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Journal of Torah and Scholarship

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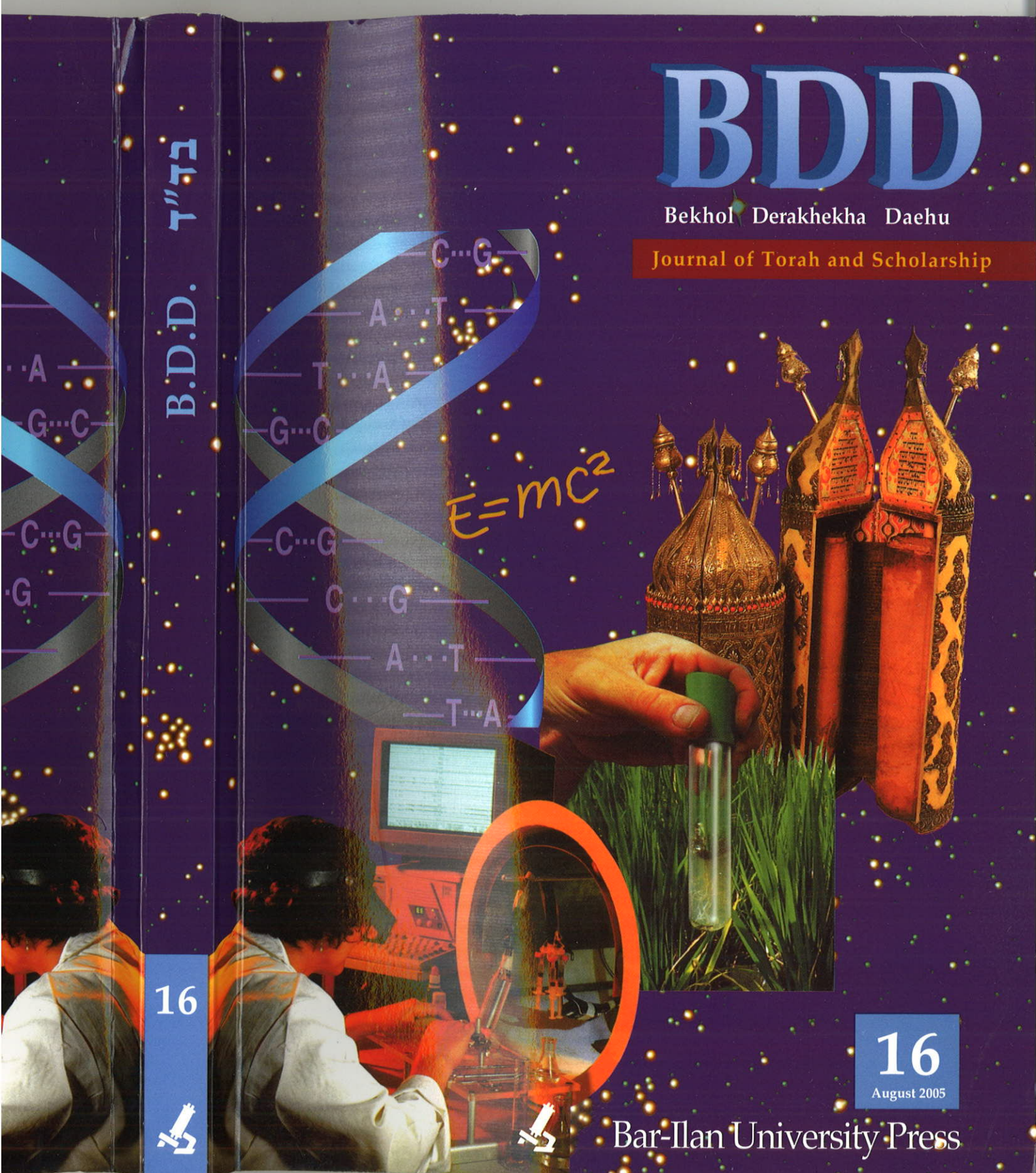
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NAFTALI LOEWENTHAL

**"THE LOWER UNITY"
JOINING MYSTIC QUEST AND REALITY
IN THE FIRST CENTURY OF HABAD**

Is there a "central axis" in the thought of the Habad Hasidic movement? This paper considers this question in terms of the first four generations of Habad, from its beginnings at the end of the 18th century until 1882, when Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch passed away. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Habad, defined the theme of the "lower unity" (borrowing a term from the Zohar), in which mystical perception is joined with the practical realities of daily life. It is suggested that this theme, in a variety of forms, was in fact the "central axis" of Habad thought throughout the 19th century, in a period prior to the religious activism of the movement in the 20th century.

