

Like his grandfather R. Shneur Zalman, R. Menahem Mendel was known as a leading halakhic authority. Quite apart from the volumes of his hasidic teachings, there are nine volumes of responsa and halakhic writings, which were printed posthumously in the 1870s and 1880s.³⁷ In the case of R. Shneur Zalman, these two dimensions of thought: the mystical hasidic and the halakhic, are sometimes drawn together by presenting a halakhic basis for the mysticism, or responding to a question that springs from halakhic literature.³⁸ However, this is rare. R. Menahem Mendel's earliest work is a volume in which there is a deliberate attempt to join the halakhic and hasidic traditions. Probably written between 1814 and 1828,³⁹ *Taamei HaMitzvot — Derekh Mitzvotekha* selects some 60 *mitzvot*, both positive and negative, generally using the formulation of *Sefer HaHinukh* or the Rambam, and provides explanations to them largely drawn from R. Shneur Zalman's discourses.⁴⁰ While it existed only in manuscript form during the 19th century, it was printed in 1911 and again in 1914, and was one of the Habad works chosen to be reprinted in Shanghai in 1946, indicating its significance. It now fills an important function in introducing hasidic teachings to the beginner, whether the young member of the hasidic movement, or those approaching Habad from the world of the yeshivah. Here in book form is an example of the quest for the Lower Unity, the joining of the spiritual hasidic teachings with the "worldly" halakhah.

Another more mysterious work by R. Menahem Mendel concerns Rationalism. We saw earlier that R. Shneur Zalman was accused by his colleague in the hasidic movement, R. Avraham of Kalisk, of tending towards rationalism, and these accusations were repeated in the case of his son R. Dov Ber. Rabbi Menahem Mendel went further than either of his predecessors in the discussion of rationalistic ideas. In a work entitled *Derekh Emunah-Sefer Hakirah* ("Path of Faith — Book of [Philosophical] Investigation"), first published in Poltava in 1912, we find discussion of Saadia Gaon, Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* and its traditional commentaries and Albo's *Ikarim*. This work is to be considered in the context of the prevailing attitudes in the hasidic movement: Rabbi Nahman of Braslav, for example, harshly forbade any of his followers from studying the *Guide* and declared that he could "see on their face" whether they had done so.⁴¹ R. Menahem Mendel's *Sefer HaHakirah*

37 *Tzemah Tzedek, Sha'alot u-Teshuvot*, 6 vols. (Vilna, 1871-84); *Tzemah Tzedek Hidushim aliba d'Hilkhata* (Vilna, 1878); *Tzemah Tzedek Piskei Dinim*, 2 vols. (Vilna, 1884).

38 An interesting example is in *Tanya*, Chap. 32.

39 According to the introduction to the 1953 edition. At the beginning, it cites *Iggeret Hakodesh* (the 4th part of *Tanya*) printed in 1814, and all references to R. Dov Ber are with "ו".

40 Using the transcripts of R. Dov Ber.

41 See Rabbi Natan Sternhartz, *Hayei Muharan* (Jerusalem, 1962), sec. *Shivhei haRan, Lehitrahek meHakiroi*, p. 37.

also discusses the 16th-century Hebrew scientific work *Nehmad veNa'im* by David Gans (1541-1613), who knew Tycho Brahe.⁴² In this book R. Menahem Mendel tries to find the point where rationalism, science, the Talmud and Habad teachings meet. Again, an example of moving towards the world: the hasidic Rebbe who is reported to have visions of departed souls, and whose mystical writings fill forty volumes, was also writing discussions of the *Guide* and early Hebrew works on science.⁴³

Finally, as regards our brief outline, we come to the fourth generation, when the Rebbe in Lubavitch was Rabbi Shmuel (1834-82 [5643]), the youngest son of R. Menahem Mendel.

RABBI SHMUEL OF LUBAVITCH

If we look at this period through the eyes of Haim Meir Hielman, author of *Beit Rebbe*, a history of the Habad movement published in Berdichev in 1902, we see on the one hand the sense of loss at the passing away in 1866 of Rabbi Menahem Mendel, the Tzemah Tzedek, and on the other hand the consolation at the broad spread of Habad hasidic leaders — his sons and grandsons — who were established in the environs of Lubavitch in the north, thus including Liady and Kopys, Niezin further south, and, even further south, in Ovrotch near Zhitomir in Poland. At the same time Hielman was deeply upset at the fierce conflict that had broken out among certain of the brothers.⁴⁴ However, a unifying factor among all these leaders was the heritage of the Habad hasidic teachings. Some of the sons had been empowered by their father R. Menahem Mendel to deliver hasidic discourses in public and to give blessings, during his lifetime. For Hielman, while the teachings lived, Habad lived. This was not the view of his German-Jewish contemporary Aaron Marcus. Writing about the period under discussion, he felt that while Habad philosophy continued in its original form, it did so "without considering whether the younger generation, which was absorbing Russian culture... was following in its footsteps".⁴⁵ It seems that Marcus could not see the point of the exploration of the spiritual subtleties of Habad thought while Russian Jewry was going through the crisis of successive

42 See Andre Neher, *David Gans u-Zemano* (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1982), Chap. 3.

43 See my "'Reason' and 'Beyond Reason' in Habad Hasidism", in *Alei Shefer, Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexandre Safran*, ed. M. Hallamish (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990), pp. 109*-132*.

