

Let the Old Make Way for the New

Studies in the Social and Cultural History
of Eastern European Jewry

Presented to Immanuel Etkes

Edited by David Assaf and Ada Rapoport-Albert

Volume I: Hasidism and the Musar Movement



The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History
Jerusalem

Editorial Board

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ISBN 978-965-227-257-7

Catalogue No. 185-580

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Printed in Israel, 2009

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Typesetting: The Zalman Shazar Center
Printing: 'Givnat' Press Ltd., Be'erotaim

quasi-rebbe and being treated as such by all those closely associated with the Lubavitch court.¹⁷¹

Alongside these fragments of information on the involvement of rebbeisms in the provision of food, the memoirist literature of twentieth century Habad refers occasionally to men who were in charge of various aspects of food production, distribution and financial management, most specifically in connection with the Tomkhey Temimim yeshiva. For example, Moshe Nahman Garelik is described as the “steward” (*sadrani*) of the student kitchen and dining room in Lubavitch,¹⁷² at the branch of the yeshiva in Shchedin, the male bursar (“*ha-menahel ha-gashmi*”) decided to economise by stopping the provision of desert for the students’ Sabbath meal, a decision which was eventually overruled by the Admor Shalom Dovber himself;¹⁷³ and tea for the students at Lubavitch was prepared by the gentle *havlik*.¹⁷⁴ It seems likely that by the early twentieth century, the rebbeism’s role had begun to shift away from direct involvement with the kitchen or with oversight of the “court economy” – a responsibility that was now increasingly being placed in the hands of male officials. The rebbeism, modeling itself on what had become the social norm for the women of the upper bourgeoisie, was supporting her husband’s projects in a more personal-secretarial or even executive capacity,¹⁷⁵ as did Shterna Sarah when she first engaged her *Damen ferym* in a fund-raising campaign, which was to pave the way for the emergence of Habad’s female constituency.

171 Cf. above n. 69.

172 See Jacobson, *Zikkaron li-Yeney Yisra'el*, selections published in *Keren Habad* 3 (above, p.64), 250.

173 See Karak’s memoirs (above, n. 77), 264.

174 See selections from Iser Gutin’s memoirs, *Kur’oni*, published by Mondshine in *Keren Habad* 3, 272.

175 See above at nn. 89–92.

THE BAAL SHEM TOV’S *IGGERET HA-KODESH* AND CONTEMPORARY HABAD “OUTREACH”

Naftali Loewenthal

The popular version of the Baal Shem Tov’s *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*¹ includes the famous passage in which, entering the heavenly palace of the Messiah during a mystical ascent of the soul, the Baal Shem Tov asks, “When will you come?” The answer given is, “At the time when your teaching is ... revealed in the world, and your wellsprings gush outwards ... and [others]

* Thanks are due to Rabbis Shmuel Lew, Leivi Yitshak Raskin, Michael Seligson and Shragai Fairish Vogel for many useful clues regarding this investigation, and also to Mr. Zvi Rabin A.L.A. and his wife Mrs. Faige Rabin, the librarians of the Lubavitch Library in London, for their courteous efforts to provide a number of works needed in the course of research.

1 In Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye’s *Ben Porai Yosef*, first printed in Koretz in 1781 and reproduced in part at the beginning of *Keter Shem Tov* (Zolkiew, 1794). A variant manuscript was published by David Frankel in his *Iggerot ha-Beshit ve-Talmidav* (Lvov, 1923), another by Yehoshua Mondshine and yet another by H.D.A. Tiefenbrun (see below). For a discussion of the manuscript versions of the letter, especially Frankel’s, see Mordechai Shragai Bauminger, “Letters of our Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov and his son-in-law R. Yehiel Mikhal to Rabbi Avraham Gershon of Kutov,” *Sinai* 71 (1972): 248–69; idem., *Sinai* 72 (1973): 270–82; Avraham Rubinstejn, “The Letter of the Beshit to R. Gershon of Kutov,” *Sinai* 67 (1970): 120–39; idem., *Sinai* 72 (1972): 189–202; idem., *Sinai* 73 (1973): 175–80; Y. Mondshine, “Nusah Kadam shel Iggeret ‘Aliyat ha-Neshamah le-ha-Beshit’,” *Migdal ‘Oz* (Kfar Habad, 1980), 119–26; Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism. A Quest for the Historical Ba’al Shem Tov* (Berkeley, 1996), 97–113; Immanuel Etkes, *The Beshit: Mystic, and Leader*, trans. Sadya Sternberg, (Waltham, MA, 2005), 79–80, 282–8; Haviva Pedayah, “Iggeret ha-Kodesh shel ha-Beshit: Nusah ha-1.kest u-Temunat ha-Olam – Meshiviyut, Hifgalut, Ekstazah ve-Shabat ut,” *Zion* 70/3 (2005): 311–54; H.D.A. Tiefenbrun, “Iggeret ‘Aliyat ha-Neshamah ha-Yedut ah me-ha-Beshit,” *Hevkehul ha-Beshit: Me’asef le-Mishnat ha-Hasidut, Toldoteha ve-Hinzyuha* 20 (5768) (Tivon 4, 5th year: 6 19 (with a response by Y. Mondshine).

too are able to make [mystical] unifications (*yihutin*) and [mystical] ascents (*aliyot*) like you..." The text continues: "I was shocked at this; I was very upset that the time until this could be was so long."

The passage in the manuscript version published by Yehoshua Mondshine, which Immanuel Ekkes in his important book on the Baal Shem Tov accepts as authentic, is more or less the same.² By contrast, in the manuscript version published by David Frankel and discussed by Mordechai Baumingger, the Messiah's reply is much shorter: "Once your Torah will have spread through the whole world, etc." The idea remains that the coming of the Messiah depends on the spread of the Baal Shem Tov's teachings, but the crucial phrase "gush outwards" is missing.

It is this phrase — present in all the other versions of the letter — that became the key element of the process discussed here. There has been much scholarly debate concerning the different versions of the letter, raising such questions as what the Ba'al Shem Tov's exchange with the Messiah might tell us about the Baal Shem Tov himself, how it might have been understood by the early hasidic followers, and how it related to the much discussed issue of messianism in Hasidism.³ However, our focus is on how a few words from this eighteenth-century text gradually became a central motto for followers of the HaBaD-Lubavitch school in the twentieth century, generating a major change in the direction of the movement.

In early HaBaD, the study of mystical teachings in the form of HaBaD hasidic texts was strongly encouraged for all followers. As Rachel Elior has shown,⁴ Hayyim Vital had already given a forceful impetus to the communication of kabbalistic ideas, and HaBaD was committed to this from

the outset, distinguishing itself from most other hasidic schools by the emphasis it placed on the personal study of mystical teachings, which its followers were expected to utilize in contemplative prayer. This was a point of serious conflict with other hasidic leaders, such as R. Avraham of Kalisk, who thought that "too much oil [i.e.: mystical teachings] will extinguish the lamp."⁵ The HaBaD approach may have been influenced by the general tenor of this passage in the Baal Shem Tov's letter, but the key phrase was not actually quoted in the main published writings of early HaBaD, such as *Tanya*, *Torah Or*, *Likkutei Torah*, or the polemical letters between Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady and Avraham of Kalisk. The first discussion of it that I have found is in a *sihah* (talk) given in Lubavitch on 19 Kislev,⁶ 1907 by Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, the fifth Rebbe (1860–1920), who, incidentally, is said to have kept in the drawer of his desk a volume of *Keter Shem Tov* (where the letter appears on the first page) together with two other volumes of hasidic teachings, which he would frequently peruse.⁷

Shalom Dovber's talk can be seen as the first stage in the process of the transforming of a brief passage from the Baal Shem Tov's letter into a powerful HaBaD motto. The key word in the text is *hutsah* (outwards). Shalom Dovber, known as the RaShab, explains that *hutsah* refers to the person who does not have an exalted soul, or who has not achieved inner purity. In the first generations of Hasidism, the intense spirituality it espoused was accessible only to the spiritually gifted. The Ba'al Shem Tov's wellsprings could not reach ordinary people "outside." However, states the RaShab, after Shneur Zalman's arrest and release from prison, his style of teaching changed. His hasidic discourses became more accessible to the ordinary rational mind, as a result of which, the spiritual ideas could be

2 Ekkes agrees with Mondshine that both the Mondshine and the Baumingger versions are authentic, and are, respectively, the first (before 1750) and second (1752) letters, which the Baal Shem Tov sent to his brother-in-law. The text printed in *Ben Porot Yosef* would seem to be an amalgam of them both (Ekkes, *The Beshv*, 80, 288).

3 See Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*, 245, n. 8; Ekkes, *The Beshv*, 82–7.

4 See Rachel Elior, "Messianic Expectations and Spiritualization of Religious Life in the Sixteenth Century," *Revue des études juives* 145 (1986): 35–49, reprinted in David B. Ruderman (ed.), *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York and London, 1992), 283–98.

