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R. NAFTALI OF ROPSCHITZ: THE SOCIAL AND PERSONAL
CONTEXTS OF HIS HUMOR

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requirements for Ordination

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Referee: Prof. Ben Zion Wacholder

DIGEST

R. Naftali Zvi Horowitz of Ropschitz lived in a world of contradictions. He was born in 1760 in Galicia (Southern Poland), into a family of very distinguished rabbis. He too became a learned rabbi, and would have become a rich and powerful man in a culture that respected learning and lineage. But R. Naftali rejected this culture for the young mass movement called Hasidism. He became a Hasidic master, and according to the stories we have about him, he learned to be a mystic and a magician. He gained the ability to read minds and perform miracles.

Perhaps because he was raised in one culture -- stressing Mitnagid values -- and lived in the Hasidic culture, he saw the world with two sets of eyes. He saw the weaknesses in both systems, and would express these weaknesses in jokes.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the Ropschitzer's use of humor as a way of confronting the contradictions in his life. We will examine this phenomenon in many of our approximately 160 stories. We will also examine the structural similarities between comic techniques and the mystical hermeneutic devices of gematria and notarikon.

Part One offers an overview of some of the more important doctrinal and historical influences on Galician Hasidism. It also provides a short biography, highlighting the least controvertible facts we know about the Ropschitzer.

Part Two is a translation of the earliest published collection of stories

about the Ropschitzer, found in Esser Tzachtzachot.

Part Three provides the reader with a crash course in relevant comic theories, and their impact on our analysis.

Part Four examines a sample of the comic genres and techniques evident in our stories of the Ropschitzer.

Part Five profiles the prevailing themes in our stories, and examines the social context of the Ropschitzer's humor.

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PART I

HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

We are told that Naftali Zvi Horowitz was born on Shavuot, 1760, the very day that the founder of Hasidism, Israel Baal Shem Tov, passed away. By the time R. Naftali assumed the mantle of leadership, and became a tzaddik, Hasidism had become a mass movement which, by some estimates, numbered half the Jews in Eastern Europe as its adherents.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide the reader with a thorough grounding in the intellectual and political history of Hasidism. (The uninitiated reader is directed to the general works on Hasidism listed in the bibliography, many of which can provide a competent introduction to the subject.) The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: To point out certain doctrines and historical forces that had particular impact on the life and thought of the Ropschitzer, and then to summarize the least controvertible facts we have about his life.

Mendel Bodek, one of the first historiographers of Hasidism, pointed out in his book, Seder HaDorot HaHadash, three central characteristics of the movement founded by the Baal Shem Tov, who is known by the acronym "Besht."

Our teacher, the Baal Shem Tov, followed Rabbi Isaac Luria in disclosing divinity in this low, earthly world, in each individual thing. What Rabbi Isaac Luria, may his memory be for blessing, revealed was in regard to the celestial worlds and the upper luminaries, and not every mind can grasp what transpires in the exalted heights. The Baal Shem Tov revealed divinity here on

earth, especially in the lowliest person, in whom there is not a single limb or force that is not a garment for the divine power concealed in it. In earlier generations rabbis and great scholars occupied themselves with God's Torah, but the poor folk who were engrossed in the concerns of earning a living did not understand the Torah and derived no benefit from it. They walked in darkness because they could not study the Torah and penetrate into its chambers. Then the Master of the universe, in His vast grace, sent down to us an angel from heaven, the Baal Shem Tov of blessed memory, who illuminated the way of piety (hasidut) in the world, the way in which man should go even when he is deeply absorbed in his worries and concerns.¹

The three characteristics evident in this passage are the mystical world-view of Isaac Luria, the element of absolute trust, or bittahon in God and the man-of-God -- the tzaddik, and concern for the poor and unschooled masses.

The first element, the world-view of Isaac Luria, is slightly misrepresented by Bodek. Kaballah literally means "tradition;" Luria was a creative force in the development of kaballah, but he is part of a mystical tradition that began half a millenium before him. The notion of tikkun, or tikkun olam -- the "repair of the universe," can be traced to the Zohar, which modern scholarship dates back to the Thirteenth Century, as well as to its midrashic antecedents. The Zohar suggests that ten Attributes of God, such as God's Wisdom, Intelligence, Love, and Sternness, are isolated into ten Emanations, or Sefirot. The kaballists believed that objects in the material world could be redeemed or repaired by establishing and exploiting the associative link between the material object and the Divine Attribute. Luria expanded this doctrine and claimed that, as part of the process of Creation, particles of

God's essence, called nezozot, or "holy sparks," became trapped in the material world. According to the Hasidim, it is within the power of the tzaddik to release these sparks, by concentrating on their source among the Divine Emanations. (For a more thorough explanation of this doctrine, the uninitiated reader is directed to the chapters on Lurianic Kaballah authored by Gershom Scholem, which exist in most of his works listed in the bibliography.)

Gershom Scholem has characterized this world-view as gnostic, because it posits the existence of an unverifiable spiritual realm that both transcends and inhabits the material world. Because of this interaction, material objects that appear trivial can assume cosmic dimensions. When Bodek claims that "the Baal Shem Tov revealed divinity here on earth," he overstates his case because other kaballists did this as well. But he is correct in acknowledging that an innovation of the Besht was his emphasis on this world, rather than the traditional kaballistic speculation on the heavenly worlds. This focus produced what Dubnov identifies as Bittul Ha-Yesh, or "negation of the material world."² The boundaries between the upper and lower worlds are abolished, and the Hasid comes to understand that the world of the senses is but a pale reflection of a hidden reality. As a result, he no longer views events in the material world as a result of material causes, but rather as the result of hidden forces. The world-view posited by the kaballists provided theosophical underpinnings for the magic that is so prevalent in Hasidic stories, and particularly evident in the stories of the Ropschitzer.

The title Baal Shem Tov means a "master of the name of God," which implies great magical powers. The legends of the Besht are suffused with accounts of the wonders he performed.

This belief in magic is also grounded in a second essential characteristic of Hasidism suggested by Dubnov. Bittahon, or trust, in the providence of God, is a prime motivation for Hasidism. God will answer the prayers of the faithful, and the tzaddik can intercede for the Hasid with God. If actual conditions in the world of the senses do not improve, then it is assumed that either the Hasid lacked sufficient trust, or the restoration was achieved in a higher or future world.

This trust that negates objective reality, which the Hasid felt toward God and his rebbe, was also extended to the sacred literature. For two thousand years Jews have acknowledged that the Bible can and should be interpreted in many ways. The Hasidim, like other Jewish mystics throughout history, believed that secrets existed in the text beyond the simple meaning, or its practical application. They tried to uncover these hidden meanings via several hermeneutical devices, two of which -- gematria and notarikon -- are prominent in our stories of the Ropschitzer.

Gematria is based on the Greek words, "gamma" and "tria," meaning that gamma, the third letter of the Greek alphabet, equals tria, meaning three. Every consonant in the Hebrew alphabet is assigned a numerical value. The hermeneutic principle in gematria is that two words or phrases with the same numerical value are linked in some way.

Notarikon is based in the conceit that the consonants of a word in the

Bible are actually initials for the individual words of a phrase, and that the meaning of the phrase can be freely substituted for the meaning of the original word. Both gematria and notarikon are devices that date back to the period of the Rabbis.

The third element described in the Bodek passage is that the initial adherents to Hasidism were those people who needed most to trust in God's Providence: The poor Jews. The Baal Shem Tov brought kaballah to the masses, who were eager to have confirmed that their wretched condition was transitory, and that they, too had a share of the spiritual life of the Present and the World-to-Come. Throughout Eastern Europe crushing poverty deprived Jews of the opportunities for scholarship; yet the prevailing values system claimed that only the scholar was deserving of honor. Against this backdrop, the Besht emphasized that piety and intentionality were superior to erudition, and that even the most ignorant Jew could experience devekut, or the ecstatic cleaving to God.

Hasidism's assault on the dominant spiritual values of the time worked on more than just the spiritual level. Over the centuries, scholarship had become the principal value of society, and as such, it was the avenue of upward mobility and the main criterion for power. By acknowledging the authority of the tzaddik, Hasidism confronted the prevailing power structure in the Jewish community and, in effect, became a rival political group. This led to sharp divisions in the community, and in Hasidism's first generations, political persecution, excommunication,

and the practice of denunciation to the Gentile authorities by both sides. The eventual rapprochement between Hasidism and their opponents, the Mitnagdim, was only in its earliest stages towards the end of R. Naftali's life, as both groups joined together to face the threat of enlightenment to their way of life.

While the Baal Shem Tov found many disciples and sympathizers who shared his new set of values, the organization of Hasidism into a cohesive movement was really the work of his disciple and successor, Dov Baer, the "Great Maggid" of Mezeritz. It is said that the Maggid gathered over three hundred disciples, of which thirty-five founded dynasties of their own. The Maggid sent his disciples to different towns throughout Eastern Europe, so that rather than staying just an isolated sect in the regions of Podolia and Volhynia in Southern Russia, within a generation or two, Hasidism claimed millions of adherents throughout Russia, Poland, and Lithuania.

The tzaddik who became the first leader of Hasidism in Galicia, a region of southern Poland, is R. Elimelekh of Lizensk. The Lizensker is credited with setting down the political and economic dynamics of the tzaddik's court. In his major work, Noam Elimelekh, he outlined the importance of the tzaddik, or rebbe, as an intercessor between God and man. For this service, the tzaddik was entitled to a "brokerage fee," called a pidyon. While it is stated in the Talmud that God's Immanence does not exist outside the Holy Land, the Lizensker quoted the Talmudic argument that Esther was wrapped in the Holy Spirit,

(based on Esther 5:1) and affirmed that the Holy Spirit rested on tzaddikim outside Israel. This justified their claim to foretell events and accomplish miracles.³ Galician Hasidism became distinguished by its emphasis on the charismatic leadership of the tzaddik.*

We are told that R. Naftali was a disciple of the Lizensker, and this is entirely possible, since Lizensk is not far from Liska and Dukla, the towns in which he spent his early life. But this fact, and almost all of the facts we know about the Ropschitzer, must be viewed with some skepticism. Many of the stories we have about the Hasidim were circu-

* While Jewish historians have accounted for the rapid rise of Hasidism and its widespread popularity as reactions to poverty, excessive legalism or the power structure of the Jewish community, no real attempt has been made to evaluate the spread of Hasidism as a reaction to the Enlightenment, particularly in Galicia, where charisma was emphasized. The anthropologist, Bryan R. Wilson, describes in The Noble Savages⁴ how charismatic movements often spring up in backward societies when they are invaded by exponents of Western modernity, and that those movements put absolute trust in the magical prowess of their leaders. Galicia was annexed to the Austrian Empire in 1772, and Galician Jews soon afterward "enjoyed" the benefit of a patent of toleration, including government schools and military service. Dubnov acknowledges that the upheavals caused by the Napoleonic Wars seem to have nurtured the Hasidic movement.⁵

lated with the purpose of glorifying one's rebbe, and attracting youthful adherents. Dubnov claims that the Lizensker had a crew of "seducers" who would travel to other Galician communities and persuade young men to join them in Lizensk.⁶ This practice was followed by many tzaddikim after him. Most of the stories we have of the tzaddikim were circulated orally for generations before being written down. Keeping in mind the source of our facts, we will now attempt to present a brief biography of the Ropschitzer.

Naftali Zvi Horowitz was born in 1760, the son of R. Menaḥem Mendel Rubin of Liska or Linsk. We are told he was born on Shavuot, on the day that the Besht died, but this may be too much of a coincidence to accept uncritically. He adopted his mother's surname, Horowitz, and consciously identified himself with the distinguished line of rabbis which that family had produced. While his maternal grandfather, R. Isaac "Hamburger" Horowitz, was an opponent of the Besht, this rabbi's first cousin was R. Shmelke of Nikolsburg, a famous disciple of the Mezeritzer. Wiesel claims that Naftali's father was a Mitnagid and his mother was a Hasid, but this is not confirmed by stories collected in this thesis.

His first marriage to the daughter of a rich merchant of Brody ended in divorce. He then married the daughter of R. Zvi Hirsch Goldhammer of Dukla a year later, and worked for his father-in-law as a wine merchant before accepting his position in Ropschitz. This second marriage was apparently also unsatisfactory, but the couple stayed together.

R. Naftali had many illustrious teachers. He spent a year studying with R. Mordechai of Neschkiz, a year with R. Michle of Zlotzov, and apparently spent some time with the Lizensker. His more important mentors were the four chief disciples of the Lizensker: Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt, Menaḥem Mendel of Rimanov, Israel, the "Maggid" of Koznitz, and most importantly, Yaakov Yitzḥak, the "Seer" of Lublin. Although most of these rebbes are not known for their scholarship, based on the allusions he makes in our stories, R. Naftali seems to have received a solid background in the study of Talmud. Fully qualified as a talmudic scholar, or lamdan, R. Naftali served as the av bet din, or leading rabbinic authority, in Ropschitz. He also succeeded his father as av bet din of Linsk, and held both positions until his death.

While the Rimanover, Koznitzer, and Lubliner were still alive, R. Naftali refused to assume the mantle of tzaddik. He stayed on good terms with all of his teachers until Napoleon's campaign in 1812 against Russia. According to legend, the Rimanover believed that the Napoleonic War could usher in the Messianic Age, while the Koznitzer and Lubliner realized it was not yet time for redemption. All three men used their powers to try to affect the outcome of war. The Ropschitzer is said to have sided against Napoleon, perhaps because he saw him as an exponent of the Enlightenment. Napoleon's Russian campaign was a disaster -- with or without the magical assistance of the rebbes. According to another legend, the three men decided to try to bring about the redemption in 1814. All three suffered deaths that are shrouded in

mystery, within a year. It was only then that the Ropschitzer established a court and dynasty.

Through his four children, R. Naftali is considered the progenitor of numerous courts. His eldest son, R. Eliezer, became the av bet din of Dzikov in 1848. He is prominent in several of our stories. The second son, R. Jacob, became a tzaddik after his father's death. He was labelled the "Little Baal Shem Tov," because of the miracles ascribed to him. The third son, R. Abraham Haim, assumed authority in Linsk until his early death in 1831. The fourth child, Raatza, married R. Asher Isaiah Rubin, who founded the Rubin-Ropschitz dynasty. Within three or four generations, the Ropschitz Dynasty included courts in towns throughout Poland and Galicia, such as Plonsk, Dembitz, Rozvadov, Rimanov, and Melitz.

The Ropschitzer's most illustrious disciple was R. Haim Halberstamm of Tzanz, who became famous as one of the leading Hasidic exponents of traditional learning. The yeshiva he founded in Tzanz attracted both Hasidim and Mitnagdim. His children intermarried with the Ropschitz dynasty, so modern-day Tzanzer and Bobover Hasidim see the Ropschitzer as a progenitor.

R. Naftali's reign lasted for a decade. He died in 1827, and was buried in Lanzut. His yahrtzeit, the Eleventh of Iyyar, is celebrated by various Hasidic courts in a joyful manner. He authored two works: Zera Kodesh, sermons on the Torah and the festivals, and Ayalah Sheluha, a commentary on Genesis and Exodus.

There is an ongoing dispute in the academic world with regard to the primary sources which best capture the contributions of the Hasidim. Some scholars emphasize the theoretical writings. Others scrutinize their sermons. Some scholars have found the niggunim, or melodies, that they composed useful in understanding a tzaddik's oeuvre. Many interpreters of Hasidism see the stories about the tzaddikim as the best avenue for understanding the impact they had on their followers. While other scholars object that these stories are apocryphal, there are problems in authenticating all primary sources.

Particularly in the case of Galician Hasidim, charisma and personality play a central role in the movement. Each tzaddik embodies a unique personality trait, a consistent approach to spirituality, that seems to be captured best in the stories we have of them. The personality trait that distinguishes R. Naftali from all of the other tzaddikim is his accomplished and persuasive use of humor. This tendency was acknowledged while he was still a student, and he used humor throughout his life to express insights. There are also interesting parallels between his use of humor, and his utilization of magic, clairvoyance, and mystical hermeneutic devices. We will study this interaction in approximately 160 stories culled from several sources. The 75 stories in Appendix B all appear in published English collections of Hasidic stories. Chapter Two of this thesis presents a translation of the earliest collection of stories about the Ropschitzer, published in the book Esser Tzachtzachot.

The editor of Esser Tzachtzachot, Israel Berger, compiled several collections of stories about the tzaddikim in the first decades of the Twentieth Century. As will be seen in the prefatory remarks to each story, Berger takes great pains to authenticate his sources. We may remain skeptical about the truth value of these stories, which often describe magical events. Still, we can be reasonably certain that the stories were first circulated by contemporaries of the Ropschitzer, and faithfully represent their perceptions of him.

PART II

TRANSLATION OF ESSER TZACHTZACHOT,

pages 83-100

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSLATION

Esser Tzachtzachot was compiled by I. Berger in 1910. It is the oldest collection of stories and anecdotes we have of the Ropschitzer. It also includes a good number of the divrei torah and hiddushim in his name.

A prominent characteristic of the collection is Berger's scrupulous attempts to legitimate his work by identifying the sources of his entries. I have included these citations in the translation towards the goal of being faithful to the text.

Such fidelity is difficult on several levels. There is little punctuation to speak of in these selections, which necessitated devising my own punctuation to make the stories intelligible to the English reader. I occasionally retained the style of run-on sentences, in order to preserve the flavor of the loose strings of associations that would yield an insight.

When knowledge of the Hebrew word was essential to understanding the story, it was written into the text, followed by its translation in parentheses and quotation marks. If the word involved a pun, it was transliterated. If gematria or notarikon was employed, or something else that demanded seeing the Hebrew word written out, the Hebrew characters were used.

Orthography proved to be a maddening problem. One of the legacies of Poland's sad political history is that there is no accepted English orthography for Jewish towns, which often used a different name than the official Polish or German name. Variant spellings of Ropschitz, to give one example, include Ropshits, Ropshitz, Roptchitz, Ropczyce, Ropzyce, Rafschutz, and other renderings. The only consistent letter is the "R."

As a method of standardization, I have employed the spelling found in Newman's Hasidic Anthology, with a few exceptions (Ropschitz, Neschkiz).

So many words of Hebrew origin are included in the text that, if underscoring were used consistently, half of each page would be underlined. I have, therefore, decided to omit underscoring the most frequently used terms (rabbi, rav, rebbe, Mitnagid, rebbetzin, tzaddik), as well as well-known holidays and customs that can be found in any good dictionary (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Shabbat, etc.), while leaving lesser-known customs underscored (brit milah, Beit Ha-Shoavah). Established spellings (mitzvah, tzaddik) of Hebrew words were utilized.

A large number of acronyms are employed in the Hebrew text. Most have been translated; eight common ones were not:

ABD"K--Av Bet Din Kehillat--"leading rabbinic authority in a community."
ADMU"R--Adoneinu Moreinu V'Rabbeinu--"our Master, Teacher, and Rabbi."
AK"L--ad kan leshono--"so end his words."
DPH"H--divrei pi haçham hein--"the words from the mouth of a wise man are good."
KB"H--Kadosh Baruch Hu--"the Holy One, Blessed be He"--God.
Shla"h--Shnei Luchot Ha-Brit--"The Two Tablets of the Covenant;" R. Naftali's ancestor, who was nicknamed after his most important book.
ZA"L--zichrono livracha--"May his name be a blessing."
ZATZ"L--zacher tzaddik livracha--"May his righteous name be a blessing."

Most of these acronyms are honorific titles, used extensively in the text. I have excised many of these long honorifics, and replaced them with an ellipsis.

Finally, as a service to the reader who wishes to check the translation with the original, found in Appendix A, I have retained Berger's comments in brackets (as they are in the original). My comments are offered in parentheses.

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 1-2

1) This is a collection concerning the famous, holy and divine ga'on, a master to all those in exile, our rabbi Naftali Zvi, may his holy and righteous memory be a blessing, the ABD"K of Ropschitz; the author of the collection, Zera Kodesh ("Holy Seed"), the first section of which concerns the Torah (sidrot), and the second section concerns all of the festivals. He has also written Ayalah Sheluhah ("The Fleet-footed Gazelle") on the Torah. He is related to us by marriage through the righteous R. Yisrael of Berenov his grandson. [The son of his son the holy R. Eliezer of Dzikov,] who was the father-in-law of our grandfather the holy R. David of Zoblitov. And also because my grandfather, the holy R. Zvi Hirsch ZA"L of Pimshinizen the son of our grandfather R. David (of Zoblitov), was the father-in-law of the holy R. Abraham Hayim of Linsk, who was also a son of R. Naftali Zvi.

2) My dear friend the great rav, Fortress and Tower, the erudite scholar, philologist and excellent critic, the son of the holy man our teacher R. Abraham Ettinger Segal -- May he live a long and happy life -- of Dukla; the author of the third volume of Shem Ha G'dolim ("The Name of the Great Ones"). The grandson of the ga'on of Israel Shlomo Kluger [and because he sent me much information for this book I make known from the outset who this dear scholar is]. He wrote me, and this is what he said:

I heard from a trustworthy man who heard from the mouth of the holy

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 2-3

ga'on R. Haim of Tzanz, on whose merit the world stands, that the holy rav of Ropschitz was born on the very day that our master the holy Besht died, (therefore he was born on Shavuot, 5520 [1760]) fulfilling the verse in Gemara (Kidd. 72b): A righteous man does not depart from the world until (another) righteous man like himself is created, as it is said, "The sun rises and the sun goes down."

He also said he was named after a certain tzaddik, R. Naftali, who used to come after his death to the holy ga'on R. Meir of Tiktin (the grandfather of the Ropschitzer) while he was awake, in order to study with him. AK"L

3) Our rabbi Naftali Zvi, known as R. Naftali Ropschitzer was called a Horowitz, even though he was not a Levi, (like most Horowitzes) because he was only related to the Horowitz family through his mother. His father was the holy ga'on R. Menahem Mendel, may his memory be the blessing of life in the World-to-Come, the ABD"K of Liska, known as R. Mendele Linsker, son of our teacher R. Yaakov the ABD"K of Liska (Linsk). But the mother of Naftali was the daughter of the holy ga'on our teacher Yitzhak Halevy Horowitz who was called R. Isaakl Hamburger, son of our teacher and ga'on Yaakov Halevy Horowitz, who was known as R. Yokl, the ABD"K of Glogau. He was the son of our teacher the ga'on Meir Halevy Horowitz, ABD"K of Tiktin, who was the son of our teacher the ga'on Shmelke Halevy Horowitz ABD"K of Tarni, son of our teacher

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 3-5

and ga'on Joshua Aroch ABD"K Premislah. Their yihis is known in the highest heights, and elaborately presented in Geza Tarshishim ("The Stalk of Tarshish") in the section "Geza Or Ha-Zvi" ("The Stalk of the Light of Zvi"). This is not the place (to discuss the genealogy in depth).

4) In the book Shemen HaTov ("The Good Oil"), written by the Hasidic ga'on, the ABD"K of Plonsk, we find these words [on page 61a:] I heard directly from the righteous ga'on our teacher R. Meir Horowitz ZA"L, the ABD"K of Dzikov, how once his grandfather, the holy ga'on our teacher R. Naftali of Ropschitz came to the congregation in Tarni, and sought out the burial society. He asked them whether his ancestor, R. Shmelke, was concealed and hidden there, or if he had been moved from there. They answered that the tradition was that he was buried there but they didn't know exactly where. So he followed them and walked with them to the cemetery. He did what he did (something mysterious) and then paced back and forth for a short time. Suddenly he said, "My holy ancestor is hidden here." They dug and found a gravestone, and his name was engraved on it. Thus they saw that, "The word of the Lord in his mouth is truth (he was inspired by God). AK"L

5) The aforementioned Hasidic ga'on wrote me in these words: Once R. Naftali of Ropschitz came to the congregation of Dembitz, and sent after the householders and children. He made a great feast for them. He himself served wine to the children. He said, "The angels were

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 5-6

unable to be presumptuous against our teacher Moses at the time of the giving of Torah, since they ate at the feast given by Abraham his ancestor. Know then, that one of my offspring will be a rav here, and since you have benefitted from me, you will not be able to trouble him." He said to a lad named Shneur and two others, "Remember that." It happened that in later life these three boys became the leaders of the congregation and the rabbi there was the holy R. Reuven Horowitz, the son of the holy R. Eliezer ABD"K of Dzikov, the son of the holy Rav, our teacher R. Naftali of Ropschitz. [The ga'on of Serotsk said with regard to R. Reuven Horowitz: I was allowed to spend the holy Shabbat with him; Lech Lecha, 5632 (1871). At the time he was mourning his mother. From the age of twelve he would not sleep on Shabbat. He would only dance in honor of the Shabbat queen. The men of the city allotted four watch periods to sing and dance with him, including the day I was with him. He told me, "Since I have always behaved thus, if I had not done so it would be like mourning in public."] AK" L

6) My friend and teacher, the aforementioned ga'on Abraham Segal Ettinger wrote to me, and these are his words:

I have heard that the righteous of his generation said of our R. Naftali of Ropschitz that his particular soul was linked with the mitzvah of Sukkah in the Torah. In fact he used to occupy himself with the mitzvah of Sukkah all year round. Every day he would do some work

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 6-7

revolving around his sukkah. One day he might stick a peg in the sukkah. One day he would study in Tractate Sukkah. Such was his pattern all the days of his life. By all accounts, during every summer day he would mention the name of the Sukkah, and guide his conversation until he arrived on the subject of the Sukkah.

7) The previous source (The ABD"K of Plonsk) also wrote me:

R. Naftali's son-in-law, the holy R. Asher ZATZ"L, told that one time, in the morning, he entered the kitchen and found his father-in-law, the holy rav, our teacher R. Naftali, standing there and arguing with the maid. He asked her, "Why have you stopped giving me milk?" He repeated these words several times. And the matter was wondrous in his (R. Asher's) eyes. When he left the room he saw a woman standing by the door. He asked her, "What do you want?" and she answered him that it had been several weeks since she gave birth to her daughter, and she lacked the milk to nurse her child. Thus he understood why his father-in-law was quarrelling with the maid. After several weeks passed, he heard his father-in-law quarrelling with the maid a second time. He yelled at her, "Why do you give me milk that is so bad I am unable to drink it?" When he left the room he noticed the same woman standing by the doorway. She told him that since the time she was with the rabbi she had had milk, but the milk was bad and hurt the child. Once again he understood the intention of his father-in-law, since for

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this reason he had spoken out.

(Naftali's powers of clairvoyance allowed him to sense the child's needs.)

8) The aforementioned rav (the ABD"K of Plonsk) also wrote:

The holy R. Elimelech of Rudnick was a student of the Ropschitzer. Once, on the evening following his wife's ritual immersion he saw in a vision his rav standing with staff-in-hand, and he appeared to warn him not to do "the deed." He abstained (from intercourse) because of this. In the morning he discovered that she had menstruated.

The matter is introduced in hints in ל"ט"ל (the text is unclear -- apparently it is the name of a book) on parashat Pinchas, section 6.

9) In Dvir Ha-Mootzna (The Secret Sanctuary"), in parashat Shmini, it is written in the name of the Ropschitzer, that once at the third meal on Shabbat, he discussed Torah and revealed its secrets. "A God-fearing man told me (the author) after the meal, he (the Ropschitzer) was crying, for he told me that he knew he was too humble to reveal secrets of Torah. He feared for his soul that, God forbid, he might be of the Other Side (an evil man). This man told me that immediately after Shabbat had ended he asked the man (the man was the Hasid R. Fishel Sopher) to go with him to the ADMU"R of Pristik (the Rimanover), to the man of God, R. Mendele ZA"L. They walked all night four

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parasangs (approximately 16 miles) and at the morning light they reached R. Mendele's. When he saw them, he asked the Ropschitzer what they were doing here so early in the morning, and he said, 'Shalom to you and your household.' He (the Ropschitzer) then began to cry a very great deal, and he told him his story."

