for me to bring you to our court," said Rabbi Simha, as he ordered everyone to leave his study. Their meeting was the first of many spent in stimulating discussions and debates on a variety of subjects. The Rym had finally discovered a teacher at whose feet he could sit.

He then returned to Warsaw, and as he stepped over the threshold of his house he received the tragic news of

the death of one of his sons. He then recalled the ominous prophecy of Rabbi Moshele on the last Sabbath he had spent at Koznitz when he broke the news of his forthcoming departure: "Rabbi Yitzhak Meir spoiled one Sabbath for us. I suspect that many Sabbaths will be vitiated for him."[21]

Unfortunately every journey made to Pshykhse by the Rym resulted in a tragic incident at home upon his return. Thirteen sons expired in their youth on the Sabbath. Rabbi Yitzhak Meir himself died on the Sabbath. Would Rabbi Moshele not forgive him for forsaking his court? The Rym's resentment against his former colleague increased, fearing some strange imprecation cast upon him by Rabbi Moshele.

The Rym attempted to pacify the Koznitzer, and sent emissaries to him, assuring him of his continued loyalty and devotion. When he was advised to beseech the *Rebbe* personally, the Rym refused, fearing that a visit would indicate his official return to Koznitz and would create even greater confusion in the Hassidic world.

Admittedly, the modern sophisticate finds it difficult to accept any cause-and-effect situation between Rabbi Moshele's ominous prophesy and personal vendetta against the Rym and the latter's tragic, Job-like calamities. Even for the unsophisticated it appears a most remote possibility. The Hassid, however, accepts the association without equivocation, for the Rym himself had so expressed it. Even after Rabbi Moshele's death, the Rym continued to experience additional bereavements in his family, and the *Rebbe* asked: "Is he not now residing in the world of truth—surely now he knows the truth!"[22]

Indeed, this entire episode, *i.e.*, the rifts between Hassidic sects in their competitive attempt to give luster to the diadem of their own *Rebbe's* glory by attracting men like the Rym, and the rousing passions and animosities that this engendered was, as Minkin concludes, "the most injurious effect of *Zaddikism.*"[23] The unequivocal faith in the Hassidic potentate, attributing to him the power of affecting a resultant joy or tragedy, further caused this "twilight of the Gods."

Somehow the Rym's belief that the Koznitzer's ill fore-

boding was unquestionably a cause of the tragedies in his family seems to contradict his own rejection of super-human powers attributed to the *Zaddik*. It is strange that his thirteen children and the Rym himself died on the Sabbath. Yet how can any saintliness be attributed to a *Zaddik* who, because of a Hassid's disloyalty or even betrayal, remotely desires than any physical harm comes to the Hassid, especially the death of thirteen of his children? Conversely, did the Rym have such little regard for the Torah sanctity, piety, and basic humanity residing in Rabbi Moshele of Koznitz, to really associate his own tragedies with the "curse" of the *Zaddik?* It can only be concluded that the Rym, too, was not innocent of the superstitions which permeate religion, Hassidism in particular.

The "orthodox" Hassid will offer strong objections to a comparison between the sacred words of a *Zaddik* and common superstitions. Surely, they will state, the talmudic concept of the *ayin hara* (evil eye) is more than magic. But the observant antagonists of Hassidism in the Lithuanian schools were not blind to the supernatural concepts contained in Jewish sacred books.

Suffice it to say that gullibility arising from man's basic fears are present in every generation, religion, or sect, the distinction being a matter of degree. In Hassidism the degree was unfortunately over-exaggerated and completely beyond control.

Yet, if the *Zaddik* was to be an intercessor and possess a special channel to God, why should his other powers be limited? Hassidism unfortunately set no limit to his powers and influence. "This neo-catholicism introduced into Judaism proved foreign and dangerous to the spirit of the ancient faith," claims Minkin.[24]

THE RYM AND PSHYKHSE

As the Rym's name as a scholar and teacher became acknowledged throughout Poland, he attracted many young talmudic intellectuals, Hassidim and non-Hassidim, to whom the Rym revealed his own concept of *Torah hanigleth* (re-

vealed wisdom) and *yirath ha-Shem* (fear of the Lord) as the Besht taught it. Inadvertently he converted many *mithnageddim* to Hassidism as his sphere of influence extended to the length and breadth of Greater Poland. The gifted students were especially anxious to attend his lectures, which they found profound but not complex or overly *pilpulistic.* His *talmudic derekh* (methodology) was a compromise between the classic rabbinic method and the simple Polish and Hassidic approach. Of course, his discussions were didactic in essence, for the chief purpose and ultimate goal of all learning was the spiritual and moral improvement of the student. *Torah lishma* was not only studying for the sake of study, but *lishma,* for the very interest and aim of the Torah itself, namely to establish a closer proximity with Him who had revealed the Torah to Israel.

It was no Hassidic court which Rabbi Yitzhak Meir established in Warsaw, but an informal school where his disciples numbered in the hundreds. *Shtibblekh* (small synagogues) multiplied throughout the city.[25]

But there is no light without its shadows, for the Hassidic antagonists in Warsaw began to fear this "creeping intellectualism" invading the Hassidic school, where many of the foremost young scholars could now be counted among the Rym's followers. Heretofore, there had been a distinct division between the *mithnageddim* and Hassidim, the erudite academician belonging to the former, while the less literary schoolboy, not particularly interested in higher talmudic education, belonged to the latter.

Fearing the loss of their most accomplished students, many *mithnageddim* accused the Rym of slandering the *Gaonim* (scholars) and men of high scholastic repute in the presence of his students. It was for this reason, they claimed, the young *yeshiva* students were disrespectful and irreverent towards them, creating further animosities and divisiveness in the Jewish community. Hassidim believed that their intent was to dissuade parents from sending their children to the Rym and thus limit his sphere of influence.

It is, however, plausible that the *mithnageddim* were disparaged in order to defend and impart the basic motiva-

tion for the founding of Hassidism. The criticism of Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, therefore, may not have been totally unfounded. Suffice it to say that the open castigation of the Rym did not affect the "enrollment" at his school. Abraham Alter, author of *Meir Einei Ha-Golah,* maintains that the truth eventually emerged and the Rym was acquitted of the accusation of open slander and calumny.

Despite his official position as Dean of his *yeshiva* and head of the first recognized Hassidic school in Warsaw, the Rym reserved many Sabbaths for his visitations to Pshykhse and Rabbi Simha Bunam. Somehow he found his spiritual tranquillity and inspiration there, as he was once quoted by the Sefath Emeth: "The Sabbaths I spent at Pshykhse inspired me so that even now on the selfsame Sabbaths I still sense a profound spiritual imprint on my soul."[26]

Rabbi Simha Bunam, greatly honored by the Rym's presence in his court, manifested much interest and love toward him and focused all of his attention upon his guest. Those days were "special Sabbaths" for both the *Zaddik* and his court, as the Hassidim developed an unusual friendship with and love for their honored guest. It was here that the Rym formed his life-long friendship with Rabbi Mendele of Tomoshov, later to become the *Zaddik of Kotzk.*

The major innovation of Pshykhse was the broadening of Hassidic horizons beyond the *shtibbel* and court, and beyond the four ells of prayer and study, in any area of Jewish communal life. Rabbi Simha Bunam frowned upon those sects who were completely and exclusively immersed in their own spiritual progress and were not at all concerned with any current communal problems. Moreover, in his opinion, fanatical piety would once again bar the common man from the movement whose primary intent it was to encourage his return.

Perhaps it was not the *Zaddik* himself nor even the spirit of Pshykhse which so impressed the Rym, but rather the intellectual circle of friends gathered there. This comraderie included men who ultimately became the foremost leaders of their day: Rabbi Mendele of Kotzk, Rabbi Yitzhak of Wurke, Rabbi Henikh of Alexander, Rabbi Mordecai

Yosef of Izbitze, Rabbi Hirsh of Tomoshov, and Rabbi Eliezer of Paltusk.

By their association with Rabbi Simha Bunam they too were accused of diluting their daily observance, not studying sufficiently, postponing their morning prayers beyond the prescribed hour, and slandering renowned *Zaddikim.* Never had a court been the object of so many criticisms, slander, and calumny as the Pshykhser. The rival sects were determined to deprecate the successors of the Yehudi, who himself was almost destroyed by similar deplorable tactics. It was their intent to recall Rabbi Simha Bunam from the position as *Rebbe* and dissolve his entire court, even to the extent of the possible excommunication of his devotees.

The accusation levelled against Pshykhse that the Hassidim had decreased the six-hour waiting period between eating meat and dairy and generally rejected many laws of the Codes, was most probably motivated by a desire to discredit a rival flourishing sect.[27]

A popular Hassidic tale is associated with this rivalry. The son of Rabbi Michel of Zleteshov was to be married to the daughter of the *Zaddik,* Rabbi Yosef Horowitz of Neshchiz. Almost all the noteworthy Hassidic leaders would be present at the wedding. This would indeed be an opportune time to confront Rabbi Simha Bunam in a vigorous debate and thus openly deprecate his wisdom and scholarship.

Accordingly an invitation was sent to Rabbi Simha which he accepted. The *habura* (circle of devotees) with Rabbi Mendele at its head, being fully aware of the motive behind the invitation, strongly advised him against his participation. Rabbi Mendele actually threw himself in the path of the *Rebbe's* carriage in his earnestness to prevent the encounter. The *Rebbe,* finally convinced, agreed to send his emissaries to defend his court. The mission was to consist of five men, each proficient in his own field: Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Warsaw, the scholar; Rabbi Feivel of Gritze, one of the Seer's outstanding pupils, as the Hassid; Rabbi Zushe of Shedliz, the editor of Rabbi Simha's book

Kol Simha, as the *hakham* (sage); Rabbi Yissachar Bar Horovitz, the Rym's personal friend, son-in-law of Tamaril Bergson and grandson of the *Rebbe* of Nicholsburg, as the affluent representative; and as the spokesman, Rabbi Eliezer Bar Megroviz, who had gained the reputation as the dynamic orator of Pshykhse.

The auspicious wedding as well as the knowledge of the forthcoming debate attracted thousands of Hassidim to the city of Austilah. Pshykhse was the only court not represented by a *Rebbe.* His emissaries, however, counselled together on the most effective method of saving the good name of Rabbi Simha Bunam.

Following the ceremony the great debate commenced, with the first question being tossed by the elder statesman of Hassidism, Rabbi Abraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apte.[28] The problem pertained to a decision of Maimonides and was baffling to many scholars. None of the responses given by many of the foremost scholars gathered were adequate. The Rym sitting in a distant corner, suggested a possible solution, but because of his humble demeanor spoke softly. His colleagues angrily ordered him to project his reply, for now was the sweet moment of victory. He rose and in a voice resounding throughout the study hall clarified his answer. The *Rebbe* of Apte was greatly impressed with both the answer and the crystal-clear and logical manner of the presentation, and immediately engaged the Rym in conversation: "Where are you from?" "From Warsaw," he replied. "Who is your *Rebbe?*" "The *Rebbe* of Pshykhse," he answered with pride, creating a storm like thunder on a clear day. Yet the debate was so stimulating that no one dared to interrupt.

As the festive wedding meal commenced, Rabbi Abraham Y. Heschel placed the Rym and his young associates from Pshykhse, all in the early twenties, at the head table alongside the foremost elder *Zaddikim,* leaders of thousands of devotees. Pshykhse was finally publicly recognized and received the approbation of Hassidic leaders—the first victory for the delegation.

The antagonists of Pshykhse could no longer contain

themselves, and, fearing another victory, poured forth a torrent of open criticism against Rabbi Simha Bunam and his Hassidim, accusing them of legal and ritual deviations and of slandering the good name of other *Zaddikim.* They cited an incident when an Apter gave a white belt (worn by Hassidim during prayer) to a Hassid of Pshykhse, who dipped it into black tar as a symbol of open disrespect of the *Rebbe.* Their prosecution centered particularly around the Pshykhser's rejection of the *Shulhan Arukh,* his minimizing the study of Torah, and permitting a late hour of morning prayer. Rabbi Yosef of Miaritshov, their spokesman, requested the excommunication of Rabbi Simha Bunam and all of his disciples.

The spokesman of the Pshykhse delegation, Rabbi Eliezer Bar Megroviz, countered every accusation and specifically objected to the notion that Pshykhse was devoid of learning, citing Rabbi Yitzhak Meir as an outstanding example of intellect and knowledge prevailing in their court.

The opponents launched an even more bitter attack, citing additional incidents of decadence and irreverence. Rabbi Leib of Kvalli, a member of the wedding party, then delivered an inspiring defense of the Pshykhser whom he portrayed as a *lamdan* (scholar), *Zaddik,* and deeply religious person.

The *Rebbe* of Apte suddenly turned to Rabbi Yerahmiel of Pshykhse, son of the Yehudi, who was one of Rabbi Simha's most vehement antagonists, especially after the *Rebbe* succeeded his father in Pshykhse. "I can testify," said Rabbi Yerahmiel, "that my father once called Rabbi Bunam, 'the beloved of my heart.' "

His words caused a momentary hush in the audience, but the attack continued with Rabbi Shimon of Zelikhov delivering an impassioned charge. The *Zaddik* of Apte suddenly interrupted: "Rabbi Shimon, you and your colleagues are known to be opposed to everything and anything, even during the period of the Yehudi. If you were in a forest, you would probably be fighting the trees!"[29] A second victory was won by the delegation.

As the dancing proceeded, the Rym and his colleagues opened with popular Pshykhser melodies, and, surprisingly, the crowd joined them. When the Apter rose to dance, he called the Rym, and taking hold of his hand danced a Hassidic dance, announcing to those gathered in the circle: "When we claimed in our discussion that the Sabbath awakens a spirit of song, joy, and exaltation, we meant this young Hassid who is 'all Sabbath and all holy.' "[30] The Pshykhser deputation were now assured of a complete and unequivocal victory.

The Rym remained in Austilah for a few days engaging the Apter in further discourse, and struck a bond of friendship with Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, the son of the *Rebbe* of Apte, remaining devoted friends thereafter.

At Pshykhse, Rabbi Bunam read the Rym's letter announcing the victory and the details of the debates in which their delegation engaged. "Behold the great power of this young man," said the *Rebbe.* "His greatness lies in his humility, attributing the victory to others rather than to himself."[31]

The shadow of fear and uncertainty had now been lifted from Pshykhse, and its spirit and fame increased as "thousands" flocked to its *Rebbe* and court. As the *Rebbe's* years waned he lost his vision. His "chosen circle" was now his vision, as they read aloud to him: the Rym in the Talmud; Reb Mendele in the *Zohar;* the *Rebbe* of Wurke in the Midrash.

During the *Rebbe's* last illness, the Rym's father expired, on 17 Iyar, 5587 (1827). After he concluded his seven days of mourning, the Rym hurriedly returned to Pshykhse to spend the last months with his *Rebbe,* guide, counsellor, and mentor. The *Rebbetzin* (rabbi's wife) wept bitterly, but was exhorted by Rabbi Simha: "Why the tears? Have I not studied all my life to prepare myself adequately to accept death?"[32]

On the twelfth day of Elul, 5587 (1827), Rabbi Simha Bunam of Pshykhse died. The mourning was profound, especially now that the court's fame had become pre-eminent. Who would lead them now? Who possessed the love

and affection of most of the Hassidim so that another rift and further disunity does not come to pass as it did after the Yehudi's demise?

The "chosen circle" called a special conclave of the recognized disciples of the court, to elect a leader who would be acceptable to all.

RABBI MENDELE BECOMES PSHYKHSER *REBBE*

Officially, the conclave was never called to session, for some of the delegates, specifically Rabbi Yitzhak Meir and Rabbi Mendele of Tomoshov, never arrived. Rabbi Mendele had not waited for any convention and had gathered about him a community of followers, establishing a court in Tomoshov. The younger element felt that Mendele was extending Pshykhse to Tomoshov and continuing the way of Simha Bunam. Eventually they were to be shocked by the drastically unorthodox and completely individualistic and original manner of Rabbi Mendele. The elder Hassidim, being thoroughly familiar with the non-conformist attitudes of Mendele, feared a new uprising and renewed animosity towards the transplanted Pshykhse. "With Rabbi Bunam we could compromise, but in his disciple from Tomoshov there is a burning zeal and passion!"[33]

To avoid any additional conflict they sought a more stable and conservative leader. The inclination was towards Rabbi Bunam's only son, Abraham Moshe. The convention was called anyway, and invitations were sent to the disciples of Pshykhse, including Rabbi Mendele and the Rym. The Hassidim of Warsaw were committed to the Rym who was their favorite son, but he let it be known that he was not in the running and would support other candidates of his choice.

The Rym from Warsaw and Rabbi Mendele embarked together upon the journey to Pshykhse. The delegates, who waited impatiently for them to arrive, were notified that the two friends had tarried in the village of Samut and were deeply engaged in a lengthy discussion. It was noted that the Rym was beginning to serve Rabbi Mendele as

though his colleague were the Master. They were closeted in a room for quite some time and Hassidim relate the overheard discussion: Rabbi Mendele: "It seems that the Heavens endowed the mantle of leadership upon us; either I will serve you or you will serve me. Will you accept the position and I will come to you?" "Why shall the position be mine? You accept it and I will serve you," answered the Rym.[34]

The door was opened then and the Rym, turning to those gathered, announced: "Hassidim, do not become obstinate. Accept the *Rebbe* (Rabbi Mendele) as your Master, for he is an honest and pious man!"[35]

The Hassidic caravan, detained at Samut, no longer continued on to Pshykhse. The deliberations at the conclave no longer held their interest and there was no purpose in attending it. They had a *Rebbe!* The Hassidim travelled to Warsaw to attend the first *tish* conducted by Rabbi Mendele. Even there they tested the Rym by handing him the *kiddush* cup and beseeching: "Let the *Rebbe* pronounce the *kiddush.* The world is waiting." Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, however, passed the cup to Rabbi Mendele, for this was his candidate and there was no turning back.[36]

Overnight numerous *shtibblekh* sprung up in Tomoshov, the transplanted Pshykhse. The method and way of Rabbi Simha would not die but would be re-invigorated in these new surroundings. Rabbi Hanokh Henikh of Alexander considered Rabbi Bunam's disciples as commentaries on his teachings[37]

Meanwhile, the remaining delegates at Pshykhse chose to crown Rabbi Simha's only son, Rabbi Abraham Moshe, as their *Rebbe.* He was the choice of some of the elders in the "inner circle," but was derided and scoffed at by those who left for Tomoshov. Rabbi Abraham Moshe, possessing a sensitive and soft character, was known to weep easily. His personality, unlike his father's, was not sufficiently strong to engage in this new rivalry created by his appointment. His Hassidic way was other-worldly and too mystical for him to indulge in earthy and mundane squabbles.

Buber mentions the strange story of his marriage to one of the Yehudi's granddaughters: "He took to the woods with

a group of youths 'attached to him' to learn the 'Hassidic way.' Rabbi Simha came to fetch him home to his young wife. As if waking from sleep, he said: 'I forgot.' "[38]

The Rym was the chief protagonist of Rabbi Mendele and urged young and old to visit Tomoshov: "As the Torah was revealed at Sinai amidst thunder and lightning, so is the Torah received at Tomoshov day in and day out!"[39]

His colleagues were curious to know why he, already a scholar and leader in his own right, required a *Rebbe*, specifically Rabbi Mendele, a contemporary? The Rym felt that he had much to learn and sensed in Rabbi Mendele a new approach unlike his predecessors. "I saw a burning coal of fire in him and I warmed myself before it for thirty-two years."[40]

In the words of Alfasi: "Tomoshov was one word which included intellect, an elevation in spirit, greatness, and perfection. At its head was Rabbi Mendele. He was the leader, the director, and the captain."[41]

Rabbi Mendele, born in Gurya, a suburb of Lublin, in 1787, was the son of Rabbi Aryeh Leibush Halperin. (Rabbi Mendele later changed his name to Morgenstern.) He was educated in his native city but travelled to Zamusht to study with its Rabbi, Yosef Hochgelerenter. After his marriage *Reb* Mendele resided in Tomoshov-Lublesk. The Seer of Lublin claimed that he discovered this young scholar and sent emissaries to bring him to Lublin. But Mendele refused to establish official loyalties and was known to have visited other courts, among them Koznitzer.

His rebellious spirit and more transcendental approach left him totally unsatisfied with the simplicity of Lublin and Koznitz. The mystical and hidden way of the Yehudi was more in consonance with his religious inclination and it was to him and Pshykhse that he was attracted.

As Buber comments: "From childhood on Rabbi Mendele was a rebel who zealously guarded his own independent way. It is told that when the Seer of Lublin sent for the youth and according to his custom asked him questions which revealed his own gift of 'seeing,' Mendele answered only under protest, and later when the Seer rebuked him

for his way because it led to melancholy, Mendele left Lublin and went to Pshykhse."[42]

After the Yehudi's death, Rabbi Mendele stood at the helm of those young scholars who allied themselves with Rabbi Simha Bunam, and spent a good share of his time at Pshykhse. Along with the Rym, Rabbi Mendele was considered second in command and no major decision was made without the counsel and approval of these two friends. Historians of Hassidism claim that Pshykhse's renown as a school insisting on high scholastic standards can be attributed to Rabbi Mendele.[43]

After Rabbi Bunam's demise and Rabbi Mendele's acceptance of the post as *Rebbe* at Tomoshov, he launched a newer and more mystical Hassidic way, defending it by claiming: "Here we conduct ourselves and live more profoundly." "The purpose of man's creation was to lift up the Heavens," he declared. "Holy revelation has deteriorated into habit, and every ounce of strength has to be concentrated to press on to revelation, to that point from which the heavens can be lifted up."[44]

Rabbi Mendele had every intention of renovating the movement and succeeded because of his rebellious and obstinate spirit bordering on fanaticism. His Hassidim had to walk in the spirit of the angels, and like them they constantly pronounced the "Lord, He is our God." If not like angels, they must at least strive to become children of prophets. The entire task of "lifting the heavens" was no longer in the domain of the *Zaddik;* the task was the disciples' as well.

Prayer was a spontaneous act, not to be perfunctorally and ostentationally offered. At Tomoshov and later at Kotzk, prayers were "quickly gotten over with." As Buber portrays it: "There was no longer any real feeling for congregational prayer as such. Prayer and teaching had finally become two worlds which were related only through knowledge of the goal but not through the warmth of the heart and enthusiasm of practice. . . . . Everything depended upon the discipleship as an elite which was to press forward to revelation." [45]

At Tomoshov Rabbi Mendele was still in direct contact with his students and personally delivered all lectures in Talmud, Bible, Commentaries, and Hassidism. Taking his students to the natural surroundings of the woods, in good Beshtian tradition, he revealed the secrets and mysteries of the *Zohar* and *Kabbalah.*

The Rym became totally subservient to his new Master and teacher, journeyed to Tomoshov regularly, and brought many of his own students with him. The new "way" required tremendous self-sacrifice, and many were reluctant to leave their homes, professions, and businesses to devote their entire beings to spiritual elevation, study, and meditation. Rabbi Mendele's method was too transcendental and other-worldly and seemed to negate the very simplicity and "commonness" of classical Hassidism. The innovation therefore held many at arm's length, but Mendele was not moved. His was a school for the intellectual and spiritual elite, not for the "common" Hassid. It was this paradoxical approach that created a philosophy which was both successful and unsuccessful. It succeeded in attracting a special group of "gifted" men but did not succeed in attracting the masses.

The Rym, at least at this time, accepted this method wholeheartedly. He was quoted as saying: "Every Hassid at Tomoshov had the potential of reaching the spiritual level of the Besht but their antagonists prevented it."[46]

Rival sects as well as the Hassidim remaining behind at Pshykhse did not appreciate the Rym's transfer to Tomoshov. In order to create a rift between him and Rabbi Mendele, they circulated a rumor that the Rym had severed relations with Tomoshov, ceased his visitations, and was now journeying to another *Rebbe.* Rabbi Mendele was deeply grieved, and the thought of losing his most revered friend and respected disciple was almost unbearable to him. Rabbi Mendele wrote a number of letters to his friend, reflecting his sorrow at the "news" and bemoaning the spiritual vacuum created by the Rym's absence. He also alluded to the financial plight in which his court found itself, caused by the attraction of only young and impoverished Hassidim.

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir did not answer these letters but immediately set out to visit Rabbi Mendele and openly deny the rumors.

The court at Tomoshov remained insecure and unstable due to the open antagonism of the local rabbi, Joseph of Yaritshov, and his followers. Rabbi Mendele's financial distress as well as the knowledge that he was unwelcome at Tomoshov were responsible for his decision to transfer his court to Kotzk. Said the *Rebbe:* "Our sages tell us that if 'two scholars reside in one city and cannot savor each other, one will die and the other will be exiled' (Talmud Sotah 49). I desire to be exiled rather than die."[47]

In 1829, Rabbi Mendele left Tomoshov and moved to Kotzk in the vicinity of Lublin. He was invited to establish a school there by Rabbi Matithyahu of that city. Hassidim like to repeat the incident that occurred at Kotzk upon Rabbi Mendele's arrival: "When he entered the city, the residents cast a few stones at him and let the dogs loose. Said the *Rebbe:* 'A city where stones are thrown is already a metropolis. Here will I settle.' Thus did Kotzk deserve to become one of Hassidism's historic centers, the city of Rabbi Mendele the Kotzker."[48]

During the same year, 1829, Rabbi Abraham Moshe of Pshykhse died, only two years after the death of his father. His father had said of him that he had the soul of King Jeroboam I who separated Israel from Judah: "Now his way could lead either to utter evil or to perfect goodness and an early death"—and it led to the second.[49]

In the very first years of the development of Kotzk as a Hassidic center, small "Kotzker" synagogues were established throughout the country. The court of Kotzk spread beyond the borders of the town. Hassidim pledging loyalty to the *Rebbe* and visiting his *hatser* (court) from time to time, desired to be among their "own," and practiced the Kotzker way in their own communities.

The cream of Hassidic youth and elders began to flock around the new *Rebbe.* The Rym is known to have been greatly responsible for the rapidly increasing popularity

of Rabbi Mendele, urging his own students, many of whom came from affluent and influential families in Warsaw, to journey to Kotzk.

As expected, the sectarian rivalries and animosities raged on, this time between Kotzk and Wurke, both having Hassidim formerly loyal to Pshykhse. Whenever an appointment of a rabbi or *shohet* came before a community, the battle between the two sects raged anew, with Kotzk usually the victor. When the *Rebbe* of Wurke once happily informed Rabbi Mendele that it appeared that both sects were now at peace, the Kotzker was seemingly disappointed, and mused: "In that case, falsehood has emerged victorious since an argument fought for the sake of heaven (from conviction) is usually founded on truth."[50]

The Rym strengthened his *Rebbe's* hand through regular visitations and constant praise of Rabbi Mendele to whom he was a disciple, colleague, and confidant. "There is no one like him," said the Rym, "and he is as great as the Besht."[51]

In defense of the Kotzker's short-tempered and aloof manner which irritated many would-be followers and even kept his own devotees at a great distance, the Rym maintained that even that shortcoming was Rabbi Mendele's "secret," which was a prerequisite for his peculiar but sacred concept of Hassidism. In this case the Rym appeared to deify his *Rebbe,* who must have some mysterious reason for his shortcomings. Even for the Rym, the *Zaddik* was almost infallible.

The Kotzker looked upon the Rym not as a disciple but rather as a loyal colleague, calling him *Sar Ha-Torah* (prince of Torah). To his father-in-law, the noted scholar, Rabbi Abraham Sochochov, he said: "Do you believe that you are a genius? Not so, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir is surely one! His learning is filled with sanctity and purity."[52]

As diligent in his studies as the Rym was, he concentrated on learning with even more fanatic intensity, for this was the underlying mode and motive of Kotzk. Buber maintains that this was Rabbi Mendele's outlet for the over-

whelming disappointments he had suffered in his early years.[53]

Undivided concentration on study was the first step to "see straight into heaven," which was the Kotzker's hope for every member of his select group who were striving to become like the Baal Shem Tov. Students of Hassidism claim that Rabbi Mendele's disappointment in his Hassidim made him even more aloof for the last twenty years of his life. Buber, however, disputes this theory and maintains that Rabbi Mendele was rather disappointed with the general decline of the movement. "In Rabbi Mendele's time the decline had advanced so far and he was so sensitive to it, that the question felled him with cruel force, and he succumbed to its blows."[54] Suffice it to say that the Rym was able to separate some of the wheat from the chaff, adopt that which was sacred and beneficial, and cast away some idiosyncrasies and abnormalities of Rabbi Mendele. Utter concentration on Torah study and the development of the intellect was the most significant gift bequeathed by Rabbi Mendele to the Rym.

In the Pshykhser period the Rym's financial condition was still favorable. His wealthy father-in-law was able to assist his wife, Feigele, in the textile business which she administered. But during the Polish rebellion in 1831, their store was destroyed by a bomb which almost annihilated the entire family. His father-in-law lost his entire wealth and became financially distressed after "lending" huge sums of money to the rebels. It was after this unsuccessful rebellion that the Rym was forced to change his name from Rothenburg to Alter. Alfasi claims that the Rym was so severely poverty-stricken that there was virtually no bread in the house. But he never revealed his plight to a soul.[55]

Interestingly, even the intellectually sophisticated Rym was influenced by Hassidism's creeping supernaturalism, and sought enigmatic causes for certain natural, material, and physical calamities. He attributed the financial depression of his father-in-law, Moshe Halfen, to the latter's having failed to acquiesce to the demands of the *Rebbe* of

Koznitz to leave Yitzhak Meir with him instead of taking him to Warsaw after his marriage.[56]

The Rym entered into various business ventures but without much success. He opened a factory for the manufacture of wool cloth and prayer-shawls, and managed to eke out a living. After the death of his father-in-law, his sister-in-law, Haya, later the wife of the Kotzker, was also his dependent and charge. His economic condition improved when his affluent brother, Moshe Hayim Rothenburg, "selected" him as administrator of his vinegar factory. The Rym cooperated with his brother's scheme, knowing full well that there were others in the plant far more experienced and capable who would carry the full responsibility. He preferred this plan rather than accept gifts from his brother.

It was not uncommon in 18th and 19th century Europe for a rabbi to prefer other means of earning a livelihood over holding salaried rabbinical posts. The foremost rabbis and scholars in the last century received no compensation for their ministry, preaching, or teaching, for Torah was not to be used as a "shovel with which to dig," an instrument to acquire worldly goods.

Despite his dire financial condition, the Rym continued to take a most active part in communal affairs, and lectured to hundreds attending his *yeshiva* in Warsaw, whom he also encouraged to make regular pilgrimages to Kotzk.

After the death of his wife, Glikel, Rabbi Mendele of Kotzk married the Rym's sister-in-law, Haya. An interesting discussion between the Kotzker and the Rym is recorded: "The Talmud informs us," said the Kotzker, "that if one enters into a marital contract on the condition that 'he is a *Zaddik* (righteous)' the union is valid even if he is found to be a *rasha* (wicked). Perhaps he considered repenting at the moment when the marriage was consummated. But," the Kotzker continued, "if one marries on the condition that he is a *Rebbe,* the union is invalid, for here repentance is of no avail. If my bride accepts our marital vows on the premise that I am a *Rebbe,* the marriage would really be totally invalid, for in truth I am not a *Rebbe.*"

Whereupon the Rym quickly responded: "Let your mind be at ease, for the bride assumes that you are a *Rebbe* because all the Hassidim consider you to be one, and your devotees will always so believe!" Rabbi Mendele was appeased and walked towards the marital manopy.[57]

It appears that Rabbi Mendele was not a typical *Rebbe,* neither in thought nor in conduct, being completely at odds with the movement. While his eccentric and cryptic ways were more acceptable to Hassidim, his accentuation on learning as superseding observance and prayer was more in consonance with the rabbinic schools. One must therefore take his conversation with the Rym most seriously, as inwardly he undoubtedly protested his position as *Rebbe.* Why he accepted the post, nay almost vied, to succeed Rabbi Simha Bunam, is a mystery that contradicts his public protestations and general aloofness to his adherents.

On the eleventh of Nisan, 1839, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, the first Chief Rabbi of Warsaw, died. After the thirty day period of mourning, community leaders gathered to consider a successor, and a delegation was sent to the Rym to offer him the candidacy. Once his willingness could be established, his appointment would be assured, for despite the fact that most Jews residing in Warsaw were *mithnageddim* and *maskilim,* he was supported by the most prominent rabbis and laymen of the community. This was to be expected, for despite the Rym's total allegiance with Hassidism, he was acclaimed not only as a scholar but was also noted for his erudition in a variety of literary disciplines, Hebrew grammar, physiology, and medicine. He also spoke an impeccable Polish.

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir chose not to become a candidate and proposed the name of Rabbi Hayim Davidson, who was elected as Rabbi of Warsaw at the ripe age of eighty. He served for fourteen years. The *Rebbe* was an intimate colleague and confidant of Rabbi Davidson during his entire ministry.

The Rym was thereafter offered many other rabbinical posts, but after consultation with Rabbi Mendele, he rejected them. He did, however, consent to serve the com-

munity of Grodzisk on a part-time basis on the condition that half of the honorarium be given to his sister, the widow of the former rabbi of that city, Moshe Yehiel.

As the Jewish population of Grodzisk increased, the community felt the need for a full-time spiritual leader. The son of Rabbi Moshe Yehiel, Rabbi Elimelekh, had established residence in Grodzisk and was asked to accept the appointment. But prior to his official election the Rym's contract had to be recovered. It was difficult to find an emissary. Finally, one person gathered up sufficient courage and asked the Rym to return his contractual agreement, which he did most graciously. Hassidim tell that the emissary was stricken with paralysis for the remaining years of his life.[58]

It was an incident in 1840 that proved critical for Rabbi Mendele, now the Rym's brother-in-law. The *Rebbe* once failed to pronounce the *Kiddush* (sanctification) until midnight on Friday evening, staying in his study until that time. There are many oral reports which differ considerably on exactly what transpired. One group claims that Rabbi Mendele was defiant in his attitude towards some ritual observance, touching the candlestick on the Sabbath, thus publicly defying Rabbinic prohibitions. Others maintain that Rabbi Mendele actually cried out: "There is no judgment and there is no judge," defying God and His Torah. Still others softened the rebellion, claiming that the *Rebbe* simply stated that all of man's urges and lusts are part of God.[59]

Certainly, something drastic must have occurred, for thereafter Rabbi Mordecai Joseph, the Kotzker's disciple and later his rival, called to the Hassidim: "The tablets and the broken tablets were both preserved in the Ark of the Covenant, but when God's name is desecrated there is no place for consideration of a rabbi's honor—tie him up!"[60]

The Rym, faithful to his Master, defended Rabbi Mendele and appeased a large number of Hassidim. But many left Kotzk and took with them Rabbi Mordecai Joseph as their *Rebbe,* settling in the city of Izbica.

Rabbi Mendele enclosed himself in his room for the

remaining twenty years of his life, living a monastic existence. On the rare occasions when he opened the door, "his face was awful to behold. He cursed them in choppy words that burst from his lips with such force that they were seized with terror and fled from the house through doors and windows."[61] The mystery of the Kotzker's self-imprisonment is not yet resolved. Suffice it to say that this further intensified the Hassidim's veneration of him, a result which may have been a conscious or unconscious desire on the part of the Kotzker.

Again it was rumored that Rabbi Yitzhak Meir had abandoned him, and again the loyal disciple came running to assure him of his constancy. "Yitzhak Meir, you have not forgotten me. I shall remember you through eternity."[62]

It was the Rym's dedication and influence on his large circle of colleagues and friends that encouraged many to return to Kotzk, even the Hassidim who had moved to Izbica. The court of Kotzk was restored, and for the time being the decline of the entire movement was stemmed.

It is known that many courts sent special envoys to the heavily populated centers to espouse the cause, views and message of their respective teachers. The Rym had travelled on many occasions to lecture and explain the Pshykhser and later the Kotzker approach. In 1844, the Rym "missionized" in Galicia and was especially anxious to introduce the Kotzker concept to that country's foremost *Admor*, Rabbi Israel of Ryszin. He said upon his return: "I found nothing in Ryszin which is not in Kotzk."[63]

In 1844 the first edition of the Warsaw Talmud was published. The Rym was one of its editors and in the final Zhitomer edition completed in 1864, we find the Rym's commendation of the publication.[64]

The Rym and his son, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, were engaged in the publishing business and operated a religious book store (on Eizengas Street in Warsaw where they also lived until the Rym's departure for Gur).

Moshe Hayim Rothenburg, the Rym's wealthy and influential brother, died in 1850 and was mourned not only by his family but Kotzk as well, for he was the financial

wizard of the family and kept the Kotzker court in a sound financial state.

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir was afforded a second opportunity to become the spiritual head of Warsaw after the death of Rabbi Hayim Davidson, who died at the age of ninety-four. Again the Rym was reluctant to accept the post, and this led to a schism within the community. An influential segment desired to import the Rabbi of Cracow, Dov Ber Meysels, who was renowned for his wide knowledge and participation in the social and political problems of the total Polish community.

Others insisted on a native of Warsaw, Rabbi Yaakov Gezundheit, who was known to be vehemently antagonistic to Hassidism. The Rym favored the former, and, probably due to the influence of the Hassidic community, Rabbi Meysels was elected in 1856. Throughout his ministry, he called upon the Rym for counsel, and an intimate association was established between them.

In 1855, the bond between the Kotzker and the Rym became even closer as the latter's granddaughter married Rabbi Mendele's son. The same year marked the most tragic event in the Rym's life, the death of his last son, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, at the age of 40.

THE STORY OF THE RYM'S DEATH

The Rym's tenure at Gur, his ministry, contributions, and concepts are discussed in the ensuing chapters which are also interspersed with biographical material. To complete the more personal aspects of his biography, the writer chooses to include the story of his death at this point, although in a sense it is not in its chronological order.

According to Hassidic tradition, the *Zaddik* would have an intuition of his approaching death and would reveal his forthcoming demise by means of allusions and hints. His Hassidim, however, might not comprehend these signs until the final days, or even posthumously.

Before Rosh Hashana in the year of his death (1866), the Rym called together a few of his relatives and disciples

and said: "The sages tell us that there is a *parnes* (provider) in every generation. If the community does not heed the words of the leader nor walk in his ways, either the leader or rabbi must resign from his ways and methods to be in greater consonance with his contemporaries, or retire from this world." When the Rym concluded his remarks, he heaved a deep and sorrowful sigh.[65]

That year thousands of Jewish youth were being conscripted into the Polish army, and the Rym went into a state of deep depression and concern, which affected his health. On the eve of Yom Kippur he asked his son-in-law, Zanvil Broder, to gather a quorum of ten men to his study. They rushed to see their master, filled with fear and trembling. After a few moments of total silence, the Rym fell upon the floor and completely prostrate, wept bitterly: "If the conscription is carried out and the cream of Jewish youth will be taken away, it would be completely unbearable for me. I could never survive this decree."[66]

All during the night of Yom Kippur, the Rym remained awake to complete the talmudic Tractate *Yoma,* his eyes filled with tears. Pinchi Unger inquired the reason for the *Zaddik's* tears. "I fear," he replied, "that I shall not live out the year, for I envisioned Elijah the Prophet who reflected a concerned and sad countenance."[67]

On the 12th of Shevat, as the Rym was embarking on a journey to Warsaw, a door fell on his foot. A local physician did not consider the injury serious and permitted the *Rebbe* to travel to Warsaw. Despite pain and a growing swelling of his leg, the Rym conducted the *tish* with outward merriment and joy, but insisted on returning to Gur the same day. Before leaving Warsaw he visited his personal friend, *Reb* Yeshiele Mushkat, the Rabbi and *Rebbe* of Prague. They were in conference for some time and finally took leave of each other. When the Rabbi was later informed of the Rym's demise, he revealed to his colleagues that the Rym predicted the day and hour of his death.[68]

On the Rym's return journey to Gur it was obvious that he suffered great pain, but he rejected all pleas to postpone the trip. He did tarry in Munktov and there asked his grand-

children to study Talmud Shekalim with him, "for who knows whether I shall again have the opportunity to study this subject."[69]

Despite his illness, upon his return to Gur, the Rym insisted on receiving his Hassidim, not heeding the protests of his daughter, Leah Hadassah. "Who knows," he finally conceded, "whether I shall have the good fortune of raising my grandchildren who were orphans."[70]

During these final days Rabbi Yitzhak Meir once related that he did not fully comprehend one of Maimonides' codes: "Repentance is complete and perfect only when God is able to testify that the penitent would never commit the same transgression again" (*Yad HaHazakah,* ch. II). The Rym questioned: "What is the law in the case of one who is ill, repents, and expires from this illness? Since he can no longer repeat the transgression, is his penitence complete, for in this instance not the will or temptation was removed, but only the physical possibility of not transgressing again?"[71] Preparing to meet his Maker despite the righteous and pious life he lived on earth, even the sainted Rym concerned himself with repentance. No human being, even the saint, is without failures. Every man is fallible, subject to the same natural laws of temptations.

The Rym's condition seemed to improve, and he maintained his regular daily schedule, holding audiences with the many who came to him for counsel. However, a few weeks before Passover, Rabbi Itche Blass, the Kotzker's son-in-law, entered his study and insisted on knowing the nature of his illness. The Rym confessed that his wounds and pain had now extended to his legs and thighs. The most eminent Warsaw physicians were consulted, and at first the amputation of one of his limbs was suggested.

On Sabbath *Parah,*[72] still conducting the *tish* from his bed and participating in the Sabbath services, he was examined by a Warsaw physician who informed his family and Hassidim that the *Zaddik* was incurably ill and that the time of his death was imminent. Only rest and medication could prolong his life and give him strength, the Rym was warned. "Are you still not aware," said the *Rebbe,*

"that the Jew gains renewed strength through prayer and study?"[73]

On the selfsame Sabbath, the *Rebbe* conducted the Sabbath "table" and forced himself to eat the repast, for Sabbath food is sacred and cannot easily be rejected. As he gasped for breath and his strength waned, the Hassidim suspected that the end had come. Yet at two in the afternoon he gathered his grandchildren to his bedside and blessed them as he pronounced his last testament and will: "To walk in the ways of God and His Torah."

During *Minhah* (afternoon service), he overheard the impassioned prayers of his Hassidim filled with deep pathos and lamentations. "Why do the worshippers intone their prayers with so much sadness?" asked the *Zaddik*. "Have they forgotten that today is the Sabbath and no mourning nor melancholia must invade its joy?"

Preaching on the Scriptural portion of the week at the *Seudah Shlishith* ("Third Meal"), he recalled the Rabbinic passage: "Why is the chapter of the red heifer placed so closely in the Torah to the passages relating the death of the righteous, if not to teach that as the ashes of the red heifer absolves the transgressor, so is the death of the righteous an atonement." The congregation understood his allusion and awaited the death of the righteous and sainted Rabbi Yitzhak Meir.

His more devoted disciples could no longer contain themselves and burst forth with prayerful laments and tears. "The time has not yet arrived," interrupted Rabbi Yitzhak Meir. He performed the pre-meal ritual washing of the hands, pronounced the benediction, and forced down a piece of bread the size of an olive (as required for a blessing). He urged those gathered around the table to chant the customary joyous Sabbath melodies, but without success. They observed the lips of their *Rebbe* slowly moving and as they heard the whispering of the twenty-third psalm they all joined in the recitation.. The *Rebbe* then asked for some water with which to wash his face and hands, saying: "I must prepare myself." It was then that his beloved disciple and nephew, Rabbi Pinhas of Pilz, approached him

and pleaded: "Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, the son of Sarah, should beseech the Lord's mercy for his own healing and recovery." "Please let well enough alone," replied the *Rebbe*. "If not for your own sake, at least for the well-being of your many devotees," shouted Rabbi Pinhas. There was no response except some whimperings and then the words *"Leibele Kaddish"* were heard, alluding to his will that Leibele, his grandson, recite the memorial doxology following his death, and also suggesting that Rabbi Aryeh Leibele become his spiritual heir.

Then the word *bayith* (house) was faintly recognized, probably requesting that he be buried in the "tent" of his father. "Father tarried but I do not wish to wait as long," he rambled on. This undoubtedly alluded to his father's last days and lingering illness. He again chanted the twenty-third psalm, wrapping himself in his prayer shawl. Casting off the prayer shawl to indicate that the commandments were no longer incumbent upon him, and uttering the words from the psalm, "I will honor Him and glorify Him," Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, the first *Rebbe* of Gur died fifteen minutes before the conclusion of the Sabbath, twenty three days in the month of Adar, in 5626 (1866).

Thirty thousand Hassidim were orphaned, it was said. The doors and gates of the court were flung open, and amidst tears, mourning and wailing they uttered: "Woe to the world which has lost its leader, and woe to the ship which has lost its captain."[74]

The news of the Rym's demise travelled quickly, as thousands of Hassidim poured into Gur. Rabbi Mendele of Wurke was the first to arrive, and finding the *Zaddik's* motionless body already on the floor, he literally cast himself on the ground next to the Rym and hysterically shouted: "A Holy Scroll of the Torah is lying upon the earth." He would not be restrained but finally left the room after fervent exhortations.[75]

The Hassidim of Sochochov related that as their *Zaddik*, Rabbi Abraham, Hassidism's foremost talmudic scholar, raised the cup of wine to pronounce the *Havdalah* service at the conclusion of the Sabbath upon which the Rym ex-

pired, he announced with profound sadness that "a great darkness has now enveloped the earth."[76]

As the funeral procession left the synagogue, Rabbi Yaakov Gezundheit shouted to the mourners: "Hassidim will find another *Rebbe,* but as for us, his old and loyal followers, there can be no successor."[77] Rabbi Eleazer Ha-Kohen, the *Rebbe* of Paltusk cried: "We are orphaned and fatherless. You will never know how far-reaching his demise will be even for generations to come. It is not only a great loss to Hassidim but to all mankind!"[78]

Memorial meetings were held throughout Poland and the Hassidic world. Many of the outstanding eulogies delivered were finally published in a booklet called: *Zekher Zaddik Yesod Olam* (the memory of a *Zaddik,* a foundation of the universe).[79]

A biography of the Rym was included in "Halevanon," a periodical published by Yehiel Beryl of Paris and printed in Jerusalem. One issue, 22 Kislev, 5627 (1867), contained an article by Nahum Zvi Goldstein, Chief Rabbi of Valkovisk, evaluating the Rym, his life and works. It is herein translated in detail and is worth noting, especially since the author was not a Hassid.

> Seven months have now passed since the death of Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Gur, a loss felt by the Jews of Warsaw, all Poland, and Jews everywhere. . . . He will be mourned for many years and long be remembered for his saintliness, scholarship, and accomplishments.
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> * * * *
>
> Even as a lad of seven his genius was already recognized in the Jewish intellectual world. . . . His influence extended to every village in Poland, from Lublin to Koznitz, to Pshykhse and Kotzk. After the death of Rabbi Mendele of Kotzk the crown of the Hassidic kingdom was placed upon the Rym's head. . . . His wisdom, piety, and aggressive leadership attracted in its prime an estimated thirty thousand followers, and even more devotees from other Hassidic sects who were indirectly influenced by his philosophy. The Rym however did not profit materially from his spiritual

work, earning his livelihood from family investments and other business ventures.

* * * *

He was not noted for miracles and amulets but wore his Hassidic crown naturally, and led with utter simplicity. . . . The Rym enjoyed the highest reverence and respect from his many colleagues who looked to him for counsel. . . . Unfortunately, the thirty thousand followers lost their central banner around which they rallied, and after the Rym's death, in a short span of seven months, they are already divided and seeking other *Zaddikim*.

* * * *

A peculiar and cherished treasure was lost to Hassidism, and who knows when it can find a substantial heir. May his memory be blessed and may his soul rest in peace.

Following the Rym's death, the school of Gur was divided. The larger segment crowned Rabbi Hanokh Henikh Ha-Kohen Sotin Levin. In his youth, Rabbi Hanokh Henikh resided and studied at Pshykhse as one of the foremost disciples of the Yehudi Hakadosh. The Rym had often commended him for his scholarship and piety when he served as Rabbi in Pshykhse, Noidvahr, and Alexander. He was especially noted for his *harifuth* (intellectual genius and sharpness) and his mastery and fluency in the Hebrew language. He died four years later on the 8th day of Adar, 5630 (1870). Rabbi Levin's commentaries and contributions were posthumously published (Pietrekov, 1929), in *Heshva Letova*. Among his many students was the noted Polish scholar, Rabbi Abraham of Sochochov, as well as the Sefath Emeth.

The remaining Hassidim of Gur travelled to the court of Rabbi Abraham of Tschekenov. Among them were Rabbi Eliezer of Paltusk and Rabbi Yehiel Meir of Gostanin. A small group followed the *Zaddik* of Rodzimin and Rabbi Dudel of Kotzk.

After the demise of the Rabbi of Alexander, the full court of Gur was re-established with the appointment of

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, the Sefath Emeth, grandson of the Rym.

The story of the Rym's death again reflects the exaggeration of Hassidism's noble ideals, i.e., attributing divine powers to the *Zaddik* enabling him to predict the day and the hour of his death. Whereas the story of the death of Moses is nothing more than midrashic legend, in Hassidism it unfortunately becomes a live reality.

THE RYM'S FAITH AND COURAGE

It is told, that once when Abraham Mordecai, the Rym's son, fell ill at the age of thirty, the Rym said to him: "Know my son, man is obliged to desire life as it is written: 'and ye shall choose life' (Deut. 11:26). I am therefore certain that you will fulfill this *mitzvah,* not to lose faith but rather pray for life; and I say to you that you will rise, recover, and become the father of a son who will distinguish himself in the world." Whereupon, Abraham Mordecai girded his strength and prayed for a son whom he would call "Yehuda," to fulfill the passage: "This time I will praise the Lord" (Gen. 29:35).[80]

Indeed, God, God, and God was constantly on the *Zaddik's* lips. If any Jews in history were truly God-intoxicated," the Hassidim were even more intensely God-inebriated. Their *raison d'etre* was God. Their *simha* (joy) was in God. Their *kavanah* (intention, aspiration) bordered on the sensuous love of man for woman. They communicated with God as a lover with his beloved. This was the God-intoxication that permeated the atmosphere in which the new-born Hassid, Yehuda Leib was raised.

Unfortunately, his father died when the boy was but eight years old. Even the fervent prayers of counless *Zaddikim* did not alter God's decision. Woe to the parents whose child is taken from their midst in their lifetime. Multiply that by thirteen children and you may fathom the grief contained in the hearts of the first *Rebbe* of Gur and his wife, the *Rebbetzin.*

His faith being beyond reproach, the *Rebbe* comforted

his helpmate: "Our misfortune will be a great source of comfort to all bereaved parents, for now they compare their tragedy to ours, and say: 'Behold Yitzhak Meir, who had thirteen children—all beloved—all expired while their parents lived. Shall we then lose faith because of one bereavement?' "[81]

Even the immortal words of condolence: "Must we not return our gift to God, the donor," uttered by Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir in talmudic times, seem to grow cold in comparison.

The remembrance of death did not always spell austerity and gloom for the Hassid. The *Zaddik's Yahrzeit* is not celebrated by the recitation of dirges and the delivering of eulogies. On the contrary, Hassidim drink *l'hayim* over spirited drinks, and celebrate the ascension of the *Rebbe's* soul to *Gan Eden,* Divine Paradise.

For the *Rebbe* of Gur, his children merely departed from their earthly domain and entered a far more spacious and glorious abode, with souls less defiled and less tainted.

Mourning, in accordance with Rabbinic law was, of course, practiced to the letter by Hassidim. But the *aveiluth* (mourning) was not to result in melancholia. Serving the Lord with gladness was essential to worship in the religious life. When sadness seizes a man's soul, it becomes defiled. A Hassid afflicted with *marah shehorah* (psychological depression) is also religiously sick, and creates a barrier between the Divine and himself. Like his fellow Hassidim, the Gerer believed that if tears open the gates of Heaven, joy destroys them completely, thus making God more accessible.