5 See the text of the letter in Ya'acov Barnai, *Hasidic Letters from Eretz-Israel* (Jerusalem, 1980), 240 [in Hebrew].

6 This festive day in the HaBaD community celebrates the release of Rabbi Shneur Zalman from his first imprisonment in 1798. See below for Rabbi Shalom Dovber's declaration in 1901 that it is the "New Year of Hasidism."

7 See Rabbi Yosef Yitshak's description of this custom of his father in *Sefer ha-Mu'amarim... Ahtzer Yosef Yitshak* 5710, 265. The other volumes were the Maggid's *Or Torah* and Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya*.

appreciated even by people who had neither exalted souls nor inner purity.⁸ Shalom Dovber added that this was a matter of concern in hasidic circles beyond HaBaD, and that they claimed that the Baal Shem Tov “wept” at the idea that the sacred teachings should be transmitted to those who were “outside.”⁹

Information imparted to me many years ago by an elderly Hasid, Shmuel Grossman, who had studied in the yeshivah in Lubavitch around 1910, in the time of the RaShBaB, shows the extent to which hasidic teachings were regarded as “holy” in the HaBaD circles around Shalom Dovber. Grossman described how the teacher who taught *Tanya* in the yeshivah “read the words and translated them into Yiddish but did not give any explanations: they were too holy. However, as he read, his eyes were streaming with tears.”¹⁰

Earlier, in Kislev 5762, towards the end of 1901, Shalom Dovber had announced in a letter originally addressed to his son Yosef Yitshak, that it was very likely (*karov ha-davar*) that the 19th of Kislev celebration was “the Rosh Hashanah of hasidic teachings ... which are bequeathed to us by our [HaBaD] Rebbes and which are indeed the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov.”¹¹

The idea that the HaBaD teachings are, in some way, those of the Baal Shem Tov, despite their difference in style and content, was expressed by Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, the Admor of Kopyts (d. 1900), who was the grandson of the third generation HaBaD leader, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the Tsemah Tsedek (1789–1866). According to Shlomo Zalman’s son, his father “would often say that he was very meticulous not to alter the exact turn of phrase of his grandfather [Menachem Mendel], and the latter would

8 *Torat Shalom, Sefer ha-Sihot* (Brooklyn, 1946), 112–17. Note that the editors of this book (112, n. 1) writing in 1946, felt it necessary to explain that the phrase “when your wellsprings gush outwards” was from the Baal Shem Tov’s letter. This suggests that the concept had not yet been popularized.

9 *Ibid.*, 113.

10 Oral communication c. 1975 from Shmuel Grossman (d. 1979), son of R. Asher Grossman of Nikolayev, the editor of the Vilna 1900 edition of *Tanya*. The teacher thus described was the *mashtei’a* (spiritual guide) from an Osternan. (Concerning the latter, see Nahum Shannyayahu Sissonkin, *Zikhronot* (Jerusalem, 1980), 69–70.

11 *Iggerot Kotlesh ... Admor ... Shalom Dovber*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn, 1982), 299.

preserve the exact turn of phrase of [Shneur Zalman], as he received [the teaching] from the Rav, the Maggid [of Mezeritch], and the Rav, the Maggid [in turn, had received them] from the Baal Shem Tov.”¹² The idea that the Baal Shem Tov’s metaphorical “river”¹³ flowed till the recent passing of Menachem Mendel in 1866, is expressed in a letter written by Shlomo Zalman. He writes, however, that now, the river has dried up.¹⁴

Shlomo Zalman’s son’s letter, dated 1901, implicitly adds Shlomo Zalman’s voluminous HaBaD style teachings to the chain of transmission of the Baal Shem Tov’s “river.” These ideas were fully alive at the time when Shalom Dovber was writing, and it is understandable that he, too, should have made the claim that the chain of expositions of the HaBaD teachings, including those of his own father, R. Shmuel (known as the MaHaRaSh, d. 1882), uncle of Shlomo Zalman and rival Admor in Lubavitch, were also the “wellsprings” of the Baal Shem Tov.¹⁵

Shalom Dovber stated in his talk of 1907: “I maintain that the real gushing of the wellsprings outwards began after ‘Peterburg.’”¹⁶ He explained that the liberation of Shneur Zalman vindicated, in his own eyes, his method of communicating hasidic thought, and through his newly

12 From the introductory letter by Yehudah Leib to the first volume of his edition of his father’s Shlomo Zalman’s *Magen Avot* (Berditchev, 5662 [1901–2], reprinted Brooklyn, 1976).

13 Citing the Zoharic theme of the river from Eden which ebbs and flows (cf. Zohar I 32b, and frequently). It is noteworthy that this term is used, rather than the theme of the “wellsprings” (*ma’yanot*) from the letter of the Baal Shem Tov.

14 This letter of 1866, printed in the first volume of *Magen Avot*, was written after Shlomo Zalman’s father Yehudah Leib had died a few months after his father, the Tsemah Tsedek, had passed away in Nisan 1866. The double death intensified the sense of being cut off from the source. Shlomo Zalman’s letter is critical of the mass of the HaBaD following, claiming that they study the HaBaD teachings but do not put them into practice in terms of contemplation and inner spiritual effort.

15 Subsequently his own voluminous and remarkable teachings were probably seen by him (and certainly by his followers, especially his son and successor, Yosef Yitshak) as also embodying the wellsprings of the Baal Shem Tov.

16 *Torat Shalom*, 112. “Peterburg” (sic) signifies the arrest of Shneur Zalman, his incarceration in the Peter-Paul fortress in St Petersburg and his subsequent release on 19 Kisleev, 1798.

intellectualist, rational-style discourses, ideas conveying intense spirituality became available to "everyone," namely to all the hasidic followers of HaBaD, despite their awareness that they were neither "exalted" nor "purified." Thus, in his view, following Shneur Zalman's release on 19 Kislev 1798, the wellsprings began to be spread outwards.

We see that at the start of the twentieth century, the phrase *hutsah* in the Baal Shem Tov's letter was taken to mean the communication of spirituality to the hasidic followers themselves, including, and perhaps especially, the students in Shalom Dovber's yeshivah, who were studying hasidic teachings and sometimes engaging in contemplative prayer; they were considered to be "outside" because they did not have exalted souls, and had not succeeded in achieving inner purity.¹⁷

We now turn to the use of this theme by Shalom Dovber's son, Rabbi Yosef Yitshak Schneersohn (1880–1920) and his successor, Rabbi Menachem Mendel (1902–1994). Their understanding and exposition of this theme generated major changes in Lubavitch thought and practice.

Yosef Yitshak's key presentation of the Baal Shem Tov's letter was on *Simhat Torah* 5690 (1929, in an apartment at 184 Brooklyn Avenue, in Crown Heights, Brooklyn).¹⁸ After several years of struggle to preserve traditional Judaism in the Soviet Union in the face of Communist oppression,¹⁹ he was imprisoned and then released in 1927. Following a sojourn in Riga, he embarked on a journey which included the Holy Land and then the United States. The fact that his talk on *Simhat Torah* took place in the secular West was a crucial factor in his presentation of the letter's significance.

17 Concerning the establishment of this yeshivah in 1897, see N. Brawer "Yisudah shel Yeshivat 'Tomkhey Temininim' ve-Hashpa'atah 'al Temi' at HaBaD," in Immanuel Etkes (ed.), *Yeshivot u-Vatet Mikdashot* (Jerusalem, 2007), 357–68.

18 See Rabbi Yosef Yitshak, *Sigler ha-Sihot 5688–5691 (1927–1931)* (Brooklyn, 1995), 110–30. Concerning the circumstances of this talk, see the Introduction (44, 46). The apartment in which it was delivered belonged to Mr. Werbovsky of the Hebrew Publishing Company.

19 See David E. Fishman, "Preserving Tradition in the Land of Revolution: the Religious Leadership of Soviet Jewry, 1917–1930," in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *The Lives of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era* (New York and Jerusalem, 1992), 85–118.

Another important factor was Yosef Yitshak's view of the coming of the Messiah. In his letter, the Baal Shem Tov asks the Messiah when he will come. As explained by Yosef Yitshak, this should be seen in the context of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's identical question to the Messiah in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 98a): "when are you coming?" – "Today," says the Messiah." As the Talmudic story unfolds, it transpires that "today" means, in the words of Psalms 95:7, "Today, if you listen to [G-d's] voice." According to Yosef Yitshak, the Baal Shem Tov saw the self-sacrifice of the Jewish people in the darkness of Exile, and as far as he was concerned, they were listening to G-d's voice. In that case, he asked, why had the Messiah not yet come?²⁰

Then follows a key statement which, I suggest, can be seen as defining Yosef Yitshak's goal and program for the future. Since the Jewish people had indeed "listened to G-d's voice," he says, the Baal Shem Tov "wanted to decide that he with his sacred company (*havraya kadisha*), the hidden *tsaddikim*, would bring the Messiah."²¹

One wonders whether Yosef Yitshak saw himself, together with the *Temininim*²² who had fought to keep Judaism alive in the Soviet Union, as constituting a similar *havraya kadisha* who would themselves be able to bring the Messiah. A year earlier, in Riga, Yosef Yitshak had declared that for the Jews of the Soviet Union, on account of their strenuous, self-sacrificing efforts to maintain a vestige of Jewish life under the Communists, "they only have to polish the buttons of the garments with which they will greet the Messiah."²³

Returning once more to the Baal Shem Tov's question as presented by Yosef Yitshak, which was also, clearly, his own question in 1929: If the Jewish people, or many of them, had shown such dedication, why was the Messiah delayed?

