

THE ORTHODOX FORUM

The Orthodox Forum, convened by Dr. Norman Lamm, Chancellor of Yeshiva University, meets each year to consider major issues of concern to the Jewish community. Forum participants from throughout the world, including academicians in both Jewish and secular fields, rabbis, *rashai yeshiva*, Jewish educators, and Jewish communal professionals, gather in conference as a think tank to discuss and critique each other's original papers, examining different aspects of a central theme. The purpose of the Forum is to create and disseminate a new and vibrant Torah literature addressing the critical issues facing Jewry today.

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Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law

EDITED BY

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Spiritual Experience for Hasidic Youths and Girls in Pre-Holocaust Europe A Confluence of Tradition and Modernity

Naftali Loewenthal

The eastern European Jewish community prior to the Holocaust was in a state of crisis as regards traditional Jewish values and observance. Secularization was widespread and increasing. This led a number of religious leaders to make an attempt to provide unusually intense levels of spiritual inspiration for Jewish youth, both males and females. These attempts sometimes crossed borders of normative, accepted traditional practice.

This is not unique to Hasidism: the Novardok *Mitsvat* move

ment provides a non-Hasidic example of the same process.¹ However from its inception Hasidism had attempted to introduce overt spiritual practices into Jewish society, despite various forms of opposition. Hence this paper focuses on the theme of Hasidic prayer, meditation and spiritual experience particularly as seen in the first half of the twentieth century, relating to both males and females.

A number of instances will be considered. For males, we will outline the contemplation systems of Habad and of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman, the Piaseczner Rebbe (d. 1942). For females, we will examine some spiritual aspects of the pre-war *Beit Yaakov* movement, and a unique meditation system which was written by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe for a member of the Habad girls' group in Riga. There will be some discussion of the way, in these examples, borders of previously 'accepted' orthodox practice were redrawn.

HASIDIC SYSTEMS OF CONTEMPLATION

Eastern-European Jewry, from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, saw the rise of a number of contemplation and meditation systems. The Lurianic *kavvanot*, originating in sixteenth century Safed, provided detailed information on kabbalistic concepts (to bear in mind during one's prayer; at first these were available only in manuscript, then in the second half of the eighteenth century there were a number of editions of prayerbooks containing them.²

Of a rather different nature, a number of contemplation systems and approaches to prayer were produced by the hasidic movement.³ Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760), the central figure of early Hasidism, emphasized the theme of *devekut*, 'cleaving to God'. This is relevant in all aspects of life, at least for the *Zaddik*, but particularly in prayer and Torah study. An outline of this technique is provided

¹ See David E. Fishman, "Musar and Modernity: the Case of Novardok," *Modern Judaism* 8:1 (1988): 41–64.

² Such as Zolkiew, 1744 and 1781; Koretz, 1782, 1785, 1794; Lwow, 1788. *Shema hu Kavvanot* was first printed in Salonika, 1852.

³ See Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism: Quartaia Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*, trans. J. Chipman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* (London: Routledge, 1977).

in the famous letter which the Baal Shem Tov wrote to his brother-in-law, R. Gershon of Kutzy.

During your prayer and study, in every single word, have the intention to achieve 'unification' there. For in every single letter there are worlds, and souls and Godliness, which rise and join and unify one with the other. Then the letters join and unify together and become a word. They achieve a true unity with God. You should include your own soul with them at every step....⁴

The idea of "having the intention to achieve 'unification'" led to the controversial practice of reciting a formula to this effect: *le-shem yihud kudsha berikh hu u-shekhinteh* ("for the sake of the Unification of the Holy One with His Shekhinah") before carrying out any *mizvah*, including prayer.⁵ Yet beyond the recitation is the idea that apart from the halakhic imperative to pray, a spiritual transformation of existence was taking place on account of one's prayer. The divine realm of the *sefirot* suffers from disunity, on account of exile; the Holy One, may He be blessed, the 'male' aspect of the Divine, is separate from the *Shekhinah*, the 'female' aspect. Through prayer, Torah study and the *mizvot* these two aspects could be unified, achieving a mini form of redemption.

A form of the *le-shem yihud* formula found in hasidic prayer-books presents the goal as that of unifying the two halves of the Divine Name: *Yud* and *Heh*, the Holy One, should be joined with *Vav* and *Heh*, His *Shekhinah*.⁶ One practice may have been to visual-

⁴ R. Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye, *Ben Porat Yosef* (Koretz: 1781; New York: 1954, photog. reprint of Piotrkov: 1884), p. 128a. For the most recent and comprehensive discussion of this letter, see Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Baal Shem Tov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 97–113.

⁵ See L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, pp. 140–51. Reciting this formula was condemned by Rabbi Yeliezek Landau (1713–91), in his *Noda bi Yehudah* (Zolkiew, 1823), *Yoreh De'ah*, no. 93.

⁶ In R. Shimon Zuhman's *Seder Tefilat mi Kol ha Shmuah* (Kopyel, 1816; Brooklyn: Kehot, 1967), fol. 40b before *hanukh she amun*.

ize these letters of the Divine Name, another to conceptualize the unity among the *sefirot*. Yet the statement by the Baal Shem Tov that within each letter there is "Godliness" leads to a rather different form of spiritual experience, described boldly by his disciple Rabbi Yakov Yosef of Polonnoye (d. 1784):

The idea of *devekut* to [God] may He be blessed is that by means of the letters of Torah and prayer, one makes one's thoughts and inwardness cleave to the inwardness and the spirituality which is within the letters, as is expressed esoterically by the verse 'let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth' (Cant. 1:2), a *devekut* of spirit to spirit... and when one prolongs reciting a word it is *devekut*, that one does not want to separate from that word.⁷

In the next generation, Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch (d. 1772), taught a form of mystical experience based on the concept of self-abnegation. In this state, the ego of the person dissolves. His speech is felt as an expression of the World of Speech, the Divine attribute *malkhut*; his thought expresses the World of Thought, the attribute *binah*.⁸ A system of such mystical intensity may be considered suitable primarily for charismatic leaders, rather than followers.⁹ By contrast, in the third generation of the movement, R. Dov Ber's disciple, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745–1812), the founder of the Habad school of Hasidism, taught a number of less

⁷ *Keter Shem Tov* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1977), p. 7, no. 44, based on R. Yaakov Yosef's *Ben Porat Yosef*, p. 59d, and see also his *Toledot Yaakov Yosef* (Koretz, 1780), p. 132a.

⁸ See Schatz, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, ch. 7.

⁹ Another controversial aspect of his teachings, which originated with the Baal Shem Tov, was the concept of 'elevation' of foreign thoughts in prayer. If a stray thought enters the person's mind he can elevate it to its source by perceiving its spiritual root. For example, if it is a thought of love, it originates with the *sefirah* of *loved* (Kindness). By the third generation of the movement it was widely felt that this practice was not suitable for the haskle follower. See R. Shneur Zalman's *Tanya* (Shavita, 1796; Brooklyn: Kehot, 1982), 1:28, 6d, 6a.

intense systems of contemplation which he expected his followers to utilize in their prayer. In his work *Likkutei Amarim*, generally known as *Tanya*, he presented several alternative approaches to contemplation, such as what he called the "long way" and the "short way."¹⁰ These comprise longer and shorter varieties of contemplative technique. The second section of the same work, *Shaar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*, functions as a manual providing material on which to base one's thoughts during a specific form of contemplation, focusing on the divine nature of existence. The first chapter describes a stream of divine energy in the form of Hebrew letters which is the true essence of all Creation. These letters flow from the "Ten Utterances" which originally brought the universe into being, and which now too continuously provide the force which keeps it in existence. Everything, even a stone, has a spiritual dimension, and the Hebrew word for any object is the key to that inner level of its reality. In practice, this means that the contemplative who follows R. Shneur Zalman's system perceives the world around him as an expression of the divine. An anecdote depicts R. Shneur Zalman as recounting what he was thinking about during prayer: "that this *stender* (lectern) is Godliness."

This perception has different phases, such as the "Upper Unity" in which one perceives that 'all is God', meaning that there is *only* God, associated with the first line of the *Shema*. The words "God is One" are explained as meaning not that there is One God, but that there is *only* God – nothing else exists. Another phase is termed the 'Lower Unity', in which one perceives that there is a world, but it is an expression of God: "God is all." This theme is expounded in terms of the second line of the *Shema*, "*barukh shem*...."¹¹

¹⁰ The title page of R. Shneur Zalman's *Likkutei Amarim*, *Tanya* uses the terms 'long' and 'short', referring to various contemplative techniques described in the book. The 'short' path aims swiftly to awaken the 'hidden love' within the person, while the 'long path' consists of deliberate (and usually lengthy) contemplation, arousing feelings of love and fear of the divine, or a profound sense of self-abnegation. See M. Hallamish, *Mein Tai Tanya* (Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1987), pp. 277–94.

¹¹ See *Tanya*, *Shaar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*, ch. 7.

The second generation of Habad was particularly rich in its exploration of and argument about issues relating to contemplative prayer. There is discussion of approaching contemplation in a general or a detailed way.¹² These mean, respectively, either an inspiring but general and relatively brief pondering on the divine nature of existence, or a detailed, step-by-step exploration of the spiritual succession of worlds and *sefirot* described in kabbalistic texts. This is similar to, but not identical with, the distinction between short and long contemplative approaches to prayer made in the *Tanya*.

Rabbi Dov Ber (1773–1827), the second leader of Habad known as the *Mitteler Rebbe*, wrote tracts which provide material for these kinds of contemplation, as did his rival, Rabbi Aaron of Starroselye (d. 1828).¹³ In this literature there are questions about the different goals to be achieved through contemplation – whether *bitul*, mystical self-abnegation, or heartfelt emotional ecstasy, and critical discussions about whether one's intense emotional experiences in prayer are really genuine. R. Dov Ber comments that the contemplative praying loudly with great enthusiasm may well get angry if someone else tells him to keep quiet, indicating the shallowness of his spiritual experience.¹⁴ Rabbi Aaron countered that the person who rejects the path of spiritual enthusiasm is likely to remain attached to material desires.¹⁵

How did these contemplative practices fit with the synagogue

¹² See R. Dov Ber's *Shaar ha-Yitbud*, the second part of *Ner Mizvot ve-Torat Or* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1974), p. 4b.

¹³ See L. Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity: The Life and Works of Aaron of Starroselye* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1966); *idem*, (trans.), *Dobh Ber, Tract on Ecstasy* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1963); Rachel Elior, *The Theory of Divinity in the Second Generation of Habad* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982); *idem*, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism* (New York: SUNY, 1993); Nafhai Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹⁴ R. Dov Ber, *Shaar ha-Eminah* reprinted in *Ner Mizvot ve-Torat Or* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1974), ch. 48, fol. 88a. See also in the same volume, *Shaar ha-Yitbud*, ch. 54, fol. 90b.

¹⁵ Rabbi Aaron Halevi Horowitz of Starroselye, *Shaneri ha-Avudah* (Slukhov, 1821; Jerusalem, 1970), *Shaar ha-Yitbud*, fol. 68th.

service? It seems that in the case of R. Shneur Zalman, the goal was a lengthy weekday morning service for the entire *minyán* which was geared to the requirements of the contemplatives. Thus he ordered his followers to ensure that the weekday morning service should proceed at a slow pace, "an hour and a half," considerably longer than most synagogues today, with no talking at all during the prayers.¹⁶ At the same time, he gave permission to certain individuals to pray apart from the *minyán*.¹⁷

It is likely – but not certain – that this was the pattern followed by the followers of Rabbi Aaron of Starroselye: enthusiastic ecstasy would combine with the exigencies of prayer in a *minyán*, although certain individuals may have prayed alone. In the case of R. Dov Ber's followers the question is more acute. His path of intensive and lengthy meditative thought, which in some cases almost approached a trance-like state of immobility, beyond consciousness of one's surroundings, must have completely transcended the synagogue service.

