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## THE ROLE OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER IN 20TH CENTURY HABAD

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The emphasis of the early Habad school of Hasidism on contemplative prayer is well known. Rabbi Seneur Zalman (d. 1812), the founder of the movement presented several alternative approaches to contemplation in his work *Liqqutei Amaram* and in his discourses. The second generation of Habad was particularly rich in its exploration of and argument about issues relating to contemplative prayer. There is discussion of approaching contemplation in a "general" way, or a "detailed" way,<sup>1</sup> and questions about the different goals to be achieved through contemplation: whether *bitul*, mystical self-abnegation, or heartfelt, emotional ecstasy. Then there are different approaches to the question whether such ecstasy is spurious or genuine. All this has been extensively discussed by Rachel Ellor and other scholars.<sup>2</sup> Our question today concerns not this earlier period but the 20th century. This was a time of increasing secularisation and ferment in the Jewish community. Secular movements such as the Russian Jewish Enlightenment,<sup>3</sup> Zionism and Bundism were growing. In this atmosphere, would Habad mystical contemplation disappear, as part of a natural process of modernization? If it did not, why not?

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<sup>1</sup> The terms are used in R. Seneur Zalman's introduction to the second section of *Tanya*, and are amplified in R. Dob Ber, *S'ar ha-yehud*, published in *Ner m'yvach ve-Torah*, or, Brooklyn, 1974, fol. 4b.  
<sup>2</sup> See R. Ellor, *The Theory of Opposites: The Mystical Theosophy of Habad*, Jerusalem, 1982 (in Heb.); *idem*, *Unity of Opposites: The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, New York, 1993; R. A. Foxbrunner, *Habad: the Hasidism of R. Seneur Zalman of Lyady*, Alabama, 1992; N. Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite, the Emergence of the Habad School*, Chicago, 1990; Dob Baer Seneur, *Ta'at on Ecstasy*, tr. L. Jacobs, London, 1963.  
<sup>3</sup> This organisation is often cited in the Habad texts of the turn of the 20th century. While it was founded in 1863, its period of major expansion began in the 1890s.

Our thesis is that Habad contemplation in prayer in fact underwent a revival around the year 1900. This took place in the context of a deliberate response to increasing secularization. At the same time, certain features of contemplation which come to the fore in study of this process throw light on the earlier form of Habad contemplation. In particular this emphasises the link between what is generally seen as the lonely, individual contemplative and the wider Hasidic community.

We are speaking of a society which claimed to be "traditional", meaning that, in its point of view, its belief and value systems have not changed from the past. Nonetheless, our starting point is the process of secularization.

Max Weber's famous thesis of the "disenchantment" of the world implicit in the process of modernity is relevant here. Taking this idea further, secularization has been defined as "a decline or dilution of other-worldliness".<sup>4</sup> Precisely this is the issue, for while one might claim belief in the other-worldly, the transformation of consciousness to which contemplative prayer can lead requires not only belief but some kind of *experience*. Thus a person could believe that reciting Psalms or procuring a blessing from a Hasidic Rebbe were effective ways of dealing with problems such as illness, and would act energetically on the basis of belief, but caught in the increasingly intensive economic hurly burly of daily life, in which to an ever increasing extent, time could be turned into money, might find it difficult to experience *hitpa' alit* (ecstasy, or enthusiasm) in prayer.<sup>5</sup> He might also be quite reluctant to spend valuable time in trying to do so.

Despite this Rabbi Šalom Dob Ber Schneersohn, fifth leader of the Lubavitch line of Habad, around the year 1900 produced a number of tracts concerning contemplation and related topics. This was part of a revival and broadening of the contemplative ideal. The immediate recipients and readers of these tracts were the students of the new Yešibah, called *Tomkey Temimim*, set up in Lubavitch in 1897. This Yešibah was distinguished by making the study of Hasidic

<sup>4</sup> See S. Sharot, "Magic, Religion, Science and Secularization", in: J. Neusner, E. S. Frenichs, P. Virgil McCracken Flesher (eds.), *Religion, Science and Magic in Context and in Conflict*, New York, 1989, p. 272.

