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י"א זכרם ברוך

*'Get wisdom, get understanding;
Forsake her not and she shall preserve thee'*

PROV. 4:5

HASIDISM
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Habad Approaches to Contemplative Prayer, 1790–1920

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I. INTRODUCTION

MOST schools of early hasidism paid special attention to prayer.¹ A distinctive feature of the Habad branch is the endeavour to popularize a contemplative approach.² Tracts on contemplation were compiled by R. Shneur Zalman (1745–1812), the founder of this school, his son R. Dov Ber (1773–1827), known as the Mittelel Rebbe, the latter's rival, R. Aaron of Starosteice (1766–1828), and also later leaders.³

This chapter explores the dialectic implicit in popularizing a contemplative approach to prayer. A system of contemplation suitable for an élite group of men of stature may well need modification before it can be applied by a wider echelon of society. In fact, it would seem that R. Dov Ber felt that his initial guidance on the contemplative process was being misinterpreted; people were reaching too high. In consequence, he felt compelled to restrain the majority of his followers from the intense mode of contemplation that he had originally advocated in his works.

Later leaders of Habad continued the attempt to introduce deep and lengthy contemplation to the members of the fraternity. This was achieved with a surprising degree of success by R. Shalom Dovber (1860–1920), known as the Rashab, of the fifth

¹ Prominent studies on this topic include G. Scholem, 'Devotut, or Communion with God', *Review of Religion*, 14 (1949–50), 115–39, repr. in id., *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971); J. G. Weiss, 'The Karavoth of Prayer in Early Hasidism', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 9 (1958); and 'Petitionary Prayer in Early Hasidism', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 31, both repr. in id., *Studies in East European Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford, 1985), 95–130; R. Schatz-Uffenheimer, 'Contemplative Prayer in Hasidism', in E. E. Urfach, R. J. Z. Werblowsky, and C. Wirszowski (eds.), *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem* (Jerusalem, 1964); id., *Halakhsat kemitsibah* (Jerusalem, 1968), pub. in Eng. as *Hasidism as Mysticism* (Princeton, 1993); L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* (London, 1972).

² This was an aspect of the Habad endeavour to popularize the esoteric dimension of hasidism throughout the hasidic fraternity, which was opposed by R. Abraham of Kalisk. This conflict divided the hasidic movement. See my *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago, 1990).

³ A considerable number of works have been produced dealing with the first two generations of Habad. (For a bibliography of recent studies, see my 'Self-Sacrifice of the Zaddik in the Teachings of R. Dov Ber', in A. Rapoport-Albert and S. J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Chimen Abramsky* (London, 1988), n. 7). However, very little scholarly attention has been paid to the later generations. An exception is Ada Rapoport-Albert, 'Polish Hasidism in the Habad Perspective: The Admor Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn in Orvock and Warsaw' (forthcoming).

generation of Habad leaders.⁴ At the beginning of the twentieth century he taught the art of intense contemplation to the youthful pupils in his Tomekhei Temminim yeshivah,⁵ and one is left with the impression that the Habad contemplative ideal was realized to a greater extent around 1914 than a century earlier.

This phenomenon seems to defy the principle of *yerivat hadorot* (decline through the generations) that is assumed by scholars and—perhaps to an even greater extent—by Hasidim themselves.⁶ As I shall try to show, however, it is in fact the product of this very concept, together with some other relevant factors. Perhaps surprisingly, we shall find that in some ways the more institutionalized social structure of the twentieth century aided rather than hindered the quest for the spiritual.

2. R. SHNEUR ZALMAN'S SYSTEM

The basis of the Habad contemplative approach is found in R. Shneur Zalman's tract *Gate of Unity and Faith*, printed in 1796 as the second section of *Tanya*.⁷ This work elaborates the idea that all existence is nothing but an expression of the Infinite, the Ein Sof, and that therefore the Infinite is the only true reality. This perspective, piercing the veil of existence, is called the Higher Unity. A further contemplative step, perhaps more difficult, that is proposed there is to appreciate the Lower Unity, that our

⁴ R. Shalom Dovber was the son of R. Shmuel (1834–82) ('Maharash'), who was hasidic leader in Lubavitch after the demise of his father R. Menahem Mendel (1789–1860), known as the Tsemah Tsedek. The latter was both the son-in-law of R. Dov Ber and a grandson of R. Shneur Zalman. R. Shalom Dovber's life is described in a number of Habad publications, in particular A. H. Gitzenstein, *Sefer haSholoh Rabbi Shalom Dovber: Admor Rashab* (Kfar Habad, 1972); S. A. Heilprin, *Sefer hate'se'it* (Jerusalem, 1980), 179–95.

⁵ This yeshivah was founded in Lubavitch in 1897. See the Habad publications by A. H. Gitzenstein, *Tomekhei temminim* (Brooklyn, NY, 1969), which includes letters and other documents, and R. Kahn, *Lubavitch vehayalutah* (Kfar Habad, 1983).

⁶ This concept is basic to the talmudic approach to Judaism, and is expressed in sayings such as 'if the *ristonim* (earlier scholars) were angels, we are men; if the *ristonim* were men, we are like donkeys (Shab. 112b). In Habad, the idea of the greatness of the earlier generations compared with the present is prominent in the teachings of the *admor* R. Joseph Isaac. However, inherent in hasidism is also the claim that the contemporary *zaddik* manifests the most exalted religious ideals. See L. Jacobs, 'Hasidism and the Dogma of the Decline of the Generations', in this volume.