We do not know how this problem was dealt with in R. Dov Ber's life-time. However, early in the twentieth century, when there was a revival of intensive contemplative prayer in Habad, the compromise reached was that the contemplative would attend the synagogue service but would then stay on alone afterwards. The practice of contemplative prayer led also to structural refinements of the synagogue. The typical Habad synagogue would include an extra room, adjoining the main synagogue hall, where contemplatives could pray at their own pace, not disturbing and not disturbed by others.¹⁸

What was the nature of this revival? Here we come to the crux of our discussion. Under the pressure of the secularizing

¹⁶ See *Tanya*, fols. 103a, 137b, 138a, 16th, 16ga. For discussion of R. Shneur Zalman's three times concerning prayer see L. Etkes, "Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi as a Hasidic Leader" (Hebrew), *Jahilut: Volume of Zion 50* (1986): 347–9, and N. Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite* (n. 15 above), pp. 110–2.

¹⁷ See the 'Laws and Regulations' in S.B. Levine, ed., *Aggurat Kodesh: Admor ha-Zaken, Admor ha-Tinyar, Admor ha-Zemah Zedek* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1980), p. 105.

¹⁸ See Haim Lieberman, *Chof Chofed*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn, 1980), pp. 164–9.

force of modernity, some Jewish leaders felt an urgent need for an intensification of spirituality. In the first decades of the twentieth century this led to radical steps in a number of different areas, including the development of *Beit Yaakov* and also other movements outside Hasidism such as Novaredok.

This radicalism developed despite the fact that in an earlier move to counter modernity, the mid-nineteenth century had seen the emergence of Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy. Following the lead of the Ḥatam Sofer, this emphasised that *hadash assur min ha-Torah*, all innovations are to be eschewed, especially in matters relating to the synagogue. To a considerable extent this set the tone for the hasidic movement as a whole. Despite this, the quest for spirituality as the route to the survival of Orthodoxy led to a number of developments which were novel or even unprecedented.

The first of these was the establishment by Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn (1860–1920), the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, of the Tomkhei Teminim Yeshiva in 1897. This Yeshiva, in the townlet of Lubavitch, was distinguished by making the overtly mystical teachings of Ḥabad an integral part of the curriculum, in addition to study of Talmud, the main fare in other Eastern European *yeshivot* of the time, although some of these also included study of *musar*.¹⁹ Unusually lengthy and intense contemplative prayer was encouraged among the students of *Tomkhei Teminim*. R. Shalom Dovber compiled a number of works providing guidance for this spiritual practice, chief of which was *Kuntres ha-Tefillah*, distributed among the students of the Yeshiva and members of the community in mimeographed copies in 1900.²⁰

¹⁹ This was sometimes a controversial addition to the curriculum. See Ben Zion Dinur, *Be-Olam she-Shakai* (Jerusalem: Mossad Biakik, 1958), pp.70–1 for an account of the Telshe Yeshiva around 1897–1898, when there was a strike of the students protesting against an attempt to make *musar* study compulsory. See also Sinaid Stammper, *The Lithuanian Yeshiva* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Zahman Shazar Center, 1995), p. 233.

²⁰ It was printed in Vilna, 1924 and reprinted several times since (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1942, 1956, 1988) and there is an English translation, *Tract on Prayer*, trans. Y. E. Danziger (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1992). Another tract by R. Shalom Dovber relating to prayer is *Kuntres ha-Avoda* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1946).

R. Shalom Dovber made clear in a letter from around the same year that he saw his Yeshiva as counteracting the secularizing tendencies of the time, which had crept into other, unnamed yeshivot. Their students, he claimed “are beardless, mocking the words of the Sages and especially of the *Zohar* and kabbalistic works, and are inclined to be permissive in matters of Jewish law.”²¹ His ideal for the Tomkhei Teminim students emerging from his yeshiva was that they would not only study Torah but also be noted for “service of God in the heart, which is prayer, in love and in fear”²² – a hint at the emphasis on contemplative prayer in the Lubavitch Yeshiva.

This emphasis continued throughout the lifetime of R. Shalom Dovber’s successor, Rabbi Yosef Yizhak (1880–1950), as is attested by the tenor of his teachings in Otwock, Poland, where the main Lubavitch Yeshiva was situated during the 1930s, and also in Brooklyn, where he moved in 1940. The republication of *Kuntres ha-Tefillah* in Brooklyn in 1942 likewise attests to the concern to transport Ḥabad contemplative prayer techniques to the United States.

RABBI KALONYMOS KALMAN SHAPIRA

Another hasidic Rebbe who was concerned to intensify spiritual experience among the youth was Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Shapira (1889–1942) of Piaseczno, author of the posthumously published *Aish Kodesh*.²³ His father-in-law Rabbi Yerahmiel Moshe was the grandson of the famous Kozhnicz Maggid (1736–1814), and was Admor in Kozhnicz. When his father-in-law passed away in 1909, R. Kalonymos Kalman took his position as *Rebbe* in Kozhnicz, but in 1913 was persuaded to take up residence in Piaseczno, near Warsaw, where he conducted a hasidic ‘court’. In 1923 he founded of one of the largest hasidic yeshivot in Warsaw, *Daat Moshe*, and in 1932 he published his famous work *Hovat ha-Talmidim*. This provides an

²¹ R. Shalom Dovber, *Iggerot Kodesh*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1982), pp. 212–3.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Published in Jerusalem, 1960. See Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: the Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Chaito* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994).

inspiring spiritual guide for Yeshivah students, including the outlines of some basic mystical concepts.

In the introduction to this work the author expresses his discontent with the separatist Orthodox approach which was prevalent in Poland, in which the heads of the *Yeshivot* would focus on the few who remained faithful to committed Orthodoxy, and, he claimed, give up hope for those who did not:

Our heart mourns and our hair stands on end when we see how the younger generation have become impious and uncontrolled, Heaven protect us. They have no faith, no fear [of God], no Torah. They hate God and those Jews who serve Him. The principals and heads of the *yeshivot* who are completely immersed in their academies, with only the best students before their eyes, take comfort by saying 'it is true there are now many who are not observant, but nonetheless the Jewish people are not destitute, there are some first class scholars with excellent knowledge of Torah and true faith in God! However, let them just stretch their heads out of the narrow enclave of their *yeshivot!* They will see the great mass who are not observant, Heaven protect us.... The Houses of Study which were filled with Torah scholars are now empty, and in their place are groups and clubs with goals of heresy and loathing of Torah.... Even the workers and the businessmen who previously, even if they were not Torah scholars, were nonetheless faithful Jews, have now joined with the youth in impiety, slipping into destruction.... Can we really be satisfied with just the handful of students who remain in our *yeshivot?* Are they the whole Jewish people?²⁴

His remedy for this situation was to attempt to intensify the spiritual goals of those who were still studying in the *yeshivot*. Previously, writes Rabbi Shapira, hasidic practices such as the quest for

enthusiasm and ecstasy were considered appropriate only for older people, not for youths studying in *yeshivah*. Now, however, the need of the time indicates that younger people too should be taught to strive for these goals. Even if the enthusiasm is superficial, compared with that of the mature *hasid*, it is valuable. For, if the enthusiasm of the young is not drawn toward a sacred purpose, it will become focused on other, worthless, things.²⁵

Defending this approach, R. Shapira argues that in Talmudic study too it is obvious that the young boy studying *Gemara* and *'tsafot* does not understand it to the same depth as does an adult. Nonetheless the boy is taught Talmud so that later he will become a scholar. In the same way, the youth who is taught hasidic ideas and practices will later become a true *hasid*.²⁶

Hovat ha-Talmidin includes some material derived from kabbalistic sources.²⁷ In addition, the publication concludes with three essays aimed at "older students and young married men." The first presents some basic concepts from kabbalistic teaching, including the spiritual nature of the soul, the theme of *zimzum* (the spiritual concealment or 'contraction' of Godliness, enabling the world to come into being), and the divine *sefirot*. The second gives guidance for an intensive, enthusiastic, and ecstatic approach to prayer and melody, while the third presents a mystical approach to Shabbat. In these essays the author repeatedly expresses concern about the question of study of kabbalistic material, but defends his decision to encourage it.²⁸

Hovat ha-Talmidin was the only one of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman's works to be published in his lifetime. *Hakhsarot ha-Avreikim*, a work he left in manuscript, indicates that R. Kalonymus Kalman also taught a number of systems of contemplation or meditation to his disciples.²⁹

²⁴ *Hovat ha-Talmidin*, fol. 7a. b.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ See ch. 10.

²⁷ See, for example, fol. 59a. 81a.

²⁸ This was published in Jerusalem: 1966. See N. Polen, *Ha'p' Five*, pp. 4-5. See also L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 43.

²⁹ Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Kuntres Hovat ha-Talmidin* (Warsaw, 1932; Tel Aviv, n.d.), fol. 4a. b.

One method he taught was that of visualization. For example, while in prayer, one should picture oneself as standing in the Temple, a method based on a passage by the early hasidic master (and ancestor of R. Kalonymus Kalman) R. Elimelekh of Lizhensk (d. 1786).³⁰ R. Shapira taught two different approaches to visualization: 'simple' and 'creative'. The former would be quite straightforward as regards the imagery employed, while in the latter, the more advanced method, the person would give his imagination free reign, utilizing the full gamut of aggadic sources, in creating images relating to spiritual themes.

An interesting system of meditation taught by R. Kalonymus Kalman was described by one of his students who escaped the Holocaust.³¹ This is termed *hushkatala* and involves 'silencing' one's thought. The goal is to achieve a state of mind empty of the normal stream of turbulent ideas. An aid to this could be to gaze at the hardly moving hour-hand of a clock. Then one can focus on one single sacred idea, such as "the Lord God is True." After this meditative process, which should lead to an 'indwelling from above', presumably a form of inspiration beyond oneself, one should sing the verse "Teach me, o God, Thy way" (Ps. 27:11), in the special melody taught by R. Kalonymus Kalman.³²

There is also an ethical dimension to these practices. R. Kalonymus Kalman says that the time of 'silencing' can be utilized for gaining certain religious or ethical qualities. The sacred thought on which one focuses might concern faith, love or fear of God, or the putting right of bad qualities such as laziness.³³

Another technique of prayer taught by R. Kalonymus Kalman is in some ways reminiscent of Braslav *hitbodedut*, in which the individual speaks directly to God, spontaneously creating his

³⁰ R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Haklsharat ha-Avrakhim*, (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 32.

See *No'am Elimelekh*, ed. G. Nigal (Jerusalem: Mossad ha Rav Kook, 1978), *Lekhi Lekha*, p. 7b.

³¹ See Polen, *Holy Fire*, pp. 5, 159 n. 14.

³² R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Pereshi ha-Midkhi* (Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 406-407.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

own prayer.³⁴ This is explained in another work left in manuscript by the author, published posthumously with the title *Zav ve-Zinuz* (Jerusalem: 1966).