The answer is that the Messiah will indeed come, "when your – the Baal Shem Tov's – wellsprings spread outwards." For Yosef Yitshak, as for his

20 *Sigler ha-Sihot 5688–5691*, 112.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Students and alumni of the *Tomkhey Temininim* yeshivah were called *Temininim*. See below, n. 55.

23 *Ibid.*, 42.

father Shalom Dovber, this meant that the wellsprings of HaBaD Hasidism, expressing the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, have to spread to the "outside."

Where is this "outside"? As Yosef Yitshak's talk unfolds, it becomes apparent that the scattered HaBaD followers were themselves the "outside" that the wellsprings needed to reach, and also that this "outside" was in some way, "not fit."²⁴ In 1929, from the viewpoint of the hasidic and other Orthodox communities of Eastern Europe, America was indeed "not fit" for the traditional observance and Jewish spirituality of the past. It was the *goldene medine* as regards material goals, but not in terms of the quest for holiness. The HaBaD followers who had made their way there could be considered as being "outside," on many counts, despite Yosef Yitshak's own earlier attempts to strengthen their hasidic identity by founding the "Agudas Chassidei CHaBaD of the United States and Canada" in 1924. Members of this group no doubt formed the inner circle accompanying the Rebbe in the 1929 *Simhat Torah* celebrations. Yet, it is likely others were present too, with a lesser level of HaBaD affiliation. As Yosef Yitshak clearly says, when considering the erstwhile Hasid in America, one is not speaking merely of a lack of study of hasidic teachings and customs, but of being "*opgerissen fun Yiddisheit*," torn away from basic halakhic observances such as women's ritual purity (*taharat ha-mishpahah*), *Tejilin*, Shabbat, and kosher food.²⁵

In his *Simhat Torah* talk, addressed to the probably somewhat mixed group who had come to eat the festive meal with him, Yosef Yitshak delineates the goal for the individual who is imbibing the wellsprings of HaBaD hasidic teachings. This is the acquisition of what he calls "Divine intellect," *sekhel eloki*:

Divine intellect is G-dliness which is contracted in such a way that a created being should be able to understand it ... Despite the fact that [understanding] is limited ... and G-dliness is without limit and simultaneously combines

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.
²⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

opposites, nonetheless Divine intellect is something finite which understands, which grasps, aspects of that which is unlimited....

The understanding of Divine intellect differs from human intellect. Human intellect can only understand something finite ... first it limits the topic, then it understands it. In the case of Divine intellect, not only does it not begin by limiting the thing it is trying to understand, even when the thing is understood it remains infinite.²⁶

This passage represents, in my view, the attempt to convey the luminous state of consciousness which, according to Yosef Yitshak, can be achieved through the study of hasidic teachings and their application in contemplative prayer. The text continues with a common contemplative theme, the idea that all existence is sustained by the Divine life-force, and explains how it is to be utilized in the morning prayer. This leads to an ecstatic state:

...this understanding brings the person to a beautiful and wise world, where he encounters himself, his own soul, and at the same time there are awakened in him inner powers, there open within him key wellsprings of understanding permeated with feelings of delight.

It is a kind of World to Come form of life ... a life of light and clarity. Everything is seen in its true form. One sees the true delight in good, and the true suffering of bad. The Divine intellect illuminates and reveals the dual face which G-d has given the person: on the one hand, the wild animal which is within him, on the other hand the perfectly righteous man (*tsadik*) which he could be. It reveals his freedom of choice, to choose as he likes...²⁷

According to Yosef Yitshak, the revelation of this Divine intellect is the legacy of the Baal Shem Tov. This comprises his own teaching and the teachings of the HaBaD line of leaders, and it is these teachings that provide the clue to the coming of the Messiah.²⁸

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.
²⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.
²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

In the Messiah's answer to the question of the Baal Shem Tov – "when are you coming?" – "When your wellsprings gush outwards" – it is clearly understood that the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov [*Lorat ha-Baal Shem Tov*] is the vessel for the radiance of the Messiah...²⁹

Between the lines of Yosef Yitshak's talk is the suggestion that in this American realm of the "outside" the ability to achieve "Divine intellect," through study of hasidic teachings and contemplation in prayer will open the door to the coming of the Messiah. In the Soviet Union the Messiah's advent had been earned by self-sacrifice for the preservation of Judaism. In the West it will be gained through the spreading of the wellsprings "outwards," meaning the rediscovery of hasidic spirituality in a materialist and secular environment.

This spiritual focus is complemented by a more practical demand, expressed in a lengthy exposition of Isaiah ch.11, describing the qualities of the Messiah and explaining how to hasten his advent. This is expressed in terms of a spiritual intimation which becomes the fulcrum for practical action:

The Messiah is a radiance of the Essence. We created beings, dwelling in houses of clay ... are too small to grasp what "radiance" is in general, and the radiance of the Essence in particular. It is understood how far we are from understanding what the Messiah is. However, by considering his behavior and activities, we can gain a tiny fragment of knowledge...³⁰

The behavior and activities of the Messiah are explained in terms of the verses from Isaiah 11:2-4: "and there will rest on him ... a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and might ... his scent will be with fear of G-d, and he will not judge [merely] by the sight of his eyes ... he will judge the poor with righteousness ..."³¹

Yosef Yitshak explores the theme of the inward and sacred "judgment" by the Messiah and leads his audience to a sense of their own spiritual

inadequacy. The insight of the Messiah, who sees unerringly the flaws of the individual, is lent to the would-be Hasid himself. He may be a wealthy American, but he discovers that inwardly he is poor.³² Now he must battle with his own desires (*ta'avot*), including desires for permitted things, his total immersion in the pleasures of eating meat and drinking wine.³³

In this context Yosef Yitshak gives a practical and organizational instruction, that:

This should be the duty of Agudas Chassidei CHaBaD in the United States and Canada, to organize at certain times, as convenient for the members, hasidic talks and explanations, and to discuss carefully various topics concerning strengthening observance of *mitsvot* and love of Torah, which will provide spiritual food for many who are of hasidic [ie: HaBaD] stock.³⁴

It thus seems that the spreading of the wellsprings outwards means that the descendants of HaBaD families should live as Hasidim in America. However, Yosef Yitshak adds another important twist to this concept. What is the direction of HaBaD spirituality? Is it inward, or for that matter heavenward, or is it outward, towards the world?

"People make a mistake," says Yosef Yitshak. They think that *avodah*, spiritual service, is "that one goes to the *mi'beva'h*³⁵ before prayer, one prays for five or six hours with vitality (*haya'ut*), one fasts,³⁶ one learns a lot of Torah..." But all this is not enough, says Yosef Yitshak. HaBaD Divine service means an outward direction having an effect on one's surroundings, somehow improving the world, so that "when a Jew walks in the street, the stone has to know that a Jew is treading on it, the air has to become more pure, the world has to become more radiant." In order to achieve this, says

32 Ibid., 122.

33 Ibid., 121.

34 Ibid., 122.

35 Lit. "one goes into water."

36 Although ascetic fasting (other than the statutory fasts) is generally seen as negated in the hasidic movement, the third section of *Tanya*, *iggeret ha-Teshuvah*, ch. 4, following R. Isaac Luria, does recommend undertaking many fasts as an aspect of penitence.

29 Ibid., 114.

30 Ibid., 115.

31 Ibid., 117.

Yosef Yitshak, one must indeed study hasidic teachings and pray at length and with enthusiasm; one must uproot all bad traits and instill positive ones. "Then," he says, "the world will be illuminated." The difference appears to be one of intention and direction: if one's goal is to light up the world, the outside, this indeed will be the effect of one's personal spiritual service.³⁷

The idea of "purifying the air" was to be developed by Yosef Yitshak in the early 1940s, when once again back in the United States after spending some ten years in Poland.³⁸ One of the activities of his "Machne Israel" (*machaneh yisrael*) society was the learning by heart of chapters of Mishnah, in order to recite them at every free opportunity, including especially while walking in the street. This was described as having the effect of "purifying the air," a way of preparing for the Messiah, as has been described by Gershon Greenberg.³⁹

In this earlier talk on *Simhat Torah* 1929 we see the germ of this idea in the context of the discussion of the Messiah's reply to the Baal Shem Tov. One aspect of the wellsprings reaching outwards is to live as a Hasid in America: one contemplates hasidic teachings, gaining some intimation of the Divine intellect; one prays at length, with vitality, specifically in an environment which is perceived as being outside, beyond the realm of traditional Judaism. Another aspect is that one's spirituality is turned outwards: it is not just for oneself; it is intended to have an effect on the world, or as Yosef Yitshak puts it, to purify the world and illuminate it.