⁷ For a bibliography of this work by R. Shneur Zalman see Y. Mondshine, *Tora habadi: Bibliografika: Likutei amarin—Sefer hatanya* (Kfar Habad, 1981). It was first published with the title *Likutei amarin* (Slavuta, 1796), the title *Tanya* was used in the second edition (Zolkiev, 1799). The standard edition is that of Vilna, 1900. My references will be to a reprint of this (Brooklyn, NY, 1984). The original manuscript version, which was distributed among R. Shneur Zalman's followers for several years before the work was printed in Slavuta, 1796, has been published as Shneur Zalman of Lyady, *Likutei amarin: Mahadura kama (meitvet yad)*, ed. S. B. Levine (Brooklyn, NY, 1982). An annotated translation of the second section, 'Sha'ar hayinud veha'emunah', by R. Nissem Mangel, was published in Brooklyn in 1965 and is included in the Sencho edition of *Likutei amarin: Tanya* (London, 1973). For a Yid. trans. by R. Y. Weinberg, with extensive commentary, see *Siv'urim be'efes haTanya* (4 vols., Brooklyn, NY, 1980–6); in: Other commentaries on this section of *Tanya* include those of R. Hillel Halevi of Parich, a katan in his *Pelek harmon* [3 vols.; Vilna, 1847] (Brooklyn, NY, 1954–7), i. 294–304; and that on the main body of the work is entitled 'Sha'ar hayinud' and is printed in Dov Ber Shneur of Lubavitch, *Likutei be'urim* (Warsaw, 1868). See also Y. Korf, *Likutei be'urim be'efes haTanya* (2 vols.; Brooklyn, NY, 1968–73), i. 319–71, and A. Steinsaltz, *Be'ur leshtar ar hayinud veha'emunah* (Jerusalem, 1987).

material world is to be perceived not as a concealing veil but as a direct manifestation of the Divine.⁸

The tract states that these two contemplative perspectives are expressed in the esoteric interpretation of the first two utterances of the Shema.⁹ During the morning service, the disciple of R. Shneur Zalman was expected to contemplate these and similar ideas. It is reasonable to assume that contemplative themes of this kind did actually fill the head of the typical Habad follower in the 1790s and later as, robed in his *talit* and *tefillin*, he recited the morning prayers in the synagogue.

An impression of what the early Habad morning *minyān* was like is provided by R. Shneur Zalman's letters.¹⁰ Before the prayers, which were held early in the morning, no talking was permitted.¹¹ Everyone would begin praying together, taking an hour, or an hour and a half, to cover the main section of the morning service. The first part of the liturgy was recited aloud in unison,¹² and was seen as an opportunity for contemplative preparation for the Shema, the ecstatic declaration of the 'Higher Unity'—that All is G-d—and the profound realization of the 'Lower Unity', that G-d is All. There was an intense emotional mood, described as 'great love', or 'outpouring of the soul', which culminated in a feeling of self-sacrifice and self-abandon as the congregation embarked on the silent Amidah.¹³ The first section of *Tanya*, entitled *Likutei amaran*, as well as discourses which were studied in manuscript, provided further contemplative material which was employed to arouse these intense feelings.¹⁴

This method of prayer was designed for the hasid. R. Shneur Zalman was very concerned to make clear in his *Likutei amaran* that the highly mystical teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid on 'raising foreign thoughts to their root' were only for the zaddik, the hasidic leader, not for the hasidic follower.¹⁵ An essential element in the

⁸ An introductory paragraph at the beginning of the version printed in 1796 (and subsequently) quotes Zohar 1: 18b, where the terms 'Higher Unity' and 'Lower Unity' are employed with reference to the Shema (*Tanya*, 66b). The earlier manuscript versions omit this passage and lack a long section, spanning chs. 6–7, in which this concept is elaborated. The manuscript version of this tract therefore emphasizes chiefly the 'Higher Unity' mode of contemplation, reaching towards the perception of the dissolution of all existence; there is naught but the Divine. See *Mahadara kama*, 457, and 465 n. 1. The printed text, presented to a wider public, makes more prominent the contemplative 'return' to the world, described as the 'Lower Unity'.

⁹ These comprise Deut. 6: 4 and the phrase *harnith shem kercud malchuto le'olam va'ed* (Pes. 56a). See also previous note.

¹⁰ See I. Etkes, 'Darko shel R. Shneur Zalman mil'adi kema'ang shel hasidim', *Zion*, 50 (1986), 347–9.

¹¹ See *Taknoti hozna*, ordinances instituted by R. Shneur Zalman c. 1800, in D. Z. Hillman (ed.), *Igrot ba'al haTanya uzerai lavro* (Jerusalem, 1953), 58; S. B. Levine (ed.), *Igrot kodesh Aharon hazaken, Aharon ha'Entsik'i, Aharon ha'Isma'el Tsadek* (Brooklyn, NY, 1980), no. 42, 103.

¹² Levine, *Igrot kodesh*, nos. 8, 82, 84; see the letters collected in *Tanya*, 103a, 162b–163a.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 102b; cf. *Igrot kodesh*, no. 80, 173–4, and the related material on 46a; a record by R. Israel Jaffe of an interview (*yejhadat*) with R. Shneur Zalman.

¹⁴ See *Tanya*, i, chs. 42–50.

¹⁵ Cf. *Tanya*, i, ch. 35, 35a. R. Shneur Zalman's teachings on 'foreign thoughts' have been discussed in S. Dubnow, *Toladot hahasidut* [Tel Aviv, 1930–1] [Tel Aviv, 1960], 239; J. G. Weiss, 'Reshit tsemiharah shel haderech hahasidut', *Zion*, 16 (1951), 103; Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, 'Antispiritualizm hahasidut', *Molad*, 20: 171–2 (1962), p. 522; I. Tishby and Y. Dan, 'Torat hahasidut vesifrut', *Hebrew Encyclopedia*, xvii (1965), 766–82; repr. as a pamphlet by Academic, Jerusalem and in A. Rubinstein, (ed.), *Perakim be'orot hahasidut veteledeihah* (Jerusalem, 1977), 275; Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, 112–17; Moshe Hallamish, 'Mishnato ha'yunit shel R. Shneur Zalman mil'adi: Mekorotav balabalah veyajaso leresit hahasidut' (Ph.D. thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976), 301–4.

contemplative technique taught by R. Shneur Zalman was, therefore, that one should 'know one's place',¹⁶ and not 'be a fool', by attempting to overreach oneself in one's efforts in mystical prayer.¹⁷

R. Shneur Zalman insisted that the leader of the prayers and the core members of the congregation should proceed at a slow, meditative pace. He made allowances for those who did not have time for contemplation during the week, and permitted those individuals who had to hurry off to work to pray more quickly, but it was they who were out of step, not the contemplatives. On the sabbath, however, all his followers were expected to recite their prayers slowly and to utilize the Habad teachings for contemplation.¹⁸