Job lost his household and family, but clung to the God of Judgment, becoming the symbol of the faithful and courageous in the midst of tragedy. Rabbi Yitzhak Meir was bereaved of thirteen potential *Zaddikim* and was thus tried by God three times more than his first ancestor, Abraham. (Traditionally, Abraham was given ten tests of faith.) Yet he comforted his Hassidim: "Do you believe that I grieve bitterly over the great loss which I have sustained? If this is the will of the Creator, who am I to grow sad?


YITZHAK MEIR HAD
THIRTEEN
BELOVED CHILDREN
AND THEY ALL EXPIRED

Great is my pain, however, that an important *mitzvah* was taken from me, a commandment which I could have fulfilled daily in my home, namely, the *mitzvah* of 'Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children' " (Deut. 6:7).[82]

One may believe that such incredibly stoic behavior can be relegated to Hassidic fable. But recall that only recently, during the European holocaust, millions of the Gerer's faithful brethren sang the now immortal *"Ani Maamin"* (I believe with a complete faith in the coming of Messiah), as they entered the crematoria of Auschwitz and Treblinka. Is, then, the Gerer's own unequivocal faith in God's righteous judgment so incredible?

This is not to imply that the Rym grew callous and hardened to his tragedies. He mourned and shed tears, which Hassidim may have believed remain in a special receptacle before the throne of the Almighty. But, like the sages of old, he accepted his misfortunes as *yissurin shel ahavah,* "the afflictions of love."

Moreover, it was incumbent upon the *Zaddik* to show the Hassidim the way to remain an examplar of *tzidkuth* (righteousness and faith), and to practice the joy that he preached. Personal tragedy could not interfere with the *Rebbe's* duty to fulfill a Hassidic ideal. Melancholia and depression can become contagious, especially if the *Rebbe* is affected with the disease.

And so, like Abraham of old who was asked to sacrifice Isaac, his son, his only son, the son whom he loved, the Gerer Isaac, Yitzhak Meir, brought thirteen children to the altar of the Lord, without questioning and without composing a book of lamentation.

If he sought solace, he found it in his beloved grandson Leibele, the crown of his head. And as for the *mitzvah* of teaching one's offspring, he fulfilled it twofold with Leibele, to whom he became both father and teacher.

Chapter Eight

The Second Zaddik of Gur—Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir concentrated his entire parental affection upon his grandson, Yehuda Leibush, and endearingly called him "Leibele." Even in his childhood Leibele sat at the feet of the Rym, ate and slept with him, not only because his father was a sickly man but because the Rym insisted upon it.

As was the case of many heirs to a throne, the Hassidic heirs were not permitted to enjoy a normal childhood but lived a more austere life in preparation for their future responsibilities. Leibele did not engage in children's play, for biblical and talmudical acrobatics were far more fascinating to him. And indeed, the great Rym who stimulated his intellectual fancy, was a far more enjoyable playmate than any child his own age could be. His grandfather was also father and friend, to whom he always came for counsel.

Despite the love both his father and grandfather bore him, they did not "smother" or pamper him. It is told that one of Rabbi Yehuda Leib's grandchildren in later years refused to eat, whereupon the grandfather (Yehuda Leib), told him: "I recall when I was a child I disliked beans. When my father heard this, he ordered me to eat beans for forty days. From that time on I still eat beans."[1]

Leibele lost his father, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, in 1855, when he was only eight years old. Thereafter he was taken to his grandfather's home where he received physical, spiritual, and educational nourishment. The Rym played a father-role in his attempt to influence his grandson to

become what his own sons failed to be, because of their ill health and the brevity of their years.

It is doubtful that the Rym actually directed Leibele along a particular educational and spiritual path in order to prime him for a future ministry as the second *Zaddik* of Gur. *Zaddikism* was secondary to the Rym, the boy's scholarship being of much greater import. Never did Rabbi Yitzhak Meir outwardly influence his grandson to succeed him or to become a *Rebbe.* As ample proof of this, Yehuda Leib rejected the appointment of *Zaddik* at Gur after the Rym expired. Had he been prepared for the position, he would not have audaciously contradicted his grandfather's will after his death.

Suffice it to say that the Rym did his utmost to develop Leibele's spiritual and intellectual talents. He taught him personally but also established a daily schedule of study for him and his teacher, which was followed diligently. The grandfather laid down three conditions to Leibele's private teacher:[2]

1. To urge an early rising for study.
2. To make daily progress.
3. To teach him eighteen hours daily.

It was not a difficult task for the teacher to fulfill these conditions, for early in the morning Leibele would already be hunched over his *Gemara.*

It is related that when Rabbi Yehuda Leib's hearing was failing in his elder years, he admitted: "I know that this condition has come upon me because I did not eat nor sleep sufficiently. I do not regret the lack of sleep but I do regret not eating properly, for it would not have taken any more time from my studies."[3]

Thus, away from childhood "distractions," in the room designated for his personal study, Leibele devoured one talmudic tractate after another. He did not, however, de-emphasize the study of Bible as many students of the Oral Law had done. His later works on the Pentateuch and Written Works reflect his continued interest and love for the basic ancient Judaic sources.[4]

From the Pharisees through the *tanna'im* and *amora'im* of talmudic times, and including the scholars of our period, the Oral Law was essential to the understanding of the Written Law. It was generally felt that one remained an *am ha'aretz* if he were not familiar with talmudic theory and interpretation. To this the Hassidim agreed, but offered the emendation that the student dare not over-emphasize the Oral Word at the expense of the Written. In other words, one must be thoroughly grounded in the entire Bible, especially the Pentateuch with its basic Commentaries, if the Talmud was to have any meaning for him. The Hassidic *Rebbe* preached from the Scriptural portion of the week and insisted that the prerequisite to Talmud was the study of *Humash* (Pentateuch) and not vice versa.

Though many Hassidic rabbis left *hiddushim* works on Talmud and the Codes, more saw fit to interpret the Bible homiletically and derive moral lessons therefrom. Hassidism was a way of life for the comman man, and the hair-splitting casuistry and complexities of the Talmud were not sufficiently "common" for him. It is said in jest that the Hassid worships God, while the *mithnaged* worships God's Law.

Thus, said Hassidism, let the common Jew turn to the *Shulhan Arukh* for guidance in daily practice, and let him derive greater inspiration from the study of the portion of the week. This is not to imply that the Hassidic disciple did not study Talmud. He did, but not with the intensity required by the teachers of Lithuanian schools.

Leibele unquestionably studied Talmud at an early age, probably commencing at the age of five, but, as previously mentioned, he was also given basic instruction in Bible and Commentaries. Needless to say, his grandfather never missed an opportunity to publicly boast of the genius and diligence of his grandson. It is related that when an eminent *Zaddik* visited him, the Rym quietly opened Leibele's private room and said: "Come and see how devoutly and diligently my grandson studies Torah."[5]

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir was also anxious to expose Yehuda Leib to Hassidic influences and never failed to take him

along on his regular pilgrimages to Kotzk. In contra-distinction to Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, who was known as the *Illui* (genius) of Warsaw, the grandson was called the little *Illui,* by the Kotzker. Leibele's childhood visits to Kotzk and Rabbi Mendele made a marked impression upon the lad, and he often recalled the discourses led by the Master as well as his memorable personality. His later ministry reflects the inspiration and influence of both his grandfather and the Kotzker. An interesting incident is related by Gerer Hassidim. Upon returning from Kotzk with Leibele, the Rym was asked by a Hassid: "Was it really necessary to take the young boy with you in this bitter cold?" The Rym replied: "It most certainly is necessary for the lad to behold a thoroughly true Jew!"[6]

Leibele was only twelve when his grandfather accepted the appointment as *Zaddik* of Gur, and at the age of thirteen he was already being considered a suitor for Jewish Poland's choice young ladies. The Rabbi of Pilz once suggested one of his relatives as a suitable mate for Leibele but the grandfather rejected her by stating: "For my Leibele I seek a daughter of a scholar."

"And whom do you consider sufficiently learned?" asked the Rabbi.

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir suggested Rabbi Yudel Kaminer's daughter. Rabbi Yudel's wife was the Rym's niece.

The marriage took place two years later, in 1862, when Leibele was fifteen years old. Since his father-in-law's name was also Yehuda (Yudel), Leibele's first name was changed from Yehuda to Aryeh. This was customary in the nineteenth century and is prevalent in orthodox families today, so that in the event of his father-in-law's death, the grandchild could be named after him. If the child's father possessed the same name (in this case Yehuda), the naming would be impossible, since, according to Ashkenazic Jewish custom, a child is never given a living parent's first name. Thus he was no longer called Yehuda Leib but Aryeh Leib.

After their marriage, the young couple visited the bride's uncle, the *Rebbe* of Zanz, who received the "little genius" warmly and respectfully.

The next few years, from the time of his marriage until he succeeded his grandfather at Gur in 1870, can be considered the period of his intellectual and spiritual maturation. He studied in Gur diligently, day and night, devoting all of his time to Talmud, Bible, *Zohar*, Commentaries, and Hassidism. He observed his grandfather in his ministry and was deeply impressed by his scholarship, humility, religious fervor, and compassion for his followers. He became convinced that Hassidism embodied a profound pietistic approach, the chief aim of which was to bring man back to the love and worship of the Lord. His letters to friends reflect this conviction. He writes (*Elul*, 1865): "Know, my friend, that no act or thought, good or evil, is ever committed without the Will and Knowledge of God. Even man's inclination to do penance is initiated by God."[7]

Personally satisfied with his educational progress, Aryeh Leib reflected serious concern over a kind of religious stalemate which he encountered at this time. He believed, in good Hassidic tradition, that deeds and service superceded wisdom and learning, yet he personally had not yet reached this level in his spiritual striving. He therefore proceeded to devote his entire being to the capture of this religious felicity, divorcing himself almost entirely from friends and associates to meditate, pray, and contemplate on the meaning of truth as expounded by the Rym and Rabbi Mendele of Kotzk. He even limited his correspondence, and when accused of egocentricity he defended himself, claiming that for the present he preferred solitude, lest through conversation and correspondence people might assume that he was pious and wise, when he personally knew that he was not.

It was at this time, as his twentieth birthday was approaching, that Aryeh Leib became more sensitive to Hassidic teachings and ideals, the love of truth, the love and understanding of his fellowmen, and mostly to the love of God. His preachings and teachings reflected this sensitivity. The thought of God pervaded his conscious mind, which gloried in His being, His Torah, and His creatures. Even in simple and menial conversations Aryeh Leib was sure to include God. A Hassid once remarked at



the dinner table that the soup was delicious. "Is there anything in this world that is more delicious than God Himself?" Aryeh Leib countered.[8]

The years unfortunately passed too quickly, and Rabbi Yitzhak Meir died on the 23rd of Adar, 5626 (1866)—Yitzhak Meir, his grandfather, father, teacher, and Hassidic master.

Mention should be made about some very personal incidents in the last five years of Rabbi Aryeh Leib's own life. In 1901 his wife, Yokhebed Rivka, died. They were the parents of ten children, four of whom passed away in childhood. Their eldest son, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, succeeded his father as the third *Rebbe* of Gur. The other children were Rabbi Moshe Bezalel (1869-1942) and Rabbi Menahem Mendel (1876-1942), both killed in Nazi concentration camps; Rabbi Nehemia (1875-1942) who died in the Warsaw ghetto before the uprising; Esther, wife of Rabbi Yaakov Meir Biderman, Rabbi of Warsaw, whose daughter married the third *Rebbe,* her uncle, Rabbi Mordecai; and the sixth child, Faygele, wife of the scholar, Rabbi Zvi Hanokh Lewin of Bendin. Only Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, his wife, and a few children were saved from the European holocaust. (After the death of his wife, Rabbi Aryeh Leib, at the age of 53, married the daughter of the *Zaddik* of Gurelitz.)[9]

Gur left more than a legacy of culture, spirit, and tradition in the hearts and minds of thousands of Hassidim; it left a legacy in the persons of many distinguished children and grandchildren who, despite their abbreviated lives, left their own imprints in the sands of Judaic and Hassidic history. One is tormented by the thought of how much deeper the imprint would have been if their lives had been extended. The sad truth is that not only did the Nazis snuff out six million innocent lives, but the potential of unsurpassed scholarship and the strengthening of Hassidic life as well.

In the year 1905 Rabbi Aryeh Leib was stricken with an incurable malady which paralyzed his entire body except his hands. Hassidim relate that a physician asked him to

raise his hands above his head. Retorted the *Rebbe*: "This I cannot do. The *Zohar* prohibits the raising of the hands above the head."[10]

His illness lasted for only a few days, as his family and disciples beseeched God for a miracle because of the merit of his grandfather as well as because of his own virtues. Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Pilz, his colleague and intimate friend, suggested that Rabbi Aryeh Leib permit the addition of a new name such as Hayim (life) or Rafael (God heals), as is the custom for the critically ill. "I would prefer," said the *Rebbe,* "to retrieve my original name Yehuda and be called hereafter Yehuda Aryeh."[11]

The writer notes that at least the death of the second *Rebbe* is not glorified by legends, though the power to change God's will is implied.

His biographers believe that he completed his voluminous commentary on the Pentateuch only a few days before he was stricken. He continued to pray and study on his deathbed.

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter died on the 5th of Shevat, 5665 (1905), at the age of 58. Thousands of Hassidim, *Zaddikim* and even *mithnageddim* came to pay their last respects to the *Rebbe* and his family. He was eulogized by the foremost *Zaddikim* and rabbis of his generation.

It is told that his son and successor, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, said to his brother Moshe Bezalel: "Father lived a long life."

"But he didn't even reach the age of sixty," answered Moshe.

"His years may have been brief," answered his brother, "but his days were long, full, and creative."

Chapter Nine

The Appointment of Zaddikim

The biographical legends of many personalities who either founded or greatly influenced their religions, often relate the one moment of revelation when the Lord appeared to them. In most cases, there is no previous preparation for the "moment." It is usually not an evolutionary process but rather a miraculous affair in which the individual suddenly feels a new power within him, a new "I." It is at this moment that he severs himself from his previous life and former religious experiences.

In Judaism, however, the process of revelation for the religious leader generally begins at the moment of birth and is an evolutionary process, growing clearer and stronger with the varieties of his religious experiences. The final appointment is therefore not a cataclysmic nor even climactic event, for there is no one moment of divine calling. There is no "when" and "how" to the leader's final election.

Hassidism, despite its semi-mystical approach, did not change this manner of divine appointment. There were many legends surrounding the Baal Shem Tov and the other *Zaddikim,* but none attempted to portray any one moment of their master's *hithgaluth* (revelation).

With regards to the Besht, the father of Hassidism, we are told that he was 36 years old when he revealed the *Or Haganuz* (Hidden Light) contained within him in years past, when he removed his mask and began to fulfill his mission in life. But the process of *evolutionary* revelation had been there prior to the announcement.

The Besht established a new concept of personal revelation, namely, that the divinely inspired *Zaddik,* after many

years of preparation, announces his own calling and commences his sacred work. Many *Zaddikim* in the history of Hassidism emulated this concept, though perhaps not in such a dramatic fashion. This was especially true of the early masters in the first period.

Martin Buber, in his introduction to his masterful works on Hassidism, stated: "It is common to both periods, for the *Zaddik* usually to be "hidden" at first, and only subsequently to reveal himself, *i.e.*, let it be known that Heaven has called him to its service. In addition to this call, there generally is a teacher who appoints him to office and vouches for him. It is only when one of the great teachers dies and the question arises, who, among his disciples, is to succeed him, and then only if there is neither agreement nor schism, that the Hassidim themselves make the decision . . . a decision of this kind is always made and accepted as something mysterious."[1]

The "election" of *Zaddikim* at Gur followed the traditions of the second period and the later masters, *i.e.*, the community made the decision. None of the three *Rebbe-im*, nor even the present *Rebbe* in Jerusalem, sought the position. They were appointed and accepted the election, though not immediately, and in all four cases most reluctantly.

In 1859, when the Kotzker *Rebbe* died, the eyes of his Hassidim immediately focused on Warsaw where the Kotzker's and Pshykhser's most eminent pupil resided, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Alter. Their decision to "crown" the Rym as head of the communities of Kotzk and Pshykhse, orphaned by the death of their two Masters, Rabbi Mendele and Rabbi Bunam, was almost unanimous. The only opposition to this decision came from the Rym himself.

The Rym's disciple, Rabbi Abraham Rabinowitz of Parisov, relates the tale of the special journey made by eminent Kotzker Hassidim and later masters in their own name, to ask the Rym to succeed Rabbi Mendele. They came to Rabbi Yitzhak Meir in Warsaw and were immediately questioned: "I wonder who will be the replacement in that Hassidic community (Kotzk)?" Each one replied: "We need not seek elsewhere. We have a *Rebbe* right here." The

Rym, absorbed in his own thoughts, finally spoke: "I, too, am without a *Rebbe.* I was considering going to the *Rebbe* of Proshniz. He could, undoubtedly, 'carry' ten thousand Hassidim if he were not so aloof and strange." When Rabbi Barukh of Stoshin heard this, he could no longer control himself and shouted: "This is no time for extreme modesty. The 'world' (Hassidic community) is waiting and they deserve an answer."[2]

Even when he had just returned to Warsaw from Kotzk, there were already hundreds of followers waiting. He begged them to seek someone else: "It is most difficult to succeed the *Rebbe* of Kotzk."[3]



Was this not false modesty? Perhaps not, since he had already celebrated his sixtieth birthday. Other rabbinical and Hassidic posts had been offered to him but he had always veered away from the rabbinate, and now he was called upon to succeed the Kotzker *Rebbe.*

The mandate of the Hassidim was so strong that he finally accepted. But even in the very beginning of his ministry he once interrupted a discussion and pleaded: "Why did you choose me when there are numerous scholars much greater?" Then he paused and added: "Yet, when one desires to tithe a lamb, he gathers his entire flock, and only when one pronounces the word 'holy' to a particular lamb, does he become holy. When Jews say 'Holy,' it is holy!"[4]

What the Rym is saying is expressed in a jest uttered by Rabbi Mendel of Rimnov: "If a thousand believing Hassidim were to gather around a block of wood, it too, would work miracles."[5] Perhaps this is what the Rym meant —that the congregation has the right to have a true *Zaddik.* They not only receive him but can even "make" him.

"One ought not to take the chair until one hear's Elijah's call," is a popular Hassidic expression. Obviously, the Rym heard the "calling," perhaps not Elijah's, but certainly his disciples' pleas. If they fervently believed in his holiness, then he was inevitably holy.

On the first Sabbath of his acceptance the Rym commenced in the traditional Kotzker manner: " 'The end of everything is to fear the Lord, and his commandment guard' (Eccles. 12:13). When the evil inclination steals from the Jew his inner truth, it takes all from him, even though the Jew appears devout and offers his prayers regularly." In this gentle and warm manner, though outwardly remonstrative, did the Rym receive his people.[6]

Some elderly Kotzker Hassidim, however, were not at all satisfied that the dynasty should be inherited by an "outsider," and desired to place the Kotzker diadem upon Rabbi David, the eldest son of Rabbi Mendele. This disturbed many who remained in Kotzk as well as those who had already begun to travel to Warsaw. It was also feared that

now the Rym would reject the appointment. It was later discovered that only a small minority were interested in Rabbi David. The Rym himself had discussed the entire problem with Rabbi Mendele's heirs, including the candidate himself, and succeeded in reaching a satisfactory compromise.

On the 23rd of Adar, 1866, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir died. According to the written and oral wishes of the Rym, the community elected Rabbi Aryeh Leib Alter, his grandson, as *Av Beth Din,* head of the court, which was also the term for the chief rabbi of the community. Rabbi Aryeh Leib, like his grandfather, rejected appeals to become the *Rebbe,* but he at least had a choice, because his grandfather did not clearly indicate his wishes. The Rym probably held that the position could not simply be bequeathed. He may have sensed that his grandson had neither the inclination nor the desire for it, for the same reasons he himself had once rejected the post. Yet it is questionable whether the Rym did not urge his grandson to succeed him.

Furthermore, an outgoing rabbi could recommend an ordained rabbi to be head of the civil and ritual court. But a *Rebbe* who had to establish a closer and more intimate relationship with his people, and to whom they came for guidance in questions not pertaining to ritual law, had to be "made" and fully elected by the community, without any outside interference.

Feeling a void, many Hassidim turned to the *Rebbe* of Alexander, Rabbi Hanokh Henikh, but some still insisted on knocking on Rabbi Aryeh Leib's door. He told them, possibly to fan their enthusiasm, that the heavens appoint a *Rebbe* for a specific Hassidic throne, and that he did not consider himself worthy of occupying that chair. Was his reluctance also a conscious or unconscious scheme to heighten the desire of the Hassidim for his appointment?

Meanwhile, someone had started a rumor that Rabbi Aryeh Leib was serving as *Zaddik,* which caused him great anger and disappointment, since he claimed he was sincerely unwilling to lead the life of a *Rebbe.* He also felt alone and was still grieving the passing of his beloved grand-

father. Rabbi Aryeh Leib himself had sought the guidance of a *Zaddik* and desired to visit the *Rebbe* of Alexander, Rabbi Hanokh Henikh, whom many Gerer Hassidim had already adopted. A letter to Rabbi Barukh Shapiro of Zitsv, who was a close friend of the Rym, reflects Rabbi Aryeh Leib's dilemma:

> I ask his honor to advise me on certain matters, for I have been left orphaned by both my father and grandfather, and I have no one to turn to except our Father in Heaven. I am a simple man and know not what to do. I see many men of deceit and falsehood who appear to be speaking for my good, but in their hearts are thinking only of themselves. . . . I have heard that such a man has circulated the false story that I have accepted the crown on my head (*Rebbe*). . . . I write to inform you that it is completely false; on the contrary, I do not desire it. . . . I have therefore written with the hope of receiving some counsel from his honor.[7]

He also inquired whether he, like other Hassidim of Gur, should make a pilgrimage to the *Zaddik* of Alexander. Rabbi Aryeh Leib did journey to Alexander that same year for Rosh Hashana.

The *Rebbe* of Alexander accepted him with utter humility and paid him great honor and respect. Rabbi Leibele then established the custom of an annual journey to Alexander on the Sabbath preceding Rosh Hashana, and the two colleagues would spend hours in debate and discussion. Rabbi Leibele, it appears, was not entirely intellectually satisfied with the court of Alexander. He refused to compromise, but strove for compatibility and unity between mind and heart, intellect and senses. Here we note the continuing influence of Kotzk.

The *Rebbe* of Alexander was disturbed and said to him, "Have you ever seen fermented wine when the sediments rise and make the wine impure? So is it with man who strives towards heights beyond his own power. Not only is this frustrating and evil unto itself but it weakens the good found in him."[8] Rabbi Leibele then recalled these selfsame

warnings preached by his revered grandfather before his demise.

Rabbi Hanokh Henikh of Alexander was very much attached to his new disciple and requested his presence before his own death. It was at this time that the Hassidim felt that Rabbi Leibele should "reveal" himself as their leader. Again he felt reluctant and continued to develop as a scholar and writer, completing his commentary on the Pentateuch, called *Liqqutim* (compilations), which revealed his vast knowledge and profound understanding of Torah and Midrash. It is told that he was almost coerced into accepting the "crown" in 1870 at the age of 23, four years after the death of the Rym.[9]

When the Sefath Emeth died on the 5th of Shevat in 1905, the Hassidim immediately elected his eldest son, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, as their *Rebbe*. He too was reluctant to accept the appointment but did not object as strenuously nor as long as his predecessors. At first he refused to preach or hold the traditional Friday evening *tish* (table service), but the Hassidim invaded his very privacy and would not accept his negative answer. After the Rym's death, there had been several *Zaddikim* who could succeed him. But now there was no one, no one who could fully comprehend the Hassidic "way" at Gur.

In speaking briefly about Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Gur, Buber says: "His critical, and yet not hopeless attitude toward the movement, whose decline he recognized, is expressed very clearly in a certain description—surely not without reference to his own experience—which he drew in his old age, of a congregation which had everything, a leader and members of a House of Study and all the appurtenances. Suddenly Satan bore out the innermost point, but everything else remained just as it was, and the wheel kept on turning, only that the innermost point was lacking! He was speaking intimately to his grandson, but suddenly the description wrested a cry from him: 'God help us! We must not let it happen!' "[10]

"Not to let it happen," not to assist in the decline of Hassidism, may have been another reason for the accept-

ance, on the part of Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, Rabbi Aryeh Leib, and Rabbi Abraham Mordecai of Gur, of their appointments as *Zaddikim.*

On Passover, a few months after his appointment, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai delivered his first sermon, and on Shavuoth he conducted his first *tish,* which was the indication of a *Rebbe's* acceptance.

THE IDEA OF THE *ZADDIK* AT GUR

In moderation, hero-worship can be psychologically beneficial. Even the child in his psycho-sexual development needs a parent-figure to enable him to adopt the characteristics of his own sex. Over-imitation, of course, borders on the abnormal.

In this regard the Gerer attempted to effectuate a philosophy of moderation, but also failed. The concept of *Dei Imitatio* is basic to most religions. It took generations for the Hebrews to achieve the ability to imitate an incorporeal Deity. As long as Moses was present, they imitated God's attributes by venerating his intermediary, Moses himself. But as soon as this reflection of God's glory was absent for forty days, they felt the need to worship a golden calf. Did they not rationalize by demanding of Aaron: "Make us a God who shall walk before us, for the man Moses is not here" (Ex. 22:1).

Judges, Kings, and Prophets filled the void left by the death of Moses. And in post-biblical days, sages, *tanna'im, amora'im, gaonim,* medieval philosophers, poets, and codifiers became the national heroes. Throughout, there existed a form of hero-worship. Even in Lithuanian Rabbinism, the *lamdan* (scholar) or *illui* (genius), the precocious young talmudist, was revered as possessing special divine favor.

Unfortunately, the *Zaddik* was held in esteem far beyond the norm of the historic Jewish hero. Perhaps this was the only manner, Hassidim claim, in which the leader could reach the common man who was riddled by a gnawing skepticism of God's mercy, as a result of the persecutions and misery of his life.

It is to the credit of the Gerer that he succeeded in rallying his Hassidim around him without playing God; nevertheless he remained a superman in the eyes of his Hassidim.

The Hassidic movement was corrupted by *Zaddikism* but, as Minkin points out, Gur certainly can be described as a place of saintly and godly men who exerted a wholesome influence upon their generation.

In Gur, the *Zaddik* was not born, but "made." The intensive education and spiritual preparation each *Rebbe* received in childhood indicated that Gur was not a dynasty to be inherited, but rather earned.

The Gerer *Zaddikim* combined the intellectualism and enlightenment of rabbinism with the warmth, simplicity, and traditions of Hassidism. It was not their intention to displace the rabbi but rather to complement his work.

Realistically it must be conceded that no *Zaddik* was totally unaffected by Hassidic mysticism, by Kabbalah, or by the teachings of the *Zohar,* which delves into the supernatural and esoteric meaning of God, His teachings, His creatures, His emissaries, and the mystery of human existence. Nor was Gur unaffected by the early masters whose philosophy touched upon the glorious world beyond this seemingly futile and painful present world. Indeed, many in rabbinism, before and after the *Zaddikim,* spoke theologically, and hopefully of eternity in the great beyond.

Chapter Ten

The Concept of the Hassid

Hassidism was born for, lives for, and has as its reason for survival, the Hassid. The *Zaddik* would be just another rabbi, scholar, or teacher if the idea of a "Hassid," who needed the *Zaddik,* was not germane to Hassidism. Note that the movement was not called *Zaddikism.*

But then, what are the Hassid's goals? What is his unique role in Judaism and in Hassidism? Does he fulfill his duty by simply making the holy day pilgrimage to the *Rebbe's* court, or drinking *l'hayim,* or presenting his *quittel* (prayer note) to the master, or by leaving his *pidyon* (redemption) for the *Rebbe?* True, these customs are important and play no small part in the Hassid's life.

In Gur, these traditions were not discarded. But the core of the Hassid was *aliyah ishith* (human elevation), his *raison d'etre* being self-criticism and introspection.

The Sefath Emeth often spoke of remembering one's deeds. Despite the varied goals of education, all aims and all objectives must eventually be centered in the person who is being educated. What am I? How do I live? What has all this to do with me? These are some of the questions the Hassid should ask himself daily, or as the Kotzker put it in Yiddish: *Er fregt zich uber* (he interrogates himself).

This is the Hassid's daily exercise, said Gur, and all else is commentary. In modern terms, the Hassid was expected to have daily psychiatric sessions with himself. Of course, not really with himself, for he is never alone—God is with him, and the *Zaddik* has his ear attuned to the Hassid's catharsis. There is always a listening ear, and the

Hassid knows this. This method of self-interrogation is not only good for a general catharsis, but keeps him alert and sensitive to self-improvement.

The Hassid who doesn't "ask," remains in the category of the *am ha-aretz,* the ignorant one who can never truly be a Hassid. (*V'lo am ha-aretz hassid*) "Self-education" was the Rym's great contribution to Gur Hassidism. Fulfillment and perfection must be internal; otherwise it is mere veneer and superficiality. Many devotees will reflect outer Hassidic *hithlahabuth* (ecstasy) and enthusiasm; more essential and basic is inner zeal.

The Rym, interpreting the way of Pshykhser Hassidism, said: "They taught us not to utilize the visible organs alone, for they make only a slight impression. The more lasting and important is the invisible—that which is inculcated within his heart—thus extending and intensifying the religious ecstasy. The intrinsic *hithlahabuth,* indirectly affects the outer actions of man."[1]

The inner search for *shleimuth* (perfection) must be made regularly, conscientiously and privately, without outside interference. It is for man to recognize the man within him and thus come to know the God within him.

When the Hassidim had crowded and pressed against each other to listen to the *Rebbe's* words, he used to say: "Crowding each other is not Hassidism. Of what avail is pressing the body alone? One should rather strive to make an 'impression' on the heart; the inward fear of the Lord." He further elaborated: "What care I if Hassidim have learned to converse in Hassidic vernacular unless they concretize their words, and then I will know that this language emanates from the inner man."[2]

Gur was flattered by the thousands who came to visit the *Rebbe,* but the *Zaddikim* continually questioned their visitors' motivation. The pilgrim should not expect glory and honor, miracles and amulets, nor even reunion with old friends. He should rather be motivated by one desire alone —"to elevate the soul." The *dveikuth* (alliance) with the *Rebbe's* ways and not with the "man" himself, serve as an inspiration to the Hassid. The *Zaddik's* sacred way of life

is a symbol of spiritual perfection which the Jew should attempt to emulate. As Rabbi Mendele of Kotzk insisted: "I am not a *Rebbe.* All I desire is that the fear of Heaven shall enter deeply into the marrow of your bones."[3] Thus did the Rym inform his Hassidim visiting him for the first time: "Know that I am not a *Rebbele,* neither do I desire money or glory. I desire only that, in the few years which I will be privileged to lead you, I shall succeed in bringing the hearts of the children of Israel closer to their father in Heaven. Whosoever does not desire this, should not come to Gur."[4]

"To bring Israel back to God" was Gur's primary goal, and the court succeeded in becoming Poland's center for intellectual and spiritual growth.

He who came to Gur would have rid himself of his mundane aspirations before his arrival. The Rym, however, noting that a number of Jews were deriving much joy in being present in his court for a week-end, informed them: "The *Zaddikim* did well when they instituted the custom of paying periodic visits and leaving their homes." Added the *Rebbe:* "True, many arrive, but unfortunately too many never really leave behind the house, *i.e.,* their diversions, crass materialism, and earthly concern."[5] Accordingly, those who came to Gur for other purposes, namely to seek advice in matters of livelihood, children, illness, and other problems were not the most welcome guests.

Gur was splitting at its Hassidic seams on the Sabbath and holidays. The Rym was not displeased, but in the secret domain of his heart he sought a smaller, more spiritually elite, group. "I would prefer," he once expressed himself, "a few Hassidim upon whom I could exert a more intensive spiritual influence than thousands upon whom my influence is superficial."[6] But the generation called for a large focal point of Hassidim, and the *Zaddik* had to separate the wheat from the chaff in seeking those few more spiritually sensitive individuals.

This viewpoint varied from the Kotzker who sought a strictly exclusive and intellectual group of Hassidim. Though preaching the study of Torah and seeking for the

spiritually elite, Gur indicated that even the less learned could at least make the attempt and not feel discounted. Furthermore, the daily religious introspection was not to be reserved for the synagogue or the court alone. The Hassid was to prepare himself in his home and in the market place before coming to Gur. The *Rebbe* merely set the example and stood witness to ethical ideals. The *Zaddik*, no matter how great his saintliness or spiritual powers, could not help the Hassid who did not help himself.

This is the meaning of the Psalmist's admonition: "Do not trust in princes" (Psalms 146:3). Don't trust in others, even princes, but work out your own spiritual redemption. Individual redemption, like universal redemption, is not achieved easily or quickly, nor in one single experience. It is ever-growing, a gradual and slow process of constantly renewing and uniting the spirit. There is initial redemption in the first step, but it becomes more intensified and more sanctified through the process of daily interrogation and renovation. This is the essence of Gur Hassidism: *hithhadshuth* (a daily renewal), diligent enhancement, a new *aliyah* (elevation), a re-invigoration of the Jew reborn, a new spiritual re-awakening. This is Torah and the rest is commentary.

It is told that as a few noted *Zaddikim* had congregated in Kotzk, they were suddenly called to the Kotzker *Rebbe's* study and were asked the meaning of the passage: "And he shall live among them." Replied the Rym—and his comment reflects his general philosophy—"It means simply that each man must inject his entire 'life' in the fulfillment of his duties, *i.e.*, his very lifeblood."[7]

Self-coercion is at times necessary to overcome even the most impassable obstacles to achieve this *shleimuth* (perfection). The Rym would remonstrate with those who cried, "It is impossible and beyond my reach. I can't cross the bridge." Answered the *Rebbe*: "When it is seemingly impossible, it is assuredly then that one must attempt the crossing."[8]

In view of this Gerer philosophy, what are the *Rebbe's* responsibilities and what is the primary role of the *Zaddik*



"You are a lofty soul, and I am lowly.
Lift me up, O Rebbe!"

in relation to the Hassid? Gur answers briefly: "To inspire his Hassidim sufficiently, remind them constantly, and testify to this inner perfection and introspection. This is the prerequisite for success in the field of *Zaddikism*—the ability to inspire. He who does not possess this power is not a *Rebbe,* though attracting thousands."[9]

What means does the *Rebbe* employ to influence and inspire his Hassidim in his role as a helpmate for their needs and desires? Certainly not through the means of unnatural powers and miracles. This was not the Gerer approach. To the Gerer the power of the *Rebbe* is great only if by his own spiritual greatness, he succeeds in uplifting his Hassidim. There is a Yiddish expression, "A *Zaddik mit a pelz," i.e.,* a *Zaddik* with his heavy warm fur coat, who applies his own warmth to himself alone, but does not radiate this warmth to others. This latter, the *Rebbe* must do. He can be pious, saintly, and learned, but unless this piety, sanctity, and knowledge touches others, he remains a mere *Zaddik,* righteous unto himself, but not a *Rebbe.*

A popular Gerer story is told by one of the Rym's disciples, Rabbi Nahum Yisrael of Lipne, who relates a memorable conversation:

The Rym: "What do you think about your pilgrimage to Gur?"

Nahum: "I came to listen and not be heard."

The Rym: "Nevertheless, I beg of you."

Nahum: "Hassidim travel to the *Rebbe* with their financial problems and other worries. I asked myself why the *Rebbe* should concern himself with all these problems, and how can he really help them."

The Rym: "*Nu,* and what did you answer yourself?"

Nahum replied: "The *Rebbe* inspires those who approach to repent, thereby uplifting them to a higher rung, and therefore their prayers are heard and their problems are solved."

The Rym then explained: "Not so! This is the common view of the Hassidim. I think otherwise. When they present the *Rebbe* with such problems, he thinks to himself: 'Who am I, and how can I, a mere mortal with human failings,

come to this poor soul's aid.' Thinking thus, the *Rebbe* himself takes spiritual self-inventory and becomes humble and penitent, elevating himself and inadvertently also uplifting the visitor, bringing resolution to the Hassid's unsolved problems."[10]

This story would seem to contradict Buber's contention that Hassidism bred extreme hero-worship of *Zaddikim,* at least as far as Gur was concerned.

Hassidim relate the story often attributed to the great *Maggid* of Mezeritch. A tenant farmer once came to the *Maggid* to ask his help in a business matter. "Is it me you are asking?" the *Maggid* inquired. The man replied: "I ask the Rabbi to pray for me in this matter." "Wouldn't it be better," said the *Maggid,* "if you were to ask me to teach you how to pray to God? Then you wouldn't have to come to me anymore." In this story, the thesis that the *Zaddik* could merely teach the Hassid how to pray is clearly delineated. After that lesson, the *Zaddik* could easily be dispensed with. As Buber states it: "According to Hassidic concept, external help is not what matters; it is only the outer husk which makes an inner form of help possible."[11]

"External help is not to be abandoned," says Buber. "Hassidism enters upon its decline when the *Zaddikim* no longer give their Hassidim inner help along and with and through external help. For here, everything is based on the relationship between *Zaddikim* and Hassidim, a living relationship which is all inclusive and penetrates to the innermost core."[12]

The *Zaddik* does give the people external help, but not in any mysterious and vicarious way. The devout Hassid is right there working along with the *Rebbe,* interrogating himself as he is inspired by the *Rebbe's* exemplary behavior. The Rym's penitence will stir the conscience of the people to repent. The *Rebbe* in Gur teaches the Hassid how to pray, not necessarily as an "outer husk" but rather as part of the inner form.

This idea is more akin to the story of Rabbi Shalom Shakhna, the grandson of the great *Maggid.* A tenant farmer came to him before the Sabbath and told him that

one of his calves was ailing. "And from his words," says the Rabbi, "I heard him imploring me: 'You are a lofty soul, and I am a lowly soul. Lift me up to yourself!' "

According to Buber, as he understands the philosophy of most *Zaddikim,* especially the early masters, the *Zaddik* must uplift. Gur believed that although the *Zaddik* participates in the uplifting, it is the Hassid who does most of the work. This in no way negates the importance of the *Zaddik* in Gur Hassidism. Even in Gur, the *Zaddik* was still the cornerstone of the movement. He might act only as the midwife, the exemplary actor, and the inspiration, but this did not necessarily vitiate his role. The good in man lies dormant, and the *Zaddik* makes the potential kinetic.

Gur went one step further than Pshykhse. There the *Zaddik* was the leader and counsellor. In Gur, the *Zaddik* is the "choicest" and the "chosen one" in the community. He possesses extra-sensory perception because of his piety, learning, and understanding, and at times his powers are beyond comprehension, Gerer Hassidim claim. He is not a miracle worker nor a master of the good name, but his unique kinship with the Almighty gives him the license of intervention, if he so desires. In Gur, the *Zaddik* would seldom employ these powers, refusing to tamper with divine judgments. Gur taught, however, that since the spiritual powers of the *Zaddik are* great, one should cleave to him, for through and by his sacred inspiration, one can help uplift himself.

Chapter Eleven

The Relationship of the Zaddikim With Their Hassidim

THE RYM

The *Zaddik* and the successful rapport he established with the common man were the core and foundation upon which Hassidism was built. Said the Besht: "He who loves God, loves all creatures." He was indiscriminate in his choice of friends and was severely criticized for it.

Some *Zaddikim,* either because of their own personality makeup or their own Hassidic philosophy, did not always succeed in developing a personal tie with their followers; nor did they particularly care. But these were the exceptions and not the rule. The Besht made it crystal clear that he came not to increase the burden of observance but rather to teach a new approach to the service of the Lord: by loving Him, loving Torah, and loving the people of Israel.

This extraordinary love for humanity, for God's creatures, and for Israel was manifest in Rabbi Israel's unique influence on his disciples. He served them as a father serves his children, concerned with their physical as well as spiritual welfare. He was the first to establish the tradition of an intimate relationship between master and disciple. Many stories pertaining to his utter loyalty and devotion to his disciples are recorded in Hassidic history and in the biographies of the Besht.

The school of Gur retained this aspect of Beshtian philosophy, though it was indirectly influenced by Kotzk and Rabbi Mendele. Unlike his teacher, the Rym did not prac-

tice an ascetic withdrawal from his court but was easily accessible for even the most menial questions. The *Rebbe* was made aware of both the personal and spiritual problems of his court. Indeed, it was a Hassidic world very different from Kotzk.

Said Rabbi Hanokh of Alexander: "The school of Pshykhse exemplified love; Kotzk taught fear; and Gur stood for that which was permeated with beauty, which includes both."[1]

Like the Kotzker, the Rym never accepted gifts from his Hassidim, not even in the form of a *pidyon.* His wife, Feigele, was the breadwinner. By receiving no remuneration, salary, or gifts, the *Rebbe* could thus preach more courageously and establish a more amiable and natural relationship with his people. None of the *Zaddikim* of Gur accepted gifts or redemption honorariums. This was an established Gerer approach, novel to the Hassidic world.

Like the Besht, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, was also concerned with the physical welfare and livelihood of his followers. He informed the self-appointed leaders of Gur: "I request of you to receive hospitably all our guests and provide them with their physical needs in an honorable and not exorbitant fashion. . . . You will be amply rewarded for your kindness, and I promise that every resident of the city will profit thereby. The ideal of lovingkindness is one of the virtues which is unlimited. Its reward is therefore also unlimited."[2]

His constant emphasis on the practice of humility was reflected in his own modesty which kept him ever in intimate touch with the Hassid. "The devout, who is closer with God, must strive for 'lowliness' and utter humility."[3]

THE SEFATH EMETH AND HIS HASSIDIM

Rabbi Aryeh Leib, living with his grandfather for many years, observed the singular way in which the Rym formed close relationships with the common man. Accordingly, he, too, formed a father-son relationship with his Hassidim, and

they came to their chief counsellor with their fears, anxieties, spiritual conflicts, and personal dilemmas.

He established appointed hours and a rigid schedule to receive his people. The writer's father, Mailech Lipshitz, describes the manner with which he spoke to his guests. Standing near the door, near the bookcases, he seemed more engrossed with his books than with the visitor. He listened attentively, however, to every word, and answered to the point. He often defended himself: "I am standing near the door but close to the *Shulhan Arukh* (the code of the Jewish Law), for how can one answer appropriately without a thorough knowledge of the Code."[4]

"As he stood there," relates the writer's father, "his face reflected a strange sadness as though all of Israel's suffering was upon his shoulders." He felt personally responsible to everyone who saw fit to consult with him and succeeded in his own precise and amiable way in mitigating their fears and suffering.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib possessed unusual insight and easily detected the subconscious fears of the "client." His was not an indirect approach, for he gave advice and made quick decisions *for* the client rather than *with* him. "Deliberation takes as much time for me as the distance from my desk to the stove in the room," he used to say.[5] It was a distance of only a few steps.

Being one of the youngest *Zaddikim* of his generation, the Sefath Emeth befriended the youthful Hassidim. He received them in groups and established a definite schedule for debates and discussions. He was counsellor and confidant to them—a veritable physician of the soul—listening patiently and never growing weary or angry. Often he would open the discussion, knowing that the Hassid was awe-stricken and unable to speak: "Speak, my friend," said he, "and tell me what's in your heart, for this is the primary reason for my existence here."

How empathetic and compassionate was Rabbi Aryeh Leib even to the unlearned. It was his policy to examine every young student who came under his influence. He once detected the superficiality of a student. Not to embarrass



him he said: "Tarry in my study a bit and then go out and tell your friends that you engaged in a lengthy discussion with me."[6]

In discussing Hassidism with his students, he once interpreted the passage: "Behold, the Keeper of Israel shall not sleep" (Penitential Prayers), to mean that one dare not become lethargic in the task of "keeping" Judaism.

He preached and reprimanded them without fear of becoming unpopular. His disciples respected him all the more for the courage of his convictions and the blunt but warm manner of his speech. He developed an unusual, witty, but appropriately direct, response to a variety of questions. He

was at home with both young and old. An elder Hassid complained about his waning power of memory. The *Rebbe* quickly retorted: "We must praise the Lord for granting us the attribute of forgetfulness in our old age to enable us to accept, understand, and overcome all the tragic experiences of a lifetime. Otherwise we could not survive."[7]

The Sefath Emeth did not hesitate to delve into the very intimate and personal lives of his Hassidim. A story is related concerning a young student whose father refused to support him financially. The *Rebbe* called in the father and questioned him. The father replied that he simply had no means. The good *Zaddik* quoted the Scriptural portion of the week when Moses complained to the Almighty: "Did I conceive this people, did I give birth to them. . . . Where shall I acquire meat to give to these people?" (Num. 11:12).

Asked the *Rebbe:* "Wherein is the relevance between 'I gave birth,' and 'I have no meat?' We deduce therefrom that a father who gives birth to his offspring is responsible at all times for the financial welfare of his son and cannot absolve himself with the excuse, 'I simply do not have.' According to Scriptures the father is always responsible for the welfare of his offspring at any time and at any place."[8]

Like the first *Rebbe,* Aryeh Leib did not depend upon his Hassidim for financial assistance. His wife, too, supported the family in various and sundry business ventures. To those young students who consulted him regarding a livelihood, he advised: "Do not make the Torah a spade with which to dig," namely, do not depend upon the Rabbinate to support you. He advised them to find a business or other employment.

A disciple once came for counsel regarding an appointment as rabbi of a small Polish community. The *Rebbe* indicated his displeasure. "Who then shall minister to the people?" asked the disciple. "Those who do not ask me for advice," replied the Sefath Emeth.[9]

His displeasure for "salaried rabbis," is reflected in the following episode: The son of the Rabbi of Zlushin came to inform him that his father had died, and that the parish-

ioners had requested that he succeed his father. The *Rebbe* showed his discontent and asked: "Wherefore do you need it? You are a man of means and are the owner of two houses." Replied the rabbi: "But, *Rebbe,* I cannot earn a livelihood from this property." The *Rebbe* was adamant: "Despite this, why do you seek it?" He refused to give his consent to the appointment. It is told that the rabbi rejected the appointment.[10]

Great was the influence of the Sefath Emeth upon his faithful followers. It is told that the Russian government had decreed that all rabbis become fluent in the Russian language. A student came to the *Rebbe* and received the advice: "I would envy you much more if you became a shoemaker." The story concludes: "In a few days the rabbi brought a pair of new shoes to the Sefath Emeth."[11]

Rabbi Aryeh Leib was convinced that *parnasa* (a good livelihood) cures many ills, and that economic problems have much to do with depression, familial disharmony, marital incompatibility, and even spiritual degeneration. He used to say: "One should not take the urgent business of economic survival too lightly. One must be courageous and fearless and not become discouraged if he is momentarily economically depressed."[12]

The *Dayyan* (judge) of Vlozlebk, Rabbi Leib Kuchinsky, once complained to the Sefath Emeth that he felt lost and so alone in his community. He was the only Hassid there and desired to leave his post. The *Rebbe* advised otherwise: "Abraham, our Patriarch, was also much alone in his day. He who strengthens himself in study is never alone. You are earning well and this is of the utmost import."[13]

The man in business will often claim that it is almost impossible to be perfectly honest and aboveboard. He rationalizes his transgressions by repeating the cliché: "Well, everybody does it. This is the only means of economic survival." Rabbi Aryeh Leib would become most impatient with such people, especially if they flaunted a veneer of religiosity and fear of the Lord. Both they and their evil practices were severely reprimanded by the *Rebbe.* He ex-

pected them to remain the finest exemplars of moral uprightness.

A young Hassid once informed him that he was considering studying *shehitah* (the skill of kosher slaughtering), so that he could accept the position of ritual slaughterer in one of the nearby communities. It was the practice at that time, as it is today, to pay for this type of employment, and "buy out" another shohet. "Do you have any promises for a position?" asked the *Rebbe*. "First find yourself a job, then learn the skill of *shehitah*." Answered the Hassid: "It is a well known fact that one can purchase employment in this area. I, too, will follow this 'worldly' practice." The *Rebbe* interrupted him: "This is unfortunate, since the world is no world at all."[14]

Another incident occurred during the ten Days of Penitence. A well known businessman asked the *Rebbe* for advice concerning a particular venture and insisted on an immediate response. Said the *Rebbe* with some asperity: "The first item on the agenda today is penitence. Perhaps if you take self-inventory and personal stock of your deeds, you will find the solution to your problem."[15]

A wealthy Hassid once bewailed the depressed economic conditions and admitted to irreparable business losses. Since he could not repay his promissory notes and loans, he asked the *Rebbe* permission to claim bankruptcy. Quipped Rabbi Aryeh Leib: "According to which saint and code of Jewish Law do you desire to file your bankruptcy?"[16]

The Sefath Emeth believed in the innate goodness of man and expected constant reflection of this God-endowed gift. Truth without equivocation and without excuses is an ideal upon which the world is sustained. Falsehood in a garb of truth is more degrading and injurious to personal inter-relations than outright dishonesty. Convalescing in a mountain resort after an illness, the *Rebbe* once said to his son: "Here I breathe clean air, devoid of any falsehood and trickery."[17]

His crusade for ethical standards in business became an obsession with him, and despite the natural desire to maintain an amicable relationship with his Hassidim, he pro-

tested against their deceptive ways in the light of their outer religious practices.

A Hassid came from Lodz to consult the *Rebbe* about opening a new factory. The *Rebbe* forewarned him to be cautious in giving too much merchandise on credit. The Hassid assured him that his purchasers were known to be men of esteem and high religious calibre. They were "Kosher Jews." The *Rebbe* insisted: "There are many Kosher Jews, but too few upright and completely honest men in business."[18]

The *Rebbe's* responses were virtual medicines to the soul-sick individuals who came to him from far and near. A truly penitent individual was understood and forgiven by him, and left his study with a new lease on life, completely transformed. His love for and faith in what he called the *nekudah pnimith* (the inner essence of man), was exhibited in his preaching and teaching, and his amiable association even with a seemingly unwelcome individual.

The Jew must never adopt a dualistic philosophy of morality—one for the home or synagogue and the other for the market-place. Both are interdependent. Religion, he believed, is a sanction for morality. If none is exhibited, it is not based on religion in the first place. Observance of tradition is meaningful only if it emerges from inner conviction and not from mere *pahad* (fear). *Torah lishma,* study of Torah for its own sake, brings one to the religious moment of truth and will inevitably develop the man of total unblemished truth.

Two brothers once informed the *Rebbe* that they were considering a partnership and asked for approval and blessings. "Partnership in business," he advised, "but partnership, too, in matters of the spirit. You must both include in the contract a pledge to study together daily. Then will your partnership meet with success."[19]

He felt compelled to personally uncover this *nequdah pnimith* and believed that though sometimes deeply hidden, it could be brought to light. Even the sinner must have faith in this innate power which is Divine. This, perhaps, is the *tselem Elohim,* the divine image in man.

The *Rebbe* sometimes acted as a surgeon and, at times, as the Socratic midwife, to dissect the inner man and give him insight into his own basic goodness. In discussing penitence, he quoted the Talmud (Yoma, 86a): "Premeditated transgressions sometimes become virtues . . . sometimes out of fear and at times out of love."

"Wherein lies the difference, as long as a man repents?" asked the Sefath Emeth. "Truth is, that without love repentance is impossible. Hosea (14:5) proclaims: 'I shall love them as a gift.' Rashi explains that even though they are not worthy, I give it to them with my love." Added the Sefath Emeth: "As God grants His love to man as a gracious gift, so must man, sometimes against his own will, strive to love God. Penitence involves an act, sometimes self-contradictory, insincere, and motivated by fear. All the greater is that penitence derived from love. Either way the penitent eventually gives love and reciprocally receives divine love."[20]

As the Jew is God-intoxicated, Rabbi Aryeh Leib was love-intoxicated in his relationship to his followers and to mankind generally. He sensed the difficulty of thwarting one's own *yetser hara* (evil inclination), and pointed out the ill logic of pursuing . . . succumbing to sin. In explaining the Midrash: "He who influences others to transgress is more evil than a murderer,"[21] the *Rebbe* asked: "The sinner's world has come to an end if he is unable to cast off his yoke. He is never satisfied, and like the desire for narcotics, his craving grows stronger. A man who has a hundred, wants two hundred. Since the sinner is unable to satiate his unquenchable hunger, life becomes morose and futile for him. As the Psalmist (32:10) puts it: 'The wicked is filled with pain, but he who trusts in the Lord, will be surrounded with lovingkindness.' The wicked is constantly in pain for his appetite is never satisfied, but the man of faith is always happy with his lot for he is easily satisfied."[22]

It is one thing to be sinful, but how serious it is to cause others to sin, as did Jeroboam who was known as the prototype of such a sinner. Therefore, taught Rabbi Aryeh

Leib, through *havrutha* (Hassidic fellowship), we not only bring strength and encouragement to each other, but may at times save a man from falling off the precipice of moral behavior. Every man must seek that "inner divine image," not only within himself but within his fellowman. Always judge a man with merit and give him the benefit of your doubts.