Another section of Yosef Yitshak's talk speaks not of hasidic spirituality but of simple traditional Jewish observance. During his years in the Soviet Union, promoting the observance of basic Judaism in the face of oppression had been the focus of his activities. Now visiting America, this simple level of demand remained:

37 *Sefer ha-Shtar* 5688-5691, 125.

38 The idea of reciting (or thinking) words of Torah by heart while walking in the street in order to bring the Redemption closer was expounded by Yosef Yitshak a year later, also on Simhat Torah, 1930, then in Latvia. See *ibid.*, 155.

39 See Gershon Greenberg, "Mahane Israel-Lubavitch 1940-1945: Actively Responding to *Khurban*," in Alan Berger (ed.), *Bearing Witness to the Holocaust 1939-1989* (Lewiston, NY, 1991), 141-63.

For the sake of the education of one's children, the conduct in one's home must be "Jewish" (*a Yiddishe*). When the father goes to the *minyán* to pray, and attends the *shulim* which are taught there, and the mother observes *Yiddishkeit*, and Shabbat is Shabbat, then the air in the home is good, and this has an effect on the children. It implants *Yiddishkeit* in them.⁴⁰

This is the most basic level of Yosef Yitshak's teaching to his audience in Brooklyn, the scions of HaBAd families whom "the torrent of *Gadlut* has scattered round the world..."⁴¹ On this he built the higher levels, whereby the home and the parents should not only represent Orthodox observance but also HaBAd hasidic warmth, vitality and spirituality, leading even to the intensity of intimations of the Divine intellect, not just for oneself but with the intention of illuminating the world. This higher level is the spreading of the wellsprings outwards.

Yosef Yitshak's talk on *Simhat Torah* in Brooklyn during his visit to the United States in 1929-30 can be seen as laying the groundwork for future developments in HaBAd-Lubavitch, linked to the interpretation of the Baal Shem Tov's letter. There is the attempt to communicate spirituality, the wellsprings; and there is also the concern for basic Jewish observance.

The Messiah in the Newspaper

Yosef Yitshak left the United States in the summer of 1930 and returned to Europe. Till 1933 he was based in Riga, although during this period he made a number of visits to communities in Lithuania, Vohlyn, Poland and Germany.⁴² In August 1933 he moved to Warsaw, which became his new center, till the summer of 1935 when he moved to Otrock, a rural suburb of Warsaw. This became the setting for his *Tomkhey Teminin* yeshivah and the base for all his activities till the outbreak of war in September 1939. During this period a major aspect of his work was the attempt to spread HaBAd hasidic teachings, including his own historiographical perspectives,

40 *Sefer ha-Shtar* 5688-5691, 128.

41 *Ibid.*, 130.

42 See S.B. Levin's introduction to *Iggerot Kedosh ... Admor ... Yosef Yitshak*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn, 1982), 25.

as has been explored by Ada Rapoport-Albert.⁴³ The journal *Ha-Tamin*, published in Otwock from 1935 to 1937, was a major vehicle for this, together with the publication of talks and discourses in Hebrew and Yiddish, and many personal letters. It was also during this period that Yosef Yitshak began the serious endeavor to communicate hasidic teachings to women.⁴⁴ The anonymous editorial of the fourth issue of *Ha-Tamin*, published in the summer of 1936 and celebrating the beginning of its second year focuses on the theme of the encounter of the Baal Shem Tov with the Messiah.

The hasidic story [*legadat ha-hasidim*] is well known whereby in the year [4]507 (1746) at the time of the Baal Shem Tov's ascent of the soul (*aliyat ha-neshamah*) in which he reached the heavenly palace of the Messiah, the Baal Shem Tov asked: "when are you coming?" and the answer from the Messiah was, "when your wellsprings gush outwards." A broad and deep explanation of the Baal Shem Tov's question, and of the answer of the Messiah is given in the *Sihah of Simhat Torah* [by Yosef Yitshak] of the year [5]690 (1929) in New York (which will soon be printed),⁴⁵ and from what is said there we learn, in brief, that there are places and kinds of people who are called "outside," because they are still outside the fortified wall of Torah and religion (*dat*) infused with the flames of hasidic fire. Thus the Messiah answered: when your wellsprings gush outwards, that is, when the wellsprings of the Baal Shem Tov's hasidic teachings reach also the "outside," the distant places which are still outside the border of Hasidism.⁴⁶

- 43 Regarding Yosef Yitshak's presentations of the history of Hasidism, see Ada Rapoport-Albert's "Hagiography with Footnotes, Editing Tales and the Writing of History in Hasidism," *History and Theory*, Beiheft 27 (1988), 119–59. Cf. 153.
- 44 See Ada Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism: S.A. Horodecky and the Maid of Ludmir Tradition," in A. Rapoport-Albert and S. Zipperstein (eds.), *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky* (London, 1988), 495–525; cf. 508–9 and n. 82; see also Naftali Loewenthal, "Women and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism," in Immanuel Etkes, David Assaf et al (eds.), *Within Hasidic Circles, Studies in Hasidism in Memory of Mordecai Wilensky* (Jerusalem, 1999), 7–*65, cf. *42–*52.
- 45 It was printed in the second volume of *Likkutei Dibburim* (Otwock, 1937). An earlier version of it was published in New York in 1930.
- 46 *Ha-Tamin* (Kfar HaBd, 1971), 2nd Year, Issue 4, 2 [330].

The delicate point being made here is that the Orthodox, Torah-studying Jews of Poland can still be considered "outside" if their Judaism is not inspired by the fire of Hasidism – in particular, HaBd Hasidism. It was this sentiment that prompted the establishment of *Ha-Tamin*, a journal in Hebrew addressed to the Orthodox, as a medium for the "spreading of the wellsprings." The perspective it promoted is underscored by the following passage in the editorial, which cited a saying which it attributed to Rabbi Shneur Zalman⁴⁷ that "before the coming of the Messiah even the newspapers will publicize his advent," explaining that this means that before the Messiah's advent, hasidic teachings, which reveal the radiance of the Messiah, will be publicized in newspapers. It seems that the editors were claiming that *Ha-Tamin* was fulfilling this role.

The messianic theme, linked directly with the Baal Shem Tov's letter, continues in the next paragraph:

The present period in which we find ourselves is without doubt the time of the "Heals of the Messiah," as in the sacred words of [Yosef Yitshak] in one of his *Sihot* at a hasidic gathering, whereby "we are now on Friday, the eve of Shabbat, after midday, and the sacred Shabbat will soon commence." The severe suffering and terrible persecution which our brothers the Jewish people are suffering in various countries, together with the unrest and revolutions which have shaken the entire world fully testify to this. There is not a shadow of doubt that now has come the time for fulfillment of the promise "when your wellsprings gush outwards."⁴⁸

These anonymous statements, which were without doubt inspired and authorized by Yosef Yitshak and possibly his son-in-law Menachem Mendel,⁴⁹ characterize the atmosphere of his sojourn in Poland. They repeat

- 47 See above n. 43.
- 48 *Ha-Tamin* 4, 3 [331].
- 49 In the 1987 trial in New York concerning the Lubavitch Library, the librarian, Rabbi Shalom Ber Levin presented evidence – manuscripts of articles with editorial comments in Menachem Mendel's distinctive handwriting – which indicates that he was closely involved in editing *Ha-Tamin*, although his name does not appear as an editor. (Personal communication from Rabbi Levin, 19/02/2008).

and intensify some of the themes we first encountered in his *Simhat Torah* talk of 1929, and provide a background to his publishing activities from his yeshivah and headquarters in Otwock. While the 1929 talk was addressed primarily to the descendants of HaBad families in America, the activities in Poland – particularly the publication of *Ha-Tamin* – took into consideration the Orthodox, Hebrew reading public, the “yeshivah world,” and the numerous hasidic communities who were as yet outside the circle of HaBad. The next step, widening the circle yet further, was to take place again in America, which Yosef Yitshak reached, via Warsaw, Riga, Stockholm and Gottleburg, in the spring of 1940.⁵⁰

Outreach in Montreal

At the end of 1941, Yosef Yitshak succeeded in bringing a group of nine advanced yeshivah students from the Lubavitch yeshivah in Otwock to safety in Canada via Shanghai (where forty others remained). They were denied visas to the United States and had to remain in Montreal, where there was a Lubavitch community large enough to maintain two Lubavitch synagogues.