R. Kalonymus first explains how helpful it is to have a friend to whom one can confide one's problems, following an interpretation by the Sages of Prov. 12:25, "If there is a worry in a person's heart... he should speak about it with others" (BT *Yoma* 75a). R. Kalonymus says the effect is "as if a stone were rolled off his heart." Then he continues:

Now do you have any good friend and companion like your Father in Heaven? [In saying one should tell one's worry to others] the Sages were hinting at Him! So hide yourself in a particular room, if possible for you, and if not, turn your face to the wall, and imagine in your thoughts that you are standing before the Divine Throne of Glory, and pour your heart out to Him in prayer and entreaty, as it occurs to your heart, in any language you understand.³⁵

The idea that the reader might not be able to find a room to himself in which to carry out this practice is realistic in terms of the lack of space for private spiritual devotions in the pre-war (and perhaps also post-war) yeshiva environment. R. Kalonymus continues with 'an example' of such individual prayer, written simply in case the reader is not used to this kind of practice; he does not want his text to be treated as yet another text to recite. The prayer expresses the longing for purity:

Master of the Universe! You brought me out from Naught, and created and formed my entire body, spirit and soul, and You see how great is my longing to stand before You with a pure and unsullied soul, which would sense Your Will and

³⁴ However, in the nineteenth century collection of such prayers by Rabbi Nathan Sternhart (1780-1849), *Likkutei Tefillot* (Braslaw: c. 1822; Jerusalem, 1957), each prayer is woven around a teaching by Rabbi Natlman.

³⁵ *Zav ve-Zinuz* (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 6.

meditate on Your Thought, hearing Your Voice in the depths of her heart. However, my heart is sick within me because it is so stilled, sensing foreign feelings, desiring impure desires....³⁶

The prayer continues at length with a heartfelt request beseeching God to grant purity to the soul, so that it can ascend above with longing for the Divine, achieving abnegation and unification with God's Oneness.

THE HALAKHIC ISSUE

From the earliest days of Hasidism there had been attacks on the hasidic mode of prayer, on a number of counts: the change of *nusah* (prayer rite) from the traditional Ashkenaz rite to a version of the Lurianic prayerbook, resembling the Sefardic rite; adding new phrases such as *le-shem yitnod kudsha berikh hu u-shektineh* ("for the sake of the Unification of the Holy One with His Shekhinah"); and the times of prayer. We will focus only on the third point, times of prayer, because by the twentieth century issues of *nusah* and the addition of phrases which had been points of conflict as 'new departures' in the 1760s could now be seen as time honored tradition.

The same could almost be said about the time for prayer. However, this remains an equivocal issue simply because the Mishnah, Talmud, and *Shulhan Arukh* clearly present specific times by which the morning and evening *Shema* and the main daily prayers (*Amidah*) should be said. Prolonged hasidic contemplation of any kind is liable to lead to overstepping the bounds of this time constraint. One could say that the time for the morning *Shema* is partially dealt with by reciting it early, before beginning the process of contemplation and prayer.³⁷ But what about the time for the *Amidah*?

³⁶ *Ibid.* See L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, pp. 32-3.

³⁷ However, there remains the problem that one may be reciting the *Shema* without wearing *tefillin*. Cf. *BT Berakhot* 14b.

The general focus of hasidic contemplation techniques was on the morning prayer. Long periods of study and thought could take one not only beyond the required time for *Shaharit* but to a point when, according to the *Mishnah Berurah*, by Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, (1838-1933), the Hafez Hayyim, one should first say the afternoon prayer and then recite the *Amidah* a second time as compensation for missing *Shaharit* in the morning.³⁸ Nonetheless, among a variety of hasidic schools in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we find this extreme phenomenon. Less radically, in major Jewish centers today one can generally 'find a *minyán*' in a hasidic *shiteib* well after the end of the time for *Shaharit*, although generally before midday. Are the people there because they have been contemplating or engaged in some other specifically spiritual practice? Have they been studying Talmud, Rashi, and *Tosafot*? To my knowledge, no surveys on this point have been published.

How did the *hasidim* excuse their practice of praying beyond the required time? At the outset, let us make the point that while the Talmud – considering this as the constantly studied and restudied 'foundation document' of the rabbinic ethos – is very concerned about subtle issues of Shabbat observance and *kashrut* of food, for example,³⁹ it presents a variety of approaches to the issue of prayer. These include the idea that those "whose Torah study was their trade" like R. Simeon bar Yoḥai would not interrupt their Torah study for the sake of prayer,⁴⁰ or, like R. Yehudah, would only pray once in thirty days, while revising their studies.⁴¹ It also speaks, by contrast, of the 'early pious ones' (*hasidim ha-rishonim*) who would spend an hour in preparation for prayer, an hour in prayer, and an hour after prayer. The Talmud then asks how, if they did this three times a day, and therefore spending nine hours in prayer, they were ever able

³⁸ I.e. if after midday. See *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim*, 89:1, gloss by R. Moshe Isserles and *Mishnah Berurah*, no. 7.

³⁹ See at length the second chapter of "Tractate Avodah Zarah (29b ff.), discussing wine, cheese, and milk of Gentiles and food cooked by Gentiles.

⁴⁰ *BT Shab.* 11a.

⁴¹ *BT Rosh Ha Shannah*, 55a.

to study Torah or to work, and answers that since they were 'pious,' they were given Divine help in both areas.⁴²

The Talmud also emphasizes the need for great concentration in saying the *Shema* and in prayer, which leads to the idea that if one is not in a sufficiently relaxed mood, one should not pray. Thus a groom before his wedding night is declared exempt from saying the *Shema*, and Maimonides also cites the view that a person who has been on a journey should wait three days before praying.⁴³ Various Talmudic sages did not pray if they were angry or upset.⁴⁴ However, this exacting approach to the inner dimension of prayer was discouraged by leading medieval Ashkenazi authorities such as Rabbi Meir of Rotenberg. The latter is quoted in the fourteenth century *Arba'ah Turim* as stating that since "we" – meaning our later and weaker generation – "do not have such great concentration in prayer," these exemptions do not apply.⁴⁵

In this context we can consider briefly some of the hasidic comments on the question of praying after the time stipulated in the *Shullhan Arukh*. Criticism of the *hasidim* on the grounds of praying late is found in early documents, even those prior to 1772.⁴⁶ However, early material in defense of the hasidic practice is sparse. There is a passage by Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polonnoye extolling the virtue of 'silence' before prayer, leading to delay in the actual prayer. Since the silence too is for the sake of the Creator, it too is considered as praise, as the Psalmist says: "For You, silence is praise" (65:2).⁴⁷

⁴² BT Ber 32b.

⁴³ *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Ahavah*, Laws of the Recital of the *Shema*, 4:3; Laws of Prayer, 4:15.

⁴⁴ BT *Eruvin* 65a.

⁴⁵ *Tur, Orah Hayyim*, 98; see the comment in the *Beit Yosef*. A similar caution voiced in *Hagahot Maimoniot to Mishneh Torah, Hil. Tefillah* 4:15 is cited in the name of the Tosafists. The idea that "we" suffer from lack of concentration in prayer and therefore cannot aspire to the standards described in the Talmud is included by R. Joseph Karo in his legal Code (*Orah Hayyim*, sec. 98, para. 2).

⁴⁶ See the sources listed by M. Wilensky, *FKasidin and Minhagim: A Study of the controversy between them in the Years 1772-1815* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Haik, 1970), vol. 1, p. 38, n. 19.

⁴⁷ Jacobs, *Jasidic Prayer*, p. 50, citing R. Yaakov Yosef, *Tefilot Yaakov Yosef* (Kornik, 1780), fol. 13a.

In the nineteenth century we find a number of responses to criticism regarding the times of hasidic prayer. One form of this concerns the special stature of the hasidic *zaddik*, which places him above time. His prayer is of such spiritual power that it transcends ordinary boundaries. This idea was accepted by the hasidic followers: it seemed quite naturally to express the distinctive nature of the hasidic *Rebbe*. Thus, for example, in the late nineteenth century Avraham Yizhak Sperlin, author of the well-known *Tamei ha-Minhagin*, after giving a number of examples of hasidic leaders who would pray *Shaharit* or *Minhah* well after the stipulated time says "*has ve-shalom* to imagine criticizing them – for them the night shines as does the day" (p. 27).

Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin (1796–1850) is reported to have presented an elaborate schema according to which, originally, in the Garden of Eden, existence was of such a pure nature that prayer was suitable at any time. The sin of the Tree of Knowledge led to a serious coarsening of the atmosphere, but – linking to a well-known *aggadah* – each of the Patriarchs succeeded in purifying a certain time for each prayer: the morning prayer by Abraham, afternoon prayer by Isaac, and evening prayer by Jacob.⁴⁸

Then came the giving of the Torah. Again, existence was purified, and prayer was effective at any time. This blissful state was spoiled by the worship of the Golden Calf, and specific times were again necessary, reinforced by the enactments of the Men of the Great Assembly. Based to this account, R. Israel of Ruzhin said that a pure soul which had held back from the sins of the Tree of Knowledge and of the Golden Calf, i.e. a *zaddik*, continues to be beyond time and can pray in an unrestricted way.⁴⁹

Consistent with this approach is the tradition that while R. Israel himself prayed late, he wanted his followers to pray at the correct time. When a group of them began trying to imitate him, he criticized them. His rebuke took the form of a story. Yet the account

⁴⁸ BT *Berakhot* 26b.

⁴⁹ A. Weisheim, *Law and Custom in Hasidism* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Mossad ha Rav book, 1960), p. 95, citing Fischmann, *Dvoret David* (Hasidim, 1903).

includes a sequel which seems to extend the concept of late prayer to the *hasidic* followers as well. Here follows a paraphrase:

A woman would always cook a simple lunch for her husband, and would serve it at the same time daily. Once, she delayed the lunch by an hour, but served exactly the same, simple food. Her husband was upset; he would not have minded waiting for something special, but this dish was no different from the normal meal.

This part of the anecdote stresses the special stature of the *zaddik*. His prayer is indeed late – but is like a special dish which is welcome at any time.

Yet the story does not stop here. Rabbi Israel's *hasidim*, who had been the subject of this rebuke, came upon an "old man" to whom they recounted the parable of the food. He responded that the rejection of the tardy dish only takes place if the love between husband and wife is incomplete. But if the husband truly loves the wife, he will welcome the food whatever it is and whenever it is served. According to this account, when the *hasidim* later told this to R. Israel, he accepted this view. God's love for the individual is so great that He will indeed accept his prayer at any time.⁵⁰ The implication is that permission is given to R. Israel's followers to imitate the example of their *Rebbe*.

The idea of the *hasid* simply imitating an earlier form of genuinely spiritual behavior is expressed in a story written in the mid-nineteenth century to defend the late prayer of the *hasidim*.

The texts on which the work *Vikuhah Rabbah* is based, first published in 1864, were probably composed by a follower of Rabbi Levi Isaac of Berdichev (1740–1809),⁵¹ although they were later edited by Jacob Cadaner, a Habad follower in the second and third generations of the movement (thus c. 1815–60). An interesting passage in this work discusses questions relating to contemplative prayer

⁵⁰ After being silent for a while, Rabbi Israel said that the old man whom they met had told him, Rabbi Israel, the same thing – and also God! From Wertheim, p. 93 n. 56, quoting *Higgulat ha-Zaddikim* by Shlomo Gavriel (Warsaw, 1905), quoted in Buber, *Or ha-Ganuz*, p. 282.

⁵¹ Thus Mondschein in his "Ha sefarim 'Ma:ref' ha Avodah' u' 'Vikuhah Rabbah,'" *Alif Sefer* 5 (1978): 174–5, and n. 22.

and indicates that the author felt that by his generation authentic spirituality in prayer was largely a matter of the past, whether for the *hasidim* or the *mitnagedim*.

The earlier generations are described as musicians who knew how to play melodies for the king according to the rules of music, and also knew how to prepare their instruments. Some of these, (i.e. the pre-*hasidic* pietists and kabbalists) played their music early in the morning, because they had very good instruments "made of coral", while others (the early *hasidim*) played later after spending a long time preparing their lesser quality instruments. Both groups were acceptable to the king.