Upon his return from Berlin, a student inquired if he found many faithful and observant Jews in Berlin. Not willing to slander his brethren, the *Rebbe* replied: "We are told by our sages in the Ethics of our Fathers to always judge a man meritoriously. 'Adam' means the entire man, with all his shortcomings and in all circumstances and at all times. The Jews of Berlin should be judged accordingly."[23]

One of the reasons for the decline of Hassidism, was the "deification" of the *Zaddik,* the complete hero-worship of the *Rebbe.* This unquestionable and blind loyalty to the *Zaddik* created fierce and unnecessary competition, not so much between the masters themselves, as between the Hassidim of various sects. In glorifying his own teacher and negating the qualities and powers of another, each Hassid created disunity and schisms within the movement. Their teachers often censured them severely, but mostly to no avail. In addition to the disharmony it caused, such glorification tended to further exaggerate the scholarship, piety, and prophetic powers of the individual *Zaddik.*

The *Zaddikim* of Gur were adamant in their insistence on *shalom bayith* (peace within their (the *Zaddikim's*) courts), and amity with other Hassidim. A *Zaddik* once called upon the Sefath Emeth, and upon his departure expressed the prayer that there should always be love and peace between them. Rabbi Aryeh Leib added: "Our love is insufficient. More important is the love between our followers."[24]

The Sefath Emeth is known to have lived in friendship and rabbinic fellowship with his colleagues. When Rabbi Aryeh Leib was elected *Rebbe* of Gur, he received a message from Rabbi Yehiel of Gostenin, assuring him that he was a good friend and asking to be remembered in his

prayers. The Gerer *Zaddik* returned the message: "I know that Rabbi Yehiel is my devoted colleague. As for remembering him in my prayers, I always do in the liturgy of the *Amidah, 'V'sim helkeinu immahem,'* (give us a share of their righteousness), referring to the pious and righteous."[25]

Even in his early ministry, his colleagues already considered him one of the great lights in Israel and sought his views and opinions. A conference of the foremost Hassidic leaders of the day was convened in 1888 at the court of the Grodzisker *Rebbe.* The urgent question was the governmental decree to make secular education compulsory for all Jews. There was a fear that this eventually would destroy every vestige of Jewish learning. The Sefath Emeth felt that the Jews themselves had wished this decree upon themselves. Had they opposed the government's meddling in their educational affairs, the law could not have been passed.

He, therefore, posed the following practical resolution to the assembled rabbis: "I have heard that it is possible to nullify this legislation with three hundred thousand rubles. It is our responsibility, here and now, to raise this quota. I will do my utmost to raise 100,000 rubles; the *Rebbe* of Grodzisk will get his 50,000; and so will our colleagues from Alexander, Sochotschov, Puribsk, Radomsk, and Skerneviz—each bringing us 25,000 respectively." After this initial address by Rabbi Aryeh Leib, the youngest *Rebbe* present, the conference adjourned in fifteen minutes.[26]

At the ensuing banquet, the Gerer was asked by the Grodzisker to lead in the Grace after meals. Rabbi Aryeh Leib declined the honor, claiming that it should be given to older and more pious men. "Let the elder in our group lead us—the *Zaddik* of Grodzisk," answered a delegate. Replied the host from Grodzisk: "If I have the good fortune of having a 'king in Israel' in my court, shall I not honor him?"[27]

A leader held in so high esteem is prone to become aloof from the common man. But Rabbi Aryeh Leib exhibited a Moses-like humility in descending from his rabbinic pedestal

to the level of the simple Jew. More than his scholarship, there was an even greater genius in the humble and unsophisticated manner of his demeanor in the midst of his spiritually hungry folowers. He was their preacher, teacher, father, and often provider. He gave sustenance to many, bridal dowries to others, and to some even loans to prevent bankruptcy. He had his few men of means who never refused his request for financial assistance, coming to the *Rebbe,* placing a bundle of money on the table, and insisting that he take as much as he deemed necessary. Thus, the *Rebbe,* in addition to all his other roles, became a social worker. How closely akin was the role of the *Rebbe* of old to the rabbi of today!

The *Rebbe* of Gur possessed a phenomenal knowledge of everyone whom he met or who came to his court. Obviously he was deeply interested in their welfare. As an example of the *Rebbe's* close relationship with his people, a story is told of a Hassid who asked the *Rebbe* whether to permit the consummation of his son's proposed marriage, since the bride was said to be ill. The Sefath Emeth advised consummation of the marital vows because the bride was surely not ill. If she were, he stated, her father, a devout Hassid, would have consulted the *Rebbe* concerning the illness.

The Sefath Emeth attracted devotees from every walk of life: the affluent and the poverty-stricken; the intellectual and the uneducated; the pious, and at times, even the impious. In the main, his court consisted of a middle-class socio-economic group, but many of the more renowned families of Poland were counted among his Hassidim.

Within his own family circle, the Sefath Emeth was also highly regarded as a master and leader. His family, it should be remembered, consisted of Poland's leading scholars, rabbis, *Zaddikim,* and lay leaders. To mention a few there were his own children: Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, later his successor; his third son, Rabbi Moshe Bezalel; his son-in-law Rabbi Zvi Hanokh; his son-in-law, the renowned scholar, Rabbi Yaakov Meir Biderman; his son, Rabbi Nehemia Alter; his youngest son, Rabbi Menahem

Mendel Alter; and his brother-in-law, the *Rebbe* of Pilz, Rabbi Mendele.

It is said of his brother-in-law, Rabbi Mendele, that he accepted his post as "Rabbi" and not "Rebbe," because he had heard from his brother-in-law, the Sefath Emeth, that a *Rebbe* must have the power to bind one Hassidic soul to the other. This, he feared, would be beyond his own powers.[28]

Despite Rabbi Aryeh Leib's crusade against secularism and the open desecration of Jewish tradition, he was highly respected by the members of the opposition. As an example, when a decree was passed for compulsory secular education, an influential manufacturer of Lodz was invited to a conference of *Zaddikim.* They beseeched him to use his good influence to help abolish the law, but were immediately rebuffed. Rabbi Aryeh Leib took him aside and pleaded: "At times, a man must also work on behalf of a brother in distress, even though he, himself, may not consider it a problem." It is said that this plea made a marked impression upon the skeptic, and he expended much effort and means to help abolish the decree.[29]

Like most men of decision, however, the Sefath Emeth had a few who opposed him and attempted to weaken his influence. A story is told which illustrates this jealousy. In 1901, four years preceding his death, the synagogue at Gur burned down. The *Rebbe* was sorely grieved, not only because a House of God was destroyed but because it had been erected by his grandfather, the Rym. When the new synagogue was built, someone informed the government that this was not in keeping with the law which prohibited the erection of two synagogues in one city. Since the town of Puvunsk was so near to Gur, the argument ran, two synagogues were unnecessary. The synagogue, accordingly, was condemned by the authorities. Of course, when it was later proven that the two towns were separate entities, the synagogue was reopened. The *Rebbe* pleaded with his Hassidim to forgive the informer, since he was undoubtedly concerned about the economic welfare of the residents and their possible inability to support two synagogues.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib judged men meritoriously, but recog-

nized the fallibility of human nature. He was empathetic but not naive. When the charity box of the *Rebbe's* synagogue was missing, the recently engaged sexton was suspected. The Sefath Emeth called him in and, after interrogation, ordered him to return the charity money. The sexton confessed and returned the money. "Now," said the *Rebbe,* "I suggest that you return to your hometown, for here no one will hold you in esteem any longer because of this incident. As for your promised remuneration, I will send it to you personally each month."[30]

It is also told that a certain Hassid, returning from market, was detained in a small village because of a breakdown of his carriage. He spent the Sabbath with an eminent lay leader and gave him his money bag to hold until the end of the day. On Saturday night the host denied that he had been given the money and refused to return it. Many weeks later, the host came to Gur to implore the *Rebbe* to remove the suspicion cast upon him and to ask whether he should open a new business in Lodz. The *Rebbe* answered sharply: "With regards to your business, you should consult an authority, not a *Rebbe.* But regarding the aspersion cast against you, you can remove the slander by returning the money and without coercion."[31]

One can readily understand that the *Zaddik* who claimed to be omniscient and to possess *ru-ah ha-kodesh* (the holy spirit), certainly felt able to dole out advice on all aspects of living. Many if not most *Zaddikim* did just that, even delving into the supernatural on occasion. Rabbi Aryeh Leib, however, reflecting Gerer philosophy, was not afraid to admit total unfamiliarity with various matters, especially those pertaining to business. Plagued with so many problems unrelated to religion *per se,* he finally announced: "I have not undertaken my studies to become an authority on business. I have simply undertaken to teach Torah and Hassidism to Hassidim who come to me, and counsel them on how to be Jews, and no more than that."[32]

On the eve of the Day of Atonement, a Hassid came to ask the *Rebbe* to remember him on the Holy Day. Preached the *Rebbe:* "A man must remember himself, first and fore-

most, and not depend on the *Rebbe*. When a man does not cast off personal responsibility he does himself the most good."[33]

Religion is a unique personal experience. Its rewards, punishments, and atonements are personal commitments and cannot be experienced vicariously. No one, according to Jewish doctrine, can pray for me, rejoice in God for me, and suffer for me. There are no proxies to the human soul, no surrogates to religious ecstasy, and no substitutes for a personal intimacy with the Divine. Not even the Messiah can create that moment of religious truth for the individual.

This is what Rabbi Aryeh Leib meant when he denounced the appointment of the *Rebbe* as the intermediary to God. The only intercessor is one's own plaint and prayer, which reach the Heavenly Throne more speedily since there is no human interference. As a *Rebbe* there were certain Hassidic traditions expected of him. He accepted the *pitka-quittel* (prayer-note), with its request for spiritual assistance and interference. He could not very well dissolve a tradition which brought solace to many grieving, disturbed, or anxious Hassidim. But he would, from time to time, preach his basic thesis: "A man must primarily remember himself."

The works, writings, teachings, aphorisms, and parables of the *Zaddik* have been transmitted to us both in manuscript form and orally, as have been most Hassidic contributions. The hearsay stories cannot be verified except through the testimony of another Hassid, and even then remain questionable. But when hundreds of followers are familiar with a particular teaching and relate it without too many drastic changes, it seems plausible and probable that the *Rebbe* uttered it. Each *Zaddik* possessed a distinct style, wit, manner of speech, idiom, and vocabulary. A student of Hassidism can often associate a story with its author by means of its style.

The Sefath Emeth left many manuscripts from which his teachings and parables are culled. The incidents mentioned in this chapter were originally transcribed in a

number of publications listed in the bibliography. Rabbi Nathan Bromberg of Ostrov substantiated many of the above tales and added those he had personally heard. His son, Rabbi Abraham Israel Bromberg of Jerusalem, accredited these stories and co-ordinated them with written information.

This author, however, questions the authenticity of some tales, since many were transmitted orally. Hearsay stories change through over-repetition.

In summarizing the Sefath Emeth's relationship with literally tens of thousands of Hassidim, it would be accurate to state that he emulated the way of his grandfather as well as basic *Zaddikism,* by establishing an unusually intimate rapport with his following, but in a natural, realistic, and intelligent way, devoid for the most part of soothsaying, prophecies, and miracles.

THE THIRD *REBBE*

To complete the story of Gur in the important area of *Zaddik*-Hassid relationships, some mention must be made of Rabbi Abraham Mordecai's approach.

In 1905, after his father's death, the Hassidim elected Rabbi Abraham Mordecai as *Rebbe.* He, too, like his two predecessors, was reluctant to accept the honor. Once he did, he led Gur in his own independent and unique way. Rabbi Abraham Merdecai retained some of the classic traditions of the courts of Pshykhse, Kotzk, and Gur but introduced his own innovations.

It was customary among many Hassidic sects, including Gur, to schedule services at later hours, which was not in accordance with Talmudic and Lithuanian traditions. Rabbi Abraham Merdecai, however, established the hour of morning service at 7:30 A.M. This was quite revolutionary at Gur, whose Hassidim were in the practice of offering this service at a very late hour, after many hours of *hachanoth* (preparation) for prayer through meditation, study, and discussion.

What was the basic cause for this innovation? Seem-

ingly, it was associated with Rabbi Abraham Mordecai's general emphasis on the virtue of *zrizuth* (aggressive diligence), which called for orderliness and a regimen of daily living. A precise schedule of activities would help create a planned system of prayer, study, business, family life, and recreation. "Orderliness" in activity creates orderly and logical thinking.

The *Rebbe* was obsessed with study and deeds, and always preached against the evil of "killing time." Time, felt the *Rebbe,* is God's most precious gift and it is for man to utilize it wisely and creatively.

He instituted an even more revolutionary tradition, *i.e.,* the interruption of the Sabbath morning service with a lecture or study session between the *Shaharith* (morning service) and *Musaf* (additional service). He introduced a similar session on Friday evening, between the preliminary psalms (*Kabbalath Shabbath*) and the evening *Maariv* prayers.

Schedules, orderliness, and the preservation and utilization of time was the core of his way of Hassidic life. His day was pre-planned—each activity and appointment precise and punctual. He believed the more punctual a man is in his menial tasks, the more punctilious he would become in his sacred commitments.

He therefore wasted little time in idle talk. They say he spoke very little, his responses being exact, brief, and to the point. Generally, it is an old Hassidic tradition to be careful with one's words lest one profane the name of God with impure, slanderous, or idle talk. His sermons were brief; his lectures, well-organized and coherent; and his prayers devoid of pomp and ceremony. His meetings with Hassidim were expeditious but meaningful.

After the evening service on Rosh Hashana, he greeted as many as five or six thousand worshippers, calling most by their names and wishing them God's blessings for the New Year.

Interestingly, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai never chose to sit at the head of the table, but rather in the midst of his Hassidim. In this manner, fewer congregants would be too

distant, and he himself would remain less aloof and more humble.

Like his predecessors, he too refused gifts, salaries, and honorariums. Receiving funds from his Hassidim in America, he wrote them:

> I received your check, and have already appropriated half of it to the completion of our building fund, as you had stated. About the second half, which you request that I accept, I am happy to inform you that I am not in need. With your permission, however, I should like to utilize these moneys for the establishment of a fund to publish the works of my revered father, the Sefath Emeth, who left us many manuscripts. . . . I also urge you to set aside a regular hour for the study of Torah, and for those who are extremely busy, at least ten minutes of daily meditation on the purpose of man's creation, the recognition of the Creator. . . .[34]

He recognized the urgent problems, shortcomings, persuasions, and failings of his generation, and attempted to deal with them on their own level. He was not afraid to be tactless with his Hassidim if it meant the improvement of their character. Once he reproached an influential Hassid for being boisterous, loud and pompous, and beseeched him to speak softly with his friends. It is told that the Hassid's demeanor from that day forward was gentle, considerate, and well-mannered.[35]

To another Hassid, he wrote: "I do not like what I hear, that you are ill-mannered and insulting. This is not the way of Hassidism, and good manners precede even the study of Torah. I implore you to do your utmost to use self-control."[36] It is difficult to imagine any minister or rabbi writing such courageous letters to his parishioner in our age!

Rabbi Abraham Mordecai was adamant in his insistence upon *shalom v'ahduth,* peace and amity, in inter-court and intra-court associations. In a famous letter to his Hassidim in 1929 he wrote:

> I am writing to all of you pertaining to a matter which is of greater import than any before us now . . . and this is my hope and prayer, that there shall be amity, unity, and peace among you . . . for only through an inner desire to live in peace and to assist one another, can we hope to grow from strength to strength in Jewish life. Everything is dependent upon unity.[37]

He despised slander, small talk, and futile arguments with a passion. As stated, he chose his words carefully and expected others to "guard their tongues," advising them to study diligently those portions of the code dealing with the subject.

He believed strongly in the efficacy of knowledge. Destroy ignorance, he believed, raise the level of education, and you nourish a generation of creative and pious men. Education, therefore, was Rabbi Abraham Mordecai's chief love. He feared the waning of Poland's great institutions of learning. Through his contacts with the *Agudath Israel,* as well as his large following of men with means and love for Torah, many schools were established: *Yesodei Hatorah* schools for boys, and *Beth Yaakov* schools for girls. The latter network of private, Orthodox schools for girls still exist in Israel and America.

The elder Hassidim of Gur, at first, were shocked at the sudden emphasis on youth, for the *Rebbe* paid less attention to them. Every moment spent in developing the young was precious and priceless to him. Little time was left for the mature Hassid who had already captured the meaning of Torah and Hassidism. Thousands of young students began to converge on Gur and remained there for a number of years as students. Among them was the father of the writer.

The Hassid flourished in Gur, and the *Zaddik* flourished because of the Hassid. The devotees were reverent, respectful, obedient, and spiritually hungry. The *Zaddik* was compassionate, concerned, empathetic, firm, and profoundly pious. There was unusual rapport, bordering on love—indeed there was love—between Rabbi Yitzhak Meir, Rabbi Aryeh Leib, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, and their Hassidim.

Chapter Twelve

Hassidic Music

Today even the most vehement antagonist of Hassidism will concede that Jewish religious and cultural life in the area of song and dance would be poverty-stricken without Hassidic contributions. This concession, of course, did not always prevail. Originally the *mithnageddim* were ashamed of the Hassidim's overt public expressions, which, in their opinion, reflected instability and lack of discipline. They objected particularly to the "abnormality" of joy, song, and dance on the Sabbath, a practice which to them bordered on the sacriligious.

But Hassidism without song would be soulless. Hassidism awakened within the masses a heretofore dormant love for and sensitivity to music. As example of the influence it has had in this area, try to conceive of a modern "Jewish" wedding, or any *simha,* without the cadence of Hassidic song and spirit.

Hassidic literature is filled with proof-texts and parables indicating the great role which music played in its philosophy. "With song one can open all heavenly gates, but with sadness, they would remain eternally shut," is a popular Hassidic aphorism. Also: "If with tears the gates can be opened; with joy, fortresses can be broken."[1]

The Besht, who drew much from the wellspring of Kabbalah, found mystical sources for music in its text, the *Zohar.* "The Torah is within music; God's spirit is within song; and Israel will be redeemed from exile because of music (*neginah*)."[2] Hassidism strove for universal and individual redemption, and thus included song as one of the prerequisites of *ge-ulah* (redemption).

Among the Besht's disciples were many popular composers and singers. They were not accomplished musicians, neither were they all familiar with theory or method. But they possessed an inner joy and inspiration, that coupled with a Hassidic "ear" for music, led to the introduction of melodies which began to circulate among the new Hassidim.

Hassidic literature contains many legends concerning particular melodies. The *niggun* sung today by Lubavitcher Hassidim, for instance, is traced back to the Besht and his disciple, Rabbi Mekhele of Zloteshu, and is known as the "song of longing." The pupil, unable to visit the Besht, composed this melody expressing his inner longing for his Master. The Besht requested this song to be chanted on his deathbed.[3]

The importance Hassidim put on song is reflected in the plaint of Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz, who spoke to God: "Master of the Universe, if I could but sing I would not permit You to live above in the Heavens. I would, with my fervent melodies, coerce You to inhabit the earth together with us, Your faithful."[4]

The *Zaddik* of Ladi claims to have attracted young devotees through the medium of music, and quoted the Besht who said: "The word is the heart's pen, but music in the soul's pen."[5]

Idelsohn, in his classic book, *Jewish Music,* which is the basic text in the field, included a number of compositions attributed to the Besht. The founder's music is said to have influenced such immortal compositions as: "The Baal Shem," by Ernest Bloch; "Yiddishe Melodies," by Joseph Ahron; "Hassidic Dances," by L. Saminsky; "Melodies to the Dybbuk," by Joel Engel; and "Hassidim," by Shlomo Rosovsky.[6]

The renowned Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav is known to have maintained that every area of wisdom possesses an aspect of music, which is both its cause and reason for existence. Even prophecy and total alliance with God can only be accomplished through music.

Rabbi Nahman's disciple tells of his master: "He used



With song one can open all heavenly gates.

to sing his own composition, and suddenly found himself dancing joyously to his own accompaniment. He who has not seen his dancing has not witnessed joy in his life."[7]

One of the objectives of song as employed by the Hassidim is to drive away the depression and melancholia which keeps man distant from God. The Jew must expend his greatest efforts to have joy, mirth and melody permeate his home and heart.

Moreover, he who has attuned his mind, heart and ear to music, can eventually hear the song in the air, in things inanimate, in nature—even in the slightest blade of grass. There, the song emanates from the soul of the inner being, rising without musical blemish directly to the Almighty without the interference of strange thoughts.

"All religions," said Rabbi Nahman, "possess their unique spiritual music. The music rendered to the *Ein Sof* (Infinite One), strives for and reaches the highest cadence. But the most sacred song is reserved for the messianic era, and will be sung without lyrics or notes. That eternal song will reach the aspect of total silence."[8]

For the Hassid there was no better means than song and dance for releasing his often suppressed emotions and for interpreting, in its own distinct but bizarre fashion, his religious experience. The singing of old and familiar melodies to each other created a nostalgic bond among the Hassidim, exhorting them to even greater religious fervor, as though the Besht or Rabbi Nahman or Rabbi Shneur Zalman were chanting the *niggun* at that very moment.

So important was music considered, that a *Zaddik* who possessed musical talents along with scholarship and eloquence would unquestionably gain rapid prominence. Even if he possessed only the ability to sing and compose melodies, he could easily rise to the forefront of Hassidic recognition and popularity.

Many of the courts and schools were known and remembered primarily for their musical excellence. The school of Modzisk, in Poland, for example, was renowned for its music and the publication of numerous melodies. Contemporary Modzisker Hassidim have recently recorded both old

and new melodies, thus extending that school's tradition and keeping its music alive.

Was Hassidic music truly original? Many musical historians claim that little originality and genius is found in Hassidic song, and that it was often directly influenced in the areas of rhythm, tempo, and feeling by the province or land in which it was born. The famous melodies of Modzisk, for example, are easily discernible as Polish waltzes and polkas. Lubavitcher melodies cannot always be differentiated from Russian balalaika music.

In defense of Hassidic song, it should be stated that no art, music, or literature can be totally devoid of either geographic-cultural influences or the contemporary trends. Progress in communication, which inevitably narrows the broad cultural universal community, makes unequivocal originality almost impossible. Hassidic music in the United States would undoubtedly bear the American stamp.

At Gur, Hassidim took pride in their ability to transform a popular contemporary melody into Hassidic music.[9] Moreover, Gur was not ashamed to adopt and accept "outside" melodies emanating from other courts and *Zaddikim.* It is interesting to note that Gur rejected, for the most part, the sadder and more somber tunes, retaining the more jovial and spirited melodies. This inclination they undoubtedly inherited from the school of Kotzk.[10]

Geshuri contended that Gur's emphasis on scholarship resulted in a kind of music which lacks method, lustre, and organization. In its staccato and scherzo tempo, the song would sometimes be as long as thirty minutes and at times longer.[11]

The Rym was neither singer nor composer but possessed a musical "ear" and a profound love and appreciation for "good" Hassidic music. It is told that at a nephew's wedding in Paltusk, he objected strenuously to both the orchestration and vocal rendition of the songs. He turned to the local rabbi, Yisrael Yeshua Trunk, and in great dismay asked: "How is it that you minister in a community in which the cantor is unable to chant well, and the orchestra unable to play?" The local rabbi was quick to empha-

size that both the cantor and orchestra leader were pious and learned in Torah. The Rym insisted that one has no bearing on the other, and that any joyous occasion requires proficient musicians. On the other hand, upon hearing a melody which pleased his sensitive ear, the Rym would have it repeated until he was thoroughly familiar with it.[12]

Though musical talent was important, there were other even more important prerequisites to the acceptance of a musician at Gur. He had to be, first of all, God-fearing and pious. Piety was essential if the composer or interpreter was to capture the inner religious mood. Without religious inspiration, Gur argued, the musical product would be tepid and empty of religious feeling and expression. How can religious music be intense and true, they reasoned, if the artist is not inspired by his own personal religious experience? By the same token, distinct Hassidic music can be created only by the Hassid who has captured the Hassidic religious fervor.

Zalman Tutan, Jacob Talmud and Hirsh Parzuber were among those whose musical excellence was known in the Hassidic world. The last, who was better known for his liturgical compositions, was the *baal-tefilah* at Pshykhse, Kotzk, Gur and Alexander, and later sang for the Sefath Emeth.

The *baal-tefilah* must be distinguished from the *hazzan* or cantor. Both chant the liturgy and lead the congregation in prayer. The cantor, however, was often professionally trained, and his interpretation of the liturgy was more artistic, complex, and exact. Why then did Hassidic synagogues discourage the development of professional cantors, and prefer the chanting of a layman as a *baal-tefilah?*

The reasons were simple. The worshipper who acts as the cantor is a *shliah tzibbur,* an emissary of the people before God, and must therefore be fully representative of the people. This would not preclude the appointment of one trained professionally for the task. Such an election, however, would prevent other laymen in the synagogue from rendering the service, denying many the privilege and pleasure of acting as cantor. Accordingly, in the Hassidic

synagogue of Gur, the more able laymen—and there were many—took turns and waited eagerly for their opportunity to chant the services publicly.

The Hassid and his master looked for no more than a simple, brief, and sincere interpretation chanted humbly by one of their own pious and enthusiastic "master of prayers." Brevity, simplicity, and an opportunity to participate in the chanting were cardinal principles to the Hassid. A professional cantor would lengthen the service unnecessarily by an over-fondness for a repetition of words, a habit vehemently opposed by Hassidism.

Thus, Hassidism never nurtured any great cantors but rather developed and encouraged thousands of *baalei-tefilah* who chanted the song of the masses. In this way the Hassidic court developed its own unique music despite its cantor-less society.

Gur sought to avoid monotony in its music not only by making use of many *baalei-tefilah,* but also by encouraging the introduction of new songs at every Holyday. This tradition finds its source in the Rym's early expressions: "If I had been graced with a pleasing voice, I would introduce to you new songs daily, and reveal to you their mysteries and multi-faceted meanings. As creation is renewed daily, so is there born a new song daily."[13]

The Rym's disciple, the *Rebbe* of Alexander, adds to his master's interpretation: "As age proceeds slowly but steadily in debilitating health and life, thus does old age and time weaken a song sung too often and too long."[14] A melody rejected by the *Rebbe* of Alexander and his Hassidim, evoked the comment: "In Pshykhse this song inspired its listeners. Today it is no longer appropriate for the time nor inspiring to us."[15]

Most of the melodies, songs, and compositions of Gur and other Hassidic courts were unfortunately not scored, but transmitted orally from Hassid to Hassid and from generation to generation. Some are being transcribed today and others are being recorded. In 1961 Rabbi Jacob Talmud recorded the "Songs of the Gerer Hassidim" (Menora Rec-

ords Inc.). Rabbi Talmud was the court composer of Gur until 1933, when he left Poland for Israel. By 1955 he had over 1,000 compositions to his credit.

The court of Gur, despite its illustrious *Zaddikim's* emphasis on scholarship, piety, and ethics would have been spiritless and lifeless without music, song, and dance.

Chapter Thirteen

Miracles

Baal shem (master of the name), as the term was first used in the Talmud (Pesahim 86b), served to describe a man little distinguished for either learning or saintliness.

Rabbi Samuel, the father of Rabbi Judah He-Hassid, said to his younger son: "Know that you will be the head of an academy all your life, but as for your brother, Judah, he will know what is above and what is beneath—he will be a *baal shem.*"[1] The name could have implied many things, a miracle-worker, or perhaps just a holy man.

In describing the fears that oppressed Polish Jewry in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Graetz says: "There is no country where Jews are so much given to mystical fancies, devil-hunting talismans, and exorcisms of evil spirits, as they are in Poland."[2]

With the hope for messianism still strongly ensconced in their hearts and in their desire to emancipate themselves from their oppression, the Jews sought mystical ways to achieve relief, including recourse to magicians and religious enchanters.

The exorcising of demons was in great demand, and the *baal shem* exercised this function, first in Germany and then in Poland. He was a composite of medicine man, Kabbalist, and quack doctor, writing amulets and prescriptions to drive out the evil spirits and demons. The effectiveness of the *baal shem* lay in the manipulation of the four letters of the Ineffable name of God.

Strangely, or perhaps not, the exorcism sometimes worked. Perhaps through the psychotherapeutic method of fear and faith, the *baal shem* acted as the "doctor" in the

presence of whom the "bedevilled" rid himself of his demon. The "session" was often accompanied by bizarre costumes, black candles, sounding the ram's horn, and donning of prayer shawl and phylacteries. The focus of attention was always the *baal shem* who remonstrated, cajoled and shouted, and read psalms and incantations until the patient showed signs of improvement.

The "cures" developed a following and reputation for these men, and the *baalei shem* often became formidable competitors to regular physicians.

Even rabbis who became jealous of the sorcerers either learned the act of writing amulets, or employed scribes and secretaries to help them. Graetz claims: "To write amulets for the exorcism of diseases was required of the rabbis, and they devoted themselves to their work; many wished to be thought of as conjurers of spirits."[3]

A less superstitious but equally mystical approach consisted of storming the heavens by prayers, fasting, and self-torture. Classical Lurian Kabbalism with its rigorous demands for self-mortification, was practiced by many who wished to hasten the advent of Messiah.

Asceticism, performance of penance, and other Kabbalistic methods were used to overcome the evil spirits which guarded the Messiah. The followers of Isaac Luria did not practice the monastic customs of Christianity, but like their Christian counterparts, they attempted to change the Will of God by destroying their sensual appetites and mortifying their flesh. They found in the Torah and the *Zohar* a mysticism foreign even to the early Kabbalists.

Rabbi Israel, founder of Hassidism, was a *baal shem*—perhaps against his will. A great leader had to possess some powers of healing. Rabbi Israel either had to practice these powers or not fulfill his calling as a founder of a new movement. Yet he was more than just a miracle-worker because he accompanied his deeds with love, compassion, understanding, and holiness. For that reason the word *tov* (good) was added to *baal shem*. Because of his great compassion he was the master of the *good* name.

Minkin asks: "How far did Israel himself believe in the

miraculous powers which his admirers attributed to him?" He concedes that "It is not impossible that he was little flattered by the opinion held of him by his contemporaries, and only too willingly accepted their blind faith in him. . . . There was no secret on earth or in heaven unknown to him. . . . The revelations and visions which he reported of himself, surpass in daring anything that his admirers had claimed for him."[4]

In consonance with his philosophy of joy and pleasure, the Besht frowned upon Lurian Kabbalistic methods of asceticism. "To the truly pious," he said, "praying, eating, drinking, and sleeping are all one; to bring all these things into living action and carry everlasting life into them, is the true purpose of religion."[5]

When he heard that one of his disciples was following ascetic practices, Rabbi Israel wrote to him: "I hear that you think yourself compelled from religious motives, to enter upon a course of penance and fasts. My soul is outraged by our determination. By the counsel of God, I order you to abandon such dangerous practices, which are but the outcome of a disordered mind. It is written, 'Thou shalt not hide thyself from thine own flesh!' Fast, then, no more than is prescribed; follow my command and God will be with you."[6]

Gur inherited its vehement antagonism to miracle-working from the schools of Pshykhse and Kotzk, despite the fact that in this period one of the cornerstones of Hassidism was performance of miracles. The Yehudi Hakadosh, the founder of Pshykhse, once said: "To perform a miracle is no miracle, but to make a Jew is a miracle."[7]

The Rym announced, after his acceptance as *Rebbe:* "I do not indulge in miracles. If a Hassid's motive (for making a pilgrimage) is livelihood, healing, or miracle-working, he should not come to Gur. But whoever feels that these problems are due to a waning faith in the Lord, may come to me and he will be assisted!"[8]

Gur was chiefly concerned with developing Jews and Hassidim. There were, however, among the thousands who insisted on rallying around the banner of Gur, many who

would not destroy their faith in miracle-workings. They were sent by the *Rebbe* to the eminent "healer" in Poland, Rabbi Yaakov Aryeh of Radzimin. "Woe to us," said the Rym, "if we had to resort to sorcery and amulet-writing."[9]

The Rym would add in his general arguments against these practices: "Not only is it not the Jewish way, but I simply have no desire to differ with the Will of the Lord."[10]

One notes in the following story a struggle between the Rym's basic *Zaddikism* and a more rational approach. He once told the renowned miracle worker, Rabbi Yosef Barukh, called the "good Jew" of Neistadt: "If I were certain that I could bring the hearts of the children of Israel closer to their Father in Heaven through the methods of sorcery and miracle-healing, I would travel to Germany and show them miracles which had not yet occurred. Presently, however, I am convinced that it is impossible to accomplish this task of influencing their return to God, except through study and religious observance."[11]

The Rym was, nonetheless, the victim of Hassidism's irrational exaggerations, and many tales of the Rym's "miracles" are related by Hassidim who claim they were actual witnesses to the incident. Even the modern, enlightened Hassid will not strip the reputation for divine prowess from his *Rebbe,* and believes these legends which have been circulating from generation to generation. Strange but true is the fact that the originators, the so-called witnesses, were men of scholarship and integrity. To understand the nature of these incidents, a few are hereby mentioned.

1. This story is related by the Rym's nephew, Pinche, the *Zaddik* of Pilz. The Rym had lived for many years in cramped quarters, the former building of the Hassidim of Kotzk. The *Rebbe's* study was very close to the study hall of his students. The Hassidim wanted to remodel the house and enlarge the *Rebbe's* dwelling. He refused on the grounds that it would take at least four days, during which he would be away from his studies. He could waste one, but not four, precious days, he told his good friend, Yakil Frohman. His friend happened to mention the *Rebbe's*

obstinacy to a builder who had no children. Said Yakil: "If you can fulfill the wishes of the Rym and complete the job in one day, I promise you, in the name of the *Rebbe,* that you will have offspring." Though not a Hassid, but believing in the sanctity and piety of the Rym, the builder gathered every available man and kept his promise. The remodeling was done in one day. Even the Rym was highly pleased. Yakil quickly added: "But, *Rebbe,* this was an expensive job. The builder has no children, and I promised him a son in your name."

Hearing this, the Rym turned white and Yakil even whiter. After many moments, the *Rebbe* said to the builder: "What do you say to Yakil? He does what he desires and leans on my shoulders. But, so be it! Since the thing was done, so shall it be. The Lord will indeed help you!" It is told that a son was born to that builder after many years, and the Rym was the godfather at the ceremony of circumcision.[12]

2. Bunam, the Rym's sexton, relates the following incident. One day when he brought the *Rebbe* his daily meal, the Rym took one look at the chicken soup and rejected it. Whereupon Bunam ran to the Rabbi's wife and questioned the *Rebbe's* action. The wife ran to the cook and asked her if anything went wrong with the soup. "Yes," she replied, "there was a ritual question with regards to the *kashruth* of the chicken, but the Rabbi of the city, upon examination, assured me that it was strictly kosher." The maid was new and was not aware that questionable fowl was never eaten in the Rym's house. Now they understood the *Rebbe's* actions. But how did he know that the chicken was questionable? The *Rebbe* revealed the secret: "This power of recognition in matters of food I learned from our *Rebbe* in Pshykhse, and everyone is capable of it. If a Jew truly believes that he would rather choke than eat forbidden food, the Heavens will always inform him and not permit him to swallow it."[13]

3. Barukh, the *Zaddik* of Tshiziev, tells the following regarding his wife. She was alone one night, and claimed to have been attacked and beaten by men dressed in white

sheets. These incidents occurred night after night. Guards were placed next to her bed but she insisted that the attacks continued. The *Rebbe* of Kotzk, not much interested in these matters, was consulted, and suggested an iron fence around her bed, but this helped for a few days only. The *Zaddik* of Tshiziev finally came to the Rym, and would not leave until he found some cure. The *Rebbe* lit his pipe and said nothing, the smoke billowing upward for half an hour. He finally burst forth: "Go home and return in four hours. God will help us!" When he returned, the Rym handed over a sealed letter and warned him not to open it: "When the attackers come, let your wife throw this letter at them, and say: 'Upon the behest of our *Rebbe* of Gur, receive this letter!' " The woman did as the *Rebbe* had told her, and said that the attackers received the epistle and fled.[14]

In view of the Rym's constant opposition to miracles and his discouragement of visitors who came to him for amulets, it is difficult to picture his participation in such miracle tales. One must conclude that Gur could not resist the temptations of miracle-healing, for this was the wish of the populace; and at times even Gur had to concede. Thank God for the incidents in which the *Zaddik's* promise was fulfilled. The ones which were not fulfilled were never mentioned.

We can also be more pragmatic and reject these tales as apocryphal stories conjured up by devout Hassidim. What the Gerer Hassid believed was one thing; the truth might have been quite another. Suffice it to say that the school of Gur bequeathed little to the history of exorcism, amulet-writing, and sorcery. Few incidents of miracle-workings are attributed to the Rym, fewer to the Sefath Emeth, and hardly any to Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, the third *Rebbe*.

Miracles and magical powers, or a unique channel to God by the "true illuminate," are always products of ignorance and blind irrational faith. Hassidim were unfortunately more blameworthy in this area than any other

movement in Jewish history, a weakness which caused the decline of Hassidism and increased the antagonism of the rabbinites against the "miracle-working" *Zaddikim.*

Gur must share the guilt, however slight, in this area, for no Hassidic school, unfortunately, discarded these ludicrous practices.

Chapter Fourteen

The Sabbath and Holydays

One of Hassidism's chief contributions to Judaism was restoring to the Sabbath all its original joy and pleasure. In the seventeenth century, it was still customary to celebrate the Sabbath amidst great pomp, ceremony, song, and dance. However, at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, when East European Jewry had been depressed by decades of pogroms and persecution, the Sabbath had been transformed into a day of serious meditation and austere solemnity. Its worship services featured heart-rending prayers for salvation, and the absence of melody and joy was obvious. The committee of the city of Brisk in Poland proclaimed that no cantor shall chant more than three melodies on the Sabbath, reflecting the melancholy permeating the atmosphere of Jewish communities.



Despite continued travail and persecution, Hassidism insisted on reinstituting joy and gladness into Sabbath observance, for "it is prohibited to mourn on the Sabbath," according to the Jewish Code of Law.

Lurian mystics rejoiced on the Sabbath, taking their disciples on Sabbath eve to the valleys and springs in the mountains of Safed, and there, with religious fervor and song, welcoming the Sabbath, queen of all days. *Zemiroth* were especially composed for the Sabbath; among those included in the liturgy were, *Azammer bishevahin, Asadder lisudatha,* and *Bnai heikhala,* sung by Hassidim today.

Hassidism not only injected a new joy and importance into the Sabbath day but also into the eve and conclusion of the Sabbath as well. Friday was devoted to preparation, for one cannot simply saunter in and saunter out of a religious experience but must establish the mood by prior readiness.

Hassidim celebrated the Sabbath through Saturday midnight, and ushered out the "day" with a feast known as the *Melaveh malkah,* (ushering out the queen). Until this day some Hassidic sects still wait until Sunday morning before offering the "evening prayers" and the *Havdalah* service officially separating the holy from the secular, and concluding the Sabbath. The *Rebbe* of Belz concludes his Sabbath "table" (*tish*) on Sunday morning. The spirit and joy of the holy day was too precious to permit its conclusion only twenty-four hours after its commencement.

If Sabbath is austere it remains a brief twenty-four hour experience. But if it fills the Hassid with a love for life, despite a week of degradation, the Sabbath spirit lingers and continues to inject his life with meaning throughout the following week. It sustains him and nurtures his soul and revitalizes his body with renewed strength.

A contrast of Sabbath observance between the Hassid and the *mithnaged* is illustrated by a legend of a dream related by the Besht. He saw paradise in a dream and there envisioned two chairs, one of gold and the other of hardwood. The Besht inquired who would occupy these

two seats, and the angel of the Lord showed him two scenes.

The first episode took place in a tavern of a small village. A non-Jewish farmer, dressed in immaculate clothes, was treating all the rural residents to beer and whiskey. The inn was soon filled with laughter, song, and dancing. Upon inquiring the reason for such rejoicing in the middle of a Friday afternoon, the Besht was informed that the neatly dressed farmer had established this custom because he had remembered his parents donning clean attire on Friday and singing and dancing with their children. The Besht was then convinced that the farmer was of Jewish origin, brought up by non-Jews. The angel of the Lord then whispered: "That golden throne is reserved for that man who observes the Sabbath in his own crude but joyous manner. He has captured the inner meaning of the Sabbath joy for himself and his friends."

"And who then will occupy the seat of hardwood?" asked Rabbi Yisrael. And he beheld another scene, the synagogue in a Lithuanian town filled with *mithnageddim* engaged in an intricate talmudic discussion. A stranger waiting at the synagogue door was completely ignored, as rabbis and students were deeply immersed in study. At twilight, on the eve of the Sabbath, they scurried to their homes, washed, and returned quickly for the Sabbath service.

The old rabbi finally noticed the stranger at the door and invited him to his home for the Sabbath. The visitor was shocked to see the rabbi sad and anxious, almost tearful. He "said" the liturgy without melody and without the clapping of hands or gesticulation. He walked slowly and with deliberation, fearing that he would, God forbid, commit some slight trespass on the Sabbath. He was even fearful of breathing too hard lest his breath snuff out the Sabbath candles. The stranger felt uneasy and disappointed at the depression and the lack of joy in the home of the rabbi.

The chair of wood was unfortunately reserved for the revered rabbi who observed all the minutiae of Sabbath laws, but lost the true meaning of the Sabbath.

The story exaggerates the attitudes of both rabbinism and Hassidism but illustrates the viewpoint of the opposing schools towards observance: one was guided by restrictions and negations; the other by liberality and "thou shalts."

The Besht was the first to introduce the custom of public observance of the Sabbath, with Hassidim gathering in joyous fellowship and song, eating the three Sabbath meals at a communal table. Even intoxicating spirits were recommended to stimulate physical joy, for the body is the receptacle of the soul and its depression can infect the soul. The entire being and all possible faculties must participate in the commandment of Sabbath observance.

The alma mater of Gur, the school of Pshykhse, taught that whereas the Feast of Tabernacles features a commandment into whose fulfillment the Jew must "enter" with his whole being, *i.e.*, actively entering the *Sukkah*, Sabbath observance is of even greater import, since even passively the Jew finds himself immersed in the Sabbath and fulfills its precepts. Sabbath, as a *mitzvah* of time and space, prevents the observer from disassociating himself from it. Indulging in physical pleasures on the Sabbath and satisfying the five senses, both sensually and sensuously, therefore, is more acceptable to the Lord than fasting during the weekday.

Sadness was an unwritten Hassidic prohibition, but on the Sabbath it was a proscribed restriction, preached by almost every *Zaddik*. Even on the days of semi-mourning for the destruction of the Temple, on the very Sabbath preceding the ninth day of Ab, the *Zaddikim* would not introduce any melancholic spirit into the service.

Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz, who was notorious for indulging in much song on Sabbath, continued without deleting one melody on *Shabbat Hazon*, the Sabbath of semi-mourning during the first nine days in the month of Ab. Turning to his Hassidim, he explained: "Sabbath is a most distinguished guest to us. Let it therefore linger with us a bit longer. The ninth day of Ab, however, is not a welcome guest, and we would be better off had it not

arrived. Therefore, let that sad day tarry, while we continue to rejoice with our dear guest, the Sabbath."[1]

There is a talmudic debate on the question of whether sleep or study is of greater value on the Sabbath. As important as bodily rest and sleep may be, certain Hassidic sects discouraged over-indulgence. Every hour of Sabbath joy to which the Jew is unconscious is time wasted.

The Ropshitzer, Rabbi Naftali, alluded to Napoleon who refused to take naps during the day. " 'When I sleep,' said Napoleon, 'I am no longer King, and what a great loss to sleep away such a fabulous kingdom.' Sabbath is our kingdom and we are the monarchs and princes. How dare we waste such a precious kingdom in sleep."[2]

THE SABBATH AT GUR

The Hassid's Sabbath itinerary at Gur transformed a life of travail and tension into a veritable paradise. During the secular week, he strove for the holy and the sacred; on the Sabbath, he realized it fully through all his senses; including his sixth. The extra soul, known as the *neshamah yetheirah* (extra soul) was perhaps that sixth sense.

As the people of Israel were God's elect, charged with a divine mission of testifying to His Holiness, so was the Sabbath a divinely elected day of all days, infused with distinct holiness and a testimony to the sanctity of time.

To the Hassid, the Sabbath religious experience is a preview of the world to come, that entity of time and space enveloped in total holiness, the highest rung in the ladder of man's religious striving. As one must sufficiently prepare himself in this world for the journey into the next, so must the Jew enter the Sabbath with six days of concentrated preparation consisting of the fear of God, ethical practices, and humility. *"Olam hazeh* (this worldliness), and secular materialism must be removed in the process if one is to sense the glory of Paradise on the Sabbath," said the Rym.[3]

The Rym prescribed a program of preparation consisting of three elements: fear, ethics, and humility which uplifted man from the filth and mire of the secular week.

Divine recognition and observance were not reserved for the Sabbath or public prayer service. It was an ever-growing process which knew no time or place.[4]

The decline of traditional Judaism in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries may be attributed, among other reasons, to religion by intimidation and religion by restriction—one inextricably related to the other.

Ask the young observant Jew to tell you the meaning of the Sabbath and he will usually recite the restrictions that it imposes upon him. Ask the Gerer Hassid, and he will recite his agenda for the Sabbath day. For one thing, his preparation for the Sabbath began on the previous Sunday. On *erev Shabbat* he would indulge in the usual physical and spiritual preparations, often the *shvitz* (Turkish bath), followed by immersion in the *mikvah*. Often he would travel to the court of his *Rebbe*. Otherwise, he welcomed the "bride Sabbath, queen of all days," with prayers and joyous song in his own hometown. The service for him was not cold, quiet, and perfunctory. He would clap his hands, gesticulate, and dance with joy as he prayed. The main course of the Sabbath meal was the *Rebbe's* lilting melody which he brought back from his last visit to the court. He would attend the Friday evening meal of the local *Zaddik*, and there grab a piece of the *Rebbe's shirayyim* (leftovers, morsels). The truth is that the *Rebbe* ate little publicly and left the greater portion for the Hassidim.

In Gur, there were literally thousands in the great hall for the *Rebbe's tish*. The *Rebbe* did not preach at the service but between the courses of the meal. There was either a song or a *Dvar Torah*, a brief sermonette on the week's scriptural reading.

The *Rebbe* would drink his wine or whiskey and toast *l'hayim* (to life), as the Hassidim quickly responded *l'hayim*. It was customary to grasp the *Rebbe's* hand as the toast was pronounced. Explained the Rym: "The handshake symbolizes the *tekiath kaf*, the promise and vow of that love which should exist between man and man."[5]

Often the *Rebbe* would rise and begin a Hassidic dance, filled with religious ecstasy and zeal. "Dancing," said the

Rym, "uplifts man spiritually." The Hebrew words *meraked* and *rikkud* are similar; the former meaning to separate the chaff, the latter a dance. Similarly *rikkud,* dancing, removes the crust of materialism from the spirit.[6]

The attitude of the Gerer Hassid reflected the spirit of the Sabbath captured at most Hassidic courts, but added richness and joy to the holy day, for the *Zaddikim* of Gur constantly accentuated the positive both in Judaism and Jewish observance.

III

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GUR

Chapter Fifteen

The Influence of Kotzk

THE KOTZKER WAY

To better understand the uniqueness of Gerer Hassidism, one does well to study its parental influence, *i.e.*, the distinctiveness of the Kotzker's philosophy.

Kotzker Hassidism preached a striving for the highest and most spiritual rung on the ladder. Every aspect of human living—the physical and spiritual—must remain undefiled and unaffected by the "I" in its striving for the "Thou." Egocentricism is a form of idolatry and a poison which results in bigoted and prejudiced thinking. Only through total selflessness can man reach the moment of Truth.

It is man's chief duty to wage a constant battle against his hidden antagonist by introspection and daily self-inventory, until he is able to uproot the "I" from the core of his being. In Kotzker vernacular this is known as *yetsiah mirshuth atsmo* (extrication from one's "inner" property). The obstacle to this total cleansing is over-confidence in one's own powers. Said the Kotzker: "Yohanan the High Priest (a member of the Pharisees), ministered for eighty years and yet became a Sadducee because he seemed righteous in his own eyes."[1]

This self-psychotherapy leads one to discover himself, to see himself in the light of truth, and thus to find his purpose in living.

No other Hassidic philosophy was more blunt, forthright, and courageous. No other *Zaddik* antagonized more rabbis, scholars, and philanthropists than did Rabbi Men-

dele. He despised falsehood with a passion and fought even more vehemently falsehood cloaked in a garb of truth. He possessed the intuitive ability to recognize even the slightest blemish of *sheker* (untruth) in man and never hesitated to bring it to his attention.

The Hassidim compare this power of recognition to a man who is extremely sensitive to odors, so much so that the slightest smell would be offensive to him, though not to others. The Kotzker was intensely sensitive to the foul odor of untruth and self-delusion.

Kotzker Hassidim strove to walk humbly and to do justly, serving the Lord in their own esoteric and unobtrusive way, never flaunting their good deeds publicly, attempting to disassociate their *mitzvoth* from themselves as individuals—seeking a life which assures total purity of behavior.

Briefly, Kotzker Hassidism is founded upon five principles:[2]

1. The primary foundation is *scholarship:* the study of Torah, Prophets, Hagiographa, Oral Law, and the Codes. The uneducated man was not a welcome guest in the court of Kotzk. The *Rebbe* ignored the *am ha-aretz.* Kotzker Hassidim made a point of studying during the night when their diligence would not be publicly recognized.

2. Kotzk sought *kavanah be-mahshava,* intensity of feeling and thought, and complete absorption in any pious or religious act. Through the highest state of *kavanah* and deep concentration, one is more likely to abandon the self, destroy superficialities, and enter into the *pnimiuth* (one's interior and inner self). Only then can the individual discern between essence and triviality and cast off the chaff from the kernel. *Kavanah,* according to traditional Hassidism, is a gift which comes by the Grace of God.[3] In Kotzk, the Hassid was impatient, and stimulated *kavanah* by study and observance.

3. Prayer has its limitations, said the Kotzker, and one need not constantly indulge in superfluous plaints, *piyutim* (liturgical poems), and prayer addenda not included in early prayerbooks. True, the reading of appropriate psalms

helps to establish the spiritual harmony needed for the attainment of *kavanah.* But *kavanah* can also be achieved through the study of Torah, and an over-abundance of prayer leaves less time for learning.

4. The Kotzker preached introspection as a means to perfect inner unity. Each man must examine his own deeds, never imitate the tawdry and cheap fads of the day, and never conform to socially accepted norms and mores if they are vain and fleeting.

5. Undoubtedly the most radical of all Kotzker concepts was that one must keep distant from the materialistic masses even at the cost of social ostracism. Kotzker Hassidim were, for this reason, often accused of practicing a type of social snobbery diametrically opposed to basic Jewish social ethics, namely, the fellowship of *Klal Yisrael,* the entire community of Israel.

It is related that the *Rebbe* was so completely absorbed in his meditations that he often refused to see even his own next of kin. His brother once asked for an audience, and after a long wait informed the secretary that he was the *Rebbe's* brother. Whereupon he received a blunt reply: "In Kotzk there are no privileged characters. All Jews are equal."

