

WITHIN HASIDIC CIRCLES

**Studies in Hasidism
in Memory of Mordecai Wilensky**

Edited by

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Naftali Loewenthal

Women and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism

Introduction

The question of the role of women in the hasidic movement and their access to hasidic spirituality constitutes an important topic whether one is approaching it from the direction of gender studies or the research of Jewish mystical movements.¹ All branches of hasidism are typified by

* At the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies in 1985 Professor Wilensky delivered a paper entitled "The Status of Women in Polish Hasidism." That paper and the discussion which followed helped to generate the present study, which is part of a wider investigation of hasidism and modernity. I am grateful to the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and the Institute of Jewish Studies for their assistance in this project. Acknowledgement is due to the late Dr. Judith Grunfeld for providing information and documents concerning Beis Yaakov in Cracow; to Mrs. Sarah Lieberman of the Beth Rivkah seminary in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, for drawing my attention to various aspects of the history of *Ahoy ha-Temimah*, to Dr. Ada Rapoport-Albert of University College London for extensive discussion of many facets of this and related topics over the years and for a careful reading of the text, and finally to Ms. Dena Ordan for her many helpful comments on this paper. Thanks are also due to Mrs. Dalia Tracz of the Jewish Studies Library, University College London, for much gracious assistance in the course of this research.

1. For studies specifically devoted to the woman's role in Hasidism, see A. Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism: S. A. Hordecky and The Maid of Ludmir Tradition," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. A. Rapoport-Albert and S. Zipperstein (London, 1988), pp. 495-525; N. Polen, "Miriam's Dance: Radical Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought," *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992), pp. 1-21; idem., introduction to his translation of M. Shapiro, *From Judgement to Mercy* (forthcoming); T. El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant: Ultrorthodox Jewish Women and Their World*, trans. H. Watzman (Boulder, Colo. and London, 1994); D. R. Kaufman, "Engendering Orthodoxy: Newly Orthodox Women and Hasidism," in *New World Hasidism: Ethnographic Studies of Hasidic Jews in America*, ed. J. S. Belcove-Shalin (Albany, 1995), pp. 135-60; and B. Morris, "Agents or Victims of Religious Ideology? Approaches to Locating Hasidic Women in Feminist Studies," in *New World Hasidim*, pp. 161-80.

singular approaches to womanhood and to the relationship between men and women in the community. On an overt level, "modesty" and related issues are paramount, leading to highly distinctive patterns of behavior. However, among the different branches of hasidism there are some quite different modes: at one extreme women appear to be denied access to serious Hebrew study; at another, we find evidence for the active involvement of contemporary Habad women in the dissemination of the hasidic ethos.² At a median position women do engage in study, yet we find the assessment that women are not themselves hasidim, but only the wives and daughters of hasidim.³

This article seeks to elucidate the evolution of the role of the woman in the hasidic movement and her level of Jewish/hasidic education. The focus is on the emergence of *Ahrot ha-Temimim*, a Habad girls' hasidic study group in pre-Holocaust Riga, and the development of the spiritually empowered female *shehivah*, considered in the context of the pre-war Beis Yaakov movement and attitudes to women in Satmar hasidism. My claim is that this twentieth-century development in Habad relates to a specific aspect of early Habad mysticism: the focus on the "Lower Unity," rather than the "Higher Unity," as the ultimate spiritual goal. Rather than being simply a mystical concept of interest only to contemplatives, this focus eventually resulted in a tangible transformation of the role of the woman in Habad hasidic society.

The Dialectic of Spirituality

Early Habad texts describe two polarized concepts: the Upper Unity reaching away from the world, and the Lower Unity reaching towards it. These categories are rooted in early Habad theories about contemplative mysticism, yet they can also be translated into social forms: a world-avoiding enclave on the one hand and, on the other, a society which attempts to relate in positive spiritual terms to external reality. A complementary polarity is that of "service from above," in which the

2. See Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," pp. 523-25 nn. 82-83.
3. El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant*, p. 103.

Zaddik elevates the passive hasid, as opposed to "service from below," in which the hasid has to make an effort of his own.⁴

I suggest that these categories have some bearing on the changing role of the woman in hasidism. Let us consider a mode in which spirituality is conceived in terms of the Upper Unity, remote from the world, and is primarily the domain of the Zaddik. His "service from above" spiritually illuminates the hasidic male and his family, as long as they clearly remain within the fellowship of the Zaddik's following. I take Satmar hasidism as an example.⁵ Its founder Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1886-1979) was seen by all (including many of his detractors) as a saintly figure beyond this world.⁶ From the beginning of his tenure as hasidic rebbe he sought to create an elite enclave society untouched by "modernity" or Zionism.⁷ In the community he created in post-war Williamsburg, he demanded that the male hasid fulfill the requirements of hasidic orthodoxy with the

4. The emphasis on "service from below" characterized the approach of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Habad, and was disputed by some other contemporary hasidic leaders. Thus Rabbi Shneur Zalman sought to disseminate the study of mystical hasidic teachings and practice of contemplative techniques among the members of the fraternity, to the consternation of contemporary leaders such as Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk who believed that all the hasidic follower required was to have "faith in the Zaddik." See N. Loewenthal, *Communicating the Ineffable: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago, 1990), chap. 3.
5. For discussions of the woman in the Satmar movement, see I. Rubin, *Satmar: An Island in the City* (Chicago, 1972), *passim* and particularly pp. 151-56; J. R. Mintz, *Hasidic People: A Place in the New World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), chaps. 6, 16; G. Kranzler, *Hasidic Williamsburg: A Contemporary American Hasidic Community* (Northvale, NJ, 1995), pp. 167-206.
6. At the same time he saw his religious duty towards the Jewish world in terms of vociferously and actively rebuking its "iniquities." His fiercely anti-Zionist stance is well known. See also his *Divrei Yoel: Mikhivvin*, ed. Y. M. Sofer, vol. 1 (Brooklyn, 1980), p. 11, editor's note, concerning his attempt in 1924 to prevent mixed dancing at a wedding that resulted in his being physically attacked. His successor Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum is criticized by some Satmarers for his alleged worldliness (Mintz, *Hasidic People*, pp. 131-33).
7. See Rubin, *Satmar*, pp. 34-42. Rabbi Yoel's hasidic fellowship was defined by a set of *takkanot* for his community in Satmar (founded in 1905, after the death of his father, Rabbi Hananyah Yom Tov Lipa Teitelbaum, rabbi and rebbe of Sighet), written in 1912 and augmented in 1913. Anyone who did not want to sign these regulations was banned from the fellowship. See *Divrei Yoel*, p. 9 and the editor's note.

special overlay of Satmar custom and careful observance of cultural barriers. By this means, the male hasid gains access to a heightened level of religious experience, particularly during direct encounters with the rebbe.

In this model, the females in the Satmar community are generally denied personal contact with the rebbe but nonetheless experience his illumination through the blessings of children, health, and sustenance. However, the role of the woman in Satmar is of crucial significance. She is at the borderline of the spiritual and the practical, and her symbolic actions ensure that this boundary is maintained. Thus, throughout his career Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum campaigned for very stringent observance of specific rules of female modesty.⁸ A fierce opponent of Beis Yaakov,⁹ which he regarded both as a modernizing "German" influence and also as tainted with Zionism, in the post-war period he came to accept – in the context of the battle against modernity – the need for schools for girls as opposed to having them educated only at home.¹⁰ However, the woman in the post-war Satmar movement is largely barred from study of Hebrew texts, apart from learning how to read the prayers and Psalms. As a bulwark of "tradition" countering change, this prohibition is itself a response to modernity.¹¹ According to Israel Rubin, the Jewish education of a girl

8. His 1913 amendment to the takkanot of his fellowship in Satmar (see previous note) concerned this issue. A further set of takkanot by Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum defining in great detail permitted and forbidden modes of female attire was published in 1938. See *Divrei Yoel: Mikhayim*, pp. 14–15. See also his letter of 1969 (p. 17), and the editor's note there.
9. See *Divrei Yoel*, p. 49.
10. The final section of his *Kayovel Mosheh* (Brooklyn, 1961; 5th edition, 1978), titled "Maamar Leshon ha-Kodesh," argues that in the modern context girls' schools are now necessary, yet also insists that no Hebrew studies (e.g., of Himmash with Rashi) should be on the curriculum. See sections 30–50 (particularly secs. 41–42). This is partly but not solely motivated by opposition to Ivrit (Hebrew). See also *Divrei Yoel*, p. 45, a letter of 1952 to the Bnos Yerushalayim school in Jerusalem, strongly commending its ultra-orthodox (and anti-Zionist) approach. The letter makes the point that if girls are not given the right education, there would be no one for the boys to marry (see below, concerning a similar rationale for the support of early Beis Yaakov).
11. See Rubin, *Satmar*, pp. 15–52, where he traces the development of the ban in the context of the more relaxed pre-twentieth-century attitudes. To fill the gap, R. Yoel encouraged the creation of a literature in Yiddish on "Jewish law, ethics, and modesty." See *Divrei Yoel*, p. 70 and the editor's note. In *Kayovel Mosheh*, "Maamar

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at the Beth Rachel school in Williamsburg in the 1960s was limited to reading some works in Yiddish and taking notes on the Jewish laws governing daily life.¹² Later there were attempts to provide more demanding Yiddish educational material, but the basic prohibition on Hebrew study remains in effect.¹³ Notwithstanding, aspects of female spirituality may be present in forms similar to those of pre-Hasidic Eastern European society,¹⁴ as well as in participation in organized societies for charity and acts of kindness.¹⁵ For a woman, participation in the Satmar Hasidic movement is defined in predominantly practical terms: what one does and what one wears,¹⁶ rather than what one studies.

By contrast when the emphasis is on the Lower Unity, in which the world beyond the Hasidic enclave is itself seen to have spiritual significance, and when this is complemented by a concern for the "service from below,"¹⁷ in which the individual Hasid has to struggle to

12. Leshon ha-Kodesh," secs. 37–39, he presents his arguments against women studying Torah, citing the well-known statement that "anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is considered as if he had taught her lewdness" (*Mishnah Sotah* 3:4), and also, intriguingly, the prohibition on teaching "an unsuitable student" (*BT Hullin* 133a; *Maimonides, Code*, "Laws of Torah Study," 4:1). See sec. 33 concerning the definition of what a woman is permitted or even obliged to study: i.e., the practicalities of Jewish law and ethics.
13. Rubin, *Satmar*, pp. 153–56. At the same period the secular instruction in her school seemed more demanding and innovative. Rubin sees the woman in Satmar as an agent of acculturation. See *ibid.*, pp. 198, 207, 261 n. 2. See also Mintz, *Hasidic People*, pp. 182–84. Krantzler, *Hasidic Williamsburg*, chap. 7, presents the results of a survey of 175 Satmar women, most of whom, he states, were "perfectly satisfied" with their role in society (p. 180). See, however, Mintz's account of Satmar deflections to Lubavitch in *Hasidic People*, pp. 154–75. See also n. 188 below.
14. See n. 11 above, and Krantzler, *Hasidic Williamsburg*, p. 177. At the same time the role of the Satmar woman in running the family has become more important on account of her increasing economic power. See Rubin, *Satmar*, pp. 106, 125.
15. See C. Weisler, "The Traditional Piety of Ashkenazi Women," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present*, ed. A. Green (London, 1987), pp. 245–75. See Krantzler, *Hasidic Williamsburg*, p. 180, for a depiction of a woman's feelings in prayer, seeking forgiveness and well-being for her loved ones.
16. See Krantzler, *Hasidic Williamsburg*, pp. 191–92, concerning the flourishing *Bikkur Holim* organization in Williamsburg, which is also looked upon favorably by some of the area's non-observant Jewish residents.
17. See n. 8 above. Issues of attire are also prime categories for men. See Rubin, *Satmar*, p. 253 n. 26 regarding the significance of male Hasidic attire.

17. See n. 4 above.

discover his own intimations of holiness, there is a possibility that particularly under the pressures of modernity the religious role of the woman could develop considerably further.

In this model the woman might be encouraged towards an internalized mystical perspective on life endowed through direct study of hasidic-mystical texts. She could feel empowered to activate her own and others' spiritual potential, and thus would be led to see herself as a full hasidic follower in her own right, with her own direct experience of specifically hasidic spirituality. This has taken place in the Habad movement, as will be outlined below. A median position is seen in the pre-war Beis Yaakov movement, in which a special form of feminine spirituality and activism developed, loosely attached to hasidism.

The correspondence between the role of the woman and the nature of the model of spirituality confirms a point made by Chava Weissler.¹⁸ She claims that study of the religiosity of women can function as an *addition* to what we know already about a specific area of Jewish history, so that our hitherto exclusive knowledge of Jewish men is supplemented by some knowledge about Jewish women; alternatively, it can have a *transformative* effect, reconfiguring the conception of that field of history as a whole.¹⁹ The history of the woman in a religious or social movement can therefore shed light on the inner nature of that movement.

Perspectives on the Woman in Hasidism

From its early period opponents of the hasidic movement have accused it of ignoring the role of the woman and weakening the concept of the family. David of Makov's *Shever Poshim* paints a graphic picture of the young husband who steals away to the joyful court of the hasidic rebbe where "sorrow is forbidden." His wife's response when she discovers

18. C. Weissler, "The Religion of Traditional Ashkenazic Women: Some Methodological Issues," *AJS Review* 12 (1987), pp. 73-94.

19. She also suggests a third option: that the study of women elucidates our understanding of other groups whose significance is hidden in conventional historical approaches, unlearned men for example. See *ibid.*, pp. 77-86.

where he has gone is unmitigated grief. He has taken all the available money and left his children virtual orphans.²⁰

A quite different view was presented early this century by S. A. Horodecky who suggested that women had an especially positive role in hasidism, contrasting with their lack of participation in normative talmudic study outside the hasidic movement.²¹ He focuses on Hannah Rachel the "Maid of Ludmir" (c. 1815-1892 or 1895), whom he presents as a full-fledged female Zaddik. Ada Rapoport-Albert has debunked this position, persuasively presenting the view that the pious, ascetic Hannah Rachel was regarded by contemporary hasidic leaders – most notably, R. Mordechai of Chernobyl – as an aberration. Through his intervention she agreed to marry, although the marriage was never consummated and ended in divorce; she then married again, but this marriage also failed.²²

Nehemia Polen has outlined²³ a very different model of a fulfilled woman in hasidism: Sarah Horowitz Sternfeld of Checiny (the "Chentshiner

20. M. Wilensky, *Hasidim u-Mingge'atam* (Jerusalem, 1970), vol. 2, p. 173. This anti-hasidic tract was written 1798-1800. Similar accusations are voiced in Rabbi Yisrael Loebel's *Sefer ha-Yiknah* (Warsaw, 1798), *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 315, and, more briefly, in the 1781 *herem* of Vilna (*ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 103; for another version, see vol. 2, p. 151). David of Makov also claimed that the ascetic aspirations of the hasidim distressed their wives and often had deleterious effects (*ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 159-60). See Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 511 n. 16 where these and other sources are cited, including a talk by Rabbi Nahman of Braslav which expresses concern at the lack of marital harmony among many of the younger hasidim, which led to separation and sometimes divorce. Rabbi Nahman – who preached intense asceticism – advises his followers to honor and hold their wives precious, citing talmudic sources to support his attitude (*Shtetl ha-Ran*, printed with *Shivhei ha-Ran* [Jerusalem, n.d.], p. 192, secs. 263-64). An early letter by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady presents the idea that while "according to the Torah" (cf. *Shulhan Arukh: Yoreh De'ah* 251:3) the [material] needs of a man's wife and children take precedence over others, they do not take precedence over the needs of the Zaddikim and especially the Zaddikim in the Holy Land (*Iggerot Kodesh... Admur ha-Zaken* [Brooklyn, 1980], p. 10). In 1814 this letter was printed together with the *Tanya* in the newly added *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* (sec. 9). Interestingly, the extreme passage cited was censored by the hasidic editors. In the Brooklyn 1954 edition of *Tanya* it was added in an appendix (fol. 203b).

21. S. A. Horodecky, *Ha-Hasidut ve-Ha-Hasidim* (Jerusalem, 1923), vol. 4, pp. 67-71.

22. According to Rapoport-Albert, marriage terminated her career as a spiritual leader. Her final years were spent in Palestine ("On Women in Hasidism," p. 503).