The children of the members of these two groups, however, know neither the rules of music, nor how to prepare their instruments. They all produce sounds which are largely false. In imitation of their illustrious parents, some, the *mitnagedim*, continue to play early in the morning, and others, the *hasidim*, "sleep late" and therefore play later in the day.

As far as the king is concerned, none of these melodies are worth hearing. Despite this sorry situation, there are some of the (*hasidic*) children who realize that their playing is false. They take this to heart, and spend time trying to learn the rules of music, even though they do not do this successfully, and try to prepare their instruments, even though they do not know how. The king sees this endeavor and accepts it.⁵²

The meaning of the story is clear: 'our' generation (when the story was told) merely imitates the earlier, genuinely spiritual, figures. Knowing neither the rules of music nor how to prepare one's instruments, the best one can achieve is a sense of humility at one's lack of competence in performing for the King. This leads to a sincere attempt, despite the fact that objectively it is unsuccessful. Yet the attempt itself has some worth.

This was the way the question was evaluated by some of the *hasidim*. We are not considering here the scorn with which this quest for the spiritual was regarded by the opponents of Hasidism.

⁵² *Vikuhah Rabbah*, (Petruckow, 1912; reprinted Brooklyn, 1981), fol. 19b.

A collection of relevant material till 1815 was made by the late Professor Mordechai Wilensky.⁵³ There is obviously room for study of the conflict between *hasidim* and *mitnaggedim* after that date. However, as we have suggested earlier, by the time we come to the twentieth century, whatever the rivalries and enmities, the *hasidim* were able to feel, at least to some extent, justified by their illustrious forbears. Yet quite apart from criticism by the *mitnaggedim*, questions within Hasidism continued on the issue of late prayer and balancing one's individual prayer with the synagogue service.

Thus, moving to the modern West, in 1949 a tract of hasidic teaching by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yizhak Schneersohn (1880–1950), included a letter in which the Rebbe stated, in the names of his forbears, how one's individual prayer relates to that of the synagogue service.

[The previous Rebbeim of Habad] defined the *halakha* for those who asked concerning prayer with the community: how can they fulfill both – to engage in the 'service of the heart' with lengthy prayer, and also to pray with the community? They answered that the meaning of 'prayer with the community' is *at the time that the community is praying* [emphasis added, NIL]. They instructed them to hear all the prayers, the saying of *Kaddish*, *Barekhu*, *Kedushah*, the Reading of the Torah and recital of *Kaddish* [concluding] the communal prayer service. After that they should pray slowly, each individual according to his level of attainment in the service of the heart.⁵⁴

This statement by R. Yosef Yizhak gave clear guidance to the contemplative: be present in the synagogue, participate at a certain level in the public service (through saying *amen*, etc.), but mean-

⁵³ M. Wilensky, *Hasidim and Mitnaggin*. On the *mitnagginim*, see Allen Nadler, *The Faith of the Mitnaggin: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rapture* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁵⁴ R. Yosef Yizhak Schneersohn, *Kimrus 2 Nisan 5, 709* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1949), p. 99. (collected in *idem*, *Sefer ha- Amana'im* 5, 709 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1976).

while be preparing for prayer, probably through study of hasidic teachings. Then the hasid would pray in his own individual, lengthy, intense way. The passage was reprinted in an important work of seventh generation Lubavitch, the *Sefer ha-Minhagim*,⁵⁵ which enabled the widely flung and growing movement to have consistency of custom.

It is interesting that R. Yosef Yizhak's counsel concerning prayer, originally directed at scholarly contemplatives, was partly adapted for use by the *balei teshuvah*, the newly Orthodox (literally 'repentants'). The person who, reading slowly, cannot keep up with the synagogue prayers, is advised by his Lubavitch mentor to attend the synagogue service from the beginning, but to pray at his own pace.

Another form of conflict regarding contemplative prayer concerns not the time of prayer but the very idea that the individual before one's eyes should dare to aspire to it. An example of this is seen in the background to a letter from the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), written in 1952 to the head of the (non-hasidic) Yeshivah in Manchester, Rabbi Yehudah Zev Segal (c. 1911–1993). The latter had written to the Rebbe with a complaint about some boys from Lubavitch families in the Yeshivah, who were clearly trying to follow the contemplative style of prayer. In other respects, however, they were perhaps not untypical youth of the 1950s, at least in the eyes of their austere *Rosh Yeshivah*.

In his reply the Rebbe expressed the belief that the attempt to achieve spirituality in prayer, even if not matched by other aspects of a young person's life, would at least have a generally positive effect. The inner experience in contemplative prayer was a resource which would strengthen their affirmation of traditional values in a period of change. R. Menahem Mendel wrote:

As for what you write concerning the conduct of certain of the students...that you are not pleased about their lengthy prayer

⁵⁵ *Ketav Habad* Kehot, 1965, p. 8.

since this does not match their behavior in other matters.... Perhaps your claims are justified. However, it is clearly apparent to anyone considering the nature of the youth of this generation that for them in particular it is a time of crisis. One therefore has to be very careful not to weaken their power to reject the 'winds' which are blowing through the world....⁵⁶

This brings us back again to the concept of the *baal teshuvah*. It is interesting to note that one of the major *Habad* teachers of *baalei teshuvah*, Rabbi Shneur Zalman Gafni (b. c. 1940), is one of the leading contemporary exponents of lengthy, intensive contemplative prayer. A former student described how day by day he would sit almost immobile in the yeshivah hall of Kefar Habad, wrapped in his *tallit*, engaged for three hours in silent meditative prayer. He also expects attempts in this direction from his students.

One might ask: surely someone who is relatively new to traditional Judaism should beware of such intensely spiritual practices? Now, those who follow Rabbi Gafni into the mysteries of *hibbonenuit* (contemplation) have indeed learned to study profound teachings in Hebrew: *Tanya*, *Torah Or* and *Likkutei Torah* by Rabbi Shneur Zalman and other works by later *Habad* teachers. Yet at some level they may well still be regarded as neophytes. Nonetheless, R. Gafni guides them to levels of experience which in any other traditional *beit ha-midrash* or synagogue would seem quite startling. Perhaps his view is that precisely the intensity of *Habad* contemplation can help these students affirm their commitment to ideals which challenge directly the secular values in which they had been immersed.

WOMEN AND JEWISH SPIRITUALITY

Having attempted to examine some aspects of hasidic prayer and spirituality for males, particularly in pre-Holocaust Europe, we

now will endeavor to investigate questions relating to spirituality for women and girls, focusing on the same period.⁵⁷ Here too, as a reaction to the secularizing force of modernity, a gradual transformation was taking place. Polish-Jewish girls had not previously been given formal Jewish education. In the second decade of the twentieth century, a new movement for the Jewish education of girls began. This was *Beit Yaakov*, founded by Sarah Schenierer (d. 1935) and centered in Cracow. From there it spread throughout Poland and further afield, involving tens of thousands of girls. This movement is well known, but is as yet insufficiently understood as an example of feminine spirituality. Functioning primarily as a movement of schools for Polish-Jewish girls, *Beit Yaakov* is usually thought of as an adventurous step educationally, which is the way it is described by Shoshana Pantel Zolty,⁵⁸ or, interestingly, as a model for Jewish feminism, as it is depicted by Deborah Weissman.⁵⁹ However examination of some of the sources relating to this movement indicates that in its pre-war form, for the inner circle of its members and leaders, it is to be seen as a remarkable example of feminine spirituality.

The initial context of early twentieth century Polish-Jewish Orthodoxy is the world of the yeshivah, from which the woman or girl was largely excluded, and of the hasidic *Rebbe*. The kind of personal relationship a man or youth might have with a *Rebbe* is seen from the account of Jiri Langer (1894-1943), a young man from Prague and a friend of Kafka. Despite his thoroughly westernized background, in the second decade of the century he became inspired by contact with the Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Issakhar Dov Rokeah (d. 1927). In the introduction to Langer's Czech work on Hasidism, entitled *Nine (rites)*, he tells of a waking vision he had of the *Rebbe*⁶⁰ and describes,

⁵⁷ The following is partly based on Loewenthal, "Women and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism" in I. Etkes, D. Assaf et al. (eds.), *Within Hasidic Circles: Studies in Hasidism in Memory of Mordecai Wilensky* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1999), pp. 7-65.

⁵⁸ *And All Your Children Shall Be Learned: Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, NJ and London: Jason Aronson, 1993), ch. 9, pp. 263-300.

⁵⁹ Deborah Weissman, "Beit Yaakov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminists" in *The Jewish Woman*, E. Koltun, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 139-48.

⁶⁰ Jiri Langer, *Nine Rites*, (London: James Clarke, 1961), p. 12.

⁵⁶ *Iggerot Kodesh Admor...R. Menachem Mendel*, vol. 5 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1988), p. 325.

among other aspects of his five years with the *hasidim*, the spiritual intensity of their dancing on a festival, and the way the dance of the *Rebbe*, alone, filled him with awe.⁶¹ He also relates that the *Rebbe* recommended that he study Elijah de Vidas' *Reishit Hokhmah*,⁶² a compendium of passages from the *Zohar* giving guidance for one's spiritual life.

What access did a girl or woman have to this kind of experience? Comparatively little. In many hasidic courts she could meet the *Rebbe* and ask him for a blessing, usually giving a written note called a *kvitel*. She would be filled with awe. But in terms of direct communication, that was as far as it would go. Langer writes about R. Issakhar Dov:

The saint never looks on the face of a woman. If he must speak to women – as, when he receives a *kvitel* – he looks out of the window while he speaks.⁶³

Whether or not the *Rebbe* would actually look at a woman, one should not underestimate the spiritual effect achieved by contact with him. Rivkah Leah Klein (neé Einhorn⁶⁴) describes movingly⁶⁵ an interview in Hungary early in 1944 with Rabbi Shalom Eliezer Halberstam (1862–1944) of Ražfeld, the son of R. Haim of Zanz. This was shortly before he was to die in Auschwitz. He gave her a blessing that she, her husband and her unborn child would all survive the war. She describes how some months later, posing as an Aryan on a Hungarian bus, at a crucial moment of danger, when she feared

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 16–7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Her father was Avraham Einhorn, Rabbi of Szombathely.

⁶⁵ R.L. Klein, *The Scent of Snowflowers* (Jerusalem and Spring Valley, NY: Reideheim, 1989), pp. 81–82. Naturally there are methodological problems in using a text of this kind. The account is written only after many years, with either deliberate or unintentional suppression, addition or other editing, of the material. Nonetheless for certain kinds of information – such as the clues we are seeking, concerning the relationship of a woman with a hasidic *Rebbe* – the source can still have some use, if treated with caution. See n. 85, below.

she could no longer maintain her disguise and that she and her baby would be killed:

All at once a tremor passed through me, and a picture quickly flashed through my mind; a picture of a beloved face, so fragile, so thin, almost lost in a long, snow-white beard. The *Rebbe*. The *Rebbe's* words rushed into my consciousness from the past, and, awed and trembling, I clung to his promise....⁶⁶

According to her account, this vivid memory of the *Rebbe* enabled her to regain her composure, saving her life. Rivkah Leah clearly derived spiritual and emotional power from her contact with this *Rebbe*. In fact she had also seen him several years earlier, when she was a small child; he was visiting the house of her eminent father, the Rabbi of Szombathely, and he gave her a coin which he had blessed.⁶⁷

This level of contact for a woman with a *Rebbe* at this period is possibly rare, a product both of her distinguished lineage and the intensity of the times. For the woman in an average hasidic family in the first few decades of the twentieth century, most of the evidence suggests a more distant relationship. It was her father, husband, or brother who went to the *Rebbe*, leaving the women at home.⁶⁸ In strong contrast to their brothers, Jewish girls were very likely to attend the Polish *gymnasia* where, despite the intense anti-Semitism they encountered, they would also develop a strong interest in Polish literature and secular values. At home, the “modern” girl would appear at the Sabbath meals in stylish immodest clothing, with her

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 433. Another reference to the spiritual strength of Hungarian hasidic girls is in Anna Ellenberg's *Sisters in the Storm* (Lakewood: C.I.S. Publishers, 1992). These girls, coming to Auschwitz in 1944, were able to inspire the other Polish girls through stimulating a Friday night or Pesach Seder atmosphere. See pp. 155–7.