Upon entering the *Rebbe's* study, the brother introduced himself. Asked the *Rebbe:* "What is your mother's name?" "Don't you recognize me?" replied the brother. "We are sons of the same mother." After which came a typical Kotzker response, reflecting his basic thinking: "I'm not even related to myself. I am no kin even to my own body. How then shall I know who my mother was?"[4]

The *Rebbe's* withdrawal was intentional, in order to avoid having to observe the social amenities and to escape the infection of society. In Kotzk the Hassidim formed a community of the elect with their own manual of discipline.

Outwardly the Kotzker preached against the extreme veneration of the *Zaddik.* This "modesty" may have intensified the desire of the Hassid to worship him as the symbol of great humility.

A Jew once came to the Kotzker, bewailed his poverty,

and wept because his wife was barren. Rabbi Mendele was provoked to utter: "What am I, a sorcerer and a diviner to produce children for you? You seek sustenance? I myself am poverty-stricken, and you seek help from me!"[5]

A Hassid once boasted of the miraculous powers of his *Rebbe* while in the presence of the Kotzker. Replied Rabbi Mendele: "Stupid fellow, why don't you return to your *Rebbe* and ask him to perform another miracle and produce a Hassid."[6] Again, his aversion to amulets and miracles left its mark upon his many disciples, among them the Rym and the Sefath Emeth of Gur.

Martin Buber vividly describes the Kotzker in his introduction to the "Tales of the Hassidim":

> Rabbi Mendele kept to his room behind two doors which were almost always closed. Two holes were bored through one door, through which he heard the service in the adjoining House of Prayer, sometimes probably watching. The other door, he occasionally opened himself, when Hassidim were gathered outside. On such occasions, he stood on the threshold without his *kaftan.* His face was awful to behold. He cursed them in choppy words that burst from his lips with such force that they were seized with terror and fled from the house through doors and windows. But sometimes, on a Friday evening, he issued from his room dressed in his white *pekeshe* (robe) and greeted his visitors, whom he otherwise gave only the tips of his fingers through the hole in the door. But he never sat down at the Sabbath table and almost never ate a plate of soup in the evening. When called to read the Torah on a Sabbath, he would go to the pulpit, his prayer shawl drawn over his face, and would go back again as soon as he heard the Scriptural portion.[7]

These ascetic practices led to the enhancement of the idea of the "true illuminate" of Kotzk instead of destroying the myth. Rabbi Mendele's motives may be seriously questioned.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KOTZK AND GUR

One of Rabbi Menahem Mendele Kotzker's outstanding disciples was the first *Zaddik* of Gur, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Alter. When Rabbi Mendele established residence in Kotzk in 1829, the Warsaw "genius," as Yitzhak Meir was called, and many other young scholars followed the *Rebbe* and established a Hassidic metropolis there. Yitzhak Meir was one of the Kotzker's most devout and loyal disciples who defended his teacher's thinking, though he later went far afield in many aspects of Hassidic life.

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir labored for many years on a commentary and critique of the *Shulhan Arukh*[8] and the *Hoshen Mishpat.*[9] The student once brought his work to his *Rebbe* at Kotzk for examination and criticism. After a long hour of discussion, Yitzhak Meir was seen walking away with tears flowing.

Later he asked his own pupil, Meir Landstein, to bring him firewood, and thereupon burned his composition. The following day the *Rebbe* asked Meir Landstein what Yitzhak Meir did with his commentary. Rabbi Mendele was not astonished when told that it was destroyed, and predicted that here was real genius and a man with strength of character.

Incidentally, Rabbi Mendele of Kotzk began all of his writings with the passage "These are the generations of man" (Gen. 5:1), wrote a few pages, and then burned them together with the leaven on the eve of Passover. He preferred to leave "living books" in the persons of thousands of eminent disciples.

For thirty-two years of his life, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir was under the direct influence of the Kotzker. Yet, his thinking did not necessarily follow the Hassidic *weltanschauung* of his teacher though he was recognized as the Kotzker's outstanding disciple.

All who were defiled in the slightest were unwelcome at the court of Kotzk. It was this view that kept the gates of Kotzk closed. But he who was truly pure would climb the gates and peer over the windows like Hillel of old, and

finally enter. Those with defective souls would find the gates closed and would make no attempt to enter.

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir "opened" the gates wide in Gur, and the court was filled to capacity, not because he necessarily defied the Kotzker's concept of being concerned only with the intellectually and spiritually elite, but rather because he believed that every man is created for a unique mission, appropriate only for himself and not for another. Consequently, the Gerer believed in a personal mission to extend the philosophy of Kotzk beyond the narrow confines of his own select court and transmit it as a legacy to the populace.

Kotzker disciples were at first disturbed by the gathering of the "common" masses at the city of Gur, unlike their own selection of those who were spiritually and intellectually pre-eminent. They questioned the Rym as to whether he was not forfeiting quality for quantity. Rabbi Yitzhak Meir retorted by interpreting the passage: "I found one man among a thousand" (Eccles. 6). "In order to find that one scholar, one must first search through many, even a thousand," he said.[10]

The Gerer *Zaddikim,* the Rym, Sefath Emeth, and Rabbi Abraham Mordecai possessed a profound love for all Israel and an even greater desire to bring spiritual joy to the common man, so that the Kotzker exclusiveness was not at all compatible with their conception of the need for communal fellowship.

In many ways, the Rym, being under the direct influence of Kotzk, intensified and expanded its thinking. Kotzk taught the importance of using each moment wisely. "To commit a transgression may not be prohibited, except that it is such a waste of precious time."[11] Gur extended this concept and gave it more positive connotation, namely, that if time is to be saved, then every extra moment must be used for study. One talmudic page is far more worthwhile for the purification of thought than many moral and Hassidic treatises. Here again we find the intellectualism, bequeathed to it by the Kotzker, which Gur injected into Hassidism.



Twenty years behind closed doors despising falsehood garbed in truth.

What innovation, then, did Gur introduce? After all, the rabbis preached and practiced intellectualism, and opposed Hassidism for the dilution of the talmudic curriculum. Gur, however, was deeply aware of the possible consequences of scholarship without the Hassidic idea of *shifluth* (utter humility), lest the scholar become arrogant and haughty because of his knowledge. The Rym admitted that if learning leads man to egocentricism, then society would fare better if the intellectual had never been born.

The passage *"kol holekh al gahon"* (Lev. 11:42—"he who walks on his stomach") falls at the very half-way mark of the Pentateuch, by a letter count. Said the Rym: "Woe to the man who having completed 'half' of Torah begins to walk with his 'stomach outstretched,' and becomes overbearing and arrogant."[12]

In Kotzk a man was likened unto a potsherd—a container whose worth is measured only by what it contained, for its sides are only worthless clay. In Gur they added that man must recognize the purpose of the receptacle, strive to fill it to capacity with Torah, and become totally absorbed with its contents rather than the receptacle itself.

Standardization and imitation were taboo in Kotzk. Originality and creativity were the marks of divinity. To pray today because one prayed yesterday is shallowness, unless one adds a new *kavanah,* thus revitalizing today's prayer and giving it a rebirth.

The Rym of Gur added that there is even danger in self-imitation which leads to a robot-like behavior, where actions and even good deeds become mechanical and listless. Sometimes it is necessary to deviate from the ordinary, just because it is the expected behavior and therefore would lack a personal and conscious feeling.

Rabbi Yitzhak Meir was steeped in the Kotzker's philosophy, yet developed his own view, as reflected in seemingly insignificant incidents. It is related that on one Yom Kippur, the cantor chanted the confessional with an overenthusiasm of lengthy song and cantillation. Suddenly the Kotzker nudged his hand and whispered, "Listen my friend!

Must we be made to taste our transgressions with your lengthy chants? Cut it short!"[13]

The Rym's general approach to the problem of the sinner and penitence was that it is bad enough that a man transgresses; but it is dangerous to rationalize his actions and attempt to probe into causes and effects. In most cases the Gerer would reject psychoanalytic therapy, which attempts to find the reasons for the syndrome and to awaken lethargic guilt feelings. Supportive type of therapy would be more in consonance with his thinking. The Gerer interpreted the passage "Turn away from evil" (Psalms 37:27) to mean that man must flee from his misdeed and not delve into it and be continuously infected by its disease. Rather, he completed the same passage: "Do good"—engage in just and worthwhile deeds, thus destroying and repressing the previous transgressions.

A devout Kotzker Hassid, upon sensing this foreign atmosphere in the court of Gur, once asked the Rym to explain this change. The *Rebbe* replied: "The word of a particular Hassidic *Rebbe* is *Halakhah;* but when a new *Rebbe* comes on the scene we must accept his interpretation of the law. At times it is necessary to set aside and forget the old ways in order to uncover a new approach."[14]

ATTITUDE TOWARD *ZADDIKISM*

The Kotzker was one of the first to destroy the myth of the *Zaddik* and claim that Hassidism does not stand or fall on the *Rebbe* but rather upon his disciples, as previously mentioned.

It is told, that before the Kol Nidrei Service, an awesome and solemn plaint arose from the worshippers as they wept in preparation for penitence. Suddenly, the *Rebbe's* door opened and he shouted: "Why does this day differ from yesterday? Where were you until now and why do you depend only upon Yom Kippur to atone for your sins? The Almighty will not cleanse your souls until you accomplish it first."[15]

The infrequent granting of audiences attempted to de-

emphasize the place of the *Zaddik* in the Hassidic community of Kotzk, but did not succeed.

The Kotzker view was deeply embedded in the three generations of Gur. But there was one major distinction. Gur held that the *Zaddik* must and can remain a pastor without becoming an idol. He cannot care for the needs of the common man by divorcing himself from society. He dare not practice any form of asceticism, for the *Zaddik's* major task in life is to influence and assist all Israel directly. Moreover, it is his chief duty to associate with the masses, so that his exemplary behavior will affect his followers. As the *Rebbe* of Koznitz once said: "The *Zaddik* is like an intermediary pipe through which flow good deeds, thus inundating the community of Israel with Divine ideals."[16]

The Jew attains a closer proximity with the Almighty by coming nearer to the *Zaddik,* who is the intermediary. A Hassid once introduced himself to the Sefath Emeth on the eve of Yom Kippur. Said Rabbi Aryeh Leib: "Better for a man to recognize himself more than to pay homage to his *Rebbe.* He would do himself a greater favor if he would concern himself more with his own spiritual welfare."

Thus, unlike their progenitors, the Gerrer *Rebbe-im* did not ostracize any segment of Israel, especially the lowly and ignorant for whom they lived and labored. They inherited the basic Kotzker attitude towards the position of the *Zaddik,* but refused to completely dethrone him from the realm of teacher, pastor, and leader.

ON SCHOLARSHIP

Students of Hassidism admit that Kotzk, despite its radical and singular views, did attain the pinnacle of scholarship. As mentioned, ignorance in any form was not tolerated.

Gur, its offspring, also set Torah scholarship as a cornerstone of its faith. Gur was famous for its many scholars who were the first to gain entrance into the court of the *Zaddik.* Among the disciples of the Rym were Rabbis Abra-

ham Bernstein of Sochochov, Abraham Rabinowitz of Parisuv, Eliezer Hakohen of Poltosk, Barukh Shapiro of Tshizev, Hayim Eliezer Wacks of Kalish, Yehiel Meir of Gostanin, Yaakov Landau of Yezov, Isaac Hakohen Feigenbaum of Warsaw, Lemiel of Vienna, Aaron Simkha of Gombein, Nahum Israel Ha-Kohen of Lipna, Hersh of Tomoshov, Shalom Tsvi of Zegrez, and Shmuel of Sheneve.

Numerous other rabbis and *Rebbe-im* are counted as Gerer disciples, all elevating the *Zaddik* to a position of eminence as the source of spirit, faith, and scholarship, and exerting a wholesome influence upon their generation. But the chain of Kotzker influence in the realm of intellectual pursuits found one of its strongest links in the Sefath Emeth, through his grandfather, Rabbi Yitzhak Meir. Rabbi Aryeh Leib emulated the philosophy of Kotzk as interpreted by his grandfather. His search for truth was ecstatic and passionate, and, like his intellectual progenitors, he employed Torah study as the power through which one attains this objective in life. Dabbling in various Hassidic sources was only second in importance to the study of Bible and Codes.

To a Hassid who bemoaned the sudden disappearance of his Hassidic *shtreimel* he quickly retorted: "Why should you care? Be careful that they don't steal your head." The *Rebbe* meant that Hassidism, as symbolized by the *shtreimel,* is important only if the basic ancient sources of Judaism are not forgotten.[17]

Chapter Sixteen

Philosophy and Ethics

OPPOSITION TO PHILOSOPHY

Even the casual student of Hassidism senses that it produced no great philosopher or theologian, developed no profound philosophy or theological innovations. But these facts do not in the least deprecate the movement, nor reduce the *Zaddikim* to shallow, unsophisticated teachers.

Hassidism, by virtue of its essence and *raison d'etre,* could not and would not strive for complexity in thought. Simplicity was its law of religious life. It would have defeated its own purpose if the complexity of its theology had exceeded the intellectual capacity of its devout followers. Moreover, Hassidism came into existence because talmudic casuistry and impractical rabbinic responsa had lost their appeal to the common man. The Jew in the marketplace and in his humble surroundings was not concerned with the ability of talmudic scholars to push an "elephant through the eye of a needle." He sought simple and direct inspiration that would fill his own soul with God's immanent holiness.

This brings us to the major causes for the simplicity of Hassidic thinking. Admittedly, ideals, ideology, fundamental theology, and logical principles of exegesis for the derivation of legal principles are all essential to the understanding of the written and oral laws. Philosophical guides are needed for the intellectually perplexed. Theological defenses and apologia are important.

Hassidism accepted the fact that study and comprehension would inspire and enhance observance; it taught that

Ein am ha-aretz Hassid, the truly pious could not be ignorant. But far more important than ideals is practice. Man did not have to understand the minutiae of the thirty-nine categories of work prohibited on the Sabbath in order to capture the inner spirit of the Sabbath. The Hassid was aware that it was his duty to be holy because God was holy; to develop a philosophical treatise around the simple concept of *dei imitatio* was beyond his scope. The *Zaddik's* chief objective was to teach by word and by unblemished and impeccable example the idea of *mitzvoth maasiyoth,* creative deeds; less ideology and more doing; less talk and more religious action.

Thus, with the exception of a few *Zaddikim* such as the Rabbi of Ladi, the Lubavitcher, who developed *Habad Hassiduth* and wrote the popular treatise, the *Tanya,* most *Zaddikim* developed no distinct philosophy or theology and certainly no organized system. Despite it, or perhaps because of it, a variety of schools of Hassidic thought did develop.

The scholastic schools of the rabbinites emphasized talmudic studies but also permitted the study of medieval Jewish philosophy. There were no formal courses in philosophy, no teachers of philosophy, and no assignments, but students were permitted—though not necessarily encouraged—to study Maimonides' *Guide* or Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari,* on their own.

A philosophy of Judaism, however, in its broad connotation, could be derived from the debates, discussions, maxims, and ethical sayings of the Talmud. The student of Judaism need not probe beyond the confines of the *Mishnah* to find a system of ethics. Maimonides is best known in orthodoxy not for his "philosophy" but for his "Codes," not for his *Guide to the Perplexed* but for his *Yad Hahazaka,* the fourteen Books of Jewish Law.

Unlike rabbinism which at least permitted the reading of Maimonides, Halevi, Gersonides, or Crescas, Hassidism viewed the study of these commentators as unnecessary and taking valuable time from Torah study. The *Guide* would not necessarily lead one to more intense piety. The

Jew, they held, did not arrive at faith through reason but rather through observance of *mitzvoth,* the study of Torah, and prayer. The faithful Jew does not need the five proofs for God's existence postulated by Maimonides in the *Guide;* his Torah commences with "In the beginning, God created." God, the Creator, is accepted as a *fait accompli,* an axiom. The negative and positive laws—613 of them—need not be rationalized. The reasons are clearly delineated for the *mishpatim* (statutes) ; and *hukkim* (ordinances) are divine postulates, revealed at Sinai amidst thunder and lightning in the presence of God's *Shekhina,* His indwelling spirit. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

The Rym of Gur reflected a fundamental antagonism to philosophy. He said: "Others may have arrived at recognition of a Deity and creation through the philosophical method. The Jew should employ the more lasting basic medium, the wisdom of Torah, in which are embedded and hidden all wisdom and knowledge."[1]

With great zeal and deep conviction the Rym clarified his views on this subject: "And Moses refused to sit with the man" (Ex. 2:21). Comments the Midrash: "Jethro told his son-in-law, Moses, that his first son was to be an idolater, but that the rest could worship the God of Moses." Mentioning this, the Rym bellowed: "I take an oath that if the Midrash is to be taken simply and literally, I could never refer to it again. He then continued to interpret: "Before the revelation of Torah at Sinai, men arrived at the concept of God via philosophy, logic, and other wisdoms. Jethro, too, employed his pagan method until he discovered the truth and pronounced: 'Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods' (Ex. 18:11). Prior to his dialogues with Moses, he was convinced that the method of logic and reason was the only approach to faith, and thus requested that his first grandchild be under his idolatrous tutelage." "We who are the recipients of the Torah," added the Rym, "need not resort to philosophy or to Jethro's methods, for our souls are carved out and created from and by Torah, and our only concern is with the way of Torah."[2]

Rabbi Samuel Shinvar, who was present at this discus-

sion, testifies: "When the Rym postulated this theory, we could sense a burning zeal in his sacred soul."[3]

Philosophy, Gur believed, is that knowledge which emanates from the physical faculty of reason, which is relative and not absolute, subject to changes of condition, as are all sensual faculties. The Torah is a definitive, absolute rationale even beyond moral ken, an absolute reserved only for divine comprehension. Sensual rationale can therefore not compete with the divine absolute. On the contrary, God's revelation is the source and basis for all understanding, and without Torah all else is futile.

This view is not necessarily original or new, neither with Gur nor with the Besht. Hassidism is often regarded as a new philosophy of Judaism, and even held to be opposed, in many instances, to basic Jewish theology. It is, however, no more than an emphasis and fortification of fundamental functional Judaism. It underscores, according to Gur, classic traditions and tenets of the faith as they are written in the Bible and interpreted in the Talmud. Hassidism is not an illegitimate offspring, as some may contend, but rather a "kosher" product of historic Judaism. It employs all the well-springs of Jewish life and thought, including the Kabbalah which is filled with the infinite wisdom of the *Ein Sof* (the Infinite).

There is, however, an element of protestantism and reform in Hassidism, of which the school of Gur forms an integral part. Rabbinic Judaism speaks in lofty, metaphysical terms, more often of God than of man. Its philosophy is more theoretical, abstract, and intellectually aristocratic. Hassidism, though equally lofty, speaks in less metaphysical terms of man's relationship with God and himself. It is a more real, democratic, concrete, and practical system. Unlike its Kabbalistic predecessors, it is concerned more with the lower world (*olam ha-tahtonim*), *i.e.*, man, than with the Lurian world (*olam ha-elyonim*), *i.e.*, God.

ETHICS

If one had to choose the most important, though not the

most original, aspect of Hassidism, he would without equivocation choose its ethical preachings or *middoth.*

Here again, there is no clearly defined systematic treatment of ethics. From the Hassidic point of view if ethics was to have any real meaning for the common man, it must be treated with the utmost simplicity, taught in parables and simple aphorisms. For this reason Hassidism's forte is teaching by illustration. Although today many of Hassidism's contributions have been discarded, its habit of teaching by parables lives on.

Hassidism courageously faced the great dilemma of modern ethical philosophy: whether it is possible for morality to exist without religion. The views of such contemporary naturalists as John Dewey, Lamprecht, and Krikorian, hold that it is erroneous to identify morals with purification of motives or with religious sanctions. For them there is, moreover, no fixed goal to be attained in the world. Good is relative to existing needs.

Like modern religion's continuing battle with the heirs of these thinkers, Hassidism waged war with the old *Haskalah.* Both the Rym and Sefath Emeth often spoke of the deleterious influences of the *maskilim,* who, according to them, assaulted organized religion, dethroned God in the sphere of human conduct, and derided all moral inhibitions. When human experience becomes the true guide to human duty and happiness, they said, then religion no longer is needed. Gur would vehemently reject "situational ethics."

The Rym speaks in great detail of "fear" of God, in the sense of standing in awe before Him, as leading to an inner love for Him, and eventually leading to just and righteous behavior.[4] "Standing in awe" before a Supreme Being influences a man to cling unswervingly to His ethical laws of right and wrong. These laws of "Thou shalt not" and "Thou shalt" are absolute, the categorical imperatives in religion.

Hassidism attempted to strongly reaffirm the divinity of the moral life. Everything, it held, animate and inanimate, springs from the Creator, including the duties and responsibilities of man in his relation with his fellow man.

"What is the meaning of *yirath ha-shem* (fear of God)?" asks the Rym. "To recognize that all is derived from God. Everyone is able to strive for and fulfill this desire."[5]

It is within the individual's power, within the scope of his God-endowed gifts to choose between good and evil. "All is in the hands of the Heavenly power except the fear of Heaven" (Berakhoth 33b). Interprets the Rym: "The simple explanation is that prayer is seemingly futile because everything is in the power of Heaven! Therefore, the passage must be understood to mean that prayers may sometimes be accepted and fulfilled and sometimes rejected. But when a man prays in fear of the Lord, in *yirath shamayim*, that plaint is always fulfilled."[6]

The Rym's interpretation is rooted in the doctrine of freedom of will. To deny the principle of authority helps to create social and moral chaos. But this divine authority is not extended to the concept of determinism or pre-destination, both of which would limit man's freedom to choose between good and evil. This fundamental theological concept is clearly delineated in Deuteronomy: "I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live" (Deut. 30:19).

It is clearly expostulated by Maimonides:

> Free will is granted to every man. If he desires to incline towards the good way and be righteous, he has the power to do so; and if he desires to decline towards the unrighteous and be a wicked man, he has also the power to do so. Since the power of doing good or evil is in our hands, and since all the wicked deeds which we have committed have been done with our own full consciousness, it befits to turn in penitence and forsake our evil deeds, the power of doing so being still in our hands. Now this matter is a very important principle; nay, it is the pillar of the Law and of the Commandments.[7]

We are free agents as far as our choice of good and evil is concerned, but the sphere in which that choice is exercised is limited by heredity and environment.

The rabbis speak of *zekhuth aboth,* the virtues and credits of one's family lineage. Hassidism embellishes this and preaches the recognition of the familial virtues inherited by every man. The *Zaddik* accordingly attempted to create an intensive spiritual atmosphere which would incline the individual to "choose" the good life. The court, with its *ru-ah,* the spirit of piety and religious joy, thus acted as tinder in kindling that divine spark which would assist the Hassid in his "choice."

From the Hassidic point of view the major goal of man is to strive for the good and moral life, which is synonymous with God. Once he discovers the image of God within him, his choice will be "life." The struggle with one's *yetzer ha-rah,* one's evil inclination, is strenuous and endless, but man's *nekudah pnimith,* his inner essence of divinity, will emerge victorious.

Only man is endowed with the freedom of choice, and by virtue of his decision, he also elevates all creation, animate and inanimate. Thus did the Rym interpret the Midrash: "When Adam was created, everyone in the animal kingdom came to him and said, 'Come let us bow down to God.' Because Adam showed obedience and reverence for the Creator, he also influenced and inclined other created beings toward Him. Had he chosen the path of evil and ungodliness, all creatures would follow suit. This is the meaning of, 'the earth will be cursed because of thee' (Gen. 3:17), *i.e.,* when man is accursed, the earth too is cursed. One is dependent upon the other."[8] According to the Rym, man's decision will therefore have great universal consequences and will extend beyond his own sphere and life. It can affect his family, community, people, all humanity, and the very earth upon which he treads. God has thus given the reins of conduct into man's own hands, and, in the moral universe, man remains his own master.[9]

Judaism, and certainly Hassidism, objects to determinism on the grounds that it robs man's life of all moral and religious value. It reduces man to the rank of inanimate nature. Without free will, man is no better than a slave, and his life doomed by an inexorable fate—nothing being

more abhorrent or more deadly to the striving soul of man than to be bound to a fatalistic morality. Thus, even in authoritarianism, man's thoughts and actions are liberated. Judaism does not coerce man to act virtuously, but places its faith in man's will to choose good over evil.

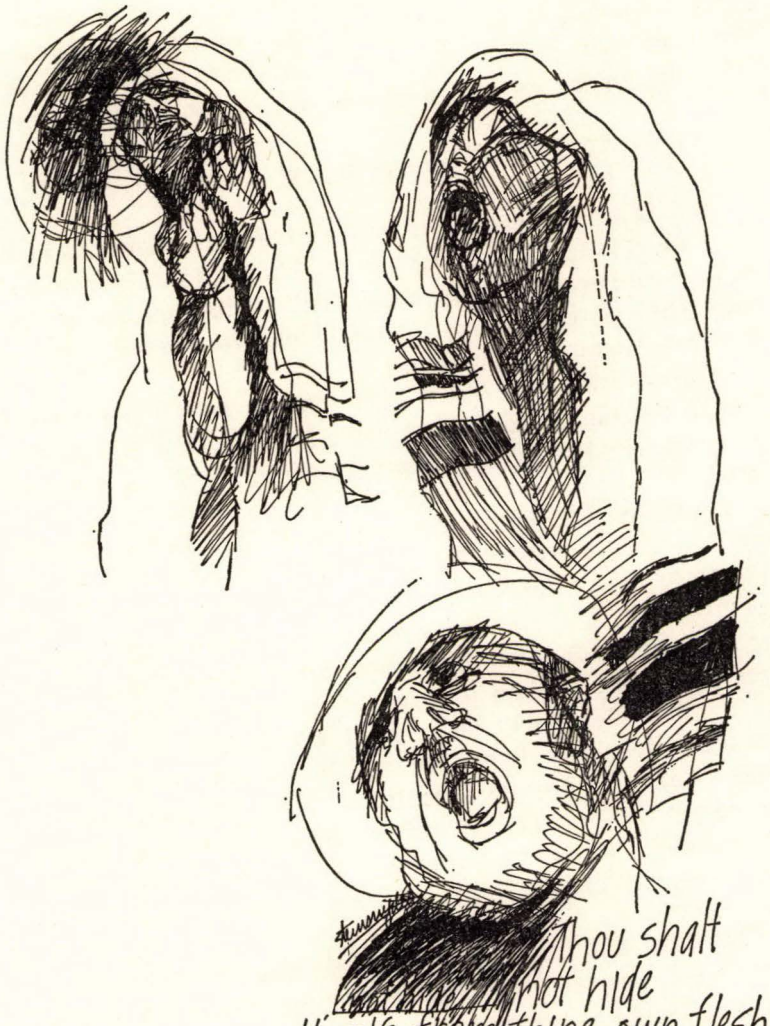
PENITENCE

But if a man chooses evil, is there any reprieve for him? Can the evil act be undone? Is his choice now irrevocable? Judaism answers a categorical "no" to this question. Perhaps the act cannot be revoked, but the "actor" can be forgiven through penitence.

The doctrine of *teshuva* (penitence), is a cornerstone of Jewish theology, and is even more important in Hassidism, which directed itself to the common frailties of the common man.

Penitence, according to the Rym, if it is to be effective and meaningful, must be completely sincere "until the Master of man's secrets is certain that the sinner will not fall prey again."[10] Penitence consists of sorrow and regret for past misdeeds, and affirmation for future actions.[11] The Rym comments on the passage in Genesis (4:10): "Why are you downhearted?" "Why ask a murderer if he is downhearted," asks the Rym, "if not to inform us that God taught Cain the way of repentance. Mere sadness, sorrow, and regret are insufficient unless accompanied by a strong determination to pursue a course of truth and righteousness. This involves introspection, self-interrogation, and devout prayers."[12]

The Rym had sent out a proclamation of penitence in which he emphasized the great power and virtue of teshuva. "Greater is the punishment of him who has not repented, than those whose inclination is naturally weak; *i.e.*, not regretting a sin is in itself a serious transgression, and the punishment is that much more severe. How powerful and divine is penitence which endows man with a new personality. Yesterday he was despised, unclean, and covered with the mire and filth of sin. Today, the *baal teshuva*, the



KAVANAH

penitent, is loved and admired by both God and man. How great is the power of penitence."[13]

Even the most pious and devout *Zaddik* of long duration does not excel the penitent. There is a special place of sanctity and love reserved by God for him who repents, even after a lifetime of going astray.

Penitence, or recognition of God, that stems from human fears and frailties or any such extenuating circumstances borders on idolatry. Judaism is not a spiritual receiving hospital nor an asylum in an hour of desperation. It is not a religion for the sick and dying alone, but for the strong and healthy who desire to capture the ecstasy of life through joy and religious fervor (*hithlahabuth*).

Recognition of God must emanate inwardly, from the deepest recesses of his soul, from what both the Rym and the Sefath Emeth called *yirah pnimith* (inward reverence). Religious experience is many different things to many people. Gur preached on *yirah yehida,* individual and independent religious experience, recognizing the scale of man's intellectual and emotional potential.

He who possesses unswerving faith in God, crystal-clear and without blemish, would never feel the need for enhancing his faith or even changing the concept of his faith when faced with an unusual situation of stress and tragedy. "Even if a serpent stings him, his faith remains unchangeable," no more and no less.

"Any other kind of fear which influences the individual to become more God-fearing, is tinged with idolatry," says the Rym. "When Israel was emancipated from Egyptian bondage, and later saw the Egyptians pursuing them, they became frightened, and therein sensed that their fear of God was external, with great equivocation. It was at this moment of urgency, when they called upon God to save them, that they still reflected a vestige of their early idolatrous practices."[14]

Unlike extremists in other Jewish sects as well as in Hassidism, the school of Gur was vehemently opposed to religion by intimidation, and threats. They stressed the positive, the good life gained through good deeds on this

earth, and less of the "if you sin the burning kettle in *Gehenna* awaits you."

Rabbi Phineas Elijah, Rabbi of Pilz and the Rym's nephew, once journeyed with his uncle aboard a carriage to Ryzin. When an accident occurred, the passengers panicked amidst loud screaming and groaning. The Rym remained calm and quiet, asking: "Why all this noise and fear?" The Rabbi of Pilz answered in amazement: "Are you not aware of the accident in which the carriage fell into a deep ditch?" "How powerful then is this fear of injury and death that causes the individual to forget everything else," answered the Rym. "This is the very kind of fear of the Creator which the Jew should possess, removing all other thoughts from his conscious mind. David possessed this ability; and this enabled him to compose the book of Psalms."[15]

How should a man repent? Is the repudiation of all earthly things the only way? The Sefath Emeth suggests a two-fold program: one during the course of the entire year, and the other during the penitential season. "All of life's experiences in this world have a divine purpose and it is therefore incumbent upon man to engage even in secular matters. Even, and perhaps especially in the marketplace, is penitence necessary and possible, not through self-mortification and asceticism but through active participation in society."[16]

Reminiscent of this position is the well-known dialogue between the Gaon of Vilna, and the *Zaddik* Zusya. "Tell me *Reb* Zusya," insisted the Gaon, "reveal to me my shortcomings." After repeated pleading, Zusya replied: "True, you are most pious and righteous, living confined to your schools and four ells of learning, divorced from society. But you would be the same *Zaddik* if you had as much social intercourse as that commoner in the market-place?" It is told that the Gaon of Vilna retired into his study and wept bitterly upon hearing Zusya's words.

Repentance, said Hassidism, can take place anywhere and at anytime. "However, the penitential days commencing on the first day of Elul and concluding forty days later

on the Day of Atonement, are days especially reserved for renewing man's unique relationship with the Almighty. This can only be accomplished by divorcing oneself from mundane activities and striving towards the holy and divine," says the Sefath Emeth.[17]

The Sefath Emeth, too, postulates the idea of the intermingling of the pious and impious, thereby including all creation in the Creator. But to gain spiritual ammunition for the battle ahead, after being desecrated by the baneful influences of the past year, the Jew must immerse himself in total sanctity *vis-à-vis* penitential prayers, meditation, fasting, self-denial, and the sounding of the ram's horn—to "awaken him from his spiritual lethargy."

"The quintessence of penitence is to remind us of our mission in life and our *raison d'etre,* namely, to do His will and glorify His name."[18] Penitence is the return (*teshuva*) to God, and acceptance of our duties towards Him.

Penitence is not relegated to the sinner alone. Even the saint's *dveikuth,* total identification with the Holy One, wanes from time to time. At birth, the I-Thou relationship was perfect and untarnished. It declines as the intellectual and emotional battles between the good and evil inclinations begin to rage within. "*Teshuva* is complete when one recreates that unalloyed state existing at birth," claims the second *Rebbe* of Gur.[19]

Is the evil act absolved and undone through penitence? This question, previously posed, is answered by the Sefath Emeth, and is an enlargement and ramification of the Rym's views. If a sinner repents out of fear of punishment, he is forgiven, but the act remains recorded. "The transgressions of Adam and Cain are never forgotten, because they repented only after being forewarned by God of their ultimate punishment. But Reuben's failing is completely eradicated and forgotten because he was not prompted to repent by virtue of Divine threats or fears."[20]

In commenting on the talmudic claim (Berakhoth 34b): "In the place where the penitent stand (before the Almighty), even the most righteous are absent," the Sefath Emeth explains poignantly: "The penitent is no longer

fearful of further temptation because he had developed the ability to recognize the evil and its consequences. The righteous has never experienced temptation and has never been put to the test. He therefore lives in constant fear that he will yet fall prey to sin." He cites the illustration of the *Zaddik* of Ladi (the Lubavitcher): "The penitent is compared to one who ties the two ends of a rope in a strong knot, which makes the rope stronger and more difficult to sever. True, a piece of rope with many protruding knots is not straight and smooth, but it is compensated by a lasting strength. In this sense, is the penitent on a higher rung than the *Zaddik*."[21]

The Sefath Emeth implores man to repent out of love rather than fear, and explains the talmudic statement (Yoma 86b): "Penitence, arising from love, changes the sinner's knowing and voluntary transgressions into credits and virtues. But penitence aroused by fear, simply changes the voluntary transgressions into unwitting and involuntary transgressions." Firstly, claims the Sefath Emeth, the man filled with religious fear is more concerned with God's "Thou shalt nots," the restrictions, whereas the man of religious love is concerned with the "Thou shalts," the positive aspects of observance. The "fearful" one is observant, but would much prefer to be relieved of the restrictions. The "loving" religionist seeks out opportunities to "act" and to perform God's will. "Thus if the former repents, he is once again able to guard himself against the negative restrictions. The latter's repentance affords him additional opportunities to fulfill the positive and creative commandments," says the *Rebbe*.[22]

For both the Rym and the Sefath Emeth, this philosophy of religious "love" is the crux of the Hassidic approach generally, and that of the Gerer specifically.

Unfortunately, the Hassid's emotions of love and fear were at times chaotic and confused. He served the Lord with love but the *Zaddik* with greater love. True he stood in awe, in God's presence; but he stood with even greater awe in the presence of the *Zaddik*. Although the *Zaddikim* of Gur preached love and strived for the ideal, the typical

Hassid, subject to human frailties, suffered from his superstitions, personal fears, and anxieties, misunderstanding the Masters' teachings as often as he understood. But Judaism and the *Rebbe* reminded him always that he could repent, and, since his tradition stressed love rather than fear, his "return" could be complete and perfect, thus atoning for his sins and being "at-one" with God and with man.

TRUTH

In Hassidism, truth was absolute. In Pshykhse, for instance, it was announced once that Rabbi Bunam would address the Hassidim at the conclusion of a Festival. He arose, and without hesitation condensed his sermon into one phrase: "Do not utter any falsehood," and left.[23] The Hassidim were undoubtedly more stirred by this brief remark than by a lengthy sermon.

Rabbi Bunam also remarked: "I could easily influence all sinners to repent, but on the condition that they would not be guilty of deceit."[24] Repentance and all righteous observance was meaningless and empty if it contained one ounce of deceit. This was the view of the Pshykhser.

The *Zaddik* of Sochochov, Abraham, used to say: "In the days of the Yehudi Ha-kadosh, Hassidism began to teach the way of truth. In Kotzk, however, truth was so deeply rooted and embedded that the slightest untruth could be detected by the mere stroke of the finger."[25]

Truth is the first and last commandment; all else is commentary. At the beginning of all things is *emeth* (truth), which begins with the first letter in the alphabet, *alef*. Adds the Rym: "The word *alef* also spells out the initial letters of *emeth lemad pikha,* let your mouth learn to utter truth."[26]

How does one attain this priceless ethical virtue, unblemished truth? In a most simple and uncomplicated fashion, says Gur—by keeping falsehood at a great distance.

Emeth me-eretz titsmah, "The truth will sprout from the earth" (Psalms 2:12). (Also, the mathematical evalua-

tion of *Eretz* and *Kotzk* is the same—291. Thus, the truth will sprout from Kotzk.) The Rym was asked by the Kotzker: "What does one 'plant' in the ground to assure the harvesting of truth?" Quipped the Rym: "One plants falsehood, deep, deep within the earth, burying it, to enable the truth to flourish."[27]

HUMILITY

The virtue of humility is one of Hassidism's most elaborate pillars, reiterated by almost every *Zaddik* of repute. Humility and Hassidism are one and the same because "he who is humble merits *hassiduth* (lovingkindness)."[28] Rabbi Nahum of Tschernebol comments on this passage from the *Zohar:* "He who attributes any small measure of importance to himself, prevents the *Shekhina,* the indwelling spirit of God, from penetrating his soul. But when he attributes no measure of worth to himself, God is most anxious to infuse His Spirit within him."[29]

In Gur, as in Pshykhse, humility is the logical and expected offspring of the ideal truth. The man of truth does not delude himself. Moreover, the practice of self-interrogation, introspection, and self-scrutiny prevents false illusions and conceit.

Egocentricity, according to the Rym, is man's most despicable trait. Self-aggrandizement can lead to self-destruction and nullifies all previous accomplishments. The Talmud enunciates this ethical failing: "He who walks four yards in a haughty and conceited manner (*komah zekufah*), pushes aside and crowds the 'feet' of the *Shekhina*" (*Berakhoth* 43b). The Rym explains this as follows: "The Lord selected Sinai for the revelation of Torah because it was the lowliest of all the mounts in the desert. This was a most powerful object lesson for the virtue of humility. The egocentric man obviously believes in the value of his character trait, openly defying and rejecting the Almighty who descended upon Sinai, a lowly and humble mountain."[30]

The egocentric individual has no further goals; he has arrived. The humble man is constantly striving for higher

and more worthwhile objectives. He who practices humility never arrives. The humble Jew is a man of peace, forfeiting his own honor and glory. The conceited Jew is a deterrent to peace, for his status and self-esteem exceed any ideal, let alone peace. "He whose self-concept is realistic and humble," wrote the Rym, "is always cognizant and appreciative of God's beneficence." The egocentric person attributes his good fortune to his own self-accomplished abilities[31]

The school of Gur does not imply self-negation and exaggerated modesty. On the contrary, the humble scholar, recognizing that his intellectual faculties are God-endowed, and thus acting as an intermediary between divine and human intellect, must speak with confidence and authority. The man of Torah cannot deride his own knowledge, for then the Torah becomes a target for derision and scorn.

The median of this virtue, *i.e.*, self-confidence without self-aggrandizement, is difficult to achieve. This has been a perennial problem for all men since time immemorial. Even today, psychologists aspire to a realistic and healthy self-concept, bringing the individual sufficient security and dispelling his feelings of inferiority. On the other hand, a self-concept which exceeds the individual's abilities and knowledge borders on fantasy and self-delusion.

How, then, can man attain the virtue of "realistic humility?" The schools of Gur and Pshykhse return to their basic premise: through the ability to recognize truth as man's most cherished ideal. If man has strived for truth and nothing but the truth, he will inevitably become aware of his virtues as well as his shortcomings. "Conversely," quotes the Sefath Emeth on behalf of the Rym, "the man of truth is easily recognized by his humility. Happy is the man who has merited this virtue, for it is a testimony to the depth which truth penetrated through him."[32]

The *Zaddikim* of Gur practiced what they preached. They never flaunted their piety, knowledge or position before their Hassidim, and rarely reflected aloofness or arrogance, as many scholars and men of position are often inclined to do. Not only would conceit contradict their basic

philosophy, it would reject the fundamental purpose for which Hassidism was established—the amicable rapport between *Zaddik* and Hassid.

In his introduction to a commentary on Codes (*Orah Hayyim*), the Rym wrote: "This ability to understand a bit of Torah is a gift bestowed upon me by the Almighty in His great mercy and compassion, and is, in no account, due to my own piety or righteousness. I know well my own failings and transgressions and do not delude myself. Perhaps for this reason, did the Lord see fit to endow me with the gift of Torah knewledge."[33]

His eminent student, Rabbi Yitzhak Feigenboim of Warsaw, testified that as the Rym lectured and offered an original talmudic interpretation, the master would suddenly become very sad at the thought of gleaning pleasures from his own intellectual prowess. The Rym's trait of humility was greatly appreciated by his Hassidim, and many tales and legends were created to embellish it.[34]

As mentioned, *malkhuth Gur,* the kingdom of Gur as it was called, attracted thousands of devotees to its court on the Sabbath. It is related that often when the Hassidim pushed and crowded forward to listen to his sermon, the Rym remarked with regret: "They don't heed the exhortations of our Prophets, so they must perforce suffer and listen to one as lowly as myself."

How poignant was his cry at his mother's grave: "Forgive me, dear mother. You see, in this world I am greatly honored, and they call me *Rebbe.* But in the world to come —that world of truth—you will discover that it is not so! I beg your forgiveness and do not think ill of me. What can I do if the world is totally mistaken concerning me?"

The Sefath Emeth inherited and retained the Gerer concept of humility. Even after his appointment, he objected strenuously to the honor and announced: "Let it be known that I am not a *Rebbe,* neither am I worthy of being your *Rebbe.*" When he noted that the Rabbi of Porisov had also come to his court, he told him: "I see that you too have decided to come here. In that case, let us teach each other."

This then was Gur, opposed to philosophical rationale, metaphysics, and ideological theories. The *Zaddikim* in Gur were not *luftmenschen,* preferring practice over theory and ethics over philosophy.

Chapter Seventeen

The People of Israel

"Ahavath Yisrael," the love of the people of Israel, plays an important role in Hassidic literature and way of life. The centricity or sacredness of the people of Israel is a cornerstone of the pietistic movement which engulfed nineteenth century European Jewry.

The *Zaddik,* in his role of teacher, master, and intercessor, sensed the depression of the common man, and, by the outward manifestations of his own love for the people as well as of God's special love, uplifted the Jew from his morose and lethargic state. Israel *Baal Shem Tov,* the progenitor of this unique relationship between master and disciple, bequeathed his spirit to the schools of Mezeritch and Lizensk. Similarly the *Zaddik's* love for Israel permeated all the Polish schools of Hassidism.

The *Admorim* of Poland reaffirmed and further concretized the theoretical maxim of "the Torah, the Holy One and Israel are one and inseparable." Their love for their disciples, as well as all of Israel, overflowed in their actions as well as their teachings. Said Rabbi Meir'el of Apte: "Every Israelite is one of the many 'organs' of the *Shekhinah* (God's Spirit) and one of His divine sparks."[1] The schools of Pshykhse and Kotzk did not veer from the path but emphasized the loving relationship Israel enjoys with God and the necessity for the people of Israel to share this love among themselves.

In Gur, the *Zaddik* reflected a zealous passion in this I-Thou relationship. All three *Zaddikim* of Gur constantly preached of Israel's merits and virtues. The Rym's major work on Torah was entitled *Sefer Ha-Zekhuth* (The Book

of Virtue).[2] "Know ye," the first *Rebbe* said, "that I care little for myself. What I possess, both physically and intellectually, is for you, and you alone."[3] Once, upon finding a soft pillow on his chair, the Rym angrily cast the pillow aside and reprimanded: "Is this just? Many scholars are present at whose feet I am not even worthy of standing. They stand in great discomfort, and shall I be seated on soft pillows?"[4]

The *Zaddikim* felt personally responsible to their disciples, particularly in their days of travail. During the first years of the Sefath Emeth's leadership, the plight of Polish Jews was serious and full of stress. Though he had personally suffered the loss of two sons in one year, he considered it almost negligible in light of the total picture of suffering Israel, and felt compelled to inspire and strengthen the faltering spirit of his constituents. His utter concern for the well-being of his contemporaries is indicated in letters written by him to his colleagues. The following note was addressed to Rabbi Pinchi of Pelz, in 5633 (1873):

> May the Master of the Universe bless us with good news concerning our brethren, who are in dire need of His compassion to improve their lot physically, spiritually, and economically. I have almost forgotten my own affliction in the loss of my two beloved sons. May the Lord console me and transform this misfortune unto me for my good. . . . I can almost no longer tolerate the sad news which we receive daily. May the God on High have mercy upon us and bear in mind that we are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who have done His Will with complete heart. We have chosen freely to tread their paths, and we wait patiently for His everlasting mercy to cause us to be nearer unto Him, so that we shall merit to be His everfaithful servants. And if we were assured that travail brought some measure of joy to the Almighty, then we could accept our lot with equal joy. But we are grieved that through our pain we bring Him no measure of satisfaction. May His eternal compassion

transform our pain into gladness, to bring a new light into our world of darkness. . . .[5]

How poignantly did another *Zaddik,* Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev (1740-1810), speak to his Hassidim one Passover some two centuries ago, in his interpretation of the four sons in the *Haggadah.*

> Of four sons, the *Haggadah* speaks: The wise, wicked, simple, and the one who knows not to ask. Which am I? I, Levi Yitzhak, am the one who knows not to ask. Lord of the World, I not only know nothing, I do not even know what questions to pose. Does not the *Haggadah* say to the father that in the case of the one who knoweth not to ask: You broach the subject to him. Do Thou take the initiative in disclosing the truth to him. But on one issue I cannot wait. This You must reveal to me at every moment. Show me in connection with whatever befalls me, what it requires of me, what You, Lord of the World, are hinting by way of it. You see, God, I do not ask why I suffer. I wish to know only that I suffer for Your sake.[6]

The run-of-the-mill mortal would probably ask: "Lord of the world, please let me not suffer at all." Not Levi Yitzhak, and not the Rym even after losing thirteen children, and not the Sefath Emeth after sustaining the loss of two children. These sainted men wanted assurance that their suffering, aye, Israel's eternal suffering, shall not have been in vain. Pain, if it is to be tolerated, must be for a purpose, for the Lord's sake. In more secular terms, something good must come out of it. A pain that is senseless is intolerable. As Milton Steinberg puts it: "If only one could be sure that his suffering is for God's sake—what a difference that would make, not only in a particular ordeal, but in all of life, since life and pain are interwoven."[7]

Pain is a condition of life, says Hassidism, and the *Zaddikim* urged the Jew to exploit the pain and create therefrom. This is the formula of life: To move from pain to dreams to fulfillment. This is the history of Israel: from

sorrow, the pangs of tormented souls, to a new note of resolution and challenge where pain is not permitted to go unanswered; and finally to the climax when we must all sense a new mood of adoration and hope. This is the meaning of the Sefath Emeth's words: "And if we were assured that this travail brought some measure of joy to the Almighty."

Like the *Zaddik* of Berditchev, the Gerer's life was dominated by the passion of love for all men. The milk of human kindness flowed in Gur abundantly. Having suffered much themselves, both the Rym and Rabbi Aryeh Leib were tolerant toward all. No man was a stranger in the kingdom of their hearts. It is told that at one time one of his sextons received permission from the Rym not to permit anyone to enter his study. One young Hassid tried to force himself through and so angered the sexton that he lifted his hand to strike the intruder. The Rym noticed the incident. Towards evening, the *Rebbe* asked the sexton to gather a *minyan* for Services. The sexton complied and so informed the *Rebbe*. "I see only nine," retorted the Rym. "But I am the tenth man," said the sexton proudly. "Not true," quipped the master. "He who would raise his hand to strike a fellow Jew cannot be counted for a quorum." The sexton then attempted to justify his actions by claiming that he acted to fulfill the Rabbi's request. To which the Rym answered angrily: "Was it then my desire to strike a fellow Jew, especially a young *ben Torah* whom you know is as dear to me as my own son?"[8]

The love of the rabbis of Gur for Jews was a pure and exalted love. They forgave man for his imperfections as a father forgives his son. If the scholar does not search for that which is noble and good in man, the Rym reasoned, who else can then be expected to discover his virtues? On the passage in Deuteronomy (16:18): "Judges and officers shall ye place unto you in all your gates," the Rym expounded: "*To ye alone*—the commandment is to appoint judges and officers who shall be for *you,* on your side, who will find Israel's virtues not his shortcomings."[9] And it is possible to uncover these virtues, for every man is inher-

ently good and not evil. Yes, there are some who flaunt the trappings of evil. But basically and innately they are also good. This is the meaning of the adage in the Sayings of the Fathers (Aboth 1:7) : "Judge all men in good merit." If you search deeply enough, you will discover each one's basic goodness.[10]

In this vein, the Rym expresses his love for man and Israel: " 'Beloved are Israel who are called children to their Creator.' All Israel are considered God's children, even the wicked among them.[11] 'Children are ye to the Lord, your God.' Assuredly, they are all His progeny, even the blasphemers among them."[12]

The relationship that exists between God and Israel is eternal and inseparable. Even when one transgresses, he is prevented by his Creator from being guilty of an unalterable transgression. The sinner can always repent and make amends and find retribution for his misdemeanor. "Thus the Lord is called a 'Mother' to Israel, for like her does He watch over His offspring in their weak human moments. God, too, is in exile with Israel, even to residing with the exiled in the midst of their spiritual failing, to prevent them from falling deeper into a mire from which they could never be cleansed," said the Rym.[13]

Evil will yet be conquered, *i.e.*, that which overtly appears evil; sin will disappear, *i.e.*, the sin which outwardly appears as sin; and the threefold redemption of Israel, God, and the Holy Land will come about. This was the stubborn belief that the school of Gur held for the innocence and perfection of the Jews. "The election of Israel was no act of grace, no favoritism on the part of the Deity, but was due to the hereditary virtues and tendencies of heart and mind, which equipped the Jews for their high calling." So says Jacob S. Minkin in writing of the "Defender of Israel," Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev.[14]

An interesting conversation took place between the young *Rebbe* and one of his contemporaries, who visited with him immediately following his acceptance of the post as the *Zaddik* of Gur. Rabbi Aryeh Leib was overjoyed to meet his friend to whom he could easily reveal the inner

struggles which lay hidden in his heart. The two young friends, after an intellectual exchange, took a walk on the banks of the river Visla. It was a cold and dark wintry night, and the hour was late, but they walked shoulder to shoulder in deep silence. Suddenly, Rabbi Aryeh Leib stopped and spoke: "I recall the days of my youth. When I was only twelve, my grandfather took great pains in imparting to me the intricate laws of *terefa,* according to the Kabbalah. At thirteen I already knew three hundred explanations of the *Shma.*" He then continued to walk without uttering a word, returning to his deep meditations. Suddenly, a bird perched on a rooftop and flew to and fro. Sighting the bird and listening to its chirping, the Sefath Emeth awakened from his thoughts, turned to his colleague and said: "Do you see that bird? Believe me, would that I were like that bird yonder who has neither concern for this world nor the next. All I ask, hope, and pray for, is to witness peace and tranquillity for Israel." He then lifted his head heavenward and prayed: "Master of the Universe, look down upon our oppression!"[15]

Thus did the school of Gur manifest the concept of love for Israel the people, as well as its individual constituents.

Chapter Eighteen

The Land of Israel

There is a divine plan in Israel's expulsion from its land: the exile is to pave the way for the final redemption. But to Gur, exile remains exile. Enslavement means just that, enslavement. The first *Rebbe* of Gur was among the chief exponents of the "return," and this approach was transmitted to his grandson and to the latter's son, Abraham Mordecai Alter, the third *Rebbe*. For to them, just as Israel is unique, so is the Land of Israel. As Yehuda Halevi says in his *Kuzari:* "Palestine was appointed to guide all the world."[1] As Israel was elected, so was his land. This relationship between a people and its geographical space is uniquely experienced by Israel. Zion sustains the Jew, and the Jew nourishes his real homeland. There is no substitute for his Holy Land, for there rests a unique divine sanctity.