<sup>5</sup> See Sharot, *art. cit.*, pp. 261-263, for discussion of attempts to distinguish differing

mystical works an integral part of the curriculum, together with the conventional study of Talmud and Codifiers. Apart from the students in the Yešibah, R. Šalom Dob Ber's tracts on prayer also had an effect on the broader community of Lubavitch followers living in a wide area from Riga in the north-west to Rostov Don in the south-east.<sup>6</sup>

R. Šalom Dob Ber explains in a letter why the Yešibah was founded. He complains about the increasing secularisation of the students studying Torah at other, unnamed Yešibot—a point corroborated by the memoirs of Ben Zion Dinour.<sup>7</sup> As a result, says R. Šalom Dob Ber, many of the student rabbis produced by the Yešibot "are beardless, mocking the words of the Sages and especially of the Zohar and qabbalistic works" and inclined to be permissive in matters of Jewish law, factors which, he warns, will have a corresponding effect on the wider Jewish community.

The Tomkey Temimim Yešibah was therefore seen by its founder as combating the secularization of the time. A key aspect of this *kulturkampf* was the Habad path of contemplative prayer which was taught in the Yešibah. Rabbi Šalom Dob Ber wrote a number of tracts concerning contemplation, of which the most important is *Qvntres ha-tefillah* written in 1900 and distributed in mimeographed form. Some time later his son, Rabbi Joseph Isaac, wrote an introduction to this, in which he describes the revival of contemplation in the Habad community. R. Joseph Isaac, the Sixth Rebbe, was himself a key mover in the recreation of the contemplative ideal in the modern world. Letters to him are extant from his father discussing questions concerning contemplative prayer. Two letters from the spring of 1900 discuss *hitpa' alit* (ecstasy) in a personal way,<sup>8</sup> one dealing with the question of such intense *hitpa' alit* that the contemplative faints!

<sup>6</sup> See R. Joseph Isaac Schneerson, *Qvntres u-ma'ayan mi-beyt ha-Šem*, Brooklyn, 1958, Introduction, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> See B. Z. Dinour, *Be-šlam še-šaqaf*, Jerusalem, 1958, p. 71, reproduced in: E. Etkes (ed.), *Mosad ha-yešibah be-šilhey yemey ha-beynyim uše-ét ha-hadashah*, Jerusalem, 1989, p. 164.

<sup>8</sup> *Qvntres ha-tefillah* was later printed in Vilna, 1924. In 1937 it began to be serialized in the Habad journal published in Warsaw, *ha-Tamim*. Then it was republished in Brooklyn, 1942, 1956 and subsequently. In 1992 an English translation by E. Danziger was published in Brooklyn, entitled *Tract on Prayer*.

<sup>9</sup> See Sharot, *Admur R. Šalom Dob Ber*, vol. 1, Brooklyn, 1982, pp. 222-225.

In his introduction to *Qunires ha-tefillah*, R. Joseph Isaac enumerates the important factors in the revival of contemplation. One was the founding of the Yešibáh, which is obvious. Another, which is rather surprising, was the production in 1898–9 of a tract ostensibly on a different topic: that of human relationships.

This tract called *Ma'amar hehalsá*<sup>10</sup> presents the theme of *biñtál*, selflessness, as a necessary adjunct to association with other people: otherwise one falls into causeless hatred. The result of social conflict is that one does not feel sympathy for the pain of the other person nor join with him in his joy.<sup>11</sup>

The antidote to this is friendship, which is achieved through *biñtál*: intimate friendship in which people are able to help each other conquer such problems of the spirit. This process itself helps a person overcome their inner pride and separateness from others.<sup>12</sup>

Complementing this apparently purely social theme, another aspect of this tract *Ma'amar hehalsá* concerns the idea that *biñtál* is necessary in the process of contemplation. The paradox of the quest for spiritual enthusiasm is that it can lead to a sense of selfishness and pride, or even envy.<sup>13</sup> Through *biñtál* one reaches intimations of the realm of the Tetragrammaton, characterised by unity and integration.<sup>14</sup> In this context the discourse provides guidance for contemplative prayer. By careful self-scrutiny and thorough clearing out of every particle of causeless hatred "one will be able to walk securely on the path of contemplative prayer with the quality of *biñtál* and purification of one's feelings."<sup>15</sup>