A "CENTRAL AXIS"?

This paper¹ seeks to provide a perspective on the first century of the Habad movement. There have been a number of studies of the first generation, that of Rabbi Shneur Zalman (1745-1812), and a few studies of the second — that of Rabbi Dov Ber (1773-1828), the son of R. Shneur Zalman, and of Rabbi Aharon of Staroselye (d. 1828), the latter's foremost disciple and rival of Rabbi Dov Ber.² In Rachel Elijor's interesting work, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*,³

- ¹ This paper was presented at the Second Jolson Conference: The Habad Movement in the 20th Century, Jolson Centre for the Study of Israel, Judaism and Democracy, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel, 2002. The Hebrew version will appear shortly in the Book Publication of the conference proceedings (Bar-Ilan University).
- ² Basic works of and about early Habad (in English) include: Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likkutei Amarim-Tanya*, trans. N. Mindel et al. (London: Kehot Publication Society, 1981); Dobb Baer of Lubavitch, *Traet on Ecstasy*, trans. Louis Jacobs (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1963); N. Mindel, *Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi* (2 vols.), (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1969, 1973); N. Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Roman A. Foxbrunner, *Habad, the Hasidism of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1992); Rachel Elijor, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God, The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism*, trans. Jeffrey M. Green (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993).

she seeks to define "the central axis" — הציר המרכזי — around which Habad thought revolves. She defines the limits of her study as extending from the beginning of the movement until 1830, just after both R. Dov Ber and R. Aaron had passed away. Within this limited period, she claims, it is possible to speak of a "central axis". The present paper seeks to extend the period of investigation initially by another two generations, those of Rabbi Menahem Mendel, known as the Tzemah Tzedek (1789-1866), and the leader who followed him in the town of Lubavitch, his son Rabbi Shmuel (1834-82). We will consider the question of whether, in this extended period, it is possible to speak of a "central axis" of Habad and, if so, how this axis might be defined.

When attempting such a task, there are a number of traps into which one might fall. One is that there may not be any significant central axis at all. Each separate epoch of the movement may have had significance in its own terms and in its own context, but there is no important central theme the definition of which can help the student. Even the term "movement" is dangerous. To what extent is there any real kind of continuity? A further factor that complicates all study of Hasidism from its earlier to later periods is the emergence of Hungarian *haredi* Orthodoxy, conveniently defined by the Psak Beit Din of Michalowce in November 1865, as described by Michael Silber.⁴ Although this did not greatly influence the Russian and Polish hasidic movements before World War I, as Silber points out,⁵ the increasing politicization of Orthodoxy in the inter-war period and after the Holocaust served to introduce new factors into the socio-political realities of Hasidism within which the spiritual elements that overtly characterize the earlier period have had to find their place.

However, one important feature in the case of Habad is the continuous study of the Habad hasidic teachings, and their progressive institutionalization in the life and thought of the community. This provides a certain substantial link, although the behaviours generated in response to the text might be rather different in different generations.⁶ If we use an image employed by Rachel Elijor,

3 The title of the original Hebrew work is תורת אחרות ההפכים, *Unity of Opposites, The Mystical Theosophy of Habad* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1992).

4 See Michael Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy — the Invention of a Tradition", in *The Uses of Tradition, Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge, Mass: JTS, 1992), pp. 23-84.