The holy R. Mendele ZA"L walked with R. Naftali into a secluded room and he said to him: "This man, (the Ropschitzer) may God watch over him, will say Torah before me and I will know if he goes with God or, God forbid, does not. And when he spoke and told and repeated the Torah to him, he tapped his shoulder and showed him love, and he said to the Ropschitzer, "May your portion be great, blessed be your coming and may you reach a high level in the ways of the Lord, and reveal secrets of Torah." AK"L

10) In the parasha of Vayehi of Zohar Chai, ("Living Splendor") page 395, it is written: And so I studied my teacher and rabbi, for in all the words of R. Naftali were wondrous yihudim ("intellectual connections), that would often make me tremble. Once I was standing behind him out of his sight. It was the afternoon preceding the holy Shabbat, the time when he liked to go to the mikvah and bathe. He was speaking to his wife in stories but I understood that his intended meaning concerned washing in hot water and the mikvah. I was shaken by how it was within human power to clothe such ideas in stories and words. He sensed this

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and turned his head toward me and was silent. He continued to speak until he finished this mode of associations, concerning the intentionality of hot water and mikvah. In all of the rest of his days I heard nothing more from him that might tend to grieve any son of Israel, etc. AK"L

11) The young, brilliant, mature Hasid, our teacher R. Zvi Hirsch Winkler of Sighet, may his light shine, wrote me:

While I lived at the house of my father-in-law R. Yohanan Rasch of Spinka, may his light shine, I heard directly from the holy ga'on of Spinka at a feast for Hanukkah; he spoke of the spiritual growth of our master and teacher, the Ropschitzer ZATZ"L. Once, in his old age, the Ropschitzer suddenly stopped speaking completely. He was like a mute, which caused much grief among the householders and their families, since they didn't know what happened to him and because they could not fulfill his needs, since he didn't tell them what he wanted. He stayed this way for a long time. Once his son... R. Abraham Haim ZATZ"L came to him and said, "My dear father, from your eyes I can tell that you can talk, but that you don't wish to. Tell me why you don't want to talk." He opened his mouth and answered, "My son, since the day I first expressed my thoughts (since maturity), I haven't said anything important or trivial without yihudim. Now, in my old age, my mind is weak, and I concluded that it was better for me to shut my mouth than to speak without yihudim." AK"L

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12) Once he received a question as to whether a certain bird was kosher. He ruled it was kosher, and his students began to do pilpul with him, saying the bird was trefe. So he argued with them using new reasons to justify his decision. He said to them finally, "I rule it is kosher, and after my decision is made there will be no change." After this a man with a pitkah came before him. On it was written, "That the sick bearer should be healed." He answered and said to him "A question about a bird just came before me. It had the same disease and I said it was kosher. So it is possible to live through this illness, and afterwards, you will be healed."

13) R. Abraham Ettinger... wrote me, and these are his words:

I heard from a man of faithful spirit who heard from the Rebbetzin of Dukla, Hannah, the daughter of... R. Abraham Haim, ABD"K of Liska, that once on the eve of Yom Kippur, the Ropschitzer stood in the marketplace. He wanted to buy radishes from a Gentile woman. She said, "Do you want to buy a bunch of radishes?" She said she had fourteen bunches and he said she didn't, only thirteen. Thus they argued for a long time. Afterwards he said, "Lord of the world, I want, and she doesn't want. What can I do?" And he went to the synagogue and began Kol Nidre. AK"L

(The Ropschitzer seems to be alluding to the Thirteen Ikkarim, or Attributes of God, which is a prominent theme in the Yom Kippur

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liturgy. There may be a pun implied in the fact that "ikkar" means "root," as well as "attribute," and a radish is a root.)

14) He also wrote to me, and these are his words:

Strong winds prevailed in the city of Dukla. When the holy R. Naftali came to his father-in-law's house, (he found) the rich man couldn't stand the winds. So he expelled them by the strength of his holy prayers. After this an illness prevailed in the city, and they travelled to... R. Mendele of Rimanov. He told them, "Why have you come to me? Go to R. Naftali, since he caused the illness by driving the winds from your city." AK"L

15) He also wrote me:

The city of Ropschitz wanted to find a rabbi for the congregation. They sent a delegation to... R. Mendele of Rimanov for his advice, and remained there for Shabbat. During the Se'udah Shlishit, the holy R. Mendele began to discuss the issue of a rabbi for Ropschitz. Suddenly a voice came forth with these words: "If only R. Naftali Dukler [for so he was known in his youth] would leave his wine business and be received as rabbi." R. Mendele immediately said the Birkat Ha-Mazon and lighted candles. He asked everyone who had been eating there, "Who said this?" and each answered that he hadn't said it. Then R. Mendele said, "If so, it appears that this is a declaration from heaven," and he commanded them to go to Dukla and retain him as their rabbi,

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which they did.

Apparently, he was later retained as the ABD"K of Liska, succeeding his father. This can be seen in his endorsement of the book Otzar Ha-Kavod ("Treasury of Honor"), published in Novidwahr in 1807. The endorsement was signed on Monday, the Eleventh of Iyyar, 1806:

"The holy Naftali Zvi Horowitz of the congregation of Liska, in the region of Sanik." It is written in this way at the head of the endorsement.

16) He also wrote:

When the Ropschitzer first came to R. Elimelekh of Lizensk, the latter didn't want to accept him as a student. He told him, "I don't want students with yihis." The holy rav began to cry and beg for grace. He said to him, "Why am I guilty, just because my father has yihis?" Still, he didn't want to accept him. When the Ropschitzer saw that he would in no way accept him, he fell to earth and began to wretch blood; so he finally accepted him.

There are those who say that he said to him, "I will not accept the murderer's son." He told him that he and his brother R. Zusya had come to Liska in the course of their wanderings. When they came to R. Mendele, the Ropschitzer's father, he told them, "If I had gone wandering in Exile as long as you, I would have reached a higher (spiritual) level." Because of his words, they continued their wanderings for another entire year.

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17) He also wrote:

During the wars of Napoleon I, R. Mendele (of Rimanov) wanted to make him into (construe him as the forces of) Gog and Magog, and tried through prayer to bring him victory on the battlefield, in order to bring redemption. He said that it would be good for the blood of Israel to be spilled kneecap-deep from Pristik to Rimanov, in order to bring on the time of our redemption. However, the tzaddikim of Koznitz and Lublin did not agree with this, and they prayed that he would fall in war, since they saw in their holy visions that the "final days" had not arrived.

It is told that Napoleon disguised himself as a common man and came to the Maggid of Koznitz when he was in the vicinity. When he left the house, the Rebbe of Koznitz took up the Purim scroll, and read concerning him, "Nappol tippol -- Napoleon tippol" ("He will surely fall -- Napoleon will surely fall"). (Based on Es. 6:13)

The Ropschitzer was young then, and lived in the city of Dukla. He agreed with (the assessment of) the holy men of Koznitz and Lublin, and he travelled to R. Mendele with the intention of changing his mind. He arrived on the eve of Passover, which had been a day of fierce fighting. R. Mendele was at that time pushing matzot into the oven, and each time he did so, he said, "Another five hundred Russians will fall;" and so it was in the war. Suddenly, the Ropschitzer entered and asked, "Rebbe, is not Napoleon unclean, and if so, the unclean is postponed until the second day of Passover?" With that, he fled the house.

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R. Mendele commanded that he be brought before him, but they didn't find him. He had already fled the city in the wagon that had been readied for his trip back to Dukla.

After the festival of Passover, the Ropschitzer travelled to the Koznitzer to request that he stand up for him lest he be hurt by the grudge of R. Mendele. The Maggid was very weak, and had lain all day in bed, but had gone to the mikvah when the Ropschitzer arrived. The Ropschitzer took this as an opportunity, and laid himself in the Maggid's bed. When the Maggid returned from the mikvah, he wanted to lie down in bed, as usual, to refresh his spirits. However, the Ropschitzer told him he wouldn't allow him to lie in bed until he promised him that he wouldn't allow him to be hurt by the wrath of R. Mendele. He promised him, and he left the bed. [See more concerning this in our collection, Esser Orot ("Ten Lights"), in the section on the Koznitzer, paragraph 32.]

18) He also wrote:

I heard directly from a reliable source who heard directly from the wealthy R. Mendele Weinberger ZA" L, that he and his father, R. Moses Flentscher [R. Moses was the brother-in-law of the Ropschitzer], were once visiting with R. Mendele of Rimanov, and found the Ropschitzer and his son R. Abraham Haim of Linsk, conversing with R. Mendele. When R. Mendele Weinberger and his father entered the room, the

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Ropschitzer stopped talking. And when they left, the Ropschitzer said to me [sic], "I am very angry that you interrupted my discussion with our rebbe, for I wanted to ask him what will be in fifty years." R.

Mendele Weinberger said in his old age that fifty years after this incident was the war of Napoleon III, and it appears that this was his intention.

19) He also wrote:

When the Ropschitzer became a Bar Mitzvah, his father, the holy R. Mendele, was the rabbi of Leshnov. He travelled with him to R. Michle of Zlotzov. When R. Michle laid tefillin on him, the Ropschitzer said that he has bound him to the higher world, and will not be able to loosen himself forevermore.

20) He also wrote me that he heard that the holy rav of Shinava said in these words: It is clear as day that the Rebbe of Ropschitz had the power to bring the King Messiah even before the appointed time of redemption, had he not been prevented by heaven beforehand: He had been given a wife [His apparent meaning is that she was a shrew who distracted him]. AK"L

21) The ABD"K of Plonsk wrote me how he (the Ropschitzer) used to conceal his ways of holiness with wisdom. Once when he prayed the tikkun hazot (the midnight service) with outstretched hands and feet on

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the ground, he forgot to close the door. At this moment one of the townsfolk entered the room. He arose quickly, and in order to hide his holy actions, he said to this householder, "If only the townsfolk knew of the piety of their rabbi, they would treat him with more respect." The householder thought he intended to glorify himself through his deeds, and left and belittled him (for his boasting). But you should understand (his true intent).

22) He (the Ropschitzer) used to say:

The tzaddikim ask that those in need of salvation will come to them requesting that prayers be said for them. But the rav of Ropschitz arises in the morning and prays that all who need help will be saved in their houses and not need to come to Ropschitz, and not think that they were helped by the prayers of the rav of Ropschitz in particular.

23) It is known that he was first married to the daughter of one of the community leaders of the city of Brody. Once, he came home and found his wife in front of the mirror adorning herself. He said to her, "Why are you adorning yourself so much? I find you attractive without adornment." She replied, "Do you think I want to be attractive only to you? I also want to be attractive to others." When he heard this, he immediately fled from there to the city of Zlotzov, to R. Michle. As soon as he came to him he said, "Rebbe! I need a divorce," and the rebbe, R. Michle, agreed.

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He divorced his wife, and remained with him for a full year. After this, the rich man R. Zvi Goldhammer of Dukla came to R. Michle, and reminded him that his daughter was still unmarried. He told him she should marry the holy Ropschitzer, and there and then they made the marriage conditions.

24) He would say:

"Happy is the man who comes here and has no meat in his stomach." He also commanded the reciting at meals of the Mishnah passage in Zebahim (chapter 4:6), "An offering must be slaughtered while mindful of six things, etc." Because the table substitutes for the altar, as it is known.

25) He used to say that when the holiest tzaddikim eat earthly meat, they change it into heavenly flesh, interchanging their food higher and higher until (it becomes) the ox on the Throne of Glory. [See Zera Kodesh, by the holy rav, regarding the second day of Sukkot, and your hair will stand on end because of his holiness.] See there.

26) Our teacher... R. Shalom of Kaminka came to R. Shalom (Rokeach) of Belz after his rebbe, the Ropschitzer, had died. He once asked the holy man of Belz if he would reveal to him a divine yihud (permutation) of the Holy Name that he prepared for the time of his passing, and he gave him a time limit on it. After he received the secret from his rav,

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he was asked by the rebbetzin (of Belz) if he received such a secret from his rav in Ropschitz. He said, "I swear!" When he was staying with his teacher in Ropschitz, along with the holy ga'on of Tzanz ZA"L they worked in the kitchen preparing the Passover needs with their comrades. R. Naftali came into the kitchen, leaned on him and his comrade, and whispered this secret into their ears, as it were. May his merit defend us.

27) I heard during my youth from great scholars and Hasidim a wondrous story of our rebbe the Ropschitzer. Once on the eve before Yom Kippur, at the time when everyone gathered at the pure table (the Rebbe's tisch), we waited a long time for the holy rebbe to come to the table, as was customary. But he didn't come. Important people entered his room, and found him crying incessantly, such that it was impossible to approach and speak to him because of the great bitterness of his tears. They told his wise and holy son, R. Eliezer ZATZ"L, to go to his father, because he was very, very important to him. He entered the room and asked his father why he was crying. His father answered him: "My beloved son, I am too ashamed to go to the table, and to the synagogue to pray on this Yom Kippur, since I have examined that every year I promised the Blessed Name (God) during the "Days of Awe" that I would return with complete repentance, and walk the straight path, but I examine my ways and discover they are corrupt. I have not done tikkun for anything,

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etc." He was very bitter with himself.

His wise and holy son responded in his wisdom: "My beloved lord and father, I promise you that from this moment on you will repent fully and walk the straight path and come with me to the table." He answered him, "If you will promise me, I will believe you and come to the sacred table."

During the interrupted meal the holy... R. Naftali drank sugar water, and hid a piece of sugar in his white trousers for the evening after Yom Kippur. And it happened that evening, that when the holy rav prayed the sacred prayers, the sugar melted and shrivelled up from the heat, and made a stain on his white clothes.

In the morning, the holy rav saw the stain on his white clothes (he had forgotten the hidden sugar), and suspected that, God forbid, he had had an emission. He cried out to his wise and holy son, "In vain did I agree to your promise, for look what happened to me!" And during the entire Yom Kippur day he shook the world with his tears in prayer, such that everyone repented completely.

During the evening after Yom Kippur, when he wanted to drink water; he searched for the sugar in his pocket, and suddenly remembered. He realized that he had suspected himself falsely, as the stain was from the melted sugar.

For this reason, he interpreted the passage (Lev. 4:3), "If the anointed priest should sin..." [understanding that the anointed priest is com-

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parable to the tzaddik of his generation who "sins," but in truth does not sin. For this was merely an error, and the meaning of "sin" is the error that he sinned, for it never happened. Behold, he does so] "...to bring guilt on the people..." [If among the commonfolk there is one who sins in these ways and doesn't know how to repent properly, the Blessed Name makes it appear that the tzaddik sins in this way, that he might repent loudly] "...that this entire people be forgiven" [including the masses].

I heard all this from the tellers of truth about his wisdom. DPH"H

28) The ABD"K of Plonsk... wrote me that R. Abraham, the ABD"K of Ulanov [who compiled the Toldot Avraham ("Generations of Abraham") on the Talmud] son of R. Y_____ Harif (the name is unknown to me), who was one of the great friends of the Ropschitzer, died on Simchat Torah in Ulanov. In Ropschitz, the Hasidim were celebrating Simchat Torah in their usual manner, dancing out into the courtyard of the synagogue in front of the window of the holy rebbe. R. Naftali... stood by the window and watched. Suddenly he raised his hand to signal that they should cease. He stood like a man who had been stricken, and they were silent for a few minutes. Afterwards he said, "If, in war, one of the commanding officers of the army falls in the field of battle, do the troops turn fainthearted? No! The battle continues. Dance and rejoice!" and they resumed. Afterwards, it became known that this was the hour

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that the holy ga'on of Ulanov ZA" L died.

29) He also wrote:

It is known that the Ropschitzer was irritated with the holy R. Zvi Elimelekh of Dinov. R. Yekutiel Aryeh, the Rosh Yeshivah in Stanislav wrote me: "When I was young I heard from... R. Gershon ZA" L, who told that... R. Naftali would say that his irritation was not over his assumption of power -- that he organized a separate following during his lifetime. Rather, that he knew that it was decreed in heaven that R. Zvi Elimelekh should wear his crown only so-and-so many years [I do not remember exactly how many]. What will happen to him? If he would begin his rabbinic leadership in his old age, he would live a long life.

When R. Zvi Elimelekh had passed away, they realized that he wore his crown only as long as the holy Ropschitzer had predicted. AK" L

30) The ga'on and ABD" K... of Plonsk wrote me:

R. Simcha... the ABD" K of Klimnitov wrote me that he heard directly from R. Avraham Shlomo... the ABD" K of Azrov, son of the holy kohen, the ADMU" R... of that place, that once on the holy Shabbat, the Ropschitzer sat with many Hasidim and distinguished scholars (at his tisch). One particular Hasid had a question in mind over the verse, "Before Me there was no god formed, and after Me there will be none " (Isa. 43:10). He was perplexed and astounded by the verse, for how can there be a before and after for One Who is "without beginning or end" (an allusion

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to the phrase in the hymn, "Adon Olam")? He was unable to rest in peace over this problem.

The Rebbe sensed this, and stood up from the table, and answered: "The prophet Isaiah said, 'Before Me there was no god formed.' We hold with Rashi's interpretation, that 'before me' means 'in my presence,' meaning 'in all the time that I have existed.' 'And after Me there will be none.' There will be none, 'for I am eternal, says the Lord.'" He put the mind of the Hasid at rest, and he realized that R. Naftali had said this for him. He saw clearly that his holy rebbe was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

31) Once R. Naftali was considering his yihis up to the Shla"h and beyond him, and said to a particular Hasid: "What is the function of yihis? He (one without yihis) rises dutifully at midnight and involves himself in holy works and study until the time of the morning prayers, at which time he prays extra prayers. After the service he comes to surmise that, without a doubt, his father and ancestors (were ordinary men and) didn't do as much.

The same is not true of the Ropschitzer. If he does as much as the aforementioned man, after prayer he only tastes bitterness in the brandy he brings to his lips. It tastes like bitter water when he recalls the divine service of his ancestors. Did they too take a break at this juncture? Therefore, yihis forces one to drink less brandy after prayer.

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32) My dear friend... R. Avraham Ettinga of Dukla wrote me that he heard from the rav of Yoshnitz, who heard from his father... the author of the Ravid Ha-Zahav ("The Golden Necklace"), who spent fifteen years with the Ropschitzer, that he saw three wondrous signs performed by the Ropschitzer.

Once, on the eve of the first day of Sukkot, a woman with a small child on her right arm came before him. The child was sick with consumption. The holy rav said, "I don't like to say it, but I must tell you that the child is not redeemed." The woman admitted that he had not had a pidyon ha-ben ("Redemption of the First-Born" ceremony). The Hasidim investigated and clarified which city she was from, and it was known to them that the city was farther than 160 miles from Ropschitz. So they saw that the knowledge of the holy rav was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

33) The second miraculous sign:

Once, on Sukkot, the author of the Ravid Ha-Zahav had an injury to his leg, and sat behind the furnace and cooking stove, for he feared that if he sat with people, they might knock against the leg. On Hoshannah Rabbah, a man stood next to him, and at the time of the "beating of the Hoshannah," he accidentally hit his leg. He fell to the earth and fainted from the great pain. The holy Ropschitzer was standing by the lectern, turned (away) towards the eastern wall, and suddenly, at that very mo-

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ment, felt he was going to faint. He moved over to the man and said to him, "Yisrael Ber Leib (for so he was called), will you indeed suffer alone? Come with me to the other room, and eat to your heart's delight, a little brandy and cake."

34) The third miraculous sign of the author of the Ravid Ha-Zavid, who was the son-in-law of a civic leader of Rimanov, and ate at his table for fifteen years: This son-in-law had a friend who was the Hasidic rebbe, R. Yotzi b. R. Berish b. R. Avraham Elchanon of Plontsha, who also used to eat at the father-in-law's table. These two were as devoted to one another as David and Jonathan. They always used to go together to the holy... R. Naftali, and would always sit together at his tisch.

It was the holy way of R. Naftali to personally distribute loaves of bread at the table, and he would customarily give two loaves of bread of equal size, that were stuck together, to the two devoted companions. This was his standard practice on every occasion.

Once, a trace of resentment suddenly stole into the heart of each one for the other, although neither knew why. When the holy rav was distributing loaves on the holy Shabbat, he took two loaves that were stuck together, separated them, and handed a loaf to one and a loaf to the other.

After the festive meal, while they were walking to their homes, they began to question the matter and asked each other, "What has the rebbe done to us, separating the loaves before giving them to us? This can

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only mean that we are guilty of resentment towards each other." Therefore, they reconciled and drank brandy to the health of the other, and their love and brotherhood became even greater than ever before.

The next day, at the noon meal, he gave them two loaves stuck together, as he had before. Then they saw clearly that the Holy Spirit appeared in the House of Study.

35) My dear friend... R. Yosef Ha-Kohen Schwartz [the author of Yarhon Rabani ("Rabbinic Monthly") and the Yalkut Yosef ("Compilation of Yosef")] who was father-in-law of... R. A. Deutsch, the ABD"K of the God-fearing congregation of Banihad, wrote me, in these words:

I am writing out for you two authentic stories. The first I heard from R. Naftali Ha-Kohen..., whose paternal grandfather was the famous... R. Abraham Leib ZA"L [ABD"K of Bergsoz], at the time that he lived in the city of Ohel (Hungary) after his marriage.

Once he travelled with the property of a companion in a coach to R. Naftali of Ropschitz. As soon as they left the city, a big dog pursued them for about an hour, screaming and barking, astonishing everyone in the coach. My grandfather ZA"L said, "Is it not known that one who disputes and opposes tzaddikim is reincarnated as a dog? Behold, we are travelling to our rebbe; this dog must be the reincarnation of a disputant and Mitnagid, and for this reason, he is shouting at us." Immediately after he said this the coach rode over the head of the dog and

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killed it. It seemed like a wonder. [The meaning of the event is that it atoned (for crimes in his past life).]

When they arrived in Ropschitz, they went to receive the customary greeting. The Ropschitzer initiated the conversation and said, in these words: "Young men, do you know that the whole world says that Mitnagdim are reincarnated as dogs, and that this is true?" As soon as they heard this, they understood his intent, and understood his greatness and holiness, for he had seen the event. May his merit defend us.

36) The second story from the aforementioned contributor:

As he (R. Naftali) was about to leave that place, my grandfather ZA" L asked him, "My wife is pregnant. How shall I name the child if it is a boy?" He answered, "If the child is a girl, and the next is a boy, name him after me." It happened just that way. He named the boy Naftali [he became a learned rabbi], but worried for many years that he had not given him both names of the holy rebbe (Naftali Zvi). The learned rabbi of Shinava, our teacher, R. Yehezkel (son of the Tzanzer), lived at the same time. When the namesake passed away, he said publicly, that he was certain that if the namesake had been given both names, he would have lived for many more years, because life depends on the name. AK" L

So end the words of the ga'on and teacher R. Yosef, whom we mentioned previously.

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37) My dear friend, the ga'on and ABD''K of Plonsk wrote me that he heard that once the Lubliner told R. Naftali of Ropschitz, who, as is known, was regarded as a very wise (or clever) man, that it is not written in the Torah that one should be wise with the Lord your God, but rather, "You will be simple before the Lord your God" (Dt. 18:13). The Ropschitzer responded that great wisdom is required to be simple with God.
DPH''H

38) He also told me in the Ropschitzer's name:

(According to the Sage's preface to the Zohar) the wicked are allowed to rest on every Shabbat in Gehinnom. If during his lifetime a man was accustomed to spend his Shabbat with his rebbe, if he requested to visit his rebbe in Gan-Eden, just as he had spent the Shabbatot of his lifetime at the rebbe's tisch, it would be accepted, because if not, he would not be given his due rest.

The Ropschitzer concluded that the rebbe would have to be a fool to allow the man to return to Gehinnom after Shabbat. DPH''H

39) The ABD''K of Plonsk told me in the name of... R. Dubarish ZA''L, in these words:

I heard distinctly in the name of... Naftali of Ropschitz: "And they (הם) will not know my ways" (Ps. 95:10). He who stays in his home and doesn't travel to tzaddikim doesn't know the ways of the Lord. In the language of Ashkenaz (Yiddish), he who sits in his home is called זיטער. DPH''H

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 40-42

40) In the days of (Naftali's) youth, there was a man in his native city who fasted and kept vigils until he considered himself close to perfection, and his heart swelled. R. Naftali ZA''L, sensed this. A boy was walking, and bumped against the man. Naftali scolded the boy, "Why do you disturb this man from his studies? Is he your comrade? Can you not see that he has been studying and fasting and praying on Mondays and Thursdays?" When the man heard this, he responded: "Rather say from Shabbat to Shabbat." The people understood his great wisdom, and reproved the man for his pride.

41) I heard in my youth from... R. Yosef Meir ZATZ''L of Spinka, who had heard from his own rabbis, that once, the Ropschitzer said to R. Yudeh Zvi of Rozdol (his disciple), "In the near future you will become a rebbe, and you will offer blessings to Jews. So start by blessing me." But the rav of Rozdol refused.

The Ropschitzer then said, "When I was your age the Berditschever said to me, in much the same way, 'You will eventually become a rebbe, and offer blessings to the Jews, so start with me.' I too refused, and to this day I regret it. Know this, so you will not regret the opportunity." And he placed his hands on him and blessed his rebbe.

42) In the responsa of R. Sh. M. (the acronym was obvious to the writer, but not to me), section 185, he wrote in these words:

I was instructed by an old scholar who himself was around at the

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 42-44

time of...the ABD"K of Ropschitz, that (the latter) commanded his students to sanctify the day using a small flask of brandy from which he was accustomed to drink, and added that they weren't required to fulfill the full measure of a cup (normally needed to make the blessing with wine). And although there was wine on the table before him, (the old scholar) said that (Naftali) would bless (the day) with brandy, in order to teach his students the law. And this was confirmed in the name of...the ABD"K of Kaminka (disciple of Naftali) ZATZ"L, that he always did this. I was also told in the name of the Lubliner ZATZ"L, that it is proper to use both to sanctify the day, but wine and beer require a full cup. See there.

43) The ABD"K of Plonsk wrote me that when the Ropschitzer had to make a rabbinic judgment, and his first judgment (possibly his first in Ropschitz) was that the subject was trefe (unclean or unfit), he didn't want to begin with a negative judgment, and said to the one who raised the question, "If it was so, it would be kosher, but now, since it isn't so, you talk."

44) He also wrote me:

In his first sermon, the Ropschitzer said, "'I am a worm' (Ps. 22:7). But Hasidim are afraid of worms." DPH"H

(Jews are forbidden to eat creeping animals (Lv. 11:43) and so, Hasidim are particularly meticulous in cleaning fruits and vegetables

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 44-47

of worms. Because the words "fear" and "awe" are identical in Hebrew, the Ropschitzer suggests that his Hasidim will hold him in awe, and give him support.)

45) His son, R. Eliezer ZATZ"L, once said during the Selichot (in the Amidah of Erev Yom Kippur), "We have no שִׁינֵי ("remnant") except this Torah" (liturgical phrase). This means that we don't retain the שִׁינֵי ("remnants"), but just the Torah. DPH"H

(R. Eliezer is making a pun on the word שִׁינֵי, which is the term for the practice at the rebbe's tisch, whereby the rebbe takes a small taste from a large platter of food, and the remnants are distributed among the disciples present. R. Eliezer is either suggesting that, in general, what was retained from eating at the rebbe's tisch was Torah, not a free meal; or he is alluding to the fact that on Yom Kippur there is no meal, but just Torah.)

46) Once when the Ropschitzer still spent Yom Kippur with one of his teachers, he was standing bent over during the Amidah. Someone behind him lay his Mahzor on his back, and recited the Al Het ("The Great Confessional"). Afterwards, he said to him, "You have sinned, and you tell on me!" DPH"H

47) The holy rav (Naftali) said that the words וְחַי טוֹב ("and live well") refer to saving one from the Evil Inclination, and specifically to safe-

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 47-48

guarding the holy brit (milah). This is also brought up in the Zera Kodesh (authored by the Ropschitzer). He said that for the woman who doesn't have a fixed menstrual period like the rest of her gender, but sometimes has it early and sometimes late, it is good (for her husband) to pray the prayer for the New Moon at its proper time. He should emphasize the first letters in (each word of the liturgical phrase) "that they might not change their appointed time," which gives (the notarikon)

יְהוָה ("my wife"). He should also pray that his wife might not change her appointed time (for menstruating), but rather, just as the moon waxes and wanes for two weeks without missing its appointed time, so too might his wife be ritually pure for two weeks."

The holy R. Naftali of Lizensk (probably a misprint; it was most likely either Naftali of Ropschitz or Elimelekh of Lizensk) told of another remedy: The husband should study the "Order of Women" (in the Mishnah), as mentioned in the book Divrei Yitzhak ("The Words of Yitzhak").

48) Our teacher... R. Eisik of Ziditzov said in the name of R. Naftali, concerning a great man who said that he himself was not a Hasid:

In the chambers built in the Temple (Court) and opening onto the ground that was not holy, no sanctity attaches to the place within them, but their roofs are deemed to be within holy ground; in those built on ground that was not holy and opening onto the Temple (Court) the space within them is holy but no sanctity attaches to their roofs (from the mishnaic tractate Ma'aser Sheni ("Second Tithe") 3:8).