According to Rabbi Joseph Isaac, the effect of this discourse primarily concerning social unity and of another talk on the topic of prayer by R. Šalom Dob Ber<sup>16</sup> was that many members of the com-

<sup>10</sup> The title comes from Num. 31, 3. The tract was a discourse recited by R. Šalom Dob Ber in the autumn of 1898 (on *Simhat Tórah*) and repeated a few weeks later. It was then issued in mimeographed copies. The first printed version was in Brooklyn, 1948, another edition appeared in Kfar Habad, 1972. It is also collected in *Sefer ha-m'amarim 5659*, Brooklyn, 1976, pp. 53–81. An English translation by Uri Kaploun was published in Brooklyn, 1988, entitled *Maamar Hehalsá*—*A Chassidic Discourse on Ahavas Yisrael*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ma'amar hehalsá*, ch. 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 14–15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 12–14; 18–20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 16.

<sup>16</sup> A brief fragment of this talk survives: "Torah and prayer are two completely separate worlds & . . . Not only are they separate in time, that the times of Torah

munity began trying to engage in contemplative prayer, and addressed questions to the Rebbe as to how to do this. This explains, says R. Joseph Isaac, the opening words of the *Qunires ha-tefillah*: "Since all members of the community are enquiring and seeking how to pray . . . I decided to explain this a little."<sup>17</sup>

*Qunires ha-tefillah* provides guidance for several varieties of contemplative prayer. It addresses itself both to the adult scholars in the community, and also, in a different way, to those who are heavily pre-occupied businessmen.<sup>18</sup> Yet another kind of directive is given to the youthful students at the Yešibáh.<sup>19</sup> The tract discusses demanding modes of contemplation, leading to intense feelings of *biñtál* "like a stone"<sup>20</sup> and *tzubrokhenkayt*—"broken"—and also more easily accessible paths.<sup>21</sup> The general thrust of the work emphasises the "detailed" style of contemplation taught by R. Šeneur Zalman and R. Dob Ber nearly a century earlier, and recommends finding time to be alone, spending "an hour or two" thinking deeply in a contemplative manner, not necessarily at the time of prayer.<sup>22</sup> The tract makes clear it is concerned with the contemplative discovering real enthusiasm.<sup>23</sup>

Moshe Idel has discussed the change in attitude to the Qabbalah which preceded the rise of Hāsīdism in the 18th century. The qabbalistic texts had become the objects of simplistic scholarship rather than a source of tangible spirituality. Early Hāsīdism was a reaction against this, a return to spiritual experience.<sup>24</sup> There is a sense in which the revivalist movement of contemplative prayer in 1900 was mirroring this process.

[study] and of prayer are separate, but they are even distinguished by having different melodies. The melody of Torah [study] is not the same as the melody of prayer". See R. Šalom Dob Ber, *Tórah šalóm, Sefer ha-sihót*, Brooklyn, 1946, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Qunires ha-tefillah*, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 16.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 10–11.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Thus it deals with the problem of a person who is unable to pray with enthusiasm despite the intellectual effort he has invested. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Moshe Idel, "Perceptions of Qabbalah in the second half of the 18th century", *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1, (1991), pp. 59, 67–8. The question of spiritual experience as opposed to academic scholarship is also addressed by R. Mešulam Feibúš of Zbaraz, as discussed by Prof. Roland Goetschel in this volume.