23. Polen, "Miriam's Dance" (n. 1 above).

Rebbetsin"). When she died in 1937 at the age of 99, ten thousand people attended her funeral. She was survived by 250 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.²⁴ An article in the Warsaw Yiddish paper *Der Moment* claimed: "After the death of her husband, hasidim travelled to her with *kvitlakh*. She was the only woman in Poland who conducted herself as a rebbe."²⁵

The Maid of Ludmir sought to gain the spiritual by transcending her own femininity. This indeed was the route to holiness for female mystics in the Christian and (to some extent) Islamic traditions. In Judaism however it failed.²⁶ By contrast the Chentshiner Rebbetsin combined spiritual charisma with fulfilled womanhood. The contrast may not be as great as it seems for in her case the public manifestation of her spiritual qualities came to the fore only after the death of her husband. At this point she could safely transcend worldliness in its conventional sense. On the other hand, as presented by Polen, an aspect of her charisma was her fulfilled power of being a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother.

The Maid of Ludmir represents an unusual female quest for something like the Upper Unity. The Chentshiner Rebbetsin seems rather to be a product of the centrist form of Polish hasidism described by Rachel Elior in her discussion of the Seer of Lublin.²⁷ Here *yesh* and *ayin* coexist,

24. *Ibid.*, p. 10, where he quotes *Der Moment*, 1 March 1937, p. 6, an obituary published a few days after her death on 26 February. Rapoport-Albert comments that she was one of the very few wives of hasidic leaders who commanded a following in their own right; most notable hasidic women of this ilk were the mothers, daughters, or sisters of Zaddikim. Sarah's public activities apparently began after her husband died; he was succeeded by their son Joshua Heschel ("On Women in Hasidism," p. 518 n. 39; see also n. 42). Her descendants included Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Piasecener Rebbe (d. 1942). See N. Polen, *Esh Kodesh: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York, 1994).
25. *Idem*, "Miriam's Dance," p. 10, quoting *Der Moment*, 28 February. Her husband Rabbi Haim Shmuel Horowitz Sternfeld was a great-grandson of the Seer of Lublin. See Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," pp. 506-8. See also T. Frankel, *The Voice of Sarah: Feminine Spirituality and Traditional Judaism* (San Francisco, 1990), p. 49; S. Pantel Zolty, "And All Your Children Shall be Learned," *Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, NJ, 1993), p. 252.
27. R. Elior, "Between *Yesh* and *Ayin*: The Doctrine of the Zaddik in the Works of Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, pp. 393-455.

mediated by the Zaddik, who bears the tension inherent in this process.²⁸ The Zaddik in a sense combines the qualities of both the Upper and Lower Unities. Whether or not this is the way the Chentshiner Rebbetsin saw herself, and was seen by others, is an open question. It is likely that she did not claim this kind of mystical grandeur; simplicity and piety, backed by her position in the hasidic hierarchy gained through both birth and marriage, were sufficient.

The focus of this article is not, however, the exceptional woman. My attempt is rather to study the woman as a *member* of the hasidic movement. My claim is that the hasidic adjustment in facing the pressures of a changing society was to some extent predicated by mystical structures.²⁹ In Habad, the legacy of emphasis on the Lower Unity as a path of contemplation eventually led to the development of the role of the woman as a full participant, as a hasidic follower. Without this emphasis, differing positions were possible. Satmar, espousing the "Higher Unity" model of spirituality, chose a route embracing a "traditional" posture in which women are totally excluded from Torah study yet are expected to affirm a lifestyle which they see as holy. Beis Yaakov followed another route into modernity, creating a unique form of feminine pietistic spirituality.

The Upper and Lower Unity

The spiritual quest of the early generations of the Habad movement has been characterized as a "paradoxical ascent" to God.³⁰ As this phrase suggests, this is a spiritual movement away from the world. From the

28. On the inherent tension in the role of the hasidic Zaddik, see Elior, "Between *Yesh* and *Ayin*," p. 396.
29. This view contrasts with that of Joseph Dan who does not see any spiritual or ideological foundations for the hasidic adjustment to modernity. See his "Hasidism - The Third Century," in *Hasidism Reappraised: Proceedings of the International Conference of the Institute of Jewish Studies in Memory of Joseph G. Weiss, University College London, 21-23 June 1988*, ed. A. Rapoport-Albert (London, 1996), pp. 421-22.
30. R. Elior, *Torat Ahdut ha-Haftakim* (Jerusalem, 1992); English edition: *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism*, trans. J. M. Green (New York, 1993).

perspective of the acosmistic dimension of Habad mystical teachings the world indeed seems to dissolve into the Infinite. Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya* and other Habad treatises describe this as *Yihuda Ila'a*,³¹ the "Upper Unity." All is one, absorbed in the infinite oneness of the Divine. As defined by Rachel Elior the quest of early Habad was to leave the world or to see beyond it, to gaze at the ultimate Divine reality. She notes however that "spiritual worship was solely the part of the men within the community."³² The contemplative quest for the Upper Unity was exclusively a male province.

This however did not constitute the sole focus of Habad spirituality, even in its eighteenth-century systems of contemplation. For there was also a complementary movement back to the world, or even in some sense, forward to the world. As an aspect of contemplation, this is termed the *Yihuda Tata'a*, the "Lower Unity." This is not just the return to reality after experiencing an ecstatic state. Rather the Lower Unity means that the contemplative discovers that there is a world: but it too is an expression of the Infinite. This movement into the world is to a certain extent at odds with the generally ascetic, otherworldly aspirations of eighteenth-century East European pre-Hasidic mysticism.

In the case of early Habad one is able to trace the gradual development of the concept of the Lower Unity. This is apparent in the *Tanya*, the main Hasidic treatise of Rabbi Shneur Zalman (1745–1812), the founder of the Habad movement. The second section of this work comprises a tract on contemplation entitled "Gate of Unity and Faith." We can see the development of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's thinking by comparing the early manuscript copies of *Tanya*, dating from around 1793, with the text of the printed book published in late 1796. The manuscript version does not

31. The term is found in the brief introduction to the second section of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya* (1796 printed edition), and explained in chapter 7 of that tract (see below). It also appears in his discourses, both those published from manuscript collected by year (5562, 5564, etc.) and the versions in *Torah Or* and *Likkutei Torah*. See the relevant indexes at the end of these volumes and *Sefer ha-Maftehot le-Sifrei... Admur ha-Zaken* (Brooklyn, 1981), q.v. *yihuda ila'a*, *yihuda tata'a*.
 32. Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, p. xiv, footnote. The comment is found only in the English version, in a note explaining the exclusive use of the masculine gender (rather than both masculine and feminine) throughout the book.

mention the concept of the Lower Unity. Its entire focus is on the Upper Unity, although this term is not used since its corollary the Lower Unity is absent, not only as a technical term but as a concept. By contrast, the printed text introduces the concept of a further step of spiritual perception for the contemplative – the Lower Unity. This follows the Upper Unity, and the distinction between them is carefully described. The author explains that in the Upper Unity the universe is not apparent to the contemplative: he focuses on the mystical reality of the *En Sof* in which all existence is absorbed. There is nought apart from God. In the Lower Unity the contemplative progresses to a further stage, in which there is a world, which he now perceives as being an expression of Godliness.³³

This dialectic between the Upper Unity acosmism and the Lower Unity perception of world *qua* world expressing the Divine took practical expression in the split in the movement following Rabbi Shneur Zalman's death in 1812. One group followed his foremost disciple, Rabbi Aaron Halevi Horowitz, who lived in Starroselye, and the other group followed his oldest son, Rabbi Dov Ber, who took up residence in the townlet of Lubavitch.³⁴ Scholars agree that the difference between them primarily

33. *Tanya*, part 2, chap. 7, fol. 82a–b. This idea is expressed in terms of two modes of combination of Divine Names: In the Upper Unity, the Sefirah Malkhut, represented by the letters Alef, Daled, Nun, Yud interleaves with the Tetragrammaton so that the Yud of the Tetragrammaton is the first letter, dominating the whole. In this mode Malkhut, representing the universe, is not apparent. In the Lower Unity it is the other way round: the Alef of the Name representing Malkhut comes first in the combined, interleaved Divine Name. The world is apparent, yet it is seen as an expression of the Divine. The printed text of the "Gate of Unity and Faith" begins with a brief introduction which presents this twin theme of the Upper and Lower Unities as the central topic of the tract (*Tanya*, fol. 76b). This introduction is missing from all the manuscript versions, as is the presentation of the concept of the Lower Unity. Cf. *Likkutei Amarim: Mahadava Kama (miklav yad)* (Brooklyn, 1981), pp. 425, 457–59. See N. Loewenthal, "Reason' and 'Beyond Reason' in Habad Hasidism," in *'Alei Shefer: Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexandre Safran*, ed. M. Hallamish (Bar Ilan University Press, 1990), pp. 113–117.
 34. The rivalry between them is explored in L. Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity: The Life and Works of Aaron of Starroselye* (London, 1966), pp. 23–25; R. Elior, "The Controversy over the Leadership of the Habad Movement" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 49 (1980), pp. 166–86; idem, *The Theory of Divinity of Hasidai Habad* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 5–14; Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite*, chap. 4.

concerns theoretical issues in contemplative prayer.³⁵ One might suggest that Aaron of Starroselye sought above all the Upper Unity, the acosmist perception that there is only God, whereas Dov Ber taught the significance of the Lower Unity.³⁶

These concepts may seem ethereal abstractions relevant only to mystical contemplation. However, the fact that the focus of the Lower Unity is on "the world," which is somehow seen as an expression of Godliness, has broader implications. As one of Dov Ber's disciples stated: "The world is a world – and it does no harm."³⁷ What is "the world"? Rationality, on the one hand; and also, taking the concept to an extreme, the world which traditional womanhood represents: home, food, children, sexuality. All of this does not have to be negated. Unlike the Upper Unity, the thrust of the Lower Unity is not away from the world but towards it.

This presents us with a typology of spirituality which, if utilized with care, can help us elucidate a number of aspects of hasidic life and thought beyond the ranks of the Habad school. The dialectic of the Upper and Lower Unities expresses something of the tension inherent in hasidic thinking, which is highly relevant to the dilemma of domesticity: how does the mystic or hasid cope with the presence of a wife and children?³⁸

35. Jacobs focuses on the question of Dov Ber's quest for "authentic" ecstasy in prayer, while Aaron of Starroselye seems ready to tolerate also "spurious" ecstasy among his followers (see L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* [London, 1972], pp. 101–3); Elior describes Aaron as "theocentric," and Dov Ber as "anthropocentric" (*Theory of Divinity*, p. 325). See Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite*, p. 137. Rabbi Dov Ber devotes particular attention to this theme in his *Imrei Binah* (Kopys, 1821; Brooklyn, 1976) where he often claims that the Lower Unity is greater than the Upper Unity. See fols. 11a, 27a–28a, 31d, 32c–33b, 40c.
37. "Die welt iz a welt – un es shat gor nit," from a letter by Rabbi Yitzhak Aisak Halevi of Homel (1780–1857), published in *Hannah Ari'el* (Berdichev, 1912), sec. "Iggeret ha-Kodesh" (at the end of the volume), fol. 4b; translated in Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity*, p. 160. See Loewenthal, "Reason" and "Beyond Reason," p. 122.
38. One type of solution was presented by Elimelekh of Litzhensk in the third generation of the movement. He advised the hasidic follower to focus on imagining a great fire into which he is ready to throw himself for *Kidush Hashem* during intense moments at prayer as well as while eating and engaging in marital intercourse (see *Tzeiel Katam*, near the beginning of *No'am Elimelekh* [New York, 1956], secs. 1–3). It is interesting to compare this with the evidence adduced in a study by Immanuel Ekkes of a number of

Further, does his mysticism accord his wife a conscious spiritual role?³⁹

Put simply, if the dominant quest is the Upper Unity, seeking to transcend the material world, it is likely that there will be little place for women as women to manifest the mystical path. By contrast, if the direction is the Lower Unity which imbues worldliness with holiness, then there is more likelihood that at some point, possibly as a result of some quite extraneous historical circumstance, a woman – acting as a woman – may be able to become an exemplar of the spiritual ideal.

The realization of this possibility is governed at least to some extent by her level of access to sources of Jewish knowledge. At this point let us review the available information concerning women and Torah study in early hasidism, particularly in Habad, which will help us evaluate the twentieth-century developments generated by modernity.

Torah Study for Women: Early Stages

It is interesting that at the same time that Rabbi Shneur Zalman the mystic taught the significance of the Lower Unity, Rabbi Shneur Zalman the halakhist was giving expression to the halakhic necessity for women to study Torah. His halakhic viewpoint can be found in his *Hilkhot*

39. nineteenth-century mimagdic scholars. They perceived their dedication to Torah study as overriding the claims of involvement with their wives and young children (although we do see careful guidance imparted in a letter from a father to his adult son). As a result they would spend long periods away from home. These scholars represent an expression of the ascetic world-transcending ideal, albeit generally in non-mystical form. See I. Ekkes, "The Family and the Study of Torah among Lithuanian Talmudist Circles in the Nineteenth Century" (Hebrew), *Zion* 51 (1986) (English version in *The Jewish Family, Metaphor and Memory*, ed. David Kraemer [New York and Oxford, 1989], pp. 153–78). See also idem, *Lilia bi-Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem, 1991), chap. 3. Jewish mystical literature sometimes expresses the spiritual and indeed sacramental effect of sexual union (see R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* [Oxford, 1962], p. 139). See also Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Torah Or* (15th edition, Brooklyn, 1990), fol. 92d: "not as people think, that [sexual union] is despicable because afterwards [the male] must bathe [in the *mikveh*]. On the contrary, it is something of great significance, and also in the upper [realms] it is of great significance." Was this spiritual perspective and knowledge shared by the mystic's wife?

Talmud Torah (Laws of Torah Study [Shklov, 1794]).⁴⁰ In this treatise we find first a summary of the well-known strictures against Torah study by women, with citations of the relevant sources.⁴¹ It then presents Shneur Zalman's own position:

And nonetheless, women too are duty bound to study the *halakhot* which apply to them, such as the laws of [family purity] and [kashrut]... and the like. And all Positive Commands which are not affected by time, and all the Negative Commands, of the Torah and [also] of the Sages, which apply equally to them as to men. And in the days [of the Sages], every Sabbath the *Hakham* would teach the laws which are relevant to everyone, in a language which women and unlearned people could understand.⁴²

We thus find, in a halakic work printed in Russia in 1794, a relatively elaborated expression of the long-accepted basic idea that women should study the laws of the Torah which apply to them. As described by Rabbi Shneur Zalman this entails a considerable portion of the Torah: the details of many of the positive commandments and all of the negative ones. He also makes the novel assertion that in the remote past, in the

40. See N. Loewenthal, "Early Habad Publications in their Setting," in *Hebrew Studies*, ed. D. Rowland-Smith and P. S. Salinger, British Library Occasional Papers 13 (London, 1991), pp. 94–104.
41. *BT Kidd. 29a; Soṭah 20a, 21b*. Maimonides, *Code*, "Laws of Torah Study," 1:13.
42. *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* (Shklov, 1794; Brooklyn, 1968), fol. 11a-b. His sources included Isaac of Corbelli's *Sefer Mizvot Katan* and Jacob Landau's *Agur*. Concerning the recitation of blessings by women on study of Torah, see *Sefer ha-Agur* (Jerusalem, 1977), "Hilkhot Tefillah", sec. 2, fol. 3a. *Sefer Amudei Golah... Sefer Mizvot Katan* (Jerusalem, 1968), *hakdamah* (fol. 4) emphasizes the spiritual worth of women's study of the laws which apply to them (i.e., beyond being merely a means to know the laws). The *Agur* cites in the name of the *Sefer Mizvot Katan* (*Gadol* in the text, presumably an error) only the basic idea that a woman should study those laws. This basic concept, citing Landau's *Agur* (and the *Sefer Mizvot Gadol*, presumably the same error for *Katan*), is expressed by Moshe Isserlis in his gloss to *Shulhan Arukh: Yore De'ah 246:6*. Commenting on Joseph Karo's strictures on study by women, with the partial exception of the Written Torah (following Maimonides, "Laws of Torah Study," 1:13), Isserlis adds: "nonetheless a woman is duty bound to study the laws which apply to a woman." Karo ruled that women are required to recite the morning blessings on the Torah. See *Shulhan Arukh: Orah Hayyim 47:14*.

heyday of Judaism, aspects of the public instruction given in the study houses were also intended for women.⁴³

The image of the woman in the depiction of the family of the first Habad Rebbe sheds additional light on the Habad perception of the woman's role. The source of these anecdotes is H. M. Heilman's *Beit Rebbe* (first published Berditchev, 1902), a pious history of early Habad. These stories must be treated carefully. Perhaps more significant than the historicity of any specific detail is the fact that such anecdotes were related, although of course this may tell us more about Heilman's time (c. 1900) than about the situation a century earlier.⁴⁴