5 See n. 4 of his article, *ibid.*

6 An example is found in אגרת התשובה, "Letter on Repentance", the third section of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya*. Here we learn of an extended programme of fasting, based on kabbalistic *Tikkunei Teshuvah*. For example, for anger, 151 fasts, and so on. Rabbi Shneur Zalman says that "in our generations" it is very difficult for a person to undertake so many fasts, and one should give charity instead, 18 coins פולניעש "גדולים פולניעש" — per day. However he

in the shift from the past to the present, some bridges stand, while others have been closed. What seemed paramount in one generation, may have disappeared entirely in the next. Again, some bridges may have been rebuilt — by which is meant the phenomenon of Revivalism, such as the revival in Habad of the practice of contemplative prayer that took place around 1900.⁷ Revivalism, in general, is an important element in 20th-century Habad thought.

There is no doubt, therefore, that the attempt to define a ציר מרכזי for Habad over four or more generations rather than just the two discussed by Elijor has many dangers. Nonetheless, let us make the attempt. Let us look first at Rachel Elijor's own formulation for Habad up till 1830: "Habad combines the two contradictory tendencies of quietistic spiritualism... (*ascent*) and aspiritual activism (*descent*)".⁸ Under "activism" she groups both performance of the

then goes on to recommend that once in one's life each man should undertake the number of fasts recommended for זרע לבטלה הרצאת (masturbation), namely 84 fasts. He should do this in the winter months when the days are short; he can thus fast ten fasts each year, so that after nine years he will have completed the *Tikkun* (*Tanya* 92a-93a). It seems likely that this directive was followed literally by Rabbi Shneur Zalman's followers, and this was possibly the case for several generations. Today, however, the contemporary Habad hasid is extremely unlikely to undertake these fasts. He reads this text at least once a year, because it is in *Tanya*, which he studies as part of the חז"ת system instituted by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak in 1943 — to read every day some חניא, תהלים, חומש, תהילים, חניא. So, it would seem, the connection with the past is broken, despite the active presence of the text. Yet this is not the whole story. For although the contemporary hasid does not carry out the suggestion actually to fast 84 fasts, he does follow a further suggestion presented by Rabbi Shneur Zalman. Since it is very difficult to fast the full number of fasts that are truly required by the kabbalists, "all those who are truly pious are accustomed to give a great deal of charity" (93a). This injunction, one could reasonably claim, without undertaking a quantitative study, is followed today in the Habad movement, as was also the case for the followers of R. Shneur Zalman. Another response is that of *teshuvah hamishkal*, understood on one level as working to promote *taharat hamishpahah*, such as by operating a Mikveh. This was told to me by a Habad *shaliach* who himself managed to have a Mikveh built in the grounds of his Beit Habad for the benefit of the women in the local community. As he put it, the effort to organize the building and running of the Mikveh, and to convince couples to keep the laws of *taharat hamishpahah*, is the equivalent of the fasting. While in the past the emphasis was on perfection of oneself, he added, now it is on helping others with *mesirat nefesh* (oral communication, May 2004). Another point explaining the lack of fasting is that there is a tradition that eating at a *Pidyan HaBen* is the equivalent of fasting 84 fasts, linked to the *tikkun* for *zera levatalah* (see A.Y. Sperling's *Taamei HaMinhagim* [Jerusalem: Eshkol, n.d.], p. 399, secs. 533-534, and Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, *Iggrot Kodesh*, Vol.10 [Brooklyn: Kehot, 1989], p. 85). The text in the *Tanya* remains the same, but its expression in practical behaviour is different.

7 See N. Loewenthal, "Habad Approaches to Contemplative Prayer, 1790-1920", in *Hasidism Reappraised*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert (London: Lithman Library, 1996), pp. 288-300.

8 *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, 31.

practical *mitzvot*, and also involvement in צורכי ציבור "participation in social obligations of public service".

Thus we have the quest for the spiritual, in a sense leaving the world, combined with its opposite, entering the world both with the traditional *mitzvot* and a sense of social responsibility. According to Elior, the axis of Habad is the joining of these two opposites. This is the "Unity of Opposites", אחדות ההפכים, the Hebrew title of her book, and this provides an excellent starting point for our own brief investigation.