He said that he who follows the system of Hasidism outlined by the

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 48-50

Besht and his holy students, "even though built on ground that was not holy" [meaning, even though they aren't particularly righteous], "but open into the Temple Court" [that is, that he attached himself to tzaddikim] "is considered holy." He who says he is not a Hasid, "and built on holy ground" [meaning upright and God-fearing], but open to ground that is not holy [meaning that he doesn't attach himself to a tzaddik], "no sanctity attaches to him."

49) Our... Rabbi Zvi Hirsch of Ziditzov mentioned in (Naftali's) name in his book Ateret Zvi ("The Crown of Zvi"), in the Torah portion Beshallah, these words:

Therefore, I heard directly from my dear friend... R. Naftali of Ropschitz, may the Lord increase his days and years in goodness, Amen. He would say that the seal emet ("truth") actually hints at the notarikon

מחה...אמחה תמחה [which alludes to verses about the blotting out of Amalek, found at the end of the portions Beshallah and Ki Tetse (Ex. 17:14 and Dt. 25:19). Note there (in Ateret Zvi) that our R. Zvi shows that the holy Zohar hints at what his holy words mean.

50) Our rebbe Naftali was accustomed to say with regard to the midrash that the KB"H (God) taught Moses, "Each generation has its own leaders; each generation has its own judges," etc.: Wouldn't it seem that showing the generation before its leaders and judges is improper?

He said that the face of Moses was like the sun and the face of Joshua

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 50-51

was like the moon. And in every succeeding generation the visage waned. If the Lord had shown Moses at the beginning the leaders and judges of these times, Moses could not have endured it.

Similarly, he said about himself, "If the Lord had shown Moses that Naftali was a rebbe, he would become weak and say, "Is this my comfort? (pun on Ruth 1:19; Naomi="my comfort"). Is this a rebbe?" For this reason, He first showed him the generation, and only afterwards, its leaders, meaning that the leaders suit the quality of the generation. DPH"Ḥ.

51) In Hekhal Ha-Brachah, the portion N'tzavim, it is written, in these words:

Rabbi Naftali of Ropschitz... said to a man who used to speak evil against the tzaddikim, "The dogs recite the psalm, 'Come, let us bow down,' etc. (Perek Shira on Ps. 95:6. Perek Shira is a text of merkabah mysticism that was revived and recited as a prayer in Isaac Luria's circle.)

The idea is that he who speaks against the tzaddik is reincarnated as a dog, as explained by the kaballists. The reason is that he says against the tzaddik that, at the time of prayer, the tzaddik lingers and dances and bows; he is lustful and arrogant and sleeps too much, and similar lies. Therefore, when he is reincarnated as a dog, he says, "Come, let us bow down and thank the deeds of the tzaddikim." DPH"Ḥ

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 52-53

52) Our teacher R. Naftali was accustomed to explain the expression, "Behold, when a scholar is boiling up inside, it is the Torah that is stirring him up." It means that because of the power of the "fire of Torah," he is angry at himself, for it appears to him that he has not fulfilled his duties, and he feels that he is full of iniquity and great sin.

DPH"H

53) During his youth, when he would fulfill the role of badchan at a wedding, R. Naftali used to say that, "The match will oleh yafeh ("fair well") in the way of the world. His intention was that the match as of this moment equals Yahweh (=26) plus Adonai (=65); when the numerical value of the letters in these two words is added up, the sum is ninety-one. But in the future (the Messianic Era), the Holy Name of God will be Yihyeh (=30), according to the holy Shla"h (Naftali's ancestor). The intention of the musaf of Rosh Hashanah is that the combined sum of Yihyeh and Adonai is identical to the sum of yafeh (both add up to ninety-five), and this is the complete combination (combination of letters signifying Messianic fulfillment).

The son of R. Naftali, R. Eliezer of Dzikov ZATZ"L, explained that this is numerically equal to amen selah, because amen adds up to ninety-one, and selah has the same value as yafeh, which as already mentioned, is numerically equal to the Holy Name.

(Oleh yafeh, or "fair well," includes both a pun and a gematria. The

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 53-54

first word, oleh, means literally, "ascend," and alludes to the holy spark ascending into the Godhead in the process of tikkun, or yihud. The conjugation of marriage is also termed yihud. The second word has the numerical value of ninety-five. Thus, via a string of gematria associations, when R. Naftali says that the match should "fair well," he is implying that it should be linked to the Messianic redemption.)

54) In the book Divrei Hayim, on the Torah, in the portion Balak we find these holy words:

I heard from my teacher, the ADMU"R of Ropschitz [regarding what the Sages said: "If you merit it, I will hasten the time (of redemption); but if not, it comes in its due time,"] (alluding to Is. 60:22). Everything has its time, and there is an established time when an astronomical configuration will come into place; at which time, the righteous Messiah will come. Even though God, "sets the seasons and appoints the times," (liturgical phrase) and it is written in the Midrash, that God said to Abraham, "Saturn stands in the East; I will summon it, and it will stand in the West." ("Saturn"="Righteous One," suggesting that God can summon the Messiah when He wills.)

So in all the worlds created by God out of absolute nothingness, each of these are vitalized by Him, such that without Him they would not exist. Therefore they are like an axe in the hands of a woodsman, and do His Will even though it seems a change in their nature, for so it was stipu-

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 54-55

lated in the beginning of Creation; that is, that indeed they were not created just for themselves alone. All their lives they belong to God their Creator, and do the Will of their Owner. This is the meaning of "in its due time," for by necessity, redemption will come only at the time when the astronomical configuration reaches its (proper) point. Only God Himself can hasten the astronomical movements (leading to redemption). AK"L

(Naftali is addressing the paradox that the time of the Messiah is fixed, but that God can cause the Messiah to come sooner. He stresses that Time itself is merely another instrument of God's creation. God can affect Time, which is measured by astronomical configurations, by speeding up the amount of time it would normally have taken for the particular configuration that indicates the redemption to manifest itself.)

55) Another selection from the holy book Divrei Hayim, from the portion Noah, in these words:

I heard from...the Ropschitzer, who brought forth the question, "How does the Katagor (the Accusing Angel) have the power to approach the Throne of Glory and say, 'So-and-so has done this,' since the KB"H closes his eyes to evil, and cannot look at evil deeds?"

He said, "It is true that no accusation of sin can be brought before the Throne of Glory, because of It's Holiness, as explained in secret; for in the heavenly world, before they announce the sin, they wash it a

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 55-56

given number of times. Therefore, it is true that he doesn't bring the sin itself before the Creator of the Universe, Whose eyes are pure: None of it is brought in the accusation. The only thing he brings is the root of holiness which rests in every transgression, since in everything in the World there exists a Divine Spark, through which a transgression can be turned into a repentance. Therefore, the accusation is entered, that so-and-so has done a deed that demands such-and-such a repair and repentance, because all transgressions have a specific repentance and mode of repair. This then is the accusation, and he who did the transgression must remedy it properly." So end his holy words.

56) The ga'on, the ABD"K of Plonsk wrote me, in these words:

The holy... R. Mendele of Rimanov, the holy Rebbe of Apt, and Naftali of Ropschitz were together. The Apter Rebbe was an old man by this time, and would lay on his bed or couch. The holy Rimanover would be next to him. The Ropschitzer was still young, and sat next to them in a chair.

The holy Apter said, smiling, "Ropschitzer Rav, why were you pleased by the misreading during the Shmoneh Esreh for Yom Kippur Eve?" The Rimanover's servant, who was a great man of high standing, actually did the asking; he asked the Ropschitzer because he didn't dare ask his master, the elderly Apter Rebbe. He said, "I beg your pardon, but could you explain this to me?"

ESSER TZACHT ZACHOT 56-57

He (the Ropschitzer) told him that during the year, a "bad judgment" (an illness), God have mercy, had afflicted the women, which had taken the lives of many of them, particularly those who were pregnant. A yokel was there praying at the mincha preceding the Yom Kippur Eve service. During the "Prayer for the Year," he said nashim ("women") in place of shanim ("years"). He continued in this manner, saying "bless our women" instead of "bless our years." His prayer "bore fruit" in heaven (was efficacious), and therefore, they all laughed at this appropriate misreading. AK"L

This is similar to a story told from the days of the Besht ZA"L, in the book Be'er Moshe ("The Well of Moses"), in his section of Torah insights for Shmini Atzeret, regarding the explanation of, "God will shut up the skies so there will be no rain" (Dt. 11:17).

57) He also said:

Once he (the Ropschitzer) was travelling together with the holy ga'on of Apt to the holy rav of Rizhin ZA"L. The holy Apter asked him if he knew why they used fleece carpets on the Rizhiner's floor. He answered him that they are used to hide the fleas. The Rizhiner (when he heard this) remarked, "They aren't mistaken when they say that the Ropschitzer is wise!"

(The English pun of fleece and fleas does not exist in the Hebrew. It probably exists in the Yiddish.)

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58) He also said:

I heard that the Lubliner once said before the people who had gathered with him on Simchat Torah: "Behold, the Ropschitzer has a worthy visitor on this holiday -- the holy Shla''h."

The holy Ropschitzer told the people with him on the eve of Simchat Torah: "I am experiencing a manifestation of the spirit of the Shla''h at this time. But he turns his back to me -- that is, that I walked in front of my bookcase, I saw the book, The Holy Shla''h, sitting in the bookcase, with the title "Shla''h" engraved on the spine."

After the festival, it became known to the Ropschitzer that his teacher the Lubliner had mentioned the manifestation of the spirit of the Shla''h. He travelled to Lublin intentionally, and argued with his holy rav. He exclaimed, "Why did you reveal it (the manifestation) before the whole world? Don't I know your thoughts, and not intervene in your activities? I don't reveal your deeds to the world; why do you reveal mine?"

59) My dear friend... R. Yosef HaKohen Schwartz, sent me a number of beautiful sayings from the hand of his father... R. Naftali HaKohen Schwartz ZATZ''L, who was the ABD''K of אבדק '7 (the name is unclear):

I heard from the holy rav of Shinava, who said in the name of... R. Naftali of Ropschitz, that (with regards to) all the prayer and service that Israel performs, and still (the Messiah) ben David does not come;

ESSER TZACHT ZACHOT 59-60

the KB"H accumulates all these services, and at the time of redemption, will show why all these deeds were necessary.

60) The aforementioned rav also wrote me, in these words:

I heard that when the holy ga'on who authored M'loh Ha-Ro'im ("The Gathering of Shepherds") was visiting the master, R. Naftali of Ropschitz ZA"L, (the latter) honored him (by asking) that he give a d'var torah at the feast. Out of respect for the master of Ropschitz, he didn't want to speak, until he entreated him a great deal. After this, he said: "We find in Gemara, 'So great is the honoring of human beings, that it supersedes the negatively-stated commandments that are in the Torah.' The objective of speaking Torah is 'saying and doing' (allusion to the Baruch She-amar prayer). This means that in speaking Torah, one should make repairs in the upper worlds (via tikkun). This is not true if an utterance involves no action ("Thou shalt not..."), which isn't really significant. But so important is the honoring of people [when one must say a d'var torah], that it supersedes the negatively-stated commandments, such that, even though one accomplishes nothing in one's speech, one should speak anyway. This is hinted at when they say that it overrides the negatively-stated commandments, that are in the Torah. Even if he doesn't follow up his d'var torah with any actions, nevertheless, he must say it, in honor of people." AK"L

(The story suggests that even if one is unable to achieve mystical

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action through one's words, discussions of Torah should still be undertaken for the sake of honoring one's listeners.)

61) The Ga'on... of Plonsk wrote me in the name of the Ga'on of Saretzk, in these words:

One of the disciples of the holy R. Eliezer of Dzikov from the town of Rozvadov, was in Premishlan on the second day of Hol Ha-Moed Sukkot. He visited with the holy R. Meirl, who asked him, "Where are you from?" He answered, "From Rozvadov." "Where are you going?" "To Dzikov." R. Meirl said, "Lazarl [that is, the holy one of Dzikov] is very wise. Every time I enter heaven, Eliezerl arrives ahead of me. But he has done something innovative. He is wise, yet is now sitting in a sukkah in which the sunlight is greater than the shade" (which should make it unfit).

The man arose early and went to Dzikov, not to his home. He told his rebbe what the holy Premishlaner had said. The holy R. Eliezer said to his son, the ga'on, R. Meir: "Lamdan, I asked you about the sukkah [for he had travelled to a brit milah in another village, and the children had climbed up on the sukkah, and disturbed the thatchwork to expose too much sunlight]. You said it was fit, but he says it is not." So his son asked him, "Since you now admit that he (the Premishlaner) is also a master of the Holy Spirit, is he also truthful in saying he always sees you preceding him in heaven? Please tell us." He said he

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was lying about this. They then harassed him for an explanation. He said, "It happened only once." His children were happy to hear this. He told them, "Before I was born."

The holy ga'on R. Eliezer was modest in his ways, as was his father, R. Naftali of Ropschitz. He was angry to find chips of wood in his courtyard, for he had the German penchant for neatness. Some time later, it became known that he used to roll himself in the snow every winter night, and because of the wood-chips, he had welts all over his holy body. AK"L

62) In the book Ma'or Ha-Godol ("The Great Luminary") it is explained in the name of... R. Naftali of Ropschitz, "Every 'shrub' flourishes and saves" (based on Gn. 2:15 -- the Hebrew word for "shrub" also means "conversation"). For if the man merits, he causes divine acts, even without prayer; but rather, by speaking ordinary words with his comrade. And if this man needs healing, he is healed immediately. Indeed, everything he says works on mundane things regardless of prayer. This is the interpretation of "Every shrub/conversation [even ordinary human conversation will be efficacious, and for this reason it] flourishes and saves." DPH"H

63) My good friend...the ABD'K of Plonsk wrote me that... R. Dubarish of Risha ZATZ"L wrote:

I heard in the holy name of R. Naftali of Ropschitz (an explanation of) "All her pursuers have overtaken (literally, "grasped") her in the narrow

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 63-64

passes," (Lam. 1:3). He explained that all of Israel's enemies have grasped the great holiness of Israel when Israel was in dire straits; since they still hold fast with all their strength to the KB"H and His Holy Torah. So they too affirm and praise the people of Israel, "the offspring of his planting," (Is. 60:21). DPH"H

64) The aforementioned author also cited from the aforementioned text, in these words:

I heard from a holy man, R. Pinhas of Dembitz ZA"L, who heard directly from the holy and righteous R. Naftali of Ropschitz, regarding the verse, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord ask of you, but that you fear the Lord your God" (Dt. 10:12). This is a difficult passage, because the KB"H doesn't ask, but rather, tells this. After this, He enumerates several awesome and weighty things, such as, "to walk in all His ways," etc.

The holy one (Naftali) said that indeed, it is a fact that the KB"H requests only awe, and everything that He enumerates afterwards He is saying to Himself; this applies to what was said above. Thus he explains (the discrepancy between) these two verses. The KB"H is asking specifically about awe. For it is possible that He would find a man who possesses all the enumerated qualities, such as, "to walk in all His ways," "and to love Him and serve the Lord," etc, "with all his heart," etc., "and to observe the commandments of the Lord and His ordinances,"

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 64-65

etc. All of this could be simply for his own good. Therefore, the KB"H, Who desires piety, asks and inquires of the man, and reminds him about the awe.

Are there any words (literally, "cheeks") sweeter than these? AK"L

65) Another story from the pious ga'on of Plonsk, in the name of our rebbe Naftali, who explained, "There was envy of Moses in the camp, and of Aaron, the holy one of the Lord" (Ps. 106:16). This alludes to the fact that our teacher Moses would seclude himself during festivals. Moses raised his tent outside the camp, and didn't mix with the people. And Aaron's custom was to pursue peace, and make peace between a man and his neighbor, or a man and his wife.

But such was the character of this people, that they found room to criticize (or, "to be a Mitnagid against") a man superior to the people, in either case. So, "There was envy of Moses in the camp," because he raised his tent outside the camp, and was alone in his tent, and didn't come to mix with the camp of Israel. And they were (also) against Aaron, because he mixed with the people and intervened between a man and his neighbor. They said that it wasn't becoming to behave thus before them, but instead, he should be a holy one of Israel -- distinct and separate from all men. DPH"H

(R. Naftali seems to be describing the Mitnagdim and other critics of the tzaddikim, who indict some for being too aloof, and others for frater-

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 65-66

nizing too much with the people.)

66) Another anecdote from the aforementioned source, cited from the book B'nai Yosef ("The Children of Joseph") on the Torah, portion Vayishlah. In these words:

I heard from my esteemed father, who heard from the holy... R. Naftali of Ropschitz, that he once had a dream at night. He was in the heavenly yeshivah, and heard them explain this verse in many ways: "And Jacob sent messengers (or, "angels") before him to Esau his brother " (Gn. 32:4). He related some of these explanations at his table, but added that he was forbidden to reveal several others. My esteemed...father told me of what he could still remember, and this is his description:

The letters in וישלח ("and he sent") are divided into two words. וי indicates woe, and this is the way of evil. Therefore וי-שלח means that you should send woe away from you. Jacob observed the heel (of his brother Esau), and that in the end, man will be given account and judgment before the King of Kings, the KB"H.

"Messengers" is divided into two words: מל | אכים. מל comes from the expression, a spirit that speaks. אכים connotes exclusiveness, because (the Rabbis say) אכים ורקים מיעוטים הם ("all 'buts' and 'onlys' connote exclusiveness"). Therefore, מל אכים teaches us to be succinct in our words whenever possible.

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 66-67

"Before him to Esau" (plays with the similarity between the Hebrew words for "his actions" and "Esau"). This suggests that one should consider all this (all his actions). Before one enacts a commandment, one should first consider, using facts and common sense, whether one should perform the commandment or not.

Since I was still young (when I heard this interpretation) and didn't go over it again, I've forgotten the rest of the verses and the rest of the ways (he interpreted them).

So end his holy words in the aforementioned book.

67) In the book D'vir Ha-Mootzna ("The Secret Sanctuary"), in the portion Hayei Sarah, it is written in the name of the holy Ropschitzer Rebbe, in these words:

Once, on Hoshannah Rabbah, directly preceding the hoshannot, he began by citing, "And he made the camels kneel down..." (Gn. 24:11) [as though it were, "and he blessed the rewards," that is, he mentions the commandments and good acts that are called גומלים = "rewards"] "...towards evening..." [that is, God recalls Israel's commandments and good deeds that they perform during the evening, referring to the fourth day (of Sukkot). This is the evening of the Beit Ha-Sho'avah ceremony] "...the time that the women went out to draw water..." [meaning the time of the celebration of the Beit Ha-Sho'avah -- that is, on Hoshannah Rabbah, which is the time after the celebration of Beit

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 67-68

Ha-Sho'ava 7. His holy words end here.

(The Ropschitzer sees the situation in Genesis 24:11, which recounts Eliezer's mission to find a bride for Isaac, as an allegory for God's blessing good acts during Sukkot. This allegory is based on two puns.

כרך can mean both "kneeling" and "blessing." גמלים , which means camels, is very similar to the word גומלים , which means "rewards." Eliezer's encounter with Rebecca occurs at the time when the women went down to the well. R. Naftali associates this with the Temple ceremony of the Beit Ha-Sho'avah, which occurred during Sukkot and probably involved the carrying of pitchers of water.)

68) In the aforementioned work, in the portion Sh'lach L'cha, this verse is interpreted in the name of our master the Ropschitzer: "And now (I ask of you, may the power of the Lord) be great" (Nu. 14:17). Behold, all the holy service of Israel is towards the continuance of eighteen (mystical) lights over the entirety of Israel.

(This is a sophisticated gematria:)

"Be great" = acronym for "eighteen"

י ך גר"ל ן " ץ

$$37 \times 10 = 370 = 70 + 300$$

Thus, Moses (actually) requested that the Eighteen Lights continue over the entirety of Israel. AK"L

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 69-

69) In the aforementioned work, in the portion Balak, in the name of the aforementioned rav (Naftali):

Who is called a master of repentance? He who changes immediately after repenting. He becomes "another person," to the degree that in the higher worlds they say about him, "Who is he?" They do not recognize him (nor can they connect him with his flawed past). AK"L

70) In the book Ravid Ha-Zahav ("The Golden Necklace") [by the author of the aforementioned D'vir Ha-Mootzna], in the portion Ki Tetze, it is said in the name of the aforementioned master (Naftali):

The four species of the lulav parallel the (four letters of the) Divine Name, Blessed be He. The man takes it in his hand and fulfills God's will. So end his holy words.

71) (The Ropschitzer) is also quoted in the aforementioned book on page eighty-one, regarding the verse, "Your eyes saw my unformed limbs" (Ps. 139:16).

It really means that גלמי [which is a notarikon for יי מלך
גאות לובש ("The Lord God is dressed in magnificence" -- Ps.
93:1), and the intent is that since] "your eyes saw" [apparently that
men recognize God's Kingship because of this] "and they were all re-
corded in Your book" [they were all inscribed in the Book of Life].
AK"L

(The last quotation comes from the Unataneh Tokef prayer of Yom Kippur.)

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 72-73

72) It is also written in his name in that book, on page sixty-six, in these words:

I heard directly from the Ropschitzer (an explanation) of the verse, "And He discomfited (וַיִּהַם) the host of the Egyptians" (Ex. 14:24). It wishes to imply that the name of God (וַיִּהַ), Blessed be He, is a variant of וַיִּהַ, which is a complement of וַיִּהַ (together they make up the full name of God). For this reason, וַיִּהַ is written with the Tetragrammaton eliminating the letter ו at the end of the word. For the name of God is holy. Therefore, at the (Red) Sea, the Holy Name וַיִּהַ which is וַיִּהַ cancelled the ו at the end of its name.

Similarly, the righteous Caleb eliminated the ו, and for this reason, it is written, "And Caleb stilled (וַיִּהַם) the people towards Moses" (Nu. 13:30). So end his holy words.

(R. Naftali seems to be saying that these two Hebrew characters -- ו and ו -- suggest externality because of their closed shape. The Name of God cancels the materiality symbolized by these letters in the way that, during a miracle, the divine in the world can cancel the laws of nature.)

73) In the same source, on page seventy-seven, (we find a comment) concerning the rabbinic saying, that the KB"H tells Israel, "Give me an opening as small as the eye of a needle," etc. The holy Rebbe said that the opening the size of a needle's eye is the prayers that every man

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 73-75

must pray daily, such as, "Return us, our Father, to Your Torah," etc., and, "Return us in repentance," etc. And this is the opening. DPH"H

74) He would often say, alluding to the verse, "Tell your version, that you may be vindicated" (Is. 43:26); the Holy Name, Who desires covenantal love, wishes that each man vindicates himself, and speaks for himself. This is his interpretation, that each man should make appeals and confer with his Creator directly, with regard to how righteous He is in His judgments. This passage is also there (in Ravid Ha-Zahav).

(The Ropschitzer seems to be arguing against the prevailing belief that a tzaddik should serve as an intermediary between the Hasid and God.)

75) It is also said there, in his holy name, referring to the verse in the Kiddush of Erev Shabbat: (the Shabbat is) "The beginning of holy acts, recalling the Exodus from Egypt." It is possible for a man to easily achieve the status of holiness at the very outset of the holy Shabbat. This proves that it recalls the Exodus from Egypt, for there were forty-nine gates of defilement (in Egypt) and in just one moment they (the Israelites) left. And particularly on the holy Shabbat is it possible to instantaneously exit the "Other Side" (of evil), for the side of holiness. Even though we eat and drink on the holy Shabbat, because of it (its holiness), we can elude all our evil attributes. So end his holy words.

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 76-77

76) From the same source, on page fifty-four:

I heard directly from...the Ropschitzer (an allegorical interpretation of Nu. 13:18): "And see the country..." [Examine intellectually if the "soil" is conducive to humility] "...are the people who dwell in it strong or weak..." [It wishes to say that the tzaddik must have two capabilities -- a capacity to encourage service to God, and yet be humble and lowly and contrite of heart, and this explains] "...strong..." [if the Land of Israel will be conducive to both attributes -- strength in times when encouragement is necessary, as well as] "...weak..." [having modesty and a subdued spirit]; "...few or many?" [if the tzaddik in the Land of Israel has both capacities, such that he is small and at the same time great and mighty, as the rav of the Yeshivah (a figure in the Zohar?) said, "He who is not little is not great"]. "Does it have trees?" [It (the land) is considered righteous if they exist there] "...or nothing" [that in his own eyes he is nothing]. "And be encouraged" [for all this strengthen yourself towards the service of God]. All of this I heard from (R. Naftali's) own lips. AK"L

77) He is also cited in the aforementioned text with regard to the simple son in the Passover Haggadah, who says, "What is this?" etc. The holy Rebbe says that "this" is the redemption from Egypt, which had the quality of femininity, since after this redemption, the aspect of fertility (still exists). For this reason, the ("new song") of redemption is (gram-

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 77-78

matically) feminine.

But in reference to the future redemption -- may it come in our lifetime -- it is said, "You will know a new song," (this is a phrase from the Ge'ulah in the Haggadah) is grammatically masculine, for after it comes no subsequent redemption. For this reason, the simple son poses his question in the feminine case, implying that after it, a subsequent redemption will come.

"You will tell him, 'By the strength of His Hand,'" implying that the previous redemption was achieved via God's strength (which is grammatically feminine), but that the future redemption -- may we merit it in our lifetime -- will be qualitatively masculine, achieved through God's compassion (which is grammatically masculine). As it is written, "But with everlasting kindness will I have compassion on you" (Is. 54:8). Therefore, the masculine attribute is all compassion. His holy words end here.

(As mentioned when describing tikkun, the mystery of God is divided into ten Sefirot, or Essences, by the kaballists. R. Naftali is saying that the first redemption was achieved through a feminine Sefirah, and that the final redemption will be achieved through a masculine Sefirah. For this reason, the "new song" mentioned in the Haggadah is described in masculine terms.)

78) He is also cited in the aforementioned text, commenting on the verse,

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 78-79

"Sell me this day (your birthright)" (Gn. 25:31). He said that Jacob and Esau divided between them the two worlds -- Jacob took for himself the World-to-Come, and Esau took for himself this world. However, Jacob came to recognize that it is impossible for a man of Israel to inherit the World-to-Come without some measure of this world, (which is needed to) fulfill the commandment of celebrating the Shabbat, and the commandments that are connected to the Land of Israel.

For this reason, he said, "Sell me כיום ("this day"), which is a notarikon for כולם ישבעו ויהענגו מטובך ("all of them will be satisfied and gladdened by Your goodness" -- from the prayer Yismehu). Therefore, he was asking, "Sell me a portion of this world, which I need to worship God."

79) Another entry (from the same source) in the portion Balak, and these are his words:

I heard directly from the... Ropschitzer, who said, "It is impossible for one with great wisdom to be a transgressor," for our Sages said (in Baba Metzia), 'No man becomes a transgressor unless possessed by the spirit of insanity.'" Solomon was the wisest of men (yet we are told, "He did evil," in numerous verses in I Kings). He wanted to effect tikkun on evil by changing it to good, rather than by letting evil remain, and releasing the holy sparks within it. (Naftali implies that this was an insane wish.) He wanted to uproot evil completely and replace it with good.

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 79-80

This is a monumental task involving great danger to oneself, because this is planned for the future, with the help of our Creator, Who will change evil to good and darkness to light. For the time being, (we live) in bitter exile. But Solomon wanted to effect tikkun now instead of in the future, and for this reason it is said about him, "And he did evil." "And he did" (וַיַּעַשׂ) implies tikkun, following the verse, "And Hiram made the vessels" (I Kings 7:40). The implication is that Solomon wanted to effectuate tikkun on the evil. And the words of the Sages, "It was easy for Solomon to drag pipes," implies the extraction of good from evil, meaning the holy spark in the evil. "It was easy for him to do this," means that it was easy for him to (effect tikkun), but to repair the evil completely is very difficult and entails great danger. But in the future, with the help of our Creator, we will eliminate our Evil Inclination completely, fulfilling the verse, "Remove from me the heart of stone" (Ex. 36:26). So end his holy words.

80) I will not refrain from treating you to two stories about his beloved son, the holy R. Eliezer of Dzikov. Concerning the phrase in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy, "May it be Your Will that we be the head, (and not the tail" -- from the Rosh Hashanah Eve meal). He said that לראש is a notarikon for לעשות רצון אביך שבשמיים ("to do the Will of our Father in heaven"). DPH"H

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 81

81) Regarding the verse, "And you will serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness out of your midst" (Ex. 23:25).