Rabbi Shneur Zalman's wife Shterna is depicted as a strong figure who is credited with a significant role in overcoming his initial reluctance to assume the position of rebbe.⁴⁵ She also felt a sense of spiritual power which had accrued to her by virtue of being his wife. After his demise in 1812 she is reported as saying to her son Dov Ber, now Rebbe himself: "You have spirituality? I know more about spirituality than you. I was with [R. Shneur Zalman] for more than fifty years, and can pray on

43. Rabbi Shneur Zalman cites a comment by Rashi on *BT Shabbat 116* as his source for this statement. The editors of the modern edition of *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* suggest fol. 115a, lemma *bein she-eyn korin bahen* which speaks of talks being given on the Sabbath "to householders" about laws relevant in daily life – but does not mention women. The concept that a woman should study "the laws which apply to her" received further elaboration in the twentieth century, when it was expounded as including mystical teaching as well. See below, p. 52.
44. The question is, were these anecdotes related during or shortly after the lifetime of their subjects, or closer to Heilman's own time? Based on the presumably quite early mistaken attribution to Freida of a scholarly letter (see n. 47 below), I assume the former.
45. From the letters of the period it is known that Shneur Zalman had been reluctant to assume the position of rebbe (see I. Etkes, "R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi's Rise to Leadership" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 54 [1985], pp. 429–39). According to Heilman's account, Shterna said to him: "The people are not coming to you. It is just that since you were with the Maggid... they want you to tell them what you heard from him." Shneur Zalman is said to have responded, "if that is all they want, I will accept" (H. M. Heilman, *Beit Rebbe* [Tel Aviv, n.d.; photographic reproduction of Berditchev, 1902], p. 109). Here the wife plays the opposite role to that depicted in *BT Berakhot* 28a, where the wife of R. Eleazar ben Azariah presents objections to his becoming head of the academy.

behalf of a hasid better than you can!"⁴⁶ Perhaps here was a potential Chentshiner Rebbetsin. However, there is no indication in these anecdotes that Rabbi Shneur Zalman actually imparted to her anything of his mystical thought. This is not so in the case of his oldest daughter Freida. In Heilman's words:

She was very beloved by our Rebbe [Shneur Zalman] and he would say hasidic discourses for her. When her brother [Dov Ber, later] the *Mitteler Rebbe* wanted to hear some specific topic from our Rebbe, he would request that she ask our Rebbe about this topic, and he would tell her. Her brother used to hide in the room and listen.⁴⁷

Further possible evidence of the desire to involve women in the hasidic path of Habad is provided by the publication of two works in Yiddish during the leadership of this same Rabbi Dov Ber (1773–1827). These may have been intended for a female as well as for a male audience, although it is an open question as to whether women bought and studied them on their own. The first is an ethical tract written by Rabbi Dov Ber and entitled *Pokeah Iyrim* (Opening the Eyes of the Blind), published in 1817. Like many such works, this tract discusses the question of avoiding sexual thoughts. As Chava Weissler has noted, earlier ethical works written for women, such as the *Seyder Mizvos ha-Noshim* and the *Bramshpigl*, seem to assume that women rarely have troubling sexual desires.⁴⁸ This is not the case in Rabbi Dov Ber's *Pokeah Iyrim*. Two passages address the

46. Literally "make a better *pidyon* than you" (*Beit Rebbe*, p. 109). A *pidyon* is the request for a blessing given by the hasid to a rebbe.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 114. The dramatic idea that Freida studied Torah led to an amusing mistake by nineteenth-century Habad copyists: A letter addressed to Rabbi Dov Ber discussing hasidic teachings which began with the words "to my dear brother," probably written by Rabbi Aaron Halevi Horowitz, Dov Ber's close friend and later his rival, was assumed to have been written by Freida, and some copyists added colophons to that effect. Although it is now clear that she did not compose this scholarly letter, it is interesting that hasidim within the Habad circle could, and perhaps wanted, to think that it was. See Y. Mondshine, "A Letter from the Daughter of Our Rebbe, Freida (?) to Her Brother R. Dov Ber" in *Kerem Habad* 1 (5747/1987), p. 101. Heilman mentions this letter but doubts its ascription to Freida (*Beit Rebbe*, p. 114). See Rappoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 518 n. 41.

48. Weissler, "Ashkenazi Women," p. 89.

question of female sexuality. If men suffer the danger of nocturnal emissions, provoked by erotic thoughts during the day, this tract warns women too to avoid the possibility of having "bad dreams at night about *zivugim* (i.e., sex)," caused by staring at handsome men and conversing extensively with them.⁴⁹

This may seem a rather dubious level of female emancipation. Yet within the pietistic context of the hasidic community it means that women were no longer regarded as passive objects whose sole concern was to avoid eliciting an erotic response from men, a viewpoint reflected in the talmudic anecdote about the virgin who prayed that she should not cause any man to stumble.⁵⁰ Women were now seen as autonomous individuals who had to grapple with their thoughts and feelings.

The idea that, in the view of its author, a woman might have access to *Pokeah Iyrim* is interesting, for this is not a work of conventional ascetic piety, but a hasidic tract which seeks to impart the essentially esoteric Habad goal of *binah*, mystical abnegation, in an ethical form termed *tsuvokenkayt*.⁵¹ The tract is addressed to a person who is undergoing a spiritual conversionary experience, described as becoming a *baal teshuvah*. It represents Dov Ber's goal of making some aspect of hasidic spirituality accessible to the simple man.⁵² Like other works of Habad teaching, *Pokeah Iyrim* includes a mystical promise, that through making the endeavor to change oneself – "to purify one's heart from all bad, with true *teshuvah*" – one will be given Divine assistance: "God will send a multitude of good thoughts" to the person so that he "will automatically become *tsubroken* in his heart,"⁵³ thus achieving the spiritual humility which is a

49. *Pokeah Iyrim* (Brooklyn, 1973), chap. 9, p. 38; chap. 17, p. 42.

50. *BT Sotah* 22a.

51. This view of the book differs from that of Rappoport-Albert ("On Women in Hasidism," p. 515 n. 34). See Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite*, pp. 194–204.

52. The Yiddish *Pokeah Iyrim* is paralleled by a very intense work in Hebrew by the same author, *Derekh Hayyim* (Kopyts, 1819), which is clearly addressed to the male scholar. In *Derekh Hayyim* the "sins" of the learned reader have to be searched for with a magnifying glass. By contrast *Pokeah Iyrim* speaks of more tangible issues: thoughts of adultery, drunkenness, and, in an additional section of the work which remained in manuscript until the twentieth century, relationships with non-Jewish women in the villages. See *Pokeah Iyrim*, chaps. 27, 34.

53. *Pokeah Iyrim*, chap. 19. Cf. *Tanya* 1, chap. 12, fol. 16b.

central goal in early Habad. For the scholar, the path to this is deep self-criticism, combined with contemplation in prayer; for the simple man, contrition for his sins. If its author indeed thought a woman might in some way peruse these ideas, this book can be seen as the expression of a significant spiritual step, a deliberate and further extension of the general mood of contrition, submission, and humility promulgated in contemporary ethical works for women.

Nonetheless, we cannot automatically assume that the inclusion in this work of passages directly addressed to women meant that they themselves read it. Their fathers or husbands may have been the purveyors of the relevant aspects of its content. Even so, we are left with the impression that the conversionary experience of becoming a *baal teshuvah* as an expression of personal spiritual advance⁵⁴ was one which related not only to the man who was striving to forsake his bad thoughts and achieve a new approach to prayer⁵⁵ but, in some way, to the female members of his family as well.

The second Yiddish work was a halakhic tract that addressed a complex subject relevant to men and to women alike: the blessings to be recited before and after eating. Two earlier works by Rabbi Shneur Zalman treated this topic,⁵⁶ as did a section of Rabbi Dov Ber's *Prayerbook* with hasidic teachings (1816). In 1820 this section was reprinted in slightly condensed form as an independent tract, *Seder Birkhot ha-Nehenin*, with the addition of a Yiddish translation.

This work may well have been aimed primarily at men. As such, its publication represents the aim of spreading meticulous halakhic observance within the wider reaches of the community. For Habad this also meant the enhancement of spirituality. The earlier popular Yiddish

54. This pietistic phenomenon differs from the contemporary revivalist *baal-teshuvah* movement set in a context of Western secularism, although there may be some shared characteristics. See J. Aviad, *Return to Judaism: Religious Revival in Israel* (Chicago, 1984).

55. See *Pokeah Iyrim*, chaps. 23–24, which outline an approach to "hasidic" prayer suitable for the unlearned man.

56. Y. Mondshine, *Sifrei Halakhah shel Admur ha-Zaken: Torat Habad* (Kfar Habad, 1988) vol. 2, p. 66. The first work, published in 1800, was titled *Luah Birkhot ha-Nehenin*; a second revised version reportedly appeared in Rabbi Shneur Zalman's prayerbook (1803). Neither is extant today.

work *Lev Tov*,⁵⁷ repeatedly published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gave instruction on blessings, but not to the extent and depth of the Habad tracts on this subject. The talmudic dictum, "One who wishes to be a hasid should be careful with the blessings over food,"⁵⁸ can be seen as a rationale for the emphasis on this topic in a branch of hasidism noted mainly for its mystical publications. Further, in terms of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's exposition of halakhic categories, women too were dutybound to know the proper blessings. It therefore seems likely that women were included among those who were to benefit from the Yiddish translation of *Seder Birkhot ha-Nehenin*. As in the case of *Pokeah Iyrim*, they may have done so not by actually reading the work themselves, but by having suitable passages read out to them or paraphrased by their fathers or husbands. Nonetheless, the existence of the Yiddish translation brought this detailed knowledge closer to their purview.

What I have described as steps towards giving women further outlets for expression of spirituality must however be seen in their contemporary context. While Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* obligated women to attain a considerable amount of halakhic knowledge, throughout the nineteenth century only minimal steps were taken towards the realization of this goal.⁵⁹ Women did not engage in

57. Yitzhak ben Elyakum of Posen's *Lev Tov* was first published in Prague, 1620 and was frequently republished. It was reissued in Shklov in 1789 and in 1793, making it available to Habad followers.

58. *BT Bava Kamma* 30a. It appears in the second edition of the *Table of Blessings* (1801) at the end of the book in a printer's note. For a mystical explanation of the function of the daily blessings, see Dov Ber's *Biurei ha-Zohar* (Kopys, 1816), fol. 120d.

59. According to Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn (d. 1950), in 1879 the fourth-generation Habad leader Rabbi Shmuel publicly called for increased teaching of "the ways of hasidut" for girls (*Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 3 [Brooklyn, 1983], p. 469). There are traditions in some Habad families that even before this there were a small number of women who studied hasidic teachings. One such is Rochel-Leah Kugel (née Segalovitch), born around the middle of the nineteenth century, who was reportedly taught hasidic teachings by her father. In the presence of men, however, she studied only those texts generally considered appropriate for women, such as the *Tzema u-Re'ena*. She sometimes studied with two or three other women (oral communication from her grandson, the celebrated hasid Rabbi Mendel Futterfas, 10 December 1994). See below, p. 54. Her daughter, Maryasha Badana Futterfas (c. 1871–1955), mother of Rabbi Mendel, likewise is said to have studied hasidic teachings. A woman in another family who is known to have been a scholar of Habad

contemplative prayer, had no role that we can identify in the hasidic courts of Habad, and as far as we know did not meet with other women in order to study.

Education and Activism

Not surprisingly, in the twentieth century this began to change, in a context of the rapid development of orthodox education for girls in Eastern Europe. This was largely due to the founding of the Beis Yaakov school system by Sarah Schenierer (1883–1935), an unmarried seamstress from Cracow. The first Beis Yaakov school was founded in her home city in 1917; twenty years later there were 250 such schools operating in Eastern Europe with tens of thousands of students.⁶⁰

Primarily an educational movement which founded schools for Polish Jewish girls and a teachers' seminary in Cracow, Beis Yaakov is usually portrayed as a bold step educationally,⁶¹ or, interestingly, as a model for Jewish feminism.⁶² Examination of some of the sources relating to this movement in its pre-war form⁶³ indicates that for its inner circle members and leaders, it may also be seen as a unique variety of feminine spirituality in a loose hasidic context.

Before proceeding further, we must define "spirituality," hasidic spirituality in particular. The social and economic changes associated

with the process of modernity were accompanied by what has been described as "a decline or dilution of otherworldliness,"⁶⁴ consequently the tangible material world dominates one's thinking. Even time becomes "money." The veiling of the sense of the infinite (or divine) within the world is complemented by changes in human relationships which are dominated by rationality rather than love: "a career comes before friendship."⁶⁵ There is also a concomitant loss of the sense of brotherhood: "brothers" become "others." The contrary process, the rediscovery of the spiritual, especially in hasidism – bearing in mind the balance of Upper and Lower Unities – involves both an intensification of otherworldliness and the development of close personal relationships: love, between leader and disciples and between the disciples themselves.⁶⁶

The question has been raised to what degree secularization made inroads among the "orthodox" in the twentieth century: while espousing and "believing" in suprarational concepts, a person might still fall pray to a process of despiritualization.⁶⁷ Jewish life in interwar Poland was

teachings was Bluma Kesselman (d. 1983), wife of Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Kesselman (d. 1971), head of the Habad yeshiva in Lod and Kfar Habad. Her father was Rabbi Zev Wolf Bronstein, a Habad hasid thought of as an exemplary figure ("a *benoni*"). Born early in the twentieth century, she is described as sitting on the veranda in a rocking chair in Lod c. 1952 studying hasidic teachings from a manuscript, or a hagiograph of a manuscript (oral communication from Nachman Sudak, head of Habad in the UK, who was then a student in the yeshiva). The Habad teachings available in manuscript versions were of a particularly advanced nature, replete with kabbalistic terminology.

60. See S. Schenierer, *Em be-Yisrael: Kitvei Sarah Shenier* (revised edition; Bnei Brak, 1975); Z. Scharfstein, *Toledot ha-Hinukh be-Yisrael be-Dorot ha-Aharonim*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1960), pp. 141–56; D. Weissman, "Bais Yaakov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminists," in *The Jewish Woman*, ed. E. Kolton (New York, 1976), pp. 139–48.

61. See Zolty "And All Your Children Shall Be Learned," chap. 9, pp. 263–300.

62. Weissman, "Bais Yaakov: A Historical Model" (n. 60 above).

63. The present discussion of spirituality – rather than simply "orthodoxy" – in the Beis Yaakov movement concerns only its pre-war history.

64. See S. Sharot, "Magic, Religion, Science and Secularization," in *Religion, Science and Magic in Concert and in Conflict*, ed. J. Neuser, E. S. Fritsch, P. V. McCracken Flesher (New York, 1989), p. 272. At the same time there were countermovements in society at large which developed new secular forms of "otherworldliness," i.e., the early-twentieth-century revolutionary developments in the arts. See Kandinsky's discussion of the musicians and artists of his time in "otherworldly" terms: of Schoenberg's music he said that it "reads us into a realm where musical experience is a matter not of the ear but of the soul alone"; he described a group of painters who "sought for the 'inner' by way of the 'outer'," noted Cezanne's gift "of divining the inner life in everything"; as well as the way Henri Matisse "endeavors to reproduce the divine" (W. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, first published in German [Munich, 1912], English translation by M. T. H. Sadler [New York, 1977], pp. 17–18).

65. This was the explanation given by Y. Kanar, a cellist who became a Habad hasid – himself known as a contemplative – for the diminishing of the practice of contemplative mystical prayer (interview by author, April 1994). Max Weber states that "one of the fundamental elements of the spirit of modern capitalism... [and]... of all modern culture [is] rational conduct on the basis of the idea of a calling" (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons [London, 1989], p. 180). For an example in early Hasidism, see Z. Gries, "Mi-Mitos la-Etos – Kavim li-Demuto shel R. Avraham mi-Kalisk," *Umah ve-Toledoteha*, ed. S. Ettlinger (Jerusalem, 1984), vol. 2, pp. 117–46.