In Ḥabad history there is considerable significance in the distinction between "before Peterburg" and "after Peterburg" meaning before or after the arrest and liberation of R. Šeneur Zalman around 1800. This watershed is usually seen as marking the beginning of the full force of Ḥabad teachings.<sup>25</sup> In a talk in 1900, R. Šalom Doh̄ Ber spoke about this in unusually denigrating terms: "In general, intellectualism began with Peterburg; Peterburg was a strong concealment and hiding of the radiance of Ḥasīdūt. Before Peterburg people would be inspired by the Rebbe's discourse, that means: then the essence of the radiance of Ḥasīdūt shone. After Peterburg intellectualising began, and intellectualising means, in general, concealing the radiance."<sup>26</sup> R. Šalom Doh̄ Ber's demand was, somewhat, to rediscover the radiance. *Ver nispo'el!* he said:—"be inspired!". "We have to transform ourselves. And without contemplation, one cannot transform oneself". His demand was not just for scholarship, but for inner spiritual response.

#### The *Farbrengen*

However, there was also another factor in the process of the revival of the art of contemplation: this was the development and institutionalization of a social structure, the Ḥasīdic *farbrengen*.

R. Nahūm Šemariah Sassonkin (1889–1975) was a student in the Yešibāh in Lubavitch during the period we are discussing. In his memoirs<sup>27</sup> he devotes a chapter to the concept of a *farbrengen*, or in Hebrew *hitva'adūt*.

Sassonkin did not come from a Ḥasīdic family and states that his first experience of a *hitva'adūt* was among "Polish" Ḥasīdim in Kishinev, in 1905. They would say *le-ḥayim*, sing Ḥasīdic melodies, and tell stories about *šaddiqim*.<sup>28</sup> He enjoyed these tremendously, but discovered a further level of *hitva'adūt* in Lubavitch. He describes a *farbrengen* as a form of spiritual purification. The "darkness of the soul" would be got rid of by means of revealing the radiance.<sup>29</sup> The nature

<sup>25</sup> Thus R. Šalom Doh̄ Ber, himself said in a talk in 1907; see *Tōrat šālom*, pp. 113–114; cf. Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite*, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> *Tōrat šālom*, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> N. S. Sassonkin, *Žikvōnōt*, ed. N. Goulicb, Jerusalem, 1980.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

of the event depended on the *maspī'a* (spiritual guide) who was leading the *farbrengen*.

Sassonkin describes the *maspī'a* R. Michael Bliner of Nevil, known as "Reb Michael der Alter". According to him, study of Ḥasīdic teachings had to lead to "action"; by this he meant contemplation in prayer. For during prayer one can achieve wonderful things:

to love God, to fear Him, and to put right one's personal qualities which prevent this and conceal it from him. Even if one's study was as it should be, if one did not then pray with contemplation one's soul would remain without *tiqqūn*.<sup>30</sup>

Sassonkin tells us that R. Michael's talks at the *farbrengen* would reveal the spiritual flaws in his students; but he did this with such gentleness and in such a sincere and inspiring way that they would listen in rapture.

Sometimes the *hitva'adūt* would be at night and would go on till dawn. We did not notice that the night had passed; it was as if we were in a world which was higher than time.<sup>31</sup>

He describes the intense feeling of fraternity that enveloped the students, and the delight they would share singing the melody *qōl dōdē dōfeq pīlti lī*<sup>32</sup> in the fresh light of dawn.

At the same time, and possibly not very far away, other groups of young Jews were sitting up all night inspired by the rival ideals of Zionism or Socialism, or perhaps the dreams of the Russian Jewish Enlightenment, which had an office in Lubavitch. The Tomkhey Temīmim Yešibāh provided within orthodoxy a powerful ideal which could hold its own in a period of change. A comparable phenomenon has been described by David Fishman in the form of the intense and unconventional Novardok school of the *Mūsar* movement.<sup>33</sup>

A further aspect of the process of modernisation was also the increasing supremacy of economic concerns over the bonds between human beings, leading towards "the treatment of 'brothers' as 'others'"<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67–8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> See *Sefer Hanigunim*, Brooklyn, 1985, vol. 1, no. 5.

<sup>33</sup> D. E. Fishman, "Mūsar and Modernity: The Case of Novardok", *Modern Judaism* vol. 8, no. 1 (1988), pp. 41–64.