At the behest of Yosef Yitshak, a Lubavitch yeshivah was founded in Montreal with these nine advanced students as its nucleus, and they were at once joined by twenty four others from the city.⁵¹ This is not in itself remarkable: by this date Yosef Yitshak had succeeded in founding the central Lubavitch yeshivah in Brooklyn, and further branches in Pittsburgh, Newark and Worcester. However, what is interesting for our investigation is that a letter from him to the students, outlining their program of studies (which was intended to duplicate the hasidic spirituality of Otwock), included the demand that they should spend considerable time with members of the Lubavitch community, “to arouse them from their fainting spell, to

awaken them from their slumber,” and that they should regularly recite hasidic discourses by heart in the two Lubavitch synagogues in the city. (One could imagine that the feat of the recital of a relatively lengthy discourse by heart, rather than teaching a text from a book, may have created an extra sense of atmosphere, providing a level of spiritual experience for the participants. Yosef Yitshak instructed further that the nine students should also provide Torah study sessions for others and do their best to attract into the yeshivah young men and teenage boys from the Lubavitch community and from outside it, in order to study with them.

Do not look at the “new vessel,” the beardless face, and sometimes also the lack of *tsitsit*. [Look] only at that which is good and straight in him, judge him in the scale of merit, have mercy on him, encourage him and draw him near.⁵²

To place these communal and “outreach” duties on yeshivah students was clearly seen by the students themselves as unusual. They wrote back to Yosef Yitshak complaining that the public study sessions took time away from their own advanced studies.

Yosef Yitshak responded with an enthusiastic depiction of the spiritual advantages gained through teaching others – that “one’s own mind and heart become a thousand times more clear,”⁵³ and the interesting statement that

Abraham was a wondrous intellectual [*maskil*], and it is the nature of scholars, lovers of wisdom, to regard time as precious, using it to further their own study. Nonetheless, through Abraham’s generosity of heart, he would forsake his longing for increasing his own intellectual understanding; in order to publicize [knowledge of] (i-)dliness in the world, explaining to the coarse and simple Arabs the concept of the Creator of the world and of His unity.⁵⁴

50 For his rescue from Europe, see Bryan Mark Rigg, *Rescued from the Reich: How One*

of Hitler’s Soldiers Saved the Lubavitcher Rebbe (New Haven and London, 2004); R. Shalom Ber Levin’s Introduction to *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Yosef Yitshak*, vol. 5 (Brooklyn, 1983), 5–27.

51 See *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Yosef Yitshak*, vol. 6 (Brooklyn, 1984), 1–2.

52 *Ibid.*, 48–51.

53 See Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s *Likkutei Torah, Be-Midbar*, vii.

54 *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Yosef Yitshak*, vol. 6, 90. I see *Bevreshet Rabbah*, 90 (to) The students were later sent in pairs to visit other communities in Canada, with the overt role of speaking about the plight of the Jews of Poland, but with the real aim of

Here, unlike our previous examples, there is no mention of the Baal Shem Tov's letter, although it seems likely that its message was understood as the background of this development, especially since hasidic teachings and inspiration were the major focus of Yosef Yitshak's demand. An important advance was being made in defining the self-image of a student of a Lubavitch yeshivah, called a *Tamim*.⁵⁵ He was not only studying for his own religious and intellectual benefit; he had a duty to spread spiritual awareness to others, following the example of the HaBaD-midrashic depiction of the Patriarch Abraham we saw above.

Immediate Repentance – Immediate Redemption

In the background of these developments was the horror of what was happening to European Jewry. Yosef Yitshak, who was engaged in practical attempts to rescue students in his yeshivot and his followers,⁵⁶ was convinced these were the travails preceding the Messiah, as we see from repeated articles in the monthly newspaper he published, *Ha-Keriah ve-ha-Kedushah*. Consequently, he generated a number of spiritual responses to the situation, as described by Gershon Greenberg.⁵⁷ One was

strengthening Torah study, and – one assumes – particularly the study of HaBaD hasidic teachings. See *Iggerot Kodesh... Admor Yosef Yitshak*, vol. 6, 89. In the summer the students of the yeshivah organized a camp for the youth of the city (see the editor's introduction to vol. 6, 19). Some of the nine students became well-known figures in wider Lubavitch society and the rabbinic world, such as Rabbi Yitshak Hendl (appointed Av Beth Din of Montreal, d. 2007), R. Menahem Zev Greenglass and R. Yosef Weinberg (author of *Shivrim be-Sefer ha-Tanya*, [Brooklyn, 1980]).
55 Since 1897 the Lubavitch yeshivah had been called "Tomakey Teminin," and the students and later the alumni were called *Teminin*. See *Ha-Tamim* 1:25, 27 quoted in Rabbi M. Schneerson, *Hayom Tom*, (Brooklyn, 1943), entry for 15 Elul. See Braver, "Yisudah," (above, n. 17), 361.

56 See S.B. Levin's introduction to *Iggerot Kodesh... Admor... Yosef Yitshak* vol. 5, 27-41. At one point Yosef Yitshak managed to obtain several hundred American visas for Jews in occupied Europe, but these were then cancelled by the U.S. government since the intended recipients of the visas had relatives in the area under Nazi occupation. See *ibid.*, 35.

57 See Gershon Greenberg, "Mahane Israel–Lubavitch 1940–1945," (above, n. 39).

the founding of "Mahane Israel" at the end of 1940. According to Yosef Yitshak, its focus was "positive activities in strengthening Judaism, putting on *tefillin*, keeping Shabbat, [observing] family purity, [Jewish] education and love of one's fellow Jew (*ahavat Yisrael*).... One has to go out into the street and demand of Jews: 'Repent! Do *Teshuvah!* Have mercy (*rakhmones*) on yourselves! The situation is very bad.'⁵⁸ The slogan of "Mahane Israel" was "*Le-athar li-teshuvah, le-athar li-ge'ulah*" – "immediate repentance, immediate redemption." As mentioned above, another aspect of its activities concerned "purifying the air" by reciting Psalms, Mishnah and *Tanya* by heart in the streets, wherever this was halakhically permitted.⁵⁹ Another outreach institution founded at this time was "Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch Inc." (Center for Jewish Education) which in 1943 was printing educational material in Yiddish and English, organizing *hadarim* for boys and girls – at least some of whom were from non-observant families – and organizing educational Shabbat groups for children.⁶⁰ Another activity was the "Religion Hour" in which Jewish pupils from public schools would be brought to a nearby location and given some form of religious instruction for an hour each week.⁶¹ All of these were placed under the directorship of Yosef Yitshak's son-in-law Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, when he reached New York in the spring of 1941.

Another response in 1941–1942 by Yosef Yitshak to the war in Europe was his beginning to write a "Torah Scroll to Welcome the Messiah" (*Sefer Torah le-kabbalat peney mashi'ah*). The Torah Scroll provided a way of preparing to greet the Messiah, but it was also intended to protect the Jewish

58 Rabbi Yosef Yitshak, *Sefer ha-Shot 5702 (1941–42)* (Brooklyn, 1964; Kfar HaBaD 1973), 114.

59 Torah may not be studied in an impure environment. See *Shulhan Arukh*, Orach Haim 85:1.

60 See *Iggerot Kodesh... Admor... Yosef Yitshak* vol. 7 (Brooklyn, 1983), 156.
61 *Ibid.*, Introduction by Rabbi S.B. Levin, 14–15. By 1944 nearly 2000 pupils took part in this. For a recent extensive collection of sources, see Yitzchok Napanstek (ed.), *Shivrey Tinnud ha Dat, Sektirah Historit shel ha-Mosad le-Hagganat ve-Hatzarat Haanah ha No'ar ha Yehudi be-Arsoi ha-Brit* (Brooklyn, 2006).

people from the suffering entailed in the "birthpangs of the Messiah."⁶² The theme of protection is also suggested by a story told by Yosef Yitshak on the day on which the writing of the Scroll began, concerning a Torah Scroll written at the behest of the Baal Shem Tov in order to stop a plague in Miedzybóz.⁶³ From the end of 1942, Yosef Yitshak and his son-in-law Menachem Mendel began signing off many of their letters with the slogan: *Le-ahar li-teshuvah, le-ahar li-ge'ulah*.

Did this outreach activism, spiritual intensity and messianic expectation link overtly with the letter of the Baal Shem Tov? Would it all have taken place anyway, if the letter were not known? Quite possibly. In the Soviet Union, Yosef Yitshak had been distinguished as a religious activist *par excellence*, and the themes of national suffering, pangs of the Messiah, repentance and intensification of religious observance are all linked and firmly implanted in rabbinic literature. Moreover, the idea that love of one's fellow Jew, *ahavat yisrael*, leads one to try to draw others closer to Jewish practice is clearly expressed in *Tanya*, the central text of HaBaD, together with the assurance that even if one's attempt to draw another person closer to Jewish observance is *not* successful, one still has fulfilled the *mitzvah* of love of one's fellow.⁶⁴ In addition, outside the hasidic movement, R. Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, the Hafetz Hayyim (1838–1933), was noted both for his intense messianic expectancy and his "outreach" concern for society. On American soil, other Jewish groups were involved in outreach, particularly the Young Israel organization, with which Lubavitch had cordial relations.⁶⁵ It was thus perfectly natural for Lubavitch in America during the 1940s to be similarly concerned with outreach, quite apart from the Baal Shem Tov's

letter. Despite the seminal talk on *Simhat Torah* of 1929, Yosef Yitshak's references to the theme of the letter are very few.