At the outset, let us analyze the Zionist accusation that Hassidim and their masters were in great part responsible for retarding the *aliyah,* the return movement to Palestine. Had the *Zaddikim* encouraged their disciples to leave and settle in Palestine, the claim is made, many Jews would have been saved and the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth would have been expedited. Hassidism, it is said, was a foremost obstacle to the political aspirations of the Herzlian Zionist ideal, and the *Rebbe* prevented thousands of his Hassidim from emigrating to the Holy Land.

Admittedly, many *Zaddikim* did not encourage and, as a matter of fact, stopped mass emigration to Palestine. It must be remembered that Palestine during the nineteenth

century was still barren physically and would have been unable to accept the many Jews who aspired to settle there. Secondly, the land would first have needed a vanguard of courageous pioneers whose chief task it would have been to explore the land and pave the way for the many who would have assuredly come to its shores. Could millions of Jews really have survived, if they had emigrated *en masse* to Palestine? Was this, the nineteenth century, an appropriate time to pick up bag and baggage and begin anew in an uncertain and unsettled land? Did the Jews not suffer sufficient deprivations in their own communities in Europe? Would there not be a time in the future more ripe for their resettlement? These were some of the unresolved questions reverberating through the minds of the religious leaders of both Hassidim and *mithnageddim* in the nineteenth century.

In addition to the aforementioned doubts concerning Palestine, the *Zaddik* was concerned for the salvation of the many holy institutions, settled communities, and seminaries in Europe. Should all that which took so many years to build fall by the wayside? These vibrant communities and dynamic institutions of learning were glorious realities and were growing stronger. The community of Palestine remained a big question mark. Of course, there were the perennial problems of persecution and discrimination, and all of these institutions might totter on the morrow. But today they were here! Today, scholars emerged from these *yeshivoth*. Today, Hassidim were becoming more pious and were beginning to return to their Maker and His Torah. Today, they were finding new hope and new life in their traditions and their *Zaddik*. How precarious and uncertain would the future be, though it be in God's land, compared to the stark glorious realism of the present, and the vibrant piety and scholarship even in the European *Galuth* with all its concomitant misery! Life had new meaning for the common and simple Jew, though it be passed in a poverty-stricken, dirty ghetto.

What cared the Hassid about the Holy Land, when he found this holiness in the courts and way of life of the *Zaddikim?* Could resettlement in a land of uncertainty

bring to him the certitude of the *Zaddik's* holiness? Did he possess the strength to pioneer a new land, now that he gathered strength and faith in a movement which gave life new meaning to him?

In truth, these questions, plaguing the nineteenth century Jew also sound most familiar to the modern Jew, as he is urged by Mr. Ben-Gurion to return to Israel. Shall we, too, someday be convicted of retarding the *aliyah* and the *ge-ulah* of Israel's final redemption?

The Gerer *Rebbe-im* carefully weighed decisions permitting their disciples to move to Palestine, for their love for the land was always profound, as reflected throughout their ministry, in their efforts and literature on behalf of Palestine.

Although some Hassidim were discouraged from moving to Palestine, others, like this writer's father, were "permitted," nay, bidden to take their families and begin life anew in the new-old land. In 1924 he emigrated to Palestine with the blessings of the third *Rebbe* of Gur.

The first *Rebbe,* Yitzhak Meir, wholeheartedly supported resettlement in Israel. He also encouraged financial assistance for Palestinian institutions. In a letter addressed to Rabbi Hayim Dembizer, Chief Rabbi of the city of Cracow, pertaining to funds collected for Palestine, he demanded that all moneys gathered for the Holy Land not be misused and rendered for other purposes, charitable and worthy as these purposes might be.[2] In one of his responses to Rabbi Hayim of Zanz, with regard to the news circulating about a noted scholar whose wife was barren, and who therefore desired to divorce her, he wrote: "A better idea would be for the scholar to emigrate with his wife to the Holy Land. Perhaps the Lord will remember them there."[3]

The Rym also worked assiduously on various fund-raising committees for Palestinian causes. He headed the largest committee in Warsaw and raised 41,000 rubles in 1838-1840 and 17,000 rubles in 1850-51. He was especially interested in the Warsaw Yeshiva in Israel, which had already enrolled 500 students.

The slow pace of Palestinian resettlement was a source

of great sorrow to the Rym. One of his acquaintances relates that during the Polish rebellion in 1863 the Rym seemed depressed. He said: "There seems to be a powerful adversary against Israel in the Heavens. Here we witness a weak people like the Poles, who are prepared to make the supreme sacrifice to emancipate their country from the hands of strangers. But what are we doing on behalf of ours?"[4]

"The land of Israel," said the Rym, "must always be viewed in a favorable light. Though, at first glance, it might now appear uncharted and unsavory, we must insist that eventually it will remove this veneer and outer layer of unholiness. With constant faith in the sacred purpose and potential of the land, we can assist in removing many of its present shortcomings, even those that are not necessarily dependent upon or caused by the pioneering of a new land." Adds the Rym: "If the spies (Num. 13) would have seen the inner and potential blessings of the land, they could have corrected man's first transgression in partaking of the tree of knowledge." He adds: "Therefore, did Moses ask: 'Is the land good or bad?' (Num. 13:19). He was anxious to clearly know, either good or evil, not an admixture of the two, for even evil will appear blessed in the land."[5]

There is inherent sanctity in the land of Israel. It is a geographical entity which is more than just a combination of physical elements; it is a spiritual clime, unlike any other area. With time, the eventful reestablishment of the state and the rebuilding of the Temple, it will radiate this holiness to other nations of the world. It is, therefore, easier for the resident of the Holy Land to elevate himself spiritually and widen the scope of his religious experiences. The privilege of living in the holiness which permeates the atmosphere, makes it incumbent upon the resident to improve himself in deed and thought.

Adds the Rym: "This is the meaning of the passage 'the land devours its residents (*yoshvehah*)' (Num. 13:32). Any land can assuredly destroy those who merely sit (from *yoshev*) complacently in one place without striving to pro-

gress and grow. In *Eretz Yisrael,* one must grow from strength to strength."[6]

It was this kind of spiritual love for the land of Israel that the Rym bequeathed to his grandson, Rabbi Aryeh Leib. The Hassidic works of the Sefath Emeth contain one thought after another on the uniqueness of the land and the commandments associated with it. He repeatedly mentions the mysterious and eternal relationship between the people of Israel and the land of Israel. This land was bequeathed to Israel by God Himself from the first day in creation and it remains their "inheritance," "The foundation of the world is in the land of Israel and the Holy Temple."[7]

The Talmud is replete with legislation inextricably connected with the land, legislation which became invalid outside of the land. The law and tradition are not enjoined upon the "person," but rather upon the Holy Land, when the Jew resides there. Moreover, the soil of Zion cannot fulfill its fruitful potential unless the people who belong to it till it and make it flourish.

But the physical and geographical development of the land is the least of Israel's tasks. For what is the profound and integral tie between the people and land, if not their mutual sanctity? *Qedushah* (sanctity) is central in Jewish theology, liturgy and lore. God is *qadosh;* "Holy, Holy, Holy is He." The people are holy, so called *mamlekheth kohanim v'goy qadosh,* a kingdom of priests and a holy people. The prayer recited for the dead is the *Qadish* (holiness), sanctifying and exalting God. Marriage is known as *qiddushin,* not a mere matrimonial union, but founded and maintained on holiness.

The land of Israel is also holy. Israel's chief mission is to live, breathe, and teach the concept of holiness. But the inner and ultimate divine holiness cannot be truly realized, neither in the land nor in its people, until they are both united. Then, and then only, can their respective disassociated sanctity join and become a totality and One, as God is a Unity and One.

On the Sabbath, the individual is endowed with a

neshamah yetheirah (an extra over-soul). In Zion, the amalgamation of Israel and its Holy Land endows the people with this additional over-soul, which will revitalize their lagging and lethargic spirit. Even the Divine Emanation, God's *Shekhinah* (spirit, restive soul) cannot penetrate the Holy Land except through the medium of Israel's residence within it. God's *Shekhinah* is thus not absolute, for the idea implies a place for His indwelling spirit, and a people to receive Him. God is exclusive of any other condition. But His emanation can exist only if it possesses a milieu through which it can penetrate and upon which it can rest. The land of Israel is that place, and the people of Israel that object of His *Shekhinah.*

The Sefath Emeth extends his concept of *Eretz Yisrael* from the general to the particular. Not only was the land assigned to Israel as a people, but to each individual member of that people. Each and every Israelite has his own share within the land, "each man under his own vineyard." Every Jew will recognize his respective plot of land.

Being a partner in the real estate of Israel makes the Jew even more responsible, not only for its physical but also for its spiritual survival. When Israel and the land are reunited, establishing this new bond of holiness, the individual member in this total partnership is infused with a new spirit and a new heart of holiness. The opportunity for bringing a new dimension of divinity into his life is there. He must not fail, for he will never be afforded this opportunity for incomparably profound holiness again.

This sanctity is infinite and cannot be contained in time and space. It multiplies and captures more of the divine as it is experienced more intensely by the faithful. It is not doled out in portions to individuals. There is sufficient for all. Moreover, one *Zaddik,* in perhaps one profound moment of truth, can capture the sanctity experienced by a multitude.

Ru-ah ha-aretz (the atmospheric holiness of the land) acts as a catalyst upon the pious resident, and infuses within him this divine spirit. It is for the devout to breathe

in this *ru-ah,* as he breathes the air of the Holy Land, for both physical and spiritual survival.

But even in exile, this fundamental relationship between the Jew and Zion continues. Even though Israel has been expelled from its ancestral inheritance, it retains, nevertheless, an affinity to the land, and, therefore, the Jew prays in the grace after meals: "For the good land which you bequeathed to our ancestors."[8]

Abraham could not become the "father of a nation" until he inhabited the land and established his roots there. Adds the *Zohar:* "God commanded Abraham 'Go unto thee' (Gen. 10:5), *i.e.,* for your own divine edification. Abraham comprehended the wisdom of the foundations of every country, but he had not yet grasped the basis of the land of Israel, for it was hidden."[9]

Reciprocally, the patriarchs and the land conferred spirituality one upon the other. "We find," says the Sefath Emeth, "that when Abraham left Canaan, he hid himself until he returned. Whereupon, he removed his exilic garments and was covered with the 'light' especially reserved for him alone. Thus, he told his men, 'change your attire.' "[10]

In this fashion did Rabbi Aryeh Leib, under the tutelage and influence of the Rym, develop a form of Zionism which was indirectly responsible for the later establishment of the extreme Orthodox Zionist group, the *Agudah Yisrael.* It can be safely said that the school of Gur, in its concept of *Eretz Yisrael,* did not flourish in a vacuum, but was directly influenced by the general Hassidic Zionist *weltanschauung.* But Hassidism went beyond mere theory and translated this philosophy into deeds, namely, into *aliyah* (resettlement).

Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder himself, desired to fulfill this *mitzvah.* Like Yehuda Halevi, Rabbi Moshe Ben Nahman (Ramban), and others before him, the Besht longed to reside in the Holy Land, the land where the Redeemer will ultimately appear. He had actually embarked upon a journey with his daughter Edele, and his scribe, Tzvi. They arrived in Constantinople for the Passover, and there boarded a ship going to *Eretz Yisrael.* Numerous

stories are told regarding the storms, dangers, and other obstacles which prevented the ship from continuing to its destination.[11] The Besht saw the Lord's will, that like Moses he, too, would never step upon the holy soil. His love for the land of Israel, however, never waned, and directly and indirectly it influenced the thinking of many later *Zaddikim.* His successors, the *Maggid* of Mezeritz, Rabbi Mendel of Vitebsk, Rabbi Abraham Kalisher and Rabbi Yisrael Polisker were the first pioneers who settled in the Holy Land. Many Hassidim joined them, thus begining the first Orthodox *aliyah.*

The Besht's profound longing for Zion was inherited by his nephew, Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, who made a pilgrimage in 1788. Upon his return, he confessed that he had gained a new life from his visit to Zion. It was Rabbi Nahman who preached: "Whosoever desires to be a real Jew, should return to Israel." The venerable *Rebbe* added another argument for the emigration of Hassidic masters to the Holy Land: when a *Zaddik* resides in *galuth,* his immediate community profits from his righteousness. But if the *Zaddik* lives in the Holy Land, the entire world is affected by his piety and virtues.

It is the thesis of Rabbi M. J. Guttman in his biography of the Besht that Hassidism, in its early history, encouraged support of those secular groups who worked for the resettlement of the land. "Three gifts were given to the Israelites: Torah, the land of Israel, and the world to come. Are these not dependent upon and associated with each other? And what of those who were interested solely in the Jewish State, and not in Torah or the great beyond? Herein, too, is the hand of Providence, for it is His will that by allying themselves with this holy cause, the re-establishment of the state, they will remain loyal to the peoplehood of Israel and eventually return to God and faith. It is, therefore, unjust for any Jew to be antagonistic to those groups who endeavor to reclaim the land, no matter their secularism. On the contrary, Hassidim must assist any individual or group in this sacred work."[12]

Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav went to settle in the Holy

Land, remained for a number of years, but had to return to Poland due to ill health. Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk went to Palestine with a large group of his Hassidim from Russia, and there established the community of *Habbad* (*Lubavitcher*). Many *Zaddikim,* even before the official inception of political Zionism, visited the Holy Land, and their disciples made it their permanent residence. In many circles, these were known as the *yishuv ha-yashan,* the initial settlements which served as the basis for later Jewish settlement.

The Hassidic *aliyah* was *lishma,* for its own sake—to fulfill the biblical commandment of return. Unorganized and lacking any particular political orientation or philosophy, it was idealistic and sincere in the fullest sense. Nonetheless, with all its confusion and disorganization, it was the seed, Hassidim claim, from which sprouted the fruit of organized Zionism and the eventual return of many Jews, including secularists.

The *aliyah* which went to Palestine under the banner of *Hibath Tzion* (Love of Zion), attracted many Jews who had shed tradition and religious observance. The return was strictly secular and political. This precipitated the question, in religious circles and especially in the Hassidic courts, whether observant Jews were permitted to affiliate with the new Zionists and support them financially. It also injected doubts concerning the advisability of returning to Zion at this period. Debates between *Zaddikim* took place throughout the many lands where Hassidism flourished. These discussions are found recorded in Hassidic literature and occupied the minds of Hassidic leaders in Poland, Russia, and Galicia.

If one is to fully understand why the Hassidic movement did not support political Zionism at that time, it is crucial to analyze its position not in the light of modern political thought, but in terms of the concepts and problems of 19th century European Jewry. Hassidism was still engaging in a fierce battle against the *Haskalah* movement which encouraged the Jew to cast aside the "outmoded" and unpleasant strait-jacket of Jewish traditions. The pro-



ponents of this important secularist movement were greatly responsible for the eventual organization of the "Lovers of Zion," (*Hovevei Zion*).

But Hassidism feared that secular Zionism, with its narrow nationalistic and political aspirations, would dominate the life and thought of Jewry and would eventually overpower even the zealous and observant Jew. Its leadership consisted of sincere and idealistic men who were nevertheless totally uninterested in the preservation of Jewish tradition. The persecuted and tired Jew could now easily transfer his loyalties to a new "religion," Zionism, and no longer needed the banner of Torah around which to rally in the midst of his oppression. Hassidism, therefore, fought secular Zionism from a position of deep conviction, and unequivocally rejected its views.

Naturally, the early Zionists, as off-shoots of the "enlightened," were disappointed in the Hassidim for not supporting them. How could anyone reject an idea which would eventually bring the people nothing but salvation

and ultimate emancipation? They accused Hassidism of inhibiting Zionist progress.

This accusation was met with a reciprocal charge. Why did the Lovers of Zion limit the entire concept of a Jewish Commonwealth to an important, but not all-inclusive, philosophy? Zionism, in its classic sense of the reestablishment of the Holy Land, is an integral part of Judaism. Surely, Judaism cannot be divorced from Zionism, which is only a segment, and a theological one at that, of the entire religious entity. If one negates Zionism's sacred implications, it becomes an entirely new ideology, and one foreign to the Orthodox Jew.

At first, the Lovers of Zion were unconcerned by their lack of support among the religious masses. But eventually, realizing their numerical weakness, they turned to the Hassidic *Admorim.* By this time it was too late. A negative impression of Zionism's secularist skepticism had already affected the thinking of the devout. *Hovevei Zion* promises of repentance, remorse for their irreligious behavior, and claims that their Zionist philosophy did not reject faith, were unacceptable to the Hassidim. At first sight this Hassidic intransigency seems merely obstructive, but history, in a sense, vindicates their obstinacy, for today modern Israel justifies its existence on strictly political grounds, and the battle between political and religious Zionism is waxing hotter day by day.

In speaking of a Hassidic view or position, the writer, of course, refers only to the leaders of the movement. The followers made no move and voiced no opinion without the consent of their *Rebbe,* whether in their personal lives or concerning problems which touched upon the life of the entire people. The *Zaddikim* of Rabbi Aryeh Leib Alter, for example, looked to him for opinions, decisions and direction in many problem areas of Jewish life. He was, therefore, also their spokesman in this crucial battle. Zionists attempted to influence the Sefath Emeth to look favorably upon them, and repeatedly claimed that they did not reject tradition within their movement, although they were personally not devout. They sent a delegation of eminent

Zionists, including rabbis, to the court of Gur. But the conference failed and they left greatly discouraged. The prominent Zionist, Nahum Sokolow, then proceeded to converse personally with the *Rebbe*. He was received with great honor, and Rabbi Aryeh Leib, in his kindly manner, was the usual mild-spoken and warm host. Sokolow later spoke in appreciative terms of the marked impression that the *Rebbe* made upon him, but he was undoubtedly infuriated with the latter's continued obstinacy.

Theodor Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, realizing the far-reaching influence of Gur, made a last desperate attempt to ally the *Rebbe* with the Zionist movement. In 1899 Herzl sent a letter to the Sefath Emeth, which was published in the Hebrew press. This historic note is truly a masterpiece of diplomacy and political acumen, and poignantly reflects the battle positions of this unfortunate conflict which depleted the strength of both Zionism and Hassidism. Herzl tells of his deep concern for suffering Israel; his chief purpose for living is to save his people from further oppression. He further insists that his view of Zionism does not reject the basic *Toraitic* tenets. Although the organization includes many irreligious though sincere men, there were also many devout Jews and prominent scholars and rabbis who joined ranks with the *Hovevei Tzion*. "Our goal is one," he wrote. "Let us all work cooperatively for the welfare of our people, and the Lord shall come to our aid."[13]

Herzl bewails the fact that the Zionist ideal had been misconstrued and rejected by so many religious Jews: "It has been recently rumored that his honor, whose utterings are regarded by thousands as sacred, has accused us of being blasphemers. In the name of the tens of thousands in Israel whose plight in the midst of their antagonists is going from bad to worse; in the name of the starving masses whose economic condition is deteriorating; on behalf of the thousands of wandering Jews who are fleeing from Russia, Rumania, and Galicia to the shores of America, Africa, and Australia, where their destiny is assimilation and discrimination; lastly, in the name of Torah and God,

which are being desecrated due to this tragic plight in which Jews find themselves, I beseech his honor, the *Admor*, to reprimand us publicly, in our presence, for the sins we committed on behalf of Zionism."[14] Admittedly, one's antagonism would have to be quite irrevocable not to acquiesce to such an eloquent and seemingly conscientious and heart-rending plea.

For reasons best known to Rabbi Aryeh Leib, the famous epistle did not move him. There is no published or even rumored reply to Herzl's letter. But because of his own love for Zion and perhaps because of the sincerity of men like Herzl and Sokolow, the rabbi placed the subject of *aliyah* and *Eretz Yisrael* uppermost on the agenda of Jewish problems. "The return must, however, be for its own sake, aliyah,[15] an 'elevation' of the spirit. An idealistic 'going up,' is reserved for those upon whom he can depend to stand witness to Torah, God, and His ordinances, especially to those laws valid only in the land."[16]

"On second thought," he adds, "he whose fear of the Lord is weak, but who undertakes to fulfill the commandments of Torah and whose family does not object, may be included in the group who will be permitted to make the pilgrimage. Though this *aliyah* for him is not fully conscientious, it is our hope that it will so become, through the practice of God's Law, *mitokh shelo lishmah, ba lishmah,* (laws observed not for their sake alone will eventually be observed for the sake of the law)."[17]

Many laws which apply to the Holy Land alone are pastoral and agricultural laws, such as the alms for poor, the *ma'aser* (a tithe given to the Levites from every crop), *terumah* (a portion given to the priestly class), and the Sabbatical year, when all lands must lie fallow. The fulfillment of these laws calls for an arduous test of faith. If one relies solely on agriculture for his livelihood, he can easily fall prey to the temptation of rejecting these highly important traditions in the Holy Land.

"If the reason for *aliyah* is not for the sake of returning to the Holy Land as a *mitzvah,* but for other secular reasons, even economic depression, then the wisdom and

permissibility of the *aliyah* is questionable," wrote the Sefath Emeth, in a responsum to Rabbi Yisrael of Pilv, an opinion which concerns itself primarily with the *halakhic* (legal) aspects of the question. But in the realm of *ma'aseh* (practice), he advised the *Rebbe* of Pilv to send to Palestine devout men of intelligence, who could look into the possibility of earning a livelihood as farmers. He forewarns the *Zaddik* not to rely on hearsay alone, "for if agricultural prosperity is possible, why shouldn't the poverty-stricken in Israel now benefit from this practical research?"[18]

In another responsum, which the Sefath Emeth sent to a Hassid in Safed, he reflects concern and love for the residents of Israel. This Hassid had sent to America, citrons for the festival of Tabernacles, but he had shipped them via Beirut and not from the port of Jaffa. The boat did not arrive until Hanukah. The Hassid had lost a fortune and bemoaned his fate. The *Rebbe* wrote: "You should know that a resident of the Holy Land earns his livelihood in more than a simple, natural fashion. He is personally assisted by the Almighty. It is then expected of the individual to do business with integrity and unusual honesty, not with questionable and shrewd methods, such as using the port of Beirut instead of Jaffa."[19]

The importing of citrons was the subject of heated debate at that time. The laws concerning the ritual acceptability of a citron are complex, and it is often difficult to ascertain whether one is "kosher." A citron with the fewest imperfections, the finest color and the utmost beauty is sought after. At the time, the *ethrogim* (citrons) from Corfu were superior in beauty to the citrons from Palestine. One school of rabbis decided, for this reason, against the Palestinian ones. Rabbi Aryeh Leib, however, allied himself firmly with the rabbis who insisted on importing citrons from Palestine, despite their imperfections.

The great debate regarding Zionism *vs.* Hassidism continued, and was on the lips of every Hassid. It is told that the Sefath Emeth once saw his son, Mendel of Kalish, talking to a prominent Hassid, Ben-Zion of Ostrove. The

Rebbe asked them the subject of their discussion. "*Eretz Yisrael,*" they replied. Remarked the *Rebbe*: "The discussion will undoubtedly continue for another thirty years."[20] The Sefath Emeth remained opposed to classical Zionism, but he favored his own disciples' settling in the Holy Land. Many Hassidim of Gur emigrated and settled in Zion. Unfortunately, the Sefath Emeth himself never trod the holy soil, though he longed for that moment.

The third *Zaddik* of Gur, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, played a more important and practical role in the resettlement of Palestine. He influenced thousands of devout Jews to return to the land, and he himself visited it in 1921. Thereafter, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai went to Palestine on four additional occasions, finally settling there in 1940.

The Gerer *Rebbe's* first trip in 1921 evoked much comment in Poland. Had the school of Gur finally succumbed to the Zionists? Was the beginning of a religious *aliyah* augured by the *Rebbe's* visit? Did he go there to establish a new court, or to transfer it from Gur to Jerusalem? These questions, of course, went unanswered, but the *Rebbe's* journey and its implications reverberated throughout the Jewish Orthodox world and served as the seed of religious Zionism.

His letter to his children, written on the return boat in 1921, is historic:

> These are some of my views with regards to our Holy Land. . . . I have been greatly inspired by its sacred glory. I visited many institutions and seminaries, which are under Orthodox auspices and was deeply impressed. . . . I was especially pleased to see that it is possible to live well here and to follow the faith of our fathers without disturbance. . . . Whosoever is blessed by the Lord with sufficient means, can easily find there a means of livelihood and guard the faith. But for those who are unable or do not desire to resettle, it is my humble opinion, that it is incumbent upon them to assist their brethren in the Holy Land by setting aside a portion of their income, and thus have a share in the resettlement of our land. . . . And when I walked in the outskirts of Jerusalem, I

noticed that the Arabs, riding their camels, cleared the way for our entourage. If only our own non-Jewish neighbors in Europe would possess a little of this sense of respect. It is my opinion that we can establish a fine relationship with the Arabs, and live together in peace and tranquillity. . . . You have undoubtedly heard that at the last conference of the *Agudah,* all the *Zaddikim* and scholars unanimously promised to assist, in a concrete manner, all the aspects of the *Yishuv* (resettlement of Israel), overlooking the political overtones and connotations which may result. . . . And I wholeheartedly agree that the *mitzvah* of resettlement, enjoined upon us by our Torah, is not dependent upon time but rather upon advisability and possibility. Well, then, now is the time for that possibility, and we must take advantage of it, and work wholeheartedly for the *aliyah* to the Holy Land. The more religious enthusiasts in Israel, the greater the religious influence upon the citizenry. This will assure the retention of the land's sanctity.[21]

Though the basic philosophy of the Gerer school remains unchanged, a new emphasis appears in this letter. There is still concern over the secularist influence of Zionism; there is still no rapport with other political Zionist groups, since there is no mention of any meeting with Zionist leaders in Palestine. However, the third *Rebbe* of Gur does urge emigration and strong support for Palestinian residents and seminaries. The new approach also indicates concern and anxiety over the socio-economic and political conditions of Jews in Europe.

In 1924 the *Rebbe* made his second pilgrimage to strengthen the Orthodox *yishuv* in the land and also on behalf of the *Agudath Yisrael,* which was very dear to him. Many immigrants expressed a desire to return to Poland, but the *Rebbe* prohibited any emigration from Israel. To many, he had written that one should expect to endure pain in a new land, but the privilege of living in the Holy Land made the suffering negligible.

The *Rebbe's* fourth visit in 1931 is vividly recalled by this writer, though at the time he was only eight years

old. Literally thousands of people ran after his entourage through the streets of Tel Aviv. He was then carried in from his vehicle to the synagogue.

In 1931 it was still too early to detect the Hitlerian handwriting on the wall. The spiritual welfare of religious Jewry was far more secure in Europe in the 1930's than in Palestine, and European Torah-scholarship, seminaries, religious schools, and literature, had reached its golden period. Not a simple task to destroy all that was built in one hundred fifty years.

In 1936 Rabbi Abraham Mordecai remained in Palestine for six months, and upon his return made known his intentions to settle in the land and to transfer his court there. Interestingly, he ceased observing the second day of Passover, in keeping with religious practices in the Holy Land, and walked with his cane in public on this day. Legally he already considered himself a citizen of *Eretz Yisrael.*[22] The announcement disturbed his disciples as well as the entire Hassidic world: How can we be left forlorn without our shepherd? they asked. To whom shall we go for counsel and strength? The Hassidic pastor succumbed again to the needs and will of his followers, and established a triumvirate of advisors who would have the final decision on the matter of his departure. The *Beth Din,* after due deliberation, decided in the negative. "The departure of the *Zaddik* would prove unbearable to us," they said. Accordingly, he remained in Gur until 1940 when the triumvirate agreed that he leave. He was then rescued from Nazi-dominated Poland and brought to Jerusalem.

In one of a series of pamphlets called *Hazalath Ha-Torah B'yameinu* (The Saving of Torah in Our Day), Moshe Yehezkeli tells the incredible story of the Gerer *Rebbe's* escape. Top government officials in many countries participated in the scheme. It was truly a cloak-and-dagger story where one wrong move would have thwarted the entire plan. A few days after the *Rebbe* left Poland, the Nazis closed all possible gates of escape.[23]

The third *Zaddik* of Gur arrived in Palestine in April of 1940 and immediately set out to reestablish Gur on the

holy soil of Jerusalem by opening a new *yeshiva.* He called it *Yeshivath Sefath Emeth,* after his revered father.

On Shavuoth in 1948, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai died in Jerusalem, one month after the State of Israel was officially established.

Thus we can trace the development of Zionist philosophy in the court of Gur, beginning with the love for Zion integral to Hassidic tradition. The first *Zaddik* of Gur, the Rym, encouraged the reclamation of the land and actively participated in supporting its residents and institutions. The Sefath Emeth devoted a good portion of his literary works to the uniqueness of Zion and its relationship to the people. He rejected, however, active association with political Zionist groups. The third *Rebbe,* Abraham Mordecai, was the most active in the resettlement of the Holy Land. He visited it several times and eventually transferred the court of Gur to Jerusalem.

Chapter Nineteen

The Sefath Emeth's Concept of Redemption

One of Rabbi Aryeh Leib's major contributions to Jewish politico-religious thinking is the concept of Israel's redemption and its place among the nations of the world. However, typical of the preachings and teachings of the *Zaddikim,* his ideas are not presented in a well organized and precise manner, brought together as a thesis or essay in one particular place. One must study all of the commentaries of the Sefath Emeth in order to coordinate his thinking on a particular subject.

It was during the second period of his religious leadership, about 1870 when his Hassidim numbered in the many thousands, that Rabbi Aryeh Leib began to be seriously concerned with the peoplehood of Israel, their plight and place among the nations of the world, their mission in the universal history of man, and their emancipation from their perennial suffering. The *Rebbe* attempted to correct the erroneous concept of the "chosen people": Israel is not superior spiritually, intellectually or physically. It is not a master race. God did not choose Israel for their innate piety or prenatal intelligence. There were no divine chromosomes in their genes. Nor did they reflect distinct qualities after their birth as individuals or a nation.

Israel was God's elect by virtue of Abraham's recognition of the One God and by their acceptance of the Torah and the 613 commandments contained therein. Whereas the non-Jew is enjoined to abide by the seven Noahite Laws (prohibition of eating meat from a live animal;

murder; blasphemy; idolatry; incest and adultery; robbery; and the establishment of courts of justice)—the Jew's mission is to fulfill the 613 commandments. This Herculean task is almost impossible to achieve, but it is not in the attainment but rather in the striving for the higher ideals in life that man approaches a closer proximity with the Almighty.

The concept of the chosen people is often confused with false pride and chauvinism. In the words of Solomon Schechter: "For the Jew, the concept of the 'chosen' people meant that more was expected of him than of others, and that his actions would be judged by higher standards. It was a form of *noblesse oblige,* imposing upon him moral responsibilities, the need of stressing holiness, righteousness, and other spiritual values. The Prayer Book usually interprets the meaning of chosen people by linking it with the gift of the Torah, which is Israel's sacred trust and Israel's contribution to mankind."[1]

"If ye will hearken to My voice, and keep My covenant, then shall ye be Mine own treasure. Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a Holy People" (Ex. 19:5, 6). "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). "Israel shall not fail nor be crushed till he have set the right in the earth. I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness for a light of the nations" (Isaiah 43:4, 6). "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us all?" (Malachi 2:10). These verses clearly indicate the extra duties and special mission of Israel, not their superiority.

Israel's unique mission and election should make the Jew humble and submissive, for, in truth, he is not more worthy of this special Divine Grace than other nations. Thus, does the Sefath Emeth on Genesis interpret the passage: "I have been made lowly because of Thy lovingkindness and truth" (Gen. 32:11).

Israel must consequently study and know its distinct mission and for what purpose it was congregated as a people and a religion. The individual co-religionist must also be unequivocally clear as to his unique participation in

this mission, as well as his own *raison d'etre* as a human being.

How cogent is Rabbi Aryeh Leib's interpretation of the initial passage in Exodus in his *Sefath Emeth Al Torah:* "These are the names of the children of Israel." Rashi comments: "To make known God's love for Israel, did He compare them to the stars." "Wherefore the comparison to stars?" asks the Sefath Emeth, and replies: "We deduce that Jews must understand that the Master of the Universe loves Israel. He created the stars to bring effulgent light into the world of darkness; thus did He create the Jew to radiate and disseminate the Light of the Lord throughout the many existing dark places in the world."

What then is the divine purpose for Israel's continual exile, and whence can it be derived in Scriptures and Midrash? Exile, claims our *Zaddik,* should not be understood in its literal sense, *i.e.,* expelled from the promised land and dispersed throughout the diaspora. This purely geographical concept is mundane and unspiritual, placing a Jewish commonwealth in the common realm of a socio-political entity. Exile, or *galuth* in the Hebrew, is also a unique and divinely destined historical phenomenon for the Jew.

In the first instance, at no time in history has the Jew been spiritually prepared to enter the Promised Land. As was elaborated previously, the *Zaddik,* along with all religious Zionists, ancient and contemporary, envisioned a religious-theistic state, whose reason for existence would be to create and capture a Divine Sanctity possible only in the Holy Land. True, this land is inherently sacred by virtue of its history, geography, and biblical associations. But the Jew can only capture this holiness if he experiences the religious moment of sanctity, at least in part, through the variety of his own religious experiences before entering the Land of Israel.

Even prior to their physical enslavement in Egypt, says Rabbi Aryeh Leib, the Hebrews were already in spiritual bondage in Canaan. "Our patriarch, Jacob, before his death, was about to foretell the eventual Egyptian bondage of his descendants," comments Rashi (Gen. 47:11). He adds that

in part, they were already enslaved. Many commentators find this exposition difficult, in light of the Midrash's opinion, that as long as one tribe lives in Israel, there is no *shibbud,* or bondage. The Sefath Emeth clarifies the contradiction by adding that though there was no physical bondage, the religious enslavement had already commenced, for the inner esoteric and transcendental truth was already removed from them. They possessed physical sight and emotional sensitivity only for externals. In essence, they were already in *galuth.*

Thus the Sefath Emeth's concept of exile and redemption, or *ge-ulah,* began to crystallize. The ageless and often inexplicable question of Jewish persecution is most relevant. What are the causes for this strange historical phenomenon? Is there rhyme or reason for it? Is it a simple case of bigotry, self-hatred, or a scapegoat rationale on the part of the anti-Semite?

Rabbi Aryeh Leib, in association with many *Zaddikim,* and in consonance with basic Jewish theology—*umipnei hata-einu galinu me'artzeinu* (because of our sins were we exiled from our land) is a statement found in the Festival and Holy Day liturgy—did not place the entire burden of guilt upon the non-Jew. There appears to be Divine Providence in the tragic and unfortunate destiny of the Jew. The unending, totally irrational, harsh, and extreme oppression of Israel from its very inception as a people, would appear to reflect some mysterious divine motivation.

From this long-range view, Egyptian bigotry was for the eventual good of the Hebrews. The Egyptian exodus was the initial rung in the ladder of ultimate redemption, as well as the first indication of ultimate divine revelation. The eventual exile of the people of Israel was also herein reflected.

Scripture records: "And they were filled with hatred towards the children of Israel" (Ex. 1:12). Sefath Emeth interjects that the Egyptians suddenly sensed an unusual powerful hatred towards the Israelites. The Egyptians may not have outwardly or overtly desired it. This was, however, the will of Providence, to influence the Hebrews to

keep their distance and retain their religious purity. Constant association with the Egyptians and their various forms of idolatry would have contaminated the sacred purity of their theological views. David, in Psalms, may have felt similarly, when he chanted: *hafakh libo lisno amo,* He transformed his heart to hate his people (Psalms 105:25).

Consequently, Israel was emancipated from Egypt without desecration of their own heritage and without the idolatrous degradation of their Egyptian environment. The motive of God's intervention in this historic redemption was to sever Israel from continued contact with Egypt, to enable them to be uplifted to their destined elevated rung of holiness and to deserve their title as the host of the Lord.

The primary task and chief objective of Moses was the ultimate redemption of Israel, not only from Egyptian exile, but from the "exiles" yet to come. This idealistic and seemingly far-fetched concept appeared so incredible to Israel, then still only a horde of slaves, that Moses claimed that "they shall not believe me" (Ex. 4:1). Why should it occur to Moses that Israel would not believe him? Did he not prove his authenticity as the intermediary between God and Israel?

To this, the Sefath Emeth answers: "Moses, believing that the exile in Egypt was the foundation and root, the commencement and the springboard of all future exiles, attempted to teach Israel that despite their state of disbelief and skepticism, redemption can be wrought at any time. Moses attempted to evoke from God His official pronouncement to emancipate Israel, even in their religiously debilitated state. Redemption could then come to Israel at the most unexpected period in their history. The exodus was that historic event that not only created the peoplehood of Israel, but served as an eternal object lesson for the understanding of its historic mission and destiny. Thus, the unique manner of the exodus was a signpost for future generations." As Rabbi Aryeh Leib interprets the passage: "And God did not lead them through the land of the Philis-

tines, because it was near (*i.e.*, the shorter way)" (Ex. 13:17), it was divine will to teach Israel to traverse unimpassable roads, and thereby learn by experience to discover methods and establish "inroads" for their own salvation in every period of time, even though the roads to redemption be blocked by impassable obstacles.

The *Zaddik* and Hassid, and indeed every faithful Jew, sought the inner meaning of divine intervention in every historic confrontation with tragedy. How poignant was the classic adage of Rabbi Nahum of talmudic lore: *gam zu l'tovah,* This, too, is for the good. He, therefore, received the title *Nahum Ish Gam Zu* (Nahum, the "this too," man).

Every Jew and non-Jew today is concerned and puzzled by the annihilation of six million innocent human beings. This question is an amplification of the universal problem: "Why does it go well with the wicked, and ill with the righteous?" No longer is this query rhetorical. There is an answer! The problem of the holocaust being so seemingly contradictory to God's scheme of things, namely, to the election of Israel, and to His own immanent righteousness, leads us to no other conclusion than that the hand of God was in it. The more paradoxical an event appears to be, the more overtly contradictory and incredible, the more convinced is the Jew that this was God's unquestionable will, for a purpose known to Him alone. Not that the question is beyond the ken of mortal mind. It is within the realm of man's knowledge, particularly the Jew's, to comprehend this through faith and a strange sort of logic. There is truth and divinity in the extreme paradoxes of life's seeming futility and tragedy. There is an even more poignant truth in Israel's perennial confrontation with tragedy.

It was not surprising, then, for the European Jew to sing with zeal, the immortal *"Ani Ma'amin"* ("I believe with a complete faith in the coming of Messiah,") as he marched to the crematoria of Dachau, Treblinka, and Auschwitz. We, the survivors, continue to storm against the criminality of Nazi genocide. The Jew involved accepted his fate with unequivocal faith in God's righteous judgment. This faith was imbedded in his mind and heart

by his heritage, but particularly reinforced by *Zaddikim* like the Rym and Sefath Emeth.

The school of Gur taught that Israel's life in exile was a preparation and precursor to his final redemption. *Ge-ulah* (redemption) cannot be effectuated without *galuth*, as the divine revelation of Torah could not come to pass without the preceding Egyptian bondage. The initial step of redemption is the recognition of the meaning of enslavement, exile, and enslavement within exile. When Israel in Egypt first raised their voices unto the Lord, *i.e.*, when they sensed the bitterness of enslavement, they instituted the beginning of their emancipation. "Out of the *galuth*," said the Rym, "came the entry into the Promised Land. Redemption is germane in exile, like a seed to its budding flower; only the seed is temporarily covered up."[2]

THE GOALS OF REDEMPTION

What then is the ultimate objective of redemption? What is the purpose of life itself? Without equivocation, Gur and the Sefath Emeth reply: To recognize and come to know the Redeemer, "And ye shall know that I am the Lord who had taken you out" (Ex. 6:7). Herein does God promise that not only will Israel be redeemed from Egypt, but will also have cognition of Him as their Redeemer and Savior, and that this event will confirm their faith in the Almighty. For this is the end of all man, particularly the Jew: to fear the Lord, to abide by His Law, and to establish and maintain the I-Thou relationship with the Creator and Redeemer of all mankind.

The issue and religious consequences of redemption played an important role in the commentaries of the Sefath Emeth on the Torah, as he sought opportunities to further expound upon it. On Exodus (18:1), pertaining to the passage, "All that the Lord did unto Moses and Israel; for He did emancipate Israel from Egypt," the Sefath Emeth asks: " 'All the Lord has done' already implies emancipation. Why then is *ki hotsi* ('he emancipated'), repeated? To teach," he comments, "that the exodus enhanced the power

of sanctity in such a unique fashion, that the gate was opened to all humanity to share in this sanctity and freedom. Because the Lord had freed Israel from Egypt, was Jethro able to convert and to approach this sanctity."[3]

Furthermore, not only was the Egyptian "exile" a predestined symbolism auguring a future oppression, but the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C.E., following the destruction of the first Temple, was also an historic object lesson.

Similarly does the Midrash on the Scroll of Esther comment: "This is the meaning of 'Mordecai was a Jew' (Esther 2:1). Mordecai was well prepared for the redemption." The Sefath Emeth elaborates: "The intended meaning is that in every exilic period in Jewish history, the Master of the Universe elects a *Zaddik,* who himself is not necessarily in *galuth,* in its wider scope and meaning, but lives physically among the exiled to assist them in preparing for their own salvation. Thus, the author of *Esther* emphasizes: 'And Mordecai refused to make obeisance and bow down,' (Esther 3:2). Why was the future tense (*lo yikhra*), and not the past, used? In order to emphasize that one can find one *Zaddik* in every generation who never bows down to the Hamans, because this sainted and righteous individual is in essence not in exile." (The true *Zaddik* is never in *galuth,* for he is never enslaved.)[4]

What then is the meaning of the ultimate and final redemption? How does Rabbi Aryeh Leib envision this long aspired for and utopian epoch in the history of man? Assuredly, the *ge-ulah* will not occur suddenly and dramatically, nor even in one particular generation or era. It is incumbent upon each generation to build and add one brick, distinct and unique, to the total edifice, called the "redemption of Israel," which is being erected slowly but surely throughout history.

This is what the Sages intended when they insisted that: "A generation which does not experience the rebuilding of the Sanctuary in its day, is guilty of permitting the Temple to be destroyed in its day."[5] The Sefath Emeth expounds in many of his works that the Temple is not rebuilt at one time in history, but is reestablished throughout many

generations, each one adding one brick. For the Jew, the Temple is more than a mere physical structure. It is the repository of the traditions and laws, and intellectual and spiritual monuments of every individual, in every hour of history. Each one is afforded the opportunity to make his creative contribution to the erection of this Sanctuary in time.

A study of the long history of Israel will invariably disclose that each generation has made some spiritual contribution, though it might be seemingly insignificant in its own time. Trace the conception and birth of the Talmud and you understand the application of this idea. The Talmud is not the creative work of one sage, but the joint effort of hundreds of students from the moment of divine revelation through the periods of the Elders, Judges, Prophets, the Men of the Great Assembly, the *Sanhedrin,* the *tanna-im* of the *Mishnah,* the *amora-im* of the *Gemara,* and the *sabora-im.* This spans a period of 1,300-1,800 years. Add to this heritage, the *geonim* of the eighth and ninth and tenth centuries, the *ba-aley tosefoth,* the philosophers, grammarians, poets, codifiers of the later middle ages and the so-called *ahronim* (commentators) of the 16th-19th centuries. Review Israel's long intellectual and religious history and you will begin to understand how the Jewish Temple is being rebuilt.

Of course the *Zaddik* believed that the climactic event in this building project was the founding of Hassidism by the Besht. Whereas the *mithnageddim* claimed that scholars were the chief builders in this long-range program, the Hassidic *Rebbe* added that the Saint, sometimes unlearned and simple, can also become a mason, though not necessarily the architect. Woe to the generation, said Rabbi Aryeh Leib, in whose time no new brick or addition to the upbuilding of the Sanctuary was added. It is as though it was destroyed in its day.

Thus, Judaism generally, and Hassidism particularly, envisioned as the ideal, man's ultimate redemption and the rebuilding of the Temple in Israel, both in its physical and spiritual sense. Israel and all mankind would then be

cleansed from their gross impurities and would return to God, the Creator and Redeemer. The messianic era, when total peace will reign upon this earth, is the climactic event of the *ge-ulah.*

This is how the Jew is continually tested. If he endures his suffering with faith in God's judgments, he will fulfill his mission and eventually be redeemed. His existence will continue to be arduous and taxing. He will experience the most incredible pain in all of human existence—famine, plagues, and even the major decimation of his population. Darkness, fire and destruction will come upon the Jew and all mankind. These *Hevley Mashiah* (messianic woes) will be the preliminaries to the final redemption, the coming of the Messiah and the establishment upon the earth of the messianic era of total peace and tranquillity.

Chapter Twenty

Communal and National Leadership

RABBI YITZHAK MEIR

Among the many criticisms raised against Hassidim and their masters was that of over-concern for the survival of their petty little dynasties, and lack of participation in the national and international Jewish community. But many were the *Zaddikim* who extended their activities beyond the confines of their courts and became international leaders, assisting in the solving of manifold urgent problems confronting both Jew and non-Jew. The three *Zaddikim* of Gur stand out as the most socially and politically active among the religious leaders of their respective periods.

Generally, the *Zaddik's* presence in a region was highly advantageous to the Polish society in the area, as it stimulated the general economic life. His court attracted thousands of people, potential consumers, travelers, and eventually permanent residents. The Polish landowners knew this, and did their utmost to influence certain *Zaddikim* to establish residence in their territories. As Minkin points out: "The presence of a well-known *Zaddik* in a Polish principality, was worth to it as much as the bones of a favorite saint, for the business it stimulated."[1]

It can be held, therefore, that Hassidism was partly responsible for an inhibition of overt anti-Semitism on the part of the Poles. The latter even expressed great respect for Jews, because the Hassidic dynasties caused an upsurge in business. Though not directly affiliated with any political party, the *Zaddikim* wielded great political influ-

ence, and the *Rebbe* made good use of the power he held through this influence and the devotion of his Hassidim.

In countries where the Jew had voting rights, as in Austria, the *Zaddik* was able to wring concessions from politicians and sway elections, because no Hassid would dare to vote without consulting the *Rebbe.* "It is thus that the political fortunes of many a Polish or German candidate for office, were made or marred by the influence of the *Zaddik,*" wrote Minkin.[2]

Gur was especially noted for its concern in all matters of communal and national problems. There were few areas of communal life in which the three Gerer *Zaddikim* did not participate.

The Rym had wielded his influence in Warsaw even before his appointment as *Rebbe* of Gur. He was a fearless fighter in any arena which concerned the Jew, but he fought with understanding and unusual tact and diplomacy. He was not to be intimidated, either by non-Jew or by his own people, who often advised him against public announcement of his opinion on controversial matters.

At first, he assisted his elder associate, Rabbi Yitzhak of Wurke, who was appointed by Rabbi Bunam of Pshykhse as the overall communal leader. Every area of community relations was their business, including the appointment of judges, *shohtim,* and teachers. They represented Hassidic courts in their battle with rabbinism. Upon the death of Rabbi Yitzhak of Wurke, the entire burden of political leadership fell upon the shoulders of the Rym.

To fully understand the *Rebbe's* essential need for participation in the political life of the Jew, a brief resume of the political conditions in Poland at the beginning of the 19th century is necessary.

When the Rym was yet an infant, Poland was divided among Prussia, Austria, and Russia. Napoleon rewarded the Polish people for their loyalty to him by reuniting the provinces (1807) and reestablishing the monarchy, placing Friedrich August, the grandchild of the old king, on the throne.

With the reunification of Poland and its new adminis-

tration, Jews hoped for improvement of their lot, and therefore accepted Napoleon with great joy. They felt justified in expecting their due reward, for they had personally participated in the emancipation of Poland. The regiment of Barak Yoseloviz, for instance, lost six hundred Jews in the defense of Warsaw.

Some privileges were in fact restored to the Jewish community, but not for long. In 1808 Napoleon issued his famous religious edict in which he dissolved for ten years all the privileges of the Jews in France. The Poles were elated and on October 17, 1808, Friedrich August announced: "Jews will not receive the privileges of the general citizenry for a period of ten years, with the hope that in that time they will destroy their exterior symbolisms and customs which divide them from the rest of the people."[3]

The political and economic conditions of the Jews deteriorated in the ensuing years. They were prohibited from owning additional property, were forced to reside in restricted territory in Warsaw, and in 1812 when the Rym was *bar-mitzvah,* they were forced to shut their inns and were not permitted to sell corn oil or wines. This situation continued until Napoleon's Waterloo in 1813, when Alexander I became the monarch of Poland.

With the defeat of Napoleon, Poland became a part of Russia, and was governed by Alexander's brother, Constantine. The administrator, Novosilzov, lifted the restrictions against the Jews, thus placing them in debt to the Russians. His real motive, however, was to set the Poles against the Jews.

Paradoxically, as the political and economic conditions of the Jews improved, their spiritual state began to deteriorate. The German Enlightenment began to spread to Eastern Europe, and the walls of the ghetto began to crumble. But the rationalism of *Haskalah* threatened to destroy the well-rooted Jewish community with its centuries-old traditions, leaving the European Jewry without leaders or direction.[4]

In 1823 there was a movement to abolish the Hassidic *shtiblekh* in order to "uproot bizarre faiths and customs."

A famous debate was held in Warsaw between the *maskilim* and Hassidim, in which the latter emerged victorious. After a meeting of a government representative with Rabbis Meirel of Apte and Bunam of Pshykhse, the decree was nullified.

In 1825 Novosilzov suggested giving equal rights to the Jews, thereby enabling them to rid themselves of their strange customs. On January 31, a "committee for the improvement of the Jews" was established. The *Zaddikim* had vehemently opposed this committee, and the youthful Yitzhak Meir began to gird his loins for the ensuing battle. Novosilzov sided with the Hassidim, but the Polish rebellion in 1830 brought an end to the measure of security and peace in Poland, including any progress made on behalf of the Jewish populace.

The rebellion of 1830 found the Rym mature and prepared to take his place among the religious leaders of the day. Rabbi Bunam had died, and Rabbi Yitzhak of Wurke was searching for an associate in his political endeavors; he found one in the person of the Rym.

The Polish revolution, which began on November 29, 1830, ended with a Russian victory. Jews were not permitted to participate in the rebellion on either side, so they could not later claim assistance in the victory. The Jews in general had no intention of participating in the battle, claiming that their religion prohibited outright murder and bloodshed. Some, under the military leadership of Joseph Yoseloviz, established a Jewish Legion, but were rejected by Chalpizki, leader of the rebellion.

Most Warsaw Jews were under military curfew and suffered severely. Their shops, including the Rym's, were demolished. According to Hassidic history, the Kotzker *Rebbe* and the Rym sided with the Polish rebels, and received the favor of General Ostrovsky who was prepared to accept Jews into the Army.

Ostrovsky once turned to Moshe Halfan, the Rym's wealthy father-in-law, for a huge loan. As collateral he offered various buildings in Warsaw—if his cause emerged victorious. The Rym negotiated with the General and the

amount of the loan was reduced to $100,000, a fantastic sum for those times. With the failure of the revolution and the Russian victory, the Rym's father-in-law was impoverished, and many Jewish families suffered great economic losses.

General Ostrovsky also insisted that the religious leaders issue a public proclamation throughout Poland asking for financial support by Jews. The Rym and Rabbi Mendele were forced to sign such a proclamation. When the Russian victory looked imminent, the Hassidim called in every proclamation in order to destroy the evidence. Nevertheless, the Kotzker, the Gerer, and the *Rebbe* of Alexander were forced to flee Poland on the 8th of September, 1831, when Russia declared its victory. They remained in Austria, and returned only when the political situation became more secure. All three changed their surnames: The Kotzker, from Halperin to Morgenstern; the Rym, from Rothenburg to Alter; and Rabbi Henikh of Alexander, from Satin to Lewin.

When the Warsaw community wished to appoint the Rym as one of the rabbis of Warsaw, the city fathers requested an appropriation of 450 rubles to ascertain what the Rym's position had been in the 1831 revolution. The committee did not conclude its investigation until 1852, nine years after his election!

While the economic conditions of Jews improved after the Russian victory, their social and religious position did not, with the Russian government suspecting every new movement and any new avenue of educational endeavor. The Polansky story, in which the Rym was implicated, illustrates the Russian suspicions.