There is a problem here. Is it because God blesses his bread and water that sickness doesn't come to the man? The holy... R. Eliezer of Dzikov quoted the sages in Tractate Avodah Zarah [page 55A], "Concerning bad and incurable (literally, 'faithful') diseases, they are bad in their mission, and faithful to their oath, since when sent, they fulfill their oath by delivering their disease, which can only be remedied via a specific physician and a specific drug."

But there are many variables here, for sometimes the patient's drugs are in his town, and the appropriate physicians are members of the community; under such circumstances, it is easy to find a cure for his illness. But sometimes the physicians and drugs necessary for this illness lie in another city far away, which has bathhouses (spas) and great (medical) facilities. The patient is obliged to travel to the place he's been sent to for healing, as God in His wisdom has decreed. While the rich can afford this, what will become of the abject pauper, for whom such travel is beyond his reach: Will he lose all hope? With regard to this, the holy Torah gives advice: "You will serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread." The explanation is that the cure is attained from all the medicinal powders sold by peddlars in the hinterlands. God will send it to the food he eats -- this is a cure from the wellsprings of

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 81-82

salvation. God sends therapeutic waters to the water he drinks and to the bathhouse in his city. In this manner does He banish every disease.

DPH"Ḥ

82) In the book Divrei Yehezkel ("The Words of Ezekiel") [page 25b] we find these words:

I remember when I was a lamb (a young child). I heard that... R. Eliezer said in the name of R. Naftali... of Ropschitz, "I don't remember the whole idea, but I do recall that he cited the verse, "I will say, 'Please lower your jar that I may drink,' and she will say, 'Drink! and I will also water your camels'" (Gn. 24:14). It is known from the holy books that the prime focus between Rosh Hashanah and Shmini Atzeret is to ask only for spiritual things, and not about daily concerns. But on Shmini Atzeret one may ask what one desires. It is permitted to ask for mundane benefits of God at that time, for He will give us health and good income with abundance. It is explained in the name of the holy Ar"i (the mystic, Isaac Luria), that on Shmini Atzeret twenty-four matters are illumined. This is the meaning of, "Tilt your jar (כר"ך = your 24) and I will drink." And she said, not for your alone; I will give abundantly to your students. Instead of reading "your camels," read, "your workers of good deeds." This means, "I will also give them the Torah, that things may be well with them." AK"L, DPH"Ḥ

ESSER TZACHTZACHOT 83-84

83) The yahrtzeit of our rebbe, Naftali Zvi, may his holy and righteous name be a blessing, is on the Eleventh of Iyyar, 5587 (1827). His final resting place is in the city of Lanzut, and may his merit defend us. Amen.

84) This is what is inscribed on his tombstone:

Here lies buried and sealed a man of God, who died with a good name on the Eleventh of Iyyar, 5587. Because of this (death), our hearts ache and our eyes are darkened. Woe on us that the crown has been taken from our heads -- the holy and famous rav, descendent of a line which, in his generation, was unsurpassed in divine wisdom. We are not permitted to heap praise on him, for so we were instructed by him; Our teacher, R. Naftali Zvi -- may his memory be a blessing -- the ABD"K of Ropschitz. Son of our teacher, the famous ga'on, blessed and holy -- may his light shine and may we have peace -- the pride of his generation, our teacher, R. Menaḥem Mendel, the ABD"K of Liska. May his soul be bundled up in the gathering of Life.

PART III

METHODOLOGY

You all know of the witty satirist Lichtenberg (1742-1799) of whom Goethe said: "Where he makes a joke a problem lies concealed." And occasionally the solution of the problem is revealed in the joke.

(Sigmund Freud, General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Second Lecture)

The purpose of this paper is to examine the use and contexts of humor in the stories of R. Naftali of Ropschitz. R. Naftali was adept at using various forms of humor, and in many cases displayed this facility towards the advancement of Hasidism. If Goethe is correct in acknowledging that problems and anxieties can be couched in the comic, and Freud is correct in assuming that the joke can hold the solution, then some preliminary explanation of what humor can do is essential in order to evaluate the stories of the Ropschitzer, because his humor frequently dominates these stories.

It might surprise the uninitiated reader that there are, in fact, scores of theories of humor postulated by thinkers in various fields of scholarship. Freud's Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious is undoubtedly the most famous example from the discipline of psychology, and several other social scientists, including Herbert Spencer, Gregory Bateson, and Mary Douglas have demonstrated what impact their disciplines have on the study of humor. Philosophers are particularly susceptible to either making pronouncements about what humor is or, in some cases, devoting entire treatises to the question. The list of

philosophers who have turned their attention to humor include Aristotle, Hobbes, Kant, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Bergson. Occasionally, even humorists, like Max Eastman, attempt to analyze their medium.*

It would be close to impossible, and at very least, inappropriate, to survey all of these theories in a paper whose primary focus is the Ropschitzer Rav. Yet some attention must be paid to the many claims made about the comic which may be relevant to our analysis of R. Naftali's use of humor. It is fortunate that D. H. Monro, in his book, Argument of Laughter,² as well as in his article on "Humor" in the

*Much has been written in the attempt to define the words we use to describe what we find funny: Wit, humor, jokes, the comic, comedy, etc. The differentiation of wit and humor was a popular theme for English essayists during the Seventeenth Century.¹ Freud saw very specific differences between the comic, jokes and humor, although his English translators had trouble denoting those differences, to the extent that the title is alternatively translated as "Jokes," or "Wit" and It's Relation to the Unconscious. Ultimately, Freud is merely standardizing his own terms, rather than reflecting common usage, which tends to muddy the distinctions.

In this paper, unless, otherwise indicated, the terms will be used interchangeably. One can say "his humor," but not "his comic;" and so, particularly when the humor is highly subjective or stylized, the word "humor" will be used.

Encyclopedia of Philosophy,³ has done a commendable job of classifying comic theories into three basic categories. He characterizes these theories as superiority theories, incongruity theories, and relief theories. Each one of these categories effectively explains certain genres of humor. Unfortunately, there are other genres which each theory either ignores, or explains relatively lamely. Insofar as the Ropschitzer employs several different genres that are not adequately explained by any one of Monro's categories, it will be useful to explain each of them briefly.

Superiority theories are based in the belief that the comic is essentially an instance of self-assertion. A definition of humor that is frequently quoted by comic theories is found in Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan.

The passion for laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly.⁴

This would explain why we laugh at such comic types as the miser, glutton, immigrant, and drunkard. In Hobbes' conception, laughter is a sudden overflow of self-esteem, during which we compare ourselves to those less fortunate than ourselves. It also explains how we can laugh at unexpected successes, or even at ourselves; we can laugh at our former infirmities if we assume we have surmounted them. As Aristotle defined humor, "We laugh at what is ugly but not painful."⁵

Alexander Bain refined Hobbes' concept in two ways. According to Bain, the essential feature of humor is degradation, and the object of that degradation need not be a person. Anything that is normally

treated with respect can be degraded, usually by comparing it to something that is not accorded respect. We might recall in this regard the Ropschitzer's statement that Mitnagdim are reincarnated as dogs⁶ as a classic case of this mode of comic degradation.

Bain also noted that our laughter can sometimes be evoked through sympathy with someone else who has experienced that "sudden glory" by triumphing over some third party. People do in fact enjoy sharing laughter, which is an important reason why so many humorous stories about Naftali of Ropschitz have been preserved. These amusing stories were shared at fabrengen and other Hasidic gatherings for generations.

The question of the interplay between humor and pathos is contested by comic theorists, because that interplay is quite ambiguous. Superiority theorists tend to exclude the possibility of sympathy or empathy in humor. These theories stress an elevated, "gods'-eye" view of the world. Laughter demands a certain emotional distance. While we may laugh at a glutton or drunkard, as soon as we feel any sympathy for him, we usually find ourselves completely incapable of laughing at his plight, and often feel ashamed that we laughed at all. In the words of Henri Bergson:

Here I would point out, as a symptom equally worthy of notice, the absence of feeling which usually accompanies laughter. It seems as though the comic could not produce its disturbing effect unless it fell, so to say, on the surface of a soul that is thoroughly calm and unruffled. Indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion... In a society composed of pure intelligences there would probably be no more tears, though perhaps there would still be laughter; whereas highly emotional souls, in tune and unison with life, in

whom every event would be sentimentally prolonged and re-echoed, would neither know nor understand laughter... Look upon life as a disinterested spectator: many a drama will turn into a comedy. It is enough for us to stop our ears to the sound of music in a room, where dancing is going on, for the dancers at once to appear ridiculous... To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple.⁷

While there are many situations that evoke harmless laughter, such as punning or a simple play-on-words, or using Bergson's examples -- a Jack-in-the-Box and a puppet show -- it does seem that, rather than arising from an unemotional view of human frailty, much humor exists in an environment of highly-charged emotions. Bain says that humor accompanies the degradation of persons or objects we hold in respect, but respect generally entails a strong emotional attachment. The prime source of "nervous laughter" is more often than not the emotional tension present in a situation, rather than the technical quality of a joke. We will return to this question, because several theorists suggest that it is in fact emotional energy which enervates laughter.

Before progressing to relief theories, some brief remarks about the comic theory of Henri Bergson are in order. Bergson's theory of humor, which Monro classifies as a superiority theory, is intimately linked to his philosophy of vitalism. For Bergson, the elan vital -- the flow of life -- is the essential quality of reality. In Le Rire (Laughter, 1903), Bergson postulates that the laughable is "something mechanical encrusted upon the living."

Any arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives

us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement.⁸

For this reason, we laugh at machines, like a puppet or Jack-in-the-Box, when they appear human. Conversely, we laugh at humans when they act like machines; when a non-vital flaw, such as drinking or gluttony or some other obsession, takes over their lives. As Monro says, "The joke is to see how this obsession crops up again and again in the most varied situations, so that he (the comic object) always behaves in a manner wildly inappropriate to the circumstances as others see them, but entirely appropriate to his own ruling passion."⁹

Bergson's theory of humor, which he admits is incomplete, is particularly inadequate in explaining comic genres such as word-play. We have dwelled on his theory in particular, because several of the images he employs, which stem from his vitalistic view of the world, resemble the Ropschitzer's kaballistic concerns with vital forces in the material world. R. Naftali also saw materiality encrusted upon the living. He accepted the Lurianic notion that particles of God's essence -- nezozot, or holy sparks -- were encrusted by the husks of materiality. R. Naftali accepted the Hasidic imperative to attempt yihudim -- reunions -- of the holy sparks with their Transcendent Source via prayer and meditation. While it might only be coincidental that both the Ropschitzer and Bergson were concerned with humor and a vitalistic conception of the material world, we shall soon see that other writers have sensed the link between the comic and the cosmic. (It should be noted that

Bergson's grandparents were patrons and adherents of Polish Hasidism.)

All-in-all, superiority theories do not explain much in R. Naftali's humor. While the Ropschitzer did use satire and sarcasm to expose the foolishness of Mitnagdim and German Jews and even his own Hasidim, he rarely did it to embarrass a person, and in those cases, we could say that his purpose was instructional. Naftali's profound ambivalence towards his yihis and his role as rebbe belies the stance of superiority. His considerable use of word-play is inadequately explained by such theories.

A second set of theories is characterized by Monro as relief theories, emphasizing release from restraint. Edwin B. Holt, a disciple of Freud, summarizes relief theories with erroneous simplicity:

Humor, he says, is simply "letting the cat out of the bag." What is the cat? A suppressed wish. What is the bag? The psychic "censor." And that's all there is to it.¹⁰

Sigmund Freud made a profound contribution to the study of humor with his Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. Just as Bergson's theory of humor parallels his attitudes towards vitalism and the mechanization of life, Freud's interest in humor parallels his notions of inhibition. In the continual struggle between desire and inhibition, humor is found to be an effective weapon for liberating the suppressed wish, at least temporarily. While superiority theories focus on a flaw or infirmity as the object of wit, Freud focuses on the "true" enemy, the psychic censor. This emphasis on what motivates laughter is Freud's primary contribution to the study of humor.

Freud is also concerned with the forces that enervate laughter. He suggests that the pleasure of a joke comes from the fact that we expend psychic energy monitoring the unconscious, and that by disarming the censor, the unconscious is allowed to bubble up, giving us a sense of liberation. The excess energy we gain, due to the fact that the monitoring system is not working, is released as laughter.

As one would expect, there are problems inherent in the notion of psychic energy and its economics. Later relief theories have preferred to characterize this energy as emotional energy.

We must bear in mind that laughter is a phenomenon of the trigger-releaser type, where a minute pull may open the tap for vast amounts of stored emotions, often derived from unconscious sources: repressed sadism, sexual tumescence, unwished fear, even boredom: the explosive laughter of a class of schoolboys at some trivial incident is a measure of their pent-up resentment during a boring lecture. Another factor which may amplify the reaction out of all proportion to the comic stimulus is the social infectiousness which laughter shares with other emotive manifestations of group-behaviour.¹¹

In other words, "A joke unleashes the energy of the subconscious against the control of the conscious."¹² This fact may explain the discrepancy between many jokes that are poor in technique but yield tremendous laughter. Nervous laughter can be evinced by the poorest joke. Topical humor is popular and effective, because of the strong emotions we feel towards the current figures and events that shape our lives.

Freud's interest in witticisms was piqued by his observation that certain dreams resemble jokes, and vice-versa. More than just the fact that both dreams and jokes are capable of expressing a suppressed

wish, Freud understood that the techniques in each are similar. Moreover, wit "invariably disappears when we remove the effect of these techniques in expressions,"¹³ meaning that if the content of a joke does not have the form of a joke, it will not be funny.

Freud divides joke techniques into three basic groups: Condensation, double meaning, and application of the same material in different situations. Freud tried to discover (with questionable success) a common denominator among these categories. His first impression was that economy of expression was at the heart of the matter. But he realized that "laconism is not necessarily wit," and that the intellectual work necessary to put several meanings into a witticism can require more energy than was saved by the economy of expression. Moreover, two other categories of comic technique -- inversion and indirection -- are in fact less economical modes of expression. (These five techniques will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.)

The anthropologist, Mary Douglas, has noted that there is a certain congruence between the theories of Freud and Bergson.

For both, the essence of the joke is that something formal is attacked by something informal, something organised and controlled, by something vital, energetic; an upsurge of life for Bergson, of libido for Freud. The common denominator underlying both approaches is the joke seen as an attack on control.¹⁴

One factor that is generally overlooked is that both superiority and relief theories are intrinsically content-oriented, the major exception being Freud's discussions on comic technique. They have trouble explaining what Freud acknowledged as wit without tendenz -- without an

object of aggression -- i.e., harmless wit. Puns, word-play, and the like are often extremely unaggressive. The object of the joke is not inhibition and not infirmity, but simply, play. In order to understand harmless jokes, as well as other genres more fully, we need a theory or theories of comic form. Monro's third category, incongruity theories, attempt to supply this answer. While such theories may not help us to understand why R. Naftali was concerned with particular themes, they will help us to understand why he addressed them through humor.

Incongruity theories focus on the humor which uncovers connections where none were thought to exist. This entails the discovery that something usually thought of as existing in one context also exists in a completely different context. Immanuel Kant provides us with a formula for this brand of humor.

"Laughter," he says, "is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation... into nothing."¹⁵

This formula was attacked by Schopenhauer as putting too great an emphasis on the element of surprise. Instead, Schopenhauer amplifies the element of the paradoxical:

The source of the ludicrous, says Schopenhauer, is always the paradoxical and therefore unexpected subsumption of an object under a concept which in other respects is different from it. It is possible, he adds, to trace everything ludicrous to a syllogism in the first figure with an undisputed major and an expected minor, which to a certain extent is only sophistically valid.¹⁶

This concept can be illustrated by one of Naftali's jokes:

Once the Ropshitzer endeavored to link in marriage the families of two noted Zaddikim. The father of the prospective

groom said: "I demand that the father of the girl give the young couple twice the dowry I present, inasmuch as my son is a great scholar." The father of the prospective bride likewise demanded twice the dowry on the ground that his family was of higher pedigree. The Ropshitzer remarked to each father separately: "You are quite right; the other one says exactly the same thing."

Eventually the two fathers came together, and after many misunderstandings, they reached an agreement. When the Ropshitzer appeared, they demanded an explanation. He replied: "I merely spoke the truth to you, namely, that each of you said exactly the same thing. I knew that when you would meet, you would not demand double payment from each other, for only a thief is required by law to pay double" (Exodus 22:3).

(Appendix B. Newman, 22)

The "undisputed major" premise is that each man wants the other to double his investment in the dowry. The "unexpected minor" is that the Ropschitzer recognizes that each man wants "the same thing," even though in his own mind, each man wants something different. This paradox is addressed in the joke.

Arthur Koestler explores the phenomenon of humor in several of his books: Insight and Outlook, The Act of Creation, and Janus. In all of these works he follows many of the leads suggested by Freud, but emphasizes form instead of content. Koestler's incongruity theory of humor becomes the first stage of his general theory of creativity.

It is the sudden clash between these two mutually exclusive codes of rules -- or associative contexts, or cognitive holons -- which produces the comic effect. It compels us to perceive the situation in two self-consistent but incompatible frames of reference at the same time; it makes us function simultaneously on two different wave-lengths. While this unusual condition lasts, the event is not, as is normally the case, associated with a single frame of reference, but bisociated with two.

I have coined the term "bisociation" to make a distinction between the routines of disciplined thinking within a single universe of discourse -- on a single plane, as it were -- and the

creative types of mental activity which always operate on more than one plane. In humour, both the creation of a subtle joke and the re-creative act of perceiving the joke, involve the delightful mental jolt of a sudden leap from one plane or associative context to another.¹⁷

In assessing humor as a creative act, Koestler observes that:

The conscious and unconscious processes underlying creativity are essentially combinatorial activities -- the bringing together of previously separate areas of knowledge and experience. The scientist's purpose is to achieve synthesis; the artist aims at a juxtaposition of the familiar and the eternal; the humorist's game is to contrive a collision.¹⁸

Humor does not provide us with a synthesis of two frames of reference, it merely shows where they come together, and watches the "sparks fly."

There is one other incongruity theorist whose work demands attention, because his theory can show us a link between the Ropschitzer's use of humor, and his facility with gematria, notarikon, and other hermeneutic devices. In Creativity, The Magic Synthesis, Silvano Arieti also explores the comic in order to better understand the essence of creativity. To appreciate Arieti's theory, we must first understand his technical term, "paleologic thought."

When the creative process proceeds to a stage of differentiation that permits the use of words and ideas, two types of thinking assume prominent roles. As mentioned, one type can be included in the broad category that Freud called the primary process, and the other in the category of the secondary process. In this chapter we shall study the first type, a way of thinking that in different terminologies has been designated as primitive, immature, obsolete, archaic, dedifferentiated, abnormal, defective, first-signalling, concrete, mythic, and so forth.¹⁹

Because of its archaic nature I have called the main form of immature thinking "paleologic" (from the Greek paleo, meaning old). This form of thinking is not illogical or alogical, but

it does follow a logic different from that used by the human being who is awake and healthy. The normal human being as a rule uses the ordinary logic of the secondary process -- the kind of thinking that in Western civilization is generally called Aristotelian logic, because Aristotle was the first to formulate its laws.²⁰

Arieti acknowledges that paleologic thinking is present "in normal or average people only to a minimal degree." What Arieti terms paleologic thought was first isolated and studied by a psychiatrist named Eilhard Von Domarus, who encountered the phenomenon in his work with schizophrenic thinking.

He enunciated a principle which, in slightly different form, reads, "Whereas in normal (or secondary process) thinking identity is based only upon the basis of identical subjects, in paleologic (or primary process) thinking identity is accepted upon the basis of identical predicates." The predicate that leads to the identification is called the identifying link or identifying predicate. Obviously this type of thinking does not follow Aristotelian logic, in which only like subjects are identified. The subjects are fixed; therefore, only a limited number of deductions are possible. For instance, an apple is identified with another apple (both recognized as belonging to the class "apple"). But in paleologic thinking the apple might be identified with the breast of the person's mother, because the breast and the apple have a similar shape. The breast and the apple become equivalent. In other words, in paleologic thinking, A also becomes non-A -- that is, B -- provided A and B have a predicate (or element) in common. It is the predicate that leads to identification and equivalence.²¹

Arieti explains that paleologic thought violates the Aristotelian notions of identity and contradiction.

At the paleologic level the individual starts to think categorically, or in terms of classes; but these categories are not reliable. Being primary, they are at the mercy of emotions or random associations and do not respect the Aristotelian law of identity: that A is always A, never B. In fact, according to Von Domarus's principle, B may be A, provided B has a quality of A. The Aristotelian law of contradiction states that A cannot both be and

not be A at the same time and place. If a person follows Von Domarus's principle, he may see A as A and at the same time B (that is, non-A) if he concentrates on a quality that A and B have in common. The Aristotelian law of the excluded middle states that A must either be or not be A; there cannot be an intermediate state. In its tendency to condense several subjects, paleologic thinking neglects this law. Things are often seen as a composite of A and B. For instance, in schizophrenic drawings one often sees a human figure that is half man and half woman.²²

The hermeneutic device of gematria which plays on the numerical value of a word, and notarikon, which assumes that each consonant in a word is only an initial, fulfil this description perfectly. Such associations even have a theological justification: Since only God is truly One, logical principles of identity and contradiction can be adhered to less strictly. The philosopher W. T. Stace echoes this insight:

Although the theological intellect...endeavors always to arrange its propositions in a self-consistent system, yet, in regard to the most fundamental and ultimate religious insights, this cannot be done. The first principle of logical reasoning is the law of contradiction, namely, that two propositions which contradict each other cannot both be true. Theology can follow this principle in its peripheral and subordinate assertions, those which are mere implications of its central core of insights. But this central core itself does not yield to this logical treatment. When we seek to logicize it, we find in it irreducible self-contradictions.

We may be inclined to express this by saying -- as has often been said -- that at the heart of things, in the very nature of the Ultimate itself, there is contradiction. We may make use of this mode of expression without objection. But it is not strictly accurate. For the Ultimate itself cannot be either self-contradictory or self-consistent...for both of these are logical categories. It is neither logical nor illogical, but alogical. What we should say, rather, is that the contradictions are in us, not in the Ultimate. They arise from the attempt to comprehend the Ultimate by logical concepts. The Ultimate rejects these concepts, and when we seek to force them upon it, the only result is that our thinking becomes contradictory.²³

Given that R. Naftali was adept at using these mystical devices, as well

as a successful humorist, it is appropriate to examine Arieti's incongruity theory in greater detail.

My theory of the comic, as advanced for the first time in 1950 (Arieti 1950), can be stated as follows: "A subject is a perceiver of a comical stimulus when he realizes that he tends to identify X with Y, not in accordance with Leibniz' law, but in accordance with Von Domarus' law." For such a realization, the person does not need to know what Leibniz and Von Domarus' laws are, of course, just as he does not need to know that he adopts Aristotle's laws of thought whenever he thinks logically. These "laws" are formulations of mental mechanisms, devised for practical purposes, and probably can be designated as Kantian, or a priori, categories.²⁴

For Arieti, the fundamental factor in jokes is the possibility of an impossible identification, simply because two different subjects have one or more predicates in common. An example from the Ropschitzer stories would be his encounter with the Shla''h. (Appendix B, Newman, 44) The Ropschitzer's ancestor is named after his most important work, entitled the 'SHnay Luchot Habrit," the acronym for which is Shla''h. R. Naftali is able to play with this ambiguity, and jokingly refer to the book on the shelf when the Lubliner is referring to the ancestor.

Using a different formulation, we can say that we experience a comical effect when we recognize the inappropriate in the seemingly appropriate. The inappropriate is so similar to the appropriate that a confusion is possible. Moreover we know that in most cases if a person wanted to elicit a sense of the comic in us, he did not really want to deceive us. If indeed he produced this effect voluntarily, he wanted to confuse us, but only playfully and temporarily. He knew that a comic unity would result from the extremely rapid succession of confusion and then dissolution of that confused state.²⁵

Arieti suggests that witticisms usually involve a discordance between paleologic and logical thought. That discordance leans more towards

paleologic thought when a simple pun is made. As an example, we might recall the Ropschitzer's statement that the Rizhiner had a "fleece" carpet to hide the "fleas." A simple play-on-words relies more on paleologic than logical thought. But the Ropschitzer's joke about the Shla''h is actually a play-on-ideas. While the joke relies on paleological ambiguity, the word "Shla''h" actually serves as a bridge between two ways of thinking, two universes of discourse. The Ropschitzer is pitting the rational context of the book called the Shla''h against the supernatural context of the Shla''h as a ghost.

Arieti goes on to examine the content of humor: Those things that tend to make us laugh more than others. He organizes these subjects into four basic groups: Sex, hostility, human frailty, and the unrealistic effort of inadequate man to cover his inadequacies. But his primary contribution to the issues on which we will soon focus is his isolation of a mode of thinking -- paleologic thought -- which we will discover in both the Ropschitzer's humor and his mysticism.

Both Arieti and Koestler agree that, in several ways, humor stands as a middle stage between dreams and art. All three involve a condensation of thought into ambiguous signs. But the apprehension of a joke is more than a perception. The joke's meaning is implicit in that ambiguous sign

"Implicit" is derived from the Latin word for "folded in." To make a joke "unfold," the listener must fill in the gaps, complete the hints, trace the hidden analogies. Every good joke contains an element of the riddle -- it may be childishly simple, or subtle and challenging -- which the listener must solve. By

doing so, he is lifted out of his passive role and compelled to cooperate, to repeat to some extent the process of inventing the joke, to re-create it in his imagination.²⁵

Because we allow ourselves to be carried into the joke in order to solve the riddle implicit in it, we are more than just passive observers of the comic predicament. The focus of the joke is not some neutral sense datum, but rather an ambiguous sign which demonstrates some incongruity between two symbolic systems, two discreet contexts. The apprehension of the joke is dependent on our familiarity with both systems. But paradoxically, the joke releases us from both systems. To quote Stenson:

Witticisms are locutions, or more properly the wrecks of locutions, which must be taken in two or more logically or psychologically incompatible senses at once. They derail rational discourse and upset complacency at the point at which they occur. They force us to take two or more widely disparate lines of thought at the same time -- but we cannot. While enjoying, or suffering, a witticism -- since humor is not always an unalloyed pleasure -- a person cannot occupy any symbolic system at all! Thus wit, which is the odd meaning (the "object") of any witticism, is always literally ecstatic -- it stands out of every world order -- literally "out of this world."²⁷

While it may now appear that Stenson overstates his case, we will return to this theme in greater detail in Chapter Five. There we will find that Mary Douglas also discusses this "ecstatic" quality of humor in the context of the social functions of humor.

PART IV

COMIC TECHNIQUE AND COMIC GENRE

IN OUR STORIES

In the last chapter, we discussed how two factors must be studied in order to better understand humor: Form and content. Before we examine the thematic content of the stories and anecdotes of R. Naftali of Ropschitz, it is appropriate to first identify several comic genres and techniques that often appear in these stories, in order to better appreciate the comedic aspects of the themes presented. These genres include masquerade, practical jokes, puns, and irony. While the discussion of these techniques will progress from visual to verbal to conceptual techniques, often these devices overlap, and several techniques can be seen in certain stories.

The purpose of this chapter is to present an analysis of comic form in the stories of the Ropschitzer. Before we proceed, a note of caution is in order. In his discussion of comic techniques, such as condensation, double meaning, and multiple use of the same material, Freud noted that when a joke is divorced from the comic technique used in its formation, it loses its ability to make us laugh. For example, when R. Naftali's shrewish wife tells him she regrets that she wasn't born a man, for had she been, she would have become a great scholar -- and he agrees with her, he doesn't really share her sentiments (Wiesel, 1). He is using a comic technique -- multiple use of the same material -- to say indirectly that he regrets marrying her. But saying this directly, without the use of comic indirection, is not particularly funny. This joke is simple, and enough of the elements can be presented in my

synopsis of it to communicate some of the Ropschitzer's humor. However, it would be inappropriate to quote each witticism in-full in the course of this section, and through abridgement, some of the humor will undoubtedly be lost. In some cases, witticisms will only be alluded to along with a citation, and the "punchline" will be presented devoid of comic technique. For this reason, it is important, if not essential, to first read the stories presented in the translation, as well as the stories presented in Appendix B, in order to have a clear sense of the humor in these stories. To facilitate this, rather than use a note or footnote for citation, stories will be cited parenthetically in the text.*

The comic genre of masquerade, including the elements of disguise and mistaken identity, has a long tradition in classical comedy. The device is a mainstay in the comedies of Shakespeare, who used mistaken identity as the precipitator of dramatic action. In As You Like It and Twelfth Night, the fact that the audience knows that a woman is masquerading as a man not only produces a chain of comic situations, it sustains a sense of dramatic irony that suffuses these plays. Classical comedy seized on this device, because the societies in which it was used had a strong sense of class and sex stratification. Comedies employing masquerade allowed the audience to see how unsuspecting characters would be duped into showing respect for an inferior. It would also teach them something of the artificiality of class stratification, without "seriously" challenging the institution.