⁶⁷ Klein, *op.cit.*, p. 80–1. Langer describes a rather similar practice in Belz, *Nine Gates*, p. 10.

⁶⁸ This is discussed by Ada Rappoport Albert, “On Women in Hasidism,” S.A. Horodsky and “The Maid of Ludmir Tradition,” in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chinnun Ahnannsky*. A Rappoport Albert and S.J. Zipporstein, eds. (London: Peter Halban, 1988), pp. 199, 197.

nose in a novel; her father might be shocked, or perhaps, he himself immersed in a page of Talmud which he would discuss with his sons, and would not notice.⁶⁹ For her part, the young Polish Jewess regarded her parents as old-fashioned and her brothers, who affirmed hasidic Orthodoxy, as fanatics.

BEIT YAAKOV

It is in this context that we wish to examine the nature of the interwar *Beit Yaakov* movement. Our claim is that for its inner circle it represented a strong move toward spirituality, meaning both otherworldly experience and dedicated love. The first point to be understood about *Beit Yaakov*, as is explained by Deborah Weissman, is that while today in Israel, the United States and Britain, it represents the values of enclave Orthodoxy, when it began, it was a radical movement.⁷⁰ Its radicalism had two aspects. The fact that it aimed to provide organized Jewish education for girls, which was hitherto frowned upon in Eastern Europe, and also in its goal to reach out to girls moving towards "assimilation" (albeit assimilating in a Yiddish-speaking context) and draw them into a society dedicated to the Eastern European extreme of Jewish observance. In this sense, *Beit Yaakov* was an outreach movement. More radical than the provision of Jewish education for girls was the transformation of the young graduates of *Beit Yaakov* into outreach activists.

Dr. Judith Rosenbaum, later Grunfeld (d. 1998), worked in the Cracow *Beit Yaakov* teachers' seminary with Sarah Schenierer from 1924 to 1929. She describes how fifteen year old Gittel travels with Frau Schenierer to a little *stieft* where a meeting of women has been organized. By pinning up her hair and wearing a long dress Gittel looks older than she really is.

...[From] the platform... [Gittel] sees hundreds of faces staring up at her and she hears herself delivering a speech she memorized in the morning... After she has finished [Frau

⁶⁹ See Sarah Schenierer, *Einn be-Yisrael, Kivrei Sarah Schenierer* (Brnei Brak: Ne'zah, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 19, and Weissman, "Beit Yaakov," p. 141.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Schenierer] asks the audience whether they are willing to start a school with this girl as a teacher... There is an enthusiastic response. They enroll their children and contribute to the setting up of the school. Gittel remains behind to be the one and only teacher, while Frau Schenierer takes the next train [back to Cracow]...⁷¹

Fueling this activism and empowerment was the spiritual relationship of the girls with Sarah Schenierer. How did she induce a teenage girl to go off to a strange townlet somewhere in Poland and found a new *Beit Yaakov* school? Here we see, the sources suggest, the charisma of a spiritual leader.

Sarah Schenierer came from a family of Zanz *hasidim*. From her own writings and her Polish diary we see her as an intensely spiritual young woman, delighted to receive a set of *Hok le-Yisrael*, a kabbalistic anthology of Torah literature, including the *Zohar*, arranged for daily study, with a Yiddish translation. This she studied assiduously.⁷² She was fully aware of the rifts in Polish Jewish society and the severe problems caused by the lack of Jewish education for girls. On a visit to Vienna in 1914 she heard a sermon in the Stumpe (rasse Synagogue given by Dr. Flesch, a lecture on Judith (it was the Sabbath of Hanukah) and other heroines, given from a neo-Orthodox perspective, in which Jewish history joined with Orthodox practice and talmudic tradition to create an inspiring *mélange*. Dr. Flesch preached the need for contemporary Jewish women to follow in the footsteps of their great forbearers. With this, the idea of teaching the Jewish girls of Poland was born.⁷³ On her return to Cracow she attempted to reproduce this approach, but found that the older girls either ridiculed her traditionalism or, even if attracted by the ideas, would not modify their behavior.⁷⁴ She therefore determined to aim for younger girls, in 1917 creating a school for twenty-five students. Before this, however, she traveled to Marienbad and together

⁷¹ M. Danasky, *Rebbelein Grunfeld* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1994), p. 117.

⁷² *Einn be-Yisrael*, vol. 1, pp. 21-2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 24; Weissman, "Beit Yaakov," p. 141.

⁷⁴ *Einn be-Yisrael*, vol. 1, pp. 25, 6, 28.

with her brother obtained a blessing for the venture from the Belzer *Rebbe*, the same R. Issakhar Dov. Reading the *kvitel* composed by Sarah's brother "my sister wants to educate daughters of Israel in the spirit of Judaism and Torah" the *Rebbe* gave the blessing: *brakhah ve-hazlahah* ('blessing and success').⁷⁵ This was, despite the fact that, as Langer informed us, he did not look at women. At first, this was the only support she received. The Bobover *Rebbe*, for example, was against the venture.⁷⁶ However, eventually *Beit Yaakov* was adopted by Agudat Yisrael, with the approval of leading figures such as R. Avraham Mordekhai Alter, the Gerer *Rebbe*, R. Israel Meir Kagan, and R. Meir Shapiro. *Beit Yaakov* schools were set up all over Poland and Lithuania, with fund-raising committees active in Europe, South Africa, and the United States.

My claim is that Sarah Schenierer functioned for her pupils not just as a radical educator, but as a spiritual leader, leading her followers on a path which combined a German neo-Orthodox concept of Jewish education with a feminine version of hasidic spirituality. Certain aspects of her teaching and activity enabled her and her followers to maintain this role with the approval of some of the major forces in the religious leadership of Eastern Europe. What is the evidence for this view? Taking first one aspect of spirituality, 'otherworldiness', in which ways do we see aspects of the 'otherworldly' in Sarah Schenierer and her pupils?

Dr. Judith Rosenbaum Grunfeld describes an interesting feature of the religious life of early *Beit Yaakov*, *Yom Kippur Katan*. Observing the eve of the New Moon as a fast day was a kabbalistic practice which became popularized through prayer books such as Rabbi Nathan Hanover's *Shaarei Zion*.⁷⁷ Judith Grunfeld writes as follows:

Sarah Schneierer (!), followed by one hundred and twenty girls, would walk to the Rema's *Shul* in the Cracow ghetto....

⁷⁵ Joseph Friedensohn (and Chaim Shapiro), "The Mother of Generations," in *The Torah World: A Treasury of Biographical Sketches*, N. Wolpin ed. (Brooklyn: Messorah, 1982), p. 165.

⁷⁶ See Grunfeld in D. Rubin, *Daughters of Destiny*, (Brooklyn: Messorah, 1980), p. 115.

⁷⁷ "There was an edition in Preunyshtan 1917."

After everyone had [prayed] there, we walked to the graves of... the Rema [R. Moshe Isserlis]... R. Yoel Sirkis... and... R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller. Our *tehilim* in hand, we assembled around the tombstones. The atmosphere of [holiness] and tranquility around the graves of the *zaddikim* inspired the young girls.⁷⁸

The conventional mode of observing *Yom Kippur Katan* is by fasting and supplicatory prayers, *selihot*.⁷⁹ Sarah Schenierer's transformation of this day into a time for her girls to visit the cemetery and say Psalms among the tombstones suggests the touch of inspiration.⁸⁰ The visiting of graves (and the laying of wicks) was an authentic aspect of the spirituality of Ashkenazi women, as has been described by Chava Weissler,⁸¹ and there is a section in the collections of the Yiddish *teklines* called *maneh loshen* which concerns visiting the graves of one's parents or of *zaddikim*. For the twentieth century girls of *Beit Yaakov*, to come with Sarah Schenierer to the cemetery, visiting the graves of *zaddikim*, opens a path of spiritual encounter insulated from the grief of mourning. Indeed this itself is a significant kabbalistic practice, as we see from the writings of R. Hayyim Vital: it is associated with one of the most intense spiritual practices described in the Lurianic literature, that of *yihudim*, in which the soul of the departed *zaddik* is bonded with the soul of the living.⁸²

The practice of visiting graves was adopted in modified form by the hasidic movement. Both in Bratslav⁸³ and in Habad⁸⁴ there were

⁷⁸ Grunfeld in *Daughters of Destiny*, p. 133.

⁷⁹ See Magen Avraham sec. 3 to *Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayyim*, sec. 417.

⁸⁰ Grunfeld's description suggests that this was seen as an innovation.

⁸¹ See Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), pp. 126-46.

⁸² See R. Hayyim Vital's *Shaar Ruah ha-Kodesh* (Tel Aviv, 1963), pp. 74-5. This is discussed in Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite* (n. 11 above), pp. 10-11.

⁸³ See *Zivnei ha-Mezuzah*, (1948; Jerusalem: Hozaot Ben Adam, 1969). This includes compilations such as R. Nahman of Tchernin's *Sefar ha-Ishat Yit* (Lemberg, 1876) and also Rabbi Nahnman's selection of ten Psalms known as *Tikkun ha Keshel*, which would be recited at his grave.

⁸⁴ *Hayyim ha-Ishat Yit* (Lemberg, 1876; Lublin, 1909; Warsaw, 1922, 1928).

significant texts concerning one's thoughts and feelings when visiting the grave of Rabbi Nahman in Uman or of one of the departed Habad leaders in Hadiz, Niezhin, or Lubavitch. However, one feels, the *Beit Yaakov* girls did not need texts: the Book of Psalms itself functioned as a mediator between the realms of the living and the dead, especially given the inspiring presence of Sarah Schenierer herself.

The significance of the experience of visiting a grave for a *Beit Yaakov* girl is seen in an anecdote from the Nazi period in Cracow. The source for this is a memoir written by Pearl Benisch in Israel in the nineteen-eighties. The question of the use of Holocaust memoir material by historians has been discussed by scholars.⁸⁵ However, our aims in this paper are limited. We are looking not for simple historical facts, which might seem elusive when different observers give differing accounts of the same events, but for traces of spirituality, which arguably are more resilient.⁸⁶

Early in 1941 a young Jewish girl, Balka Grossfeld, was interned by the Germans in the Montelupich prison in Cracow. For several months two of her *Beit Yaakov* friends managed to bring her kosher food. However, they decided then to try and do something more drastic. They would go to Handke, the official who had imprisoned her, and ask for her release.

It is illuminating for us to discover that before embarking on this very dangerous plan of action, one of the friends, Pearl Mandelker (later Benisch), made a special trip to the grave of Sarah Schenierer in the new cemetery in Cracow on Jerosolimka Street. She finds the cemetery, and is horrified to see the heap of naked bodies in the cleansing room; so many people had been killed that there was no time to bury them properly. Then she walked to the graves, which were still intact.