An interesting problem was that of the people who wanted to engage in such lengthy contemplation that they would effectively end up praying by themselves. In general R. Shneur Zalman did not permit this, although he made some exceptions to this rule, presumably for the sake of men of unusual spiritual stature.¹⁹

These firm instructions concerning prayer were backed by a strict disciplinary system. This atmosphere of control was an important element in the process seeking the awakening of the spiritual power of the hasid. R. Shneur Zalman wrote in *Likutei amaran* that 'the beginning of service, its basis and root' is the arousal of an intense sense of personal discipline, termed *kabalat ol malchut shamayim*, the acceptance of the yoke of the kingship of heaven. It is the feeling of tension which this engenders, 'as if one were standing before a king', which should fill one's being while one prepares for the morning prayers.²⁰ Thus, the mystical aspect of the Habad contemplative system was complemented by discipline and control. This can be seen in action in the second generation of the movement, after R. Shneur Zalman's death in 1812.

3. R. AARON HALEVI'S APPROACH

While the mainstream of Habad followed R. Shneur Zalman's eldest son, R. Dov Ber of Lubavitch, there was a considerable faction which took as their hasidic leader R. Shneur Zalman's leading disciple, R. Aaron Halevi Horowitz, who moved to Starosielce.²¹ R. Aaron wrote pastoral letters on the subject of prayer, and later published two volumes of teachings which provide guidance on contemplation and ecstasy.²² His *Gates of Unity and Faith*, a subtle elaboration of his teacher's contemplation tract, continues the quest for the 'Higher Unity'. As earlier writers have shown, for R. Aaron the goal of the contemplative system was emotion and ecstasy: he saw no purpose in contemplation without this inner emotional response.²³ This quest for emotion meant that R. Aaron's system led beyond the limited confines of the organized

¹⁶ *Tanya*, i, ch. 27, 34a.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 28, 35a.

¹⁸ Cf. *Taknoti hozna*, in Hillman, *Igrot ba'al haTanya*, 58; Levine, *Igrot kodesh*, 104.

¹⁹ *Tanya*, i, ch. 41, 56a–b.

²⁰ Concerning R. Aaron see I. Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity: The Life and Works of Aaron of Starosielce* (London, 1966); Rachel Elior, *Torat ha'elohai bador hasheni shel hasidim habad* (Jerusalem, 1982).

²¹ Aaron Halevi of Starosielce, *Shi'arei ha'elohai veta'emmah* (Shklov, 1820) (Jerusalem, 1970); id., *Shi'arei avodah* (Shklov, 1821) (Jerusalem, 1970); the letters are at the end of his *Avodat halevi* [2 vols.; Lemberg, 1842–62 (3); 1866 (3)] (Jerusalem, 1972), i.

²² See Elior, *Torat ha'elohai*, 324.

synagogue service, even if the latter took an hour and a half as R. Shneur Zalman had stipulated.²⁴

It is likely that R. Aaron was one of the people permitted by R. Shneur Zalman to pray at length separately from the congregation. R. Aaron permits this practice in a general directive to his followers, expressed in a pastoral letter.²⁵ However, this is not without an important measure of control. The instruction in the letter is that although one is praying at one's own pace, and one's prayer is going to continue long after the service has ended, one should still start the morning prayer together with the congregation. Through this, said R. Aaron, one has the spiritual benefit of praying in unison with others, for 'in holy matters the main thing is the beginning'.²⁶

R. Aaron's teachings, with their strong emphasis on the need to attain heartfelt enthusiasm and intense religious emotion, suggest that his system of contemplation produced lengthy, ecstatic prayer in which each word was savoured as an ongoing expression of dissolution in the Divine. He expected all his followers to engage in the mode of lengthy prayer which in the time of R. Shneur Zalman had been permitted only to the rare individual. It is noteworthy that R. Aaron's letter quoted above is headed *ketav yad lehakhalal* ('general pastoral letter'): it was addressed to everyone, not just to a unique pneumatic personality.

To what extent this demand for ecstasy was met by R. Aaron's followers is not known for certain. In one letter he accuses them of being 'asleep', on account of their lack of enthusiasm in prayer;²⁷ but this may well be an expression of the attempt to stir them to seek even greater heights. The followers of R. Aaron were a self-selected group who all shared the belief that emotional enthusiasm in prayer was the goal of spiritual striving. It is likely, therefore, that they themselves were able to experience this—especially since, in striking contrast to R. Dov Ber, R. Aaron tolerated self-conscious or even contrived varieties of emotion.²⁸

While R. Aaron guided his followers to lengthy, private prayer which continued far beyond the synagogue service, it is noteworthy that, in his system, the contemplation *before* the prayer was relatively brief: the Starosielce hasid could begin his prayers at the same time as the rest of the congregation in the synagogue, just as had been the case during R. Shneur Zalman's lifetime. In this respect the early contemplative teachings of R. Dov Ber, the leader of the mainstream of the Habad fraternity, were quite different. Two tracts, circulated in manuscript form among his hasidim in 1814, present an interesting intensification of the contemplative process.²⁹

²⁴ *Tanya*, iv, ch. 1, 103a.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 20c.

²⁶ Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity*, 86, 128; Eilon, *Torat ha'elohai*, 308–9. The latter claims that, in R. Aaron's view, there is no real distinction between 'external' emotion and that which is divine. Hence all emotional enthusiasm 'is no illusion, it is all true'.

²⁷ These are Dov Ber Shneur of Lubavitch (the Mittelel Rebbe), *Kuntres habinyan ulu*, which was first printed in the late 1830s, or even in the 1840s, and *Kuntres habithovment*, also called *Sha'ar hayinyan*. This was first published as the second part of *Ner mitsvot ve'torah* or [Kopy's, 1820] (Brooklyn, NY, 1974). Concerning the printing history of the first of these works, and the fact that it originally appeared much earlier in manuscript form, see Rachel Eilon, 'Kuntres habinyan ulu' le R. Dov Ber Shneur Zalman', *Kiryat sefer*, 54 (1979), 386. A note on this article, by S. B. Levine, *Kiryat sefer*, 54 (1979), 829–30, suggests that both works originally appeared in manuscript form in 1814. See also L. Jacobs's trans. of *Kuntres habinyan ulu*, entitled *Tract on Ecstasy* (London, 1963), 28.