67. See N. Loewenthal, "Social Ramifications of Habad Divine Service in the Twentieth Century" (Hebrew), in Mendel Piekartz volume, ed. D. Asaf, I. Etkes (forthcoming).

characterized by "extreme divisiveness, factionalism, personal hatreds"⁶⁸ while even the hasidic *shitebl* was not immune to outbreaks of social violence.⁶⁹ Internally, Polish Orthodoxy was politicized by the establishment of Agudat Yisrael, a political movement supported by the Gerer Rebbe but not by the Belzer Rebbe. Within Agudah itself, as characterized by Gershon Bacon, "at every step of the way, controversy raged."⁷⁰

To the extent that otherworldly experience existed within this structure, there was a vast contrast between its availability for men or for women. A man or a youth could encounter varying aspects of religious-intellectual, emotional, spiritual, or possibly mystical life in the *yeshivot* and hasidic courts of the time. Jiri Langer's *Nine Gates*, a Czech work on hasidism, provides an example of how a youth from a westernized background could become inspired by contact with the hasidic environment. Langer (1894–1943), a native of Prague and a friend of Kafka, was strongly influenced by his personal encounter with the Belzer rebbe, Rabbi Issakhar Dov Rokeach (d.1927).⁷¹

Women and girls, on the other hand, had very little access to this kind of experience. In many hasidic courts a woman could meet the rebbe and ask him for a blessing, usually by means of a written note called a *kvittel*. This meeting might fill her with awe. But this was as far as direct communication went. Of Rabbi Issakhar Dov, Langer writes: "The saint never looks on the face of a woman. If he must speak to women – as, when he receives a *kvittel* – he looks out of the window while he speaks."⁷²

68. E. Mendelsohn, "Jewish Politics in Interwar Poland: An Overview," in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, ed. Y. Gutman et al. (Hanover and London, 1989), p. 13.

69. See S. D. Kassow "The Interwar Shetl," *ibid.*, p. 205, where he describes a brawl in a hasidic synagogue on Yom Kippur 1932.

70. G. C. Bacon, "Agudat Israel in Interwar Poland," *ibid.*, p. 34; see also p. 25.

71. In his *Nine Gates* (trans. from the Czech by Stephen Jolly [London, 1961], pp. 12–17) he tells of a waking vision he had of the rebbe and describes, among other aspects of his five years with the hasidim, the spiritual intensity of their dancing on a festival, and the way the rebbe's solo dance filled him with awe. He also relates the rebbe's recommendation that he study Elijah de Vidas' *Reshit Hochmah*, a compendium of passages from the Zohar intended as a guide for one's spiritual life.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Whether or not the rebbe actually looked at a woman, one should not underestimate the spiritual effect of such a meeting.⁷³ However, in general it was their fathers, husbands, or brothers who went to the rebbe, while the women stayed at home.⁷⁴ In Poland, in strong contrast to their brothers, the girls were very likely to attend the Polish *gymnazia* where, despite encountering intense antisemitism, they also developed a strong interest in Polish literature and secular values. At home, the "modern" girl, who possibly espoused Marxism and other revolutionary ideologies, would appear at the Sabbath meals in stylish immodest attire, her head in a novel; meanwhile her father was bent over a page of Talmud – which he would discuss with his sons.⁷⁵ The young Polish Jews regarded her parents as old-fashioned and her brothers as fanatics. The rapidly growing rift between the generations and, perhaps even more so, between the sexes, received practical expression in the question of where *yeshiva*-trained hasidic young men would find suitable brides.⁷⁶

In this context the interwar Beis Yaakov movement represented two different goals. One was the affirmation of orthodox practice, such as Sabbath observance and strictly modest dress. The second, which concerned primarily its inner circle, was a strong move towards

73. For an example from Hungarian hasidism, see R. L. Klein, *The Scent of Snowflakes: A Chronicle of Faith, Hope and Survival in War-Ravaged Budapest* (New York, 1989), pp. 80–82, 433–34. The author recounts a visit to Rabbi Shalom Lazer Halberstam of Ratfeld (1862–1944), son of the Zanzor Rebbe, in January 1944, during which she asked for a blessing to survive the war, together with her husband and unborn child. Later, at a moment of great danger while posing as an Aryan, her baby in her arms, she had a waking vision of the rebbe giving her the blessing, which endowed her with new confidence (p. 434). Concerning the question of using such material as a historical source, see below, p. 33–34.

74. See Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism" (n. 1 above), p. 497 for the early period of Hasidism, and D. Rubin, "Sarah Schenierer" in *Daughters of Destiny* (Brooklyn, 1988), p. 170, for an impressionist view of the same phenomenon in the early decades of the twentieth century.

75. See Schenierer, *Em be-Yisrael*, vol. 1, p. 19, and Weissman, "Bais Yaakov: A Historical Model," p. 141.

76. *Ibid.* Weissman correctly spots this as the crux of the matter. See also M. Danaky, *Rebbeztzin Grunfeld* (Brooklyn, 1994), p. 157, which quotes the contemporary Gerer Rebbe, Avraham Mordkhai Alter (d. 1948), as saying: "I have thousands and thousands of *baaturlim* [young unmarried men] among my followers, but I am not sure whether there exists even for ten of those young men, girls who are fit and willing to share their Torah governed lives."

spirituality, in both the sense of otherworldly experience and of dedicated love.

The means to attain the first goal was the school environment and its rules (some of which also applied when the student was at home) and the curriculum of organized Jewish education for girls. This focused on the Pentateuch with the commentary of Samson Raphael Hirsch, popular sections of the Prophets and Writings, liturgy for weekdays, Sabbaths, and festivals, Ethics of the Fathers, practical Jewish law especially as it relates to the daily life of a woman, and Jewish history "from creation to the present."⁷⁷ Interestingly, given the strong influence of the hasidic tradition on the movement, there was no specifically hasidic element in the curriculum.⁷⁸ The formal studies – which also included German and Polish literature, pedagogy, and psychology – were intended to create a literate informed person dedicated to orthodoxy, who could be the wife of a pietist of any kind, whether hasid or minaged. She would not necessarily be a hasidic follower in any sense, but she would meticulously observe Jewish law.

The means to attain the second goal were quite different, and will be considered below. Through them the members of the inner circle became women with spiritual authority and power, loosely related to the general male hasidic movement, but actually participants in a unique feminine version of hasidism.

Although the contemporary Beis Yaakov movement in Israel, the USA, and Britain represents the norms and values of the ultra-orthodox enclave, its inception was a radical step.⁷⁹ Its radicalism lay in two aspects: first, in its aim of providing organized Jewish education for girls, which was hitherto frowned upon in Eastern Europe, and, second, in its goal of

77. See Scharfstein, *Toledot ha-Hinukh be-Yisrael*, p. 147. The curriculum is discussed in D. Weissman's unpublished MA thesis, "Beis Ya'akov: A Women's Educational Movement in the Polish Jewish Community: A Case Study in Tradition and Modernity" (New York University, n.d.), pp. 70–71, citing *Beis Yaakov Journal* 39–40 (Spring, 1929).

78. Weissman, "Beis Ya'akov: A Woman's Educational Movement," p. 71, citing J. L. Oriani's standardized curriculum, *Yahadus-Program: Fun Ershier Biz Zekstier Baraitung*. See also his *Program fun'm Yahadus Limud Jar di Beis Yaakov Studien in Poila* (Warsaw, 1931).

79. Weissman, "Beis Yaakov: A Historical Model," p. 139.

reaching out to the somewhat "assimilated" albeit Yiddish-speaking girl in order to draw her into a society dedicated to the Eastern European extreme of Jewish observance. In this sense, Beis Yaakov was a movement of outreach. Even among its inner circle, the students in direct contact with Sarah Schenierer in Cracow, there were girls who had to modify their behavior upon entering the seminary, in order to conform to its stricter norms regarding such issues as modest attire.⁸⁰ This point will be discussed below.

Religious outreach activism is in and of itself not spirituality; although in some cases it may be fueled by spirituality. How did Sarah Schenierer induce a teenage girl to alter some aspect of her behavior, especially her style of dress? One could say, through bargaining: in exchange for keeping my rules, I will provide you with knowledge of Jewish sources.⁸¹ But we must also enquire what induced the same teenage girl, soon after, to go off to a strange townlet somewhere in Poland and found a new Beis Yaakov school? Here the sources suggest an additional quality: the charisma of a spiritual leader.

At this point we pause to consider the personality of Sarah Schenierer herself. She came from a family of Zanzer hasidim. Both her writings and her Polish diary portray an intensely spiritual young woman, who was 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.⁸² This she studied assiduously, as well as talmudic stories and the neo-Orthodox writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.⁸³ She was fully aware of the rifts in Polish Jewish society and the problems caused by the lack of Jewish education for girls. At the beginning of the First World War her family moved temporarily to Vienna, where she encountered Rabbi Dr. Flesch, a neo-Orthodox exponent of Jewish history and an advocate of contemporary women playing their "historic" role in Judaism. In 1917, back in Cracow, she

80. Dansky, *Rebbelein Grunfeld*, p. 92.

81. See p. 38–39 below.

82. This Lurianic work was first published in Egypt in 1740 and has been frequently published since. An edition with a Yiddish translation appeared in Warsaw, 1896. See Schenierer, *Em be-Yisrael*, vol. 1, pp. 21–22.

83. See Schenierer, *Em be-Yisrael*, vol. 1, p. 27 and Scharfstein, *Toledot ha-Hinukh be-Yisrael*, vol. 2, p. 148.

opened her first school for girls, with a blessing from Rabbi Issakhar Dov, the Belzer Rebbe.⁸⁴ At first this was the only support she received. Eventually, however, Beis Yaakov was adopted by Agudat Yisrael, with the approval of leading figures such as the Gerrer Rebbe (Rabbi Avraham Mordechai), the Hafetz Haim, and Rabbi Meir Shapiro. Beis Yaakov schools were set up all over Poland and Lithuania, with fund-raising committees active in Europe, South Africa, and the USA.

My premise is that, for the inner circle of her pupils, Sarah Schenierer functioned not only 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.

An example of an otherworldly, spiritual focus in the religious life of Beis Yaakov was *Yom Kippur katan*. Observed on the eve of the new moon, fasting on this day was a kabbalistic practice which became popularized through prayer books such as Nathan Hanover's *Shaarei Zion* (Prenyslan, 1917). The late Judith Grunfeld (d. 1998), a teacher at the Cracow seminary from 1924 to 1929, describes its distinctive observance in Beis Yaakov:

Sarah Schenierer (!), followed by one hundred and twenty girls, would walk to the Rama's Shul in the Cracow ghetto... After everyone had davened [prayed] there, we walked to the graves of... the Rama [R. Moshe Isserlis]... the Bach (R. Yoel Surkis)... and... the Tosefos Yom Tov (R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller). Our *Tehilim* in hand, we assembled around the tombstones. The atmosphere of *kedushah* [holiness] and tranquility around the graves of the *tzaddikim* inspired the young girls.⁸⁵

Sarah Schenierer's transformation of this day into a time for her girls to visit the cemetery and say Psalms among the tombstones, which diverged from the conventional mode of fasting and recitation of supplicatory prayers (*selihot*),⁸⁶ was an inspired move in her quest to recapture the

84. Scharfstein, op. cit., p. 145; see Schenierer, *Em be-Yisrael*, pp. 24–26, 28. The Bobover Rebbe, Ben Zion Halberstam (d. 1941), opposed the venture. See Grunfeld's memoir in *Daughters of Destiny* (n. 74 above), p. 135.

85. Grunfeld's memoir, *Daughters of Destiny*, p. 133.

86. See *Magen Avraham*, sec. 3 to *Shulhan Arukh: Oraḥ Hayyim*, sec. 417.

spiritual.⁸⁷ The visits of the twentieth-century Beis Yaakov students with Sarah Schenierer to the graves of Zaddikim opened a channel of personal spiritual encounter. As described by Chava Weissler in her study of Yiddish *rekhines*, gravevisiting was an authentic facet of the spirituality of Ashkenazi women. Eleven of the 120 Yiddish prayers in *Sefer Tklines [u-]Vakoshes* are related to such visits.⁸⁸ Moreover, gravevisiting is an important kabbalistic practice; in the writings of Rabbi 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 bonds with the souls of the living.⁸⁹

This practice was adopted in a modified and limited form by the hasidic movement. Both the Braslav and Habad groups created texts guiding one's thoughts and feelings when visiting Rabbi Nahman's grave in Uman or the grave of one of the departed Habad leaders in Haditz, Niezhin, or Lubavitch.⁹⁰ But, one feels, the Beis Yaakov girls needed no special texts: the Book of Psalms itself mediated between the realms of the living and the dead, especially given the inspiring presence of Sarah Schenierer herself.

The lasting impact of this experience emerges from an anecdote dating to the Nazi period in Cracow. While the source for this anecdote is a Holocaust memoir written by Pearl Benisch (née Mandelker) in Israel in the 1980s and, as such, must be approached by the historian with caution,⁹¹ the aim at this point in this paper is not to seek historical facts,

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

88. See Weissler, "Traditional Piety of Ashkenazic Women" (n. 14 above), p. 248. See also pp. 262–67 concerning the female practice of measuring graves with candlewick and laying the wicks on the eve of Yom Kippur. See also idem, "Religion of Traditional Ashkenazi Women" (n. 18 above), p. 81.

89. See Vital's *Sha'ar Ruah ha-Kodesh* (Tel Aviv, 1963), pp. 74–75; idem, *Sha'ar ha-Yihudim* (Koretz, 1783), fols. 4c–5b. See also L. Fine, "The Contemplative Practice of *Yihudim* in Lurianic Kabbalah," in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 2, pp. 64–98, esp. pp. 79–83.

90. In the nineteenth century Habad texts for gravevisiting were printed under the title *hayan Hahishatut* (Shklov, n.d.; Warsaw, 1864, 1871; Lemberg, 1873). Some editions also included Braslav material (Lublin, 1909; Warsaw, 1922, 1928).

91. See J. E. Young, "Interpreting Literary Testimony: A Preface to Rereading Holocaust Diaries and Memoirs," *New Literary History* 18 (1987), pp. 403–23. I would like to thank Dr. David Bankier for bringing this article to my attention.

which may seem elusive when different observers give different accounts of the same events, but traces of spirituality, which arguably are more resilient.⁹² Even when these accounts do not record actual events, but fictions, the nature of the fiction is also significant.

According to Pearl Benisch's recollections, in early 1941 a young Jewish girl was interned in the Montelupich prison in Cracow. For several months two of her friends from Beis Yaakov, Pearl and another girl,⁹³ managed to bring her kosher food. Prior to embarking on the significantly more dangerous step of asking for her release, however, Pearl made a special trip to the grave of Sarah Schenierer in the new Cracow cemetery on Jerosolimska Street. She describes her horror at seeing the heap of naked bodies in the cleansing room: so many people had been killed 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 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.⁹⁴

Even if this account of the daring attempt to rescue their friend is exaggerated, or invented – which I find unlikely – nonetheless, the inclusion

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 417, 421.

93. Rivkah Horowitz-Pinkusewitz, who assisted Benisch in the writing of the book.

94. P. Benisch, *To Vanquish the Dragon* (Jerusalem and New York, 1991), p. 81. The preceding passage (p. 80) makes it clear that the author is addressing Sarah Schenierer (not the Matrarch Sarah). Scharfstein speaks of women visiting the grave of Sarah Schenierer before the war (*Toledot ha-Hinukh be-Yisrael*, vol. 2, p. 148). Benisch expresses her disappointment that after the war the grave of Sarah Schenierer could not be found: it was just somewhere in "a vast empty stretch of grass" (p. 81). Gravevisiting continues to be a feature of the modern Gerrer hasidic woman's life; see n. 120 below.

of this gravevisiting scene still constitutes an expression of an otherworldly dimension of spiritual life.

This passage reveals both the spirituality of gravevisiting and also an intense personal relationship with Sarah Schenierer. How was this bond created? As reflected in Judith Grunfeld's and other memoirs, Sarah Schenierer's relationship with her pupils was based on firmness, strength of will, and also love and the gift of intimacy. Yet another traditional hasidic ingredient played a role in the creation of the Beis Yaakov atmosphere: the power of dance. Repeated references are made to Sarah Schenierer dancing with her pupils, far from the gaze of any man, while singing *ve-tahter libenu*, "purify our hearts." The following excerpt describes this ecstatic dancing at the close of 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 *vetahter libenu* and how we danced in circles around and around and around.⁹⁵

Clearly, this group of girls experienced a religious fervour comparable to that of their brothers at a rebbe's court. It is not surprising that, in her depiction of Beis Yaakov, Judith Grunfeld drew her terms of reference from 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.⁹⁶

This sense of love and dedication was not directed solely to Sarah Schenierer. For some of the girls, at least, it was demonstrably a determining factor in their future relationships with each other. This is illustrated by the history of the *Zehmerschaft*, a group of ten young

95. B. (Epstein) Bender, "The Life of a Bais Yaakov Girl," in *Daughters of Destiny* (n. 74 above), p. 181. Weissman comments on the dancing with Sarah Schenierer as providing the female equivalent of the male hasidic experience of dancing with a rebbe ("Bais Yaakov: A Women's Educational Movement," p. 120).