"UPPER UNITY" AND "LOWER UNITY"

An important formulation of the two opposites is in terms of the theme of יחודא עילאה, the "Upper Unity" and יחודא תתאה, the "Lower Unity". These terms are employed in the Zohar⁹ in relation to the first line of the *Shema: Shema Yisrael*, which is the *yihuda Ila'a* (Upper Unity), and the second line of the *Shema*, said in a whisper, *Barukh Shem....* This expresses the Lower Unity. In the second part of *Tanya* these two terms define a system of contemplation that in fact has two stages. The first stage is the Upper Unity, expressing the idea that all is absorbed in the Divine; there is no world, only the oneness of the Infinite, in other words, an acosmist perception that אין עוד מלבדו, "there is nought apart from Him" (Deut. 4:35). The second is the Lower Unity, which is the contemplative realization that there *is* a world but that it can be induced to reveal Godliness. This Lower Unity itself is the אחדות ההפכים, a joining of opposites. The finite world exists but it reveals the Infinite within.

The Lower Unity is not only a mode in contemplation, but a mode in life: for it is precisely through activity within the world that the hidden Divine is revealed and this Lower Unity is disclosed.

Thus, in the figure of Rabbi Shneur Zalman we see the mystic enthusiast at prayer, but also the person who was heavily occupied in collecting funds for the hasidic community in the Holy Land, or for simple Jews who had been dispossessed of their homes by the implementation of the Statute of 1804. We see the inspired teacher of oral hasidic discourses, and also the writer of the *Shulhan Arukh HaRav*, carefully sifting through the entire halakhic tradition.

It is interesting that in the manuscript version of *Tanya*, which was made available to the hasidim probably about three years before its publication in 1796, the theme of the Lower Unity is entirely absent. The tract presents a system of a single line of contemplation — that of the Upper Unity. True, after prayer the contemplative returns to the world and in effect is carrying out the

⁹ Zohar I, 18a.

practical implementation of the Lower Unity. But the concept of Lower Unity is not mentioned. Before the publication of the book, however, it was somewhat reworked by its author. A chapter on love of one's fellow man was added, another on the significance of the practical *mitzvot*, and a few key passages in which the Lower Unity is expounded as a further step in the contemplative process. One way of interpreting this is that Rabbi Shneur Zalman's mystical system was gradually moving *towards the world*. In his view, religious life is not only a combination of other-worldly spirituality and practical carrying out of the *mitzvot*, which is the normative position for the mainstream of kabbalists, but the spirituality itself combines within it a positive perspective on the world. It is because of this tendency that the late Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer wrote of the "Anti-Spiritualism" of Rabbi Shneur Zalman. Comparing him with his teacher the Maiggid, he seemed to be retreating from the spiritual and embracing the world.¹⁰ In fact, he was actually doing both at the same time.

There are a number of other ways that Rabbi Shneur Zalman's life and work appear to combine the opposites of (spiritually) "upper" and "lower". One is his use of mystical discourses for guidance of the community in response to current events;¹¹ another is his insistence on the role of rational intellect, *sekhel*, in the exposition of Habad teachings, which was strongly criticized by his colleague R. Avraham of Kalisk.¹² In both these examples one can see the movement from the Divine, other-worldly Upper Unity, towards and into the world: Lower Unity.

RABBI DOV BER: CONTEMPLATION AND COMMUNICATION

Let us now move on to the era of R. Shneur Zalman's son, Rabbi Dov Ber (1773-1827), known as the Mitteler Rebbe ("middle Rebbe"). At the same time

¹⁰ See Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism, Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*, trans. from the Hebrew by Jonathan Chipman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1993), pp. 255-289. However, J.G. Weiss expressed the opposite view in his *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism*, ed. D. Goldstein (Oxford: Littman Library, 1985), pp. 44-47. See also I. Tishby and J. Dan in their article in the *Enziklopedia Ha-Ivrit*, Vol.17, entry *Hasidut*, col. 775 (collected in *Perakim be-Torat ha-Hasidut u-ve-Toledoteha*, ed. A. Rubinstein [Jerusalem, 1977], pp. 258-259) and see M. Hallamish, "The Theoretical System of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady (Its Sources in Kabbalah and Hasidism)" (Hebrew), doctoral thesis at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1976, p. 253 ff.

¹¹ See N. Loewenthal, "Early Hasidic Teachings: Esoteric Mysticism, or a Medium of Communal Leadership?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 58-75.