²⁸ *Avodah halevi*, i, 'Likutum', 18c ff. Cf. also 20c–d.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 3a.

Habad Approaches to Contemplative Prayer

4. R. DOV BER'S METHOD

The inner effect of the mode of contemplation taught by R. Dov Ber is expressed in the first of these, known as *Tract on Ecstasy*.³⁰ This work provides an analysis of different levels of enthusiasm and ecstasy which might be achieved in prayer and, as has long been noted, presents a strongly critical approach to the question of authenticity and spontaneity of religious emotion. Spurious emotion is condemned as vain illusion. Instead of achieving a *derhet*, meaning an intimation of the Divine, the intended effect of the contemplative process, the person who indulges in spurious enthusiasm merely *derhet zikh*, he reaches an 'intimation' of his own self: rather than serving G-d through his emotion, 'he serves himself'.³¹

A further aspect of this tract, which is not so obvious, is that it leads the reader to the realization that the highest level of attainment is *beyond* emotion. Although R. Dov Ber describes levels of genuine heartfelt ecstasy, he also makes clear that the ultimate achievement is not this, but rather 'utter *binul*', self-nullification, based on the intellectual contemplation of the hasidic teachings.

Binul is a term which denotes 'nullification' in the halakhic sense (as with the nullification of leaven before Passover).³² In this context, however, it means nullification of the self. It is an emotionless state, in which there is no self-awareness. The mind is focused on a stream of imagery, culled from kabbalah, which for R. Dov Ber and the elite of his followers functioned as a gateway to the mystical radiance of love of the Infinite, the Ein Sof. The effect of this radiance is to engender intense feelings of love of the Divine, which are genuine and also valuable. But, says R. Dov Ber, once the contemplative gives way to this emotion, however sincere it may be, the gateway to the divine radiance closes. Instead of the Infinite, one is left with one's own self: 'there is someone who loves',³³ and the quality of *nishkavut*, being nothing, of 'utter *binul*', is lost. The paradigm of *binul* was R. Dov Ber himself, who could stand immobile for hours, silent, beyond the world.³⁴

This emphasis on *binul* rather than emotion was not entirely new. There are teachings by R. Shneur Zalman, dating from the latter period of his life, in which we find the idea that emotionless self-abnegation represents the higher attainment.³⁵ R. Aaron too subscribed to this idea in theory, but claimed that *binul* was suitable only for the giants of the past.³⁶ Hence it had no place in his system. After R. Dov Ber became

³⁰ All references are to the edition published with the title *Likutei be'urim* (Warsaw, 1868), and to Jacobs's trans. (see previous note).

³¹ *Likutei be'urim*, 8a–b; *Tract on Ecstasy*, 67–8.

³² 'Nullification' of all leaven in one's possession on the eve of Passover. See Pes. 6b; *Yad. Hll. hamets umatsah* 3:7.

³³ *Likutei be'urim*, 52a; *Tract on Ecstasy*, 128.

³⁴ H. M. Hiehlman, the Kopy's follower who wrote chronicles of Habad history, is probably recording a reliable tradition when he writes of R. Dov Ber: 'His prayer was silent without any movement or stirring of any limb at all. Within him he was burning like a burning flame but it was not revealed externally at all' (*Beit rabbi* [Berdenoer, 1903] [Tel Aviv, n.d.], 184). He adds that R. Dov Ber's son-in-law, the Tsemah Tselek, said of his father-in-law: 'His prayer had a cerebral quality of . . . *binul* which is beyond enthusiasm, totally pure' (*Ibid.* n. 3). See also Loewenthal, 'Self-sacrifice of the Zaddik', 472ff.

³⁵ See *Torch* or [Kopy's, 1836] (Brooklyn, NY, 1984) (a collection of discourses by R. Shneur Zalman), 44a: '*binul* is on a higher level than emotion'.

³⁶ See R. Aaron's *Sha'arei avodah*, 'Tshakmanah', 12b (considering the title-page as fo. 1); 'Sha'ar yihud haneshamot', 396–40a.

leader, the men of stature among his followers sought to follow the path of *binul*, and so, probably, did others—but not necessarily with his approval, as we shall see.

R. Dov Ber's contemplative method, which he intended to be utilized whether one's goal was *binul* or some lower level of attainment, is described in the second of his works to be issued in manuscript in 1814: *Tract on Contemplation*.³⁷ In this R. Dov Ber defines two modes of contemplation: 'in general', and 'in detail'.³⁸ The 'general' mode is familiar from earlier Habad teachings. By contrast, the 'detailed' mode of contemplation is defined as 'contemplating each world, each created thing, on each of the different levels of the order of the downchaining of worlds'.³⁹ R. Dov Ber describes the step-by-step progress of this form of contemplation, beginning on the lowest level of the Lurianic world-order, and ascending level by level, through each of the *sefirot* in each of the four worlds described in kabbalah. A higher form of the same kind of contemplation starts in the realm of Atsilut—the highest 'world'—and ascends to the most exalted reaches of the Lurianic spiritual cosmology. Material for this highly intellectualist style of contemplation is provided by the remainder of the book, in more than forty chapters. These present the total schema of the kabbalistic cosmos, with strong emphasis on discovering the reality of this through introspective investigation of the parallel structure of the microcosm: the psychological make-up of humanity. Through this process one comes to appreciate the *hikalehut*, the integration and unification of all.⁴⁰

R. Dov Ber believed that through this 'detailed' form of contemplation, necessarily a lengthy process, the person would attain a far greater degree of spiritual union with the Divine. The 'general' method was easier, and more suitable for a beginner, but he considered it also more likely to lead to self-deception, with merely a superficial level of attainment.⁴¹ The style of contemplation implied by the detailed method was one of lengthy thought *before* the prayers. The élite of R. Dov Ber's followers would thus become absorbed in the boundless stream of kabbalistic imagery, and then, in a state of suspension of selfhood, utter *binul*, would begin to pray. Those who could not reach 'utter *binul*' would eventually give way to a flush of emotion. Habad hasidim today describe the followers of R. Dov Ber as struggling with great effort to hold back their welling emotion in order to maintain the exalted state of *binul*. In the light of the relevant texts, such anecdotes may be rooted in fact.