<sup>34</sup> See W. Schluchter, *The Rise of Western Rationalism, Max Weber's Developmental History*, transl. G. Roth, University of California Press, 1981, summarizing Weber, p. 172. See also the final statement on p. 174.

and emphasising the existential loneliness of the individual. A Russian Jewish contemporary of Sassonkin, the philosopher Leon Shestov, wrote at around the same time "the last word of philosophy is loneliness".<sup>35</sup> In the view of Rabbi Joseph Isaac, this existential loneliness had always existed and was alleviated by the rise of Ḥasidism and particularly Ḥabad. He wrote:

The Rebbe (Rabbi Šeneur Zalman) achieved that one is not lonely. Previously, the Rabbi—head of Yešibāh and Sage—was lonely, and his students were lonely. The path of Ḥasidism which Rabbi [Šeneur Zalman] founded has the great divine advantage that the Rebbe is not lonely and the Ḥasidim are not lonely.<sup>36</sup>

In researching this paper I asked a number of contemporary Ḥabad Ḥasidim for explanations why contemplative prayer seems to be less common today than it was fifty years ago. An interesting answer given by a person who himself engages in contemplative prayer was: "because now a career comes before *khaaverstaf* [friendship]". An important aspect of the revival of contemplative prayer among the Ḥabad Ḥasidim at the turn of the 20th century was the strengthening of human values. The *farbrengen* played a significant role in this. From the perspective of R. Joseph Isaac, contemplative prayer and the Ḥasidic *farbrengen* went together. He explains in a letter to his son-in-law (the present Rebbe) that around the year 1900 the *farbrengen* became more popular in the Ḥabad community, influenced by the Yešibāh which held one every New Moon. He writes that it was at this time that in the Ḥabad community

it became fixed as the order of service of the Ḥasidic community, that just as Ḥasidim have to study Ḥasidic teachings and be involved with contemplative prayer, so Ḥasidim have to come together in a *farbrengen*.<sup>37</sup>

The concepts of social unity and mystical prayer are complementary: the quality of *bitul* selflessness, is the goal of both. It is this

<sup>35</sup> L. Shestov, *All Things are Possible*, transl. S. Kotliansky, London, 1920, p. 70. See also on the same page: "Loneliness, desertion, a boundless, shoreless sea, on which no sail has risen for tens of years—do not many of our contemporaries live in such a circumstance?"

<sup>36</sup> R. Joseph Isaac Schneerson, *Sefer ha-sihot 5700*, Brooklyn, 1967, p. 111, quoted (from a manuscript) in R. Menahem M. Schneerson, *ha-fom yom*, Brooklyn, 1942, entry for 22 Iyyar.

<sup>37</sup> R. Joseph Isaac Schneerson, *Iggerot qodes*, vol. 7 (Brooklyn, 1984), p. 324. This was first printed as the preface to *Quntres u-maayan mi-beyt ha-šem*, Brooklyn, 1943.

quality which enables a person to join with others in a luminous Ḥasidic *farbrengen* and also to join with the Divine in the ecstasy or mystic selflessness of contemplative prayer.<sup>38</sup>

### The *mašpī'a*

This brings us to the institution of the *mašpī'a*, which carries us back to the beginnings of Ḥabad and also onwards into the present. The concept of *mašpī'a*, without the word being used, is found in the time of Rabbi Šeneur Zalman. He appointed senior Ḥasidim to give advice to the communities of his followers. In the introduction to his *Liqūṭey 'amarim*, *Tanya*, a work which in certain senses was intended to substitute for personal audience with R. Šeneur Zalman, the author states

... and anyone who does not understand the advice [he requires] from this tract should discuss this with the leading [Ḥasidim] in his city, and they will help him understand. Of them I request that they should not refuse to speak, expressing false modesty God forbid...<sup>39</sup>