This is not so in the case of his son-in-law, Menachem Mendel. Many of his letters from the early 1940s mention this theme, particularly in connection with appeals for activism. The link is seen particularly in a series of letters from 1942–1943, sent by Menachem Mendel to a number of *Temimim*, alumni of the Lubavitch yeshivot, who now found themselves in various parts of the globe, such as the following, which was sent to a person in Mexico. After describing the activities of Machne Israel and Merkav L'Inyonei Chinuch, Menachem Mendel writes:

"G-d directs a person's footsteps" (Ps. 37:23) – all the *Temimim*, wherever they are, have a special task to introduce "light [i.e.: Jewish teachings] into the dwellings"⁶⁶ of the local Jews, to achieve all they can, and with total dedication (*mesirat nefesh*), as regards "spreading the wellspring" outwards," and especially in these times of *ikveta di-meshilva* when it is a double and redoubled duty of every one of the *Temimim* and *Anash lansh'v shelomeyma*, i.e. members of the Lubavitch fellowship] to fulfill the *mitzvah* of "Love your neighbor as yourself" and to be one of those who bring merit to the many (*mi-mezakek ha-rabim*). I am sure that you will make the effort to be active in all the above, and to participate in our sacred work, which unifies all the *Temimim* in all the four corners of the world...⁶⁷

This means two things: firstly, Menachem Mendel saw the outreach activities in which he was involved as examples of "spreading the wellsprings," linked also with the messianic tension of the time; secondly, that he viewed the *Temimim* whom history had scattered round the world as a pool of potential activists: martial the force of the person who is already on the spot for, after all, G-d has directed his footsteps, he is already "outside." This can be seen as an early form of the concept of "mission" (*sh'lim*) which later was to characterize his leadership of HaBaD, where

62 See *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Yosef Yitshak*, vol. 6, 279.

63 See *ibid.*, 280–3; *Sefer ha-Sihot 5702*, 118–9.

64 See Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya*, Pt. 1, ch. 32, fol. 41b.

65 See *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Yosef Yitshak*, vol. 6, Introduction (appendix), 21–4, minutes of a meeting between representatives of Young Israel and senior Lubavitch figures, including Menachem Mendel. The Lubavitchers sought to encourage Young Israel in its activities but also to ask them to move somewhat to the "right" in their religious approach, for example, to hold separate activities for boys and girls, and to try to prevent mixed dancing among their members.

66 Cf. Exodus 10:23.

67 *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Menachem Mendel*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn, 1987), 57. The letter is addressed to a Moshe Dulchin.

the “emissary” (*shaliah*) and his wife are sent “outside” in order to do his and her work of what was later termed “spreading abroad” (*hafatzah*) – a term obviously relating to the Baal Shem Tov’s letter.

Menachem Mendel saw a direct connection between the “spreading of the wellsprings” and the work of strengthening Jewish practice. A lengthy letter from 1944 to R. Moshe Pinhas Katz, who had studied in the Lubavitch yeshivah in Europe, was now living in Newark, N.J., and had financed the printing of hasidic teachings, emphasizes the importance of the publication of hasidic texts in terms of the letter of the Baal Shem Tov.⁶⁸ The letter also discusses two contrasting modes of drawing a person closer to observance of laws of the Torah. One is by emphasizing the loathsomeness of evil and the idea of punishment in *Gehinom*, while the other is “the path of Hasidism.” This means:

to explain to him the greatness of the Creator, how manifold are [His] works, the infinite greatness of Torah and the Commandments ... [and] knowledge of the [kabbalistic] down-chaining of the worlds ... [and] of the unity of G-d...⁶⁹

Through hasidic teachings, says Menachem Mendel, one can reach both the Divine soul and the animal soul of the person:

The [hasidic] discourses⁷⁰ relate more to the Divine soul, the mind, an effect which takes place from above to below (within the person), whereas “talks” (*sihot*)⁷¹ which include stories, explanations of the intellectualist aspects of hasidic teachings, arousal to [spiritual] Divine service and so on have an effect on both aspects [both the Divine soul and the animal soul]⁷²

68 Ibid., 255.

69 Ibid., 259.

70 The term *ma'amarim* is used, which in contemporary HaBaD means overtly kabbalistic expositions.

71 The term *sihot* signifies the more conversational and narrative style of public communication by the later HaBaD Admorim.

72 Ibid., 260.

This describes what was later to become the typical “Lubavitch” mode of communication and outreach, in which spiritual ideas – the “wellsprings” – fuel the attempts to increase the level of simple practical observance of the laws of the Torah.

The Motto of 19 Kislev

Another aspect of Menachem Mendel’s use of the theme of spreading, the wellsprings, differing from that of his father-in-law, is that he connected it to the HaBaD festival, 19th of Kislev, which had already been declared by Shalom Dovber to be the “Rosh Hashanah of hasidic teachings.” For Yosef Yisshak, the serious concept of Rosh Hashanah was the main theme of the 19th of Kislev festival. It was a time to reflect on the spiritual values of HaBaD, with all the earnestness of Rosh Hashanah in hasidic life. In the published transcripts of his talks as hasidic leader on this day, 19th of Kislev, from 1920 to 1949, he never mentions the theme of the Baal Shem Tov’s letter.⁷³

By contrast, from 1950 onwards Menachem Mendel draws a close connection between the two themes of the Rosh Hashanah of Hasidism and the goal of “spreading the wellsprings to the outside.” For this he employs the passage from Shalom Dovber we cited earlier,⁷⁴ claiming that the liberation of Rabbi Shneur Zalman on the 19th of Kislev (in 1798) celebrates the beginning of the spreading of the wellsprings to the outside. Yet there is an important shift of meaning. By the term “outside,” as we saw, Shalom Dovber meant HaBaD followers and yeshivah students studying; hasidic

73 See Yosef Yisshak’s talks on 19 Kislev in the series *Sifrei ha-Sihot* for the years, 1920–1927 (Brooklyn, 1992), 1927–1931 (Brooklyn, 1995), 1935–1940 (Brooklyn, 1989), 1940–1945 in separate volumes (Brooklyn 1963, 67; Kfar HaBaD 1961, 1971), and 1945–50 (Brooklyn, 2001). Regarding Yosef Yisshak’s talks on 19 and 20 Kislev in December 1932, see his *Likkutei Dikbharon* (Brooklyn, 1973; 4th edition), vol. 1, Likkut 2, 11b–47b. This speaks of the Baal Shem Tov (see fol. 11a b, 41a) but not explicitly about the ascent of the soul and *Iygeret ha-Kodesh*. The talk for 19 Kislev in December 1933, printed in the same volume of *Likkutei Dikbharon*, fol. 81b–111b, does not mention the Baal Shem Tov at all.

74 See passage referenced by n. 16.

teachings and contemplating in prayer, despite their lack of inner purification. For Menachem Mendel, the term patently includes the Jew who is “outside” the circle of traditional observance.

Yosef Yishak passed away on 10 Shevat 5710, (January 28, 1950). In December that year Menachem Mendel issued a public letter in order to prepare the Lubavitch community for the forthcoming celebration of the 19th of Kislev.⁷⁵ Addressed to “*Anash* [members of our fellowship], and lovers of Torah everywhere,” this letter presents the theme of “spreading the wellsprings to the outside” as central to Hasidism in general and as essential for all members of Lubavitch in particular. The focus of the letter is on the spreading of hasidic teachings not only in the synagogue or study house, but also “when sitting in a shop,” and similar. Moreover, “one should not limit oneself to particular groups or types of person ... one has to spread the wellsprings ... also to those who are outside all ‘camps’...”⁷⁶ On the 19th of Kislev festival, Menachem Mendel led a hasidic gathering, and near the beginning of his talk, expounded the idea that 19 Kislev celebrates the implementation of the “spreading of the wellsprings” to every Jew:

Previously it was accepted that study of secrets of Torah relates only to special people, or at least to those who had already put right all those aspects which needed correction (*tikkun*). [Rabbi Shneur Zalman] taught the new idea that study of hasidic teachings is relevant to every Jew, even to the lowest souls of the times of *ikavta di-meshiha*, even to those who have not yet fulfilled their task as regards [positive Commandments], and even to those who are not yet whole as regards [negative Commandments] — they too should study hasidic teachings...

This is the preparation for the coming of the Messiah, as stated by the Messiah in reply to the Baal Shem Tov’s question “when are you coming?”
 “When your wellsprings gush outwards.”⁷⁷

75 At this stage, Menachem Mendel had not accepted formal leadership of the Lubavitch movement. This would take place in January 1951, on the *Yahzeit* of his predecessor, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson *Torat Menachem Hinei Yehiyot 5711* (1950–51), vol. 1 (Ramle, 2002; 2nd edition), 110–11.
 76 *Ibid.*, 114–5.