We now have to consider the problems inherent in a system of contemplation in which self-abnegation is the ultimate ideal but is not suitable for all. Could the average follower of R. Dov Ber correctly recognize his place in the system? Or did he aim too high, and therefore need corrective guidance and discipline?

5. THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE

Letters by R. Dov Ber, also dating from around 1814, indicate that he was concerned about this very question. He criticizes the local leaders of the hasidic communities for

³⁷ See n. 29 above. An account of this tract is given by L. Jacobs in his *Hasidic Prayer*, 84–91, and by Rachel Elior in *Torat ha'elohim*, 315 ff.

³⁸ *Sha'ar hayipud*, ch. 4, 4b. See Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, 87; Elior, *Torat ha'elohim*, 317.

³⁹ *Sha'ar hayipud*, 4b.

⁴⁰ The appreciation of *hikalehut* is the central goal of this contemplative system; see *Sha'ar hayipud* chs. 10, 15, 21, 31, 36, 43, 53. See also Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, 91, and Elior, *Torat ha'elohim*, 316.

presenting too coarse a representation of the Habad path, taking the concept of *binul* to an extreme. 'They completely forbid enthusiasm', he complains. He pours scorn on those who try to rid themselves of emotion, who mock emotional expression by others, and who themselves—though clearly unsuited for it—are so eager to adopt the silent, emotionless mode of prayer that 'they sit silently thinking and fall asleep'.⁴²

In fact, R. Dov Ber compiled his *Tract on Ecstasy* in order to provide guidance in this matter. Its presentation of a typology of the variety of different levels of attainment was intended to help the hasid recognize his own position and strive to achieve fulfillment on that level.⁴³ While the man of stature should strive for the highest level, *binul*, R. Dov Ber expected the majority of his followers to understand that they should be striving for a lower level of attainment, such as genuine heartfelt emotion, or, lower still, simple *kabalat ol*, acceptance of the yoke of heaven. He was critical of those who overreached themselves. During the ensuing years of his leadership, we see further examples of guidance of his followers in application of the contemplative technique.

One problem was the relationship between the 'detailed' mode of contemplation and the text of the daily prayers. After spending, say, two hours conceptually entering the Lurianic spiritual cosmology, while the sense of union with G-d expressed by the Shema is heightened, the contemplative may well wonder about the relevance of the words of the Psalms and other liturgical compositions in the morning service.⁴⁴

Thus R. Dov Ber writes in the introduction to the *Prayer Book* published in 1816: 'I know the pain of all those who seek to come close to the Divine in prayer. They are unable to connect the thoughts in their mind . . . their contemplation . . . with the words they are uttering with their mouths . . . They are not connected.'⁴⁵ The solution, states R. Dov Ber, is provided by the *Prayer Book*, which includes an extensive commentary on the prayers, explaining the wording—and the relevant Lurianic *kanonot*—in terms of the detailed spiritual cosmology found in *Tract on Contemplation*. By means of the teachings in the *Prayer Book*, the contemplative could follow a natural movement from the detailed contemplation before prayer to the awareness of the Divine during the prayer; one becomes an extension of the other.⁴⁶ This, at least, was the ideal. But

⁴² *Likutei be'urim*, 1b: *Tract on Ecstasy*, 179. This letter is referred to in R. Dov Ber's introd. to *Kanot ha'hipu'ah* as 'my earlier letter' (*Likutei be'urim*, 4d; *Tract on Ecstasy*, 57). See n. 29 above for Levine's comments on the dating of this text.

⁴³ This view of R. Dov Ber's aim differs from that suggested by Rachel Elior in *Torat ha'elohim*, 296. She sees R. Dov Ber as demanding one specific style of service, while R. Aaron gave more freedom to the individual. It seems from the sources that the contrary is true: R. Aaron's insistent demand was for overt emotional enthusiasm. R. Dov Ber presented a typology of different varieties of inner 'movement' (*hitpa'ahut*) so that each individual could find his level.

⁴⁴ The Talmud describes the practice of 'pausing', presumably in a contemplative mood, for an hour before reciting the Shema and the Amidah (Ber. 32b). The section in the liturgy of the morning service entitled *pasukei dezimrah* (verses of praise), consisting largely of Psalms, seems intended to provide textual substance for this preparatory period. The Habad method of meditation on kabbalistic themes was not thought of as a substitute for this earlier popular contemplative system but as absorbing and complementing it. This is typical of the conservative nature of the hasidic movement, balancing its radical aspects. See Schwarz-Uffenheimer, *Habashut kemistakeh, passim*.

⁴⁵ *Hakdamat vehaskamat* . . . Dov Ber', in *id*, *Sefer teiflot mikol hashanhah* [Kopys, 1816] (Brooklyn, NY, 1965).

⁴⁶ The *Sefer teiflot mikol hashanhah* was first printed in Kopys, 1816, then in Berdichev, 1818. A third edition was published in Kopys, in 1823 (cf. Mondshine, *Torat ha'elohim*, ii, 55–7). The text of the prayers is that of the Lurianic prayer book edited by R. Shneur Zalman and published in Shklov, 1803. Cf. *ibid.*, and

was it achieved by the mass of the fraternity? The answer is provided by a pastoral letter written by R. Dov Ber in the early 1820s, demanding an abrupt change of style from his followers.