The device of masquerade plays a prominent role in many of the

("E. Tz." denotes translation; Appendix stories are identified by compiler's name, i. e., Newman.)

Ropschitzer's stories, even though classical comedies usually took place in the totally different milieu of courtly society. One reason it is used is because Hasidic stories are dramatic -- they are called mayse instead of sippurim ("tales") precisely because the root of mayse is

מעשה, activity. The element of disguise propels dramatic action in a mayse just as it does in a Shakespearean play.

But there are two other reasons why masquerade is a particularly appropriate device in the Hasidic milieu. The first reason is theological. To quote Scholem, Hasidism represents a major trend in Jewish mysticism. As such, it emphasizes the importance of spirit over substance, and kavannah (intentionality) over kevah (structure). Mystical insight allows a Hasid to recognize that material reality is merely the husk covering the spiritual kernel of existence. Masquerade is an appropriate device for revealing this insight.

This theological reason extends itself into the social realm. Hasidism actually provides its adherents with an alternative set of values to the eastern European norm. In place of the objective criterion of scholarship, Hasidism posits that spiritual values, such as kavannah, hitlahavut (enthusiasm or ecstasy) and devekut (cleaving to God) are the primary goals of existence. All of these values are subjective and unverifiable, and could be hidden in the most mundane husks of humanity.

This comic device is particularly evident in the stories of the Baal Shem Tov. A famous example is the story of the mentally-retarded son

of a village yokel whose whistle-blowing on Yom Kippur, against the protestations of the congregation, is praised by the Besht. He admonishes the congregation for castigating the boy, saying that his whistle-blowing with kavannah was more efficacious in heaven than all the recited prayers of the congregants. In story after story, the Baal Shem Tov finds spiritual worth in the most unlikely of vessels.

R. Naftali was not above using disguises himself. In a story from Ohel Naftali, (section 74 -- Martin Buber gives a rendering of the story in his historical novel, For the Sake of Heaven¹) the Ropschitzer disguises himself as a gravedigger in order to bury the Seer of Lublin. To understand why, we must know that in several comic stories, the Seer competes with a learned Mitnagid nicknamed the Eisener Kop ("Iron Head") who serves as his comic foil. In this story, the Eisener Kop has control over burial sites. The Ropschitzer comes to the Eisener Kop, pick-in-hand and defaming the Hasidim, and asks where he might bury the Seer. He asks the Eisener Kop about numerous sites, finally confusing him enough to get him to agree to a site of honor.

We have numerous stories of the humble R. Naftali attempting to disguise his holy deeds in mundane activities. But according to one story, he was invited to serve as the rabbi in Ropschitz after impersonating a voice from heaven in a crowded room (E. Tz., 15).

As previously stated, Hasidic stories are called mayses, which implies action. Another stock comic device which is found in the stories of R. Naftali is the practical joke. Like the masquerade, the practical

joke is visual and physical, rather than verbal. Practical jokes, or more often, situations that resemble practical jokes, are often used by the Ropschitzer to convey a message. We have one story (Newman, 7) in which Naftali masquerades as an emissary of R. Meir Baal Ha-Nes in order to gain charity from a Jewish innkeeper who would only give charity to that Rabbi. The joke is on the innkeeper, and perhaps the lesson is that people should be more charitable. But in Wiesel's rendering of the story,² the funds were used to buy liquor.

In another story, the lesson is more explicit. An overzealous disciple wants to know the mystical significance of the Ropschitzer's penchant for white trousers (Langer, 4). After putting the disciple through a week of fasting, he tells him that he wears them only because they are cheaper. He keeps his reason for wearing them a secret because, if everyone knew this, they would then buy them, and the price would go up.

Just as the previous practical joke succeeds in showing that the supposedly sacred is actually mundane, another practical joke backfires, because R. Naftali underestimates the power of the sacred. Mintz tells how the Ropschitzer once hid underneath the bed of his rebbe, Elimelekh of Lizensk, in order to find out how he prayed in private (Mintz, 1). The simple unwinding of the rebbe's gartel proves to be such a powerful mystical event, that Naftali almost succumbs to the experience. Strictly speaking, this incident is not a joke. However, hiding under a bed is a typical situation for a practical joke. The rebbe's bed, as an extremely

personal possession, serves as a prop for several stories that are reminiscent of practical jokes (E. Tz., 17; Newman, 28; Mintz, 4).

Another incident that might be construed as a practical joke with miraculous overtones is when Naftali has an am ha-aretz read the Blessing for the Year (E. Tz., 56). He erroneously substitutes the word נשים for שנים ("women" for "years") and is able to halt a plague afflicting women. There are other stories that look like potential comic encounters, in which the comedy is not exploited. In one story, Naftali has two absurd arguments with his cook about not getting enough good milk (E. Tz., 7). The witness to these events soon discovers that the Ropschitzer is actually speaking for an infant, whose complaint he has miraculously perceived. In another story, Naftali has an equally absurd argument with a female gentile produce seller over radishes. It turns out that the argument, which precedes Yom Kippur, is actually an allusion to the thirteen attributes of God, a prominent theme in the Yom Kippur liturgy. In both stories, an apparently absurd conflict is resolved when the reader understands the magical or mystical overtones of the incident. The fact that the comic possibilities in these incidents go undeveloped suggests that the storyteller had a more important message to convey.

This brings to mind a unique element in some of these stories which, in light of our investigation, demands special attention. In a number of our stories, the comic or potentially comic situation is not just underplayed, it is superseded by a miracle or mystical experience which be-

comes the central focus of the story. It is this element which distinguishes the Ropschitzer from other jokesters, such as Herschele Ostropoler. Beyond mere amusement, the stories become vehicles for an understanding of moral or mystical truth.

A classic example of this is the story of the sugar stain (E. Tz., 27). In this story, the Ropschitzer refuses to conduct Yom Kippur services because he feels unable to achieve a true spirit of repentance. He is finally coaxed into leading, and before the service, puts a lump of sugar in the pocket of his white britches. During the night, the sugar melts and leaves a stain. Thinking that, God forbid, he has had a nocturnal emission, the Ropschitzer spends the following day in a spiritual frenzy that penetrates the soul of the most obdurate sinner in his congregation. After Yom Kippur ends, he discovers the truth, realizes that his mistake had a positive effect, and even connects this experience to a problematic text in Scripture.

The experience has all the trappings of a humorous case of mistaken identity. We could say that the joke is on the Ropschitzer. But rather than remaining on that level, this comic predicament serves as an occasion to teach the participants and the readers that the rebbe, like the biblical High Priest, only appears to sin, with the true purpose of inciting repentance in his constituency.

Another example deserves a full quotation (Mintz, 6).

The Ropchitser Rov used to say vertlekh (sayings). We didn't understand everything he said. He was a student of the Seer of Lublin, the Lubliner, Reb Yankev Yitshak from Lublin. He al-

ways used to say those jokes. The Rebbe knew what he meant with the jokes, but once the Lubliner Rebbe told him, "Look, Roschitser Rov," that is what he called him, "maybe you'll stop for a year. Why do you say so many jokes? Let me see you control yourself for a year and don't make any jokes."

So he said all right. He didn't crack any jokes.

Once he was in Lublin. All the students, all the big rabbis were there. The rabbi, the Lubliner, was standing for the Eighteen Benedictions. It was very long. They couldn't stand it. The Ropchitser calls over to his other friends and tells them, "You know why the rabbi stays so long saying the Eighteen Benedictions? He probably reminds himself of the day of the wedding." That is what he said. And so all of them start laughing. You know, it's a joke.

So then after the Ropchitser Rov said this he went over to the Lubliner and he sang a song in his ears, in the middle of the Eighteen Benedictions, and then right away he finished. As soon as he sang him the song, he finished the Eighteen Benedictions. And he turned around and he saw all of them were laughing. "Oh, you probably cracked a joke already. They're laughing." So he said, "You promised me you wouldn't crack a joke for a year."

In Jewish there's a saying: you say a year and a Wednesday. If somebody takes too long to tell something, you tell them it takes a year and a Wednesday. "It's not my fault if the Rebbe stays for the Eighteen Benedictions a year and a Wednesday. The Rebbe told me only one year I shouldn't say any jokes. The Rebbe stays for the Eighteen Benedictions a year and a Wednesday."

So then he asked, "Why are you laughing?"

So they told him, "The Ropchitser said that you reminded yourself of the day of the wedding."

"He knew what he was talking about." So he told them in the middle of the Eighteen Benedictions there came a man, a man who sings songs at weddings. He was not a good person. So in the other world they didn't want to allow him in Paradise. So he came over to the Lubliner, and he begged him he should do something for him here -- pray for him they should let him in.

So he says, "I didn't know him."

So the man says, "I sang at your wedding."

"So I don't remember."

The Ropchitser Rov came to his ear and sang what he sang him at the wedding.

(I have retained Mintz' spelling and will do so with all previously translated stories taken from Appendix B.)

This story is an exciting combination of humor and insight. The Lubliner asks the Ropschitzer to stop making jokes for a year, probably because

he considers them frivolous. Out of respect for his rebbe, R. Naftali consents.

The story then mentions two problems, both of which are ostensibly solved by witticisms. The first problem is that the Lubliner is being extravagant in the amount of time he dwells on the Shmoneh Esreh. In order to finally proceed from this prayer, the Ropschitzer performs two seemingly frivolous actions: He sings in the Lubliner's ear, and tells his comrades a "joke." (According to a story variant, it is the laughter which arouses the Lubliner from his meditations, rather than the song.) When the Seer accuses R. Naftali of breaking his word, the latter doesn't offer a direct rebuttal. Instead of explicitly telling the Lubliner that he spent too much time in meditation, he makes a pun. He says that the Seer meditated for "a year and a Wednesday," bringing life to a dead metaphor which implies "taking too long a time." Using humor, he clears himself of the charge, and also gives moral instruction to his rebbe.

But beyond the moral insight, we discover a mystical insight behind these frivolous acts. The Lubliner actually had been thinking about his wedding, which R. Naftali had sensed via clairvoyance. The Hasidim learn that their rebbe's spirit had ascended to heaven to solve a problem, and that this problem was solved by Naftali's seemingly puerile act of singing in the Lubliner's ear.

Just as something mundane can have supernatural significance, something supposedly mystical can be made to appear mundane. In the story

of the spiritual visitation of the Shla''h, which Newman transliterates as the "Shalho," we see just such an occurrence.

The Lubliner declared that on Shemini Atzereth the Ropshitzer held fine processions with the Scrolls of the Torah, inasmuch as his ancestor, the "Shalho" was with him in spirit. When the Ropshitzer visited him later, the Lubliner inquired concerning the former's observance of Shemini Atzereth.

"Oh, we had excellent wine, tasty fish and delicious birds," was the Ropshitzer's reply.

"But was not the 'Shalho' present?" persisted the Lubliner.

"Yes," replied the Ropshitzer, "but he must have been angry with me, for his back was turned and he spoke not."

"How could that be?" inquired the Lubliner.

"Why," said the Ropshitzer, "he was standing in the book-case."

There are several interesting variants of this story. In Ohel Naftali,³ it is included under the same paragraph heading as the story previously mentioned, involving the Lubliner's ascent to heaven. In fact, it is seen as the event precipitating the Lubliner's request that Naftali refrain from telling jokes. We therefore discover, under one paragraph heading, humor making the sacred mundane and the mundane sacred.

In Newman's version, the Ropschitzer seems to make a veiled rational attack on the Lubliner's supernaturalism. This tendency is confirmed in a similar story about Naftali's most illustrious disciple, the Tzanzer. (Newman, 25). In this instance, the spirit of the Ropschitzer is said to make an appearance at the table of the Tzanzer. But the Tzanzer explains this away by characterizing the appearance as merely being a metaphor for following the customs of the Ropschitzer (a la "spirit of the times"). It is interesting that this rational explanation follows the opposite format of a comic technique. Reviving a dead metaphor is a

common mode for expressing double entendre. What the Tzanzer is doing in this instance is turning a living supernatural reality into a "dead" metaphor. (There is no pun intended in this explanation.)

It should be noted that in another variant (E. Tz., 58), the Ropschitzer admits to the Lubliner that he was visited by the Shla"h, but criticizes the Seer for publicizing the incident. He argues, "Don't I know your (mystical) thoughts and not intervene in your activities? I don't reveal your deeds to the world; why do you reveal mine?" According to the composer of this variant, the Ropschitzer was intimately involved in the supernatural but, out of modesty, did his best to obscure this fact from his followers.

The incongruity theories of humor posited by Koestler and others stress how humor always links together two distinct "universes of discourse," two discreet contexts. In these stories and others, humor serves as the bridge between this world and heaven. Humor is able to achieve this feat because the heavenly worlds are structurally similar to our own world. Men study, are rewarded for good deeds and punished for evil, and all are ruled by the King of Kings. The theosophical kaballists went so far as to distinguish ten Essences, or Sefirot, in the Godhead. Elements in our world could be linked, or juxtaposed, to the Godhead, by connecting them to the Essence they most resemble. This is the theoretical basis of tikkun.

The Hasidic view of reality held both the theosophical conception of the Godhead, as well as the naive, folkish view of heaven. In a number

of stories, the nexus between heaven and earth is vividly described. The Ropschitzer says that when a tzaddik eats earthly beef, it is actually transubstantiated into the Holy Ox on the Throne of Glory (E. Tz., 25). He evidently was making similar associations at a very early age, for at his Bar Mitzvah, he describes his tefillin as binding him to heaven (E. Tz., 19).

Given this world-view, Naftali's license to make jokes is comprehensible. Humor can affect the process of bisociating elements of this world with the divine, which is analogous to the mystical practice of tikkun. As we have seen, this process can be effective in achieving profound moral and mystical insights. It is not surprising, therefore, that we have the amazing story of R. Naftali substituting as a badchan (Langer, 2). As a result of this experience, the storyteller makes the audacious claim that the jokes of the Ropschitzer could supersede the tears of the Koznitzer (a tzaddik whose integrity was so impeccable that even Graetz acknowledged it).⁴

Perhaps "mystical" appears too strong a word to describe the insights gained from these stories. The mystical element might better be described as magical in nature, since it usually involves such paranormal phenomena as clairvoyance, visitations from deceased spirits, and spiritual visits to heaven. The modern reader doesn't achieve a flash of conceptual insight from these stories that we might expect from true mysticism. But we must recall that these stories are maysey -- action-stories -- and their insights tend to be represented visually rather than

conceptually.

Deeper insights can be gleaned from the more verbal and conceptual passages we have read about the Ropschitzer. In order to gain a more adequate understanding of these passages, we need a better understanding, via definition and example, of the comic techniques that can be found in them. The techniques we will now examine are condensation, multiple use of the same material, indirection, inversion, and double meaning.

It is important to bear in mind the remarks made in the previous chapter about Silvano Arieti's notion of paleologic thought. All of these techniques are based in the ability of the human mind to overlook the logical rules of contradiction and "excluded middle," and accept, at least temporarily, that two things that are not identical can be perceived as identical, even though they only possess a common trait. That trait can be that they sound alike, in the case of puns. The two things can even be represented by the same word, but with two usually discreet meanings, in the case of double entendre. Most comic techniques seize upon this ambiguity in order to form a temporary juxtaposition.

Freud identified two modes of condensation.⁵ One mode employs the formation of a composite word or phrase. The other mode also uses a composite, but allows it some modification. An example of the first type is the story of the future fathers-in-law quibbling over the dowry (Newman, 22). Each man wants the other to pay double. In order to get them to negotiate, Naftali tells each that "the other says exactly the same thing." In this instance, Naftali condenses two different ideas

into a single phrase. An example of condensation with a modification is the story mentioned above of the am ha-aretz who leads the congregation in the Birkat Ha-Shanim, only to replace the word שָׁנִים ("years") with נָשִׁים ("women") (E. Tz., 56).

The second technique discussed by Freud is the multiple use of the same material.⁶ Four stories showcase this technique. One story comes from the Ropschitzer's inaugural drasha on the parasha (Newman, 37). Naftali says first that a drasha should be true, brief, and relevant to the parasha. Then, "I wish to say that I do not know what(parasha) is to be read on this sabbath. This is true, it is brief, and has the (parasha) as its theme. Amen." Another example of this technique is the Dzikover's protest that "the Evil Impulse doesn't have an Evil Impulse to tempt him away from his duty (Newman, 43). Langer's two stories about the Leizer-gabbai (Langer, 6 and 7) also employ this comic technique. In the second story, the gabbai learns that the ambiguous sign of an intentional cough is his cue to help the Ropschitzer by giving him a spoon. When the Ropschitzer coughs for assistance a second time, in a completely different context, the gabbai again offers him a spoon. In the first story, the gabbai acknowledges the superiority of the divine to the earthly realm, and tries to trick God into giving him a divine kopeck, which is an earthly fortune. He is thwarted when God also invokes the discrepancy between the two realms. This latter story is a perfect example of the phenomenon which Koestler terms "bisociation."

Before progressing to Freud's category of double meaning, we should

examine two other techniques which aren't as thoroughly developed by him. The first technique is indirection, which means that a simple concept is sometimes stated in a roundabout way because of some restraint. The laughter this technique engenders can be understood in the context provided by relief theories of humor; the psychic censor is thwarted by a circumlocution. Naftali offers us a few examples of this technique, although the comic aspect of the device is not exploited. In one anecdote, because he doesn't want to begin a session of rabbinic judgments on a negative note, Naftali says, "If it were so, it would be kosher, but now, since it isn't, you talk" (E. Tz., 43). In a similar vein, a sick man asks the Ropschitzer if he would be healed. R. Naftali had just had a dispute with his students over the kashrut of a certain chicken. His answer to the man was, "A question about a chicken just came before me; it had the same disease, and I said it was kosher. So it is possible to live through this illness, and therefore, you too will be healed" (E. Tz., 12). A simple affirmative response would have been a more direct, and less comic response.

The device of inversion is very similar to the previous technique, but instead of relying on a long circumlocution, the central concern of the joke is represented by its opposite. It is the basic technique employed in irony. Masquerade, which has already been discussed, is a variation of the technique. "Dramatic irony" is the technical term used to denote the tension produced by mistaken identity when a play's audience knows the true identity but some of the characters do not. One example

of this irony is the story of the sugar stain, mentioned above (E. Tz., 27).

We have several examples of the technique of inversion, which is particularly appropriate in the stories we have of R. Naftali hiding his greatness. In one story, he accidentally falls asleep in bed, rather than appear to be studying at night (Mintz, 4). He unintentionally heals a cripple, by ordering him to get out of his way (Mintz, 2). He is boastful, so that people won't realize how modest he is (E. Tz., 21). He calls himself a worm, to indicate that his Hasidim should be in awe of him, because Hasidim think that worms are "awful" (E. Tz., 44).

There is also a note of irony in two stories which aren't really humorous. The Ropschitzer asks his neighbors for dowry-money, rather than his followers, who give generously, because in this situation, he personally needs the money (Newman, 31). After the Lizensker's death, the fact that the Ropschitzer does not court followers makes him all the more attractive to them (Newman, 21).

The technique of double meaning is perhaps the most interesting device in the repertoire of verbal comic techniques, because it resembles the devices the Ropschitzer uses to derive religious insights. Double meaning implies that a single word or idea is used to bridge two different contexts. As we have already mentioned, several mayses in our collection begin in a mundane context and are then shown to have ethical or even mystical significance. The stories already scrutinized were essentially action-oriented. Double meaning is primarily a verbal technique, which the Ropschitzer used to great effect.

As mentioned above in the analysis of the story of the "Shla" in the

bookcase," one way of achieving double meaning is by interpreting a metaphor literally. Naftali does this in several stories. When a man accidentally puts his prayerbook on Naftali's shoulder while reciting the Al Het ("The Great Confessional"), Naftali accuses him of "telling on me" (E. Tz., 46). When Naftali says that he tolerates a woman who talks to him at length because that is how he earns his redemption (Newman, 38), he is referring both to salvation, and to the fee he is paid for this service, which is called a pidyon (literally, "redemption").

These quips are relatively frivolous; they could just as well have been said by any trickster. But Naftali is a ga'on and many of his double entendres allude to a biblical or rabbinic phrase. The phrase is taken out of its literary context and made relevant to a mundane situation. Using Koestler's terminology, we would say that the mundane world is bisociated with the world of sacred literature.

Sometimes these allusions are extremely comic. Instead of chastising a miser who hides himself when the Ropschitzer arrives asking for charity, he ironically compares him to Moses (Newman, 20). According to the Rabbis, it is better to honor guests than the Shechina (God's Immanence). Noting that Moses "honored" the appearance of God at the Burning Bush by hiding his face, Naftali claims that the miser has exceeded Moses, by hiding his entire body. Another story is paradigmatic of the whole genre.

When the Ropshitzer came for the first time to the Rimanoover, his Master, he found a great crowd in the vestibule. In order to steady himself in the jostling throng, he leaned on a Hasid

by the name of Simon. Later his friends reproved him for being so familiar with a Hasid whose reputation was not of the best. The Ropshitzer replied: "We find in the Talmud the expression: 'Rabbi Simeon is deserving to lean on in an emergency.'"

As Koestler has noted, humor involves a juxtaposition, rather than a synthesis. The more permanent the association, the less comic it becomes; the insight becomes less ephemeral and more legitimate. Since insights are of greater value than mere witticisms, even for one whose humor can sway the Heavenly Host when the tears of the Koznitzer cannot, a good number of our passages about R. Naftali record insights -- hiddushim -- that are not particularly comic. These insights parallel the formal structure of jokes, but because the juxtapositions are more valid, the reader may laugh as an expression of surprise, but the insights themselves are not particularly funny. As Koestler suggests, this continuum goes from "ha-ha! to aha! to ahh!"⁷

One insight recorded in Esser Tzachtzachot is formally a bilingual pun, although laughter is not its goal (E. Tz., 39).

I heard distinctly in the name of... Naftali of Ropschitz, "And they (עץ) will not know my ways" (Ps. 95:10). He who stays at home and doesn't travel to tzaddikim doesn't know the ways of the Lord. In Yiddish, he who sits in his house is called ייִט.

Such allusions abound in several other stories. The ambiguity of the Hebrew word עץ, which means "shrub" in the Bible, but can also mean a rabbinic discourse, becomes the opportunity for praising such discussions (E. Tz., 62). When the Bible talks about גמלים, ("camels") Naftali suggests that it implies גומלים ("doers of good deeds").

As stated previously, Arieti claims that this mode of thinking -- paleological thinking -- is endemic to primitives, but is also shared to a limited degree by Western minds. One consequence of this mode of thought is a belief in the efficacy of magic. Sympathetic magic was a part of the Ropschitzer's world, although, as a God-fearing man, he grounded this magic not in himself, but in prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the mystical power inherent in the biblical text. We have already mentioned how an am ha-aretz could cure a plague by uttering ׀'שׁ] in place of ׀'י]שׁ (E. Tz., 56). We can see that the "participation" of the tzaddikim in the Napoleonic Wars is based in a firm belief in magic (E. Tz., 17). In this story, the Ropschitzer comes to the Rimanover to dissuade him from magically assisting Napoleon. He is against this assistance because other rebbes have peered into the future and discovered that it is not yet time for the Messiah to come. He arrives in Rimanov, only to discover that the rebbe is pushing matzot into the oven, and saying, "Another five hundred Russians will fall." According to the story, this magical incantation proves effective. Napoleon's final downfall is precipitated by a corruption of the text of the book of Esther. Instead of reciting "Nappol tippol," ("You will surely fall" -- Es. 6:13) the Koznitzer says "Napoleon tippol" ("Napoleon will fall").

It should be noted that the Ropschitzer's mode of allusion follows the traditional model of rabbinic and Hasidic midrash, and as such, is not radically new. What is unique in Naftali is his pronounced use of humor

and the extremes he went to in order to discover his hiddushim. The Rabbis, in general, tried to base their elucidations of the text on more solid, rational ground than the tenuous connections which the Ropschitzer delights in exposing. While rabbinic midrash is also filled with humor and tenuous juxtaposition, scholars usually assess the amount of humor at a much lower level.

The Ropschitzer engages in fairly straightforward, "serious" midrashic analysis in a number of anecdotes. In one instance, he analyzes why the redemption from Egypt is characterized as feminine by the simple son in the Passover Haggadah (E. Tz., 77). In another story, he suggests that the reason Jacob asked for Esau's birthright is that Esau's inheritance is a share of this world, Jacob's inheritance is the World-to-Come, and that one needs a small share of this world to achieve entrance into the World-to-Come (E. Tz., 78).

He also engages in allegory. The qualities that the Twelve Spies are supposed to seek out in the Promised Land are seen as analogous to the qualities one should look for in a rebbe (E. Tz., 48). In a third allegory, the story in Genesis of Eliezer's encounter with Rebecca is seen as an allusion to the Beit Ha-Shoava ceremony during Sukkot (E. Tz., 67).

Notarikon and gematria are two other hermeneutic techniques devised by the Rabbis, and exploited by the Ropschitzer and the Hasidim. While the Rabbis acknowledged that midrashic techniques cannot always serve as a firm basis for Jewish law, these two modes seem particularly ephemeral. In this light, we can sense how similar these modes are

to the comic techniques we have already discussed, since they are used to achieve juxtaposition, rather than synthesis.

Notarikon is essentially just another word game, another "comic" device. It is a corollary to the comic technique of condensation. Locked in the consonants of a word found in the sacred literature lies an entire phrase. Implicit in that phrase lies the kernel of a deeper meaning. An innocuous word thereby takes on great, even cosmic dimensions, because the way we interpret the word is not confined to the rules of Aristotelian logic. It is expanded via paleological associations to assume cosmic importance.

Sometimes every letter can signify a separate word (Newman, 11):

The Dinover offended the Ropshitzer and paid him a visit to placate him. Seeing the Dinover tremble from fear, the Ropshitzer said: "It is true that it lies within my power to punish you for your disrespect. Fear not, however, for I shall not use this power. The Lord said to Moses: 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet' (Exodus 3:5). This word 'Na'al' (shoe) contains the initials for the words: 'Nesicha' (Bite); 'Akitzah' (Sting); and 'Lechisha' (Hiss). In the 'Ethics of the Fathers' (2:15), we are told that these are the three means by which the Sages inflict punishment for disrespect. But the Lord instructed Moses, the first of the Sages, not to use these powers of punishment if the sinner regretted his offense."

Sometimes a word is divided in half to yield two words (E. Tz., 66). In this case, **וַיִּשְׁלַח** ("and he sent") becomes **וַיִּ...שְׁלַח!** ("send away woe").

In other cases only part of the word is used. For example (E. Tz., 72), a name of God **יְהוָה** is discerned in the word **וַיִּהְיֶה**, and according to the interpretation, the name of God cancels the final letter. In

another example, this one exhibiting extreme abstraction, the mere fact that the name of God has four letters is enough to link it to the Four Species of Sukkot (E. Tz., 70); this tenuous connection serves as the basis of an interpretation.

Naftali also engages in gematria, which parallels the formal structure of a pun. Instead of relying on the arbitrary fact that two words sound alike, gematria is based on the concept that if the numerical value of two words or phrases is the same, (each Hebrew consonant has a numerical value) they are linked in some essential way. Such a notion completely defies any sense of Aristotelian logic. The fact that Jewish exegetes, and particularly Jewish mystics, exploited this device suggests that they acknowledged few boundaries in the attempt to achieve insight. They are not even bound by the rule that only whole words or phrases be used in a gematria. In one example, we find that a word can be divided to derive its hidden meaning (E. Tz., 82). Because the final letter of the word כַּדֶּךָ ("your jar") indicates the possessive form of the second person singular, R. Naftali interprets the word to mean "your twenty-four" (כ"ד = 24). In another case, a word (יגדל) is separated into two parts (י + גדל = 37 + 10), and then the parts are multiplied together, to reach the figure 370. This figure is then associated with the number eighteen, because the numerical value of the acronym of eighteen (שמונה-עשרה = ש"ע) is 370 (E. Tz., 68).