I knew my way around and soon found the grave of our teacher, Sarah Schenierer. There I poured out my heart in

⁸⁵ See James E. Young, "Interpreting Literary Testimony: A Preface to Re-reading Holocaust Diaries and Memoirs," *New Literary History* 18 (1987): 403-23.

⁸⁶ See Young, *op. cit.*: 417, 421.

prayer over what I had just seen, over the disaster which had befallen our people. I cried to our mother Sarah for help.... "Mother," I cried, "...please intervene with the Court of Heaven. One of your children is in the claws of a beast; she must be helped. Mother, I know you cannot observe her pain and remain unmoved. I know you will do all you can, and with God's help you will succeed." I stepped out of the cemetery, my peace of mind restored.... I headed home with renewed hope.⁸⁷

How was this otherworldly bond between Sarah Schenierer and her disciples fashioned? The memoirs of Judith Grunfeld and others show in addition to her firmness and strength of will, her love and power of intimacy in her relationships with her pupils. Yet another factor too, traditional in the history of Hasidism, is also relevant: the power of dancing. Repeatedly, one finds reference to her dancing with her pupils, far from the gaze of any man, singing *ve-taher libeinu*, 'purify our hearts.' One account tells of this ecstatic dancing after the close of the prayers on Yom Kippur:

We were so caught up in the day's holiness and intensity that, after the fast, instead of running to eat, we began to sing and dance. Where we found strength I cannot imagine, but we just kept on dancing. I can remember clearly how our voices rang out to the tunes of *ashrei ha-ish* and *ve-taher libeinu* and how we danced in circles around and around and around.⁸⁸

This group of girls clearly were experiencing a religious fervor which could match that of their brothers at the court of a *Rebbe*. It

⁸⁷ Pearl Benisch, *To Vanquish the Dragon*, (Jerusalem and Spring Valley, NY: Feldheim, 1991), p. 81. Visiting graves continues to be a feature of the life of the modern Hasidic woman. See 'Tamar El Or, *Educated and Ignorant: Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women and Their World*, trans. Haim Waxman, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), pp. 151-5.

⁸⁸ *Basya* (Epstein) Bender in D. Rubin, *Daughters of Destiny*, p. 181.

is not surprising that Judith Grunfeld depicts *Beit Yaakov* in terms of the hasidic movement:

Here among the girls, the inspiration of the chassidic life had found its way into the woman's world. It had formed its own style, softened and differently molded, but it was of the same fiber that made the *chassidim* crowd round their *Rebbe*, made them stand for hours to catch a glimpse of him.⁸⁹

However, on the textual level the studies in *Beit Yaakov* concerned Bible, Jewish law, and Jewish history. Although set up in the wider framework of Hasidism, and observing meticulously stringent hasidic custom regarding modesty,⁹⁰ the curriculum in the *Beit Yaakov* classroom did not have specific hasidic elements. This is not surprising, given that even for boys the inclusion of hasidic 'spiritual' material in the curriculum was a rarity; Habad's *Tomkhei Teminim* chain of *yeshivot* and R. Kalonymus Kalman's *Daat Moshe* were the exceptions to the rule.

Prayer in *Beit Yaakov*

Deborah Weissman, in her study of pre-war *Beit Yaakov*, notes that the girls were required to engage in formal prayer twice a day, for the *Shaharit* and *Minhah* services, and took full part in the Sabbath morning service in the synagogue.⁹¹ What was the nature of this prayer?

We gain an inkling from an interesting document written by Sarah Schenierer herself, in the last period of her life, when her articles for the *Beit Yaakov* journal were the main way in which she communicated with her disciples.⁹² This is an essay called "The

⁸⁹ Dansky, *Rebbezin Grunfeld*, p. 142.

⁹⁰ Apart from any other possible consideration, the intense concern for modesty functioned as a protection for the movement, guarding it from the accusation of being 'modern.'

⁹¹ Deborah R. Weissman, "Baia Yaakov, A Women's Educational Movement in the Polish Jewish Community: A Case Study in Tradition and Modernity", Master's Thesis at New York University (n.d.), p. 87.

⁹² See *Etz ha-Yisrael*, vol. 2, p. 21.

Power of Prayer." The author does not claim that the ideas in this are new, in relation to what she has previously taught. Indeed, she suggests that readers will already have heard these ideas from their teachers in *Beit Yaakov*.⁹³ This makes the essay particularly valuable for us as an indicator of the general expectations regarding prayer in the *Beit Yaakov* movement.

Sarah Schenierer starts with a question: why should we pray? Doesn't God know our thoughts and needs anyway? To this she gives three answers:

1. Prayer purifies one's heart from sin, and exalts one's thoughts to a divine plane. Through this we can strengthen our bond with God and cleave to His qualities.
2. Prayer inspires us with joy in our lot, giving us the power to bear all the troubles of life through arousing in us strong *bitahon*, trust in God. It implants in us a strong faith that there will be better times ahead.
3. Since prayer pours into us a fountain of joy, it also reduces our longing for material delights, our desires for worldly matters. Through this we become more devoted to our spiritual concerns, acquiring more *mizvot* and good deeds.

This gently spiritual presentation of the nature of prayer is followed by another question: how can we prepare for prayer? Here Sarah Schenierer describes a serious mode of inner preparation:

Before we stand up to pray, we should properly inspect ourselves, in order to banish from our heart any foreign thought, any bad intention, any false feeling of jealousy, hatred or pride, and also any feeling of trust in our own power.

This self-examination may lead to the discovery that one has wronged another person. This will call for genuine repentance and asking forgiveness from the one who was wronged.

Further practical aspects of preparation for prayer include giving charity to the poor, ensuring that one's clothes are physically clean, and achieving clearly focused *kavanah* of the heart towards God. One should think of the meaning of the words one is saying.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

"Prayer should be filled with meaning, and be serious. Better to pray a little, with meaning, than a lot without." She then follows with a series of examples of biblical figures noted for prayer: Abraham, Hannah, Solomon at the Temple, Hezekiah, and so on.⁹⁴

Here we see an intriguing mixture of simple directives and spiritual goals. Sarah Schenierer concludes:

Now, my precious daughters, remember to be very careful with prayer. Pray much, and may your prayer be pure, with truth and with a full and pure heart. You with your warm prayers, and I with mine, we will ask God for a complete healing. But first we will prepare ourselves through *mizvot* and good deeds.... May God swiftly send me healing, so that I can be together with you, working for the sake of the glory of God's blessed Name, till we merit the complete Redemption....⁹⁵

Purity, intimacy, and seriousness; a sense of love from Sarah Schenierer to her 'daughters' and from them to her. Fueled by this kind of spiritual power, during the twenty years leading up to World War II, *Beit Yaakov* and her sister movements spread throughout Eastern Europe, attracting large numbers of Jewish girls to schools, Sabbath groups, summer holiday camps, and other activities.

Ahot ha-Temimim

In the late 1930s there was a further advance in the discovery by girls of Jewish spirituality. Rabbi Yosef Yizhak, the sixth Lubavitcher *Rebbe*, had been continuing the route set by his father, the fifth *Rebbe*, in marshalling women as a force for the strengthening of traditional Judaism.⁹⁶ A new development was that, in 1938, R. Yosef Yizhak encouraged the establishment in Riga of *Ahot ha-Temimim*, a society for girls and young women focusing on the study of Habad

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 86–90.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.

⁹⁶ See Ada Rapoport Albert, "On Women in Hasidism" pp. 508–523, 4, n. 82.

hasidic teachings.⁹⁷ This was a completely new departure. For the most part, earlier rabbinic opinion which had favored teaching girls to study Jewish texts had shied away from the idea of teaching any form of mysticism.⁹⁸ There is some evidence that during the nineteenth century a few women from prominent Habad families did have access to mystical hasidic teachings, but these were a very tiny handful. R. Yosef Yizhak set up the *Ahot ha-Temimim* group without apology, simply stating that for the authentic Habad hasidim "there is no difference between a son or a daughter" and that, in contrast to conventional practice, one also has to teach girls "the paths of Hasidism."⁹⁹

R. Yosef Yizhak appointed three Rabbis as spiritual guides for the group. The program of instruction included discourses, those which make an inner demand (*manarei avodah*) in particular. In addition, hasidic gatherings were to be held,¹⁰⁰ which would help in the internalization of the hasidic ethos, and would foster a sense of love and unity among the participants.¹⁰¹ The members of the Riga *Ahot ha-Temimim* group were expected not only to study, but also to spread hasidic ideals and the observance of practical *mizvot*. They had the duty to translate (into Yiddish) and disseminate hasidic teachings, and to campaign for observance of the laws of family purity and other aspects of Judaism.¹⁰² Thus spiritual study was combined with practical activism.

⁹⁷ See *Iggerot Kodesh...R. Yosef Yizhak*, vol. 4, note by the editor (R. Shalom Ber Lewin) on p. 62, giving a list of R. Yosef Yizhak's letters relating to the setting up of this organization.

⁹⁸ See *Sefer Hasidim*, ed. R. Margoliot (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1970), 90, 93.

⁹⁹ *Iggerot Kodesh...R. Yosef Yizhak*, vol. 3, p. 469.

¹⁰⁰ *Iggerot Kodesh...R. Yosef Yizhak*, vol. 4, p. 187. This letter also reprimands a father for not finding a way to satisfy his daughter's wish to study hasidic teachings.

¹⁰¹ *Iggerot Kodesh...R. Yosef Yizhak*, vol. 4, p. 391.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 301. The Yiddish letter on pp. 377–87 includes an essay on the theme of the spirituality of each Jew. It was sent to the Riga *Ahot ha-Temimim* in order to be published and disseminated there (see the editor's note, p. 377). Regarding the demand for practical activism, see p. 98.

Chaya Sima Michaelover

In January 1939, R. Yosef Yizh'ak sent a letter to Chaya Sima Michaelover (or Michaelson), a member of this group, setting out a highly unusual system of meditation. Some time earlier she had been involved in translating a letter by R. Yosef Yizh'ak from Hebrew to Yiddish.¹⁰³ In 1938 this Yiddish translation was published in Riga with the title "On the Moral and Educational Significance of Habad Hasidism, a reply by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to a letter from Germany." It is helpful to consider the contents of this letter as providing a form of an introduction to Chaya Sima's spiritual path. In some ways, R. Yosef Yizh'ak's tract on meditation, addressed directly to her, seems to function as a response to issues which are raised in this earlier letter which she translated.

The "letter from Germany," from a correspondent who has not been identified, asks R. Yosef Yizh'ak how to bring about a spiritual rejuvenation for "assimilating and enlightened" German Jewish youth, for whom the Jewish religion is "dry", and inquires whether the hasidic teachings of Habad could be used for this purpose.

R. Yosef Yizh'ak's reply presents two contrasting features of the Habad perspective on Judaism. On the one hand there is a strong insistence on the need for practical observance of the *miz'vot*, emphasizing the virtues of simplicity and purity of heart without any intellectualist ramifications. On the other, there is a striking depiction of early Habad Hasidism as a path of intense, otherworldly spirituality. The Habad followers of the first Habad leader, R. Shneur Zalman, are described as "spending several hours of the day in *hitbodedut* [a term which usually means solitary meditative thought] for a number of days – and especially nights – of the week... each according to his ability."

What was this *hitbodedut*? R. Yosef Yizh'ak continues:

¹⁰³ See the introduction to volume 4 of R. Yosef Yizh'ak's letters, p. 12, n. 25. The Hebrew letter, dated Nisan 5696 (1936) is in *Iggerot... R. Yosef Yizh'ak*, vol. 3 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1983), pp. 532–542. It was published three months later in the *Tammuz* 5696 issue of *Ha'Tammuz* p. 47 (189).