44 *Beit Rebbe* 242.

45 Aaron Marcus (Verus), *Der Chassidismus, Eine kulturgeschichtliche Studie* (Yeshurun: 1901), p. 362. See the edited Hebrew translation by M. Schonfeld, *HaHasidut* (Bnei Brak, 1980), p. 250.

waves of aculturalization and modernization. As seen by Marcus, Habad in the fourth generation was *withdrawing* from the world. However, let us look more closely at Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch and his activities.

R. Shmuel is reported to have had a number of worldly skills, including knowledge of medicine — he is described as being able to write a prescription in Latin — and having the ability to read music. Like some of the leading figures of the Hungarian *haredi* movement he was attracted by the idea of settling in the Holy Land. He said of the early Zionist *Bilu* movement, so called as an acronym of the verse *Beit Yakov lekhu venelkha* “House of Jacob, you go, and we will go” (Is. 2:5) — “if they would only include also ‘in the light of God’ [the completion of the verse] then I would also go with”.⁴⁶

An important innovation of R. Shmuel was the invention of the *המשכה* *hemshekh*, a series of hasidic discourses that develop a single theme.⁴⁷ This was an important step in terms of the quest that the Habad teachings should become a full, self-contained kabbalistic-hasidic philosophy, incorporating an entire worldview and spiritual cosmology. The concept of the *hemshekh* was to be significantly developed in the next generation, that of R. Shalom Dov Ber. Further, the content of R. Shmuel’s teachings had an important influence on those of the seventh Rebbe, Reb Menahem Mendel.⁴⁸

R. Shmuel was aware that study of Habad hasidic teachings could be superficial. The Kotzker Rebbe (d. 1859) is supposed to have said about the mystical teachings of Habad “and where is the *pipik?*”, meaning, presumably, the earthly reality (*Emet VeEmunah*, Jerusalem, 1969, p. 19). When a hasid described to R. Shmuel in *yehidut* how his entire day is spent studying Habad hasidic teachings, R. Shmuel responded “All this is about how you think of God. But when do you think about *yourself?*” According to the story, the hasid fainted.⁴⁹

A further expression of this concern for inwardness was R. Shmuel’s attempt to institutionalize the role of the *mashpia* in the Habad community. It was understood that a community would have a Rav to decide halakhic questions. However, a letter of 1868 to the community of Borisov, near Minsk, asks the

46 Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Sefer HaToledot Admur Maharash* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1947), p. 78.

47 Rabbi Shneur Zalman often delivered a discourse and then a second one on the same theme, called a *biur*. The *hemshekh* is different in that the subsequent discourses proceed to further stages in the discussion.

48 The *hemshekh* beginning *Vekhakhah* (Exodus 12:11), which commenced in 5637 and comprises 47 separate discourses, each expounded on a Sabbath during the course of nearly a year, is the basis of many discourses of R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

49 *Sefer HaToledot Admur Maharash*, p. 79.

community to support another communal figure who would teach hasidic discourses and would explain their meaning “to the many, and to the individual, inspiring hearts, bringing into action the inner point of hidden love that is in the heart of every Jew, so that he serves his Creator with fear and love... each one by his own measure... especially in our difficult times when people are very preoccupied”.⁵⁰

The concept of the Habad *mashpia* began in the time of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, and had been sharply attacked by R. Avraham of Kalisk. For a society in which spiritual teachings and practices are important, the *mashpia* fulfills a significant role. In the Habad yeshivot founded by Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber and extending to the present, the role of the *mashpia* is vital, and a series of talks by the seventh Rebbe, beginning in 1977, re-emphasized the importance of the personal *mashpia* in the contemporary Lubavitch community.