The interplay of the comic and gematria can be seen in one story in particular (E. Tz., 53). The Ropschitzer devises a gematria about God

and redemption while acting as a wedding jester. The gematria is based on a pun. The phrase עולה יפה ("fare well" -- literally, "go up well") conjures up an association with the lifting of holy sparks. Both the conjugation of holy sparks with their source, as well as the marriage conjugation, are characterized by the term yihud. Based on this pun, the Ropschitzer engages in a stream of arithmetic associations, to arrive at the conclusion that the marriage should be linked to the Messianic redemption.

The forms of divine play exhibited in gematria and notarikon are structurally similar to comic play, but the former requires two qualities which Dubnov identifies with Hasidism. One quality is the inclination to negate the world of the senses in favor of spiritual levels of experience. The other quality is bittahon perfect trust that the sacred literature is suffused with higher levels of meaning. The literal meaning of the texts must be "played with," in order to understand those higher levels of reality.

In this chapter, we have attempted to develop a sense of how the mind of the Ropschitzer worked by examining the comic devices he used to express himself. Obviously, he was not a rationalist in the tradition of Aristotle or Maimonides. While an heir to the Western mode of thought, he also placed a premium on paleologic insights. He was adept at comedy, irony, magic and arcane hermeneutics, and all of them are derived from a mind that balanced Aristotelian and paleological thought. Having received a better idea of how the Ropschitzer thought in the following

chapter, we will turn our attention to what he thought about, as well as the social context for these perceptions.

PART V

CONTENT AND SOCIAL CONTEXT
OF THE STORIES

Given all we have presented in the past two chapters regarding the many theories of humor and the comic devices employed by the Ropschitzer, we are left with three important questions: Why did he use humor? What themes did he stress? Why did his Hasidim consider his comic remarks holy and worthy of recording?

According to Kierkegaard:

The tragic and the comic are the same, in so far as both are based on contradiction; but the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical, the painless contradiction.¹

R. Naftali of Ropschitz found himself in a peculiar predicament, fraught with contradictions. He was the heir to two cultural traditions: The world of Mitnagdim and Hasidim. On one side, he was tied to the Mitnagdim by his lineage, his yihis. He was a member of the Horowitz family through his mother. This family produced countless scholars, including Isaac Halevy Horowitz, known by the name of his most important work, the Shla''h. The Shla''h traced his own lineage back to Rashi. While we cannot be sure whether Naftali knew his more distant lineage, according to Neil Rosenstein's The Unbroken Chain, the Ropschitzer was also a member of the Katzenellenbogen clan, whose members number some of the greatest minds of European Jewry. The Ropschitzer did see himself as the direct descendant of a long line of expert talmudists and succeeded in becoming a true lamdan. In short, he possessed the ideal characteristics of a Mitnagid. Yet he rejected the values he exemplified in favor of the Hasidic movement.

The Ropschitzer studied Hasidism under several tzaddikim, and mastered their supernatural abilities of clairvoyance and magic. He accepted the kaballistic notions of Isaac Luria, including metempsychosis and the fundamental doctrine that divine sparks can be released from mundane reality via mystical yihudim. While kaballistic Mitnagdim also affirmed these doctrines, their mysticism was more speculative than utilitarian. Yet the Ropschitzer was unable to wholeheartedly accept the Hasidism he knew. He never attached himself to any one rebbe, perhaps because he realized that they were not superior to his illustrious ancestors. He saw the rivalries that existed between his teachers, regarding the significance of Napoleon, and such dubious concerns as dynasty building. He disliked the dependence of Hasidim on their leaders, but at times endorsed it. He also saw the criterion of charisma being gradually superseded by the value of yihis. The einikls -- children and grandchildren of the first leaders -- began to take control of the Hasidic movement in his lifetime.

Thus, the Ropschitzer found himself in a paradoxical position. Unable to attach himself completely to either set of values, and living at a time when Jews were unwilling to reconcile -- synthesize -- the values of both groups, he was obliged to merely juxtapose these two systems. This juxtaposition is the source of much of his humor. As explained in the last two chapters, incongruity theories explain the process which generates this kind of humor.

Following the lead of Freud, we might also suspect that a man bound

up in two systems might be looking for relief from the restraints of both of them. This seems to emerge in his satires on the Mitnagdim, as well as in his cynicism regarding the authority of the rebbes.

There is no way to conclusively prove that ambivalence is the source of the Ropshitzer's humor, although as we shall soon see, he is particularly ambivalent about such value-laden themes as the role of the tzaddik, modesty, and yihis. This ambivalence towards life in general is captured in a revealing confession (Newman, 12):

The Ropshitzer declared that previous to his birth, an Angel showed him a tablet divided into two columns.

On the right he read: "In order to know the Torah, a man must have no compassion on his wife and children. If he works to satisfy their needs, he will have no time to study the Torah" (Erubin, 22). On the left, opposite, he read: "He who pities people, is pitied in Heaven. A man must care for his family even beyond his strength, for their lives are dependent upon his" (Hullin, 84).

On the right: "The learned man should be like unto a fiery flame" (Taanith, 4). On the left: "Who will inherit the World-to-Come? The meek and lowly one, who bows when entering and leaving (Sanhedrin, 88).

On the right: "A man should be wise in his fear of the Lord" (Berakhoth, 17). On the left: "You shall be simple-hearted before your God. If you are simple-hearted, your lot is with your God" (Yalkut Shofetim).

On the right: "Be satisfied with a minimum, like Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa" (Taanith, 24). On the left: "He who pledges himself not to drink wine, and thus afflicts his body, is called a sinner" (Taanith, 11).

He continued in this strain for a while, and then said: "I was engrossed in the thought of how difficult it is to find a way of behavior which will reconcile these antinomies. Suddenly I heard the words: 'Mazal Tov, a male child is born.' I remained wondering, and since then I still labor to find the way to follow both rules, however contradictory."

This story indicates that R. Naftali felt ambivalent from his earliest recollections, and that contradictory values made him feel this way.

Insofar as he aligned himself politically and theologically with the Hasidim, we might expect him to display intense comic aggression towards the Mitnagdim. Since the Enlightenment posited values that were particularly invidious to Hasidism, we should also expect enlightened Jews to be the target of derision. As explained in Chapter Three, superiority theories acknowledge degradation as the principle function of humor. All these motivations -- superiority, relief, and incongruity -- are evident in our stories of the Ropschitzer.

The theme that recurs most often in our stories is the Ropschitzer's ambivalence towards the role of tzaddik. The tzaddik is a combination of both the divine and the mundane. Naftali exhibited the tzaddik's ability to read minds, perform wonders, make tikkun, and awaken repentance in a sinner. But Naftali also mocked the role on many occasions.

This ambivalence appears to date back to his earliest years as a scholar. Naftali was a serious student of several rebbes; so serious that he went into convulsions when the Lizensker at first rejected him as a student (E.Tz., 16). He tried unsuccessfully for half a year to get the Apter Rebbe to say something about him (Buber, 1). Yet he had already demonstrated his own supernatural prowess. He once walked through a cemetery and divined where an ancestor, whose gravesite had been lost, was buried (E.Tz., 4). He banished harsh winds from the town in which he lived with his father-in-law (E.Tz., 14). As a youth,

at least on one occasion, he feared his powers, and the secrets of Torah to which he was privy (E. Tz., 9).

It is as a disciple that he indulges in several activities that resemble practical jokes. He hides under the Lizensker's bed in order to discover how he prays (Mintz, 1). He interrupts the Rimanover's incantations against Napoleon, then runs to the Koznitzer and lays in his bed, demanding protection from R. Mendel's wrath (E. Tz., 17). A particularly strong example of this ambivalence is the story, quoted in the last chapter, that begins with the Lubliner ordering Naftali not to tell jokes for a year. Out of respect for his rebbe, he initially agrees, but when he realizes via his powers of clairvoyance that his rebbe's soul requires assistance with a controversy in heaven, he solves the problem in heaven by interrupting the Lubliner's prayer -- a serious offense -- with a joke and a song (Mintz, 6).

As he matures, he occasionally jokes about the role of the rebbe by emphasizing the mundanity of the office. According to one account, he receives his "vocation" to serve as rabbi in Ropschitz by impersonating a voice from heaven in a crowded room (E. Tz., 15). Once he arrives in Ropschitz, he avoids his inaugural sermon by stating that he doesn't know the parasha, and audaciously asserts that this simple confession fulfils the three criteria for sermons (Newman, 37). In one story he explains that he could see through the Premislaner Rebbe's disguise because, "One thief can't deceive another" (Newman, 19). In another, he acknowledges that he didn't want to become a rabbi because a rabbi must

be a flatterer, and only accepted the position of rav when he discovered that all people must use flattery in their occupations (Newman, 14).

The Ropschitzer jokingly apologizes for the current quality of rabbinic leadership, in an allusion to the midrash that Moses is shown first the masses, then the leaders of each generation. He explains that when judged against the quality of the masses of his generation, the poor quality of the rebbes can then be excused (E. Tz., 50).

While he himself paid careful attention to the mundane actions of his rebbes in order to divine great secrets, the Ropschitzer discourages this practice in others. He has a man fast for a week before revealing that the secret reason he wears white breeches is because they are cheaper (Langer, 4). He jokingly suggests that the reason the Rizhiner has expensive fleece carpets on his floor is to hide the fleas (E. Tz., 57).

As a disciple of several rebbes, he was certainly aware of the petty rivalries between them. Such rivalries are obvious in the story of the rebbes taking sides in the Napoleonic Wars (E. Tz., 18). While in this extreme case he sides against Napoleon and therefore against his rebbe the Rimanover, he generally acts as a peacemaker between the rebbes. In one story, he refuses to help some tzaddikim in the attempt to diminish the Premishlaner's supernatural powers (Langer, 1). He himself faced a challenge to his leadership from the Dinover Rebbe (E. Tz., 29; Newman, 11).

The Ropschitzer acknowledged the difference in styles between rebbes. When the Rizhiner promotes his fiery style, the Ropschitzer remarks

that flies are attracted to cream as well as fire (Newman, 17). He anticipates that the Apter's fiery style will be the downfall of R. Feibush Hobnover, whose own fiery devotion, when inspired by the Apter, leads to his early death (Newman, 33). He opposes the Rimanover's attempt to move village Jews into large towns as an antidote to ignorance (Newman, 28).

The Ropschitzer was somewhat ambivalent about the use of alcohol. Following the Lubliner, who was famous for indulging in liquor in order to achieve a spirit of ecstasy. R. Naftali approves of its use, and even makes judgments on the matter (E. Tz., 42). Yet rather than welcome the Messiah with brandy when he appears, R. Naftali stresses that when that time arrives, sobriety will be in order (Newman, 24).

There is one important characteristic which divides the tzaddikim since the beginnings of Hasidism. Should a tzaddik travel from town to town as a missionary and maggid, or should he stay in one place and establish a court? If he does establish a court, should he engage in performing miracles? The Ropschitzer eventually did establish a court, but was ambivalent about his "reign."

On the one hand, he affirms the importance of visiting one's rebbe. In one aphorism, he makes a bilingual pun on the word הם, which means "they" in Hebrew and "home" in Yiddish. The Ropschitzer claims that the people referred to in Psalms 95:10, "They know not my ways," are those who stay at home, rather than visit their rebbe (E. Tz., 39). In another case, R. Naftali takes the mishnaic determination that

areas adjacent to the Temple were holy as an allegory to the Hasidim who acquire holiness by attaching themselves to their rebbes (E. Tz., 48). He transforms the phrase in Avot 6:6 that a sage is a person who knows his place, into the statement that a sage (meaning rebbe) is one who makes his place known (by establishing a court) (Newman, 42).

But the Ropschitzer is modest, perhaps obsessively modest, about his role and responsibility as a tzaddik. He claims that he prays every morning that his followers will receive divine help with their problems without having to set out for Ropschitz (E. Tz., 22). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the stories depict him as working hard to disguise his supernatural abilities. According to one story, after unintentionally curing a cripple, he is so "ashamed," that he isolates himself for three days (Mintz, 2). Similarly, he tries to hide the fact that he received a spiritual manifestation of the Shla'h (E. Tz., 58; Newman, 44). Several stories mention that he hired a foolish gabbai in order to keep his supernatural activities a secret (Mintz, 9; Newman, 32). He would even boast about himself in public in order to dampen the honor accorded him (E. Tz., 21).

He evidently projected this concern for humility onto others, for we have several stories of him criticizing Hasidim who would mortify themselves to prove and improve their piety. In most of these stories we find a high degree of sarcasm. He sees an old man wearing sackcloth, and tells him he is obviously caught in Satan's snare (Newman, 4). He exposes the false piety of another man who undertakes long fasts, by

maneuvering him into glorifying this fact (E. Tz., 40). The Ropschitzer may have been personally ambivalent about such activities. One of his rebbes, the Lizensker, was noted for his mortifications, and according to one account, did himself engage in such mortifications surreptitiously (E. Tz., 61).

In the sarcastic comments just cited, we suspect that the Ropschitzer's comments have the power to awaken repentance in these overreachers. This ability to promote tshuvah in his Hasidim is highlighted in several stories. When a sinner claims he is recounting the sins "of a friend," R. Naftali wittily indicates that he has seen through the ruse, by telling the man that his friend should have come and done the same thing (Newman, 39). When a sinner comes asking the Ropschitzer to teach him to repent, the Ropschitzer asks him, with piercing directness, "What harm has God done you, that you have done so much to spite him?" (Newman, 40). This technique of reminding the sinner that it is God against Whom he sins, is followed up in another story which uses a notarikon to make this point, as well as to serve as a mnemonic device (E. Tz., 71). Perhaps the best story in our collection of Naftali's powers of persuasion is the story of the sugar stain, discussed in depth in the last chapter. After his entreaties awaken the desire for repentance in his entire congregation, he reflects on how, like the High Priest, the tzaddik can also achieve repentance and atonement for his people.

In at least one instance, the sinner's heart was turned without direct confrontation with a rebbe. We are told that the Ropschitzer, R. David

of Lelov, and the "Holy Yehudi" decide to combine their magical powers to implant a desire for repentance in the heart of a sinner who had done them a favor years before (Zevin, 1). It is much more common, however, for the sinner to confront the Ropschitzer after the latter has perceived the sin through his powers of clairvoyance. In one story, he enumerates all of a man's sins, which ignites a desire for repentance (Newman, 41). While the story does not say so explicitly, he apparently knew these sins via clairvoyance. In another story, the Ropschitzer senses that two close friends have been drifting apart even before they themselves are consciously aware of the problem (E. Tz., 34). He gives them a sign of this tension, and they soon reconcile.

This clairvoyance, which the Hasidim termed "inspiration by the Holy Spirit," is evident in dozens of our stories. The Hasidim considered clairvoyance an objective sign that legitimated their devotion to their rebbe. In various stories, the Ropschitzer miraculously perceives that a child did not receive a pidyon ha-ben, that the lives of certain people will be cut short, that individual disciples are in pain, and even that a follower's wife is having her menstrual period. In the latter case, he told this to his disciple in a dream (E. Tz., 8). We have already discussed numerous stories in which this power plays a central role in the story.

A corollary of this quality is the Ropschitzer's belief in gilgul, or metempsychosis. It is a corollary to clairvoyance because the perception of former lives is beyond the senses. This notion gained cur-

rency through the influence of the Lurianic kaballists. R. Naftali remarks that Mitnagdim are reincarnated as dogs (E. Tz., 35; E. Tz., 51). Elsewhere, he casually remarks that he wishes he might be reincarnated as a cow (Buber, 2). As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, he claims that he vividly recalls two tablets that were shown to him before his birth.

Inspiration by the Holy Spirit is merely a subset of the entire scope of miracles performed by the tzaddikim. Along with clairvoyance, the rebbes also have the capacity to ascend to heaven (Mintz, 6). Naftali once banished harsh winds from a city (E. Tz., 14) and unintentionally cured a cripple. He is also said to have kept his sukkah dry during a rainstorm (Mintz, 3). His whole world is filled with such miracles. While one justification for these miracles is that they serve as a sign of the power of God and the rebbe, the Hasidic concept of miracles is aligned with the notions of tikkun and redemption. Divine sparks exist in all things. These sparks can give supernatural power to everyday speech (E. Tz., 62). They turn the dinner table into an altar, and earthly meat into the flesh of the Holy Ox on the Throne of Glory (E. Tz., 24 and 25). The holy spark explains the paradoxical ability of the prosecuting angel to level an accusation of profanation in pristine heaven. We are told that the angel brings only the spark inherent in the accusation before the Throne of God (E. Tz., 55). The spark is powerful enough that when we recognize its existence in Shabbat food and drink, it can immediately cleanse earthly defilement (E. Tz., 75).

The wise and the righteous all have the ability to raise these sparks. The process is so fundamental to the Ropschitzer's life that when he finds himself too old to achieve tikkun, he abstains from speaking altogether for several months (E. Tz., 11). In one entry, the Ropschitzer explains that while Solomon could easily raise sparks from evil things, he attempted to completely transform the evil into good, but was unsuccessful (E. Tz., 79).

R. Naftali adhered to the Lurianic idea that when enough of these tikkunim have taken place, God will intervene, and bring on the Messianic redemption before its time, by speeding up time itself (E. Tz., 54). He comforts his followers, telling them that eventually they will know how their prayers and service were necessary for redemption (E. Tz., 59), and that everyone contributes to the process of redemption (Newman, 29).

All of the categories discussed so far exemplify values whose cast was peculiarly Hasidic. But R. Naftali was tied to the world of Mitnagdim because of his yihis, his lineage. He often mentions this yihis and how it informs his actions almost as profoundly as his Hasidic values. It undoubtedly has great bearing on his obsessive modesty. The Ropschitzer refused to sanction any mention of his own greatness on his tombstone, but did allow his yihis to be mentioned (E. Tz., 84). In one passage, he stresses that the true value of yihis is that it keeps a descendent from becoming smug or complacent; he is always aware that his ancestors were better than he. Yet he acknowledges that a

person who performs a mitzvah well without benefit of yihis is entitled to special merit (Newman, 27 and 47).

Notwithstanding this link with the Mitnagdim, the Ropschitzer is fairly harsh with them, most probably because he experienced some persecution at their hands during his lifetime. Along with claiming that particularly vociferous Mitnagdim are reincarnated as dogs, he accuses them of not praying with proper intentions (Newman, 36). When the Ropschitzer discovers that one of his followers eats soup according to a Mitnagdic* custom, he tells him to recite several dirges during the festive meal which are popular with Mitnagdim (Newman, 30). Similarly, the Ropschitzer has little tolerance for the customs of German Jews whom he accuses of assimilationism. Langer describes how he would lampoon the attempts of German Jews to substitute German terms for Yiddish words (Langer, 5). He would usually use the technique of reviving a dead metaphor to show that Yiddish is more appropriate than German (i. e., "grossmutter," which means grandmother in German but literally means big mother, is lampooned as inappropriate for describing one's frail little bubbe). The fact that we have few stories of confrontations with enlightened Jews is odd, when we consider that such confrontations would have been fertile ground for comic repartee. Two explanations suggest themselves. Perhaps as a rebbe in a small town

*I have just coined this adjective, in order to avoid awkward circumlocution when describing the traits of Mitnagdim.

with a large entourage, the Ropschitzer was insulated from direct contact with enlightened Jews. Perhaps such lampoons were not considered appropriate stories for transmission.

One indication of Naftali's conscious rejection of his Mitnagdic values is the omission of stories dealing with the theme of learning. We can easily assume from the sophisticated allusions in our collection that the Ropschitzer was a lamdan. Yet except in one story, in which the value of study is expressly downplayed, we find no mention of this theme in the collection (Newman, 46). While the Ropschitzer claims that he would prefer to live in hell with a man of intelligence than in heaven with a fool (Newman, 1), and in several other stories extols the importance of wit and intelligence, he doesn't explicitly link intelligence with learning.

Certain other themes are very popular with the Ropschitzer. Charity and the sin of stinginess emerges as a theme in several stories. Since the Hannukah Lamp is used only once a year, R. Naftali keeps it in hock for the rest of the year, and uses the money for charity (Newman, 8). His son, the Dzikover, is visited by the late Lizensker in a dream, after an act of charity (Zevin, 3). Naftali uses his wit to get two prospective fathers-in-law to agree to a dowry (Newman, 22), and elsewhere, he jokes about a miser who hides himself in a haystack to avoid giving alms (Newman, 20). In another anecdote, Naftali notes wistfully that his sermon on charity is half successful, because, while the wealthy are still unwilling to give charity, the poor are now willing to accept it (Newman, 6).

The theme of joy, which is central to Hasidism since the Baal Shem Tov, is also quite popular. Maintaining joy must be a part of every mitzvah, which explains the Ropschitzer's criticism of asceticism and mortification. R. Naftali stresses that one must not mourn the Exile with a whole heart, because the Lord is with the Jewish people in Exile (Newman, 26). He claims that the niggun, the Hasidic melody, opens all doors in heaven (Wiesel, 3). He occasionally acts as a badchan, a wedding jester, and in one story, it is stressed that his humor made a greater impression in heaven than the Koznitzer's tears (Langer, 2). In a particularly poignant story that takes place on Simchat Torah, the Ropschitzer clairvoyantly perceives that a tzaddik in another town has just died, but orders his Hasidim to continue celebrating, and compares their situation to that of a war in which a general has died, but the battle continues (E. Tz., 28). Simchat Torah, which celebrates the completion of the cycle of reading Torah, is a time of great joy, and as such, was particularly significant to him. It is the last day of the festival of Sukkot, which provides the setting for many of our stories. We are told that the Ropschitzer felt a special kinship with the festival, and tried to spread its influence into the entire year, through the study of the laws of Sukkot and preparations for the sukkah (E. Tz., 6). The stories do not indicate a particular reason for his fascination with the festival, but Sukkot has long been identified as זמן שמחתינו -- the time of our joy.

The Ropschitzer shows self-awareness of his use of humor; he connects wit with wisdom and defends it as such. Humor is an instrument

of redemption, as demonstrated in the badchan stories of the Ropschitzer (E.Tz., 53; Langer, 2). Naftali believes that wit is the opposite of innocence and purity, and says so in several ways. He questions the ability of the Rimanoover to understand his wit, because he is a man of holy simplicity (Newman, 23). When the Lubliner claims that the Torah desires not cleverness, but simplicity, the Ropschitzer retorts that one must be very sophisticated to be simple before God (E.Tz., 37). Similarly, he claims that a Jew must be good, smart, and pious; for if he is only good he is a fool, only smart, a thief, and only pious, a priest (Mintz, 8). He also stresses that innocence must be mixed with some wiliness, for if not, one is easily deceived, as Isaac was deceived by Esau (Newman, 45). As a postscript to a number of our stories in which the Ropschitzer demonstrates his wit, he is acclaimed by his rebbes as a hochem, indicating a wisdom based on a sophisticated, even cynical, appreciation of the ways of the world. Clearly, R. Naftali believed that his humor was a path to wisdom, and he cultivated this path throughout his life.

Why did the Hasidim celebrate the humor of R. Naftali of Ropschitz? We can gain several useful insights from the anthropologist Mary Douglas, who discusses the social context of humor in an essay entitled, "The Social Control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception."²

One reason why the Hasidim may have preserved Naftali's jokes is that they believed that great wisdom was locked within them. The story-

teller in Mintz' Legends of the Hasidim, often explicitly expresses this sentiment; it is hinted at by Naftali. He says in one story that he will no longer speak, because he is unable to achieve yihudim, as he had during his prime. Mary Douglas suggests how jokes can also appear to have this power.

By revealing the arbitrary, provisional nature of the very categories of thought, by lifting their pressure for a moment and suggesting other ways of structuring reality, the joke rite in the middle of the sacred moments of religion hints at unfathomable mysteries.³

Since religious jokes often indicate imperfections in a sacred system, we might well ask why they aren't considered obscenity, or even blasphemy, rather than worthy of publication. Douglas answers that:

Inevitably, the best way of stating the difference between joking and obscenity is by reference to the social context. The joke works only when it mirrors social forms; it exists by virtue of its congruence with the social structure. But the obscenity is identified by its opposition to the social structure, hence its offence.⁴

Abomination is an act or event which contradicts the basic categories of experience and in doing so threatens both the order of reason and the order of society. A joke does nothing of the sort. It represents a temporary suspension of the social structure, or rather it makes a little disturbance in which the particular structuring of society becomes less relevant than another.⁵

The Hasidim recognized that, while he might make light of the rebbes, the Ropschitzer ultimately held them and the other institutions of Hasidism in great esteem, perhaps because they knew that he could always have been a successful Mitnagid.

Towards the end of her essay, Douglas focuses on the role of the joker

in various primitive and western societies.*

He appears to be a privileged person who can say certain things in a certain way which confers immunity. He is by no means anything like a taboo breaker whose polluting act is a real offence to society... He has a firm hold on his own position in the structure and the disruptive comments which he makes upon it are in a sense the comments of the social group upon itself. He merely expresses consensus. Safe within the permitted range of attack, he lightens for everyone the oppressiveness of social reality, demonstrates its arbitrariness by making light of formality in general, and expresses the creative possibilities of the situation.⁶

Perhaps the joker should be classed as a kind of minor mystic. Though only a mundane and border-line type, he is one of those people who pass beyond the bounds of reason and society and give glimpses of a truth which escapes through the mesh of structured concepts. Naturally he is only a humble, poor brother of the true mystic, for his insights are given by accident. They do not combine to form a whole new vision of life, but remain disorganised

* By discussing the role of the "joker," Mary Douglas wisely bypasses problems associated with the term "trickster." Paul Radin, Karl Kerenyi, Carl Jung and other anthropologists employ this term to describe an archetypal figure in several mythologies. The trickster is usually a demi-god whose activities often include the practical jokes and insightful humor that we associate with the Ropschitzer. Douglas, in fact, applies the term "joker" to mythological characters who are identified by others as "trickster" figures. But this category is still unstandardized, and applied by various authors to refer to different types.

R. Naftali may in fact be a Jewish trickster figure, and a comparative analysis between him and other potential tricksters, particularly Herschele Ostropoler, would be enlightening.

as a result of the technique which produces them. He is distinctly gimmicky. One would expect him to be the object of a hilarious mythology, as among the Winnebago, but hardly the focus of a religious cult. And yet there he is, enshrined -- Proteus in ancient Greece; the elephant god who gives luck and surprises in Hinduism; and the unpredictable, disruptive, creative force called Legba in Yoruba religion. Needless to say, he is always a subordinate deity in a complex pantheon. The joker as god promises a wealth of new, unforeseeable kinds of interpretation. He exploits the symbol of creativity which is contained in a joke, for a joke implies that anything is possible.⁷

The Ropschitzer seems to fit this description so well, that we must seriously question if there is a factual basis for any of the stories we have about him.

The Ropschitzer is not a major figure in the intellectual history of Hasidism. He is the founder of a dynasty, and many Hasidic courts see him as their progenitor. He did have a strong influence on the founder of Tzanzer Hasidism, R. Haim of Tzanz. He did write two books, although their influence is minimal. He is best known for the stories that are told about him.

To use Douglas' phrase, he is a "minor mystic;" a man whose yihis and learning and supposed supernatural powers give him immunity to the charge of blasphemy. He is not a rebel, yet he sees flaws in the Hasidic system and is allowed to address them with relative impunity. The Hasidim delight in this conduct, and perhaps, secretly admire his ability to see the comedy in Hasidic norms in particular, and human life in general. Stories about him and by him have been shared at Hasidic gatherings for generations, and to this day, his yahrtzeit is celebrated with drinking, dancing, and story-telling.

APPENDIX A

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[illegible]

(7) וְכַלְמָה

ויהי בן זכר. והשבע בליל זה יהי נקבה. והשני יהי בן זכר והתקף כעני. ויבין חסד. ויקרא אם הילך כעמל [אסוף] יהי לחמור ויל' וכל דבר זה מלמעלה הרבה שנים בליל קורא למה כל השני שנות כל השני' ויל'. וההפך מלמעלה מוהרש"א ויל' יהי שם כלשהו בעמוד והפך נעמד להפוך ויל' למה צדצת כי הוא ודע כמה שנים יהי כללשני' ודע כל השני שנות כל יהי כי עמד הרבה שנים כי הסמות סמל כעס הרבה. ויהיה ודע סמל קני :

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

There are several English collections of Hasidic stories in which stories concerning the Ropschitzer appear. Some of the renderings are freer than others. Some exploit living storytellers, others rely on Esser Tzachtzachot, and Ohel Naftali, and other sources. In this appendix, I have collected stories that did not appear in Esser Tzachtzachot. Often the collections include some of the same stories. In this case, I have selected what I consider to be the most faithful rendering.