Shlomo Polansky, a Kotzker Hassid, journeyed to the Holy Land, and upon returning set about to raise funds for Polish Jews residing there. Still in Russia, he wrote to his son in Poland, informing him of his return. In his letter he mentioned that in Russia he had met with great success in his campaign for the Polish community in *Eretz Yisrael.* The Rym and other leaders were mentioned by name. He also described the progress Jews were making in the Holy Land.

The censor reported this letter to high government officials, and they ordered Polansky's arrest. The Rym's home and study were searched for additional "evidence" of the forthcoming "revolution" to establish a Jewish Kingdom. In the process, most of the *Rebbe's* books and personal manuscripts were destroyed.

After many meetings and negotiations with the officials, the Rym finally convinced them that no disloyalty was intended, and that the Jews made pilgrimages to the Holy Land and some established residence there. A document granting Polansky freedom was signed, but unfortunately too late—he had died in jail.

There was a general belief among the Hassidim that 1840 was the year of the arrival of the Messiah. This faith was based on a statement in the source book of Jewish mysticism, the *Zohar:* "In the six hundredth of the sixth thousand year (5600) the gates of wisdom will be opened and the world will be perfected."[5] This belief was so deeply embedded among the Hassidim that one *Zaddik,* Abraham David of Butshtadt, kept white garments and a ram's horn at his bedside, and a sexton remained awake through the night. When 5600 had passed and the Messiah had not arrived, Rabbi Abraham David fell ill and died from depression and utter disappointment.

Even the great *Gaon* of Vilna, Rabbi Elijah, the century's greatest scholar, believed in the forthcoming redemption and urged his disciples to prepare for its coming.[6] Rotating vigils were kept in Warsaw, so that all could be immediately informed. Many sold their worldly goods and properties and organized a group called *Tarnieks.*

Rabbi Yaakov Gezundheit, fearing the consequences of such sects, arose in the central synagogue and took an oath that the Messiah would not come that year. The Rym joined forces with him, explained the passage in *Zohar* as a mystical allusion, and insisted that his opinion was unequivocally correct on the grounds that "the decline of ritual circumcisions decreases the powers of intellect. Penitence is valid only for a lack of understanding, but as for intellect and wisdom there is no repentance. The 5600th year opposes

this basic concept, *i.e.*, during the course of this year the gates of wisdom will open, and thereby penitence will be valid even for the uncircumcised whose ritual is in consonance with wisdom."[7]

In 1841 the Rym, in association with the Chief Rabbi of Warsaw, Rabbi Hayim Davidson, succeeded in obtaining a governmental proclamation that all Jews who develop rural areas and engage in agriculture would be exempt from military service.

In 1846 the government issued a decree which threatened to create a deep schism between the religious and irreligious Jewish populace of Poland. The decree held that all Jewish teachers had to be fluent in the language of the land and had to include a secular curriculum in Jewish schools. Jews were prohibited from wearing their "peculiar" garments, such as the black *kaftans,* black hats, white stockings, etc. The religious community was totally convinced that this decree resulted from the underhanded influence of the *maskilim* who wished to expand their own philosophy and weaken Orthodoxy. Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Gur and the *Zaddik* of Wurke began an intense battle to avert this decree, which in their opinion would spell the dissolution of both Hassidism and of traditional Judaism itself.

Some historians, including Minkin, chastise the Hassidim for their stand against this decree, which they hold to be in the best interests of the Jews. "*Zaddikism,* knowing no greater enemy than education, was naturally interested in thwarting or impeding its spread and progress. Thus, when the compulsory education of the children and other such cultural advantages were entertained by the Austrian government, the Hassidic shepherds of their flocks stamped the measures as 'ungodly' and defeated the proposed legislation."[8]

One must remember, however, that Hassidic philosophy was built upon the strengthening of Torah learning and Jewish education. They were less concerned about knowing the vernacular than they were about the thousands of teachers who would immediately lose their positions because of

their inability or lack of desire to learn the language. Without religious teachers, the schools would crumble. The *Zaddikim* as well as many non-Hassidic rabbis sincerely believed that the study of Torah was of primary importance for the devout Jew.

Each camp possessed its own point of view, and Hassidism cannot be categorically chastised for its opposition to the exposure of its followers to secular enlightenment.

An episode is related concerning the meeting of Moses Montefiore of England with Rabbi Yitzhak of Wurke and the Rym in 1846. Montefiore had been sent on a mission to Petersburg to protect the citizenship rights of Jews in Russia. Upon meeting the two rabbis, Montefiore asked them: "Are you *Zaddikim?*" "He is," answered the Rym, "I am a Hassid with great difficulty." Then they poured out their aching hearts to him, clarifying the dangerous consequences of this decree. Montefiore's secretary then asked the Rym: "The Scroll of Esther seems to strengthen the position of your opponents. Mordecai knew the language of Bigthan and Teresh. Had he not spoken the language of the land, he would not have understood their plot against the King. Through his knowledge he saved the King, thus saving the Jews of Persia." The Rym smiled and said: "On the contrary, the passage proves that the Jews of Persia did not speak the language of the land, otherwise Bigthan and Teresh would not have dared to speak so freely in the presence of Mordecai. Mordecai, who was in the legislature, knew many languages, but the masses did not." Montefiore interrupted: "Who then will defend Jewish privileges before the government?" Quipped the Rym: "We still believe in the coming of Messiah, but until then we are perfectly satisfied with his honor's diplomatic abilities!" Montefiore intervened on behalf of the traditionalists and the decree necessitating fluency in the national language was rescinded.[9]

The decree against wearing traditional Jewish attire, however, was still in force. The only individuals permitted to wear their distinct clothing were the old rabbis. The government arrested thousands, forcing them to shave their

beards and earlocks, and dress in European clothes. They were also forced to pay heavy fines for rejecting the law of the land.

Jewish Poland was never as divided as it was over the fulfillment of this decree. The Rym and his colleague, Rabbi Abraham of Tsekhnov, battled with all their resources against the decree and even believed that it fell in the category of those laws requiring the supreme sacrifice rather than its fulfillment. They announced that Hassidim should begin studying the special laws of *Kiddush HaShem* (The Sanctification of God's Name).

Rabbi Mendele's reaction to the Rym's pronouncements was interesting. "I do not agree," said the Kotzker, "and I am shocked that these two scholars may cause Jews to lose their lives. As for the business of clothes, it is only a *custom* of Jews, and a custom can be changed."[10]

The *Rebbe* of Rizen agreed with the Kotzker and explained: "Our patriarch, Jacob, received his father Isaac's blessing, dressed in Esau's clothing. If only those blessings which he received in this attire would be fulfilled in our days!"[11]

The pogroms against pious Jews continued and thousands were arrested, especially young children. The government finally turned to the Rym and insisted that he sign a proclamation calling upon all Hassidim to abide by the law. Refusing to include his name among the signators, the Rym was arrested. Poland was shocked at the news and stormed the jail. Influential Jews and non-Jews intervened on his behalf, but to no avail. The Rym suffered both physical indignity and mental anguish, being forced to sit upon another Jew's back for hours. Protests, petitions, and personal representatives sent to the Russian ruler, Poskoviz, finally succeeded in obtaining his freedom.

This incident almost created a civil war among Polish Jewry. To avoid a conflict and to thwart further arguments, the Rym left Warsaw for the small, quiet town of Noidwahr, and announced that he would remain there until the decree was nullified. The *Rebbe* was not anxious to widen the rift which divided Polish Jewry, and despite the strength

of his convictions, he urged the Hassidim not to argue with anyone on his account, reminding them that they were all brothers. When the decree was finally annulled in 1851, the Rym returned to Warsaw on the day before Passover and was greeted by thousands.

The matter, however, was not entirely settled, as the Russians gave the Jews two alternatives: to don European clothes (short jackets), and to shave their beards and earlocks; or to wear the longer Russian coats, but to cover their heads with Russian hats, and tuck their pants into high stockings. Conformity to this mode of attire would permit them to grow their beards and earlocks. The Rym, unlike the Lithuanian scholars, accepted the second alternative, thus establishing the accepted dress of Polish Hassidim until World War II.

Despite the *Rebbe* of Kotzk's initial disagreement with the Rym's intransigence he did not not accept this alternative and insisted that Hassidim don skull caps. This about face may be put down as one more example of the contradictions in both the Kotzker's life and views.

The second rebellion of the Poles against their Russian invaders in 1863, after Count Wilopolsky had decreed conscription for all the young men of Poland, attracted many young Jews. The Rym, who had suffered from his previous "patriotism" decided to remain aloof.

The rebellion was unsuccessful, and the decree of conscription, which would make it impossible for devout Jews to keep the faith, remained. This caused the Rym much anguish, and eventually his death, according to his followers. He feared that army life would demoralize young Hassidim and wean them away from observance and studies. At least, if Jewish soldiers were permitted to remain in Poland, they would still be under the influence of teachers, scholars, and families living near the army camps.

On the eve of the Day of Atonement, the Rym gathered ten men, and stretching himself out on the floor, cried out: "If this decree is carried out, how can I sit by and permit this destruction of so many Jewish souls. Dear God, may

young students of Torah not be taken away from their faith and studies."[12]

The aforementioned episodes reflect the Rym's concern for the social, political, economic, and religious welfare of his co-religionists. Despite Minkin's arguments to the contrary, they do not indicate that he was a "political potentate," nor can one really believe that he actively participated in these problem areas in order to perpetuate his dynastic glory. The Rym did not win immediate victories, but he exerted a lasting influence upon the social and religious history of Polish Jewry.

THE SEFATH EMETH

In studying the biographies of the Gerer *Zaddikim,* one notes that the Sefath Emeth, Rabbi Aryeh Leib, did not reach nor perhaps even strive for the stature of his grandfather, the Rym, in the realm of social and political leadership.

In 1888, however, when Jewish students were compelled to attend public government schools, he participated in a conference of *Zaddikim* in Grodzisk, and assigned each *Rebbe* a quota of funds to be used to fight against the decree.

In a conference called to discuss this selfsame problem and the subsequent law abolishing all private Hebrew schools, the Sefath Emeth's masterful eloquence directly influenced Poznansky, a Jew previously in favor of these reforms, to work for the defeat of this legislation.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib also fought bitterly to save Orthodox Jewry from falling prey to the secularization of army life. The conscripts were sent to the four corners of Russia, thousands of miles away from Jewish communities and influences. No provisions were made to enable them to observe their traditions. Of special concern to the *Rebbe* were the dietary laws, Sabbath observance, and the Holydays. The Sefath Emeth attempted to intervene on behalf of many pious students, but to little avail. He advised many to learn prayers, biblical passages, and one division of the

Mishna by heart so that they could at least study and pray while serving in the army.

An interesting episode is recorded concerning a young Hassid whom the *Rebbe* advised to become a *mohel* (performer of ritual circumcision), which would perhaps exempt him from service. The family could not quite understand this, since no *mohel* was ever exempt before. After studying the ritual procedure, the young man was drafted and sent into the far regions of Russia. Suddenly the train stopped and an army physician asked if there was a Jew in the regiment. Revealing himself as the only Jew, the young *mohel* was taken to the home of the physician, who informed him secretly that his own wife was Jewish. She had given birth to a son and her father was insisting that the baby be ritually circumcised. "This must remain a secret between us," he warned.

Now the student understood the *Rebbe's* counsel. "Very well," said he, "I will circumcise your son but on condition that you assist me in obtaining a discharge from service, since it is impossible for me to keep faith." The physician later intervened on his behalf and the young *mohel* was discharged.[13]

To many Hassidim the *Rebbe* counselled: "If everyone is to be exempt, who then shall serve in the army?" To others, he suggested increasing their tax quota or giving sums of money to the government. Others, against his advice, went on hunger strikes and maimed various bodily organs.

These acts did not stem from disloyalty or lack of patriotism. One must understand how difficult it was for the strictly Orthodox Jew to eat non-kosher food and desecrate the Sabbath and Holydays, in addition to violating other basic Jewish teachings. Indeed, it would have been absolutely comprehensible were the Jews lacking in patriotism, in light of the discrimination, persecution, pogroms, and lack of equal rights from which they suffered in both Poland and Russia. Was it not a contradiction on the part of the government to reject the Jew's service in time of war or rebellions and yet insist on peacetime conscription?

The government was informed that the Sefath Emeth was suggesting to Hassidim various schemes to render them ineligible for military service. A Jewish spy, impersonating a Hassid, was then sent to consult the *Rebbe* about ways and means of dodging army service. The Sefath Emeth, easily differentiating between a Hassid and non-Hassid, replied: "But the king is in dire need of soldiers." The accusations and investigations were abandoned.[14]

The disciples of the Sefath Emeth held that his personal tragedies and the travails of his people at that time, especially during the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, caused the *Rebbe* much anguish and ultimately led to his demise.

The Sefath Emeth had given every Jewish soldier his personal blessings before their departure for the Russo-Japanese War, and had implored them to retain their faith and to repent, if necessary. It is related that during the course of the war, he did not sleep in his bed, but with his shirt as a sheet he slept on the floor, weeping bitterly every night.

The young Hassidim, both in Russia or Manchuria, wrote Torah compositions and sent them to the *Rebbe.* They also kept him informed on their spiritual and physical welfare, as a son writes to his father. One student in Manchuria related his experiences on Rosh Hashana, when, instead of sounding the *shofar,* he and his Jewish comrades engaged in homiletic Hassidic discussions. Another informed the *Rebbe* that on the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jewish soldiers climbed out of their trenches, quickly built a *Sukkah,* made the necessary blessings and returned to their foxholes. The *Rebbe* was overjoyed to know that his disciples were prepared to endanger their lives if necessary, in order to perform a *mitzvah.*

When another large contingent of men were drafted, their families came to the *Rebbe* and took an oath that they would not leave unless he would come to their aid. He ordered candles to be lit in the synagogue and psalms to be recited, conducting a special service on their behalf. He also sent a delegation of pious Jews to offer prayers on the grave of the Rym. The families left, greatly encouraged and

strengthened by the *Rebbe's* words and actions. A few days later, when the soldiers were enroute to their army bases, the Armistice was proclaimed, and they were sent home before reaching their destinations.

RABBI ABRAHAM MORDECAI

The decline of Hassidism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was due in great part to the animosities and quarrels within the *Zaddik's* court and between Hassidic dynasties.

The Hassidim of Gur were less guilty of these pitfalls, simply because their masters were not interested in establishing dynasties, nor did they desire to sow disharmony among fellow Jews. The Rym and the Sefath Emeth preached and wrote letters on the subject, but the third *Rebbe,* Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, took a more positive position, exhorting his Hassidim to establish peace and harmony in the total Jewish community. Perhaps there was greater need for exhortation in his day, for the rifts and jealousies reached unbearable proportions.

Rabbi Abraham Mordecai wrote a letter to his community in 1929:

> I have come with a most urgent request to you. . . . You are all sorely lacking a desire for brotherhood and peace. . . . There are too many divergent groups and too much disharmony. . . . It is important to establish harmony among you, each man assisting his fellowman financially and spiritually. . . . The survival of Judaism is dependent upon brotherly love and peace. I beseech you all to heed and guard my request, and the Lord will bless you.[15]

Sensing the bitter slander against each other and against other *Zaddikim,* the third *Rebbe* wrote while in Jerusalem: "I also beseech you all to be careful and deliberate in speech and to destroy futile hatreds. I suggest you establish appointed schedules for the study of these laws in the Codes. . . ."[16] Gur's relationship with other courts improved during

his ministry, and feuds and dissensions of long duration ended.

Rabbi Abraham Mordecai accomplished more in the field of education than his predecessors and his contemporaries. Under his influence and direction, Orthodox schools for boys and girls were established throughout Poland, *Yesodey Ha-Torah* schools for young boys and the *Beth Yaakov* system for girls. Inasmuch as education for girls was completely ignored and even prohibited in some circles, the establishment of religious schools for girls was revolutionary in Poland. The education of the very young was taken for granted in Hassidic courts, up to that time being left to private tutors, to the father's tutelage, or to the *hadarim* (small one-room schools). Thus, the establishment of an organized system was an innovation.

Special Hassidic schools were needed because of the different requirements of Hassidic educational philosophy and curriculum. Rabbinism was concerned with scholarship; Hassidism with character. The *mithnageddim* chose a teacher for his scholarly reputation; the Hassid for his piety.

The third Rebbe reflected a great love and concern for the young and devoted much time to the Hassidim in their formative years. Thousands of young devotees left their homes and remained at Gur to study for months and years.

Despite these efforts however, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai saw the writing on the wall. Hassidism as a religious movement was declining. The *Haskalah* movement had enlightened many, especially the young intellectual. Political and social conditions in Poland had debilitated the faith of many Orthodox Jews. Rabbi Abraham Mordecai was convinced that the methods employed to keep the faith had become obsolete and antiquated. Hassidism alone was not sufficient. Some other medium was necessary, perhaps a new banner in the form of a religio-political party, around which observant Jews could rally.

The third *Rebbe* of Gur was at the helm in the organization of the *Agudath Israel* and became its foremost spokesman. He personally directed the initial organizational

meeting in Hamburg in 1912. He expended his greatest effort before becoming *Rebbe* on behalf of the *Agudah,* against the advice of religious leaders and many *Zaddikim.* There were endless meetings, long debates, and many conferences, but Rabbi Abraham Mordecai persisted in his efforts. His strongest antagonists were the older Hassidim in his father's court, and he attempted to make them aware of the need of such an organization, especially for their children. The *Agudah,* called at first *Shomrey Emunath Yisrael,* would save Orthodoxy from secular snares and influences, he felt.

He participated in all three conferences of the "International *Agudath Israel,*" the first two held in Vienna, in 1923 and 1929, and the last in 1933 at Marienbad. At the Marienbad conference, the question of the partition of the Holy Land and the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth were major items on the agenda.

The third *Rebbe* of Gur agreed with his father in his opposition to political Zionism because of its secular innovation, and he firmly believed that the *Agudah* would become the religious counterpart of the "Lovers of Zion." With *Mizrachi,* the *Agudath Israel* forms the religious parties in Israel today, as they did before the establishment of the State.

A comparative study of the Gerer *Zaddikim,* as social and political leaders, indicates that their methods and practical philosophy differed, but their ultimate goals consistently remained the same; the retention of Torah-true Judaism, the strengthening of education and observance, and the alleviation of Jewish suffering. To the Gerer, Judaism and the Jewish people came first and Hassidism second.

IV

THE LITERATURE OF GUR

Chapter Twenty-One

A Literary Profile of Gur

Jewish religious thought and its basic literature in the 19th century can be divided into several categories: biblical commentaries, talmudic dissertations, codifications and responsa. When examining the contributions of universally accepted authorities in these areas, the student may attempt to evaluate the scholarship, intellectual depth, and originality of the author, or he may seek to detect the personal character traits, emotions, piety, or religious depth of the writer.

In biblical commentaries one looks for a theological concept, a *derekh* (methodology), the religious and philosophical sensitivity of the writer. In this area the author sets himself up as a judge or arbiter of the fundamental values of faith.

In talmudic dissertations, one searches for logic and intellectual honesty. While amassing knowledge is indispensable to great scholarship, the application of that information and its relation to other aspects of learning is even more important.

In the realm of codes, responsa, and law, the student can discover the genuine sentiments of the codifier, since his practical decisions and judgments touch upon the humane and realistic aspects of life. One can ascertain if the writer subjects the law to the needs of man and the era and generation in which he lives, or if he permits the law to find its own path to the impossible and absurd.

Just as Jewish literary contributions are divided into these three groups, so are the students and scholars of these disciples placed in three categories: the *lamdan* (scholar)

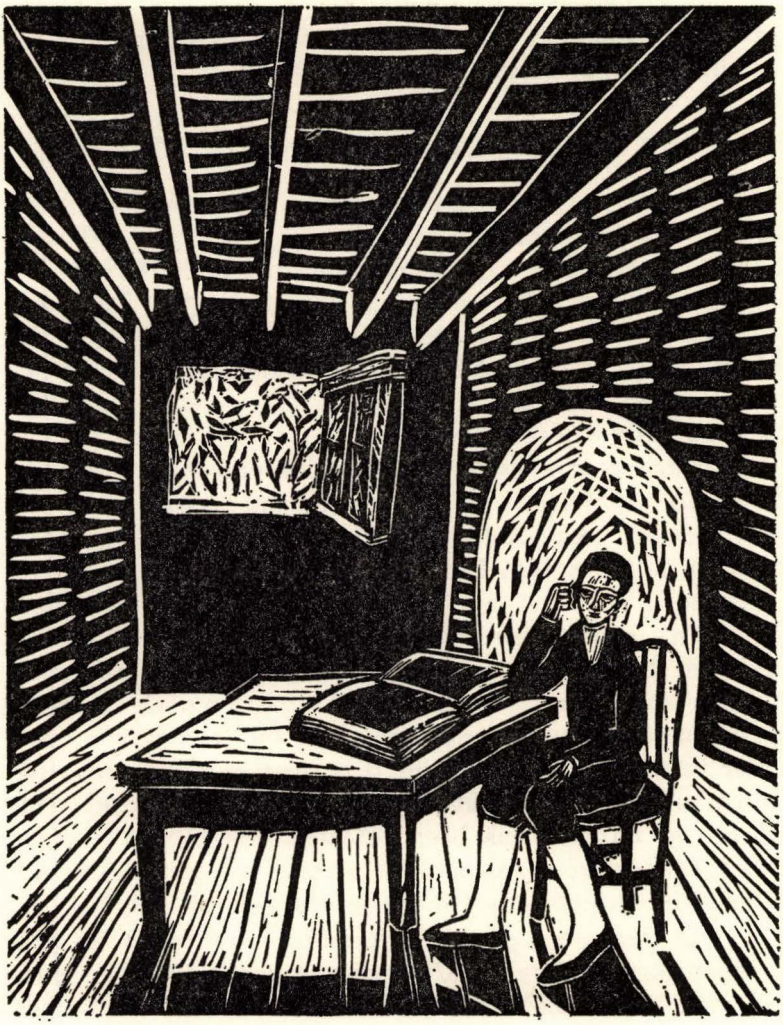
is engaged in talmudic research; the *posek* (codifier) defines the law; and the *maggid* (preacher) interprets and comments upon the Bible. Within the latter category there are a number of groups, two of which are the *maskil* (enlightened individual) and the *hassid.*

In the last century one finds a cleavage among these various types of scholars and their schools. The literary creations of the *maskil* or the disciple of Lithuanian seminaries are usually in the area of responsa, codes, and law. Very few left literary legacies in the form of biblical commentary or philosophical works. On the other hand, one could hardly expect to find legal and talmudic works written by Hassidic rabbis. It was not embarrassing for a "scholar" to admit in intellectual circles that he was not well versed in the *Zohar,* or the works of Luria and Hayim Vitale. It was also taken for granted that the Hassidic rabbi was not an expert in Maimonides, and certainly not in the Jerusalem version of the Talmud.

Thus the literary works of Hassidic rabbis, though held in high intellectual esteem in the Hassidic world, are for the most part not highly regarded by *mithnageddic* scholars. An exception is the works of Rabbi Abraham of Sochochov, which were used as companion texts in Lithuanian oriented seminaries. The logic, scholarship, and method of Hassidic writings were not trusted and were dismissed with, "It's only Hassidic Torah." It may have possessed a *guten vort* (a good thought) but *halachically* and logically it did not exhibit outstanding erudition. It was sermonic material for the simpleton but not for the learned Lithuanian scholar. And until this very day this thinking against Hassidic literary contributions is still existent in most *yeshivoth* and seminaries.

Few of the *Zaddikim* left extensive manuscripts worthy of mention. Their unappointed secretaries wrote down during the ensuing week the thoughts preached on the Sabbath, but only in the form of notes and memoranda. Most of these were then printed only posthumously.

The later masters seemed to have felt the need to write more proficiently and personally, perhaps to further com-



"*Talmud Torah* k'neged kulam."

pete with their *mithnageddic* contemporaries, and perhaps to stem the tide of Hassidism's decline.

The *Zaddikim* of Gur wrote prolifically on many facets of Judaism, Torah, Talmud, the codes, contemporary responsa, Holydays, etc.

THE RYM'S LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

The Rym began his literary career in his youth. A small diary was found among his manuscripts which indicates that he began to put his thoughts on paper in 1817, at the age of seventeen. He opens his commentary: "These are the words which the merciful Lord blessed me with, the ability to bring original thoughts to His Holy Torah. I pray that He will continue to grace me with strength and will to study His Torah."[1]

His manuscripts were numerous but only a small portion have been published. First, he himself destroyed many manuscripts. His grandchild, Rabbi Shimon Hayim Alter, brother to the Sefath Emeth, relates how he often saw the Rym burn manuscripts. Gathering courage, he once questioned his grandfather and received the reply: "The purpose of study is to please the Lord. Therefore, one must take great care in interpretation. Very often one's thoughts may sound authentic and correct at the first writing but later be found wanting. True, it is the writer's prerogative to correct his errors, but it is my feeling that if any semblance of untruth has been detected, they are no longer valid. I therefore burn what I once thought was quite clear."[2] This is in consonance with the Rym's concept of truth.

It is purported that the Rym had written a lengthy commentary on *Hoshen Mishpat,* the portion of the Codes on Civil Law. Hassidim say that he burned it because the Kotzker *Rebbe* claimed that, "if the Rym's theories were true they would reject the long-standing classical theses of the early commentators. It is impossible to conceive that a commentary four hundred years old could be countermanded."[3]

An age-old problem which has been debated by scholars

for many centuries concerns the woman whose husband deserted her, or disappeared and cannot be located. According to strict talmudic law she is unable to remarry for the lack of a Jewish divorce or positive proof of her husband's death. Throughout the years the rabbis have attempted to find some loophole or even a subterfuge to the law, and thus far have not succeeded. During the last wars when so many men were lost and unidentified, this question of *agunah* plagued the contemporary rabbis and courts of Jewish law. The Rym had written an involved and lengthy responsum to this question but could not publish it for fear that it would be misunderstood and misinterpreted.

It was often felt in critical periods in Jewish history, that the crisis would pass if Jews would return to prayer, penitence, charity, and study. In 1867 a plague broke out in Poland and the *Rebbe* of Alexander, Rabbi Henikh Hanokh, suggested to the Sefath Emeth that the publication of the Rym's manuscripts would perhaps cause the plague to cease. The Sefath Emeth agreed, and it is related that the plague terminated. The historical authenticity of this coincidence is questionable.[4]

The following is the chronological order in which the Rym's books were published:

Hiddushei HaRym on Talmud Hullin. Warsaw, 1878. *Hiddushim* are new arguments and original interpretations.

Teshuvoth HaRym. Yozefuf, 1867; Warsaw, 1882. Responsa on four parts of *Shulkhan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law) ; many of these responsa in conjunction with Rabbi Abraham of Tschekhenov, Rabbi Yaakov Meir Padua of Brisk, and Rabbi Dov Berish Ashkenazi of Lublin.

Hiddushei HaRym on Shulhan Arukh—Hoshen Mishpat; Part One. Warsaw, 1886.
Civil legislation of the Codes dealing with the laws of judges, witnesses, and lending.

Hiddushei HaRym on Shulhan Arukh—Hoshen Mishpat; Part Two. Warsaw, 1871.
Includes laws of plaintiff and defendant through the conclusion of part two.

Hiddushei HaRym on Talmudic Tractates Kethubboth and Kiddushin. Warsaw, 1885.
Deals with laws of marriage and related subjects.

Sefer HaZekhuth. Jerusalem, 1942. (First published in Warsaw in 1891.)
The book was so entitled because in the main it deals with the study of virtues (*zekhuth*). There is another allusion to the word *zekhuth* in the introduction: "That I shall 'merit' to fully repent and thus awaken penitence in the hearts of all who study this book." It was first published (Warsaw, 1891) in conjunction with his treatise of *Gittin* (divorces) and his commentary on *Shulhan Arukh-Eben Ha-Ezer* (codes of law dealing with marriage, divorce, and women).

Hiddushei HaRym on Talmud Shabuoth and Shulkhan Arukh-Eben HaEzer. Warsaw, 1891.

Torath Hiddushei HaRym on Torah and Holydays. Compiled by Yehuda Leib Lewin. Jerusalem, 1950.

Siah Sarfei Kodesh. Edited by Yoez Kayam Kaddish Rokocz. Vol. I and II: Lodz, 1926; Vol. III: Lodz, 1928; Vol. IV: Lodz, 1931.
Commentaries, interpretations, discussions, and parables mentioned in other hassidic writings or hearsay.

Meir Einei Ha-Golah. Compiled by Abraham Yissachar Alter. Tel Aviv (Alter-Bergman), 1954. Vol. I first published in 1928, Petrekov; and Vol. II in Warsaw, 1932.
Biographical stories about the Rym, and other remarks and anecdotes attributed to him are found in this book.

Likkutei Yehuda. Compiled by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (*Halvri*), 1961.
Some comments of the Rym on Genesis, but also includes comments of other *Zaddikim.*

The Rym made valuable literary contributions in all three categories of scholarship: Talmud, Codes, and Bible. His treatise entitled *Sefer HaZekhuth* (Warsaw, 1891), reflects the Rym's extensive scholarship. The first part deals with comments upon the Talmudic tractate *Gittin* (divorces). The second portion is devoted to commentaries on the Bible and Holydays, while the third division is a critique on *Shulhan Arukh-Eben HaEzer* (code of law dealing with divorce and women). In one book one finds the *lamdan* (scholar), the *posek* (codifier), and the *hassid.*

The Rym's scholarship was so unique, that if his works are studied separately without divulging the name of the author, the student could easily recognize that they were written by the same author.

As a talmudic scholar, the Rym can easily be mistaken for a student of a Lithuanian seminary rather than a disciple of Rabbi Simha Bunam. In limiting his remarks to the discussions and decisions of the *Rishonim* (the early commentators), he practically ignores the repetitive arguments of the *Aharonim* (later scholars). This method reflects simple and uncomplicated creativity without intellectual affectation. He did not create additional problems nor did he seek new contradictions in order to manifest his erudition and genius by showing how easily he is able to solve them, as was common among Hassidic rabbis writing *pilpulistic Torah.* Moreover, the Rym did not apply Hassidic methods in his discourses on Talmud. The question and answer method predominant in the Polish schools is logically absorbed in the simple arguments which are concise, brief, and to the point. His own rationale appears to respect the arguments of the early scholars but is not necessarily subservient and obedient. The Rym's coherent and brief statements covering the minutiae of talmudic discussions indicate that he was a teacher more than a scholar, a char-

acteristic sadly absent in many men of letters. His writings advance the student's knowledge of Talmud, not the erudition of the author.

The Rym's commentaries on the Codes are of particular interest, because he treats the laws of morality without any defense or apologies to time and circumstances. Ethics and morality are timeless, but also timely, if they possess any value. The Rym ignores the technical and legal aspects of sin and virtue; the law is secondary to the performance of the deed.

His commentaries and interpretations of various passages and subjects of the Bible go beyond "Hassidic Torah," but their objectives are similar, namely to retrieve the wayward soul and to bring man closer to his Creator. The simple method he employs brings heaven down to earth, making the Almighty and austere God more accessible, and building a spiritual bridge where God and man may meet.

The Rym, well versed in the *Zohar*, the writings of Hayim Vitale and Maimonides, synthesizes Kabbalah with historic realism. He thus discards the super-mysticism and exuberant emotionalism contained in so many Hassidic writings, especially on the Pentateuch. His numerous talmudic quotations and allusions reflect legal and logical forms as the cornerstones of his homiletic interpretations. Here, again, the Rym is the teacher rather than the preacher, employing a more intellectual argument for observance.

The school of Gur generally, and the Rym in particular, establishes a "scholastic" type of Hassidism, *i.e.*, scholarship compatible with the ecstatic, joyful, and human approach of Hassidism.

THE SEFATH EMETH'S LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

An analysis of the Sefath Emeth's responsa and talmudic commentaries would be, for the most part, irrelevant to an appraisal and review of his Hassidic life and thought. Moreover, it would be most difficult for the lay reader to

comprehend them without a thorough knowledge of talmudic methodology.

Suffice it to say that the attitude of the second *Rebbe* of Gur, and indeed of the entire Gerer school, in the Oral Law was one of simplicity, clarity, and conciseness without *pilpulism,* as is most obvious from the Sefath Emeth's commentaries on the talmudic divisions of *Moadim* (Holydays) and *Kodashim* (Holiness).

One is especially impressed by his courage in rejecting popularly accepted interpretations by both early and later scholars; he even sees fit to suggest changes in text. Though this was the prerogative of all the talmudic giants, only a few were courageous enough to amend the written text. The Sefath Emeth prefers this method rather than go far afield in resolving a most obvious contradiction or point. (See his commentaries on: Sabbath 57b, *Itmor amar reb Nahman;* Sabbath 105a, *Tania, Ha-oreg,* etc.; Sabbath 119b, *Shnei malakhei hashores.*) It follows that the Sefath Emeth did not hesitate to point out textual errors in the writing of noted and highly regarded scholars. (Sabbath 6b, the Tosefoth, beginning, *Ve'amar Rebbe Yehuda,* etc.)

Many contradictions would resolve themselves if the student would carefully study the original texts instead of taking the quotations involved for granted. The Sefath Emeth thoroughly examined every text in its original context and thus arrived at totally varied conclusions from those who never bothered to check a quotation taken from a secondary source. As he writes in a treatise entitled *Likutim:* "In my humble opinion it is clear that they who questioned did not examine the *Baal Ha-Ittur* (commentary), which was reprinted from a more recent manuscript. Therefore, they did not copy his original text."[5]

His own interpretations reflect a basic knowledge of sources and texts and are consequently most authentic. As a result, his interpretations are fresh and often in diametric opposition to popularly accepted notions, even the authoritative versions of Rashi[6] and Tosefoth.[7] He often adds a humble apology for his disagreement, finding no one who coincides with his opinion.[8]

Did the Sefath Emeth reach the scholastic level of his grandfather, the Rym? Generally, the question of scholastic superiority is difficult to evaluate, especially in the multi-dimensional field of the Talmud. Was Plato more profound than Aristotle, or Maimonides more erudite than Rashi?

If we are to judge by the international recognition of the Rym as one of the leading talmudic scholars of his day, and if we measure the far more numerous *halachic* contributions of the first *Rebbe* of Gur, then we must perforce conclude that he excelled in this area of learning.

The Rym is known to have received queries on Jewish law from many noteworthy scholars in Poland and other countries; among them, Rabbi Zadok Hakohen of Lublin and Rabbi Lemiel, Judge of Jerusalem.

But, whereas his grandson strikes out for himself and defies classic and popularly accepted opinions, in complex problems the Rym sought agreement from at least two other scholars. In the main, he consulted with his contemporaries: Rabbi Zev of Bialistok, author of *Maroth Hatsofoth;* Rabbi Abraham Landau of Sochochov; Rabbi Yaakov Meir Padua of Brisk; and Rabbi Berish Ashkenazi, Chief Rabbi of Lublin, author of *Noda Bashe'arim.* He repeatedly emphasizes the need for scholarly concurrence on a matter of law: "Thus, if other rabbis agree not to prohibit his action, then it is permitted. But if not, my opinion is null and void."[9]

Did the Sefath Emeth consequently reflect more individuality or egocentricity? The answer is—neither. The Rym's responsa tackled what is known in talmudic vernacular as *halachoth le-maaseh* (practical problems) which necessitated conclusive opinions directing the observing Jew to either abstain or act. The Sefath Emeth indulged in questions of theoretical talmudic interpretations which were not necessarily relevant to contemporary legal problems.

In the realm of practical problems the Sefath Emeth, too, sought rabbinical concurrence. Rabbi Shlomo Abraham Rezechto of the city of Ozorokov mentions a responsum issued by the Sefath Emeth after consulting him during

the course of a visit in Gur.[10] In the works of Rabbi Moshe Yoel of Zarnovza, an opinion of the Sefath Emeth is mentioned. A disciple of the Rym, his own nephew, Rabbi Abraham Reuben Rothenburg of Modislav, in his treatise, *Sifthei Avraham,*[11] mentions an epistle written to the Sefath Emeth:

> I earnestly request his honor, in the name of the sanctity of his Torah scholarship to seriously consider the following complex problem, *"halacha le-maaseh,"* for a final workable decision. It is difficult for me to disturb his honor's time-consuming schedule in his scholastic endeavors but knowing that his honor is also concerned with Oral Law in the area of contemporary dilemmas, specifically in a subject as important as the covenant of Abraham. I sincerely pray that it will not be too burdensome a task upon him.[12]

It should be recognized that these legal opinions were formulated before Rabbi Aryeh Leib reached his thirtieth birthday. Many other references can be cited to testify to his scholastic eminence as one to be reckoned with even in the area of Jewish jurisprudence and the Codes.

Finally, special note should be mentioned regarding his works on the talmudic tractate of *Kodashim.* By virtue of the small number of commentaries in this area as well as the profundity and clarity of his own exposition, his works, published in 1934, have become the basic text for students and scholars interested in this field, despite the theoretical nature of the subject matter. (Theoretical, because most laws of *Kodashim* are relevant only to Temple worship, in the *Beth Hamikdash,* the Sanctuary in Jerusalem.)

Unfortunately, many of the Sefath Emeth's manuscripts were lost or destroyed during the European holocaust. Only his commentaries on *Moed* and *Kodashim* were saved, and these will remain as his outstanding contributions in the sphere of Jewish Law.

Unlike many *Zaddikim,* Rabbi Aryeh Leib left manuscripts on Torah, either written by his own hand or by a self-appointed secretary after a Sabbath discussion. His

writings can easily be divided into two periods. The first, a brief one, encompasses the years 5621 to 5630 (1861 to 1870), and began with his official appointment as "Rabbi," (not *Rebbe*) after his grandfather's death. He was then only a young lad of nineteen, still under the influence of the great *Zaddik* of Alexander, Rabbi Hanokh.

His election and ultimate acceptance of the position as *Rebbe* of Gur in 1870, marked the beginning of the second and more intellectually fruitful period, which was concluded only by his death in 5665 (1905), at the age of 63.

In the course of the initial period he was reluctant to publish, let alone to officially publicize, his manuscripts, most of which he chose to destroy. The *Rebbe's* son, Rabbi Abraham Mordecai, testifies in the introduction of the *Sefath Emeth Likutim:* "My revered father and teacher wrote the major portion of these excerpts during his youth, from 1861 to 1870, the period in which he saw fit to burn most of his written works. A number of manuscripts, however, circulated among his Hassidim and disciples, and contained many obvious errors. The following however we agreed to print."

The last passage written by the *Rebbe* of Gur before his death: *Sefath Emeth Tikkon La-ad, Ve-ad Argi-ah Leshon Sheker,* (The tongue of truth is everlasting, and I shall not utter falsehood), gave him a new name. All of his works were thereafter studied as "Sefath Emeth" on Torah, on Talmud, on the Psalms, Sayings of the Fathers, Proverbs, etc. The author has since been referred to as the "Sefath Emeth."

Some Recently Published Works of
RABBI YEHUDA ARYEH LEIB ALTER
The Sefath Emeth

Sefath Emeth Al Hatorah, 5 Vols., Revised Ed. New York (Shulsinger Bros.), 1953. A commentary on various passages of the Pentateuch, with allusions to other interpretations and *midrashim.* It is an ethical and morally oriented treatise with intent to

be didactic and sermonic. Passages are interpreted homiletically with more Hassidic rather than *halachic* emphasis. The commentary is Rabbi Yehuda Leib's best and most widely studied writing, reflecting a thorough knowledge of the Bible and its classical commentaries.

Sefath Emeth on Psalms. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Heine. London (Diskin), 1952.

Sefath Emeth on Proverbs. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (*Haivri*), 1951.

Sefath Emeth on Scroll of Esther. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (*Horeb*), 1952.

Sefath Emeth on Ecclesiastes. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (S. Vinfeld), 1952.

Sefath Emeth on Aboth. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (Landsburgh), 1948.

Likutei Yehuda Al Ha-Torah. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (*Haivri*), 1961. Includes interpretations, commentaries and sayings of the Sefath Emeth not previously published.

Likutei Yehuda on Esther. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine, Jerusalem (*Haivri*), 1952; including additional commentaries of the Sefath Emeth not previously published.

Commentary on Ruth and Shabuoth. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (S. Vinfeld), 1954.

Sefath Emeth on Pesach. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (*Haivri*), 1956.

Sefath Emeth on Song of Songs. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (*Hamaarav*), 1955.

Sefath Emeth on Days of Penitence and Yom Kippur. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (*Haivri*), 1957.

Sefath Emeth on Hanukkah. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (*Haivri*), 1957.

Sefath Emeth on Ecclesiastes and Sukkoth. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (S. Vinfeld), 1953.

Sefath Emeth on Ellul and Rosh Hashana. Edited by Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine. Jerusalem (*Haivri*), 1958.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Works of Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Alter

INTRODUCTION

This book does not attempt to evaluate at length the biblical and talmudic scholarship of either the Rym or the Sefath Emeth. For one thing their scholarship is a matter of record, independent of their written theses. Even if they had left no written compositions, their erudition would still be recorded in Jewish history by virtue of their recognition as *lamdanim* by their contemporaries. Moreover, Gur's contributions to Jewish legal and talmudic thought is of secondary concern to this book. Despite Gur's emphasis on scholarship and learning, its singularity did not lie in its publication of responsa, codes, or talmudic dissertations.

However, in order to capture the religious and Hassidic sensitivities of the Rym and Sefath Emeth, one must examine their commentaries on the Bible, Midrash, Holydays, and Jewish ritual observance and traditions, and seek out their theological concept, a general *derekh* (methodology), and approach to religious thought. Are they blind and faithful followers, or are they critical observers? Do they accept a *modus vivendi* of faith, or do they attempt to create concepts relative to their own personal capacities of belief?

Grammar, style, sentence structure, idiomatic expressions, and vocabulary were of little concern to Hassidic writers. Clarity of thought was primary and that could best be expressed in the style and language of the original talmudic discussions. Even today, a legal responsum will

be written in one style while material concerning a contemporary problem, by the same author, will be expressed in another.

The style of both the Rym and the Sefath Emeth is the talmudic style, no better and no worse, possessing the classical and archaic grandeur of free thought and association. This fact, of course, makes a literal translation of their works almost impossible. The student of Talmud thinks, speaks and writes in that unique vernacular greatly influenced by the style and vocabulary of talmudic commentators such as Rashi, the scholars of the *Tosefoth,* and the early and later commentators. This cryptic style, an admixture of Hebraisms and Aramaisms, is still in use in responsa written now.

Needless to say, a thorough knowledge of talmudic language is necessary if the reader is to comprehend the legal, homiletic or philosophical commentaries.

The translations which follow below, were chosen for their linguistic comprehensibility, *i.e.,* the ability to be understood clearly in translation, and for their philosophical, ethical or religious implications.

The translator has also taken the license, in many instances, to forego a literal translation or to add a brief note within the text, for the purpose of clarifying the discourse for the reader who knows no Hebrew and is not familiar with talmudic discussion. Material which has relevancy only in the Hebrew text has been omitted.

SEFER MEIR EINEI HA-GOLAH

The book *Meir Einei Ha-Golah* is a classic anthology of commentaries, stories, brief comments, and personal experiences of the Rym, as well as hearsay tales and experiences related about him and his Hassidic court and other biographical and familial events from his birth to his demise.

It was published by his grandson, Abraham Issachar Binyamin Alter, son of the *Rebbe* of Povioniz, and Abraham Mordecai Alter, son of *Reb* Shimon of Warsaw. The

first edition appeared in two separate volumes: the first in 1928 and the second in 1930. The second edition, with both volumes bound together, was published by Alter-Bergman Press, Tel Aviv, in 1954.

The Rym's family felt the need of issuing this publication not only to incribe his oral utterances, commentaries, and biography for posterity, but also to clarify and correct many erroneous fables and episodes circulating orally or in other publications.[1]

As the editors state in their brief introduction:

> . . . Though recent books include biographical material and stories attributed to the Rym, many of these things are presented in a blurred and confused fashion and contain many errors. The writers unfortunately depended on hearsay utterances often grossly exaggerated and without foundation.

This source-book for the Gerer dynasty appears to possess greater authenticity, both in its material and in its organization, than many previous Hassidic biographies and publications. The editor confirms this statement in his introduction which is translated here in full, with the above cited excerpt omitted:

> With the help of the Name,
> may He be blessed
>
> Look well, our present generation, into this composition which we present to you this day, with the help of God.
>
> In it is contained some thoughts of the great and eternal, a giant among giants, our grandfather, Rabbi, the sacred *Gaon,* the prince of Torah, the *Admor*—may his memory be blessed—of Gur—the Rym. Also included are his biography, education, upbringing, interesting life experiences and incidents, his way of life, teachers, friends, disciples, many discussions, and sermons which he uttered with his sacred and pure tongue—and, generally, whatever transpired from his birth to his death.
>
> * * * *

This publication contains material gleaned only from authoritative sources and included only after thorough research and inquiry. Either we personally heard it from our father or it was related to us by reliable and well-informed Hassidim who merited to hear them directly from the mouth of the Rym. We therefore consider them to be authentic and place no doubt whatsoever on this information.

It is our hope that our readers will not only derive much joy and enlightenment from these discussions and stories, but will also receive special divine grace, as the Rym himself stated concerning the special reward for those who discuss the greatness and holiness of the Yehudi HaKadosh.

We presented this work to the head of our family, the present *Admor* of Gur (Abraham Mordecai), and we received his permission to publish it.

Since the book will undoubtedly be quite lengthy, we have sub-divided it into a number of volumes. We hereby present to our readers this present volume which includes the biography of our *Rebbe* from his birth till the year 5610 (1850), with the hope, please God, of publishing the other volumes in the near future.

May the good merit of our Holy *Rebbe* protect us.

Ne-um (the words of) Abraham Issachar Binyamin of the house of Alter, son of the *Admor*, head of the Beth Din of the city of Povieniz; and *Ne-um* (the words of) Abraham Mordecai Alter, son of the Hassid, Rabbi Shimon of Warsaw.

Many stories and comments from this book have already been included in this volume, but for the purpose of a more intensive comprehension of the court of Gur, its philosophy and contributions, as well as a more profound understanding of its founder, additional excerpts are hereby rendered from the Hebrew followed by the writer's personal homiletic interpretations:

A DISCUSSION PRECEDING YOM KIPPUR

Rabbi Hillel said: "If I am not for myself, who shall be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" (*Aboth* 1:14).

Comments the Rym: "If I will not perform my task, who shall do it for me? Every man must fulfill the personal task incumbent upon him and reserved only for him. 'And if not now, when?' And when will that 'now' be? The 'now' spoken of was not there from creation, nor will it ever be again. Yesterday was another and different 'now,' and tomorrow yet another. But each 'now' unique unto itself requires a unique and changing task (*avduth*). As the *Zohar* delineates it: 'The clothes one wears in the morning, one does not put on at night.' . . .

'And if I am for myself, what am I?' If I am separated from the community, how am I ever going to improve the idea of the 'now'? Once the present passes, I cannot make up in the next moment the time I had missed previously, for every single minute of time contains a different perspective.

And *a fortiori,* if one transgresses, and attempts to contemplate his failings with a deep sense of guilt, even then he is wasting the precious now (*akhshav*), for he is thinking negatively, immersed again in the mire of vanity, sin, and ugliness. The soul will dwell in the place of one's contemplation, and if one's thoughts are wasted in that precious moment on the 'turn away from evil' (Prov. 2:3), how can the soul reside in the positive aspect of that admonition, 'do good'?

Moreover, when the mind becomes anxious and confused, and infested with guilt, the inevitable state is depression (*atsvuth*) which prevents the individual from taking the more positive and constructive step of 'doing good.' If one transgresses, let him quickly repent and spend the next precious moment on *mitzvoth.*

'Turn away from evil,' keep a great distance from meditating about it, even if you are guilty, and go on to perform positive tasks. If you carry a heavy load of transgressions, perform as many noble deeds as possible to counterbalance them.

> Thus today, on the eve of the Day of Atonement, we must approach the confession of sins with sobriety and confidence, and offer the confessional quickly, disposing of them expeditiously, so that sufficient time is reserved for the 'Reign, Thou O Lord, over us.'[2]

(This excerpt and those which follow in this section have been taken from Vol. II, Addenda.)

A positive rather than restrictive approach to Judaism is reflected by Hassidism generally and by Gur in particular. Joy, ecstasy, love for life, for God, and for man, are the ingredients for worship and the religious life.

Atsvuth, depression and melancholia, are deterrents to establishing rapport with God. Overindulgence in self-punishment can lead to self-negation and a feeling of worthlessness. Furthermore, every moment of self-ridicule is precious time lost for the service of the Lord. There will be another moment, but it will be different and will require another task peculiar for that time alone.

> The subject of *simha,* joy on the pilgrimage festivals, can be compared to the levity and joviality preceding serious study, as the *Talmud* (Sab. 30b) tells us that Passover and Sukkoth precede the study semesters of the year, followed by Shabuoth, which celebrates the revelation of the Torah.

Again, we note here the emphasis on joy which must precede even the study of Torah. An ecstatic, happy, lighthearted mood motivates piety and contemplation. Especially on the Holydays the Torah enjoins us, *ve'hayita akh same'ah,* "and ye shall be joyful" (Deut. 16:15).

> We read in Exodus (11:2): "And each man borrowed from his friend and every woman from her friend." Asked the Rym: "Why did God command the Jews to borrow instead of finding other means of endowing them with material wealth?"
>
> Comments the Rym: "For this is the first experience of material acquisition for Israel, and the Lord

desired to impress upon them that all of man's affluence and material possessions are merely temporary loans, never outright ownership."[3]

Man can only claim external ownership of all which is his for the moment. It is a God-endowed loan. Therefore, the lender, at his discretion, is justified in requesting that the borrower give a portion of the loan to those who are less fortunate.

An uncharitable person rejects God Himself for the moment, and denies God as a Creator of His material possessions.

We read in Deuteronomy (6:5): "And Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God, with *all* your heart." Why is the word *be'khol* (with all) employed instead of *im* (with)?

Comments the Rym: "The *entire* heart, all of it, should contain nothing else but the love of God."[4]

Here, then, is a play on the words *if* (with) and *khol* (all). The Torah does not imply that God should be loved 'with' the heart. The entire organism—man's mind, soul, heart—his 'all' must join together in serving, worshipping, and loving the Creator.

The *Shulhan Arukh* (1:3) advises: "It would be well for the God-fearing man to mourn for and be concerned with the destruction of the Temple" (destroyed in 586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E.).

And one who is not God-fearing need not mourn for the destruction? Quips the Rym: "The individual who possesses no fear of the Lord, better mourn and concentrate on his own *hurban* (destruction)."[5]

Commenting on the dictum in the Sayings of the Fathers (1:47): "And judge every man for merit," the Rym notes the utilization of the word *kol,* which may mean "every," "all," or the "whole" man: "When you set out to judge a man, though you discover many failings, judge

the whole man, all of him, and you will ultimately judge in his favor."[6]

Man is innately good, claims Judaism. He is not without blemish, and at times his evil inclination is overwhelming. But if you probe and seek out the good in him, it will always emerge.

Hassidism, the movement of the common man, reassured the Hassid that what is "common" in him is also good. It instilled hope and confidence in the unlearned and impressed him that he too had God-endowed innate goodness and potential for deep piety.

Moreover, in attempting to enhance the dignity of man, it forewarned him to look with favor even upon the overt sinner, for with the proper approach, one can evoke divine character attributes even in him.

A Hassid showed great concern over his increasing forgetfulness of certain biblical portions. Said the Rym to this disciple: "Have you ever mistakenly placed a spoon with food near your ear? Would not your mouth immediately remind you that it was the proper organ for nourishment, for the mouth is the oral instrument for inner nourishment, and upon it lies the task of bringing continued life to the entire human organism.