96. Dansky, *Rebbeztzin Grunfeld*, p. 142.

women which formed in the Plaszow labour camp in the spring of 1943 and remained a cohesive unit for almost two years in Plaszow, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen.⁹⁷

There were many mutual-assistance groups in the camps, whose members were bound by shared ties.⁹⁸ A key factor in the formation of the Zehnerschaft was the fact that nine of its members had attended the Beis Yaakov teachers' seminary. As one of them stated: "Our years in the seminary not only forged an unbreakable bond between us. They also provided us with the moral 'fundament' on which we drew during our stay in the Nazi camps."⁹⁹

Rivka Horowitz, a single woman in her mid-twenties, cared for the members' physical needs. Rivka Englard, also single, was the group's spiritual leader.

In Auschwitz, sometimes we used to walk about near the barracks after work. It was near the crematorium and the smoke would choke us. But Rivka [Englard] would go out with one or two of us to walk and talk about the past, just like the moral discussions we used to have before the war. Why did we talk about the past, not the present or the future? Because we had no choice but to live in the present and we saw no future. So we talked about the past. But we would walk and talk and somehow gain courage.¹⁰⁰

97. J. Tydor Baumei, "Social Interaction among Jewish Women in Crisis during the Holocaust: A Case Study," *Gender and History* 7 (1995), pp. 64-84.

98. Tydor Baumei cites the work of Shama Davidson, who interviewed Holocaust survivors worldwide (ibid., pp. 64, 82 n. 4). See Davidson's "Human Reciprocity among the Jewish Prisoners in the Nazi Concentration Camps," in *The Nazi Concentration Camps: Proceedings of the Fourth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, January 1980*, ed. Y. Gutman and A. Saf (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 555-72.

99. Tydor Baumei, "Social Interaction," p. 66, based on an interview with Rachel Shantzer Teller in 1990.

100. Ibid., p. 69, from an interview with Rachel Shantzer Teller in 1987. Throughout *To Vanquish the Dragon* Benisch notes the struggle to maintain minimal levels of religious observance in the camps. These efforts evoked a sustaining sense of spiritual purpose and achievement. See also Y. Eliach, "Jewish Tradition in the Life of the Concentration Camp Inmate," in *The Nazi Concentration Camps*, pp. 195-206, and idem, *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982), which she based on interviews. Care must be exercised in approaching this material; see E. Schneid, *From Ruin to Salvation* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv, 1994), pp. 126, 227. See also the next note.

Faced with the horrors of the present there was no simple system of thought which would answer every question.¹⁰¹ Rivka Englard's ability to "talk" in Auschwitz is evidence of a deep spiritual vitality, and a sense of love and responsibility towards those with whom she would walk and talk, making the unbearable seem bearable.

One of the factors which distinguished the Zehnerschaft from other mutual assistance groups was its willingness to extend help to non-members.¹⁰² Another interesting point was the fact that the nine Beis Yaakov girls agreed to include a tenth, who was not observant. Given our knowledge of the orthodox enclave's battle against modernity we might expect this group of orthodox girls to exclude her. But having experienced the added tragedy of losing her five-year-old son in a grotesque farce engineered by the Nazis, the group adopted her as a member - even though she did not become observant.¹⁰³ If the process of diminution of spirituality is one in which "brothers" become "others," here we seem to have the reverse. The Beis Yaakov experience provided a fount of spirituality from which these young women drew during this time of ultimate crisis.

These qualities of love also emerge from the Holocaust memoir written by Pearl Benisch, who was one of the Zehnerschaft. Indeed, for her this is the focal point of reality in her appalling experience. Of course, it is difficult to corroborate her stories. Yet the issue here is not so much the specific events, as the values which their portrayal expresses. One anecdote relates the kindness of an anonymous *kapo* in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Hiding behind a facade of shouted insults and epithets, she

101. On the crisis of faith for the orthodox during the Holocaust, see M. Pekarz, *Ideological Trends of Hasidism in Poland During the Interwar Period and the Holocaust* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 326, 380-92.

102. Rachel Shantzer recalled: "One night we smuggled a number of jam jars into our barracks and divided their contents among the prisoners. It was like watching a dream come true, seeing the reactions of the other women who had no access to the kitchen or camp pantry. We knew the punishment was lashes, or even death, but were willing to risk it in order to share what we had with the other girls, giving them a taste of 'heaven' in our little hell" (Tydor Baumei, "Social Interaction," p. 72, from an interview in 1988. See p. 76 for a description of contrary behavior by another mutual-assistance group which would not share its bounty with others).

103. Ibid., pp. 73-74.

risked her life to help others girls secretly.¹⁰⁴ She too had attended Beis Yaakov. Benisch recounts similar acts of kindness, performed despite possibly fatal consequences if detected.¹⁰⁵

For Benisch, admittedly after a gap of many years, these dangerous acts of love, of self-sacrifice to the point of self-abandon, are the inner story of the Holocaust, together with resoluteness in observing halakhah whenever possible. From the point of view of this study, these incidents provide concrete examples of the realization of the spiritual goals of Sarah Schenierer and the Beis Yaakov movement.

One distinctive feature of the Beis Yaakov mode of spirituality concerns the concept of *tzeniut* which can be loosely translated as modesty. This prominent feature of modern Beis Yaakov¹⁰⁶ was also a crucial feature of its pre-war form. I have already noted Sarah Schenierer's strict attitude. A woman who was enrolled in the Lodz Beis Yaakov school around 1936 as a girl of seven or eight described how she was expelled two years later, to her mother's anguish, because it was discovered that she wore short sleeves at home.¹⁰⁷ Later, in the context of the Holocaust, when girls were frequently paraded naked, mocked, and beaten by the SS, Pearl Benisch takes pains to convey the sense of triumph one of her friends felt at managing to preserve a minimal degree of modesty while undergoing a public beating.¹⁰⁸

On the one hand, this concern for modesty on the part of Sarah Schenierer and the Beis Yaakov girls safeguarded their new role as students of Torah texts and Jewish history. A strong emphasis on modesty and conventional submission to male authority protected them from charges that their new education was having a damaging, "modernizing" effect. It can, however, also be suggested that this

104. Benisch, *To Vanquish the Dragon*, p. 350.

105. See *ibid.*, pp. 267-68, 313-24, 336-38.

106. See El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant*, index, q.v. "modesty."

107. Freide (Roche) Creson, oral testimony, Gothenberg, 30 May 1995. Her father did not observe the Sabbath. It was her mother who wanted her to acquire Jewish learning. Beis Yaakov was prepared to tolerate this inconsistency, as long as the pupil dedicated herself to the Beis Yaakov ideal. However, following her infringement of the rules, her mother's supplications and promises that from now on she would keep them carried no weight. To this day the woman regrets this, saying that: "I should have dedicated myself properly to Beis Yaakov."

108. Benisch, *To Vanquish the Dragon*, pp. 385-86.

female modesty was the counterpart of the male hasidic concern with avoiding "foreign thoughts" of sexuality which characterized hasidism from its inception. Among men, this ascetic aspect of hasidic spirituality continued into the twentieth century to varying degrees. Part of the Beis Yaakov quest for the holy was expressed in a complementary manner, through the concept of *tzeniut*, both in its visible form, as it applied to clothing, and more elusively, as applied to thoughts and subtleties of behavior.

There is an inherent paradox here. In her personal life, Sarah Schenierer seems rather to resemble the Maid of Ludmir,¹⁰⁹ as opposed to the Chentsiner rebbetzin who was clearly fulfilled as a mother and grandmother prior to entering the final "spiritualized" stage of her life. Sarah Schenierer married at the age of twenty-eight, was later divorced and then married again.¹¹⁰ She had no children. In her life, her work with her pupils and her role as a charismatic or even a spiritual leader were dominant. Her second husband was a Gerrer hasid, who by the nature of Ger asceticism, which espouses an ideal of partial abstinence, could perhaps most easily tolerate a wife of this cast. However, we have seen that the Maid of Ludmir's ascetic tendencies were not welcomed by the hasidic leadership.¹¹¹ We must then enquire what factors facilitated Sarah Schenierer's acceptance by such leading hasidic figures as the Gerrer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai, and many other hasidic and non-hasidic personalities.

One straightforward answer is that this acceptance was a product of the exigency of the times. It was in the context of modernity and the sense that the survival of orthodoxy was endangered that the educational

109. Another possible rare example of an "ascetic" woman figure is described by Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," pp. 519-20 n. 54. See also next note.

110. See Zolty, "And All Your Children Shall Be Learned," p. 281 n. 72. According to Zolty, her first marriage ended following a family tragedy. (See also Weissman, "Beis Yaakov: A Women's Educational Movement," p. 46.) In her description of her Beis Yaakov years ("An American in Cracow," in *Daughters of Destiny* [n. 74 above], pp. 189-208), C. Weinberg Pincus comments on the decrease in intimacy with the girls following Sarah Schenierer's second marriage (p. 197).

111. See Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 522 n. 78, for another example of a girl on the Maid of Ludmir pattern of whom the Vilna Gaon declared that when she married her unnatural spirituality would cease. For rabbinic strictures on too overt feminine spiritual attainment, see the sources listed *ibid.*, p. 521 n. 72.

innovations and the intense spirituality of Sarah Schenierer could be accepted. This sense of emergency is also evinced in the activities of other Eastern European leaders. In 1930, the Hafetz Haim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir ha-Kohen) delivered a sermon to an exclusively female audience at the Great Synagogue in Vilna, an unprecedented event.¹¹² Parallels to this trend can also be detected in the boys' education: partly in response to the challenge of modernity, young men were taught intensive intellectualist approaches to the Talmud,¹¹³ revolutionary and controversial paths of Musar,¹¹⁴ and profoundly esoteric approaches to contemplation in prayer.¹¹⁵ The Habad girls' movement Ahot ha-Temimim in Riga, whose members studied mystical hasidic teachings under the close guidance of Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak (see below), constitutes another example. The challenge of modernity provoked orthodoxy to reach into its inner depths for a response.

While for herself Sarah Schenierer sought an ascetic level of spirituality – albeit translated into the hectic practicalities of funding and running the Beis Yaakov movement – she succeeded in transmitting to her girls a tangible world-oriented form of spirituality, with a strong marriage ethos. Indeed, had this not been so, the very *raison d'être* of Beis Yaakov, from the Gerer Rebbe's point of view,¹¹⁶ would have been belied. There was also a strong vocational aspect in the Beis Yaakov

training, and letters from the female readers of the Beis Yaakov journal indicate a clear motivation towards work and economic productivity.¹¹⁷ This too balanced the hints of female otherworldly spirituality which have been pointed out above. Beis Yaakov combined an attachment to the extraworldly spiritual with a firm determination to have one's feet on the ground.

Studies of this movement indicate that the curriculum did not include hasidic texts; nor did it link itself to any specific hasidic group. It remains a singular example of a synthesis of neo-Orthodoxy, classical feminine pietism, and, for the inner circle of members, a "hasidic" atmosphere of love and dedication focusing on Sarah Schenierer herself.¹¹⁸ It created women who would be the highly motivated wives of hasidim and of other orthodox pietists and who rose to face the personal ethical and spiritual challenges posed by the Holocaust.

In the post-war period in Israel, Britain, and the USA the Beis Yaakov movement fought valiantly to recover from the tragedy of the Holocaust which had decimated its ranks. As an educational movement it has thrived – also continuing to provide wives for the ascetically inclined Gerer hasidim.¹¹⁹ This implies the presence of a strong level of idealism, although it is not clear to what extent the full force of the spiritual, otherworldly dimension of the pre-war Beis Yaakov movement has survived.¹²⁰

112. See Rappoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 524 n. 82. In 1934 Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn delivered a talk to women in Riga enunciating their responsibility for ensuring that their children received a traditional education and their power as activists on behalf of the ideal of family purity. He advocated sending their sons to "good *frum hadarim* and *yeshivot* where one studies Torah with *yirai shmazayim*" and sending their daughters to "good *frum* educators [the feminine form of the word]" (*Likkutei Dibburim* [4th edition, Kfar Habad, 1973], end of vol. 3, no pagination but corresponding to 1142ff.).
113. See N. Solomon, "*Hilug* and *Haqira*: A Study in the Method of the Lithuanian Haskhists," *Dine Yisrael* 4 (1973), pp. lxx-cvi, and his unpublished doctoral thesis "The Analytic Movement in Rabbinic Jurisprudence" (University of Manchester, 1966).
114. See D. E. Fishman, "Musar and Modernity: The Case of Novaredek," *Modern Judaism* 8 (1988), pp. 41–64.
115. See N. Loewenthal, "Habad Approaches to Contemplative Prayer, 1790–1920," in *Hasidism Reappraised* (n. 29 above), pp. 288–300.
116. See n. 76 above.

117. See Weissman, "Bais Yaakov: A Women's Educational Movement," pp. 81–82, 92–94. See also J. Tydor Baumel, "Kevuzat ha-Zehnerschaft ke-Dugma le-Hitarganut Nashim le-Ezrah Haddadit ba-Mahanot," *Dappin le-Heker ha-Shoah* 10 (1993), pp. 107–27. (For a more extensive treatment of the Zehnerschaft in English, see her forthcoming article "Ruchka and the Two Rivkas: The Leadership of the Zehnerschaft in Piaszów," in *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust* [London and Washington, 1998].)
118. Furthermore, in no way would the term "female rebbe" ever have been applied to Sarah Schenierer; that too would have spelled the end of the movement. Polen notes that in reporting the case of the Chenshiner Rebbezin at the same period the Agudah newspaper *Togblata* also avoided this term ("Miriam's Dance," n. 1 above, p. 13).
119. However, see n. 158 below.
120. El-Or's discussion of the women of Gur includes an interesting description of the women visiting the grave of Rabbi Yisrael Alter (d. 1977), the fourth rebbe, on the anniversary of his death. Two hours in the late morning are set aside specifically for the women, with transport arranged to take them to the cemetery on the Mount of Olives (*Educated and Ignorant*, p. 151). See n. 94 above.

Habad: Female Activism and Study of Hasidic Teachings

At this juncture we turn to a consideration of a further stage of development of the role of the woman within hasidism: the emergence of female hasidic activism and study of hasidic texts in the Habad movement.¹²¹ In the late 1930s this trend resulted in the formation of an unprecedented study circle, the *Ahot ha-Temimim*, in which young women studied mystical teachings, with the direct guidance of the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak. At the same time a similar but less intensive group was set up in New York. In the 1950s the seventh rebbe approved the teaching of Habad mystical texts in the growing network of Lubavitch girls' schools, providing a novel halakhic basis justifying such study. This was paralleled by increasing levels of empowerment of Habad women, ranging from the establishment of national and international women's conventions to the formal recognition by the rebbe and consequently by the whole community of the role of the *sheliah*, the female emissary. These developments led to a sense of consciousness for many women that they are themselves Lubavitch hasidic followers and representatives in their own right, independent and sometimes a step ahead of their husbands.

The roots of this development may be traced to the efforts of Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak to bring the concept of the woman activist to the USA during his 1929–30 visit there, as described by Ada Rapoport-Albert.¹²² Faced with the not surprising decline of religious observance in the New World, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak set up a network of Women's Associations for Family Purity with the aim of encouraging the use of the *mikveh* (ritual bath). In a letter sent from New York he advocated the direct involvement of women in this campaign:

The main thing is that one has to try to ensure that the activists in this matter should be the women themselves. They will be the ones who inspire and organize. One should find young women for, with the help of God, they have great power to influence their peers. We

121. The groundwork for this has been laid by Rapoport-Albert in "On Women in Hasidism" (n. 1 above), pp. 523–25 nn. 82–83.

122. *Ibid.*, n. 82.

have seen tangibly that when they take on themselves the organization of such a campaign they are successful, with God's help.¹²³

In 1936, now residing in the Warsaw suburb of Otwock, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak not only encouraged the practical activism and organizational power of women in the campaign for family purity but also enunciated the necessity for women to engage in study of hasidic teachings.

To a considerable extent I have an important aim in the *Siḥot* [the publication in Yiddish of R. Yosef Yitzhak's talks] – to give the wives and daughters of the hasidim the possibility to grasp the nature of the hasidic path, and to provide material to parents of Habad stock so that they can tell their sons and their daughters about the hasidic path in an interesting way.¹²⁴

During the 1930s a considerable number of Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's talks were published in Yiddish in Riga and Warsaw, under the title *Likkutei Dibburim*.¹²⁵ The talks address Habad ideals, both in story form and as accounts of discussions held by the rebbe during hasidic gatherings, and constitute an important source for some of the more profound aspects of Habad thought. During the same period, from 1928 till 1940, a series of over forty of Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's hasidic discourses, some in Yiddish, were published in separate pamphlets called *kumtrestim*. These talks and

123. *Iggerot Kodesh...* R. Yosef Yitzhak, vol. 2 (Brooklyn, 1982), p. 253.