¹² See N. Loewenthal, "'Reason' and 'Beyond Reason' in Habad Hasidism", in *Alei Shefer, Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexandre Safran*, ed. Moshe Hallamish (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990), pp. 109-126.

that he was leader in the town of Lubavitch, there was a rival Habad leader, R. Aaron of Starroselye (d. 1828), who had been the foremost disciple of R. Shneur Zalman. The traditional view of the difference between them, expressed by the Habad chronicler Haim Meir Hielman and also by Louis Jacobs, is that R. Aaron favoured ecstatic enthusiastic prayer, and R. Dov Ber preached a silent form of *bitul*, self-abnegation, in prayer. In one of her early works, Rachel Elior described R. Aaron as "theocentric" and R. Dov Ber as "anthropocentric".¹³ I define the difference as R. Aaron focusing on the Upper Unity, while R. Dov Ber is ultimately more concerned about the Lower Unity.

R. Dov Ber is famous for his teachings on intense solitary contemplation, exploring "in detail" the realms from before the *Tzimtzum*¹⁴ down to the lowest levels of the kabbalistic downchaining of the worlds, seeing the unity and the integration (התכללות) of the highest and the lowest at every level — as described in his *Gate of Unity*, which was also known as *Tract on Contemplation*.¹⁵ In this process the adept is expected to rise to ever higher levels of selflessness, as R. Dov Ber explains in his *Tract on Ecstasy*,¹⁶ the first of his works to be disseminated among his followers, albeit in manuscript form, clearly distinguishing between his path in contemplation and that of R. Aaron. R. Dov Ber urges his followers to strive to hold back the gush of emotion that would naturally ensue from the process of contemplation. The reason for this, according to R. Dov Ber, is that as soon as he feels heartfelt emotion in response to the wondrous spiritual vista disclosed by the hasidic teachings, his progress to higher levels would be halted. By contrast R. Aaron encouraged overt ecstatic enthusiasm.

We see in R. Dov Ber's approach encouragement to his followers to attempt to reach towards an exalted, almost trance-like state. What is interesting in terms of the Lower Unity, which we are now interpreting in rather broader terms than purely a mystical paradox, is R. Dov Ber's confidence that this profoundly esoteric system could be taught to his followers at all. When one examines the evidence concerning the path taken by Rabbi Shneur Zalman's disciples after his demise, in which some followed R. Aaron and others R. Dov Ber, it does seem that the men of stature, the remarkable individuals who had gained their own mystical attainments, tended to become followers of R. Aaron.

13 See Rachel Elior, *The Theory of Divinity of Hasidut Habad: Second Generation* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1982), p. 325.

14 The "contraction" (sometimes interpreted as "veiling") of the divine radiance so as to "give room" to the creation of the worlds, is described at the beginning of R. Haim Vital's *Etz Haim*.

15 This work is the first section of R. Dov Ber's *Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or* (Kopys, 1820; Brooklyn: Kehot, 1974).

16 *Kuntres Ha-Hitpa'anut* (Koenigsberg, 1831?). See n. 2 above.

They were the enthusiasts who saw his path of overt ecstasy, so similar to that of the late R. Shneur Zalman, as the course to follow. There were some exceptional individuals among the followers of R. Dov Ber, such as R. Hillel of Paritch, but many were men of lesser attainment.¹⁷ Nonetheless, among the earliest tracts disseminated by R. Dov Ber were his teachings on intense, selfless, esoteric contemplation. It seems that from the first there was considerable misinterpretation of these teachings by many of R. Dov Ber's followers. One of his early letters to the community castigates the young men who mock those who experience *hitpa'anut* in prayer. As a result of their mirth, the wrong people are attempting the more esoteric path of *bitul* and, he says, are simply falling asleep! Later writings of R. Dov Ber similarly seek to prevent excesses¹⁸ but, it seems, to no avail. The *Tract on Contemplation*, which had previously been in manuscript form, was published in 1820. It seems that this led more people to attempt a level of contemplation that was beyond them. In R. Dov Ber's view, while they were indeed contemplating, they were not achieving the lengthy, inspired luminous prayer that R. Dov Ber expected. Hence, eventually, in a letter from around 1823, he demanded a complete change in the approach to prayer from the majority of his followers. The quest for esoteric *bitul* was now replaced by a plea for more normative enthusiastic prayer, more similar to the path of R. Aaron — "ecstasy which is felt in the heart".¹⁹ R. Dov Ber said that the full time scholars should now pray in a minyan together, saying the words aloud — very similar to the approach to prayer in the time of R. Shneur Zalman. A few men of stature were permitted to pray in silence.