This *hitbodedut* was not an affliction of the body, nor a melancholy penance, on the contrary, it was delightful for them in a remarkable way, effecting a spiritual joy and a sublime love.... Through this [*hitbodedut*], not only did they move away from the swamp of materiality, but they would ascend into a realm of purity and translucence where they would gaze at the beauty of the divine with a clarity of mind and understanding.¹⁰⁴

R. Yosef Yizh'ak goes on to say that some of these early *hasidim* lost all personal interest in worldly life; the fulfillment of their sexual responsibilities as married men became the expression of duty and "benevolence" towards their wives, rather than physical desire. These highly elevated *hasidim*, says R. Yosef Yizh'ak, were few in number; but they had considerable influence on the other followers of R. Shneur Zalman, so that all the Habad *hasidim* saw the essence of life as "Form overcoming Matter," *tiboret ha-zurah al ha-homer*, the spiritual overcoming the physical.

R. Yosef Yizh'ak writes that this slogan applies to each person according to his situation, "for every person should long for that which is beyond him, and should desire and yearn to rise from level to level in doing good, in thought, in speech, and in action, acquiring good personality traits, and [spiritual] ideas."

Continuing his description of the first generation of Habad, R. Yosef Yizh'ak goes on to say that this slogan influenced large numbers of both men and women. We will consider below the effect of this interesting comment. As regards the "assimilating and enlightened" Jewish youth of Germany, R. Yosef Yizh'ak states that while the study of Habad thought is open to them, with its implicit spiritual and otherworldly quest, a *sine qua non* is the practical observance of the *miz'vot*. Thus, says R. Yosef Yizh'ak, although during the century and a half since the publication of R. Shneur Zalman's *Tanya* the teachings of Habad had spread "world-wide," nonetheless

¹⁰⁴ *Iggerot Kochav... R. Yosef Yizh'ak*, vol. 4, p. 539.

this study requires initial preparation of fear of Heaven and observance of the practical *mizvot*, which are the basis of the Torah....

This proviso, which is emphasized again at the close of his letter, indicates that R. Yosef Yizh'ak was worried that Habad thought, studied by contemporary German Jews, could easily be treated as a form of abstract philosophy, without being anchored in Jewish practice. It is interesting that in a second letter to the same recipient he does offer to enter into correspondence with anyone who wishes to inquire about Habad teachings, implying that this offer stands regardless of that person's level of observance.¹⁰⁵ However the basic message is that full adherence to the practical *mizvot* is expected before one embarks on the path of Habad spirituality.

At this point we will not consider the implications of this text as regards the religious rejuvenation of westernized Jewish youth, nor the question of the nature of R. Yosef Yizh'ak's depiction of early Habad Hasidism, particularly his inclusion of women in the spiritual quest. Rather, let us imagine the effect of this tract for Chaya Sima Michaelover, the young woman in Riga who is studying, translating, and publishing it in the late 1930s. There is the path of simple, dedicated *action* of the *mizvot*; and there is another path, entailing *hitbodedut*, solitary meditative thought, the transcendence of material desires, and a constant yearning to rise higher. The text provides a teasing hint that this path might be relevant also for a woman.

A Tract on Meditation – For a Girl

At this point we can consider the direct personal communication between Chaya Sima and R. Yosef Yizh'ak. In January 1939, shortly after the publication of her translation of the letter from Germany, Chaya Sima wrote to him, asking "what should she do in order to fill the emptiness of actions?"

The background of the earlier text helps us understand the force

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 543–4.

of this question. The Habad path is being presented to her in a dual form: simple action of the *mizvot*, contrasting with intense personal spirituality. Is she completely barred from the latter? Or is it in some way relevant to her? We can imagine her thinking: after all, the text did mention women. As an active member of *Ahot ha-Temimim*, Chaya Sima no doubt fulfilled the preliminary requirement: she *did* observe the practical *mizvot*. Yet she longed for more. Could she go further?

The *Rebbe* responded to her request with what amounts to a tract on contemplation in study, imparting a method to 'be bonded with the soul... with the essence' of the teaching one is studying, aiming to achieve an inner ethical transformation.¹⁰⁶ R. Yosef Yizh'ak employs the term found in the letter to Germany: that Form should overcome Matter. According to that letter, this defined the general goal of Habad Hasidism in its first generation. R. Yosef Yizh'ak presents this to Chaya Sima as the goal for which she should strive.

At the same time he makes the claim that the contemplative system expounded in this tract would link the outermost level of the person, their performance of the *mizvot* with the inner level, the point at which the soul delights in the unity of the mind with the idea, *ihud ha-massig ve-ha-musag*.

R. Yosef Yizh'ak dismisses conventional modes of traditional study which emphasize either covering a great quantity of material or focusing on detailed niceties of the text: why this word is written *plene* and another written defectively, or why a certain two words are juxtaposed. He recommends, by contrast, a mode of study in which one explores the same theme repeatedly, seeking to reach ever more profound levels within it or beyond it. The main content of the tract concerns the method for reaching these depths.

The basis of this method differs somewhat from the standard systems of Habad contemplation, although it is based on a concept which is extensively employed in Habad teachings:¹⁰⁷ the idea that the soul has three 'garments', namely 'Thought, Speech, and Ac-

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 408–72.

¹⁰⁷ See *Tanhu* 1, ch. 4.

tion. This relates both to the theme of the garments of the soul in the Garden of Eden, after it leaves the world,¹⁰⁸ and to the concept that the spiritual worlds, *Beriah*, *Yezi'rah*, and *Asiyah* are 'garments' of the divine, which correspond to human thought, speech, and action.¹⁰⁹

In R. Yosef Yizh'ak's tract on meditation, the concept of the three garments of Thought, Speech, and Action is developed into a meditative system, one that is almost reminiscent of the Maggid's teachings, in which these three 'garments' of the soul function as a type of ladder ascending higher and higher. From Action one can ascend to Speech, and then to Thought, which is the most intimate garment. At each level, says R. Yosef Yizh'ak, there is both 'radiance' and 'vessel'. The vessel of Action functions beyond the person; that of Speech is part of the person, but is revealed to others; that of Thought is part of the essence of the person and is concealed from others.¹¹⁰ R. Yosef Yizh'ak has thus presented a kind of mystical ladder, in some ways similar to the three worlds of *Asiyah*, *Yezi'rah*, *Beriah*, and like them, having both radiance and vessel. R. Yosef Yizh'ak's system, based on earlier sources, introduces a further subtlety.¹¹¹

This is that each level, in typical Lurianic form, includes each of the others. Thus while Thought is the highest level, within Thought there are Thought, Speech, and Action. One therefore seeks to ascend, not only to the level of Thought, but to that of 'Thought' within Thought.

To explain what this means R. Yosef Yizh'ak introduces a further category: that of *otiyot*, 'Letters'. The letters – i.e. the words or language – express an idea, and function as the 'vessel' for the idea

¹⁰⁸ See Moshe Hallamish, "The Theoretical System of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (His Sources in Kabbalah and Hasidism)" (Hebrew), doctoral thesis at the Hebrew University, 1976, pp. 227–32. See also *Zohar* 1 66a.

¹⁰⁹ Intro. to *Tikkunei Zohar*. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Likkutei Torah*, Vol. 2, p. 36a.

¹¹⁰ *Iggerot Kodesh*... R. Yosef Yizh'ak vol. 4, p. 470.

¹¹¹ Regarding the levels of 'Thought, Speech, and Action' of Thought depicted as ascending levels of spirituality, see *Tanya*, IV, sec. 30, fol. 129a. See also Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritch, *Maggid Davarnu Le Yankov*, R. Schatz, Ullenhutner, ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1976), sec. 90.

as it is conceived in the mind of the person. On the level of Action of Thought, the Letters can be 'felt'; they are *mingashim*, tangible. On the higher level of Speech of Thought, the Letters are no longer tangible, but they are still 'recognizable'; *nikkarim*. On the still higher level of Thought of Thought, the Letters are no longer apparent at all. The person has reached the level of the pure radiance of the Concept, beyond any kind of verbal definition. At this point the person can achieve unity with the Concept as it really is, beyond any veil, bonding with 'the Concept as it is in itself.'¹¹²

R. Yosef Yizh'ak speaks of the delight which is experienced through this form of meditation, which can be carried higher and higher, reaching not just Thought of Thought, but Thought of Thought of Thought, and so on. He suggests that, with practice, this meditative approach can be applied to everything one studies. Further, through this intellectualist form of meditation, an inner ethical transformation can also be achieved. The 'Concept' may concern the attempt to attain an ethical change. By uniting with the inner radiance of the Concept, that change is effected within the person in a genuine way.

It is interesting to note that R. Yosef Yizh'ak indicates that, while one is ascending this spiritual ladder higher and higher towards the realm of Thought of Thought of Thought, the lowest level of Action is still relevant. The delight of one's union with the radiance at the highest level infuses and 'fills' even the level of Action.¹¹³ Consequently, Action is extended into Action, Speech and Thought, an endless ladder reaching to the highest levels. This constitutes a direct response to Chaya Sima's question about 'filling the emptiness of action.'

'This personal guidance from R. Yosef Yizh'ak to a young woman teaching a method of spiritual meditation is possibly unique in the history of Jewish mysticism. The system presented in his letter to her differs from the standard systems of meditation in Habad, although there are some points of similarity with a letter concerning contemplation which he sent in 1936 to a prominent follower from

¹¹² *Iggerot Kodesh*... R. Yosef Yizh'ak vol. 4, pp. 470–2.

¹¹³ R. Yosef Yizh'ak cites the mystical concept of 'filling' a letter by writing it as if it were a word, thus *Aluf le Aluf, Lamed, Peh*.

Riga, Rabbi Haim Mordechai Hodakow.¹¹⁴ It seems that this system was gradually evolving. The version of it presented to Chaya Sima in 1939 is the most complete form known. Did she put it into practice? Did she share the letter with other girls? Was there a group of female contemplatives? We do not know. In 1940 R. Yosef Yizhak left Eastern Europe and reached the United States. There he continued to promote contemplative prayer in a variety of modes, including the visualization technique of R. Elimelekh of Lizhensk and R. Kalonymos Kalman Shapiro, imagining that one is in the Temple.¹¹⁵ An *Ahot ha-Temimim* girls' group had been set up in Brooklyn in 1938, studying *Tanya* and hasidic teachings with the esteemed *hasid* Rabbi Yohanan Gordon. This was a step towards the contemporary Lubavitch girls' schools where mystical hasidic teachings are on the curriculum.

Approaching the Border

How close are these developments to the halakhic border? Do they cross it? The question of the halakhic permissibility of women studying Torah – despite the well known adverse comment in the Talmud¹¹⁶ – has been widely discussed.¹¹⁷ Our focus will be on material which directly pertains to the subject in hand. The main halakhic position was briefly summarized by Rabbi Moshe Isserlis in his gloss on Rabbi Yosef Karo's *Shulhan Arukh*. Commenting on the latter's strictures on study by women, with the partial exception of the Written Torah (following Maimonides), R. Moshe Isserlis adds: "nonetheless a woman is duty-bound to study the laws which apply

¹¹⁴ *Iggerot Kodesh*... R. Yosef Yizhak, vol. 3, p. 525–6. R. Hodakow later became the personal secretary of R. Yosef Yizhak's successor, R. Menahem Mendel Schneerson.

¹¹⁵ See *Iggerot Kodesh*... R. Yosef Yizhak, vol. 8, p. 200. There was some contact between R. Yosef Yizhak and R. Kalonymos Kalman. In 1933 the latter was a signatory, together with seventeen other prominent Polish hasidic leaders, to a *Kol Koreh* letter organized by R. Yosef Yizhak on behalf of the Jews of Russia (*Iggerot Kodesh*... R. Yosef Yizhak, vol. 11, p. 219).