Louis Newman's Hasidic Anthology is the oldest collection in English. While Newman excises the original source of the story, he does include the title and page number of the collection from which he culled the story. He is generally very faithful to the stories themselves, adding little if any embellishment.

Jiri Langer's Nine Gates to the Chassidic Mysteries, collects many stories of the Ropschitzer from various Hasidim he had visited in Galicia. From these renderings, we get a flavor for the ways these stories were shared by Hasidim.

The same is true of Jerome Mintz' Legends of the Hasidim. Mintz gathered his stories from Hasidic storytellers in America.

The latter three collectors are the most literary, and seem to engage in the most embellishment. For this reason, we have included their renderings of Ropschitzer stories at a minimum. They are S. Y. Zevin's A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Torah, Martin Buber's Tales of the Hasidim, and Elie Wiesel's Four Hasidic Masters.

As an aid to the reader, I have included page headings that tell which source and stories are included on each page. The source is designated by the last name of the compiler.

NEWMAN 1-6

- 1 The Ropshitzer said: "I would rather sit near a man of intelligence in Purgatory than near a man of folly in Paradise."

page 2

- 2 The Ropshitzer told the following story: "A wealthy Jew of Wilna purchased an Ethrog for a thousand zloties. When he had finished reciting the blessing over it, a man near by asked the loan of it so that he might also pronounce the blessing. The owner complied with the request. But the borrower unfortunately dropped the Ethrog to the ground and it was damaged. The wealthy man bethought himself of the large sum he had spent on the Ethrog in the hope of pleasing the Lord by his evidence of his adherence to the divine command. He reminded himself, however, that should he feel anger against the borrower who had dropped the Ethrog, this would be displeasing to the Lord. He therefore took back the spoiled Ethrog without a word of reproach and in complete calmness of spirit."

pages 7-8

- 3 Said the Ropshitzer: "Anger is to be avoided in all circumstances. Had Boaz become angry at Ruth when she sought him out, he would never have married her, and King David would not have been born."

page 11

- 4 An old Hasid came to the Ropshitzer and described the chastisements to which he subjected himself, showing his sackcloth attire for the mortification of his body. "How powerful is the Satan," exclaimed the Rabbi. "An old man like yourself he has succeeded in capturing in his snare."

page 17

- 5 Said the Ropshitzer: "To obtain a livelihood from a man is oftentimes like obtaining honey from a bee: it is accompanied by a sting."

page 28

- 6 The wife of a Ropshitzer said to him: "Your prayer was lengthy today. Have you succeeded in bringing it about that the rich should be more generous in their gifts to the poor?"

The Rabbi replied: "Half of my prayer I have accomplished. The poor are willing to accept them."

page 32

- 7 The Ropshitzer narrated the following experience of his youth: "I was once walking with other Hasidim to our Rabbi. We discovered we had no money left for the remainder of the long journey to Lublin, where the Rabbi resided. I saw ahead of us on the road, a Jewish inn, the owner of which was known to be hostile to all wanderers and averse to giving them food without payment. He was also known to give charity only to the Charity Chest of Rabbi Meyer Baal ha-Nes. At the same time he mistrusted everyone and expected that Rabbi Meyer Baal ha-Nes would himself at some time come for the money. It was his impression that the Rabbi was still alive, though it was generally known he had been dead for many years. I ordered my comrades to walk ahead of me, and to inform the innkeeper that the son-in-law of Rabbi Meyer Baal ha-Nes would soon arrive. An excellent meal was prepared; I was heartily welcomed, and the Charity Chest was emptied for me. When we reached Lublin, I handed over the contents of the Chest to the Rabbi, to be sent to the Land of Israel."

page 35

- 8 Rabbi Shalom Kaminker came to the Belzer on a Sabbath during Hanukah. He turned to the Hasidim and said: "At the home of my later Master, the Ropshitzer, I observed that the Hanukah light was only a substitute, but here I see that even the Sabbath light is merely a substitute." He was asked to explain himself, and he said: "The Ropshitzer kept his silver Hanukah candlesticks in pawn and used the money for charity. But he kept the silver Sabbath candlesticks at home. Here the Belzer Master has but iron candlesticks, even for the Sabbath."

page 36

- 9 The Ropshitzer was told that his Master, the Rimanover, blessed a man, and that the latter was becoming richer every day. He inquired why this man deserved to receive a blessing of such magnitude. The Rimanover replied: "I merely blessed him that he might enjoy a comfortable living. But the man gives away so much to charity that his fortune must be increased abundantly by Heaven, so that he may have sufficient for his personal comforts."

page 38

- 10 The Ropshitzer Rabbi chanced to pass through a village in which ten male Jewish adults resided. They owned a small house of worship and a tiny cemetery. The

NEWMAN 10-12

Rabbi met a Jewish child and said to him: "Tell me, my boy, since the community has only ten males over thirteen, if one of them should die, what good will the synagogue be? Or, if no one should die, of what use is the cemetery?"

The child promptly answered: "The cemetery is intended for strangers passing through the village."

This sagacious reply won the Rabbi's praise.

page 44

- 11 The Dinover offended the Ropshitzer and paid him a visit to placate him. Seeing the Dinover tremble from fear, the Ropshitzer said: "It is true that it lies within my power to punish you for your disrespect. Fear not, however, for I shall not use this power. The Lord said to Moses: 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet' (Exodus 3:5). This word 'Na'al' (shoe) contains the initials for the words: 'Nesicha' (Bite); 'Akitzah' (Sting); and 'Lechisha' (Hiss). In the 'Ethics of the Fathers' (2:15), we are told that these are the three means by which the Sages inflict punishment for disrespect. But the Lord instructed Moses, the first of the Sages, not to use these powers of punishment if the sinner regretted his offense."

page 51

- 12 The Ropshitzer declared that previous to his birth, an Angel showed him a tablet divided into two columns. On the right he read: "In order to know the Torah, a man must have no compassion on his wife and children. If he works to satisfy their needs, he will have no time to study the Torah" (Erubin, 22). On the left, opposite, he read: "He who pities people, is pitied in Heaven. A man must care for his family even beyond his strength, for their lives are dependent upon his" (Hullin, 84).

On the right: "The learned man should be like unto a fiery flame" (Taanith, 4). On the left: "Who will inherit the World-to-Come? The meek and lowly one, who bows when entering and leaving (Sanhedrin, 88).

On the right: "A man should be wise in his fear of the Lord" (Berakhoth, 17). On the left: "You shall be simple-hearted before your God.¹ If you are simple-hearted, your lot is with your God" (Yalkut Shofetim).

On the right: "Be satisfied with a minimum, like Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa" (Taanith, 24). On the left: "He who pledges himself not to drink wine, and thus

¹Deut. 18:13, paraphrase.

NEWMAN 12-16

afflicts his body, is called a sinner" (Taanith, 11).

He continued in this strain for a while, and then said: "I was engrossed in the thought of how difficult it is to find a way of behavior which will reconcile these antinomies. Suddenly I heard the words: 'Mazal Tov,² a male child is born. I remained wondering, and since then I still labor to find the way to follow both rules, however contradictory."

page 54

- 13 The Rimanover asked the Ropshitzer: "Are your lodgings satisfactory?" The latter replied with the expression commonly found in the Talmudical commentaries: "It is possible to agree with this (explanation), if nothing better is in view."

page 121

- 14 Said the Ropshitzer: "I was once loath to accept a Rabbinical post, inasmuch as I believed I would be compelled to resort to flattery. I despise flattery. Then I observed that every one must practice flattery, whether he be tailor, shoemaker, or storekeeper. Hence, I said to myself: 'Since flattery is an unavoidable and universal necessity, I may as well be a Rabbi.' "

page 121

- 15 When the Ropshitzer came for the first time to the Rimanover, his Master, he found a great crowd in the vestibule. In order to steady himself in the jostling throng, he leaned on a Hasid by the name of Simon. Later his friends reproved him for being so familiar with a Hasid whose reputation was not of the best. The Ropshitzer replied: "We find in the Talmud the expression: 'Rabbi Simeon is deserving to lean on in an emergency.' "³

pages 130-31

- 16 Said Rabbi Schmelke: "We read in the Talmud: 'He who is greater than his comrade has a greater evil impulse than his' (Sukkah 52). I paraphrase it: 'Who is great? He who cleaves to his comrades. Whose evil impulse is great? The man who abides by himself.' "
- This was repeated by the Ropshitzer when the Lubliner asked him whether the Zaddik has a greater evil impulse than a common man.⁴

page 131

²"Good Luck."

³Berakhoth 9a.

⁴The lesson appears to be as follows: if the Zaddik holds himself aloof, his evil impulse is greater. If he is democratic, his impulse is not greater than that of the common man.

NEWMAN 17-19

- 17 Said the Riziner to the Ropshitzer: "Do you know that flies are drawn to fire?"

"Yes," retorted the Ropshitzer. "And cream draws flies also."

page 164

- 18 The Viceroy of Austrian Poland demanded that the Hasidim defend themselves in his presence against the accusation that they were impractical dreamers and mystics who misled the youth. The Ropshitzer determined to send his son, the Linsker, to the Rav of Lemberg where the Viceroy resided, in order to request that the Lemberger's son accompany him to the hearing before the viceroy. The Lemberger acceded to the request on the understanding that the Linsker conceal the fact that he was a Hasidic Rabbi.

When they came before the Viceroy, the Linsker found favor in his eyes by virtue of his wisdom, cultivated speech and admirable manners. The official asked the Linsker whether he was a Hasid, and received an affirmative response. On their return to the house of the Rav, the latter's son reported that the Linsker had made a highly favorable impression, and although he confessed to being a Hasid, this had not injured his cause.

The Lemberger Rav asked the Linsker: "Why did you not keep your pledge not to admit you are a Hasid? You took a grave risk that the Viceroy might reject your testimony on the ground that you were an interested party."

The Linsker replied: "Quite the reverse, Rabbi. Had I denied being a Hasid, the Viceroy would have said to us: 'Since you are not Hasidim, how do you know with such certainty that the accusations against them are unfounded?' But when he knew me to be a Hasid, and yet a man of culture and sense, he was compelled to listen to me. As to the understanding, had I refused to agree to it, you would not have permitted your son to accompany me."

The Lemberger Rav smiled and said: "Not for naught does the world say that the Ropshitzer is a man of wisdom, and that his son is not much different."

pages 160-67

- 19 Rabbi Aaron Leib Premislaner went to pay a visit to Rabbi Mendel Rimanover. This became known and some Hasidim went out on the highway to meet him. When he noticed them from afar on his high seat, he speedily changed his clothes with the driver, in order to avoid the undesired honor. His noble mien, however betrayed

him to Rabbi Naftali Ropshitzer, one of the welcoming party. Therefore, while the others shook hands with the supposed Rabbi, he gave greeting to the real Rabbi, and said laughingly: "A thief cannot deceive another one in the same profession."

page 178

- 20 The Ropshitzer came to a wealthy Jew, known to be a miser, for a donation to a worthy cause. The miser, hearing the coach halt near his home, concealed himself. The Rabbi observed him stealing out to the barn and instructed his Warden to summon him. When the owner appeared, he was deeply ashamed of himself, and gave a goodsized donation. The Ropshitzer remarked:
- "The Talmud says that welcoming guests is a greater deed than welcoming the Shekinah.¹ You have, therefore, acted quite properly. When the Lord appeared for the first time to Moses, the Prophet hid his face only.² When we appeared, however, you concealed your entire body beneath the hay in the barn."

page 182

- 21 When the Lizensker Rabbi died, some of his closest adherents left Lizensk in order to seek out a new teacher. They came to Rabbi Hirsch of Ziditzov who invited them to remain as students of his method of serving the Lord. They declined and traveled next to Premislan. The Premislaner also invited them to become his Hasidim, and sought earnestly but vainly to win their allegiance.
- Their third visit was in Ropshitz. There they met with a luke-warm reception. Not a word of invitation to remain was uttered by the Rabbi. The Hasidim were considerably piqued, and remained over the Sabbath. The Ropshitzer's ways proved of great attraction, and the visitors became his Hasidim.

page 214

- 22 Once the Ropshitzer endeavored to link in marriage the families of two noted Zaddikim. The father of the prospective groom said: "I demand that the father of the girl give the young couple twice the dowry I present, inasmuch as my son is a great scholar." The father of the prospective bride likewise demanded twice the dowry on the ground that his family was of higher pedigree. The Ropshitzer remarked to each father separately: "You are quite right; the other one says exactly the same thing."

¹Sabbath, 127.

²Exodus 3:6.

Eventually the two fathers came together, and after many misunderstandings, they reached an agreement. When the Ropshitzer appeared, they demanded an explanation. He replied: "I merely spoke the truth to you, namely, that each of you said exactly the same thing. I knew that when you would meet, you would not demand double payment from each other, for only a thief is required by law to pay double" (Exodus 22:3).

page 236

- 23 The Ropshitzer voiced a witticism which pleased his Master, the Rimanover, and the latter complimented the Ropshitzer on his wisdom. The Ropshitzer said: "My Master is a man of holiness. How then can He understand a witty saying?"

The Rimanover felt piqued and the Ropshitzer was forced to labor hard to appease him.

page 242

- 24 Rabbi Meir Apter and the Ropshitzer were at a wedding-feast. Said the Apter, holding forth a bottle of brandy: "When Messiah comes, we will go out to him with strong drink, and we shall show him the manner by which we awakened our religious emotions in the bitter Exile."

The Ropshitzer replied: "Nay, my dear friend. We will go out to him together, and show him the kind of religious leaders Israel possessed as guides in the bitter Exile."

page 249

- 25 Rabbi Meir Nathan, son of the Tzanzer, told his father-in-law, Rabbi Eliezer Dzikover, that last Shevuoth, he had heard his father, the Tzanzer, declare that the Ropshitzer sat at his table. When the Tzanzer came to visit the Dzikover, the latter asked: "Pray, explain to me how it was possible for my late father to be present at your table, seeing that he has been dead many years?"

The Tzanzer replied: "My meaning was metaphorical, to be sure. I conducted the meal according to the custom of your revered father, the Ropshitzer."¹

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¹The more learned Hasidic Rabbis cared little for miracles, and explained the true facts when among their own group. They permitted, however, the circulation of tales of wonder-working among the common people in the belief that thereby they might become attached to an ethical life.

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26-28

- 26 The Ropshitzer used to say during the three weeks before the 9th of Ab: "It is not fitting that we should deplore the loss of the Holy Temple with our entire heart, for the Lord, who endowed this edifice with holiness, is with us in Exile. We should mingle mourning with joy because our Lord is present among us."

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- 27 The Ropshitzer related his genealogy to his Hasidim and declared: "I doubt if there is a family more renowned than mine."

A Hasid, however, retorted: "Rabbi, I come from a nobler family than even yours!"

The Rabbi invited him to describe his family.

"Let me explain, Rabbi," declared the Hasid. "Of my entire family, I am the only one who dons the phylacteries and washes his hands before meals."

The Rabbi laughingly admitted the superiority of the Hasid's family connections, and respected him for his wit.

page 285-6

- 28 The Rimanover Rabbi greatly opposed the residence of Jews in the villages since their children were forced to associate with non-Jews and grew up in ignorance of Judaism. He induced many of his Hasidim to leave the villages and move into the town. Those who did not follow his injunction he threatened with excommunication. They related their troubles to the Ropshitzer, explaining they could not throw away their opportunity for a livelihood for themselves and their families.

The Ropshitzer hired a sled and journeyed to the Rimanover. The snow was deep and the cold severe. When he arrived at the Rimanover's home, he found the Rabbi absent. He removed his garments and laid himself in the Rabbi's bed. When the Rimanover prepared to retire, he found the Ropshitzer occupying his bed. He tried to awaken him, but the Ropshitzer merely groaned and refused to move.

"What ails you, Ropshitzer Rabbi?" asked the Rimanover.

"I am frozen with cold despite my warm fur coat," replied the Ropshitzer. "Before you compelled the Jewish innkeepers to move to the town, a Jewish traveler could find a place to halt his journey and warm himself. Now I can find no Jewish inns near Rimanov. I can

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28-31

provide for myself since I own warm clothes, but I shudder to contemplate the plight of the less warmly-dressed travelers."

The Rimanoover saw the point, and promised to recall his threat of excommunication.

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- 29 Said the Ropshitzer: "By our service to God we build Jerusalem daily. One of us adds a row, another only a brick. When Jerusalem is completed, the Redemption will come."

page 300

- 30 The Ropshitzer was told that one of his Hasidim ate Matzah that had been dipped in soup on Passover. He ordered a Holiday Prayer Book to be brought to him, and laughingly said: "If you eat like a Mithnaged, then say the long Piyyutim¹ that the Mithnagedim say."²

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- 31 The Ropshitzer needed money for his son's marriage, and asked the residents of Ropshitz to aid him. The leader of the community asked the Rabbi why in this instance he wished the residents of Ropshitz to assist him, whereas on other occasions he was accustomed to visit his rich Disciples in other towns, and to receive their abundant donations. The Rabbi replied: "On other occasions, I did not need the money badly; hence the people gave me freely. But this time I am in genuine need, and I fear that I shall receive only a little from free-will offerings.

"I explain thus the Mishnah (Peah 1): 'He who needs no charity and asks for it, will in the end be compelled to ask people for charity.' What punishment is there in this statement for a man who is accustomed to live on charity? The answer is: 'One who does not need aid and asks for it, receives alms in abundance. And his punishment in the end will be that when he really requires aid, he will encounter only refusals.'"

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¹Liturgical Poems, chiefly from Medieval Jewish Literature.

²The Hasidim object to dipped Matzah on Passover, inasmuch as a tiny piece may remain raw, and therefore liable to leaven if moistened.

- 32 The Ropshitzer once walked abroad late at night and passed a watchman. He asked the watchman his employer's name. The watchman gave it, and then, to the Rabbi's astonishment, asked him the same question.

The Rabbi bade him come to his house the next morning, and forthwith engaged him as his servant. The Ropshitzer appreciated that such a "golem"¹ would be unable to understand anything before his eyes, and that it would be unnecessary to seek concealment when he performed any acts of special piety.

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- 33 Rabbi Feibush Hobnover was possessed by a burning desire to serve the Lord. Once he slept in the Ropshitzer's House of Study. The Ropshitzer told his other Disciples: "Watch and you will see him awake at the dot of midnight to perform the 'Midnight Service.'" At the stroke of twelve, Rabbi Feibush awoke, tore at his collar, and began to shout: "O Mother, I am burning."

Later the Hobnover became a Disciple of the Apter. The Ropshitzer regretted this, and said to his intimates: "Feibush is a consuming flame; I stove to cool him a little; but the Apter himself is fiery, and will increase the conflagration." Shortly after, the Hobnover fell dead while praying. His heart could not endure his burning ecstasy.

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- 34 The Tzanzer was a Disciple of the Ropshitzer in his youth. Once he was praying with enthusiasm and was stamping on the floor. The Ropshitzer's wife said to her husband: "Why do you not counsel the youth to stamp only with his healthy and not with his lame foot?"

The Ropshitzer replied: "If I had known that he was aware with what foot he was stamping, I would have told him."

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- 35 Said the Ropshitzer: "A man should not declare: 'I cannot pray at this moment because my thoughts are astray; I shall wait until I can pray with the proper concentration.' He should pray at the appointed time to the best of his ability. It is written: 'But from thence ye will seek the Lord thy God' (Deut. 4:29). This means: at any place, at any hour where thou art."

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¹"Golem" means a "dull clod."

- 36 Said the Ropshitzer: "Some Mithnagedim are careful not to pass over the time of reciting the Sh'ma, but they are prone to pass over the Sh'ma itself, without giving their hearts to its words. The Hasidim are likely to pass over the time of the Sh'ma, but they are careful not to pass over the words of the Sh'ma itself with inattention."

page 334

- 37 The Ropshitzer was a scholar of great learning and would sometimes study a single verse for weeks. This caused him considerable difficulty when he began to preach. He commenced one of his first sermons as follows:

"It is fitting that a Rabbi always preach the truth; that he speak briefly, and that his theme be taken from the 'Sedrah.' I wish to say that I do not know what 'Sedrah' is to be read on this sabbath. This is true; it is brief, and has the 'Sedrah' for its theme. Amen."

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- 38 A woman came to the Ropshitzer, laid a sum of money on the table as her "Pidyon," and talked without interruption for an hour. When she had finally left, the Rabbi's brother, Rabbi Yokele, remarked: "How can you listen to so long a tirade in patience?"

The Ropshitzer smiled, and said: "That is how I earn my own 'pidyon.'"¹

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- 39 A confirmed sinner visited the Ropshitzer, saying he had been sent by an erring friend who was too shy to come himself. His friend had committed certain offenses, and he desired to learn the appropriate means of repentance. The Rabbi at once divined that the visitor was himself the sinner, and he said:

"What a foolish person is your friend! Could he not have come himself to me and pretended that the sinner is a friend?"

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- 40 A man came to the Ropshitzer and said: I am a great sinner. I have offended this person and that, and I beseech the Rabbi to teach me how to repent."

The Rabbi replied: "Tell me, my man, what harm has God done to you, that you have done so much to spite Him?"

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¹"Pidyon" means "Fee" or "Redemption Money."

- 41 A great sinner came to the Ropshitzer. He complained that though he wished to repent, the course in self-denials assigned him by the Rabbi of Kalev was too severe for him. The Ropshitzer replied: "I am confident the Kalever underestimated the gravity of your sins and gave you too easy a course in the ways of repentance."

The Rabbi, thereupon, began to weep copiously at the seriousness of the visitor's transgressions. Seeing this, the sinner himself burst into lamentations, and fainted several times from emotion. The Ropshitzer turned to him, and said: "Since you have shown wholehearted contrition for your sins, God has forgiven you."

Several Hasidim from Hungary were present at this scene, and they said to the Ropshitzer: "Since you are able to draw forth a man's very soul, and restore it again to its place, we acknowledge you to be our Rabbi."

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- 42 Said the Ropshitzer: "Who is a sage? 'One who knows his place,'¹ say our Sages. I shall paraphrase it: 'Who is a sage? One who makes his place known.' A town becomes known throughout the entire world by the presence within it of an illustrious sage."

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- 43 When Rabbi Eliezer Dzikover was a young boy, he once became unruly. The Ropshitzer, his father, rebuked him. The lad answered: "Father, it is not my fault; the Evil Impulse tempted me, and I succumbed."

"Learn from the Evil Impulse how to do your duty," said the Ropshitzer.

"But, Father," replied the boy, "the Evil Impulse has no Satan to tempt him away from his duty."

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- 44 The Lubliner declared that on Shemini Atzereth the Ropshitzer held fine processions with the Scrolls of the Torah, inasmuch as his ancestor, the "Shalho"² was with him in spirit. When the Ropshitzer visited him later, the Lubliner inquired concerning the former's observance of Shemini Atzereth.

¹Ethics 6:6.

²"Shalho" contains the initials of the famous book: "Shenei Luchoth haBerith" (by Rabbi Isaiah Halevy Hurwitz). The Ropshitzer seemed to care little for mysticism. The "true believers," however, attribute this denial to modesty.

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44-47

"Oh, we had excellent wine, tasty fish and delicious birds," was the Ropshitzer's reply.

"But was not the 'Shalho' present?" persisted the Lubliner.

"Yes," replied the Ropshitzer, "but he must have been angry with me, for his back was turned and he spoke not."

"How could that be?" inquired the Lubliner.

"Why," said the Ropshitzer, "he was standing in the book-case."

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- 45 The Ropshitzer said: "Innocence is usually a highly desirable trait, but a little wiliness is also needed. Isaac was earnest and unsophisticated; therefore he became a victim of Esau's wiles, for Esau made it a habit to ask Isaac questions regarding petty rules of conduct, while he was transgressing major ones. Rebecca, however, was born into a wily family, that of Laban, and she perceived the hypocrisy of Esau and cherished greater affection for Jacob."

page 446

- 46 A man complained to the Ropshitzer that he studied hard, but could not understand much of the subject matter. The Ropshitzer replied: "We are commanded to study day and night,¹ but we are not enjoined to become scholars. Isaiah teaches: 'Learn to do well' (1:17). If your conduct is being improved by your study, you need not be disturbed if you cannot understand every intricate detail."

page 458

- 47 The Ropshitzer said: "I am the grandson of Rabbi Isaac Hamburger, and I accomplish naught when I wave the Lulav. But my servant Hirsch, who was once a tailor, and who possesses an inferior Lulav, causes all the heavens to tremble when he waves it."²

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¹Joshua 1:8.

²Rabbi Hirsch, "The Servant" was destined later to succeed the famed Rabbi of Rimanov.

LANGER 1

- 1 Mayerl was a great saint but he had his weakness. He was not as discreet as he should have been. A real enfant terrible he was, this Mayerl. As soon as he heard anything from heaven he immediately prattled about it to the people. This greatly vexed the other saints.

The saint who was most annoyed with him on this account was Reb Urele, known as the holy Seraph of Strelisk. He was so furious that he made up his mind to deprive Mayerl of all his magic power. To do this, however, he required the consent of the holy Reb Naftali of Ropshitz. So he dispatched a special mission to Ropshitz, composed of two dependable Chassidic diplomats.

The expedition arrived at Ropshitz on a Thursday and was given a magnificent reception. Reb Naftali welcomed Reb Urele's envoys most warmly. He conferred with them at length and was extremely friendly, and invited them to be his guests on the holy Sabbath. But Reb Naftali never inquired of them the actual reason why Reb Urele of Strelisk had sent them to Ropshitz.

(Clearly he was perfectly well aware why they had come. Nothing could be hidden from the sight of a saint, a gift of the spirit in a saint so mightily blessed as Reb Naftali.)

On the Friday Reb Naftali was so busy preparing for the Sabbath that it was not possible to trouble him with anything. Then of course the envoys did not dare to disturb the peace of the Sabbath.

On the Sunday they asked for a hearing. However Reb Naftali told them such interesting things that for some while the good diplomats forgot what the actual purpose of their visit was.

After this interview there was only one hope left to them -- to be allowed to acquaint Reb Naftali with the purpose of their mission when they came to bid him farewell.

At the moment of parting Reb Naftali was courtesy itself.

But he would not permit them to say a word. He kept on talking to them until they reached the front of the house. Only when he had set them comfortably in their carriage did he say:

"Last night Reb Arn Leib -- the late father of Mayerl of Przemyśl -- came to me and said: 'I have left behind me in the world a little flame, a glovnele'--that's how he put it--'Can it really be that they want to put out that little flame?! Just you listen to me, keep your hands away from him, don't you dare touch him!'"

No sooner had Reb Naftali spoken when the dust on the highroad flew up in a mighty column. Before the men from Strelisk could recover from their amazement, a chariot drove up, and riding in the chariot was none other than Mayerl. He drove in a standing position, holding the reins in his hand like an ancient Greek warrior, while his hugewhiskers fluttered in the wind like battle pennants.

"My father," he cried, "called me a glovnele, a little flame, but I tell you he left behind him a feuer flam, a great blazing fire!"

He yelled out these words, then hurtled on his way again.

page 62-3

- 2 One day he was on his way to visit the holy Preacher at Koznitz. As he drew near the town--it was already late evening--he saw a light in the distance. So he branched off in the direction of the light and found that it came from a cottage. He went inside. A wedding banquet was in progress, but the bride was refusing to eat the Golden Soup from the same plate as the bridegroom! Many a beautiful eye had shed bitter tears over the nuptial Golden Soup. Not that the Golden Soup--which is made from chicken--was all that bad. Indeed, the exact opposite was the case. But how could a bride and bridegroom fail to be upset in such a predicament? The two young things might never have seen each other in their lives before, and now all of a sudden here they were, having to eat the Golden Soup together out of the same dish! In short, the bride was absolutely insistent that she would not eat the Golden Soup. But why? Because, she said, there was no badchen. In this she was perfectly right. A badchen, or as you would call him, a comedian or compere, must never be missing at any proper wedding. To entertain the bride and bridegroom is one of the most important duties of every god-fearing man, and what a badchen can do with his witty rhymes composed on the spur of the moment is something none of you could possibly do. The holy Reb Naftali understood the difficult situation these good people were in and felt no small pity for them. So he gaily raised his voice and intoned:

"A badchen you want, and nothing more, did you say?