Whether in terms of developing the form of the hasidic discourse into the extended *hemshekh*, or creating a paid post of *mashpia* for a community, there is a sense of consolidation of spiritual structures. These we see as predominantly focused on the male in the Habad community. But in the time of Rabbi Shmuel, the female begins to become more apparent. His own wife Rivkah was an interesting figure, described as a person who knew many stories, and who imparted them to her grandson Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak, the sixth Habad Rebbe. Further, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak claims that Rabbi Shmuel declared in a hasidic gathering in 1879: “For the authentic line of the [Habad] hasidim, there is no difference whether it is a son or a daughter. [However] the Hasidim educate their sons in the pathways of Hasidism, and they forget about educating their daughters in the pathways of Hasidism.”⁵¹

Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak gives this information in a letter of 1935 addressed to a prominent hasid in Riga, recommending that he should start imparting hasidic teachings to girls in that city. This was to become the famous *Ahot HaTemimim* group of girls who studied mystical hasidic teachings under Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak’s guidance. There is evidence that in the time of Rabbi Shmuel there were already some women who studied hasidic teachings, such as Rachel Leah Kugel, grandmother of the celebrated hasid Reb Mendel Futerfas (d. 1995).⁵²

Thus, while the focus in Rabbi Shmuel’s time was indeed on immersion in hasidic teachings, which, in the view of Aaron Marcus, drew Habad away from

50 *Iggrot Kodesh... Admur Maharash* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1993), p. 4.

51 *Iggrot Kodesh... Admur R. Yosef Yitzhak* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1983), Vol. 3, p. 469.

52 See Loewenthal, “Women and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism” in *Within Hasidic Circles, Studies in Hasidism in Memory of Mordecai Wilensky*, ed. I. Etkes, D. Assaf, I. Bartal, E. Reiner (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1999), p. 25 n. 59.

the realities of the time, in fact, the way these teachings were being studied laid some of the important elements in the groundwork for the developments that would take place under later leaders of Habad, bringing the spirituality of hasidic teachings into the lives of real men and women. Indeed, his grandson, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak (1880-1950), who was later to be the sixth Rebbe, saw him as an activist on behalf of Judaism and the Jewish people, particularly when on his frequent travels, which were ostensibly for reasons of health.

As we have seen, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak interpreted a statement by Rabbi Shmuel as lending authority to his own revolutionary programme regarding girls studying hasidic teachings. We will end with another of R. Shmuel's statements that inspired Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak, and after him also the seventh Rebbe — who, in 1947, before becoming Rebbe, edited a history of Rabbi Shmuel.⁵³

Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak describes how, having recently become the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, he came to Moscow in late 1922. There he found, to his consternation, that those who had earlier expressed support for his plans to strengthen Judaism, were now withdrawing, claiming that the situation was hopeless, that nothing could be done. At this point he remembered a saying of his grandfather, Rabbi Shmuel: "The world says, if one cannot go under, one has to go over. And I say, *from the first go over* — '*melekhathilah ariber*'... I feel that from the first we should approach in a strong way, not to feel put down by anything, and strive to achieve what has to be achieved. If one takes this approach, then God will help."⁵⁴

This concept, *מלכתחילה אריבער*, "*from the beginning go over*," became the motto of Habad in the post-Holocaust era, in the quest to revive Jewish life and consciousness, crossing the divide between the "*haredi*" and other Jews, which had gradually hardened during the course of the passage of modernity. Bringing contemplative spirituality into daily life is one form of Lower Unity. Another, one might suggest, is the sense of personal contact with the Divine through gradually incorporating practical *mitzvot* into the life-style of an individual or of a family living in a primarily secular world. R. Menahem Mendel, the seventh Rebbe, linked the *Lechatchilah Ariber* theme to a melody also attributed to R. Shmuel. Together the motto and the melody express the challenge to reveal Lower Unity, or, as Yitzhak Kraus defines it in his study of the seventh Rebbe, *Dirah batahtonim*, the dwelling of the Divine in this world.⁵⁵

53 See the work mentioned in n. 46 above.

54 *Iggrot Kodesh... Admur R. Yosef Yitzhak*, Vol. 1, p. 617.

55 See Yitzhak Kraus, "Living with the Times: Reflection and Leadership, Theory and Practice, in the World of the Rebbe of Lubavitch" (Hebrew), Ph.D. dissertation at Bar-Ilan University, 2001, p. 42 ff.

Thus we have taken this one theme, *יהודא תמאה*, the Lower Unity, and have attempted to present it as the "central axis" of Habad through its first four generations. We have seen it in different forms, but the central substance of the Habad teachings in which this idea is dominant has remained the same through those four generations, and indeed beyond into the present. Sometimes the behaviours, the expressions, may differ greatly from each other.⁵⁶ But, it can be suggested, the central theme remains the same: *יהודא תמאה*, the quest for Lower Unity, to discover and reveal the Divine in *this* world.⁵⁷

56 See n. 6 above.

57 For discussion of this theme in the thought of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, see Faitel Levin, *Heaven on Earth, Reflections on the Theology of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 2002).