The background to this is the fact that in 1820 *Tract on Contemplation*, which previously had been available only in manuscript form, was printed.⁴⁷ It is likely that, as a result, a larger proportion of the scholars in the Habad fraternity were tempted to try to follow the intensive system of contemplation it expounds, with the attendant risk of reaching for too high a spiritual level: inert, utter *binul*, transcending all emotion, instead of a more accessible variety of enthusiasm. R. Dov Ber issued his pastoral letter two or three years later.⁴⁸ In it he instructed the young full-time scholars among his followers that their mode of contemplation must change. It is this group who in his opinion were most likely to take the contemplative path too far. While conceding that their achievement in the area of lengthy contemplation was genuine, he saw a problem with the prayer service that followed:

Although they are genuinely . . . inspired by [the hasidic teachings], this is only temporary, and they are too lenient with regard to effort . . . during their prayer. As everyone can see, even he who has thorough knowledge of hasidic teachings prays very briefly. If they would apply more effort . . . they would certainly spend longer in prayer—at least two hours.⁴⁹

The implication is that, after the lengthy contemplation before prayer, these young scholars had exhausted their spiritual effort and could not carry through the same mood employing the teachings in the *Prayer Book*. R. Dov Ber therefore demanded a complete change in their approach. Instead of aiming for lengthy contemplation followed by lengthy prayer, they should divide their activities in two. On the one hand, they should study hasidic teachings 'every morning and evening', at which time the individual should use 'all his power' to consider their significance. This would provide a contemplative resource which should be applied during the second stage: the time of prayer. It is noteworthy that R. Dov Ber stresses that this should be 'specifically with heartfelt emotional enthusiasm', *hinda'ut bemingash belev basar daruka*.⁵⁰ In other words, misguided attempts to achieve *binul* should be abandoned.

Shnan Schocken (Jerusalem, 1948–52), nos. 135–6. This text is accompanied by two kinds of commentary: (a) a detailed tract expounding, in the Habad style, almost line by line, the section of the prayers entitled *pesukei dezimrah*, generally with some reference to the relevant Lurianic *karanaot*; see (in the modern edn.) 396ff., 178off.; (b) lengthy discourses explaining the inner meaning of *isivi, yefilin*, the Shema, and so on. The *Seder tefilot* also includes numerous halachic notes and passages by R. Shneur Zalman which had appeared earlier in his own edition of the prayer book.

⁴⁷ Cf. n. 29 above.

⁴⁸ The letter was first printed as the introd. to the Warsaw, 1886 edition of the *Seder tefilot mikol hashanah* and is included in C. E. Bichovsky and H. M. Heiman (eds.), *Me'ah she'arim* [Berdichev, 1913] (Kfar Habad, 1967; Brooklyn, NY, 1975), 11a. Several manuscripts of this letter are extant, one of which bears a colophon with the date 1823. It is now printed in Levine, *Igrot kodesh*, 262–8. See also 494. There is repeated reference to 'all the books [of Habad teachings] which have been printed' (my italics). Since, from 1816, roughly one book a year was published, this would suggest a date for the letter not earlier than 1820. In fact, the content of the letter suggests that it was written some time after the publication of *Sh'ar hayitid* in 1820. Internal evidence indicates it was written before 1826 when *Torat hayim* was printed. The latter work comprises teachings on the weekly scriptural reading; the letter advocates study of such teachings 'in manuscript' (Levine, *Igrot kodesh*, 265).

⁴⁹ Levine, *Igrot kodesh*, 263.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 267.

R. Dov Ber further insisted that the daily prayers of the full-time scholars should be recited aloud in a quorum together, although he did permit a minority of men of stature to pray in silence.⁵¹ Still concerned at the disparity between the wording and the contemplative stream of thought, he demanded attention to the simple meaning of the text, *perush hamior*, and insisted that contemplation during the prayer should be limited to the significance of the Shema.⁵² That all this was a conscious change is evident from the letter: 'Behold my demand and request . . . is that you should obey my trustworthy counsel and change the mode of your service.'⁵³

This directive by R. Dov Ber is a striking expression of the dialectic implicit in the process of communication of esoteric teachings. The Habad hasidic school, as a number of others, though a large group scattered in widespread communities, retained certain characteristics of the small mystic circle such as that of the Ari in sixteenth-century Safed. The guide to the esoteric path gives careful instruction to his followers, encouraging them while also restraining them, according to their respective abilities.

In R. Dov Ber's view, the intense, highly mystical technique advocated in his early tracts could be applied directly only by a small, élite group of men of stature: personalities like R. Hillel of Parichi (1795–1864), who wrote a commentary to *Tract on Ecstasy*.⁵⁴ As the Habad fraternity expanded and more young scholars sought to follow the contemplative path, he felt it necessary to institute controls in order to avoid the misinterpretations which, from the very beginning of his leadership, had caused him anxiety. He therefore now made it unambiguously clear that the earlier teachings on *binul* were restricted to a small group of men of stature. Perhaps it is for this reason that *Tract on Ecstasy*, which expounds the path of esoteric *binul*, was never printed in R. Dov Ber's lifetime. As Rachel Elior has shown, the first printed edition was not made available till some ten or twenty years after his death.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 266.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Published in *Likutei be'urim*. It is noteworthy that a manuscript discourse by R. Hillel discusses two different modes of contemplation before prayer. The first, cited in the name of R. Dov Ber, is 'to contemplate the *sefer hahtshakshelim* [Lurianic world-system] in detail' leading to a sense of the *binul* of all levels before the Divine. After this one prays, thinking of the hasidic explanation of the text of the prayers. Then, says R. Hillel, 'the meaning of the words will not contradict the general *karanaot* of prayer: [deduction] to Him alone. (And this was an answer to the question about the connection between the [Lurianic] *karanaot* of the words, such as *harkita she'amar is'rasia de'lo t'yedea*, and the [goal of] abnegation before G-d.) This clearly is a description of the mode of contemplation and prayer counselled by R. Dov Ber c. 1816. But then R. Hillel describes a second method, cited in the name of R. Menahem Mendel, the Tsemah Tsedek: 'However, there is another, higher path which is needed particularly by lower souls [i.e. people on a lower spiritual level], and this is what I heard from *admor shekhia* [i.e. the Tsemah Tsedek], to think through a teaching from the hasidic writings, in the order [in which it was written], and it seems that he too was referring to the time before the prayer; and at the time of prayer to think [simply] the meaning of the words. But the thinking about the hasidic teaching, which he did before the prayer, adds power and strength to his soul till he is able to feel the life-force of the words of the prayer'—(MASS of the Jewish National and University Library of Jerusalem, 3504, 3547. I am grateful to Mr Y. Mondshine for bringing this to my attention and making it available to me.)