¹¹⁶ BT *Sotah* 21b. See below.

¹¹⁷ See Shoshanna Pantel Zolty, "And All Your Children Shall Be Learned": Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1991).

to a woman."¹¹⁸ In the late eighteenth century this statement was amplified by the founder of Habad, R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, in his *Laws of Torah Study* (Shklov: 1794). After stating the well-known strictures against women studying Torah, Rabbi Shneur Zalman continues:

And nonetheless, women too are duty bound to study the *halakhot* which apply to them, such as the laws of *niddah* and immersing [in the *mikveh*], kashering [meat], the prohibition of *yihud* and similar. And all Positive Commandments... which are not affected by time, and all Negative Commands of the Torah and the Sages, which apply equally to them as to men.¹¹⁹

This extensive syllabus primarily seems to concern practical law, although there is an anecdote about Rabbi Shneur Zalman imparting hasidic teachings to his daughter Frieda.¹²⁰ Over a century later, R. Israel Meir Kagan extended the range of women's studies to include rabbinic ethical and inspirational teachings, with an explanation of why this was necessary. Commenting on *Sotah* 21b ("any who teaches his daughter Torah is considered as if he taught her lewdness") he first presents, according to the strict *halakha*, the areas of the Oral Torah which a woman is duty-bound to study in order properly to conduct her life – *niddah*, *hallah*, *Shabbat* candles, and *kasrut*. As for the Written Law, although in the first place this should not be taught to a woman, if it is, it is not considered 'lewdness.'

This, however, is followed by a further statement relating to the exigencies of modernity:

¹¹⁸ *Shulhan Arukh: Torah De'ah* 246:6. This reflects statements by earlier scholars. See Zolty (previous note), pp. 61–2.

¹¹⁹ R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1968), 1:14 fol. 16a. He cites as sources R. Yizhak of Corbeil's *Sefer Mitzvot Kadon* and R. Yankov Landau's *Agnin*.

¹²⁰ H.M. Lechman, *Beit Kehle* (Tel Aviv, n.d.; photog. rep. of Be'er Sheva, 1992), p. 114.

All this applied in earlier times when everyone lived in the same place as did their forebears, and the tradition of one's forebears was very firm for each individual, guiding one's behavior.... In this case we could say that she should not study Torah but should rely on the guidance of her righteous parents. But today, through our sins, when the tradition from one's forebears is extremely weak, and it is also common that a person does not live at all in their locale, and especially as regards those girls who are taught to read non-Jewish writings, it is certainly a great *mizvah* to teach them Pentateuch and the Prophets and Writings, and the ethical teachings of the Sages such as Tractate *Avot*, *Menorat ha-Maor*,¹²¹ and the like in order that they should internalize our sacred faith [*She-yitamet ezlam inyan emunatenu ha-kedashah*]. For if not, it is likely that they will turn away completely from the Divine path and transgress all the basic laws of Judaism, God forbid.¹²²

In these terms R. Kagan vigorously defended Torah study for women. This contrasts with the attitude of the leading exponent of Hungarian Orthodoxy, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum of Satmar (1886–1979). The latter totally opposed *Beit Yaakov*,¹²³ on the grounds of traditional strictures against women studying Torah and also the concern that knowledge of Hebrew could lead to Zionism.¹²⁴ In 1930, R. Kagan delivered a sermon to an exclusively female audience in the Great Synagogue in Vilna, an unprecedented event.¹²⁵ In 1932, he

¹²¹ By Rabbi Yizhak Aboab, fourteenth cent., a famous work of religious edification based on aggadic literature.

¹²² R. Israel Meir Kagan, *Likkutei Halakhot* (Jerusalem, n.d.), to BT *Sotah* 21b, ch. 3, fol. 11a–b. This was first published in 1918.

¹²³ See Y.M. Sofer, ed., *Divrei Yoel: Mikhtavim*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn, 1980), p. 49.

¹²⁴ See Rabbi Teitelbaum's *Va-Yoel Moshe* (Brooklyn: 1961; 5th edition, 1978), *Maamar LeShon ha-Kodesh*, secs. 37–39. However, see also sec. 33 which encourages study of the practicalities of Jewish law and ethics.

¹²⁵ See Rappoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 524 n. 82, citing M.M. Yashor, *He-Hafetz Hayyim, Hagvan u-Fehle*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1959), pp. 506–12.

wrote approvingly of the founding of a *Beit Yaakov* school in Pristlik. He writes that, due to the prevailing atmosphere of secularism:

Anyone whose heart is concerned about Fear of God is duty bound to send his daughter to study in that school. All the doubts and queries about the prohibition of teaching one's daughter Torah have no place in our time.... In previous times every Jewish home had the firm tradition from male and female forebears, to walk in the path of Torah and piety, and [for women] to read from the book *Zekenah u-Resenah*¹²⁶ every Shabbat, which is not the case in our time....¹²⁷

However, the question of Torah study for women remained an issue, even in *Beit Yaakov* circles. Deborah Weissman reports on discussions in the pages of the *Beit Yaakov* journal of 1930. One writer recommended study of Torah for girls only in small doses, when the girl is fairly mature, and when the study can lead to good deeds and to becoming a better wife and mother.¹²⁸ However, in a later issue of the journal, this view was countered by Mordecai Bromberg, an author of Jewish history textbooks used in the *Beit Yaakov* schools, who expressed surprise that the issue was even raised.¹²⁹

Despite this, and notwithstanding the post-war growth of the *Beit Yaakov* movement, today there are still ongoing discussions in magazines and in Gerrer hasidic female study groups (conducted by, and largely comprising, *Beit Yaakov* graduates) about the legitimacy of Torah study for women and where it is intended to lead, as is documented by Tamar El-Or in her study of the women living in a [L] Aviv Gerrer hasidic community.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ A famous Yiddish collection of aggadic commentary on the Pentateuch, first published in Lublin at the beginning of the seventeenth century, much studied by pious women in Eastern Europe.

¹²⁷ R. Israel Meir Kagan, *Mikhtavim u-Maamarii* vol. 2, ed. Y.H. Zaks (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 97.

¹²⁸ Weissman, Master's Thesis, p. 91, citing *Beit Yaakov Journal*, no. 49.

¹²⁹ Weissman, *ibid.*, citing *Beit Yaakov Journal*, no. 52.

¹³⁰ El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant*, pp. 75–9, 89–111.

Thus far we have considered only study of halakhic, aggadic, and ethical teachings. What about Habad mystical teachings, with their kabbalistic foundation, and intensely spiritual practices, such as the meditative system taught by R. Yosef Yizhak to Chaya Sima Michaelover?

While R. Yosef Yizhak, in his organizational activities, letters, and other writings,¹³¹ outspokenly campaigned for Torah education for women, he did not attempt to provide this with a specific halakhic underpinning other than reference to the past practice of Habad leaders.¹³² In 1954, his son-in-law and successor, R. Menahem Mendel Schneerson, presented a novel halakhic basis for the idea that girls should study R. Shneur Zalman's *Tanya*, and by implication, other Habad mystical teachings.

This is based on the halakhic principle that a woman should study enough to enable her to observe the laws which apply to her. R. Menahem Mendel comments that these include the six commandments listed in the thirteenth-century treatise *Sefer ha-Hinukh* which apply continuously to every man and woman. These are: to believe in God, not to believe in any power apart from Him, to appreciate His Unity, to love Him, to fear Him, and not to stray after one's desires.¹³³

R. Menahem Mendel claims that these spiritual attainments are facilitated by hasidic teachings. Hence, he states, "also according to the *Shulhan Arukh* the woman has a duty to study this portion of the Torah." Consequently, and based also on R. Yosef Yizhak's prior example with the *Ahot ha-Temimim* group, R. Menahem Mendel

¹³¹ See, for example, his *Lubavitcher Rebbe's Zikhrones* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 135, 168-172, telling of traditions concerning the Torah study of women in the ancestry of the Habad leadership. These anecdotes, which have an obvious contemporary pedagogic intent, were first published in the *Morgen Zhurnal* Yiddish newspaper in the early 1940s. See Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Hagiography with Footnotes: Kifuying Tales and the Writing of History in Hasidism," in *History and Theory* (Berkeley 27, Wesleyan University, 1988), pp. 119-59.

¹³² See his *Iggerot Kodesh...* R. Yosef Yizhak, vol. 3 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1983), p. 469, stating that in 1879 the fourth generation Lubavitch leader, Rabbi Shneur (1831-1882), publicly called for increased teaching of "the ways of *hasidut*" for girls.

¹³³ This list appears in the author's preface.

advised the head of the Lubavitch Seminary in Yerres, Paris, who had written with a practical question on this topic, that it is correct to teach *Tanya* to the more advanced female students, and gave advice on how to do so.¹³⁴

The effect of this and similar guidance from R. Menahem Mendel is that in the contemporary Lubavitch educational system, girls are encouraged to study *Tanya* and other Habad hasidic teachings and discourses, as well as other areas of the Oral Law.¹³⁵ All this can be seen as within the purview of the statement quoted above by R. Kagan, that education of girls should enable them to internalize the sacred faith of Judaism.

A TIME TO ACT...

The history of the traditional European Jewish community's scholars' and leaders' confrontation with modernity, is a fertile field of exploration. One approach taken by Jewish thinkers, including Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, and many scholars of Orthodox "*Wissenschaft*," was an apparent quest for an interface of Jewish thought with modern ideals. A rather different path was the creation of a Jewish 'sanctified' enclave signified by a dress code, a distinctive language (Yiddish), and an attention to certain specific details of halakhic practice. In general, this was the route taken by Hungarian Orthodoxy, and, eventually, by most branches of the hasidic movement.

In this paper an attempt has been made to investigate another dimension of Hasidism in its response to modernity: the reaching into the resources of its own history, and indeed the history of Judaism, for a re-emergence of the personal spiritual quest and experience. This meant the taking of steps that could be considered unconventional, unwise, or even forbidden. Yet the steps were made nonetheless, and were given their own rationale within the context

¹³⁴ *Iggerot Kodesh...* R. Menahem Mendel, vol. 8 (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1988), pp. 133-4. R. Schneerson recommends not teaching the work in the order it is written, but beginning with the easier sections of the book and with those that relate more directly to the *essence* of the student, to her personal service of God.

¹³⁵ See Zelig, "And All Yom 'Taheret" (n. 98 above), pp. 84-6.

of *halakhah* and the equally vibrant *aggadah*. We thus see again a sequence which has occurred a number of times in the history of Judaism: through crisis and danger that threatens survival, a new advance is made. In the case we have been considering, what this meant is that the secularizing process of modernity provoked some leaders of traditional Judaism to draw on the resources of Jewish spirituality, hitherto restricted primarily to an intellectual male elite, and make them available to both young men and young women, strengthening their commitment to Judaism in a time of change.

13

Without Intelligence, Whence Prayer?

Shalom Carmy

If he forgot it was Shabbat and continued as on weekdays... he should complete the blessing honen ha-daat ("who endows with intelligence"). This is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi, who said: "I wonder how they could eliminate honen ha-daat on Shabbat. If there is no intelligence, whence prayer?"

(Jerusalem Talmud)¹

Truly it is not only in man's material ambitions, in which he resembles the beast, that he requires the Torah's measures to circumscribe and order them, but also for his lofty spiritual ambitions, including the foundations and ramifications of prayer, he requires the limits and appraisal of the Torah....

¹ PT Berakhot 4:4 (11b).