What was happening here? An intense mystical system had been presented to a society of hasidic followers who were not quite capable of living up to its demands. This can be seen as an attempt to achieve a kind of Lower Unity in social terms — the wish that an intense spiritual pathway, instead of being the province of just a small elite mystic circle, should somehow be followed by a much wider group. We see the daring in this attempt simply from the fact that R. Dov Ber realized that it was not working properly, and made his followers change direction.²⁰

Another interesting change of direction in R. Dov Ber's guidance concerning contemplative prayer concerns the relation of the spiritual themes of the contemplative process with the actual text of the prayers in the Siddur. The

17 See my *Communicating the Infinite* (n. 2 above), pp. 135-137.

18 See my "Habad Approaches to Contemplative Prayer" (n. 7 above), pp. 295-297.

19 See S.B. Levine (ed.), *Iggrot Kodosh Admur ha-Zaken, Admur ha-Emtza'i* etc. (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1980), p. 267.

20 For a full description of this process, see "Habad Approaches to Contemplative Prayer", n. 7 above.

system in *Gate of Unity* has no obvious connection with the text of the prayers. R. Dov Ber regarded this as a problem, and in 1816 he published the *Seder Tefilot mikol HaShanah*, in which the texts of the prayers are accompanied by commentaries that link the text with the spiritual cosmogony and processes described in Habad teachings, together with links to the Lurianic *kavvanot*. In his introduction, R. Dov Ber writes that his purpose is to help people achieve a unity between the exalted spiritual *kavvanah* and the simple text of the prayer — “that people should be able to focus their heart together with [the words from] their mouths, and the sound of the words will arouse their *kavvanah*”.

This is another form of Lower Unity. The spiritual contemplation of the hasid, instead of carrying him away from the prayer — which is the direction that might seem quite natural, as we see from Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer's *Hasidism as Mysticism* — is now directed downwards, so that it links with the text of the prayer in the Siddur, another form of Lower Unity.

One of the ways of defining the general tendency of the first two generations of Habad is in terms of the communication ethos. There is an attempt to transmit spiritual teachings in general, not only the practice of contemplative prayer. In this process an important element is the teachings on *mesirat nefesh*, self-sacrifice, which we find both in the writings of R. Shneur Zalman and in those of his son R. Dov Ber. Not everyone is able to contemplate in prayer, and in these teachings the relationship with spirituality is widened. We see this attempt to broaden the focus of hasidic thought particularly clearly in the case of R. Dov Ber. Perhaps due to the happy relationship with Yisrael Yaffeh, one of his followers who was a printer in Kopyst, around ten books of Habad hasidic teachings were printed during his time as Rebbe. These volumes are interesting as regards their different styles. At one extreme there is *Imrei Binah* (1821), a work providing material for contemplation before the *Shema*, which states that if one does not contemplate in prayer it is as if one has not fulfilled the *mitzvah* of putting on *tefilin*.²¹ At the other extreme is *Poke'ah Ivrim* (1817), written in Yiddish and addressed to a person who wants to repent from his sins (which might have included relationships with non-Jewish women)²² and come close to a spiritual path. Here the focus is not contemplation — which is not mentioned in the book — but *teshuvah* and feelings of “a contrite heart”, *lev nishbar*, which R. Dov Ber terms *tsubrokhenskayt* (“contrition”), which in fact provides a form of spiritual *bitul* reached from a direction other than mystical contemplation.

This communication ethos is itself a variety of the quest for Lower Unity: the

21 Introduction [2a].

22 This is in the second part of the work, which was not printed until modern times. See *Poke'ah Ivrim* (Kfar Chabad: Kehot, 1973) 53, ch. 34.

spiritual radiance at the heart of religious experience should somehow be transmitted to wider society.

