

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 Hafeiz 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

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

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.

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 "neters" 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 Recited 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 leChah*, 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 Itzhak (Chatzke) 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 Ahei 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 Rachel-Leah Kugel (née Segalovitch), grandmother of the celebrated hasidic teacher Reb Mendel Futerafas,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 Futerafas, oral communication, 10 December 1994.

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

163. Beryl Futerafas (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 *hafarzah* 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 *siyah* 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 *siyah* 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 sheluhim is indicated by a thick volume published by Nshet u-Bnos Habad, titled *Sheluhim: 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 sheluhim, 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 Samaraters 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.