124. *Iggerot Kodesh...* R. Yosef Yitzhak, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, 1983), p. 13. Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak made a similar statement in an earlier letter from December 1935, written to Mordechai Hefetz and discussed below (*Iggerot Kodesh...* R. Yosef Yitzhak, vol. 3 [Brooklyn, 1983], pp. 468–70, esp. p. 470). Rapoport-Albert cites the letter from Otwock but minimizes the force of the appeal to women to study the *Siḥot* ("On Women in Hasidism," p. 524 n. 82). The earlier letter to Mordechai Hefetz and the founding of the organization *Ahot ha-Temimim* in Riga in 1937 (see below) indicates its significance. In the letter from Otwock, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak comments those homes where the male members – father or husband – explain the *Siḥot* to the women. This is not a limitation of the process of women studying the *Siḥot*, as Rapoport-Albert implies, but an extension of it. However, as she points out, the letter makes clear that Yosef Yitzhak did not want this study to replace the practical activism needed for the campaign for family purity.

125. The complete set of *Likkutei Dibburim* appeared in 4 volumes (Brooklyn, 1957–58), and in English translation by U. Kaploun (Brooklyn, 1988).

discourses comprised the core material for a new initiative concerning Habad women: the founding in 1937 in Riga of Ahot ha-Temimim, followed a year later by the formation of a similar group in New York.

Ahot ha-Temimim

The history of the Riga group¹²⁶ begins with a request from the esteemed Latvian Jewish activist and political leader, Rabbi Mordechai Dubin (d. 1948), to the hasid Rabbi Mordechai Hefetz (d. 1940), that his future daughter-in-law be taught hasidic teachings. Hefetz in turn consulted with Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak concerning this unusual request, and received the following interesting reply. The sixth rebbe stated in the name of his grandfather, Rabbi Shmuel (1833–1882), the fourth rebbe, that for authentic Habad hasidim "there is no difference between a son or a daughter."¹²⁷ In contrast to conventional practice, one also has to teach girls "the paths of hasidism." As support for this view he cited the anecdotal evidence that the famous eighteenth-century sage Hayyim ibn Attar taught his daughters Scripture on an advanced level, and these lessons formed the basis of his mystical commentary on the Torah.¹²⁸

Nonetheless, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak went on to say that serious hasidic study – i.e., of the discourses – will be difficult for most girls, although suitable for some. The problem is the need for prior familiarity with a wide range of subtle ideas. At the same time, he suggested another genre of hasidic teaching as suitable for women. By this he meant the *Sifhot*, literally "talks," in which hasidic teachings are more fully explicated and illustrated by stories. He also recommended a specific Yiddish discourse with a predominantly ethical content, *Maamar Kinyan ha-Hayyim*, published as the first of the *kuntresim*.

Hefetz began studying with the girl, but chose a quite profound section of *Likkutei Dibburim* as his subject matter.¹²⁹ He reported this back to the rebbe, who responded that this material was too difficult, not intrinsically

126. See S. B. Levin's introduction to *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 4, pp. 10–13.

127. See n. 59 above.

128. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 3, p. 469.

129. *Likkutei Dibburim*, vol. 2, pp. 572–602.

but because Hefetz tried to teach it too quickly. Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak also outlined an approach to study which included the demand for independent oral expression and also the development of written skills, again recommending the ethical discourse *Kinyan ha-Hayyim*.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's aim was that this female student of hasidic teachings should develop the ability to write about hasidic ideas. Hefetz should advise her that "an idea or concept which she understands well... after thinking deeply about it two or three times she should write it down (in the language in which she writes all her personal matters), and try to explain it to herself in writing."¹³⁰ As an initial literary attempt, he recommended that she choose a story from the *Sifhot* and write about it together with its hasidic meaning.¹³¹ The rebbe's encouraging letter to Hefetz regarding his private pupil continued with a story about the significant role played by women in the rise of neo-Orthodoxy in Frankfurt,¹³² clearly meant to emphasize the importance of Hefetz's achievement with the young bride-to-be.

Some time later, in 1937, the concept of Ahot ha-Temimim crystallized and was implemented.¹³³ Three rabbis, including Hefetz, were appointed as *rov'im*, or spiritual guides. The program of instruction included

130. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 3, pp. 623–24. For the discourse *Kinyan ha-Hayyim*, see *Sefer ha-Maamarim: Kuntresim* (5th edition; Brooklyn, 1986), vol. 1, fols. 2a–15b.

131. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 3, pp. 623–24.

132. Ibid. According to this account, Rabbi Shalom Dober, the fifth rebbe, was introduced to "an honored woman" in 1885 by Rabbi Azriel Hildersheimer (1820–1899), during a visit to Berlin. She was one of the first three women in Frankfurt, who, under Sampson Raphael Hirsch's influence, began to observe the laws of *nikveh* and other aspects of strictly observant Judaism. According to Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak, these three women had a key role in the founding of the intensely orthodox community in that town.

133. A letter from Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak (*Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 4, pp. 62–63), from early summer 1938, reprimands Hefetz for his lack of alacrity in organizing the Ahot ha-Temimim. For a list of relevant letters, see the editor's note on p. 62. See *ibid.*, p. 171, for a letter from late 1938 to the Warsaw journal *Ha-Tanin*, advising that an article be written about the already existing institution of Ahot ha-Temimim. See also P. Przov's memoirs about Ahot ha-Temimim in Riga in *Die Yiddische Heim*, vol. 32, no. 3 (121), Kislev 5757/1997, pp. 23–28, including a photograph of the members (from *Yahadut Laniva: Sefer Zikkaron*, ed. B. Eliav, M. Bubah, A. Kramer [Tel Aviv, 1953], pp. 240–41, ill. 67).

discourses, those which make an inner demand (*maamarei avodah*) in particular, as well as *sikhov*. In addition, hasidic gatherings (*hivva'aduyot*) were to be held.¹³⁴ The *hivva'adut* was an important adjunct to the process of internalization of the hasidic ethos as is seen from the history of the Lubavitch yeshivah *Tomkhei Teminim*, founded forty years earlier.¹³⁵ One of the goals of these gatherings, also found in Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's letters concerning Ahot ha-Teminim, is to foster a sense of love and unity among the participants.¹³⁶

The founding of the Lubavitch yeshivah for boys, where youths were taught *Tanya*, mystical philosophy, and the art of contemplative prayer, was an unusual step in its day. The very choice of name Ahot ha-Teminim for the girls' group created an affinity between her and the ideals that yeshivah represented: she was the sister of the Teminim.¹³⁷

The members of the Riga Ahot ha-Teminim group were expected not only to study, but to spread hasidic ideals and the observance of practical *mitzvo*t. They were given the task of seeing to the translation (into Yiddish) and the dissemination of discourses, as well as of campaigning for observance of the laws of family purity and other aspects of Judaism.¹³⁸ Thus spiritual study was combined with practical activism.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's approval of spiritual study by women was not limited to *Sikhov* and hasidic discourses. In response to a query from a member of the Riga group, a girl named Chaya Sima Michalover, concerning how she could "fill the emptiness of actions," the rebbe responded with what amounts to a tract on contemplation in study, in

134. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, 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.
135. During a *hivva'adut* a guide (*maspila*) communicates and elicits responses with sensitivity and intimacy. See Loewenthal, "Social Ramifications" (n. 67 above).
136. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 4, p. 391.
137. Concurrently, in the United States, evening study programs of hasidic teachings for men were established under the name *Ahei Teminim*, or brothers of the *Teminim*. See *ibid.*, p. 351, a letter from early summer 1938.
138. *Ibid.*, p. 391. The Yiddish letter on pp. 377-87 includes a *Sifah* on the theme of the spirituality of each Jew. It was sent to the Riga Ahot ha-Teminim in order to be published and disseminated there (see the editor's note, p. 377). Regarding the demand for practical activism, see p. 385.

which he imparted a method to "bond with the soul... with the essence" of the teaching one is studying.¹³⁹ The rebbe explained that it is possible to learn how to engage in deep thought for an extended time, acquiring a sense of "delight." This process requires humility, but it can be achieved. He continued with a detailed depiction of a system of intellectualist meditation, starting with an initial "concept" (i.e., a concept drawn from one's study of Torah) in which one reaches ever higher levels of abstraction, beyond all definitions, with the goal being mystical unity with "the concept as it is in itself."¹⁴⁰

Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's personal guidance to a young woman outlining a method of spiritual meditation is possibly unique in the history of Jewish mysticism. However, considering the Upper-Lower Unity polarity in hasidism, we must ask whether this meditative system is likely to carry her away from the world, or bring her more profoundly *into* the world? Does it lead her into the Upper Unity mode, away from the conventional female roles? Based on the letter's context, it seems that the rebbe's aim was the enhancement of a sense of personal spirituality which would empower the individual to engage in the practical work of strengthening Judaism in Latvia. Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak directed the members of Ahot

139. *Ibid.*, p. 469. Concerning this letter's recipient, see also the introduction to this volume of letters, p. 12 n. 25; in 1938 she was involved in translating one of Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's letters from Hebrew to Yiddish: "On the Moral and Educational Significance of Habad Hasidism: A Reply by [R. Yosef Yitzhak] to a Letter from Germany."
140. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 4, pp. 470-72. Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak states that of the three garments of the soul: thought, speech, and action (cf. *Tanya*, 1, chap. 4), thought is the most intimate. Yet in thought too, there are thought, speech, and action. One's goal should be to cleave to the "thought" aspect of the thought, beyond the "letters" which define it. (Regarding the levels of "thought, speech, and action" of thought depicted as ascending levels of spirituality, see *Tanya* 4, sec. 19, fol. 129a.) Through this one comes to true union with the "concept" as it truly is, beyond any veil or garment, and is unified with it. In terms of Yosef Yitzhak's teachings, this process means bonding with the spirituality or even Godliness within the sacred concept which is the subject of this contemplation. See *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 3, pp. 525-26, on the different levels of "intellect," "life force," and "Godliness" in each concept that one studies, and the task of becoming sensitive to these levels through contemplation (quoted in Rabbi M. M. Schneerson, *Ha-Yom Yom* [Brooklyn, 1943], entry for 20 Tammuz).

ha-Temimim towards this task, in which Chaya Sima Michailover herself was involved.

A similar direction is evident in a talk delivered by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak to the Riga members of Ahot ha-Temimim during his stay there from December 1939 till 4 March 1940, while on his journey out of Europe. He acceded to the group's request for a meeting. They came as a group, and two girls, one from the older class and one from the younger, each recited by heart the precis of a Hebrew *maamar* (discourse).¹⁴¹ Recital by heart of a *maamar* was something for which the young men of Tomkhei Temimim were noted. Now girls were doing it as well. In his address, the sixth rebbe expounded on the nature of hasidic teaching, which changes the person without "breaking" him, and the need for knowledge of halakhah, since "an ignorant person cannot be a *hasid* (pious)" (Ethics 2:5). The rebbe noted the special task facing Ahot ha-Temimim at a period of moral confusion: to awaken in the Jewish daughter the inner spirit of Jewish life which will dissipate false values and enable her to achieve her full spiritual stature. The rebbe addressed these girls as he would a group of male hasidim. He also imparted a warning:

Every field of knowledge grants a certain strength. The study of hasidic teachings also imparts a certain toughness (*tokef*). Hasidic toughness is true virtue. However, "there is no good without bad." Sometimes this results in a lack of obedience to the teacher, or a sense of dismissal towards one's parents. But this opposes the main principles of hasidic teaching.¹⁴²

141. One recited a precis of *Tzohar Ta'aseh la-Tevah* published in 1935 (*Sefer Ha-Maamarim: Kuratresim* [Brooklyn, 1972], vol. 2, pp. 686-92); the other recited a precis of a discourse on *LeCh leChva*, presumably the one delivered by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak in late 1939, which would have been transcribed and mimeographed for study, and was later printed in *Sefer ha-Maamarim 5700* (Brooklyn, 1967), pp. 12-21. A transcription of this *yehidut* was published in the Lubavitch women's magazine, *Die Yiddische Heim*, Summer 5741 (1981), pp. 17-19. An editorial comment suggests the *yehidut* was transcribed by a learned hasid, possibly Rabbi Izhak (Chartzke) Fagin, who was in Riga at the time and was a noted *hozer* (a person with the ability to remember and repeat an extended teaching by the rebbe). This is also described by P. Pizov in *Die Yiddische Heim* (n. 133 above).

142. *Die Yiddische Heim*, Summer 5741 (1981), pp. 18-19.

Although he clearly imparted a sense of spiritual power to these young women, at the same time Yosef Yitzhak issued a warning urging control, balance, and acceptance of conventional authority. This warning could as easily have been addressed to the young male students of the Tomkhei Temimim *yeshivah*. While the ultimate goal was one of empowerment and activism, the conventional structure of society was to be maintained.

Several months later, in June 1940, Soviet rule began in Riga, followed by the Nazi occupation in July 1941. Rabbi Mordechai Hefetz and other leading Habad hasidim were killed. Most of the members of Ahot ha-Temimim perished as well. But, prior to this tragedy, their movement had been duplicated in the USA. Consequently, in effect, it survives to the present.¹⁴³

The US Branch of Ahot ha-Temimim

Two years earlier, in 1938, Rabbi Mordechai Hefetz had traveled from Riga to New York. Hefetz conducted a moving hasidic gathering in the Brooklyn synagogue of the Habad hasid Rabbi Elyahu Simpson (d. 1976), with hasidic melodies and stories. Hefetz noticed that Rabbi Simpson's teenage daughter Rachel, who was in the women's section, was trying to follow the content of the men's hasidic gathering. Hefetz approached the curtain dividing the women's section from that of the men. "Do you want to learn hasidic teachings?" he asked her, in Yiddish. "Certainly!" she responded.¹⁴⁴ Following this encounter, Hefetz encouraged a group of girls from New York to request permission from the rebbe in Otwock to set up an Ahot ha-Temimim society for the purpose of studying hasidic teachings. In the summer of 1938 the rebbe responded warmly with a letter to the girls in English; concurrently he sent a letter to

143. Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak was interested in duplicating the Riga group in other cities. Shortly after it was founded he wrote to a follower in Kovno encouraging the formation of a similar group. This follower, Rabbi Pinhas Mintz, at once set up a study group with his own daughter - who had already expressed a desire to study hasidic teachings - and some of her friends and began teaching them a hasidic discourse. See *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 4, pp. 186-87, 216.

144. Rachel (Simpson) Feldman of Baltimore, Maryland, telephone conversation with author, 10 December 1994.

three Habad rabbis in New York, appointing them spiritual mentors to the American Ahot ha-Temimim, which followed the Riga model in conception.¹⁴⁵

The program outlined by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak mandated that the girls study discourses or *Tanya* weekly with one of the guides, meeting frequently for independent study of the *Sifot* as well. At the fortnightly or monthly *hitva'adut*, individual girls should speak and articulate their own opinions about the topics they have been studying.¹⁴⁶ The goals of the group, in Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's words, are: "to appreciate the pleasantness of the hasidic path, whether as regards observing the mitzvot, *tikkun ha-middot*, or subtlety of understanding. [The latter means] to appreciate how hasidic teachings take each concept *eidel und reikh* [in a subtle and deeply meaningful way]."¹⁴⁷ As in his letter to Chaya Sima Michalover in Riga, we see an emphasis here not only on action but also on thought.

145. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 4, p. 361. For the English letter to the girls themselves, see pp. 362-63. In practice, the running of the American group differed from that of Riga: it was less scholarly (oral communications from Miriam and Rachel Simpson, now Gordon and Feldman respectively, 7 December and 10 December 1994). For a description of the meetings by Rische (Gordon) Deitsch, granddaughter of Rabbi Yohanan Gordon (d. 1969) who taught the group, see her "Life as We Know It," *Nishei Habad Newsletter*, April 1997, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 54-55.

146. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 4, p. 361. See also the English letter sent to the group from Otwock, *ibid.*, pp. 362-63. Miriam Gordon, nee Simpson, informed me in a conversation that in fact they had only one class a week: taught by Rabbi Yochanan Gordon, in Brownsville one week, and by Rabbi Kazarnowski in Bensonhurst on the other. Rabbi Gordon taught *Sifot* in a warm and intimate way, perhaps like a *hitva'adut*. Mrs. Gordon (who later married his son) tells of the great excitement with which she attended his weekly classes. Rabbi Kazarnowski taught *Tanya*. The meetings were held on Saturday nights in the winter, and on Sunday nights in the summer. Girls came from various parts of New York in order to participate. Most, but not all, were from Habad families. An average of ten girls would attend each meeting (Miriam Gordon, oral communication, 7 December 1994). These details were corroborated by Mrs. Gordon's older sister, Rachel Feldman. According to her, however, the main subject taught by Rabbi Gordon was *maamarim*. Rabbi Jacobson also taught from time to time. Occasionally there would be a *farbrengen* (*hitva'adut*), such as on Chanukah (oral communication, 10 December 1994). According to S. B. Levin, these meetings continued till 1942, when the Beth Rivkah and Beth Sarah network of Lubavitch girls' schools was founded (*History of Habad in the U.S.A. 1900-1950* [Hebrew; Brooklyn, 1988], pp. 147, 284).

147. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 4, p. 361.

Nonetheless the American Ahot ha-Temimim was also an activist group, whose initial goal was to attract more members.¹⁴⁸

In Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's view, the Sisters of the Temimim institution paralleled the Brothers of the Temimim organization which was established in New York at the same time.¹⁴⁹ He also seems to have accorded them similar degrees of spiritual significance, for he asked from his base in Otwock to be informed of the precise times each week when the two groups are studying, "for it will be a great delight to have in mind the hours when the Ahei ha-Temimim and Ahot Temimim are studying hasidic teachings."¹⁵⁰

In the autumn of 1941, while he was campaigning for a worldwide fast to mark the plight of European Jewry, and struggling to arrange the rescue of leading rabbinic figures (he had travelled to Washington earlier that year to see Eleanor Roosevelt for this purpose), not only did Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak express interest in the Ahot ha-Temimim and arrange for his close aide Rabbi Hodakov to address them,¹⁵¹ he also campaigned on a much wider front for comprehensive Jewish education for women. In his *Zikhronim*, edited by D. L. Meckler, which appeared regularly in the *Morgen Zurnal* newspaper, Yosef Yitzhak enunciated the importance of Torah study for women through a series of stories about learned women of the past.¹⁵²

A further step in the education of women came in 1942, with the launching of the Lubavitch network of girls' schools, Beth Rivkah, in the United States. Beginning in Brooklyn, additional branches were set up in

148. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 6 (Brooklyn, 1983), p. 40.

149. See *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak* vol. 4, p. 351, for a letter sent ten days prior to the founding of the American Ahot ha-Temimim group. This was an evening study group. After 1941 Ahot Temimim became the generic name for the local *veshivot* set up in a number of towns. See Levin, *History of Habad in the U.S.A.*, pp. 223-70.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 399.

151. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak* (Brooklyn, 1983), vol. 5, pp. 463-64. See the contemporaneous telegrams to Chief Rabbis Herzog of Palestine and Hertz of London, appealing for a fast day, on pp. 464-65.

152. See the stories about Perl, the wife of the Maharal of Prague, and Rachel, grandmother of Rabbi Shneur Zalman in *Lubavitcher Rebbin's Zikhronim* (Brooklyn, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 135, 168-72. The *Zikhronim* articles appeared in the *Morgen Zurnal* from October 1940 to February 1942. Vol. 1 was published in Brooklyn, 1947.

other cities.¹⁵³ Initially these Lubavitch schools were probably quite similar to the Beis Yaakov schools which were being established in the USA. Although members of the New York Ahot ha-Temimim group helped to establish and run these schools, hasidic teachings as such were not on the curriculum. After 1950, under the seventh rebbe's leadership, the network of Beth Rivkah schools was expanded to other countries. At this point a crucial question was raised: should the pupils be taught hasidic teachings?

In 1954 the seventh rebbe responded to this very question in a letter to the principal of the Beth Rivkah School in Yerres near Paris. Citing the example of the Riga Ahot ha-Temimim, the rebbe strongly advocated the study of *Tanya* and other hasidic teachings by female students.¹⁵⁴ He presented a novel halakhic basis for this directive: a woman is required to keep all non-timebound positive commandments, and all the negative commandments, which include the six perpetual commandments listed in *Sefer ha-Hinukh*. These are: to believe in God, not to believe in any power apart from Him, to appreciate His Unity, to love Him and to fear Him, and not to stray after one's desires.¹⁵⁵ The seventh rebbe claims that these spiritual attainments are facilitated by hasidic teachings, hence, he states, it is halakhically correct for girls to study them.¹⁵⁶ This represents a further stage in the Habad elaboration of the basic idea that "a woman should study the laws that apply to her." It now included not only a large amount of halakhic material, as defined by Rabbi Shneur Zalman, but mystical teachings as well.

153. See Levin, *History of Habad in the U.S.A.*, pp. 284-93. The first school was in Brooklyn, then other branches were set up elsewhere in the United States. Some of the early schools were called Beth Sarah, in memory of Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's mother who died in 1942. Rachel Simpson, one of the founding members of Ahot ha-Temimim in New York, was assigned the task of organizing the Beth Rivkah afternoon school in Boston (Rachel Simpson, telephone communication with author, 10 December 1994).

154. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Menahem Mendel* (Brooklyn, 1988), vol. 8, p. 133.

155. *Ibid.* This list appears in the author's preface to the thirteenth-century treatise *Sefer ha-Hinukh*.

156. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Menahem Mendel*, vol. 8, p. 133.

The Question of Empowerment

It is pertinent to enquire whether the substantial amount of knowledge of texts and commentaries acquired by these women grants them any level of empowerment. In her study of women in a modern Israeli community of Gerrer hasidim, Tamar El-Or argues that their education, as opposed to that of the men in the community, leads only to an educated ratification of submission. The emphasis for the adult woman, with her days in seminary behind her, lies in questions about simple practicalities rather than philosophical ideas.¹⁵⁷

Without discussing El-Or's interpretation of the fascinating material she has collected regarding Gerrer women, let us now ask a similar question in the context of our investigation of Habad women. One of the Gerrer women teachers quoted by El-Or said the following to her class: "You know, after all, that there are no women Hasidim, right? [Laughter in the room.] There are only daughters of Hasidim and wives of Hasidim."¹⁵⁸ Would her Habad counterpart echo this sentiment? And if not, wherein lies the difference?

157. El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant* (n. 1 above).

158. El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant*, p. 103. According to another respondent, Esther Katz (Wiernick) of Jerusalem, the daughter of a prominent Gerrer hasid (Rabbi Haim Bunim Wiernick, d. 1961), not all Gerrer women would agree with this assessment. She states it is true that the Gerrer Rebbe does not see women. Yet many Gerrer women insist that their husbands consult the rebbe before making any major decisions; women and girls wait to see the rebbe at his *hof* in Geulah in Jerusalem; they pray in the rebbe's synagogue - a recent innovation; two rooms have been set aside for them there, one for married women and one for girls; during the break in the Shabbat morning prayers (a feature of Gerrer hasidism instituted by Rabbi Yisrael Alter) when the men study Talmud, the women have a class which includes Gerrer hasidic commentaries on the scriptural portion of the week (telephone conversation, 18 May 1997). One aspect of the increase in the "hasidic" content of the lives of the Gerrer women and girls can be explained as a response to the difficulty Gerrer young men experience in finding brides. According to a popular article by K. Bleich, in the Israeli Gerrer community there are more unmarried men than women, particularly because the Gerrer yeshivot have succeeded in attracting large numbers of boys from non-Gerrer families into the movement. The highly ascetic lifestyle of Gur has militated against attracting girls from other orthodox groups, and some girls from Gerrer families - especially those from the USA - have preferred non-Gerrer husbands (K. Bleich, *Maariv*, 5 February 1995). Strengthening the Gerrer hasidic ethos among women and girls in the community can be seen as an attempt to counter this trend. Concomitant to changes in the

Around the beginning of the twentieth century we see the emergence of a small number of "strong" women in Habad. One such was Rochel-Leah Kugel (née Segalovitch), grandmother of the celebrated hasidic teacher Reb Mendel Futerfas,¹⁵⁹ who was reportedly taught how to study Habad hasidic teachings by her father.¹⁶⁰ She used to attend and was able to follow the fifth rebbe's discourses – standing somewhere out of sight of the men – and engaged in independent study of Habad hasidic texts. In the presence of men, however, she studied only those works generally considered appropriate for women, such as *Tzema u-Re'ema*. She sometimes studied with two or three other women, also from noted Habad families.¹⁶¹

This study, combined with other factors, seems to have given her an unusual sense of authority: she regarded herself as empowered to uphold the Habad ethos, sometimes battling with men holding official positions in the community. Family tradition attributes to her a hand in contemporary hasidic politics – the conflict between Lubavitch and Kopys¹⁶² – and the question of secular education in the *heder* (which she opposed). She insisted on having a say in the appointment of teachers and ritual slaughterers, ensuring that they were men of the desired ideology: "There would be a meeting of rabbanim sitting at the table. She would stand by the door wearing a silk headscarf. If they said something she did not like, she would come and bang on the table."¹⁶³

central Gerer synagogue, Gerer seminars have been founded for the education of girls from Gerer families who would otherwise be sent to Beis Yaakov. This pattern is strikingly similar to the motivation for the founding of Beis Yaakov some seventy years earlier, and, later, for the establishment of seminars for Sarnar girls (see n. 10 above).

159. During the Stalin years in the USSR he set up secret *hadarim* for children. In 1947 he was imprisoned for eight-and-a-half years for helping Jews escape from Russia. In 1963 he was allowed to leave the Soviet Union after efforts made on his behalf by Mr. Wilson, then head of the British Labour Party, during an official visit. He lived in London until his appointment in 1971 as *maspia* in the Kfar Habad Yeshiva. He died in 1995.

160. See above, n. 59.

161. Reb Mendel Futerfas, oral communication, 10 December 1994.

162. A rival branch of Habad founded by Rabbi Yehudah Leib, a son of the Zemanah Zedek. He was succeeded by his son Rabbi Shlomo Zalman (d. 1900), author of *Maggen Avot* (Berdichev, 1902). See Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite*, p. 244 n. 46.

163. Beryl Futerfas (son of Reb Mendel), oral communication, 10 December 1994.

At this time of social, political, and religious ferment strong female figures were not confined to Habad.¹⁶⁴ A few decades later, as we have seen, the war years created some powerful¹⁶⁵ women in the Beis Yaakov movement, such as the members of the Zehnerschaft. There is also evidence for the spiritual power of a group of Hungarian hasidic girls and their effect on the despairing orthodox girls in Auschwitz.¹⁶⁶ The enforced heroism of these girls implies empowerment to the extreme. There was a comparable effect on a number of Habad women in the very different circumstances pertaining in Communist Russia at the same period.

David Fishman has studied the efforts of Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak, the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, to preserve Judaism in the land of revolution.¹⁶⁷

164. See N. Polen, "Where Heaven and Earth Touched," *Jewish Action* 56 (5756/1995), on the Hebrew literary works of Malkah Shapira (Bat-Zion), 1884–1971, member of a family of Polish hasidic Admunim. She describes a number of authoritative female figures in her family.

165. My concept of "power" here concerns personal moral empowerment, independent of social structures. The members of the Zehnerschaft were morally empowered to an extreme; however, as regards their position in society, at the mercy of the Nazi jackboot, they were utterly helpless.

166. Anna Eilenberg recounts: "My greatest sources of inspiration were the girls from Hungary... There was one... who came to Auschwitz in the late spring of 1944. By some miracle, the *chassidische* girl had managed to smuggle in a small *siddur* she had been given by her father. The little *siddur* became the greatest treasure and the biggest secret in our entire block... We used to wait until the *blokova* went off for a drink before we all gathered around the girl to listen to her saying some *Tehillin*. She used to read to us in a quiet, clear voice, emphasizing the meaning of each *passuk*... In those few moments, we were all able to temporarily forget our miserable surroundings and lift ourselves up out of our sordid reality. We all knew that if we were caught, we would be put to death without hesitation" (*Sisters in the Storm*, ed. P. Soloveitchik [New York, London, and Jerusalem, 1992], pp. 155–56). She continues with a description of an event she herself did not witness, of the Hungarian hasidic girl leading an imaginary Seder on Passover, visualizing the lighting of the candles, the drinking of the wine, and the other rituals (p. 157). See also Goida Katz-Libet's account of "A Siddur in Auschwitz," in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. J. Eibeshitz and A. Eibeshitz (Brooklyn, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 205–7. See above p. 33–34 for a discussion of the question of using such material as a historical source.

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

While the rebbe himself was forced to leave Russia in 1927, many of his followers remained behind. Some suffered martyrdom for their beliefs. Rabbi Yitzhak Elhanan Shagalov was one of these. His wife Maryasha and their six children carried on the struggle to preserve Judaism.

One of these children, named Rochel, described her mother's life as a widow in the USSR during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Maryasha's husband had given his life for the preservation of Judaism: Maryasha dedicated hers to the same ideal. There was a constant battle to observe all aspects of Jewish law, including the Sabbath in particular, and to ensure that her children did so. This meant keeping them out of school, a measure which also protected them from communist ideology. When the authorities began to enquire why the children were not in school, Maryasha would move away and find somewhere else to live.¹⁶⁸

Maryasha's Jewish knowledge was based on the *Tzena u-Re'ena* and three popular Yiddish works telling wondrous stories of the Maharal, the Baal Shem Tov, and the Shpoler Zeide.¹⁶⁹ She knew how to pray and say Psalms, but did not study in Hebrew.¹⁷⁰ Yet this was sufficient to empower her to stand against the tide and to bring up her children to do so as well. Her daughter said:

We were outcasts, outcasts from childhood, because we were different. In our town where we lived, we were the only family... where the children did not go to school, because going to school means transgressing Shabbos, and becoming a young communist, and eventually one goes on to become a communist.¹⁷¹

168. Rochel (Shagalov) Liberow, recorded interview with Dr. Kate-Miriam Loewenthal, 1978. See Loewenthal's "Patterns of Religious Development and Experience in Habad-Hasidic Women," *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* 12 (1988), pp. 5-6.

169. The works on the Maharal and the Shpoler Zeide (Rabbi Aryeh Leib, d. 1812) may have been Yiddish translations of Yudel Rosenberg's *Nyfla'ot Maharal mi-Prag 'in ha-Golem* (Warsaw, 1909) and *Tyferet Maharal mi-Shpole* (Piotrkow, 1912). See I. Robinson, "Literary Forgerly and Hasidic Judaism: The Case of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg," *Judaism* 40 (1991), pp. 61-78.

170. Rochel Liberow, daughter of Maryashe, oral communication to author, 3 June 1998.

171. Rochel Liberow (then Lewin), recorded interview with Dr. Kate Loewenthal, 1978. Maryasha now lives in Brooklyn, a recognized Habad heroine, famous also for her hundreds of descendants, many of whom are sheitlim and sheitlot.

This ability to live with an ethos entirely different from that of surrounding society is one aspect of the USSR experience for Habad women under communism: another concerns the power of organization. Thus Sarah Katzenellenbogen, known as *die mume Sarah* (aunt Sarah), is seen as a heroine of a different kind, a key organizer and activist within Habad during the same period. An account by non-Habad member Rachel Pomerantz characterizes her as follows:

Sarah Katzenellenbogen was a widow of great talent and energy. Originally a businesswoman, she later began devoting her talents to protecting and liberating her co-religionists. She would appear occasionally in Alma-Ata during the war years, swathed in a large grey wool cape. In pockets under the cape she concealed documents she was carrying from one place to another to help exiles, prisoners or others threatened by the police. During the Lemberg period, she was active in sending children and *yeshivah* students across the border.¹⁷²

War and similar extremes of experience summon exceptional resources of energy and character. One aspect of pietism, in particular hasidic pietism, could be defined as the attempt to tap these resources in seemingly more conventional surroundings. The religious activist sees through the deceptive calm and identifies the spiritual battle in which he or she is a key protagonist. We have seen the sixth rebbe's efforts to enlist female activists in the USA. His successor, the seventh rebbe, created a new concept: the *shelupah*, the female emissary, generally (but not always) the wife of a *shaliach*.

172. R. Pomerantz, *Wings above the Flames: Stories of Flight, Escape and Divine Providence during the Holocaust* (London, New York, and Jerusalem, 1992), p. 193. This is an example of a relatively recent literary genre: popular wartime biographies, written by orthodox women about orthodox women, utilizing personal interviews and to some extent written materials. These are intended for a predominantly female orthodox public. It goes without saying that great care is needed in trying to use such works as historical evidence. However, the depiction of Aunt Sarah has been corroborated by oral communication from her son Moshe Katzenellenbogen in London. When caught by the NKVD *die muma Sarah* was sentenced to death. This was commuted to imprisonment, but she died in prison.