This institution was scathingly attacked by R. Abraham of Kalisk, writing from the Holy Land in 1797.<sup>40</sup> Despite this during the 19th century the role of the *mašpī'a* became increasingly formalised. In 1868 R. Samuel, the fourth leader of Lubavitch, instructed the Ḥasidim of Borisov to make a fund to support a person whose function would be to

impart Ḥasidic teachings and explain them in public and to individuals, to inspire people's hearts and to bring out the inner love which is hidden in the heart of every Jew in order that he should serve his Creator with fear and with love...<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> When the discourse on social unity, *Ma'amar hehašpī'a*, was published in 1948, a brief discourse by R. Joseph Schneerson on the same theme was added as an appendix. A major *mašpī'a* of contemporary Ḥabad, famous for his contemplative prayer, Rabbi Mendel Futerfas (b.c. 1910) informed me that while a prisoner in Soviet Russia he had heard of this brief discourse. When he was finally released in 1962 (as a result of intervention by the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson) he avidly obtained a copy of the discourse and studied it as a preparation for prayer day after day, studying through the same nine-page text hundreds of times.

<sup>39</sup> *Tanya*, ed. Brooklyn, 1984, Introduction, fol. 4a.

<sup>40</sup> D. Z. Hillman, *Iggerot Ba'al ha-Tanya*, Jerusalem, 1953, p. 106.

<sup>41</sup> *Iggerot 'Admir R. Šemū'el* (MaHaRaŠ), Brooklyn, 1993, p. 4.

The *mašp̄'a* is a key factor in both the engendering and balancing of the contemplative prayer of Ḥabad. The aim of this intense and often ecstatic system of prayer was *not* to return to an elitist form of lonely spirituality, such as that which seems to characterise the pre-Ḥasīdic pietists. The fact that the Ḥasīd of stature is asked to communicate with others, on the simplest level, to teach Ḥasīdic teachings, brings his own inner spiritual attainments into a social framework. In this he is to be compared to an artist, who shares his private discoveries with others through the public medium of his art. The private exploration in contemplation in the synagogue, long after the rest of the congregation has gone home, provides an inner radiance which is later revealed to others in the *farbrengen*.

#### Later in the 20th Century

This structure has reached into the 20th century and in fact extends to our own time. Even in Lubavitch in 1910, the proportion of students who actually achieved the power to pray in a contemplative way is estimated by R. Naḥum Šemaryahu Sassonkin at ten percent.<sup>42</sup> The community as a whole responds to the spirituality of contemplation by listening and taking part in the *farbrengen* rather than by attempting to follow this path of prayer themselves.

This does not mean that the *farbrengen* is about prayer. It is about, or *is*, the Ḥasīdic mediation of life. Contemplation in prayer provides the resource for a spiritual-cosmic perspective on life which then can be shared with others.

This relates closely to the religious activism which characterised Ḥabad later in the 20th century. A letter written in 1932 from Riga to one of the emissaries sent by R. Joseph Isaac complains that the individual in question is not fulfilling the Rebbe's expectations. A central issue is the lack of personal spirituality:

The beginning of the descent, God forbid, is lack of service in [contemplative] prayer. Everything becomes dry and cold . . . one hurries, one loses the delight in Torah, the air thickens. It is obvious that one is quite unable to have any [positive] effect on another person.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Zikronotay*, p. 71.

<sup>43</sup> R. Joseph Schneerson, *Iggerot qodes*, vol. 2, Brooklyn, 1983, p. 510. The name of the recipient has been suppressed, and there is no information concerning his location.

In the 1940s R. Joseph Isaac attempted to transfer Ḥabad goals of orthodox observance and Ḥasīdic spirituality to the United States. The *Quntres ha-tefillah* and other works relating to contemplative prayer were republished.<sup>44</sup> Ḥasīdic melody too has a role in the engendering of meditative prayer: it was in this period that R. Joseph Isaac organised the transcription and publication of several hundred Ḥabad melodies in the *Sefer Ha-niggunim*.<sup>45</sup>

The attempt to discover spirituality in prayer also reached England. A letter from the seventh Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994) in 1952 to the non-Ḥasīdic head of the Yešibah in Manchester, Rabbi Judah Zev Segal (c. 1911–1993), indicates the belief that spirituality in prayer, even if not matched by other aspects of a young person's life, would help ensure that he would remain in the camp of traditionalist orthodoxy. There were some boys from Lubavitch families in the Yešibah, who were clearly trying to follow the contemplative style. The head of the Yešibah was critical, but the Rebbe writes as follows:

As for what you write concerning the conduct of certain of the students . . . that you are not pleased about their lengthy prayer since this does not match their behaviour in other matters . . . Perhaps your claims are justified. However, it is clearly apparent to anyone considering the nature of the youth of this generation that for them in particular it is a time of crisis. One therefore has to be very careful not to weaken their power to reject the "winds" which are blowing through the world.<sup>46</sup>

The "winds" mean everything other than dedication to Torah. The inner experience in contemplative prayer was a resource which would strengthen their affirmation of traditional values in a period of change.

A number of letters by the seventh Rebbe give guidance to individuals regarding contemplative prayer, as a kind of general *mašp̄'a* giving council what to do if you get headaches in the middle of

<sup>44</sup> *Quntres ha-tefillah* was published in 1948; another work directly concerning contemplative prayer, which first appeared around 1910, is *Quntres ha-'abodah*. This was reprinted in Brooklyn in 1946. Another text printed the same year is *Quntres 'es ha-hayyim*, which was originally distributed to the students of the Tomkey Teminim Yešibah in mimeographed form in 1904. This too deals with the study of Ḥasīdic teachings and, briefly, with their application in prayer.

<sup>45</sup> See my article "Spirituality, Melody and Modernity in Ḥabad Ḥasīdism", in: S. Stanton (ed), *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Jewish Music*, City University, 1997, pp. 62–77.

<sup>46</sup> R. Menahem M. Schneerson, *Iggerot qodes*, vol. 5, Brooklyn, 1988, p. 325. There were a small number of Lubavitch students at the Yešibah.

contemplation,<sup>47</sup> discussing the conflicting demands of lengthy, solitary contemplation and the halakic imperative of "prayer with the community",<sup>48</sup> and the question of lengthy prayer for a busy and pressured communal worker.<sup>49</sup> There is also advice to earnest enquirers as how to go about the process of contemplation,<sup>50</sup> including warnings against extreme behaviour such as beginning to contemplate as preparation for the morning service only at 2.00 pm in the afternoon.<sup>51</sup>

In the last thirty years there have been a number of major *mašpî'im*, such as R. Mendel Futerfas, famous for his lengthy and melodious prayer and spirited *farbrengens*. "One should weep in prayer", he says. "And if you cannot weep—then weep about that!"<sup>52</sup>

Another *mašpî'a* today is Rabbi Šeneur Zalman Gafni (b.c. 1940) who heads the *ba'al tšūbâh* section of the Yešibâh in Kfar Habad. A former student described how day by day he would sit almost immobile in the Yešibâh hall, wrapped in his *tallit*, engaged for three hours in silent meditative prayer. He also expects attempts in this direction from his students. The intensity of contemplation and the warmth of R. Gafni's *farbrengen* meetings helped these students affirm their commitment to an ideal apparently against the current of the secular society in which they were brought up. This represents another form of the process seen at the beginning of the century.

This discussion of contemplation in the 20th century perhaps affects our view of earlier Habad contemplation in prayer. We tend to consider spiritual contemplation in terms of a solitary mystic, although we grant that he had a certain role in society: he was not a hermit. Our picture of the past has to be modified. His social role as a *contemplative* was important for the community as a whole, enabling it to aspire to the spiritual ideals of Hasidism.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, <sup>2</sup> *Iggerot gôdés*, vol. 10, p. 396.

<sup>48</sup> See *ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 478-9; vol. 18, p. 81.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 18, p. 126; vol. 21, p. 140.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 10, pp. 234, 244-5; vol. 15, p. 239; vol. 17, p. 111; vol. 20, pp. 52-3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 354. The Rebbe states that it is another matter if the enquirer would start contemplating earlier. But to begin at 2.00 pm is not advisable. See also vol. 5, p. 312.

<sup>52</sup> Heard from Rabbi Futerfas in 1993.