The second mode of contemplation seems to be a further development of the path taught in R. Dov Ber's letter of c. 1823. In fact it is basically identical to the normative style of study-contemplation and prayer found in Habad synagogues and yeshivot today.

⁵⁵ See n. 29 above.

6. INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In later generations of Habad we might well expect the total disappearance of R. Dov Ber's 'detailed' mode of contemplation. This would be consistent with the concept of *yevuldat hadorot* and the general suspicion among scholars that during the nineteenth century the hasidic movement in general consolidated its social structure but weakened its links with its mystical origins.

It is therefore interesting to discover that the 'detailed' mode of contemplation is found in full force almost a century later. R. Dov Ber's great-grandson, R. Shalom Dober ('Rashab'), founded his Tomekhei Teminim yeshivah in the townlet of Lubavitch in 1897.⁵⁶ A striking feature of this yeshivah was that, alongside Talmud, hasidic teachings were part of the daily curriculum. Further, an intense mode of contemplation was imparted to the youthful students through tracts written by the Rashab in order to provide guidance for the pupils at the yeshivah. Originally these texts were studied in manuscript, then in mimeographed form. Only years later were they printed.⁵⁷

The first such work, *Tract on Prayer* (*Kuntres hatefilah*), was first distributed at the end of 1899. It represents an interesting application and development of the contemplative guidance of R. Dov Ber. The first chapter speaks of the ideal of *binul* as a state in which the person achieves total abnegation of self, a state in which 'all feelings disappear' and the contemplative is in a state of 'expiration', 'like a stone'.⁵⁸ However, having defined this exalted level of attainment, the remainder of the tract describes more accessible categories of heartfelt enthusiasm and emotion. The path of utter *binul* is there, but it is for the rare élite. An eyewitness account describes the style of prayer of a young student named Nissan Nemirov (c.1908-84), who was later to become famous as a hasidic luminary in his own right. Around 1917 he was studying in the Habad yeshivah in Kremenchug. According to this account, special permission was given to him to come late to the Talmud class, for he 'would pray for four hours, standing by the wall like a stick'.⁵⁹ A small proportion of the students in Tomekhei Teminim attained this level. Most, however, were seeking not *binul*, but heartfelt emotion, as is made clear by the *Tract on Prayer*.

The Rashab emphasizes that the correct path of contemplation is the 'detailed method', taught by R. Dov Ber.⁶⁰ Only this leads to genuine *hivd'ulut*, emotion and ecstasy. However, in order to avoid the superficiality of which the earlier *Tract on Ecstasy* warns, the Rashab suggests also the technique proposed in R. Dov Ber's letter of 1823: lengthy contemplative thought about the hasidic teachings, *not* related to

⁵⁶ See n. 5 above.

⁵⁷ *Kuntres hatefilah*, distributed at the end of 1899, was first printed in Vilna in 1924. I shall quote the Brooklyn, 1956 edition. It is pub. in Eng. as *Tract on Prayer*, trans. Y. A. Danziger (Brooklyn, NY, 1992). Another work by Rashab, *Kuntres et halayim* ('Tract on the Tree of Life'), first distributed in 1904, emphasizes the importance of study of hasidic teachings and specifies their role in the daily programme of study in the yeshivah; it was first printed in Brooklyn in 1946. A third tract, *Kuntres ha'avodah* ('Tract on Service'), a full and profound manual for the contemplative, appeared in 1910; this too was first printed in Brooklyn in 1946.

⁵⁸ Oral communication from R. Yankel Gurtkov (c.1906-93), collected in an interview in 1988.

⁵⁹ *Kuntres hatefilah*, ch. 2. The 'detailed method' of contemplation is also strongly recommended in the Rashab's later tract, *Kuntres ha'avodah*. See the Brooklyn, 1978 edn., ch. 6, 36-45. R. Dov Ber's *Shiv'ar hayivul* is cited on 39.

prayer, but at other times. Thus, says the Rashab, the student 'should make a time to engage in deep, solitary thought about a concept of hasidic teaching for one or two hours'. Through this he will learn how to contemplate at length before and during prayer, 'and also go beyond the conceptual structure of the hasidic ideas, reaching to the divine radiance within'.⁶¹

As preparation for the morning service in the synagogue, the tract recommends contemplating in the detailed method for 'an hour or more' before the prayers.⁶² Through this, cerebral ecstasy will flow to the heart without being forced: the emotion will flow of its own accord.⁶³ This will also have the eventual effect of transforming the inner life of the person in ethical terms: his animal emotions will become devoted to the Divine.⁶⁴

Together with this encouragement to embark on the 'detailed' style of contemplation there was also an emphasis on personal discipline. The tract states that each person who seeks to follow the contemplative path must accept close personal guidance. The young student is warned not to attempt long, detailed contemplation too soon. He should study together with older scholars, and 'submit' to their instructions.⁶⁵ The author continues with strong emphasis on the virtue of *kabalat ol*, 'acceptance of the yoke' or in other words submission.⁶⁶ A second work, *Tract on Service*, distributed in 1910, elaborates on this, and describes the contemplative as living in a constant state of 'tension' of inner control (*shendig farketsht*).⁶⁷

This control, I suggest, is a key aspect of the contemplative process: through self-mastery and humble submission to guidance the individual was able to 'find his place' in the contemplative system. In the new Tomekhei Teminim yeshivah, a high level of personal supervision and guidance of the would-be contemplative was possible. Thus the discipline which had been characteristic of Habad from the time of R. Shneur Zalman, and which manifests the 'mystic circle' dimension of hasidism, was an important complement to the aim to achieve radiant intimations of the Divine in contemplative prayer.

We also find that the problems which had agitated R. Dov Ber were now viewed somewhat differently. A hasid is said to have asked the Rashab about connecting the theme of the contemplation with the actual words of the daily prayers. The Rashab answered that the text of the daily prayers includes all the varieties of radiance which might shine to a person while praying.⁶⁸ In other words, the Hebrew text transcends its literal meaning and includes the 'radiance' of the stream of contemplation.