Far more than his father before him, R. Dov Ber's writings sought to draw the mystical kernel of Hasidism into the rational intellect. This process led a contemporary hasidic *tzaddik*, R. Zvi Hirsh of Zydachov, to attack R. Dov Ber for preaching “philosophy”. Similarly, the Maskil Pesah Ruderman (1854-87), who had been brought up in the world of Habad, believed that it was in the time of R. Dov Ber that the Habad hasidim began to think of themselves as “philosophers” who knew more than the savants of the Haskalah.²³ This drawing of mysticism into rationality is a further example of the quest for the Lower Unity.

R. Dov Ber passed away in Kislev 1827 (5588), and his death was followed, a few months later, by that of his rival, R. Aaron of Staroselye. We now come to the third generation of Habad, that of R. Menahem Mendel, known as the Tzemah Tzedek (1789-1866). He was the grandson of R. Shneur Zalman and also the son-in-law of R. Dov Ber. Most, but not all of R. Dov Ber's followers accepted him as Rebbe, as did some of R. Aaron's followers.²⁴

HASIDIC TEACHINGS AND VISIONS, HALAKHAH AND RATIONALISM

The first element in the Tzemah Tzedek's activity concerns the continued focus on Habad hasidic teachings. These had been generated by R. Shneur Zalman in his written *Tanya* and to a far greater extent, as regards volume of material, in his oral discourses on the Sabbath, festivals and other special occasions. The three main transcribers of these teachings had been R. Dov Ber, R. Menahem Mendel the Tzemah Tzedek, and R. Yehudah Leib, brother of R. Shneur Zalman.

It is said that R. Shneur Zalman said, looking at the different styles of transcription: “My brother Yehudah Leib writes as I say, my son Dov Ber writes as I mean, and my grandson Mendel writes as I say and as I mean.”²⁵

In his discourses as Rebbe, and in his written works, R. Dov Ber had transformed many of these teachings into his own through extended elaborations and discussions of the original material, and his son-in-law R.

23 See *Communicating the Infinite* (n. 2 above), p. 287 n. 180, citing Pesah Ruderman's article “A General Survey of the Zaddikim and the Hasidim” (Hebrew), in *HaShahar*, Vol. 6 (Vienna, 1875), p.102.

24 See Haim Meir Hielman, *Beit Rebbe* (Tel Aviv, n.d), p. 222 n. 4 and n. 2. See also p. 236 n. 2.

25 *Beit Rebbe* 220 n. 3 (from previous page).

Menahem Mendel was highly critical of this. R. Menahem Mendel set himself the task of publishing a definitive collection of his grandfather's teachings. The first volume, *Torah Or*, was published in Kopyst in 1836 (5597) just before the general closure of most Jewish printing presses by the government. It was not until 1848, therefore, that the second volume, *Likkutei Torah*, could be printed in Zhitomir. In this volume, in addition to R. Shneur Zalman's discourses, the Tzemah Tzedek's discussions of them were also printed. This was, to an extent, contrary to his own view that the teachings of R. Shneur Zalman should be clearly presented in themselves without further elaborations, and in fact some of the followers of the late R. Dov Ber were critical of his addition of these comments.²⁶ According to R. Yosef Yitzhak, the sixth Rebbe, R. Menahem Mendel printed his comments on his grandfather's teachings as a result both of the urging of his own followers, and of having a dream about his grandfather.²⁷ The early 20th-century Habad historiographer Haim Meir Hielman states that a factor that had persuaded R. Menahem Mendel to accept the position of Rebbe was a dream he had had just before R. Shneur Zalman passed away.²⁸ Further, according to Hielman, R. Menahem Mendel would have visions of his grandfather — as he once virtually admitted in public, at a hasidic gathering on 19 Kislev.²⁹