In November 1951, now officially recognized as Lubavitcher Rebbe,⁷⁸ Menachem Mendel made a special appeal to “Rabbis, Jewish Leaders, leaders of *yeshivot*” before 19 Kislev, asking them to make a special effort to study the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and spread them to the “outside,” as well as emphasizing meticulous observance of the Commandments, love of one’s fellow, and personal spiritual refinement (*zikkah ha-mi'lot*) in the spirit of hasidic teachings.⁷⁹ The overt messianic tension of the 1940s had receded to the background, but the theme of spreading the wellsprings continued.

An Halakhic Exposition about “Wellsprings”

Throughout his leadership the theme of “spreading the wellsprings” was central in Menachem Mendel’s thought. A letter of 1951 to his emissary to Morocco adds an interesting twist to the interpretation of the wording. Here the focus is on the term *ma’ayanot* which we have been translating “wellsprings.” In the laws of a ritual pool, a *mikveh*, there is a complicated procedure for imparting the required purificatory power to the ordinary water of the pool. This entails connecting the pool’s water to a large quantity — forty *se’ah* (about 332 litres) — of natural rainwater. However, if the pool is continuously connected to a natural spring, a *ma’ayan*, then even the smallest amount of spring-water invests the ordinary water in the mikveh pool with the power to purify. A further point, which Maimonides regards as essential, is that the spring should continue its course after entering the pool.⁸⁰

Menachem Mendel explains these halakhic details in terms which imply that the ordinary water is the ordinary power of the emissary, the *shlichah*. The spring-water is the teaching of the Rebbe — as Menachem Mendel puts it, of the previous Rebbe, Yosef Yishak “who is the Baal Shem Tov of our

78 See the chapter on his succession to leadership in Avrum M. Ehrlich, *The Messianic of Brooklyn: Understanding Lubavitch Hasidism Past and Present* (Levvy, 2001), 43–8.

79 *Yegivot Kadosh ... Admor ... Menachem Mendel*, vol. 5 (Brooklyn, 1988), 43–4.
 80 See Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah*, Hil. Mikva’ot, 9:9.

generation.” By *hikashem*, spiritual connection to the inspirational wellspring of the Rebbe, the *shalich* is granted the power to inspire using his own “water,” his own imagination and energy. However, adds Menachem Mendel, this should follow the view of Maimonides, that the spring has to continue further, meaning that those with whom the *shalich* comes in contact should also become sources of inspiration for others.⁸¹

With this homily on the laws of the *mikveh*, Menachem Mendel expresses the theme of personal empowerment central to his activist stance, linking it to the letter of the Baal Shem Tov.

This interpretation of the Messiah’s reply to the Baal Shem Tov, together with other themes – in particular, the fact that Menachem Mendel was the leader of the seventh generation of HaBabad, starting with Shneur Zalman, which parallels Moses’ position as seventh generation from Abraham⁸² – contributed to the messianic fervor of the Lubavitch movement. This reached a climax in 1970, when Yosef Yitshak’s Torah Scroll, intended to greet the Messiah, was finally completed,⁸³ and – much more overtly on the public domain – also in the 1990s.

81 See *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Menachem Mendel*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, 1987), 64–5.

82 This point was mentioned in Yosef Yitshak’s final discourse *Bati le-Gani*, and was repeatedly stressed by Menachem Mendel in his annual discussions of the final series of discourses by his predecessor. See his *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Bati le-Gani*, 2 vols. (Brooklyn, 1977, 1991). See also the next note below.

83 That year also marked the completion of the first cycle of the *Bati le-Gani* discourses. This series of discourses – with twenty chapters – represented the legacy of Yosef Yitshak, the Sixth Rebbe, which was being transmitted to Menachem Mendel, the Seventh Rebbe. It was by reciting his first discourse in the cycle on the first Yahrzeit of Yosef Yitshak, expounding the first chapter of the original, that Menachem Mendel formally accepted the position of Rebbe in January 1951 (10 Shevat 5711). Each year, on the Yahrzeit, Menachem Mendel would recite another discourse in the cycle, expounding another chapter of Yosef Yitshak’s original series. The theme of spreading the wellsprings is prominent in the climax of Menachem Mendel’s discourse of 1970, completing the cycle, with strong messianic overtones. See Menachem Mendel’s *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Bati le-Gani*, vol. 1, 232–3.

Spreading of the Wellsprings of Hasidic Teachings and of “Judaism”

In 1952 Menachem Mendel appealed to the Orthodox world in general to take part in what he often described as the “need of the time” – the work of strengthening Jewish observance of practical commandments. His open letter, issued before Passover, was addressed to the “Students of the yeshivot,” meaning all yeshivot, not only those of Lubavitch. The letter begins: “With the permission of the learned rabbis ... the heads of the yeshivot, I turn to you with this, my dear ones, students of the yeshivot...” In the letter Menachem Mendel comments on the four sons at the Seder, of whom “one is wise, and one is wicked...” Why, he asks, is the wise son placed next to the wicked son? And he replies that this is in order that they should talk together, so that the wise son will have a positive influence on the wicked son:

This means that a) there is hope even for the wicked son, because G-d provides him with a wise son to influence him, and to help him improve... b) the wise son should not say, “what do I have to do with the wicked son...?” For all Israel are pledges for each other, and are intermingled, and each one has to help the other improve. However, he should always remember that... he should be influencing the wicked son, not the other way round; c) the wise son should always remember that “sin crouches at the door” [Gen 4:7] and that “one who is greater than others has a greater evil desire”⁸⁴ so he himself should be very careful...⁸⁵

Menachem Mendel adds that if this demand applies even in the case of the wicked son, how much more does it apply in the case of the simple son whom he terms also “foolish,” based on a comment in the Jerusalem Talmud⁸⁶ and the son “who does not know how to ask.” This sentence

84 See *ib. Since*, 52a.

85 *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Menachem Mendel*, vol. 5 (Brooklyn, 1988), 308–9, a letter dated 11 Nisan 5712 (1952).

86 *JT*, Pesah 109a.

could be seen as simplifying the appeal and reducing it to a request to become involved with those who are less knowledgeable, possibly other students in the yeshivah. However the initial "outreach" appeal is not withdrawn. If the outreach demand of a decade earlier, addressed to the HaBAd yeshivah students of Montreal, took the *Temimin* by surprise, one wonders how this letter was regarded by other yeshivah students, who were being asked to engage with those who were not "the wise son," and even with those who might be termed "the wicked son." Notably, however, there is no allusion to the Baal Shem Tov's letter here, and the proof texts on which Menachem Mendel bases his position are Talmudic and aggadic rather than mystical.

On June 3, 1967, just before the start of the Six Day War, in what was understood as a spiritual step aimed to help protect the Jewish people, Menachem Mendel launched his *Mitsvat Tefilin*, the tefilin campaign. This meant that on weekdays his followers would ask Jewish men or boys over Bar Mitzvah age if they had "put on tefilin today," and if not, they would invite them to do so. In a hasidic gathering in October 1967, he replied to a number of points of criticism which had been raised in Orthodox and Haredi circles.⁸⁷ In reply to those Haredi critics who argued that "it is forbidden to ask the *ho'shim* (lit. "free", i.e. secular Jews) to put on tefilin," he cited the halakhic imperative of "reproof"⁸⁸ and R. Moshe de Coucy, the *SeMaG*, who himself had been active in persuading the Jews of thirteenth-century Spain to put on tefilin and keep other mitzvot. Moshe de Coucy⁸⁹ defends the right of the *rasha* ("evildoer") to put on tefilin, a point cited by Menachem Mendel. However, he also states that one cannot consider most people today as halakhically "wicked": "I did not want to quote the *SeMaG* at all ... for in our time, most of those who are as yet distant from Torah

and *mitsvot* are in the category of 'a child who is taken captive'."⁹⁰ The Jewish child taken captive among the Gentiles cannot be blamed for his or her non-observant behavior. Thus began a series of mitzvah campaigns which became a central preoccupation of many members of the HaBAd movement. This was complemented by the specific role of *sheluhim*, emissaries. Yosef Yiishak had sent *sheluhim* to a number of American locations, including Chicago in the mid-west and California. Under the leadership of Menachem Mendel the number of *sheluhim* increased many times over, becoming a global phenomenon, with the new concept of the "Chabad House" generally providing their base. Their "mission" (*shelimit*) was to promulgate Jewish observance. How does this relate to the letter of the Baal Shem Tov encouraging the spread of esoteric, mystical teachings rather than the affixing of *mezuzot* to one's doorposts and the lighting of candles for Shabbat? Here we come to a careful use of words.