The Shelulah

This concept goes far beyond the sixth rebbe's earlier call for women's activism on behalf of the "female commandments," although this call itself should not be underestimated.¹⁷³ The post-war shelulah exercises qualities of leadership, organizational power and even charisma, with the goal of strengthening Jewish life – as defined by Lubavitch – in her neighborhood, which may be very broadly perceived.

Here the power to live subtly apart from prevailing society,¹⁷⁴ and also sophisticated organizational ability, qualities glimpsed above in situations of threat and adversity, become important adjuncts to the peacetime conduct of a spiritual battle. The sense of continuity which links the shelulah of the 1990s to the heroic Habad woman of the 1940s is probably an important factor in creating her consciousness of herself as a person of independent significance and power.

The development of the sense of singularity and vital significance in the Habad woman was a deliberate goal of Rabbi Menachem Mendel. Unlike his predecessor's letters, Rabbi Menachem Mendel's "general letters" addressed to the entire community, always included women in their salutations. The first such, dated 18 Elul 5710 (1950), reads: "To our brothers and sisters, the sons and daughters of Israel."¹⁷⁵ In addition, from 1956 annual conventions have been held for the women and girls of Habad. A central feature of these conventions was an address delivered by the rebbe in the main hall of his Brooklyn headquarters, occupied by the women on this special occasion. A number of similar events (e.g., the Girls' Graduation) at which the rebbe primarily addressed women and girls became an integral part of the Lubavitch annual calendar.

173. See above, and Ada Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 524 n. 82, citing *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Yosef Yitzhak*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn, 1982), pp. 224, 252, and the editor's introduction, pp. 20–22.

174. The ethos and lifestyle of the shelulah and her family generally differ considerably from that of other members of their local community. A major task for the shelulah – and often, her specific responsibility – is the attempt to transmit this ethos to her own children.

175. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Menachem Mendel*, vol. 3 (Brooklyn, 1987), p. 462. The strong contrast between this mode of address, which reflects the status of women in the Habad movement as compared to their status in Satmar hasidism, was noted by Professor Wilensky (see unnumbered note at the beginning of this paper).

In addition, through a constant flow of letters, personal guidance in *yehidut*, and public addresses on the theme of womanhood,¹⁷⁶ the rebbe imparted to the girls and women of Habad a sense of significance, responsibility, and empowerment. He also expected them to aspire to many of the spiritual aspects of Habad teaching: in 1954 he expressed the hope that the women and girls of Kfar Habad would institute hasidic gatherings of their own.¹⁷⁷ As we have seen, the hasidic gathering is an opportunity to engender hasidic ideals, including love of one's fellow.

In a letter to the twentieth annual women's convention in 1975 the seventh rebbe writes of "the vital work... to draw Jews close to Torah and Mitzvot, notwithstanding the situation they may be in, and *not to despair* of any Jew." He goes on to explain how this task relates to women in particular: "The work of drawing Jews close to Yiddishkeit [traditional Judaism] specially concerns women, for it is understood that this work requires a special approach of empathy, good-heartedness, loving-kindness and the like. These qualities are found to a greater measure among women than men."¹⁷⁸ The seventh rebbe thus presents conventionally conceived feminine attributes – which are apparently accepted and affirmed as such by the majority of his female followers – as inherently valuable in what he defines as the vital endeavor of the time.¹⁷⁹ The use of the term *hafarazah* for outreach, an allusion to the text of the famous letter of the Baal Shem

176. Generally, at each of the major hasidic gatherings, comprising several *sihot* and a discourse, there would be one *sihah* specifically for women. The significance of these Brooklyn gatherings as a mode of leadership and communication was enhanced in the early 1970s when they were phoned through to the international Lubavitch centers. Members of each community could now hear the rebbe's address directly, with simultaneous translation for those who did not understand Yiddish.

177. *Iggerot Kodesh... R. Menachem Mendel*, vol. 10 (Brooklyn, 1989), p. 4.

178. *Likkutei Sihot* (Brooklyn, 1977), vol. 12, p. 224.

179. A later *sihah* defined the feminine approach to *tikkun olam* as superior to the male one, and suggested that men learn from the example of women. The male thrust is to "conquer" and suppress opposition; the female has a more "inward" approach which gains willing acceptance peacefully. Hence, "the service of Jewish women and daughters [should] become a guide to the men and the sons, showing how they should approach their service... in an inward way" (*Sefer ha-Sihot 5751* [Brooklyn, 1992], vol. 1, p. 86; adapted in *A Partner in the Dynamic of Creation: Womanhood in the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson*, ed. U. Kaploun [Brooklyn, 1994], p. 7).

Tov,¹⁸⁰ highlights the messianic aspect of this activity so often stressed in the seventh rebbe's letters, talks, and discourses.¹⁸¹

This also has a personal experiential dimension: there are intimations of profound spiritual meaning in introducing a woman to the concept of candlelighting for the Sabbath or the idea of the mikveh, and a deep sense of fulfillment in the completion of a *pe'ulah*, an activity on any of the varied fronts of contemporary outreach. The life of the hasidic family – generally a large one with many children – becomes a kind of showcase of Judaism; those drawn to Habad from outside the movement often depict the families of their hasidic hosts in romantically glowing terms, which may well affect their hosts' self-perception. The mother, in particular, is often seen in a particularly positive way, the strong awareness of the exigencies of a hasidic lifestyle notwithstanding. Witness Jeannette Kupfermann's description of her encounters with Habad women in London:

There was an unusual cheerfulness, and even – I use an old-fashioned word – 'gaiety' about the women... they laughed often and easily, and for women who by modern standards were severely restricted in everything they did, from how they dressed, in puritanically modest clothing, to rigid dietary restrictions placed upon them, and who were never once able to stray from their 'woman's space' in this sexually segregated society, they showed a remarkable energy, spontaneity and ease of manner. Many with five or more children attended study groups, held down jobs, kept all the minutiae of ritual within the home, including cooking for armies on frequent Holy Days, and took part in the 'conversionist', missionizing activity which is the particular domain of this group. I remember one woman who literally forty-eight hours after the birth of a fifth child, came rushing, dishevelled, into a study group, having stayed up the night before between breast-feeding to study the text. Wig askew, leaking milk, she looked radiant.¹⁸²

180. For a recent discussion, see M. Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley, 1996), pp. 97–113.

181. See A. Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago, 1996), pp. 181–206.

182. J. Kupfermann, *The MsTaken Body: A Fresh Perspective on the Women's Movement* (Granada, 1981), pp. 109–10.

A further dimension is not just activism, but *shelihut*. Generally speaking, on shelihut the entire family takes up residence in a location far from the security of the orthodox community. Kosher food may not be locally available, and the woman may have to drive for hours, or sometimes even fly, to go to the mikveh. In this lifestyle the positive involvement of the wife is essential. Otherwise the couple will simply not embark on shelihut. From the base of their new home they engage in outreach activities, trying to implement the seventh rebbe's directive "not to despair of any Jew." Since the inception of the Seven Noachide Law campaign in the early 1980s, the Habad emissaries may well be called on to minister to non-Jews in addition.¹⁸³

Fueling and underlying this activity is the study of mystical thought which distinguishes the contemporary Habad woman from most of her orthodox sisters. In the many Habad-Lubavitch girls' schools, study of *Tanya*, *sihot*, and hasidic discourses figures prominently in the curriculum, together with the more conventional study of Humash with Rashi, *Shulhan Arukh*, *Tanakh*, Jewish history, and so on. Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak's campaign in the 1940s calling for daily study of a portion of Torah (Humash) with Rashi, a section of *Tanya*, and the recitation of some extra *Tehillin* (a daily program known as *hitat*), was extended in the next generation to encompass many women.

The spiritual awareness and sense of empowerment engendered by this study underlies the female activism which has become a central feature of the Habad movement. The Habad House, usually on the periphery of the orthodox community and sometimes very far away from it, is generally run by a husband-and-wife team. The wife perceives herself not just as a hasidah, but as a shelihah.¹⁸⁴ In Brooklyn, the conferences for the male

183. See *Likutei Sifor*, vol. 26 (Brooklyn, 1988), pp. 132–44, and Ravitzky, *Messianism*, pp. 191–93.

184. The hasid goes beyond mere "palabatsikerit" (bourgeois domesticity). See El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant* (n. 1 above), p. 63 n. 16. By running a Habad House in Hong Kong or Gothenberg, the shelihah makes a comparable step of hasidic pietism. However, the seventh rebbe warns against excessive asceticism. A letter from 1955 warns a hasid against following a path of sexual abstinence, to which he claimed his wife agreed. The rebbe suggests that abstinence would have the opposite effect to that intended – purity of thought – and refers the hasid to an early Habad text extolling the spirituality of marital union (*Iggerot Kodesh*... R. Menahem Mendel, vol. 10 [Brooklyn, 1989], p. 370). See n. 39 above.

sheluhim instituted in the 1980s are paralleled by those for female *sheluhot*, an exclusive form of conference more intensive than the conventions mentioned above.¹⁸⁵ Many of the sheluhot – and sometimes other women – achieve personal fame in the Habad world due to their charismatic qualities. Like leading figures among the men, these outstanding Habad women are seen by other women and girls as a source of inspiration, as spiritual teachers who expound texts, guide a hasidic gathering, and provide personal counsel.¹⁸⁶

The Habad woman sees herself, together with her husband, as representing and concretizing a mystical hasidic ideal. This is not the path of the Upper Unity, defined earlier, the acosmist path away from the world. Neither she, nor generally her husband, seeks that. It is rather the Lower Unity that they seek, the discovery of spirituality in a daily world where both the man and the woman fulfill traditional roles of parenting and hospitality. Indeed, precisely this aspect of their lives, typified by the welcoming Sabbath table, provides a key weapon in their battle for the rejuvenation of what they see as "traditional" Jewish practice and values, which – as they understand it – will lead to Redemption.

Conclusion

The three versions of the role of the woman in hasidism portrayed here possibly provide a framework for understanding the interaction of Jewish

185. The extent to which women are actively involved in the work of sheluhot is indicated by a thick volume published by Nshet u-Bnos Habad, titled *Sheluhot: Outreach Insights* (Brooklyn, 1996). Most of the contributors and editors are women. The program of the 1996 Sheluhot Conference included study of hasidic discourses and other hasidic texts and sessions on both the practical and spiritual aspects of sheluhot, including child-rearing and marital harmony, as well as an introduction to the use of cyberspace. Some women have the status of Habad sheluhah independent of their husband's occupation. See *Sefer Ha-Sheluhim*, ed. Y. B. Friedman et al. (Brooklyn, 1991), vol. 1, an album with photographs of the sheluhim and their families, pp. 329, 330, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, 1992), p. 1301.

186. For an example of a portrait of a charismatic sheluhah, see *The Neshomo Gristman Anthology*, ed. M. Miller (Jerusalem, 1993). From 1976 until her death in 1992 at the age of 39, she and her husband served as Habad emissaries in Israel. The anthology includes her writings, transcripts of her talks, and essays about her. She is survived by ten children.

ultra-orthodox traditionalism with modernity. In each of the three modes discussed – Satmar, Beis Yaakov, Habad – there has been a certain level of change in order to accommodate to new situations and challenges. In each mode this change is a form of intensification of ideology and practice, which is seen clearly as it relates to the role of the woman.

The Satmar movement responded to the threat of modernity by proscribing the study of Hebrew by women – intensifying the application of talmudic warnings against women's study – and by emphatically maintaining very tight borders defining attire, cultural contact, and behavior. The fulfilled woman in Satmar represents an earlier form of female piety: she prays with feeling for the well-being of her loved ones, while in a specifically modern way she constantly affirms the barriers erected to keep out the immorality and impiety of the secular world. This model can be understood in terms of the Higher Unity as expressed in the figure of the Zaddik, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, who was seen as beyond this world.¹⁸⁷ The Zaddik is on the otherworldly spiritual plane, pouring blessing to the men, women, and children in the sacred community. In turn, they are expected to fulfill their role in the maintenance of and participation in that community. For Satmar women this is understood primarily in material terms. The overt spiritual dimension is provided by men.¹⁸⁸

In pre-war Beis Yaakov, by contrast, a different direction was taken. The woman was given knowledge and the inspiration to give knowledge to others through the unique structure of the Beis Yaakov movement itself, which focused on the spiritual figure of Sarah Schenierer. Here was in a sense a woman's mode of hasidism, running parallel to that of the men. Yet it did not create a woman who thought of herself as a "hasid," rather a true, bold, modest, cheerful, self-sacrificing member of Beis

187. See n. 6 above.

188. According to Jerome Mintz, when a group of Samarers moved to Lubavitch in the 1980s, the wives found the change to be spiritually liberating. One of his respondents said: "In Satmar they don't believe a woman has to learn. There it's basically what they learn in school and then it's finished. Then it's into baking and cooking without learning. In Lubavitch a woman should know about Godly things. In Lubavitch they believe that a person should learn more, that a person's mind should constantly be aware of Hashem's presence" (*Hasidic People*, p. 175).

Yaakov and its sister organizations. Her spirituality did not come from mystical texts, but from a unique mixture of gravevisiting piety and joyful hasidic dance, together with beloved Mother Sarah.

The third mode is that of Habad. In a quite unusual way within orthodox Jewish life the Habad woman is empowered to see herself and to act as a full representative and emissary of the movement, with study of mystical texts and personal intimations of spiritual experience, whether in her outreach work or reciting Psalms at the *Ohel*, the grave of the seventh rebbe. My contention is that the shift in the direction of contemplation discerned in the early Habad movement, from the Upper Unity – away from the world, to the Lower Unity – into the world, seems also to be paralleled by the subsequent changes in women's roles. The theoretical change of direction in contemplative mysticism made room for a possibility which was actualized in the upheavals of the twentieth century. Joseph Dan, who has surveyed the successful passage of hasidism in its various groups into its third century, discerns no ideological issue which has bearing on the process. He sees it simply as the product of inspired charismatic guidance by the rebbe of each group.¹⁸⁹ By contrast Aviezer Ravitzky sees the early theological stance of Habad as being highly relevant to its accommodation with the twentieth century.¹⁹⁰ The present study takes this view further and understands the specific mystical path of early Habad to be in some sense concretized through the combination of categories – spiritual joined with practical – expressed by the contemporary Habad woman, and especially the *shelehah*.

Although in married life she probably spends far more time in child care and cooking than studying or teaching *Tanya*, she understands her life in terms of the mystical categories subsumed in that work and in the Habad rebbes' discourses, *sihot*, and letters. As in the mystical concept of the Lower Unity, she balances two domains: the finite and the infinite. In the latest phase of Lubavitch mysticism, the intense messianism which began around 1990, women played a key role,¹⁹¹ perhaps precisely

189. Dan, "Hasidism – The Third Century" (n. 29 above).

190. Ravitzky, *Messianism*, pp. 184, 204.

191. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

because the messianic ideal, as understood by Habad, is the establishment and realization of the Lower Unity, joining opposites through the revelation of the Divine in the daily world.¹⁹²

In summation then, in line with Chava Weissler's methodology, I suggest that by exploring the role of women in hasidism we have not only learned more about the role of women but also something about the role of men. The definition of the polarity between the Upper and Lower Unities in Habad in the final decade of the eighteenth century was not simply the delineation of yet another contemplative choice. It provides a more general approach to the dialectic of spiritual life in the context of the tension of the confrontation with modernity. At the same time it suggests new possibilities for the woman as spiritual mediator of reality in a changing world.

192. The messianic idea also provides a further aspect of the emphasis on the significance of the feminine in Habad hasidic mysticism, as in the following by Rabbi Dov Ber (1773–1827), the son of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, from a discourse delivered at a wedding in 1826: "But in the Future to Come it says 'A woman of valor is a crown to her husband' (Prov.12:4), that the significance of the bride will be greater than that of the groom, hence it says in the final blessing [of the Seven Blessings at a wedding]: '[He] makes the groom rejoice with the bride', for the bride [will be] more important" (*Maamarei Admur ha-Emtza'i: Derushei Hanukah*, vol. 2 [Brooklyn, 1991], p. 461). See also *ibid.*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn, 1989), p. 24, and *Seder Tefilot mi-kol ha-Shanah* (Brooklyn, 1971), 138c. In these texts the bride, representing the tenth *sefirah*, *malchut*, is deemed higher than the groom (the kabbalistic *ze'ir anpin*), unlike in Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Torah Or* (Brooklyn, 1990), fol. 45a and *Likkutei Torah* (Kfar Habad, 1973), *Faykera*, fol. 9a; *Shir ha-Shirim*, fol. 48b, where she is described merely as equal.