The theme of visions, particularly of a departed Rebbe, is an important element in Habad. There is a story told by Yakov Kadaner, as an eye witness, of R. Dov Ber the Mittlerer Rebbe entering a trance-like state, and later reporting that he had had a vision of his father who had died a few years previously.³⁰ During this experience R. Shneur Zalman had expounded a discourse of hasidic teachings. According to R. Yosef Yitzhak, not only did R. Menahem Mendel, the Tzemah Tzedek have such experiences, but so did his son R. Shmuel, the fourth Rebbe, and R. Shalom Dov Ber, the fifth Rebbe. There is moreover a contemporary eyewitness account of R. Menahem Mendel, the seventh Rebbe, in a public hasidic gathering, virtually admitting to be able to see the previous Rebbe, R. Yosef Yitzhak, who had died some five years previously.³¹ In the understanding of some of the leading followers of the 20th-century R.

26 *Beit Rebbe* 236 n. 2.

27 Letter in *hosafot* to *Torah Or* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1972), p. 144.

28 *Beit Rebbe* 222 n. 1.

29 *Beit Rebbe* 224 and n. 2.

30 See Yakov Kadaner, *Sippurim Nora'im*, ed. G. Nigal (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1992), pp. 92-93.

31 This was reported by Rabbi Nachman Sudak, head of the Lubavitch Foundation of the United Kingdom. See N. Loewenthal, "Self-Sacrifice of the Zaddik in the Teachings of R. Dov Ber, the Mittlerer Rebbe", in *Jewish History, Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. A. Rapoport-Albert and S. Zipperstein (London: Peter Halban, 1988), p. 492 n. 122.

Menahem Mendel, many of his "campaigns" and other activities were initiated after some kind of communication — whether through a vision or something else — at the Ohel, the grave of the previous Rebbe.

This means, for our present study, that the process we are attempting to investigate is one in which inspired and sometimes even visionary perceptions are drawn into this world and transmitted to society, sometimes in very concrete forms. Thus, returning to the 19th century, R. Menahem Mendel, the Tzemah Tzedek's publication of a large and definitive collection of R. Shneur Zalman's teachings is itself an example of a striking concretization of the spiritual.

The first discourse in *Torah Or* begins not, as is usual, with a verse from the Torah, nor even from the Haftarah,³² but a verse from Isaiah: "The Heavens are My throne, and the earth is My footstool" (Is. 66:1). The theme is the transmission of a spiritual flow, from the highest reach beyond, from "...the Torah, 'which preceded the world by two thousand years'³³ ...this means that the Torah is very exalted, with the quality of 'two thousand years' which is a [level] higher than that of the world". Then this exalted flow is described as being drawn down, through the Written Torah, "the Heavens" which, like a "chair", have the effect of drawing "down" the one who is seated in the chair, and then lower into the world, called the "footstool", meaning the Oral Torah and its *mitzvot*. A few pages later, a discourse on the theme of Jacob presents the image of Jacob balanced between exalted Heaven above, and his wicked brother Esau below. The task of Jacob, the Jew, is to draw down the radiance into the world of Esau³⁴ — achieving the indwelling of the Divine in the world. Here we see again the "central axis" of Habad.

Apart from the published *Torah Or* and *Likkutei Torah*, Rabbi Menahem Mendel left many manuscripts of hasidic teachings, printed during the 20th century in about 40 volumes: some are transcripts of his grandfather's discourses, some his own discourses, and also specific works he wrote himself. The first of these is a work which, in the 20th century, was called "the basis of hasidic teaching".³⁵ This is the work entitled *Taamei HaMitzvot — Derekh Mitzvotekha*.³⁶ This work sets out to link Habad hasidic teachings with the Halakhah.

32 There are many discourses on verses from the beginning of *Bereishit* that R. Menahem Mendel might have chosen to begin *Torah Or*. For example, see ad loc., *Maamarei Admur Hazaken 'al Parshiot Hatorah*, Vol. 1 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1982); *Maamarei Admur Hazaken 5566* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1979); *Maamarei Admur Hazaken 5568* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1971).

33 See *Midrash Tehilim*, sec. 90.

34 This is the first discourse in *VaYishlach*.

35 See M.H. Golomb, *Sha'arei Limud Hahasidut* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1994), p. 98 n. 20.

36 Poltava, 1911; Kfar Chabad, 1976.