"How then, can you forget Torah which is also the nourishment of the soul, as the Psalmist sings: 'I will never forget Thy words, for in them I live' (Psalms 119). If you understand that your very life is dependent upon Torah, you too will never forget."[7]

The Rym once questioned the need for the appendix, since man can live without it after surgery. Answered the *Rebbe*: "Traditionally, we believe that there are within the human body 248 limbs and 365 nerves, in apposition to the 248 commandments and the 365 negative commandments. Many are the *mitzvoth* which fall into the category of *hukkim,* laws for which no reason is given in the Torah. Thus, there is within man an organism whose creation is also beyond the ken of mortal mind.[8]

A young Hassid approached the *Rebbe* for the first time and was asked whether he was learned in Torah. "A little," replied the Hassid. "And who then can learn more than just a little?" quipped the Master.[9]

The Talmud (Berakhoth 5a), teaches: "If a man is in great pain due to illness, let him look introspectively and take self-inventory. If the illness and pain still persist, let him attribute it to his failure to study Torah."

Explains the Rym: "Not that he failed to study in the past, but due to his present unbearable pain he is unable to continue his studying. Thus, if this be his remorse, God will remove his illness and pain to enable him to learn."[10]

"Why is a student of Torah called a *ben*-Torah, a *son* of Torah and not a student of the Torah?" asked the Rym.

"A son of the Torah yearns after and follows the Law, like a son who is in need of his mother and follows her for fear that he cannot survive without her. Thus, a sincere student of Torah who realizes that learning is his *raison d'etre,* and is always in pursuit of knowledge, is called a *ben*-Torah."[11]

A Hassid once confessed to the *Rebbe* that alien thoughts interfered with his prayers. "This is what Solomon had in mind," remarked the Rym. "The iniquity of man will make his path crooked, and upon God will his heart be scornful" (Prov. 19:3).

Man approaches God in prayer, often after a day filled with iniquity and dishonesty. How can his prayers be expected to be suddenly transformed into a pure and devout experience, without alien thoughts."[12]

Hassidim emphasized *kavanah,* inner concentration and full intention in prayer, but this had to be preceded by *hakhana,* prior preparation. The mood of prayer had to be established. One cannot attain the religious moment of prayer without initial motivation. Naturally, if prayer is

preceded by evil thoughts and deeds, it is interrupted by alien thoughts.

Sings the Psalmist (145:18): "God is near to *all* who call upon Him." Adds the Midrash: "Does that mean *every* one who calls upon God? Obviously not, since the poet adds, 'all who call upon Him in truth.'"

"But the Psalmist does emphasize 'all,' all who call upon Him, even without truth," says the Rym, and continues: "For the sake of those who do call to God in truth, do the prayers of all, including the untruthful, come before the Almighty."[13]

A Hassid once admitted to the Rym that he was confronted with many difficulties and much hardship in the worship and service of the Lord.

Responded the Master: "It would indeed be most disgraceful and shameful if one could worship and serve such an awesome Creator with ease and comfort."

Why are the prayers preceding and introducing the Sabbath evening service called *Kabbalath Shabbat*, the acceptance of Sabbath? Comments the Rym: "The Sabbath is dependent upon the recipient, and will be permeated with Sabbath joy commensurate with the religious level and aspiration of he who 'accepts' and ushers in the holy day."

The depth and degree of the religious experience is proportionate to the sincerity, integrity, and understanding injected into the act by the worshipper. To those who fail to capture the religious moment, we say: "Seek ye the Lord, and He shall be found."

Religion must be approached with the same degree of diligence, study, patience, and sincerity with which one embarks upon other disciplines.

THE WRITTEN CONTRACT OF THE RYM'S APPOINTMENT AT GUR

For *Mazal Tov* and a long life!

We the undersigned men of this worthy community

(*Adath Yeshurun*), and with the consent of the entire city, hereby appoint and receive unto ourselves as Rabbi and Teacher, that Prince of Torah, Rabbi, *Gaon,* wise and learned, righteous and pious, holy and pure, etc., the *Admor* —honored be his holiness and his glorious name—*Reb* Yitzhak Meir, the son of the Rabbi and *Gaon* Yisrael— blessed be his memory, who was the chief Judge in our city—in accordance with the conditions herein inscribed. And this is the testimony of the community to the aforementioned Rabbi, to which we have obligated ourselves.

(a) It shall be the responsibility of the community to give to the Rabbi a total of ten rubles every week. He shall further receive gratis, in accordance with his needs, foodstuff, wine, and drinks, as well as poultry and meats (30 lbs. a week) as is needed to feed all who eat in the Rabbi's court and table. All additional income and gifts endowed to the Rabbi will be his own and used to his discretion.

(b) We hereby permit the children and family of the Rabbi to reside in our city and to establish a business as they see fit, and without any objection by any resident.

(c) The residents of our community obligate themselves to establish a fund of 15,000 rubles in order to erect a residence and synagogue (*Beth Hamidrash*) for the Rabbi. From his weekly honorarium of ten rubles, we shall deduct six rubles weekly to repay the residents, until the sum shall have been paid in full.

Now this is agreed upon by the Rabbi to the community.

(a) The Rabbi hereby promises to reside in our city three months each year, either consecutively or dispersed as he sees fit.

(b) All legal matters, either civil, religious, or criminal shall not be incumbent upon him but upon a *Moreh Hora'ah,* a Rabbi who will be appointed by *Reb* Yitzhak Meir. We commit ourselves to abide by the decision of the *Moreh Hora'ah,* and let no one render decisions without this appointee, nor can anyone reject the appointment.

(c) And if in the future, Heaven forbid, the rabbinical position in our community is not pleasing in the eyes of the

Rabbi, we hereby give him the permission to resign without any further ill-feeling or objection of the community.

(d) If the Rabbi desires *Consens Rezindava* in the Rabbinate, he shall receive from the community additional expenses in accordance with his expenditures and needs.

The above is hereby contracted and consummated by the more appropriate *kinyan,* consummation of agreement by an exchange of movable object, and as a testimony to the consummation, we herein inscribe our names on this fourth day of the week, the first day of *Rosh Hodesh Iyar,* in the year 1859.[16]

Signatures.

EXCERPTS FROM SIAH SARFEI KODESH

In 1828 Rabbi Yoez Kayam Kaddish Rokocz of the city of Parshitik, published stories, epigrams, Torah interpretations, ethical and moral exhortations, and sermons of four *Zaddikim:* Rabbi Simha Bunam of Pshykhse; Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk; Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Gur; and Rabbi Hanokh Henikh Hakohen of Alexander. Also included in this work, entitled *Siah Sarfei Kodesh* (the choir of the holy Seraphim),[17] were a few discussions and letters of the Sefath Emeth.

The editor compiled these excerpts from written manuscripts, as well as "authentic" oral sources, as was the case in any publication of a *Zaddik's* literary contributions. The book was published in four volumes by Masorah Press, in Lodz, Poland, by A. M. Grubstein: Volume I and II in 1928, Volume III in 1931, and Volume IV in 1934.

Rabbi Rokocz delineates the criterion by which he chose some selections and discarded others: any thought which will inspire the listener or reader to return to the will of God, or reaffirm his faith in His judgment and commandments.

With this in mind, the editor published a letter of the third *Rebbe* of Gur, preceding his own introduction to Volume IV:

Barukh Hashem—With the help of the Lord, blessed be His Name.

I was requested by the "association for the preservation of the Sabbath," in conjunction with other rabbis, to appeal to our brethren to reaffirm their belief in Sabbath observance. . . . Woe to that generation which requires such a Sabbath observance renascence. Indeed, the Sabbath is the cornerstone and the glory of the community of Israel. The reward for its observance is already well-known, and its desecration is an open renunciation of the entire Torah.

* * * *

I have no alternative but to cry aloud with a contrite and heart-rending voice: Awaken, O ye who sleep, awaken from your lethargy. . . . Return and repent, return to the utmost observance of all Sabbath laws and safeguards to the laws, and the Lord will absolve the transgressions of all Israel, for we are guilty.

I urge each and every one of you to expend effort and time and join these associations to preserve the sanctity of the Sabbath . . . and the Lord, blessed be His Name, will have mercy upon us and redeem us from darkness to light, from enslavement to our final redemption.

The words of this writer were inscribed with the very blood of my heart. . . . And I beseech every Jew to actively assist in this sacred mission.

Abraham Mordecai Alter
of the city of Gur

The following excerpts from *Siah Sarfei Kodesh* refer to the *Zaddikim* of Gur and were taken from the fourth volume. Again, the choice of material cited herein devolved upon its translatibility and comprehensibility to the English reader not familiar with Torah scholarship. From these excerpts one may glean an understanding of the Hassidic *weltanschauung* and the basic philosophy of the Rym and Sefath Emeth. Since some stories are hearsay, complete authenticity is again questionable. Again, after each cited and translated excerpt, this writer adds his own comment.

> I heard the following from my revered father, in the name of his teacher and master, the Rym: "A man's work must be completed by the time Sabbath arrives. This includes his 'spiritual' concerns, to fully comprehend that the tranquillity of the Sabbath will help erase man's depression."[18]

The prohibition of mourning, depression, and moroseness on the Sabbath, as is prescribed by Hassidism, is discussed in our chapter on the Sabbath at Gur.

Here the Rym adds an additional prohibition, that even intellectual concerns which may absorb the Hassid's mind and prevent the capturing of the joyous spirit of the Sabbath are to be put aside before the Sabbath. This is not to imply the total negation of study on the Sabbath. However, an uncompleted and complex intellectual dilemma not resolved before the Sabbath may occupy the Hassid's thoughts on the Sabbath and preclude his enjoyment of its spirit.

> It was told to me that the Rym commented on the passage in Genesis (4:6): "And the Lord said unto Cain: Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen?"
>
> At first glance, it is difficult to understand God's query. Certainly, a man who has just murdered his brother is expected to be wroth and his 'countenance' fallen.
>
> It means that God teaches man the meaning of sincere penitence. Why was Cain's countenance fallen and why was he so sad? Was the reason regret and sorrow for the death of his brother, or was it simple melancholia? To be depressed over a sinful act without introspection is not sufficient penitence.[19]

One of the syndromes of guilt is depression, or exaggerated elation as a defense. An unsuccessful defense mechanism or an unbearable depression may create a feeling of regret for a wrongdoing and eliminate the cause, at least at that time. It will not eliminate the fundamental cause nor prevent a recurrence of the "transgression."

Sincere self-scrutiny or profound self-analysis is a longer and more painstaking process, but like analytic psycho-therapy it is thorough and gets to the source of the problem.

The Rym and the Rabbi of Wurke once visited a *Zaddik* afflicted with an incurable disease. The *Zaddik* said to them: "How is it that two spiritual giants like you cannot crash the Heavenly gates and destroy the little 'bug' within me?"

A Hassid who entered the room after the two visitors' departure claimed that the floor was literally wet from the tears that flowed from the eyes of the Rym and his colleague.[20]

Hassidism touched man's emotion, and the *Rebbe* inevitably, by nature and necessity, became emotionally involved with the Hassid. Outbursts of ecstasy in joyous religious experiences as well as lamentations and tears in hours of tragedy were part and parcel of the Hassidic experience.

The *mithnaged* was referred to as the *kalter neshama,* the cold soul devoid of exterior and public display of emotions. Wit, weeping, and song were the expressions of a movement which discarded total reliance on intellect and encouraged emotional self-expression.

The Rym and the Rabbi of Wurke found themselves totally helpless in the face of a final judgment from on high. They wept not only for their sick colleague but for the rhetorical question put to them. Indeed, if penitence, prayer, and charity can avert the severe decree, why were they powerless to invoke God's compassion upon this doomed man?

The question remains rhetorical but can easily evoke a tear.

The Rym liked to relate the incident in Kotzk, when a Hassid, during prayer, looked heavenward and burst forth with: "Oh, father, father, father." Said a second Hassid: "And perhaps he is not your father," referring

to a rabbinic statement that when Israel does not fulfill the will of God, they are nothing more than servants and not children. But the Kotzker *Rebbe* chimed in: "One shouts 'father, father,' so long, until he really becomes a father to him."[21]

The religious moment and divine recognition must be personally experienced. One can never appreciate the cadence of a beautiful symphony without prior preparation and development of music appreciation. That unique rapport that the religionist establishes with God is a developmental and growing process, changing with religious maturity. The child accepts the fact that his parents procreated him. But he develops filial loyalty only after a personal inter-relationship with his parents.

The theist may assume God's existence and accept it by faith, but only through the I-Thou relationship can he comprehend God as father.

The foremost search in life, it seems, is to find a father; not merely the lost father of his youth but the image of one's own strength and wisdom.

When the Sefath Emeth fell ill, many of his rabbinic colleagues offered prayers on his behalf. A special prayer for the sick which is chanted usually mentions the Hebrew name, as well as the mother's name. The question of the Sefath Emeth's Hebrew name arose. Was it Yehuda or Yehuda Aryeh, or Aryeh Leib? Did not the *Rebbe* himself relate that his grandfather, the Rym, named him *Yehuda* (praise) at his ceremony of circumcision? Hassidim relate that the Rym did not cease extolling and praising God for the rest of the day.

But at the Sefath Emeth's wedding, the grandfather ordered the name changed to *Aryeh,* since the name of his new father-in-law was also *Yehuda,* Yehuda Yudel Hentchiner.

It was incredible to the Sefath Emeth's contemporaries that the Rym would change his grandson's name, since this was contrary to Jewish tradition. But it was later related to them that the *Rebbe* was called

Yehuda Aryeh, and Aryeh translated into Yiddish was *Leib,* (a lion) but also meant to praise (*loiben*).

All people throughout history associated some meaning to either their first or surname. In biblical days the mother almost always named the child because of some associated event or as an expression of gratitude to the Almighty. Very often, a marital "match" was not consummated because either the bride or groom had the same first name of their future in-law. One of the reasons that such a marriage was prohibited was the possible inability to name the offspring of this union after the grandparent, since a child and a living parent may not have the same name. This is not a law, and cannot be found in the Jewish Code, but it is an accepted custom among traditional Jews. Sometimes, especially during a serious illness, an additional name may be given a person, but the original name is never nullified.

Hassidism added additional mystery to a name which it believed would augur a good omen in the future adult life. A child born into a Hassidic family would often be given the name of a pious *Zaddik.* It should be noted that many later *Zaddikim* possessed names similar to if not the same as those of their early masters.

I heard from my uncle, *Reb* Moshe, that the Kotzker Rabbi once inquired of a Hassid with a large family why he never asked for counsel regarding *shiddukhin* (marital matches) for his children. Replied the Hassid: "Is it not a tradition that no one, not even a *Rebbe,* possesses additional knowledge in this realm?" "True," replied the Kotzker, "but a *Rebbe* can certainly offer some insight and wise counsel."

The Rym was vitally concerned with marital compatibility and happiness and took an active part in suggesting or arranging matches, and counseled his disciples in their domestic problems. He would, at times, ask a Hassid who had never confided his marital problems to the *Rebbe:* "Why don't you give your wife a divorce?"[22]

Hassidism, by its very nature, was inextricably associated with the "whole" man, recognizing that a man's personal life affected his religious thinking and practice. The Hassid's personal problems, livelihood, marriage, and children were therefore the concern of his *Zaddik* who acted as counsellor and confidant. A *shiddukh* usually had to receive the sanction of the *Rebbe,* as did a contemplated divorce. Sanction, however, did not mean that the *Rebbe* established a direct channel with God and possessed a special marriage oracle.

A Hassid once requested counsel from the Kotzker, relevant to a proposed *shidukh.* Rabbi Mendele did not respond clearly. When the Hassid insisted on a more definite answer, the *Rebbe* angrily replied: "Do you imagine that every time a man comes for counsel that we rise heavenward and open up the ledger to see what is therein inscribed. And if a second inquires, we rise again; and a third, again and again. What audacity there is in such an attitude! This then, is our procedure. When we are asked for advice, we become slightly egocentric, thereby losing our true faculty of reason. We must therefore do our utmost to destroy our egocentricity and rebuild our minds. It is only after overcoming these obstacles and after examining the problem in light of Torah and logical reasoning that we can offer our clients appropriate responses."

The Rym had written the following to Rabbi Yitzhak Bezalel Morgenstern, a *"shohet"* (ritual slaughterer):

"This question of *emunah* (faith or religious belief) is often misunderstood and misinterpreted. Faith is not a result of contemplation alone, as most people erroneously believe, an outcome of man's possessing freedom of intellectual thought and thus rationally selecting his system of beliefs. This is not "faith," since it emanates from the intellect alone. Intellect changes, but faith must remain constant. *Emunah* must be unequivocally sustained and must be so deeply embedded within the heart of the believer that faithlessness would be absolutely impossible.

As for our sages and scholars, our theologians and philosophers who attempted a guide for the religiously perplexed, do not conclude that there was the slightest element of disbelief or doubt in their thinking. They simply desired to make their *emunah* crystal clear, and at the same time delineate, without doubt, the basic principles of our faith so that Judaism could be even more firmly embedded in their hearts.

However, since the publication of the book of *Zohar* and other sacred books, it is clearly enunciated that further philosophic speculation is now no longer necessary, for there is innately contained within each Jewish soul, the *nekuda* or essence of faith. It is for the Jew to merely dip into his own human soul and extricate, as it were, this self-contained *emunah,* which was bequeathed to him by almost three thousand years of believers.[23]

The school of Gur rejected the discipline of philosophy and logic to prove or question religious law and traditions (see chap. XVI).

The concept of the *nekuda penimith,* (the internal essence), forms one of Gur's repetitive themes. The individual has inherited or has been endowed with an innate divine entity, which is the source of his humanity, faith, and moral character traits. "It" resides within each soul, but whether it remains dormant or whether it is awakened and made active depends entirely upon the individual. The *nekuda* is there for the asking. It is only for man to ask!

Commenting on the passage in *Orah Hayyim,* (book of codes) (law 1 and law 3) : "Every God-fearing man should mourn and be concerned with the destruction of the Temple," the Rym adds: "One cannot truly be considered within the peoplehood of Israel until he assists in the rebuilding of the Temple, for every generation which has not rebuilt the Temple in its time is guilty of assisting in its destruction. Thus a Jew who is not God-fearing may return to faith by mourning for the Temple's destruction."[24]

The Temple, or in more historic vein, the peoplehood of Israel, will not be emancipated and rebuilt in one period of history. Redemption is an evolving and developmental process, adding strength and meaning with each period of time. No generation or individual could ever take full credit for the ultimate redemption.

The redemptive process is neither nationalistic nor political, but is rather primarily a religious experience. Its ultimate objective is religious in scope, enabling the devout to worship God, free from political, economic, and social tyranny.

Thus the non-God-fearing Jew may return to God through a medium which at first appears to be secular, *i.e.*, helping rebuild the "Temple," or helping the people of Israel and its land.

> Text: "Why are you hungry and why is your face downcast?" (Gen. 4:6) [Comments the Rym] "Why are you angry, Cain? Is it because your offering was *not* received, or perhaps because Abel's offering *was* received?"[25]

In a brief comment the Rym preaches a most eloquent sermon and reflects a profound psychology. Man is often obsessed with envy, not because of his own ill fortune and deprivations but rather because of another's good fortune. It is human and expected for man to feel deprived and forgotten when observing a friend's endowments and gifts. But it is less than human to begrudge a brother's happy lot in life. Cain would not have been grieved if neither sacrifice were acceptable. Sibling rivalry almost always creates a situation where the rod of punishment applied to both hurts less, and gifts to neither are usually not missed. But woe to the parent who brings a trinket to one and nothing to the other. The fact that brother received nothing is of little consequence, but sister's recognition or her bigger piece of pie is an aggravating cause.

> Text: "And Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 4:8). [Comments the Rym:] "Every crea-

ture of God possesses this spark of divine grace. To discover this spark, thereby finding favor in His eyes, is the secret of man's existence."[26]

This concept of the inner man is often referred to by both the Rym and the Sefath Emeth as *penimiuth,* or man's interior; his essence. Man created in the divine image must search for that spark of divinity within himself. He is not inherently evil nor innately weak, but rather basically good and potentially powerful. How could he be otherwise with part of God within him?

What is man's *raison d'etre* and what should be his primary objectives? To find favor in the eyes of God, says Gur, and thereby find grace in his own eyes.

How reassuring to his ego and self-concept it is for man to feel that his behavior and way of life is acceptable to the Creator. He can be rejected by his mother, unloved by his helpmate, unacceptable to his children, unwanted by his friends, yet, his ego-strength remains constant because he has found favor in the eyes of God. This is the mystery of his survival.

Text: "And Abraham and Sarah were old, coming on in days" (Gen. 18:11). "Why the addition of 'coming on in days'? 'They were old' is a sufficient description," [asks the Rym]. "They came on (*ba-u,* in Hebrew) and lived in possession of 'all' their days. There was nothing lacking in their days."[27]

"What is a day, compared to a lifetime," is the cry of many whose days, months, and years elude them as life passes them by. Every day, every fleeting moment that passes, is an opportunity lost to joy and creativity. He who idles his time away, always waits for the tomorrow which usually never comes. Gur says, don't postpone your living, but like Abraham and Sarah make every day count. They were old in years but even older than Methuselah in days of creativity and accomplishment.

Text: "And the Lord opened her eyes, and she beheld a well of water" (Gen. 21:19). "Learn from

> this, [comments the Rym], that all of man's needs are already prepared for him. All he must do is 'open his eyes' to behold them. This was David's prayer: 'Open Thou mine eyes and I shall look' (Psalms 119:8)."[28]

All energy is either kinetic or potential, the latter still nonetheless existent. So it is with all of life's energies which have been present since creation. It is man's task to unfold that which is hidden and discover the unfound. He need only open his eyes, broaden his horizon, and develop the inner God within him.

Every man must explore the unknown in life and its intellectual and spiritual disciplines. It is each man's task not to leave the earth until one iota of potential is transformed into kinetic energy. For it is there, inconcrete and intangible, unfound and unseen, except to those who will open their eyes.

> Text: "If you will walk in my statutes, and my commandments guard" (Lev. 26:3). [The Rym explains the use of the word *telekhu,* (to walk):] "It means that in the service of the Lord one cannot afford to remain standing still."[29]

Standing still is man's gravest downfall. No matter how much one has accomplished, he must not stagnate but strive for greater goals and higher achievements.

No man ever arrives. One strives after definite objectives but discovers upon fulfilling them that either the objectives have changed or he has changed.

The religious experience is moving, progressive and ambivalent. It may rise to a high crescendo of unequivocal belief and descend to the mires of disbelief. The religious experience does not preclude doubt and skepticism. He whose faith is constant without moments of questioning, is standing still in the service of the Lord. He may never be unfaithful to Him, but his faith will never expand and grow.

Text: "And Moses lifted his hands and he struck the stone twice" (Num. 20:11). "Why did Moses countermand God's commandment to speak to the rock, by striking it?" [asks the Rym and in an unusually poignant remark, he says:) "If he had spoken to the rock and it would fulfill his demand, it would serve as a pretext against the people of Israel, in *a fortiori* logic. If an inanimate object responds immediately to the commandment of the Lord, why does animate and understanding Israel disobey Him?"[30]

Text: "A man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come before them, who shall bring them out and return them" (Num. 27:17).

[Adds the Rym:] "The righteous leader must not only direct his flock away from the path of evil but lead them positively towards good."[31]

Religious leaders and preachers through the ages have unfortunately placed too much emphasis upon the "Thou shalt nots," upon the negative impositions, rather than upon the positive aspects of religious observance. Hassidism delineated the joy of ritual observance and the effect upon the soul and body of the "Thou shalts." Preachers too often reprimand and criticize, and fail, like the compassionate mother, to praise and condone positive and righteous actions.

Moreover, the religious leader must be the shepherd to his flock, like Moses of old, and "go out before them." He must not remove himself to an ivory tower away from the struggles, problems, and temptations of his people.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The Works of Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

Since, in the rabbinical world, the Ark of the Lord was taken from us and the sun set at noon, there was but one source of comfort in our sorrow: He left us this blessing, written in his own sacred hand, *i.e.*, many compositions on Torah and commentaries on the Talmud and Codes.

We have chosen to publish this present composition written by his own hand but previously delivered orally and publicly to many adherents. Assuredly, even now many hearts will be awakened and enlightened, especially those who had the good fortune to be inspired by his wisdom during his lifetime.

Indeed, his words of wisdom emanated from his heart and will thus penetrate the hearts of the readers. Surely you will be inspired and influenced to return in sincere penitence to our God, blessed be His Name, and to serve Him with utmost purity and sincerity.

We entitled this composition *Sefath Emeth* (the language of truth), for as his name is, so is he; also to reaffirm one of his last utterances before his death, as contained in this volume. He concludes his discussion with the words: "The language of truth will remain eternal" (Prov. 12:19).

We have published and printed his words as we found them in his manuscript. Though discovering some repetitive discussions, we left the composition unedited, since we preferred not to tamper with his sacred writings. The dates

and years mentioned in each Scriptural portion, may at times also not be accurate.

The children and sons-in-law of the *Gaon,* the holy Rabbi and *Admor*—may the sacred memory of the righteous be blessed—of Gur.

INTRODUCTION

(SECOND EDITION)

Barukh Ha-shem
(Blessed be the Lord)

May the righteous and pious rejoice upon witnessing the republication of the sacred texts of the "Sefath Emeth on Torah."

Almost a jubilee has passed since the demise of the light of Israel, our teacher, Rabbi, and Master, the Sefath Emeth. After his expiration, his sons published the works of the Sefath Emeth on the Pentateuch. Thousands of students quenched their intellectual thirst by studying these texts.

Now that most of his children and their families were annihilated in the European holocaust, and since along with them their libraries were burned, only one or two printed volumes remained in the family.

We were therefore determined to establish a sacred and eternal memorial in their name, by reprinting the words of our Master, *The Sefath Emeth on Pentateuch.* May the virtuous merit of our author and teacher intercede on our behalf bringing to us all good fortune and salvation.

The grandchildren of the Sefath Emeth, may his righteous memory be blessed.

SOME TRANSLATED EXCERPTS FROM THE TEXT AND COMMENTS OF THIS WRITER

> The Midrash on Genesis comments: "The Worker (God) beheld the Torah and created the universe." Certainly, the Lord could have created the world without the Torah? Assuredly, all creation was effectuated for the good of the created. Thus creation was such that man could gain insight into the manner of creation, as well as the mysterious handiwork of the Creator, from every animate or inanimate thing.
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> It is our belief that all creation centers around the Torah as man's way of life, touching upon every area and aspect of living. This then is the explanation of, "He beheld the Torah and created the universe," *i.e.*, every created object is related directly or indirectly to Torah. In studying the Holy Writ, one can therefore glean the mystery and secrets of all creation.[1]

Torah, as the revealed word of God, is the *raison d'etre* of the Jew. For Torah and because of Torah, was the Jew given life. Scripture supersedes human existence in the sense that, without it, survival for the Jew is virtually impossible.

God created man and the universe, not for His own exaltation but rather for man's exaltation. Man elevates himself to his potential exalted image by investigating the design and mystery of created things. God's revealed Law, according to Jewish Orthodox belief, contains the clues to these natural mysteries.

Investigation of the laws governing the universe is not only the prerogative of man but his divine duty. Through better comprehension and appreciation of the distinct order and unique design of creation man can extend his belief in a Creator from religious acceptance to an intellectual rationale. Faith is the starting point but reason reaffirms the heart's inclination.

Samson Raphael Hirsch expresses the Sefath Emeth's thoughts more philosophically:

> All human science can do is to detect God's thoughts and intentions concerning objects, and man may be-

lieve that he knows something only when he has succeeded in finding such a divine trace. A scientist who, while denying God's existence, spends his life in discovering "the idea in nature," reveals with each law and power and purpose which he detects, a trace of the very same God whom his lips deny. Nay, he denies his denial with the very first step he takes towards an investigation of nature's realm.[2]

Rashi comments that at the end of the six days of creation the world still lacked the concept of rest. Therefore, God perforce created *menuha* (rest). God the Creator did not need to rest, for fatigue is appropriate only to created things.

The Sabbath and its concept of "positive," not "passive" or negative rest, was the fulfillment of all that was previously created. All creation was a consequence of God's word (*logos*). The Sabbath completed His creation and sustained it even after the Creator removed His *ma'amaro* (God's word) from the universe. Moreover, God's all-pervading revelation, His word, could not be contained within a limited universe.

The Holy Sabbath is that causative effect to relate nature to that which supersedes nature. It is, therefore, the ultimate fulfillment of all creation. The six days preceding the Sabbath are of lesser import, nay of little significance, relative to Sabbath, which sustains God's Word in nature.

Like a ring lacking a signet or stamp, is the universe without the concept of positive *menuha* (rest) on the Sabbath. Thus when man observes the Sabbath, he actively testifies to divine creation.[3]

Only with the institution of the Sabbath was every part of the visible creation really completed. God made the Sabbath its goal and completion. The concept of Sabbath rest was the last touch that God put on each of His works which He had placed in the Universe. "Thus, on the seventh day, God completed His work which He had made, and on the seventh day God ceased from all His work which He had made" (Gen. 2:2).

The universe as a whole, and each part to which God

has assigned a place in that universe, has been furnished with powers and mystery which man must ever continue to investigate and ultimately discover.

> Rashi comments that initially God contemplated creating the universe with His attribute of *din* (justice). Fearing that justice would not suffice in sustaining the world, God added the attribute of compassion.[4]
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> [Adds the Sefath Emeth:] So must man initially commence as a co-partner with God in creation. Man's will and thought must be directed to fulfill the Will of God in accordance with divine justice. Only after a conscientious effort is expended to utilize the measure of equity and justice, and only after failing, should man resort to compassion. The primary motive must be prompted by justice which is all-embracing and in most cases sufficient to carry out the Will of God and man's own will.
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> In truth, man's deeds are completed only with the help of the Creator—man's deeds being an emanation of God's compassion. In a word, if a man fulfills all that is incumbent upon him with his own concept of justice, and if his will is prompted only by a pure and equitable motive, he receives additional divine assistance to bring his deed to a successful conclusion. In this manner does divine compassion sustain the universe.[5]

Rashi's commentary and the Sefath Emeth's elaboration pose the age-old question: "Why are justice and equity insufficient to sustain law and order in society?" Surely if every judge, nay every human being who judges his neighbor's action daily, would employ no lesser measure than fairness and strict justice, man would live in peace and harmony with his fellowman, and tranquillity would reign supreme over chaos and anarchy. Almost every extenuating problem confronting either the sovereign nations of the world or individuals comprising these nations could easily be resolved if "common" law were employed, tempered with mere justice. Mercy is a noble attribute but it would be superfluous. The problem touches upon the concepts of

tzedakah (strict justice) and *mishpat* (law), *hesed* (loving-kindness and *emeth* (truth) in Jewish thought.

Despite the high development of Roman law, it also introduced the dictum: *Summum Jus Summa Injuria* (sternest judgment produces hardest injustice). Even divine law must judge differently in extenuating situations. One cannot judge a man who steals in order to add to his wealth, by the same standard as one who needs bread for sustenance. True justice cannot be administered without inquiring into the causes and details of each case. Perhaps the felony was caused by the evil of our social framework, or by a generally sick society. Passing judgment without inquiry and knowledge of the specific situation would be *midath hadin* (strict justice to the letter of the law). Pursuing details and causes would be *lifnim mishurath hadin* (beyond the letter of the law), or *tzedakah* (strict righteousness). The latter concept is charity, social welfare, and a sort of balancing justice.

Thus *din* becomes *tzedakah,* justice becomes compassion, law becomes love, right becomes righteousness. *Rahamim* (compassion) considers the law in the light of love and extenuating circumstances.

Aron Barth adds a third meaning to righteousness: *tzedakah* has become a general concept, parallel to what other people understand by 'charity' and 'social welfare.' It includes alleviating hardship and preventing it.[6]

This helps us to understand the Sefath Emeth's remarks. God had to instill within man the added attribute of compassion to remove the causes of injustice, so that he might act in accordance with the circumstances pertaining to it. But prerequisite to that God-endowed compassion, helping him to complete and fully comprehend his act, is the initial endeavor founded on justice. Thus both *din* and *tzedakah,* law and love, justice and a "balancing justice" are necessary for the survival of mankind.

Text, (*Haftorah* of *Sidrah Devarim*): "The ox knows its Master" (Isa. 1:2). "God forbid," says the Sefath Emeth, "that Israel should be compared to an

> ox; Israel who prays and worships God. But it is the Will of God that Israel shall reveal His Kingdom to all living creatures . . . that all creatures should cleave unto Him. . . ."[7]

Isaiah's simile of the ox, and the ass not knowing its crib has been a source of debate among biblical commentators. The Sefath Emeth minimizes the prophet's rebuke of Israel. All other commentaries deprecate Israel for not reflecting as much gratitude to God as the lowly ox. God forbid that an animal should be more cognizant of God's beneficence and more grateful than Israel who worships and serves God even in its hour of rebellion. The Hassidic *Zaddik,* however, lessens the prophet's castigation and offers a fresh and new interpretation. It is man's duty not only to cleave to God Himself but to bring all creation closer to Him. Hassidim preached the enlistment of all creation, animate and inanimate, in the service of the Lord.

> Every generation must correct the failings and transgressions of the generation preceding it. Just as they inherit the virtues of that generation so must they assist [in erasing] its transgressions. This is how God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children [*i.e.,* if the children do not nullify those transgressions]. This is the explanation of the Midrash which claims that any generation in whose time the Temple is not rebuilt, is guilty of destroying it [the Temple]. If succeeding generations would remedy previous transgressions, the Temple would be immediately rebuilt.[8]

As lenient as the *Zaddik* appears, he is a taskmaster in the areas of good deeds, and service to God and humanity. The Sefath Emeth adds an additional responsibility—being of some service to a generation past, helping to correct their shortcomings, and making up for their failings. This is a a good deed of the highest order, for there is no expected reciprocation. Self-improvement is not self-contained but must extend to the betterment of all humanity, living and dead.

> Text: "And ye were rebellious in your tents and you said, because God hated us, did He take us out of Egypt . . ." (Deut. 1:27). [The Sefath Emeth discusses the rebellious attitude of Israel who may have turned God's love into hate, heaven forbid, because of their lack of faith in His judgments:] We must therefore learn from this that even in our present exile . . . our faith in God must be constant, for with love did God chastise us. . . . Out of the faith, will God's love for us remain constant. . . . If we are convinced that He who rebukes us also loves us, we are more inclined to receive His castigation.[9]

Psychologists forewarn parents who criticize, chastise, and use the rod on their children that they must convince the recipients of punishment that they are still loved. Punishment should not imply rejection but rather reflect concern, even love. Israel throughout its long history of oppression has not felt rejected and unloved by God. They accept their persecutions as "chastisements of love," and as object lessons for their own iniquities.

> Text: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . ." (Deut. 6:5). [Comments the Sefath Emeth:] This is the meaning of the Midrash (Deut. 6:5): 'With all your soul means with every single soul which God had created within you.' With all your heart does not mean simply that . . . but actually with every sensitivity and every part of a man's being with which he recognizes God as the source of creation.[10]

Hassidism preached *avodah* (service) with every muscle, sinew, and nerve of a man's being; with his all, every breath and sigh, man's entire organism—all unite harmoniously in worshipping God. One recognizes the Hassidic "way" in most of the author's remarks, a way filled with zeal, religious ecstasy, spiritual fervor, and a physio-spiritual approach. Religious experiences are truly varied and diverse for so many elements, spiritual and sensual, enter into them.

> If God's decisions are always just, what is the purpose of prayer? Yet if a man contemplates the infinite greatness of God whose powers are limitless . . . he [the worshipper] prays that the self-same punishment will yet be changed for his good, in accordance with God's will. The judgment is difficult for us to conceive, but [we must believe] that God is all powerful and this is why Moses prayed, even though he was fully aware that he would never enter the promised land.[11]

It is not for the worshipper to fully comprehend how God answers his prayer. He accepts God's judgments courageously, but prays that even the severe decree will eventually be a boon and a blessing for him. He doesn't question God's judgments for he is unequivocally convinced that God is just and merciful. Perhaps through meditation and prayer he may behold, even within this decree, the blessed aspect of the judgment.

Maimonides questions the commandment of loving God (Deut. 6:5). How can the Torah command something which is predicated upon man's natural inclination, to love?

> The question itself contains the answer. Let us from this very commandment learn that it is within the nature of man to love God with all his heart and soul. It [that love] is hidden deep within the heart, and can be found through sincere searching and striving. . . . If a man concentrates on and strives after this hidden love, the holy spirit within his own being is revealed.[12]

Love for God and man is contained within each man. It is for man to extricate the God-endowed qualities which are within him. Man is inherently good and loving. Evil and hate are not positive elements but rather conditions in which goodness and love are merely absent. Through intention, meditation, and sincere prayer one can easily fulfill the commandment "to love," for this is man's natural proclivity.

> The purpose of prayer is to uncover the true glory of God and cause His kingdom to reign upon the earth. It is a truism that the fulfillment of all commandments and good deeds are also forms of prayer, for all allude and relate to our desire to fill this earth with God's glory, and our attempt to develop *dveikuth* (cleaving) with Him. . . . As the Sages express it: 'The service of the heart is prayer.'[13]

Prayer, according to Hassidism, goes far beyond the limited scope of words, plaints, and lip service. Any act in which the worshipper strives to reach God and thereby bring His true essence closer to man is included in the realm of *avodah* (service). Many are the Hassidic tales which illustrate this idea of extending the meaning of prayer beyond the confines of the synagogue. Even the illiterate can pray to God, be it with words, a sigh of contrition, a lilting melody, a smile, a kind word—any menial act which may reflect the worshipper's sincerity. Hassidism's most significant contribution is the expansion and extension of formal and rigid observance to a broader and more positive scope which covers the entire gamut of man's existence.

> Text: "Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Deut. 5:12). "And ye shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 5:15). [Comments the Sefath Emeth:] With regard to the fact that in our text 'remember that you were a slave' is mentioned, [while it is not mentioned in Exodus] we can explain that the Sabbath is a surcease from labor. This is its negative aspect, *i.e.*, the improvement of the body and the affirmation that man can emancipate himself [for one day] from the vanities of the world. This is the category of *shamor* (ye shall observe). The *zakhor* (remember) falls into the category of "do good," *i.e.*, the elevation of man's extra soul.[14]

The Sefath Emeth reflects Gur's attitude towards Sabbath observance which contains both positive and negative aspects. The negative is a simple disassociation from work

coupled with the physical emancipation from mundane tasks. The total disassociation from routine and schedule for a twenty-four hour period is no simple accomplishment. The fact that God and Torah imposes this upon the Jew makes it incumbent upon him to completely erase from his conscious mind the problems and toils of the rest of the week.

The more positive aspect of Sabbath observance is to capture the spirit and sanctity of the day. This is accomplished through prayer, song, study, and *oneg Shabbat.* The observer begins to feel and even "taste" the *neshama yetheira,* the additional soul within him. It is on the Sabbath that man can reach the highest rung on the ladder of divine joy and religious zeal and sanctity.

Text: On the passage, "Hear O Israel" (Deut. 6:4), the Midrash comments: "Said God of Israel, 'All that I have created is in pairs: Heaven and earth; this world and the world to come; and Adam and Eve. But My glory is one and a unity.'" [Adds the Sefath Emeth:] God created everything for His own glory and dominion. Therefore perfection is His alone, and cannot be achieved by any other being. All creatures and created things need assistance one from the other: heaven and earth; Adam and Eve; and this world is an anteroom to the next. . . . Perfection [absolute, without assistance] is fitting for God alone.[15]

THE DAYS OF PENITENCE AND YOM KIPPUR

The Talmud (Berakhot 8b; Yoma 81b) teaches that: "He who eats and drinks heartily on the day before Yom Kippur is considered to have fasted both on the ninth and tenth days of Tishri."

[Comments the Sefath Emeth:] Eating is a preparation for the fast and establishes a proper attitude for fulfillment of these appetites the rest of the calendar year.

As the Sages explain: 'He who says, "I will sin but will repent," his penitence is unacceptable.' Thus it follows that during the course of penitence, one should

meditate with great contrition on the transgression and find its causes and stimuli. Therefore, eating heartily before the fast is encouraged, for eating is a fulfillment of one's appetite, and the cause of sin often lies in uncontrollable urges and appetites.[16]

[The Mishna (Yoma 85b) forewarns]: "All transgressions between man and his fellowman are not absolved on Yom Kippur unless forgiven by the individual against whom the transgression was committed."

[The Sefath Emeth offers the following interpretation:] On Yom Kippur all Israel becomes one. As this day unites all the days of the year, so does it unite all human souls. For in truth, all souls are always near one to another, but are separated by transgressions, as Isaiah (51:2) explains: 'Your transgressions cause you to be separated from your God.' Thus, there are some misdeeds that cause this breach between man and God, and others that create disharmony between man and man. On the Day of Atonement both of these breaches must be rebuilt, not only the seemingly serious offenses but especially those which directly cause disunity and misunderstanding within society, 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart' (Lev. 19:17), and the like.

Moreover, not only must he appease the man whom he offended to forgive him, but he must humble himself until he is assured of his friendship and love.

This then is the deeper meaning of the Mishnaic view that all Israel becomes one on the Day of Atonement.[17]

The Sages relate that there was no greater Holyday for Israel than the Day of Atonement. The young maidens went out in similar white attire, so that the young men would not distinguish between the rich and the poor. The more beautiful women would shout: "Behold my beauty." The noble women would say: "Look well into our family lineage." The less attractive maidens would beseech: "Take us for the sake of heaven."

[The Sefath Emeth adds that] this also alludes to the three categories of men. The righteous, like the handsome women, strive to be God-like, and their deeds are readily acceptable before God. Others, with good family upbringing and influence will pray for acceptance, more on the merit of their environment than for their own deeds.

The third class consists of the masses who strive diligently to fulfill the Will of God but may not always succeed.

On Yom Kippur they all become one band of brothers, in their attempt to attain a closer proximity with their Father in Heaven.

In the *Tur Orah Hayyim* a Midrash is mentioned: "If one is engaged in the *mitzvah* of the *lulav* and *sukkah* between Yom Kippur and Sukkoth, one does not transgress, and God forgives." Asks a commentator: "Why should the preparation for the Holyday be more effective than its ultimate fulfillment?"

[Comments the Sefath Emeth:] The Midrash is correct, for there is greater salvation and potency in the preparation preceding the fulfillment of the commandment than its final performance. Firstly, fulfillment is for the moment and transient, but preparation is forever. And this is the inner meaning of the passage: 'And ye shall guard them and do them.' It is incumbent upon man to be vigilant and forever prepared to fulfill any opportunity for a *mitzvah* confronting him. All of man's energies must be utilized daily to guard against the vanities and inanities of the world. Thus, preparation is a constant task and is of greater import and significance.

Secondly, few are able to perform a deed in full accordance with its laws and requirements. But the education and contemplation in the process of *hakhanah* (preparation) consists of simply striving to do God's will. Sincerity and joy are the simple prerequisites. If one possesses these ingredients, he fulfills all the requirements for *hakhanah.*

The thesis can be confirmed by the opinion in Talmud Yoma (29a): "Thinking of transgression is worse than its offense." It follows then, that contemplating good deeds in which a man is completely

immersed and through which he is momentarily prepared for any encounter with religious duty will also deter him from deviation and further transgressions.

[Maimonides maintains in the Laws of Penitence, Chap. 2, Law 4:] "Proper penitence must include both remorse for past misdeeds and affirmation not to repeat the offense in the future, until the Knower of all secrets can testify that the offender will never be guilty of a similar offense."

[Asks the Rym:] "It is most difficult to comprehend this law, for how can it be possible, if this transgression is repeated, that the initial penitence was of no avail?"

[The Rym therefore insists that] the law is merely biblical, but according to rabbinic law the repentance is valid. [He cites a legal example:] If a man steals an object and causes some transformation such as dyeing it, he consummates the transfer of ownership, and though the thief must reimburse the owner he can still claim legal title to the article. This applies to a transformation which cannot be removed and by which the article can never regain its original appearance. Otherwise it is not considered a "change." Later, the rabbis extended the law to include a change which can be eradicated (Talmud Baba Kama 94b).

Penitence is effective only if there is a "change" and "transformation," for the penitent is no longer the same individual, as Maimonides himself claims (Chap. 2, Law 4): "I am another, and not the same man who committed these deeds." In a similar vein the Talmud holds that penitence is valid because of *shinui ma'aseh,* a transformation.

If a repeated offense would always nullify a prior penitence, one would approach *teshuvah* (penitence) with great fear and hesitation.

Again the Hassidic desire to assist the common man to "return" to God is reflected in its intensification of observance and the finding of "loopholes" and even subterfuges to enable that return to be less awesome and fearful. Joy, ecstasy and love invigorated and made the service of the Lord more pleasant. Another Hassidic ap-

proach was to afford a man simple, confident opportunities to rid himself of past misdeeds, and to assure him that every attempt at improvement would be well-received by God.

(Genesis 37:29) : "And Reuben returned to the pit." Comments the Midrash: "No man has ever sinned and repented for it, but you [Reuben] have now repented."

Asks Rabbi Abraham Mordecai Alter: "Did not Adam and Cain after him sin and repent?"

"The Midrash may mean," he replies, "that they [Adam and Cain] sinned and repented, but Reuben's greatness lies in that he was penitent without a transgression."

The pious man must maintain a constant state of penitence, prepared momentarily to be remorseful and contrite for an offense which he may commit wittingly or unwittingly. This vigilance and religious alertness will train him to repent at will and may even prevent the transgression in the first place.

(Genesis 48:14 . . .) "And Israel placed his right hand upon the head of Ephraim. . . . Joseph said to his father: 'Not so, my father'. . . . And his father refused. . . . And he placed Ephraim before Menasseh."

What was then the chief reason for their disagreement?" [asks the Rym]

Their disagreement was basically a philosophical one, centering around the interpretation of 'turn away from evil and do good'—which step is to be taken first.

Menasseh, whose name was derived from *nashani Elohim* (God had forgotten all my toil), symbolized the negative approach—turn away from evil.

Ephraim, whose name was derived from *hifrani Elohim* (God had made me fruitful) in the land of my suffering, symbolized the positive approach—do good.

Joseph believed that the initial step is to destroy evil, and then one is free to create and perform *mitzvoth*. Menasseh, symbolizing forgetfulness, must therefore be initially blessed.

Jacob, however, believed that active participation in worthwhile positive endeavors, making man more 'fruitful and creative,' would indirectly influence man

to turn away from evil. Ephraim, symbol of fruitfulness, must therefore be the first to be blessed.[21]

This is in consonance with the Gerer philosophy of positive thinking and positive action. Be concerned less with evil, mitigate your guilt sufferings, and strive to begin anew through good deeds, counter-balancing your misdeeds.

(Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah, 7:2): "He who repents receives the same recognition as he who travelled to Jerusalem and rebuilt the Holy Temple."

[Comments the third *Rebbe:*] This explains the Rabbinic admonition that 'a generation in which the holy temple is not rebuilt, is considered as guilty as those who destroyed it.' Surely, not every generation is expected to rebuild the Temple? This then is its possible meaning, that if a generation repents, it is virtually rebuilding the Temple. But if it fails to repent it assists in destroying it.[22]

(Deut. 33:6): "May Reuben live and not die." Comments Rashi: "Let him live in this world, and may he not die in the world to come."

[The third *Rebbe* explains] that Reuben was that symbol of penitence, "who shared with Jacob his mourning sackcloth and fasts" (Bereshith Rabba, 84:18).

There are two approaches to repentance. One penitent may inflict pain and mortification upon himself. But the second penitent employs a more potent method. Without self-mortification, he is remorseful with profound trepidation, and concentrates his entire being toward serving the Lord. Thus Moses prayed: "Let Reuben live" in this world, and not die! The return must be effectuated through life and spiritual vigor, and not through death and pain.[23]

Abraham Mordecai, the third *Rebbe,* sustains the Gerer philosophy of concentrating on the positive, joyous, "do good" aspect of religious commitment, rather than on self-aspersion and self-negation. The rabbis confirm this approach to *teshuvah* in their statement: "Not sackcloth and

fasting, but penitence and good deeds cause the return" (Taanith, 16a).

[On the dictum in the] Mishnah Aboth (5:21): "At fifty a man gives counsel" (*ben hamishim le-eitsah*), the Bartenura comments: "As we read in Numbers (8:25) that 'at fifty years, he shall return from the army . . . and serve his brothers. . . .'"

What kind of counsel can the soldier offer upon his return? The Rym once heard from a colleague the following tale: A man, lost in a large forest, encountered an old man. Rejoicingly he asked him if he knew the way out. The old man replied: 'I have been lost for the past seventy years. All I can show you are the roads not to take. The correct path one has to discover himself.'"

This is the meaning of 'and he shall serve his brethren,' says the Rym. He can simply forewarn them after many years of military service how to protect themselves from evil—how to close the gates. But as for opening the gates to a new path of creativity and worthwhileness, this each must do himself.[24]

The *Zaddik* in Gur did not teach the Hassid to follow blindly, to imitate the ways of the master, to copy the *guter Yid.* The Hassid was not a puppet which the Rebbe would manipulate at will and arbitrarily. Gur did not rob the disciple of his self-dignity and potential.

The *Rebbe* could lead the way, guiding the straying Hassid from the path of vanity, licentiousness and immorality. But it was for the Hassid to discover his own road, his personal channel to God—a path peculiar and unique unto himself—in accordance with the level of his own piety, learning, and will.

The Rym once questioned the advisability of repenting on the Sabbath, since it requires remorse and contrition and stimulates depression, a state forbidden on the Sabbath. But he wisely noted that *Pikuah nefesh dohe Shabbat,* if life is endangered the laws of the Sabbath are nullified. If one does not repent, his very existence is at stake. It is

therefore incumbent upon us to do penance even on the Sabbath.

The Rym further asked: "Why shall we permit ourselves to take self-inventory on the Sabbath? Certainly, this will bring us no joy, which is a most essential prerequisite for Sabbath observance, as Isaiah (58:13) warns: 'And ye shall call the Sabbath, joy.' "

"Moreover," the Rym pondered, "self-scrutiny leads to self-correction, and surely this is no simple and leisurely task. On the contrary, it is a most tedious and difficult work, which can break man's very soul and therefore would certainly be prohibited on the Sabbath."

Quipped the Rym: "Self-inventory requires the 'circumcision' of the heart as it is written (Deut. 10:16) : 'And ye shall circumcise your hearts.' As we know, circumcision is permitted on the Sabbath."[25]

Abraham Mordecai once quoted his father, the Sefath Emeth: "Why is the *vidduy,* the confessional of Yom Kippur, recited in an alphabetical acrostic?"

"If not," he replied, "we would never know when to stop."[26]

Two rabbis debated the meaning of the passage: "A man shall relate the concern in his heart" (*Daaga be-lev ish yesiheinu,* Prov. 12:25).

One insisted that he need only verbalize the problem to himself. A second rabbi held that he must tell it to someone else (Yoma 75a).

[Explains the Rym:] If he relates his problem to others, he will undoubtedly choose a beloved friend and colleague, who will, in turn, be greatly anguished and concerned. Since God does not desire anguish to be extended to others, he will perforce also remove the anxiety contained in the heart of the first who ventilates his sorrow to others.[27]

Confiding in the *Zaddik* was a prevalent tradition in Hassidism. The *Rebbe* was the counsellor and confidant who encouraged his followers to unburden themselves before

him. He succeeded in establishing a unique rapport with his "client" who unburdened his innermost thoughts and secrets, never fearing any castigation. The anxious Hassid expected and received understanding and empathy from his *Rebbe.*

Hassidism truly made an important contribution to the Jewish people in the area of the personal inter-relationship of the *Zaddik* and his flock.

The Rym adds, however, that in the area of spiritual anxiety, where the worshipper is concerned over the insincerity of his prayers, such anxiety is healthy. In this area, man should constantly remind himself, not others, of his failings.[28]

The Rym pondered the reason for offering the prayer, "forgive us, O Father, for we have sinned," in the *Amidah* liturgy recited immediately after the conclusion of the Day of Atonement. "Do we not believe that Yom Kippur itself absolves transgressions? Since he is still within the synagogue, when and where did he sin?" asked the Rym.

"The point is," answers the *Rebbe,* "that the worshipper may still have some doubt about the concept of forgiveness, and fears that he may not have been forgiven. This is his very first transgression, and he is therefore again required to offer a prayer for atonement at the *Maariv* immediately following Yom Kippur."[29]

No man should ever fear the possibility that sincere contrition will not lead to complete absolution. Hassidism instilled a new hope and confidence in the masses who believed that they were so spiritually diseased that a cure was virtually impossible. The *Rebbe* did not fail to reiterate, especially before the High Holydays, the concept: "In the place where the truly penitent stand, not even the most righteous man can stand (before God)."