Although, as we have seen, Menachem Mendel viewed hasidic teachings as furthering the task of strengthening simple Jewish observance, he generally referred to this latter task as *hafatsat ha-yahadut*,⁹¹ the spreading of Judaism, as distinct from *hafatsat ha-ma'ayanot*, the spreading of the wellsprings of Hasidism. Nonetheless, we note, the trigger word *hafatsat*, from *yafutsu* in the Baal Shem Tov's letter, is still employed.

A letter from Menachem Mendel written in 1954 gives a halakhic basis for the spreading of the wellsprings, and links it with the strengthening of all Jewish observance. In answer to a question whether *Tanya* should be taught to High School girls, Menachem Mendel refers to the idea that according to the *Shulhan Arukh*,⁹² girls and women should study those

87 The most vociferous critique was expressed by the Admor of Satmar, Rabbi Yoel Tietelbaum (1887–1979). See his *Al ha-Ge'ulah ve-al ha-Temurah*, Brooklyn 1967.

The response by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson in October 1967 was printed in his *Likkutey Sifot*, vol. 6 (Brooklyn, 1972), 271–5.

88 *Ibid.*, 274–5. Cf. Lev. 19:17; *Shulhan Arukh Orach Hovvim*, 608:2; *ReMA ad loc.*

89 *SchMAG, Mitsvat Asch.*, 3.

90 *Likkutey Sifot*, vol. 6, 273. See b. Shab. 68b, *Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 159:3; *ReMA ad loc.* For discussion of this theme in contemporary Israeli Haredi society, see Tamir El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant: Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women and Their World*, translated by Iain Watson (Boulder 1994), 158–79.

91 The terms *hafatsat ha-yahadut* or *hafatsat ha-torah ve-ha-yahadut* occur in Menachem Mendel's talks and letters of 1950. See *Torah Menachem, Hivva'aduyot*, 5/10, vol. 1 (Ramle, 2002), 77; *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Menachem Mendel*, vol. 4, 55.

92 *Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 246:6, *ReMA ad loc.*

aspects of Torah that enable them to keep the *mitsvot* which apply to them. Now, there are six “continuous” *mitsvot* listed in the introduction to the anonymous but authoritative thirteenth-century *Sefer ha-Hinukh*, which apply equally and constantly to all Jews: to believe in G-d, not to believe in any other power, to love G-d, to fear G-d, to recognize the unity of G-d, and not to stray after one’s eyes and heart. Menachem Mendel claims that study of hasidic teachings help one observe these. By this logic it is halakhically permitted, indeed a duty, for both men and women to study them.⁹³ Thus our passage in the Baal Shem Tov’s letter, as well as the controversial issue of imparting mystical teachings to those who are not at all observant, are provided with a halakhic underpinning. In 1957, Menachem Mendel wrote encouragingly to a follower who had organised a *Tanya* study group for secular youths in Tel Aviv.⁹⁴ At the same time, one notes that the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, the mid-nineteenth-century R. Menachem Mendel, the Tsemah Tsedek, saw HaBaD teachings as quite distinct from “kabbalah” and so did his namesake, Menachem Mendel, the seventh Rebbe.⁹⁵ Hence the members of the Lubavitch movement understand the HaBaD discourses, despite their Lurianic terminology, as being the exoteric “teachings of the Baal Shem Tov” rather than kabbalistic ideas drawn straight from the deliberately esoteric Lurianic texts.

Yihudim

One question which we have not yet touched concerns an important detail in the text of the Messiah’s answer to the Baal Shem Tov in his letter. It

93 *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Menachem Mendel*, vol. 8 (Brooklyn, 1988), 133.

94 *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Menachem Mendel*, vol. 14 (Brooklyn, 1989), 401. Menachem Mendel wrote: “... We trust the power of our sacred Torah, that... its study leads to action, even though people differ as to the time in between the study and the action.” The Rebbe also asked the teacher to encourage practical observance of the Commandments among the participants in the group, suggesting that this would add to the power of the *Tanya* study to achieve the required effect.

95 See the Tsemah Tsedek’s *Derekh Mitsvotekha* (Brooklyn, 1953), 1991, see *Shorvash Mitsvat ha-Tefilah*, end of ch. 2, fol. 115b. See also *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Menachem Mendel*, vol. 8, 223.

does not speak only of spreading the Baal Shem Tov’s teachings but also of “making *yihudim* (mystical ‘unifications’) and *aliyot* (mystical ‘ascents’) like you.” These words are generally (if not always) omitted from the HaBaD public expostions of the theme of “spreading the wellsprings.” At no time, even in early Hasidism, were the hasidic followers invited to achieve mystical *yihudim* and ascents of the soul. How is this point viewed by the leaders of twentieth-century HaBaD? Is it just conveniently forgotten?

One answer may be that the hasidic leader understood the fulfillment of his own role as Rebbe, with its mystical overtones, as the implementation of this part of the Baal Shem Tov’s letter. Yosef Yitshak, Menachem Mendel and their predecessors were seen by their followers, and probably regarded themselves, as clairvoyants who also underwent intense mystical experiences.⁹⁶ They themselves would embark on the *yihudim* and *aliyot*, and also spread the wellsprings of hasidic teaching, while their followers would continue the latter task if not the former.

It is said that Menachem Mendel was once asked, in private audience (*vehidud*), about this aspect of the Baal Shem Tov’s letter. His reply was in two parts: 1. One cannot tell what other people are experiencing; 2. Lack of ability to fulfil one part of the instruction does not take away one’s duty to fulfil the other part.⁹⁷

There is a possible clue as to how this point was understood by the two hasidic leaders in a letter by Menachem Mendel written in 1949, in the lifetime of Yosef Yitshak. The letter is addressed to a leading Hasid, one of the early and most prominent *shekhim* — he is addressed with the rare title

96 See Joseph H. Berke and Stanley Schneider, “A Tale of Two Orphans: The Limits of ‘Integration,’” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 4/1 (2001): 81–94, concerning Shalom Dovber, Menachem Schneerson, *Tovt Mendichen Reshit ha-Tomah* (Brooklyn, 2006), 3, concerning Yosef Yitshak; N. Loewenthal, “Self-Sacrifice of the Zaddik in the Teachings of R. Dov Ber, the Mittlerer Rebbe,” in A. Kapaport Albert and S. Zippstein (eds.), *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chanan Aharanov* (London, 1988), 492, n. 123, concerning Menachem Mendel.

97 Information from Rabbi Shmuel Lew, July 2001. The person who asked the of Menachem Mendel was a London Jew, Shimon Hirschler.

“*shehuha de-rabbanan*” – and the letter is a strong reprimand: he is in the wrong country. According to the Rebbe, Yosef Yitshak, he should be in England, “to be his *shaliah* and representative there” but for some reason he is “still staying in Paris.” Menachem Mendel writes:

Perhaps one could say that this is as is told of the Maegid, that he would give each of his disciples the *yihudim* relevant to the different regions [where they were sent]. But then one spoke openly and everyone saw that these were truly *yihudim*, whereas now all is concealed by veil upon veil, so one can make a mistake as to the intention...⁹⁸

In this moment of exasperation the veil is lifted: according to Menachem Mendel, when the Admor Yosef Yitshak sends a *shaliah* to a specific place, he has in mind some kind of mystical transaction relating to the concept of *yihudim*. However, this is heavily concealed, and the *shaliah* himself does not realize the true nature of his mission; he can therefore make an error as to where he should be.

Deconstructing Boundaries

We have attempted to examine the activity of people who are both leaders in the conventional sense and also mystical personalities, for whom spiritual issues – such as the messianic idea – loom with immense prominence. We see that they consider themselves to be mediating between a spiritual realm and this world, following the pattern of the Baal Shem Tov, particularly as described by Immanuel Etkes.⁹⁹ This is also how they are viewed by their followers. In this process of mediation, texts such as the Torah, the Mishnah, the *Tanya*, and the Baal Shem Tov’s letter, which are all understood as bearing spiritual illumination yet also as generating directives and practices for the physical, daily world, are crucial elements. So are special days such as 19 Kislev, termed by another mystical figure, the HaBaD hasidic leader

R. Shalom Dovber, the Rosh Hashanah of Hasidism. With the combination of these elements, a few words reported of a visionary experience became a psychological and also spiritual key to the release of remarkable human forces, with considerable impact on hasidic society and also further afield.

Hasidism in general, and in particular the contemporary HaBaD-Lubavitch school, exhibits certain post-modern characteristics. The quest to spread the wellsprings of spirituality “to the outside” can be seen as an imperative to deconstruct religious boundaries. As the conception of the accessible “outside” gradually expanded, so the emphasis on and affirmation of this passage in the Baal Shem Tov’s letter increased. In 1746, the phrase was puzzling, even to the Baal Shem Tov himself. In the second half of the twentieth century, into our own time, it has become the motto of HaBaD Hasidism.

98 *Iggerot Kodesh ... Admor ... Menachem Mendel*, vol. 3 (Kfar HaBaD), 1987; 2nd edition), 89. The Hasid was R. Bentzion Shemtov (d. 1975).

99 Etkes, *The Beshi* (above, n. 1), 110–12.