On the problem of the contemplative expending all his spiritual energy before he actually begins praying, a later Habad answer was: 'What does it matter to you if you pray before the prayers?'⁶⁹ In other words, the process of contemplation is itself valid as divine service. None the less, one should try as much as one can to say the words with full intensity. Hence there is the concept of 'praying with a *knaitish* (a folded page)

⁶¹ *Kuntres hatefilah*, ch. 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, ch. 5, 8.

⁶³ *Kuntres ha'avodah*, 13.

⁶⁴ Recounted by A. Chitrin in *Reshivot decarim* (2 vols.; Brooklyn, NY, 1981-5), i. 160.

⁶⁵ Recounted by S. Y. Zevin in *Sipurai hasidim*, 'Torah' (Tel Aviv, 1955), 454. The statement is attributed to R. Hillel of Parich. In fact it is consistent with the second mode of contemplation described in the discourse of R. Hillel discussed in n. 54 above.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 15.

in the prayer book⁷¹; each day, the hasid would make a fold at the page he reached with the full force of contemplative thought. Beyond that point he would complete the prayers in the normal way. The next day, he would try to improve his performance, and sustain the contemplative mood for longer, making a new fold further on in the prayer book.⁷⁰

These points give the impression that early in the twentieth century there was a more relaxed attitude to spiritual attainment compared with a hundred years previously. It can be suggested that this was due to *yeridat hadorot*, the descent of the generations. Since people were considered to be on a lower level, less could be demanded of them. Thus instead of the punctilious perfectionism of R. Dov Ber, there was a wish to extend the ethos of deep contemplation and ecstasy to an entire generation of Habad scholars. This gave them a powerful ideal which was to help them maintain their spiritual balance in the contemporary atmosphere of widespread defection from traditional Judaism.⁷¹ Their belief in the Torah was not based solely on faith, nor even on intellect, the hallmark of Habad: it had a personal experiential dimension as well. The need for this in the context also of the modern West was expressed by a later Habad leader, R. Joseph Isaac Schneersohn:

The beginning of the fall, G-d forbid, is lack of *acodai hatefiah* (contemplative prayer). Everything becomes dry and cold, even habitual *mitzvoit* become difficult. One loses the *geshmak* ('delight') in Torah. The air thickens. Obviously, one is then quite unable to have any good effect on other people.⁷²

R. Dov Ber's letter of around 1823 had reined in the majority of the hasidim, due to a feeling that they had not 'recognized their place': they were reaching too high in the world of the spirit. Three generations later, at the beginning of our century, the *Tzurat on Prayer* and other teachings on highly intensive contemplation express the Rashab's conviction of the need for deep spirituality in the contemporary Jewish world and also indicate his confidence in the inner discipline of his followers.

⁷⁰ Oral communication from R. Yankel Gurkow.

⁷¹ See David E. Fishman, 'Preserving Tradition in the Land of Revolution: The Religious Leadership of Soviet Jewry, 1917-1930', in J. Wertheimer (ed.), *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era* (New York, 1992), 85-118.

⁷² *Hayom yom* (Brooklyn, NY, 1942), entry for 23 Iyar. This is a collection of aphorisms and passages from the writings of R. Joseph Isaac Schneersohn, arranged in the form of a calendar, edited by his future successor, R. M. M. Schneerson. This passage links the ideal of contemplative prayer with the religious activist aspect of modern Habad—the goal of having a 'good effect on other people'.

E I G H T E E N

The Fluidity of Categories in Hasidism: *Averah lishmah* in the Teachings of R. Zevi Elimelekh of Dynow

YEHOShUA MONDSHINE

It was the misfortune of R. Zevi Elimelekh Shapira of Dynow (1783-1841) that most of his life was lived in the nineteenth century, and for this reason scholars have deemed him and his teaching unworthy of serious consideration. Fortunately for us, intellectual fashions have changed in recent years, and many have come to recognize that even in the nineteenth century the sap of hasidism was by no means exhausted. Hasidic thought continued to develop and to diversify into streams of ever-increasing breadth and depth, with no evidence of the degeneration which its detractors in the not so distant past have claimed to perceive.

The editors of the *Hebrew Encyclopedia* have seen fit to devote to the Rabbi of Dynow and his writings no more than eighteen lines, and the modern *Encyclopaedia Judaica* less than a column. I myself do not propose to dwell in detail on his biography; in brief: he did not belong to a rabbinical dynasty; his principal teachers were Menahem Mendel of Rymanow and Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin, and after them the Maggid of Kozenice and the Rabbi of Opatow (Apta). He had close links also with certain outstanding disciples of the Seer of Lublin, prominent among these being R. Naphtali of Ropecyce and R. Zevi Hirsch of Zhidachov.

The Rabbi of Dynow was one of the few whose teaching gained acceptance among all hasidic circles, and his book *Benei Yisakhar* is reckoned one of the classics of hasidism. Since 1846 it has been printed at least twenty-one times (an average of one edition per seven years), while the *Toledot Ya'akov Yosef*, which is of equivalent scope, has appeared since 1780 in sixteen editions, one for every thirteen years. And *Benei Yisakhar* is only one of a dozen major works composed by the Rabbi of Dynow.

In the course of editing the book *Sur mera va'asch tov* by the Rabbi of Zhidachov, with commentary by the Rabbi of Dynow,¹ I had occasion to study his other works, and

¹ The book was first published (in Lemberg, c.1832) under the title *Haklamah vekeresh le'ets halayim*, without the Rabbi of Dynow's commentary. In 1840 it was published again, this time with the commentary, and since then it has been known by the title of *Sur mera va'asch tov*. The early editions contained no more than half the commentary. It was published in full for the first time in the Munlachov (Munkacz) edition of 1901. This edition contained the approbation of R. Zevi Hirsch of Munkacz who stated as follows: 'I have heard, and it is the generally accepted view, that the publisher of the first edition deliberately left out much of the material... I have recently had occasion to inspect... the holograph... of Rabbi Zevi Elimelekh of Dynow... I was alarmed to discover that the printed edition is very defective... To