SEFATH EMETH ON SONG OF SOLOMON

The three pilgrimage festivals complement man's three qualities of speech, action, and thought. On Pass-

> over, Israel's "oral" ability was opened [*i.e.*, his freedom of speech after the exodus]. We therefore read the "Song of Songs" on Passover, as the Midrash (Cant. 1:11) comments: "Let us sing to Him who has made us *sarim* (princes) in the world" (a play on the word *shir* (song), and *sar* (prince). Shavuoth symbolizes the aspect of thought and knowledge, for it commemorates the revelation of Torah. Sukkoth (Tabernacles) symbolizes the aspect of final action and deeds, as it is written (Lev. 23:40): "And ye shall take unto yourself," as well as the positive commandment of sitting in the *sukkah*, the shaking of the four species —all of which involve the participation of the entire body.[30]

"Thought is the father of the deed." Intellectual preparation must precede action and speech, but all these three join together in serving God. Hassidism believed that every bone, organ, and sinew of man is utilized in the performance of a *mitzvah*. No aspect of man's service is superior, not mind over body, and certainly not body over mind.

Moreover, thought alone is insufficient, no matter how noble, if it is not actualized in deed and noble speech. Thought must be articulated and translated into overt, concrete, and physical deeds. It must be verbalized and acted out. This is the explanation for the need of ritual observance, for it dramatizes and reifies an intangible thought.

> Text: "I am black but comely, O ye daughters in Israel" (Cant. 1:4). Said the Midrash: "I am comely because of my forefather's deeds." Adds the Sefath Emeth: It indicates that even the lowly and humble profit from the virtues of their ancestors . . . the deeds of descendants can often be traced back to good and virtuous ancestors. . . . One's deeds often come as an ancestral gift, a grace of one's fathers and an outright gift.[31]

In this comment one detects once again the opportunity the *Zaddik* gives the common man for a "return." Even the

most sinful individual still inherits a measure of credits on the balance sheet. Jewish theology called this *zekhuth aboth*, the merits or credits of the fathers. Yet the individual must be aware that this is given him by the grace of God and he ought, therefore, to be grateful to Him for this inheritance. One's inherited credits can also act as catalytic agents to influence the heir to attempt to change his ways, to live up to the virtuous life led by his ancestors and to attempt to emulate them.

> Text: "A bundle of myrrh is my beloved unto me; he shall be all night betwixt my breasts" (Cant. 1:13). [Comments the Sefath Emeth:] We read (Deut. 28:47): 'For the reason that thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart, while there was an abundance of all things.' The Ari adds that the joy of serving God supersedes everything else, for with all his character traits and manners must he be of service to the Lord, as it is written (Psalms 100:2): 'Serve ye the Lord with joy.' But the Psalmist also said (2:11): 'Serve ye the Lord with fear.' When a man prospers and all is well with him, his service and worship of God must always be done with joy and gladness. When this joy increases in the course of *avodah* (service), it will supersede and nullify all other joys. Thus in an hour of grief and pain, man's awe and fear of God must be associated with a deep concern for his lack of sincerity in the service of God. This anxiety and concern will suppress his physical pains. We therefore interpret the passage in our text that even though I am embittered (a play on the word *mar*), He will still lie between my breasts. For in pain, too, one can approach nearer to God.[32]

Joy and ecstasy are the most popular concepts of the Hassidic mood. In good fortune as well as in ill fortune the worshipper must possess a grateful and even joyful spirit. In a moment of stress, the individual must divert his anxiety to another channel, and in his introspection he discovers that the pain can be mitigated through self-improvement.

There is depth psychology in many of the Sefath Emeth's remarks, often stated subtly and concisely.

Text: "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons" (Cant. 2:3). [Comments the Sefath Emeth:] We learned in the Talmud (Sabbath 88a): "Israel is compared to an apple tree because its fruit precedes its leaves. Israel too put the 'we shall do' before the 'we shall listen' (at the revelation of Torah)". This is similar to the Besht's thesis, says the Sefath Emeth, that one can behold in every act and every deed a form of serving God. Now, even in things which appear to be only a means to an end, such as eating—even in the act of eating—the *Zaddik* must feel that he is engaged in a sanctified act of service. What the Besht means is that it may appear in the realm of nature that some things are only means, such as a leaf to a fruit, which is the final end, but in the world of 'ideals' there is Godliness in every act and deed. God's truth is infinite and is contained in everything.[33]

Both the Besht and the Sefath Emeth reflect a basic Hassidic principle: everything is sacred and every single deed is meaningful and Godly. Even the most menial task, the seemingly insignificant deed which appears only as intermediate means, is important and meaningful. There are many Hassidic stories which illustrate this popular teaching. The common man need not envy the lofty and noble deeds of the upper class, for he too can go from rung to rung on the ladder approaching God, if he believes that his menial calling is sacred.

Text: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (Cant. 2:4). [Comments the Sefath Emeth:] Man must possess the "fear" of God so that he shall not come to sin. But preferably, he should attempt to worship God out of love, even though he considers himself quite distant from God because of his transgressions. Then will God's "banner" over him be *ahavah* (love).[34]

Hassidism did not attempt to bring back the "sinner" through fear, the "be good or *Gehenna* awaits you" philosophy. On the contrary, the *Zaddik's* preachings and teachings were filled with love—love for God, love for man, and love for oneself.

Text: "The voice of my beloved, behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills" (Cant. 2:8). The Midrash comments: "When Moses came to the people of Israel and informed them that they would be emancipated during that month, they said: 'But were we not destined to be enslaved for 400 years?' Moses replied: 'If God desires your redemption (at this time), He obviously paid no attention to mathematics.'" Adds the Sefath Emeth: One single iota of truth can destroy all evil. When we stir up the slightest sincere and truthful desire, which appears to be beyond space and time, even natural law cannot stand in its way. . . . This is the meaning of 'he cometh leaping.' Through this one speck of truth, God leaps over and skips any previous mathematical calculations.[35]

Hassidism doesn't ask for total unblemished piety, at least not for the moment. One moment of truth may be that "turning" point in one's life, which can change a destined life of deceit and untruth to a life redeemed, renewed, and emancipated.

Text: "He standeth behind our wall, He looketh forth at the windows, showing Himself through the lattice" (Cant. 2:9). Says the Sefath Emeth: Even in exile, when God seemingly hides His face from us, there are still windows and lattices [through which His light shines]. The windows are the righteous, and the lattices are the simple folk, each according to his ability and worth. Each can open the smallest crack [lattice] through which God's countenance appears. We also read in the holy books a differentiation between a window and a lattice. A window can be looked through from either side, but a lattice can only be peered through from one side. God can behold man through

that smallest opening in a lattice [the simple man], even though it is not apparent to the man upon whom God is looking.[36]

The Sefath Emeth once again uplifts the man and places him on the level with the *Zaddik*. The provident God watches over him even though it may appear that He does not. He may not see the Creator, because his lattice is not a two-way window, but the Beholder is present, nonetheless.

Text: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Cant. 8:7). The Sefath Emeth alludes to the passage in Aboth (5:19): Love which is dependent upon some material cause, with the passing away of that cause, the love too passes away; but if it be not dependent upon such a cause, it will not pass away forever. [Adds the Sefath Emeth:] Such is the love God has for Israel which is dependent upon a cause, *i.e.*, if Israel fulfills His Will, it becomes beloved of God. But the love Israel has for God is dependent upon no cause, for God is within His creatures [and is absolute]. Thus even all the floods can never drown that love.... Physical love is dependent upon a material cause and is therefore transient. Spiritual love is not dependent upon any cause, for it is a part of the Divine.[37]

Even the love God possesses for His creatures is inferior to the unequivocal love man feels for his Creator. Man possesses the potential to excel even the love experienced by God Himself.

Moreover, physical love is relative and conditional. Indeed, if love between the sexes is purely physical, dependent upon physical attraction only, that love must eventually diminish in proportion to the diminishing beauty of the individual involved. But if that love envisions traits beyond the physical and can behold these beautiful qualities of the beloved, though unseen and intangible, it will remain eternally. This is the spiritual love the believer possesses and retains for God, who is his eternal beloved.

EXCERPTS FROM SEFER LIKUTEI YEHUDA

> Text: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Comments Rashi: "This passage almost says, 'interpret me.' The earth was created for the sake of Torah which is called *reishith* (the first) . . . and also because of Israel who is also called *reishith* (the first)." [The Rym interprets Rashi's comment:] The passage itself (*i.e.*, Torah) speaks to man and enjoins him to search, investigate and discover that everything was created on his account, and everything is dependent upon him. Therefore, he must take his life and himself most seriously and do his utmost to fulfill the Creator's Will. Then he can come to know the ultimate purpose of his creation.[38]

The Sefath Emeth plays on the word *Hanukah* which literally means dedication, by suggesting that it may also be derived from the root *h-n-k* which means to train, educate, and prepare. Lighting the first candle is only a preparation for the last days because the miracle of the cruse of oil was not really fulfilled until the last day. "Generally," claims the author, "most deeds and *mitzvoth* train and prepare us to enter the kingdom of God. This is the meaning of the passage in Proverbs (22:6): 'Train the child according to his way.' Prepare him, teach him, and discipline him to walk in the ways of God."[39]

> God performs miracles as an object lesson to man, teaching him that he too can serve God above his natural powers. Man's recognition of a miracle endows him with additional strength to elevate himself beyond his own limited strength and potential.[40]

The Sefath Emeth was less interested in the miracle which is a deviation from natural law, and more interested in the effect that this deviation would have upon the believer. He does not reject the probability of the miracle, but even that is of little import unless it teaches man that he too can exceed his own natural powers and strive to lift himself above them. He need not be imprisoned by the expected, the median, or the average. He can over-reach

even his own expectations through self-confidence and faith.

The Sefath Emeth discusses the reasons for the recitation of the *Hallel* Service on the Festival of Hanukah and differentiates between *hallel* (praise) and *hodayah* (thanksgiving):

> The Talmud (Meg. 14a.) says: "They established the holyday with praise and thanksgiving." This was done to impress upon all Israel, even for generations to come, that everything is dependent upon God. This is the major objective of *avodah* (service) for every Jew. Thus he is enjoined to praise and offer gratitude. Praise is appreciation for God's personal assistance and beneficence to the worshipper. Thanksgiving, however, is offered even in an hour of misfortune.[41]

Jewish law and tradition imposes the recitation of a blessing, even in sorrow. "Blessed be the true Judge" is pronounced upon hearing ill tidings. Judaism asks its faithful to bless the Eternal Judge. It even tells him to thank the Lord, for the judgment may prove to be most prudent, wise, and compassionate. But Judaism does not expect the human being to "praise" God in an hour of grief. This would be inhuman and psychologically hypocritical and unrealistic. Even God, according to legend, refused to hear the exaltations and praise of the Israelites after they crossed the Red Sea, for the victory of Israel had caused God's creatures (the Egyptians) to drown. Jewish law is stern and at times a taskmaster, but it seldom asks man to perform a deed which is psychologically unsound and which would be fulfilled without sincerity.

> Text: "They defiled all the oils" (last verse of *Ma'oz Tzur*). [Comments the Sefath Emeth:] The miracle was [not only that the cruse of oil lasted for eight days but] that they found one cruse whose oil was not defiled. As the Rym explained it: This cruse is an object lesson for man to always bear in mind that a Divine essence remains in him. . . . This "essence" must be found if the individual has sufficient faith that it is present.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Epilogue

Contemporary society is witnessing a development of interest in Judaism (whatever the motivations and the depth of concern). One can also see an increasing amount of experimentation, on many levels, with the mystic experience, and a questioning of its potential role in a rational, existential society. Parallel to these developments, an increased awareness of and interest in Hassidism is also discernable.

Hassidim are often suspect of superficial inquiries and casual research into their philosophy of living. In a negative sense they may justifiably resent the dilettante spirit of some investigators; but in a more positive argument, they maintain that Hassidism is not just a theoretical subject for research. It is a way of life, and must be lived and personally experienced if it is to be understood in any meaningful way.

There are numerous books about Hassidism, and anthologies of the fascinating tales of the *Zaddikim.* Stories can be truly appealing and beautiful, but they cannot really capture the profound essence of an all-embracing way of life.

On the other side of the coin, contemporary Hassidim read Buber, Scholem, Schechter, Kahana, Horodetzky, Minkin, and others, and then ask: "Did our Hassidic forefathers intend all this? Is the seemingly simple Hassidism that we know, really as complex as all this? Is the Hassidic life we experience—apparently so unpretentious and unsophisticated, so artless and simple—truly as involved and mystical as these writers portray it?"



Can one contain an Infinite God in a book?

Many *Zaddikim,* and certainly even more Hassidim, maintain that Buber, for example, though capturing the the spirit of the movement, has made of Hassidism a far more complex, mystical, and profound philosophy than was originally intended by the Besht and his followers. It is doubtful whether a contemporary *Zaddik* reading Buber (this too is presumptuous) would recognize the Besht, or his own father, or even himself in the beautiful but highly philosophical works of the eminent professor. Buber, whose entire life was devoted to research and study of Hassidism, saw in it many elements which may have been alluded to by the *Zaddikim,* but not necessarily intended; at least not as profoundly as espoused by Buber. Buber claims that Hassidism was a unification with the past and a revolution all in one. It is possible that Buber's Hassidism is a retention of basic Hassidic concepts, but totally revolutionized into a neo-Hassidism!

This paradox holds its own answer within it. Scholars like Solomon Schechter, Samuel Horodezky, Abraham Kahana, Simon Dubnow, Moses Hess, Eliezer Zwiefel, Chaim Bloch, Hillel Zeitlin—writers of former days; and Buber, Louis Newman, Jacob Minkin, Menashe Unger, Eliezer Steinman, Yehezkiel Rotenberg, Moshe Scheinfeld, Bezalel Landau, Yitzhak Alfasi, Zvi Kahan, Abraham Bromberg, and a score of others in our generation—have studied and produced an extensive literature on Hassidism. That they found in this movement something more than just a few pithy expressions and witty parables, and were able to build a monumental, spiritual, and intellectual edifice, implies that a foundation, narrow, simple, and uncomplicated as it may have been, must have existed. Hassidism undoubtedly contained the core and kernel of those ideas expanded and intellectualized more succinctly and philosophically by later students of the movement.

There are many modern Jews, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, who see in Hassidism ideas and qualities beneficial to Jewish thought. It cannot be denied that the Hassidic spirit in song and dance has affected modern Orthodoxy. Moreover, the *Zaddik*-Hassid relationship may

well have influenced the pastoral approach of contemporary clergymen. The Reform and Liberal groups in Judaism express keen interest in Hassidism, for they detect in classical Hassidism a protest against the arid legalisms of Jewish law.

While Conservative Judaism is not ready to discard the scholastic approach to Judaism for emotionalism, it is impressed by the multifaceted culture which Hassidism embraced. The Conservative views Judaism as an evolving civilization, and looks to Hassidism for cultural inspiration.

Critics of Hassidism, however, take a negative view of the movement, and deny it any potential influence in modern society.

There is no doubt in the writer's mind that Hassidism *can* survive and prosper in contemporary society, but not in its original form, with its mystical view of the *Zaddik* as the true illuminate. Hassidism must not contain its teachings within the Hassidic ghetto, but must disseminate its way of life to others, by living *with* the populace, and not away from it. It must establish a pastorate of scholars in the Gerer, Kotzker and Sochochover tradition. A transformed Hassidism would be a synthesis of scholarship and elementary Hassidic techniques. The Hassidic schools of Gur and Lubavitch, which have already had some experience in living compatibly within the modern society of the United States and Israel, must counteract the more zealous and conservative sects of Satmer, Belz, Leluv, and Kloizenburg. In order to reach the broad Jewish public, Hassidism will have to forfeit some of its less acceptable external trappings, so that it may win active endorsement of its more essential qualities.

Every experienced and inspiring teacher knows that meaningful pedagogy does not mean teaching a curriculum —it means teaching a child, a person, an individual. If Hassidism were to undertake a wide-spectrum teaching mission to the Jewish world, and keep this guideline in mind, it would mature, grow, and bring blessing to modern Judaism, without losing sight of the values of its founders,

and particularly of one of its outstanding courts—the school of Gur.

It is told that when Rabbi Levi Yitzhak read Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya* for the first time, he exclaimed excitedly: "It is truly amazing that Rabbi Shneur Zalman was able to contain an infinite God in such a small book!"

Our generation may yet see that a relatively small group can contain an infinite blessing.

Notes and References

Chapter One

1. Simon Dubnow, *Toldoth Ha-Hassiduth,* (Tel Aviv, 1930).

2. Samuel A. Horodezky, *Ha-Hassiduth Ve-ha-Hassidim,* (Berlin, 1923), 4 vols.

3. See Louis Newmark, *The Hassidic Anthology,* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1944), p. 536, for list of these shorter studies.

4. See glossary.

5. See glossary.

6. Hassidic leaders were never called *Ha-Rav,* or *Rav,* as the Rabbis were known, but rather *Rebbe, Zaddik,* or *Admor* (*Adoneinu* —our master, *Moreinu*—our teacher, *Rabbeinu*—our Rabbi). Dissertation stylists suggest the elimination of titles and degrees. However, since the *Zaddikim* are designated as "Rabbi" in all scholarly works on Hassidism, liberty is here taken to do the same.

7. Transliteration of the Hebrew will adhere to scholarly style with the exception of two words, *Kadosh, Kedusha,* etc. and *Kabbalah,* using "K" instead of "Qu." These words are transliterated in this fashion by many writers, and more easily read.

Chapter Two

1. Matithyahu Guttman, *Rebbe Yisrael Baal Shem Tov,* (Tel Aviv: Gelander, 1949), p. 6.

2. Jacob Minkin, *The Romance of Hassidism,* (2d ed.; New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1955), p. 86.

3. Louis Newman, *The Hassidic Anthology,* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1944), p. 203.

4. Minkin, pp. 62-63, quoting *Midrash Ribash.*

5. Meyer Levin, *The Golden Mountain,* (New York: Behrman House, 1951), p. 114.

6. Minkin, p. 91.

7. *Ibid.,* p. 95.

8. Meyer Waxman, *A History of Jewish Literature,* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1945), III, 28.

9. Samuel A. Horodezky, *Shivhei HaBesht,* (Berlin, 1922), p. 101.

10. Yekuthiel Arye Kamelhar, *Dor Deah,* (Bilguray, 1933), pp. 1-11.

Chapter Three

1. Waxman, III, 31, quoting *Toldoth Yaakov Yosef* and *Kether Shem Tov.*
2. Baal Shem Tov, *Kether Shem Tov* quoted by Menashe Unger, *Hassiduth Un Leben,* (New York, 1946), p. 96.
3. Waxman, III, 36, quoting Rabbi Barukh, grandson of the Besht, in his name.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Martin Buber, *The Legend of the Baal-Shem,* trans. Maurice Friedman, (New York: Harpers, 1955), p. 23.
6. *Ibid.,* p. 25.
7. Newman, p. 186.
8. Buber, *Tales of the Hassidim—Later Masters,* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 7.
9. Minkin, p. 338.
10. *Ibid.,* p. 354.
11. Buber, Introd. X.

Chapter Four

1. Quoted by Shlomo Shamir, *"Ha-Efshar L'Hankhil La-Dor Hatsair Erkhei Ha-Hassiduth," Panim El Panim* (a magazine) (Sivan, 1961).
2. Nathan Ziprin, "The Root of Hassidism is Spreading Rapidly," *The Jewish Floridian,* p. 10A (July 5, 1963).
3. Minkin, p. 313.
4. Newman, Introd. p. lvii.
5. Shamir interview.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Gershon Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,* (New York: Schocken, 1941), p. 329.
10. *Ibid.,* p. 347.
11. Shamir interview.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Minkin, p. 335.
14. Scholem, p. 342.
15. Shamir interview.
16. Minkin, p. 298.
17. *Ibid.,* p. 313.

Chapter Five

1. Aaron Marcus, *Hassiduth,* (Tel Aviv, 1954), p. 98.
2. Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizensk, *Noam Elimelekh,* (Leluv, 1866).
3. Rabbi J. A. Merdzimin, *Bikkurei Aviv,* (Pietrekov, 1936), introd.

Chapter Six

1. The city was called Gur, the people of the city were called Gerer, "of Gur."

2. A commentary by Rabbi Shabatai Ha-Kohen on *Yoreh Deah*, a book of codes by Rabbi Joseph Karo.

3. The High Priest entered the sanctum sanctorum in the Temple once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when he asked forgiveness first for himself, second for his immediate family, and finally for the community of Israel.

Chapter Seven

1. Alfasi, p. 21.
2. Rokocz, III, 239.
3. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 14.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 6, sec. 17.
5. Goldstein, N. Z. *Ha-Lebanon*, (1868), p. 22.
6. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 55-56. Alfasi (note 2, p. 31) claims that many Gerer Hassidim maintain that the Rym did not journey to Lublin until after the death of the preacher of Koznitz, when the Seer of Lublin was already on his deathbed.
7. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 69.
8. *Ibid.*, I, sec. 70.
9. Buber, *Later Masters*, introd., p. 35.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
12. Alfasi, p. 32.
13. Buber, *Later Masters*, p. 36.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
16. Minkin, p. 355.
17. Alfasi, p. 33.
18. Rokocz, IV, p. 49, sec. 7.
19. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I. sec. 98.
20. *Ibid.*, sec. 100.
21. *Ibid.*, sec. 96.
22. Alfasi, p. 37, quoting Rabbi Shimon Alter.
23. Minkin, p. 353.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 339.
25. There was usually no official registration in European *Yeshivoth*. Students simply attended.
26. Rokocz, II, 17.; Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 120.
27. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, p. 24, sec. 86; Alfasi, p. 42.
28. Great-grandfather of Prof. Abraham Joshua Heschel of the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York.
29. Alfasi, p. 45.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 46; Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 153.

31. *Ibid.*, sec. 161.
32. Alfasi, p. 46.
33. Samuel Shinvar, *Ramathayim Tsofim*, (Warsaw, 1883), p. 243.
34. Alfasi, p. 49.
35. Rokocz, III, 118; Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 187.
36. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 187.
37. Alfasi, p. 51.
38. Buber, *Later Masters*, introd. p. 38.
39. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 195.
40. Rokocz, I, p. 91, sec. 317.
41. Alfasi, p. 52.
42. Buber, *Later Masters*, introd., p. 39.
43. Alfasi, p. 53.
44. Buber, *Later Masters*, introd., p. 39.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
46. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 197.
47. Alfasi, p. 54.
48. Yehezkiel Rotenburg and Moshe Scheinfeld, *Harabi Mikotzk*, (Tel Aviv: Nezah, 1959), p. 38.
49. Buber, *Later Masters*, p. 38.
50. Alfasi, p. 55.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
52. Zvi Yehuda Mamlek, *Abbir Harcoim*, (Pietrekov, 1935), I, 35.
53. Buber, *Later Masters*, p. 40.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
55. Alfasi, p. 57.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 57.
57. Rokocz, III, p. 77, sec. 345.
58. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 422.
59. Buber, *Later Masters*, p. 42.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
62. Alfasi, p. 60.
63. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 378.
64. Alfasi, p. 62. see note 55.
65. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 620.
66. *Ibid.*, sec. 623.
67. *Ibid.*, sec. 624.
68. *Ibid.*, sec. 630.
69. *Ibid.*, secs. 622, 623, 624.
70. *Ibid.*, secs. 622, 624.
71. Rokocz, I, p. 35, sec. 170.
72. One of the four special Sabbaths preceding Passover, upon which the Scriptural Portion of the red heifer is read.
73. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 639.
74. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 606.

75. Shimon Weinrab, "Kotzk," *Haderekh,* (Tel Aviv), Iyar 15, 1943.
76. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah,* II, sec. 623.
77. *Ibid.,* sec. 658.
78. Yeshua Ha-Kohen of Sochochov, *Eits Avoth,* (Warsaw, 1913), p. 18.
79. Warsaw, 5631 (1871).
80. Bromberg, p. 17.
81. *Ibid,* p. 13.
82. *Ibid.*

Chapter Eight

1. Abraham Isaac Bromberg, *Migdolei Ha-Hassiduth—The Sefath Emeth,* (Jerusalem, 1956), p. 18.
2. *Ibid.*
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4. The Sefath Emeth's major works were commentaries and homiletic interpretations of the Pentateuch, Prophets, and Written Works. See Bibliography.
5. Bromberg, p. 19.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.,* p. 25, quoting a letter found in Aryeh Leib's work, *Liqqutim Sefath Emeth.*
8. *Ibid.,* p. 27.
9. For brief accounts of the Sefath Emeth's children and family, see Bromberg's addenda in his third edition (1956).
10. Bromberg, p. 120.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.,* p. 123.

Chapter Nine

1. Buber, *The Later Masters,* p. 8.
2. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah,* II, sec. 473.
3. *Ibid.,* sec. 474.
4. Rokocz, V, 44.
5. Buber, *The Later Masters,* p. 9.
6. Rokocz, V, 44.
7. Bromberg, p. 29.
8. *Ibid.,* p. 30.
9. *Ibid.,* p. 31.
10. Buber, *The Later Masters,* p. 45.

Chapter Ten

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2. Rokocz, I, 18.

3. *Ibid.*
4. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 498.
5. Rokocz, III, sec. 29.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
7. Rokocz, I, 30.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
9. Rokocz, V, sec. 77.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
11. Buber, *Later Masters*, p. 13.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Chapter Eleven

1. Alfasi, p. 66.
2. Rokocz, p. 33.
3. Alfasi, p. 72.
4. Bromberg, p. 48.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11 *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
20. Sefath Emeth, *Days of Penitence*, ed. Leib Heine, (Jerusalem: HaIvri, 1959), p. 1.
21. *Yalkut Shimoni*, I, chap. 21. (Numbers).
22. Aryeh Leib Heine, *Likuttei Yehudah*, (Jerusalem: HaIvri, 1959), p. 74.
23. Bromberg, p. 55.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
28. Bromberg, p. 63.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
33. *Ibid.*

34. Binyamin Mintz, *Rabbeinu MiGur*, (Tel Aviv: Shearim, 1950), pp. 22-23.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

Chapter Twelve

1. *Tikune Zohar*, Tikun 21.
2. *Ibid.*
3. The music for the song is found in *Sefer Haniggunim-Hassidei Habad*, (Brooklyn, 1948), song 22.
4. Menashe Unger, article in *Day-Jewish Journal*, (August 5, 1962), p. 7.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
6. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music* (New York: Holt, 1929), pp. 411-434.
7. Unger, col. 2.
8. S. Kahan, *Essays in Music*, (Mexico, 1956), p. 159; also Y. Rabinowitz, *Jewish Music*, (Montreal, 1940), pp. 81-86.
9. Menashe Unger, *Hassiduth Un Leben*, (New York, 1946), p. 102.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
11. Meir Shimshon Geshuri, "B'Olam Hanigun Shel Ha-Hassiduth," *Yesod* (Heshvan, 1947), p. 83.
12. Meir Shimshon Geshuri, *Me-Qoroth Haniggun Ha-Hassidi*, (Jerusalem, 1945), p. 59.
13. Meir Shimshon Geshuri, *La-Hassidim Mizmor*, (Jerusalem, 1938), p. 28.
14. Alfasi, p. 184.
15. *Ibid.*

Chapter Thirteen

1. Reuben Margoliss, *Sefer Hassidim*, (Lemberg, n.d.), p. 12.
2. Graetz, *History Of The Jews*, IV, 203.
3. *Ibid.*, V, 201.
4. Minkin, pp. 78-79.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
7. Alfasi, p. 169.
8. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 498.
9. *Ibid.*, sec. 581.
10. Rokocz, V, 62; Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 595.
11. Rokocz, V, 62; Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 598.
12. Alfasi, p. 172.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
14. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 601.

Chapter Fourteen

1. Menashe Unger, *Hassiduth Un Leben,* (New York, 1946), pp. 85-86.
2. *Ibid.,* p. 85.
3. Rokocz, III, p. 54, sec. 144.
4. Rym, *Torath Hiddushei Ha-Rym,* p. 16.
5. Rokocz, V, 24.
6. Shinvar, p. 76.

Chapter Fifteen

1. Gliksman, p. 40.
2. *Ibid.,* p. 42.
3. Minkin, p. 92. Also see glossary, *Kavanah.*
4. Rotenberg and Scheinfeld, I, 68.
5. Schwarzman, p. 157.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Buber, *Later Masters,* pp. 42-43.
8. *"Shulhan Arukh,"* lit. a "prepared table," the code of Jewish law, recorded by Rabbi Joseph Caro (1488-1575), to state the law clearly and concisely.
9. *"Hoshen Mishpat,"* lit. "the breast-plate of judgment," borrowed from Exodus 28:15. One of the four *Turim* (rows), a code and compendium of laws dealing with civil legislation, compiled by Rabbi Jacob Ben Asher (1280-1340).
10. Rokocz, I, 96.
11. Gliksman, p. 514.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Rotenberg and Scheinfeld, II, 525.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Schwarzman, p. 151.
16. *Ibid.,* p. 36.
17. Rotenberg and Scheinfeld, I, 424.

Chapter Sixteen

1. Yitzhak Meir Miadonov, *Niflaoth Hadashoth,* (Petrekov, 1897), Exodus, p. 31.
2. Yehuda Kaminer, *Degel Yehuda,* (Warsaw, 1939), Sidrah Jethro in Leviticus, p. 98.
3. Samuel Shinvar, *Ramathim Tsofim,* (Warsaw, 1883), p. 24.
4. Miadonov, p. 23.
5. Rokocz, I, p. 75, sec. 453.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Maimonides, *Shemona Perakim,* chap. III.
8. Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, *Sefath Emeth Al Ha-Torah,* ed. by

his grandchildren, (New York: Shulsinger, 1953), Genesis, Sidrah Toldoth, sec. 631.

9. Yitzhak Meir Alter, *Torah Hiddushei Ha-Rym,* ed. by Yitzhak L. Lewin, (Jerusalem, 1950), p. 5.

10. Rokocz, I, p. 17, sec. 12.

11. Maimonides, "Laws of Penitence," *Yad Hazakah,* chap. 2, law 2.

12. Rokocz, III, p. 62, sec. 192.

13. Berakhoth 34b: *Bemakom shebaalei teshuva omdin ein zaddikim gemurim yekholin la-amod.*

14. Shinvar, I, 55.

15. Rokocz, I, p. 85, sec. 453.

16. Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, *Sefath Emeth Al Elul VeRosh Hashanah,* ed. by Yehuda Leib Heine (Jerusalem: HaIvri, 1958), p. 6.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

23. Alter, *Sefath Emeth Al Hatorah,* Deuteronomy, Sidra Shoftim.

24. Israel Berger, *Simhat Yisrael,* (Tel Aviv, 1953), p. 45.

25. Rokocz, p. 5.

26. Rokocz, I, 104.

27. Israel Aratin, *Emeth Ve'emunah,* (Jerusalem, 1949), p. 20, sec. 134.

28. The *Zohar* on Numbers, sec. 145.

29. Nahum of Tschernobol, *Meor Einayim,* (Warsaw, 1877), Ex. II.

30. Rokocz, II, p. 108, sec. 410.

31. Israel Aratin, *Torath Hamidoth,* (Jerusalem, 1943), p. 418.

32. Alter, *Sefath Emeth Al Hatorah,* Genesis, Sidrah Vayishlah, sec. 632.

33. Rym, *Sefer Hazekhuth* on *Orah Hayim,* sec. 2.

34. Yitzhak A. Feigenboim, *Zekher Zaddik,* (Warsaw, 1905), V, sec. 4.

Chapter Seventeen

1. Reb Meirel of Apte, *Or Lashamayim,* quoted by Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah,* II, sec. 561.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 59, sec. 579.

3. Bromberg, p. 36.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. Milton Steinberg, *Sermons,* ed. by Bernard Mandelbaum, (New York: Bloch, 1954), p. 136.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 546.
9. *Ibid.*, quoting the Rym, *Sefer Hazekhuth*, on *Sidra Shoftim*, p. 45.
10. Rokocz, I, p. 18, sec. 77.
11. Rokocz, *Ibid.*, quoting the Rym on *Sidra Emor*, Leviticus 28.
12. Rokocz, *Ibid.*, quoting the Rym on *Sidra B'Halothekha*, p. 33.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Minkin, p. 157.
15. Bromberg, p. 40.

Chapter Eighteen

1. Yehuda Halevi, *Kuzari*, II, 16.
2. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 139.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Samuel Brot, "Gur," *Ha-Mezapeh, Jubilee Edition*, (1950), p. 431.
5. Yitzhak Meir, *Sefer Hazekhuth*, quoted by Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, 36.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Bromberg, p. 102.
8. Second paragraph of *Birkat Hamazon, Al she-hinkhalto lavotheinu erets*, etc.
9. Bromberg, pp. 102-103.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
11. See *Shivhei Besht*, or *Yisrael, Adath Zaddikim*, and others.
12. Guttman, *Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov*, p. 44.
13. The letter was first publicized in the Hebrew Journal *Zefirath* (1899), and then in *Yiddishe Rundshav* I (1922), p. 85.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Return to the Holy Land was always considered *aliyah*, "going up."
16. Bromberg, p. 109.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 111.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Mintz, *Rabbeinu Migur*, pp. 57-60.
22. In Israel, only the first and last day are observed as holidays prohibiting work. Only one *Seder* Service is held.
23. Moshe Yehezkeili, *Nes Ha-hazalah Shel Ha-Rebbi Migur*, (Jerusalem: Yeshurun, 1959), p. 12.

Chapter Nineteen

1. Solomon Schechter, quoted by Morris Silverman, *High Holyday Prayerbook*, (Hartford: Prayerbook Press, 1939), p. 99.

2. Rokocz, *Siah Sarfei Kodesh*, I, 31, sec. 34.
3. *Sefath Emeth Al Torah*, II, 85.
4. Bromberg, p. 86, quoting Midrash Rabba.
5. Bromberg, pp. 86-87.

Chapter Twenty

1. Minkin, p. 351.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 352.
3. Shimon Dubnow, *Divrei Y'mei Yisrael B'doroth Ha-ahronim*, (Poland), I, pp. 192-197.
4. Max Raisin, *The Haskalah Movement*, (Philadelphia, 1913), pp. 222-225.
5. *Zohar*, on Genesis, *Sidra Vayera*, p. 117.
6. Benjamin Rivlin, "Eulogy On The Wilner Gaon," *Hazon Zion*, (Jerusalem, 1947), p. 36.
7. Rokocz, VI, sec. 70.
8. Minkin, pp. 352-353.
9. Rokocz, I, sec. 580.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
11. Shabtai Weiss, *M'otzar HaMahshava Shel Ha-Hassiduth*, (Jerusalem, 1956), p. 114.
12. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, 623.
13. Bromberg, p. 114.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
15. Mintz, *Rabbeinu MiGur*, pp. 24-25.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

Chapter Twenty-One

1. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, I, sec. 257.
2. *Ibid.*, I, sec. 276.
3. Alfasi, p. 110.
4. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah*, II, sec. 562.
5. Sabbath 6b, the *Tosephoth* (Addenda), beginning, *Ve-amar Rebbe Yehuda*, etc.
6. Commentary on Sabbath 139b.
7. Sabbath 41b, Rashi, beginning *Elo velo*, etc.
8. Commentaries on Talmud and Bible.
9. Responsa of the Rym on *Eben HaEzer*, par. 2.
10. Rabbi Rezechto, *Bikkurei Shlomo Al Eben HaEzer*, II, Law 1.
11. "The Lips of Abraham." Law 41, discussion on circumcision.
12. See Law 25, in this book, dealing with the subject of a castrated individual.

Chapter Twenty-Two

1. Alter, *Meir Einei Ha-Golah,* introd.
2. Alter, Vol. II, Addenda, p. 97.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.,* p. 99.
9. *Ibid.,* p. 100.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.,* p. 101.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.,* p. 102.
15. *Ibid.,* p. 103.
16. *Ibid.,* p. 93.
17. Referring to the *Kedusha* Prayers of the *Musaf* Service and quoting Isaiah 6:3.
18. Rockocz, IV, p. 23, sec. 37.
19. *Ibid.,* sec. 39.
20. *Ibid.,* p. 28, sec. 59.
21. *Ibid.,* p. 29, sec. 68.
22. *Ibid.,* p. 32, sec. 85.
23. *Ibid.,* p. 35, sec. 105.
24. *Ibid.,* p. 40.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Rym, *Torath Hiddushei HaRym,* p. 7.
27. *Ibid.,* p. 9.
28. Rym, *Merom HaRym,* p. 5; and Alter, *Sefath Emeth on Genesis, Sidra Hayei Sarah.*
29. Samson Weiss, *Otsar Hamahshavah Shel HaHasidduth,* (Tel Aviv, 1949), p. 43.
30. Shinvar, *Ramathim Tsofim,* on Elijah Zuta, p. 75, sec. 38.
31. Rokocz, III, 58.

Chapter Twenty-Three

1. Sefath Emeth, *Genesis,* p. 6.
2. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Timeless Torah,* ed., Jacob Butler, (New York: Phillip Feldheim Inc., 1957).
3. Sefath Emeth, *Genesis,* p. 6.
4. Rashi undoubtedly notes the addition of *Adonai* to *Elohim* in the second chapter of Genesis, the first mentioning only *Adonai* (Jehovah). This is the traditional response to Biblical critics' Jahwistic and Elohistic theories.
5. Sefath Emeth, *Genesis,* p. 8.

6. Aron Barth, *The Modern Jew Faces Eternal Problems,* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Post Press, 1956) p. 178.
7. Sefath Emeth, *Deuteronomy,* p. 1.
8. *Ibid.,* p. 3.
9. *Ibid.,* p. 6.
10. *Ibid.,* p. 18.
11. *Ibid.,* p. 19.
12. *Ibid.,* p. 20.
13. *Ibid.,* p. 21.
14. *Ibid.,* p. 30.
15. *Ibid.,* pp. 32-33.
16. Sefath Emeth, *Leemey Hateshuvah Ulyom Kippur—Liqquttey Yehuda,* ed., Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine, (Jerusalem: HaIvri, 1959), p. 41.
17. *Ibid.,* pp. 44-45.
18. *Ibid.,* p. 50.
19. *Liqquttey Yehuda,* lit. the compilations of Yehuda (Heine), are included in the same book, *Sefath Emeth Leemey Hateshuvah,* ed. by Heine.
20. *Ibid.,* p. 62.
21. *Bereshith Rabba,* 84:18.
22. *Liqquttey Yehuda,* p. 67.
23. *Ibid.,* p. 68.
24. *Liqquttey Yehuda,* p. 77.
25. *Ibid.,* p. 79.
26. *Ibid.,* p. 81.
27. *Ibid.,* p. 88.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.,* p. 101.
30. *Shir Ha-shirim Im Peirush Sefath Emeth,* ed. Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine (Jerusalem, 1955), p. 6.
31. *Ibid.,* p. 20.
32. *Ibid.,* pp. 30-31.
33. *Ibid.,* p. 41.
34. *Ibid.,* p. 43.
35. *Ibid.,* p. 48.
36. *Ibid.,* p. 52.
37. *Ibid.,* p. 116.
38. *Sefer Liqquttey Yehuda,* ed. Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine, (Jerusalem: HaIvri, 1961), p. 7.
39. *Sefath Emeth LeHanukkah,* ed. Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine, (Jerusalem: HaIvri, 1957), pp. 5-6.
40. *Ibid.,* p. 21.
41. *Ibid.,* p. 23.

Glossary of Hebrew and Aramaic Words and Terms

ADMOR, pl. ADMORIM: Hassidic Rabbi, an abbreviation of the words, *Adoneinu, Moreinu, Ve-Rabbeinu,* our master, teacher, and rabbi.

AGGADAH: The narratives, parables, and legends of the Talmud, in contradistinction to the *halakhah,* the legal portions.

AMORA, pl. AMORAIM: Sages in the Gemara, the discussions following the Mishnah in the Talmud. Rabbis of the Mishnah were called *Tannaim.*

ARI HAKADOSH: The Holy Ari, abbreviation of Ashkenazi Rabbi Isaac (Luria), the leading *Kabbalist* of the sixteenth century, who taught an ascetic form of worship of God. (1534-1572).

BAAL-SHEM: Lit. "master of the Name," one who healed with amulets, signs, herbs, and calling on the Name of God.

BAAL-SHEM TOV: Israel, the Besht, founder of Hassidism—the only one to whom the word *Tov* (good Name) was added.

BETH HA-MIDRASH: Lit. "the house of study," as the Hassidic *Rebbe's* synagogue was usually called. Hassidim prayed, ate, studied, and danced in it.

BRAKHAH, pl. BRAKHOTH: Blessing recited preceding or succeeding the fulfillment of a commandment.

DARSHAN, pl. DARSHANIM; also DERUSH: A homiletic interpreter or interpretation of Scriptures or Talmud.

DVEIKUTH: Lit. "cleaving," in Hassidism a concept of cleaving unto God, establishing rapport with Him.

DIASPORA: Reference to the *Golah,* exile, or dispersion of the people of Israel among the nations of the world.

DVAR TORAH: A discussion about the Torah, usually based on a Scriptural or Talmudic comment.

DYBBUK: In *Hassidic* and mystical vernacular, the demon or a deceased's spirit or soul inhabiting the body of a living being.

ELOHIM: One designation of God, in this sense the God of justice, as in Genesis 1:1.

EIN SOF: The Infinite One, God, who is without limitations; employed in Jewish philosophy, but especially in mysticism and *Habad Hassidism.*

ERETZ YISRAEL: The land of Israel.

ETHROG: The citron, the "fruit of goodly trees" (Lev. 23:40), used in the ceremonies of the Feast of Tabernacles.

GABBAI, pl. GABBAIM: Usually the sexton or secretary of the *Hassidic Rebbe* and his court.

GALUTH: Exile, the dispersion of Israel among the nations outside of its own land.

GAON, pl. GAONIM: Lit. "genius," referring to a great talmudic scholar. Previously, the title of religious leaders and scholars in Gaonic period, during the 8th, 9th and 10th century C.E.

GEMARA: The discussions in the Talmud as distinguished from the Mishnah.

GE'ULAH: Redemption, that period when Israel will be redeemed and live in total peace.

HABAD: Lit. an acrostic of *Hokhmah* (wisdom), *Binah* (understanding), and *Daath* (knowledge); the *Hassidic* sect established by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of the city of Ladi in Russia.

HALAKHA: See *Aggadah.*

HASSID, pl. HASSIDIM: A disciple, follower, or believer in *Hassidism,* the *Rebbe,* or the movement. Also, literally in religious vocabulary: the pious.

HASSIDISM: The pietistic movement founded by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov.

HASSIDUTH: *Hassidism.*

HASKALAH: The movement of "enlightenment," an attempt to bring secular knowledge and discipline into Jewish education. Thus, *maskilim* were the founders and participants in this movement.

HEVLEI MASHIAH: Lit., "the woes of Messiah," later the sufferings of humanity, especially Jews, preceding the Messianic era.

HEDER, pl. HADARIM: Lit. "a room," as the elementary school of Jewish learning was called, usually held in one small room.

HITHLAHABUTH: The zeal, ecstasy, or religious enthusiasm experienced by the *Hassid* who captures its spirit.

HOZEH: Visionary or Seer.

KABBALAH: Lit. "what has been received," term used for Jewish mysticism, at one time the dominant theology of Judaism.

KADDISH: Lit. "holy," the prayer recited for the deceased; a doxology.

KAVANAH, pl. KAVANOTH: Full devotion, concentration, and intention directed towards God while fulfilling a religious act, especially prayer.

KEDUSHAH: Lit. "holiness" or "sanctification," a basic concept in Jewish theology; also referring to the most important portion of the Eighteen Benedictions in Jewish liturgy. The central concept of Jewish theology is *Kedushah* or holiness.

KIDDUSH: Lit. "sanctification," the benediction pronounced over wine on Friday night, or Holyday nights.

MAGGID, pl. MAGGIDIM: Preacher, usually itinerant community preachers.

MASHAL, pl. MESHALIM: An example, illustration, parable, proverb, etc.

MASHIAH: Lit. "the anointed one," ref. to kings of Israel and priests who were anointed. Later, changed to the Messiah who will bring an end to the exile of Israel and usher in the Messianic era.

MATZAH, pl. MATZOTH: Unleavened bread.

MELAMMED: The teacher of children.

MELAVEH MALKAH: Lit. "to usher out the queen," the *Hassidic* meal on Saturday night which bids farewell to the Sabbath Queen.

MENORAH, pl. MENOROTH: Seven-branched candelabrum used in the Synagogue, or the candelabrum on Hanukah.

MIDRASH, pl. MIDRASHIM: Exposition or interpretation, books devoted to homiletic exegesis of Scriptures, legends, similes, parables of talmudic and post-talmudic times.

MINHAH: Lit. "meal offering," today referring to the afternoon service, replacing the offering in the Temple in Jerusalem.

MINYAN: A quorum of ten men needed for public worship.

MISHNAH: The basic law of the Talmud, edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince.

MITHNAGED, pl. MITHNAGEDDIM: Lit. "opponent" or "antagonist," all those opposed to *Hassidism,* usually in Lithuania.

MITZVAH, pl. MITZVOTH: Lit. a "commandment;" figuratively, the performance of a good deed.

MOFTHIM: Miracles performed by the *Rebbe.*

MUSSAF: "Addition," referring to the additional morning service on the Sabath, Holydays and New Moon.

NEILAH: Lit. "closing," the concluding prayers and last service on the Day of Atonement.

NESHAMAH YETHEIRAH: The additional soul given to man on the Sabbath Day.

NIGGUN, pl. NIGGUNIM: A melody or popular song introduced by a *Hassidic Rebbe* or court.

NISSIM VNIFLAOTH: Miracles and wonders.

OLAM HABA: The world to come, the next world, in contradistinction to *Olam Hazeh,* this world preceding death.

PEOTH: Earlocks worn by Orthodox Jews, usually among *Hassidim.*

PIDYON: Lit. "redemption of the *Quittel,*" the contribution given to the *Hassidic Rebbe* for prayers or advice, given usually after a note of request, see *Quittel.*

PILPUL, pl. PILPULIM: Lit. "sharp as a pepper," referring to intricate and complex talmudic lectures and discussions.

QUITTEL: Lit. "a prayer note," referring to the note of request given by the *Hassid* to the *Rebbe*, usually through his sexton. The note included the name of the *Hassid*, his mother's name and the request.

RASHI: Abbreviation for Rabbi Shlomo Ben Yitzhak, classical commentator on the Bible and Babylonian Talmud (died 1105).

RAV: Lit. "teacher," the Rabbi, pl. *Rabbanim*, the leader of the religious community.

REBBE, pl. REBBEIM: Lit. "teacher," but the special title given to the *Hassidic* Rabbi. See *Zaddik*.

SABBATAI ZEVI: Proclaimed himself Messiah in the seventeenth century, proven a hoax and embraced Islam. Central figure in the greatest Messianic movement in Jewish history. *Sabbatians* were followers of Sabbatai Zevi.

SEDER: Lit. "order," the family home service on Passover eve in which the exodus from Egypt is recounted.

SEFIROTH: The mystical hierarchy of ten creative powers emanating from God, in the Kabbalistic system.

SELIHOTH: Penitential prayers, usually before and during the High Holydays.

SEUDAH SHLISHITH: The third of the three required meals of the Sabbath; the first on Friday night, the second Saturday noon after the morning services, and the third between the afternoon and evening services.

SHABBATH: The Sabbath.

SHABBATH SHUVAH: The Sabbath of penitence, falling between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*.

SHABUOTH: Lit. "weeks," the Feast of Pentecost, seven weeks after Passover, recalling the revelation of Torah at Mount Sinai.

SHEKHINAH: Divine Spirit inhabiting a place (*Makom*) in the physical world, or Divine Presence among men.

SHIFLUTH: Humility, a basic moral concept in *Hassidic* thought.

SHIRAYIM: The Hassidic Rebbe left over most of his portion of every course during the traditional Sabbath meal (*tish*). Eating the *Rebbe's* leftovers or sharing in his meal would bring good fortune to the *Hassid*.

SHOFAR: Ram's horn sounded on *Rosh Hashanah*.

SHTIBBEL: Lit. "room," referring to the small synagogue of the *Hassidic Rebbe*.

SHULHAN ARUKH: Lit. "prepared table," the book of Jewish Law or codes written in the sixteenth century.

SIMHAT TORAH: Rejoicing in the Law, feast on the day following Sukkoth, celebrating the conclusion of reading the Pentateuch.

SIMHAH, pl. SIMHOTH: Joyous occasions, or the joy of performing a *mitzvah*.

SUKKAH, pl. SUKKOTH: Lit. "booths," referring to the Feast of

Tabernacles on the fifth day after the day of Atonement, recalling the sojourn of the Israelites in the desert.

TAANITH: A fast day.

TALLITH, pl. TALLEITHIM: Prayer shawl to which *Tsitsith* or fringes are attached in its four corners. The shawl is worn by men during prayer.

TALMID HAKHAM, pl. TALMIDEI HAKHAMIM: Lit. "wise students," usually a learned disciple, a sage, a scholar.

TALMUD: Lit. "learning," or "teaching." Collection of the oral law compiled during the first centuries of the common era. These oral teachings, traditionally Divinely revealed, interpret the written Scriptural laws. The *Talmud* includes both the laws of the *Mishnah*, edited by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, and the *Gemara*, the discussions of these laws. Two versions of the *Gemara*, which includes both law and legend, were compiled; the *Jerusalem Talmud* written in Western Aramaic, and the *Babylonian Talmud*, written in Eastern Aramaic.

TANNA, pl. TANNAIM: Lit. "teacher," the sages of the *Mishnah*.

TASHLIKH: Lit. to "cast off," ceremony on the second day of *Rosh Hashana*, casting crumbs of bread into the waters symbolizing the casting away of sins.

TEFILAH, pl. TEFILOTH: Prayer.

TEFILIN: Phylacteries, leather cubes containing scriptural texts inscribed on parchment, and donned by male worshippers at morning services.

TEKIAH, pl. TEKIOTH: The sounding of the ram's horn.

TESHUVAH: Lit. "returning," or "penitence," man's returning to God from his transgressions. It is the basic concept of self-redemption.

TISH: Lit. "table," the *Hassidic Rebbe's* traditional meal with his *Hassidim*, usually on Friday night. There he preached, sang, danced and ate with his devotees.

TISHAH BE-AV: Lit. the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av, a day of fasting and mourning recalling the destruction of the first Temple in 586 B.C.E. by Nebuchadnezzar, and the second Temple in 70 C.E. by Titus.

TORAH: Lit. "teaching," "law," referring to both the written and oral law, but particularly to the Pentateuch. Also refers to the *Sefer Torah*, the scroll contained in the *Aron Kodesh* or Holy Ark. Studying any subject of Jewish sacred literature is called "studying" or "learning" Torah.

TOSAFOTH: "additional" commentaries on the Talmud included in every talmudic tractate.

TOSEFTA: "additional" laws supplementing the *Mishnah*.

VAAD ARBA HA-ARATZOT: Council of the four lands, whose dissolution created that political and administrative vacuum which made the time ripe for the progress of *Hassidism*.

YESHIVA, pl. YESHIVOTH: A higher school of Jewish religious learning.

YHVH: The tetragrammaton for the name of God, which may not be pronounced. "Adonai," is usually substituted.

YIDDISH: The vernacular spoken by most, if not all, European Jews, related to medieval German, but containing many Hebrew words and expressions.

YOM KIPPUR: The Day of Atonement, falling on the tenth day of the fall month of *Tishri* and climaxing the ten days of penitence, inaugurated by *Rosh Hashanah*, the New Year.

ZADDIK, pl. ZADDIKIM: Lit. the righteous Jew, but in *Hassidism* designating the *Rebbe*, Master and leader of a *Hassidic* community, dynasty, or court. In Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) the *Zaddik* or "proven one" was the mediator between God and Man.

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