"Here am I--old Naftali of Kopitchinitse!"

In point of fact, he did not come from Kopitchinitse at all. He came from Ropshitz. But it suited his rhyme just as well and he did not want to let on that he was the famous saint of Ropshitz, lest the simple village folk should get alarmed. Without more ado he rolled up

LANGER 2

his sleeves and began scattering rhymes out of them such as not even the most experienced of professional badchen would have been able to produce. As each individual guest was named, he straightway had a clever rhyme ready, and every time, every single time, it hit the mark exactly. In short, it was indescribably funny. Tears of laughter flowed from the bride's eyes, and for a whole month afterwards, whenever the bride and bridegroom remembered this evening, they would collapse in side-splitting laughter. As midnight approached Reb Naftali was still producing rhyme after rhyme, and the wedding guests were still laughing and laughing, till the windows rattled.

Now at that very moment the holy Preacher of Koznitz was getting up, as was his habit, to say his midnight prayers. As usual, he smeared his holy brow with ashes and sat down on the ground at the threshold of his room.

And then what? The words stuck in his throat. That was not a good sign at all. When our Temple still stood on Zion and eternal fire burned on the altar, any one who came to sacrifice to the Lord was able to see for himself whether or not his sacrifice had been received with favour. If he was a just man, a royal lion would appear in fiery shape in the flames of the altar, whither it had descended from the heavens, and would devour the sacrifice; but if he was an ungodly man, the shape of an unclean dog would appear in the flames. Now that we have no Temple and no eternal fire on the altar, and now that our prayer is the only passionate offering we can make, we can still know if it is received with favour or not. If it is found acceptable, then the words flow from our lips as easily and quickly as they are poured forth from our hearts. But if it is rejected, we stutter and stammer and catch our breath. The saint of Koznitz realized that night that his tears were unwanted. At other times all the spheres used to help him to weep. The heavens thirsted for his holy tears like the fallow land for the spring rain. For on the day when our Temple was burnt down in Jerusalem--says the Talmud--all the gates of heaven were closed and have never opened since. Only the Gate of Tears--that has never shut up. But that day, so it seemed, even he, Reb Yisroel of Koznitz, had been completely forgotten in heaven and his tears were despised. Needless to say, his holy intellect immediately grasped the reason. They had no time for his tears in heaven that day. The jokes being made by the holy Reb Naftali of Ropshitz in the seclusion of that forest were at that very moment sending all the celestial spheres into convulsions. Even the most secret chambers of the Lord were filled with joy and gaiety....

LANGER 3-4

3 The holy Reb Naftali entered heaven a second time. There he saw an angel carrying magnificent vessels of fine gold.

"Where did you get those vessels, and where are you going with them?" Reb Naftali asked him.

"These are sacrificial vessels," replied the messenger of God. "They have been fashioned by the prayers of your lips and the tears of your eyes, and I am taking them to the new temple."

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4 Reb Naftali liked witty people, but he was not overfond of busy-bodies. Here is a story of how he got his own back on such a person.

A young man insisted on knowing why Reb Naftali always wore trousers of white cloth.

"I can't tell you that," said the saint, "it's a secret."

When the nosy fellow heard the word "secret," his curiosity increased and he pestered the saint all the more.

"It's a secret I can only confide in somebody who has first fasted for six days."

The young fellow was so anxious to know that he really succeeded in enduring a six-day fast. Then he turned up again.

"So now I'll tell you, but promise me you won't betray the secret to anybody so long as you live."

The fellow solemnly swore not to.

Reb Naftali then led him off into a room, and from that room to a second room, and from the second to a third. Then he went back again to make sure that all the doors were well closed so that no unauthorized person should hear the secret. The young fellow was on tender-hooks.

Reb Naftali grew serious. Then he bent down to the student of mysteries and whispered in his ear:

"Know then that I wear white cloth trousers because they're the cheapest."

"So that's all it is!" exclaimed the disappointed nosy-parker. "Is that what I had to fast six days for? Why make such a secret of it?"

Reb Naftali smiled a mischievous smile.

"Because if people got to know of it, they'd want this sort of trousers too, and in no time they'd be more expensive. I shouldn't get them so cheap any more....Now don't forget your promise, and don't tell any one, so long as you live!"

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LANGER 5

5 The holy Reb Naftali was not exactly kindly in the way he summed up the three languages, Russian, Hungarian and German:

"Russian," he said, "is the personification of retsiche, or violence, Hungarian of niyef, or sensuality, while German personifies the worst quality of all, namely, unbelief--apikorses."

"It is true," he would continue, "that German resembles our Yiddish, but only in the same way as a monkey resembles a man. However, many a lie is so similar to the truth that it is almost impossible to distinguish between them." Or he would turn to you with the question: "Are we Chassidim in any way to blame if they--the Yekes, or Germans--have taken our beautiful Yiddish and turned it into their Datch, or German?!"

"The things they have done to it! May God punish them!"

"Our honest Jewish youch, it would seem, was not to their taste. They eat Suppe instead. The ruffians, they took it out of the mouths of the French, spoon and all! Presumably our mume was not noble enough for them, the good-hearted old soul. So they borrowed her too from the French and called her 'Tante'! Even our shelkes (braces) did not suit them--except that their trousers are liable to come down without them, if you will pardon my saying so. True enough, they do not wear belts in any case and they hardly wear a pasik either. Do you know what a Yeke wears instead of shelkes?--'Hosentrager'! As though the tailor's apprentice who is sent by his master to take a pair of trousers to a customer were a pair of braces! Your Yeke does not wear hentchkes on his hands, not even when he goes to a ball! Do you know what he wears on his hands? A piece of footwear, if you please--he wears shoes on his hands: 'Handschuhe'.... That's what those German baryars are like--louts!"

"Why, your true Germans discourteously turn up their noses even at our grandfather, our venerable zeide, and our wise babe, although their noses are in any case undersized, like the nose of premature babies that haven't turned out properly. There in the west they must have their 'Grossvater' and 'Grossmutter'. Idiots! The fact is that it is usually just the opposite--grandfathers and grandmothers are mostly quite small people and not 'gross' at all. But talk to the Germans about this! I ask you, just you try!"

"And what about the few riches we do have? When the poor German gets up in the morning and asks his wife what they are going to have for dinner, he gets the same answer every day: 'Erdapfel'. Very occasionally for a change he

will be told: 'Kartoffeln'. What does he feel like, all day after that, poor man, when every morning he hears one and the same thing?!"

"How do we go about it? Well, of course, we also eat potatoes and only potatoes the whole time, but at least we have something different every day: on Sunday, kartoflyes, on Monday zemakes, on Tuesday, erdepl, on Wednesday, bulbes, on Thursday, barbuyes, on Friday, krumpirn perhaps, and on the holy Sabbath we make kigel-bramboratchek.

"So there! We shall remain true to our beautiful Yiddish until the coming of the Messiah." But this is only said in passing.

page 77-8

- 6 Each Rabbi has his assistants. We call them gaboim. The holy Reb Naftali also had a gabai; his name was Leizer, if I'm not mistaken. This Leizer-gabai was a fellow of real sterling worth, except that he sometimes used to have some curious ideas of his own. But Reb Naftali was deeply fond of Leizer, more especially perhaps on account of this fault of his. Now this Leizer-gabai is the author of a joke which has long since spread far beyond the confines of the Chassidic Empire.

One day the holy Reb Naftali noticed that Leizer-gabai was somewhat downcast, so he asked him:

"What's up, Leizer?"

"I've got a quarrel with God."

"A quarrel with God? What about?"

"I said to God: 'God, our Rabbi says that a thousand years in Thy sight are but a moment. So, God, if a thousand years are like a moment in Thy sight, I, Leizer-gabai, tell Thee that a thousand ducats in Thy sight are like one ducat. God in heaven, would it harm Thee in any way if Thou wert to give me, Leizer, one of those ducats of Thine?'"

"And what did God say?"

"God said: 'Leizer-gabai, just wait a moment!'"

page 79

- 7 Some of the things we do must not be "interrupted", or disturbed by talk. Mafsik sein, the Jews call it. To begin with, we may not utter an everyday word during the main parts of the prayer service. We are not allowed to speak before a meal, from the moment when we wash our hands until we have said grace and swallowed our first mouthful; and finally we may not speak when we are where "there is neither day nor night"--to use the high-flown phrase. I am not talking about an Archaion but about the place where even the Emperor goes on foot, namely, the

LANGER 7

lavatory.

The holy Reb Naftali was getting ready for his afternoon meal. Leizer-gabai brought bread and coffee. Reb Naftali put on his belt, rinsed and dried his hands. As he did so, he looked at the table and noticed that there was no coffee spoon. Leizer had forgotten to lay one.

At that moment of course Reb Naftali could not "interrupt" by talking. So what did he do? Well, he did what any other Chassid would have done under the circumstances: he coughed.

A proper gabai understands this sort of cough. But as for Leizer, he didn't, of course! He squatted down on the bench near the oven, just as though he were a carved statue, and there was no making him understand what Reb Naftali's cough meant. The old fox!

So the holy Reb Naftali was obliged to hold his tongue and swallow a mouthful.

"Why didn't you lay a coffee-spoon here. Didn't you hear me cough?" he asked, when he had finished the mouthful.

"I didn't know that a cough meant a coffee-spoon."

By the time Leizer had waddled back from the kitchen with a coffee-spoon, the coffee was cold. Reb Naftali got annoyed. Of course he was not annoyed--a saint never gets annoyed. But it looked as though he was.

"Oh well," grunted Leizer, "next time I'll know what to do."

One day when Reb Naftali was in that place where there is neither day nor night, Leizer also wanted to go there. Finding the door locked, he sat down on a bench and waited patiently for the door to open.

But the door did not open. Under such circumstances moments are really like thousands of years. When he could stand it no longer, he stood up and banged on the door with all the weight of his determination. It was not politely done. But this time Leizer did not care a tinker's damn.

At that particular moment the holy Reb Naftali could not "interrupt". In order to drive his assailant away, he once again did what any other Chassid would have done in such delicate circumstances: he coughed.

Leizer went--and fetched a coffee-spoon....That's the sort of rascal he was....

LANGER 8

8 Every year, on the eleventh day of the month of Iyar, we celebrate the death of the holy Reb Naftali of Ropshitz. We sing his beautiful songs, tell each other these wonderful stories and drink brandy. Only ninety-six percent of course! At the same time we shake hands with one another and wish everybody lechayim!, which means "cheers!"

page 80-1

MINTZ 1-2

1 There was once a big tsaddik in the town where Rebbe Elimelekh lived. The tsaddik's name was Reb Naftali Ropchitser. He came from the town of Ropchits and he was called the Ropchitser Rov. Now Rebbe Elimelekh always davened the afternoon prayer with a minyen, but for the evening prayer he always went into the house, locked up the house, and he always prayed by himself. Now the whole town wondered what he did by himself in the house, and everyone would have liked to watch how he davened, but nobody dared to go into the house--except this Reb Naftali Ropchitser. He dared once to enter the house of Rebbe Elimelekh.

 He went in a few hours before the evening service. He went upstairs and he hid himself underneath a bed. Rebbe Elimelekh came in a few hours later, he locked the front door, he went upstairs, he closed the door of the bedroom, and he made preparations for the evening service. He took out his gartel (prayer belt) and he slowly wound it around himself. After he wound it around himself one time Reb Naftali Ropchitser noticed that the room became very, very light, extremely light, and when Rebbe Elimelekh took the gartel around himself a second time, Reb Naftali noticed that the room became still lighter and he never saw such brightness in his lifetime. And then he felt something inside himself. He felt that he was gasping for air. He began to feel faint and he yelled out to Rebbe Elimelekh, "Oy...oy."

 Rebbe Elimelekh quickly took off the gartel and he found that Reb Naftali Ropchitser was hiding under the bed the whole time. He said, "Reb Naftali, what are you doing underneath my bed?" Reb Naftali answered him that he wanted to see how the great tsaddik Rebbe Elimelekh prayed and so he hid himself underneath the bed. Rebbe Elimelekh answered him then: "It's a miracle that you yelled out after I put the gartel around myself only two times, because if I had put the gartel around myself another time, the light and the air would be so strong that you wouldn't be able to stand it."

page 171-2

2 This is the way of Bobov. All the rabbis were very hidden and they did not reveal anything--no great miracles. Some show what they're doing. Not that they want to show off. I wouldn't say that. But they have another way. But Bobov--it started in this way.

 It started with the Ropchitser Rov. Ropchits is also a city in Poland, This Ropchitser Rov was the father of the Dzikover. He was also a very hidden person. You never saw him do anything impressive. After his death,

MINTZ 2

his son, the Dzikover Rov, said, "The world tells of many miracles performed by my father, but I know only three of them." Our Rebbe told us only two of these. The third he didn't want to tell. I'll tell you the stories of the two miracles.

Once there was a very big wedding. As the Ropchitser Rov, who was the oldest of the rabbis and the grandfather of the bride, was to be there, rabbis came from all over Poland. In this city--the city of Kolbisef in Poland--there was a man who had been crippled for nine years. He couldn't move. The doctors had given up on him. They went to see all the rabbis and nothing happened. So the friends and relatives of this crippled man told him, "Now is the time for you to get help. All the rabbis in the whole world are going to be here, and the greatest and the oldest rabbi, the Ropchitser Rov, is going to be here as well. So the best thing for you to do is wait for him on his way to the wedding, fall to the earth, and beg and cry and maybe he'll help you."

In those days there weren't any closed sewers in the streets like there are now. They were like small canals. There were small bridges you could pass over from one house to another. They knew that all the rabbis would go first to the Ropchitser and from there go to the wedding. So they said, "Place your bed on the way so that he won't be able to pass, and when he comes over the bridge he'll ask what's wrong, and then you'll fall before him and cry and beg him and maybe he'll help you."

So that's what he did. They put the bed by the bridge so that it blocked the way. The Ropchitser Rov came out and he saw a person lying on the bed. He started yelling: "What's wrong with you? Are you crazy?" He gave him a kick and the man got up from the bed and ran away like he was on fire. The whole city knew he had been crippled, but the Ropchitser didn't know anything about it.

The wedding was performed and the next morning the gabai told him the whole city is talking of the rabbi's miracle.

He said, "What miracle?"

And the gabai said: "Doesn't the Rebbe know that there was a crippled man outside, and the Rebbe just gave him a kick and he ran away?" The Ropchitser was so ashamed that he didn't go outside for three days. He was ashamed that he had made a miracle.

MINTZ 3-4

- 3 The second miracle he told happened on Sukkes. He (the Ropchitser) came at night and he had to go in a sukkeh. It was showering and thundering and raining. You know the law is you're not allowed to go in a sukkeh when it's raining. If it's raining you're not allowed to go in. It's the first night. In the sukkeh you have to wait a couple of hours. If it doesn't stop you're allowed to eat in the room. You're not allowed to eat when it rains because the Torah doesn't want you to have pains. You're doing a mitsveh and you'd have pains eating in a sukkeh if the rain should go on the top of your head in the soup and the meat.

So the first hour was terrible, and the Ropchitser Rov was turning back and forth, back and forth. And he was waiting--maybe it's going to stop raining. Then he took his son, the Dzikover, he was a small kid, by his hand, and he told him: "Tell the people they should have everything ready, and as soon as I come in the sukkeh they should put everything, all the food, on the table and then take everything out."

He took him by the hand, and not even one drop of rain came down in the Sukkeh. They ate fast. He was very much in a hurry. He ate very fast and he took him by his hand and he said, "Let's go." He took him by his hand and they went out. As soon as they went out all the rain that was on top of the sukkeh suddenly came down and the water rose till the window. There was so much rain on the top. Understand? It didn't come down. It stayed on the top. That's all.

He heard another one but the third one he didn't tell us.

page 184-5

- 4 The Ropchitser told that when he was a young man he used to sit and learn all night. He never went to sleep at night. He used to sleep a half hour, an hour. So he used to sit by the candles by the table, sit and learn all night. One night he decided, "This is no good. Everybody is going to see the Rebbe." So he decided he was going to close the candles and he's going to sit and learn in the dark. Nobody will see him learning. He'll sit and learn in the dark and nobody will see him.

So he figures what will happen--he tells the story himself. So he says, "What will happen if somebody walks in and sees him learning in the dark? He'll say 'Ooooooh, we have really a great Rebbe. He doesn't even want anybody to know that he's learning. And he's a

MINTZ 5-6

modest person.'" So he decided he was going to go into bed, and he's going to learn in bed. So the end is, he said, that he fell asleep. So he said, "Sometimes modesty is the idea of the Yetser Hora in order to trick him, to make him so modest that he shouldn't want to do anything." So he says, "If I have to sit and learn, let everybody see me sitting and learning."

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- 5 You usually cut your nails on Friday before going to the mikveh. The Ropchitser cut his nails after the mikveh. A hasid saw him and said, "This must have a deep meaning." And he asked the Rebbe to explain.

The Ropchitser was a jokester. He told the man to fast two days, go to the mikveh, say so many psalms, and after he did these things, then he would tell him the reason why.

After the man did this he came back to the Ropchitser and asked for an explanation. The Ropchitser explained: "The reason why I cut my nails after the mikveh is that the water makes the nails soft and easier to cut."

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- 6 The Ropchitser Rov used to say vertlekh (sayings). We didn't understand everything he said. He was a student of the Seer of Lublin, the Lubliner, Reb Yankev Yitshok from Lublin. He always used to say those jokes. The Rebbe knew what he meant with the jokes, but once the Lubliner Rebbe told him, "Look, Ropchitser Rov," that is what he called him, "maybe you'll stop for a year. Why do you say so many jokes? Let me see you control yourself for a year and don't make any jokes."

So he said all right. He didn't crack any jokes.

Once he was in Lublin. All the students, all the big rabbis were there. The rabbi, the Lubliner, was standing for the Eighteen Benedictions. It was very long. They couldn't stand it. The Ropchitser calls over to his other friends and tells them, "You know why the rabbi stays so long saying the Eighteen Benedictions? He probably reminds himself of the day of the wedding." That is what he said. And so all of them start laughing. You know, it's a joke.

So then after the Ropchitser Rov said this he went over to the Lubliner and he sang a song in his ears, in the middle of the Eighteen Benedictions, and then right away he finished. As soon as he sang him the song, he finished the Eighteen Benedictions. And he turned around and he saw all of them were laughing. "Oh, you

MINTZ 7

probably cracked a joke already. They're laughing." So he said, "You promised me you wouldn't crack a joke for a year."

In Jewish there's a saying: you say a year and a Wednesday. If somebody takes too long to tell something, you tell them it takes a year and a Wednesday. "It's not my fault if the Rebbe stays for the Eighteen Benedictions a year and a Wednesday. The Rebbe told me only one year I shouldn't say any jokes. The Rebbe stays for the Eighteen Benedictions a year and a Wednesday."

So then he asked, "Why are you laughing?"

So they told him, "The Ropchitser said that you reminded yourself of the day of the wedding."

"He knew what he was talking about." So he told them in the middle of the Eighteen Benedictions there came a man, a man who sings songs at weddings. He was not a good person. So in the other world they didn't want to allow him in Paradise. So he came over to the Lubliner, and he begged him he should do something for him here--pray for him they should let him in.

So he says, "I didn't know him."

So the man says, "I sang at your wedding."

"So I don't remember."

The Ropchitser Rov. came to his ear and sang what he sang him at the wedding.

page 396-7

7 The Ropchitser Rov was by the Lubliner once, by the meal on Shabbes, when you sit together. They used to eat together like here we eat together with the Rebbe on Shabbes. The Lubliner liked him very much. The Ropchitser gave him his pipe every time he used to smoke. The Lubliner didn't smoke, only one time he found one of his students had a pipe. He took the pipe, gave a couple of puffs, and gave it back. He took it from him and he used to hold it the whole day. That's how much he liked him.

So in the middle of the meal he gave a pudding. There was a lot of people pushing, and he said, "The Ropchitser Rov." He called his name. He wanted to give him pudding but he couldn't reach him. So people passed it over their heads one to the other until it came to him. But one was very hungry so he grabbed it off and had a plate.

After the meal the Lubliner asked him, "How did you like my pudding?"

He says, "The one above knows." You could take it in two ways: The person that took it off, and the One on top (the Almighty).

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MINTZ 8-9

- 8 The Ropchitser Rebbe said: A Jew has to be good, pious, and smart. Because good alone is a fool, pious alone is a priest, smart alone is a thief. A Jew has to be all three.

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Compare to Wiesel:

"Three principal virtues enable man to comprehend and communicate truth. They are: kindness, devotion and intelligence. Kindness alone leads to promiscuity; devotion alone comes close to stupidity; intelligence alone is conducive to crime. So it is essential that the three qualities be present together for man to benefit from them."

page 110

- 9 You see the tsaddikim used to have their gaboyim, those people that go with them and serve them. Not a secretary--he gives them their meals. He's more like a servant, you might say. They used to take such people that had very little sense, because if they would take people with sense they would understand what the Rebbe is doing, the hidden things. He does very high things for God, so they used to take people that had very little sense.

So the Ropchitser Rov, that's the (Bobover) Rebbe's great-grandfather, he was a very hidden man. You just saw him like this--he talked, made jokes. You could crack from his jokes. You know, later on people thought they figured out every word that he meant with the joke. So the Ropchitser Rov was once outside on a winter night and he was rolling naked on the snow. That's one of the things you do, if you commit sins, one of the things to have the sins forgiven. We don't believe the Ropchitser Rov did those sins. He was a great tsaddik. But even if he doesn't do those sins, he does the same thing. It's not done now because the people are very weak. It used to be done.

In those times, every night somebody sent out a man. Let us say in every apartment house five people lived. So every night somebody has to stay outside and watch the house. The rich people they didn't want to be up all night to watch the house, so they gave money to poor people and they watched for them.

So the Ropchitser Rov's gabai was named Sheah. So how did he become his gabai? Once, when the Ropchitser Rov was rolling in the snow, so Sheah didn't understand what he was doing. He thought the Rebbe was hot. "It's hot. He's going outside in the wintertime to roll

MINTZ 9

in the snow." So he says, "Rebbe, for who are you watching now? Whose house are you watching?" He thought he's watching a house.

So the Rebbe saw, "This person is good for me. He has a lot of sense." So he goes over. "Listen, Sheah, how much do you get paid?"

He says, "Five cents an hour."

So he says, "Listen, I'll take you with me, and I'll pay you whatever you make for a whole year, and you'll be my gabai."

So he said, "Okay."

"Don't call be Rebbe," he says. Call be balebos-- boss. I'm your boss." The hasidim used to laugh at him. The hasidim used to call the Rebbe, the Rebbe. He says, "The balebos goes to the meal. The balebos goes here." He used to call him balebos.

page 403-4

9 Once the Ropchitser Rov looked out of the window and he sees Sheah carrying water from the city pump. He says, "Sheah, what's wrong with you? We have a pump right here in the yard. Why do you go there?"

So Sheah answers, "Rebbe, I thought you'd have sense. People say where the Torah is, there's wisdom. I thought the Rebbe has sense. Don't you know why I go there? Because if I take water from the city pump I have three chances to rest, but if I'm going to take it from the yard, I'm going to have no time to rest."

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ZEVIN 1-2

- 1 Reb Naftali of Ropshitz once shared a meal in Lublin with Reb Yaakov Yitzchak of Pshischah and Reb David of Lelov--but there was barely a morsel to eat. A rich young man came past and offered them a gold ruble with which to buy food, and as they ate and drank together, they gladdened their hearts by delving into the mysteries of the Divine Plan.

Years later, when all three had established themselves in their respective pastoral posts, they happened to meet again in a countryside inn. As they reminisced over their student days in Lublin, they recalled the joy that they had shared at that meal together, a joy that had come to them thanks to the kindness of the young man who had given them a gold ruble. Where was he now? Their souls took wing as they sought him high and low, in This World and in the Next--but he eluded them. Never despairing, they plumbed all the depths of Creation, until they finally found him: the young man had forsaken the path of the righteous!

"We owe him a favor," they said to each other.

And through toil of the soul and exertion in prayer, the three tsaddikim succeeded in arousing in his heart an urgent desire to return to the fold, and the young man became a sincere penitent.

page 281-2

- 2 Reb Naftali of Ropshitz had spent a year studying at the feet of the aged tzaddik Reb Mordechai of Neshchiz, when his teacher one day told him, suddenly: "It is time for you to return to your home."

Since his own entreaties were ignored, Reb Naftali decided to ask his teacher's rebbitzin to try to persuade her husband on his behalf. His answer to her was brief: "I have always taken your advice, and I shall do so now. I only hope that we shall have no cause for regret."

A few days later, while the tzaddik was at shul, a stranger visited his home and entered his study. Reb Naftali was there at the time, and no sooner had he laid eyes on this stranger than he perceived that he was besmirched with sin. He was unable to restrain himself, and blurted out: "Get out, you impure fellow! How dare you step over the rebbe's threshold!"

The stranger fled, but Reb Mordechai, sensing what had happened, hastened home and asked: "Who was here?"

When Reb Naftali described the visitor, the tzaddik rebuked him: "Whatever have you done? Quick, quick! Hurry out and bring him here!"

When the stranger was brought in, Reb Mordechai gave

him a warm, smiling welcome, and asked him why he had not called on him for so long. The visitor assured the tzaddik that in future he would come more frequently, offered him gifts of his own farm produce, and took his leave.

The tzaddik then explained to Reb Naftali that this man had once been close to him, and the tzaddik had been able to help him keep his distance from evil. Lately, however, various circumstances had combined to prevent him from visiting Neshchiz, and the link between them had been severed. At first he had become sullied with lesser transgressions, but since, as the Sages teach, "One sin brings on another in its train," he reached the point where he asked himself: "How am I going to end up? After all, I am really neither a Jew nor a goy. I can hardly go off to Neshchiz to visit the rebbe, for he will recognize at once that I am utterly enslaved to the Evil Inclination. On the other hand, if I don't go, I will simply become more and more deeply entangled in sin." And so he had continued to ponder the possibilities open to him, until finally he had decided to break his ties with his faith, and to become an apostate, God forbid.

But at that point a new idea had entered his head: "Let me make one more trial. I will make the journey to Neshchiz, and there I will see: if he receives me warmly, that shows that there is hope for me yet; I'll put my life in order, be a good Jew again, and visit the rebbe often, just like I used to do. But if he doesn't, then I'll make a clean break with him and with Judaism altogether."

The tzaddik, understandably enough, had not wanted all his hard work on behalf of this struggler, in speech and in prayer, to be imperiled by Reb Naftali's impetuous tongue. And that was why, some days earlier, he had asked him to go home.

page 388-390

- 3 Reb Eliezer of Dzikov, the son of Reb Naftali of Ropshitz, dreamed once that he was being shown to the Garden of Eden. He was taken up a luminous hill and found himself in a splendid courtyard, wherein stood a palace built of scintillating jewels. Asking who was the man looking out of the window of the house, he was told that this was Reb Elimelech of Lyzhansk, and to him all of this opulence belonged, though he was master of much besides. Reb Eliezer gazed upon his face, the face of an angel, and experienced a rare moment of spiritual bliss.

Early in the morning he went off to tell his father of his wondrous dream, but Reb Naftali was loath to believe him -- until he described the features of the face that he had seen.

"My son," he said, "it is true that it is my rebbe Reb Elimelech that you have described. But a man has to have reached a very lofty level before he is able to see Reb Elimelech."

"What does 'level' mean if not serving God through prayer and the study of Torah?" countered his son. "Then what do I do?"

"True again, my son," said Reb Naftali, "that you have reached a certain level. Still, in order to see Reb Elimelech one has to climb even higher. Could it be, for example, that you did someone a great favor, and because of that you were granted this beautiful gift?"

Reb Eliezer recalled that a few weeks earlier he had encountered one of the grandsons of Reb Elimelech making his rounds to collect alms, and he was sorely in need of a warm garment. Reb Eliezer had then taken off his own fine fleece coat and had given it: a dual gift-- for while it gave the body warmth, it gave the man esteem.

"Now," exclaimed his father, "it is clear that you did in fact see Reb Elimelech, and that you deserved to see what you saw! For Reb Elimelech asked the Almighty that his descendants should be reduced to begging, so that they should remain righteous, and he retains a liking for anyone who helps them without indignity."

BUBER 1-3

- 1 Rabbi Naftali, a disciple of the rabbi of Apt, who later became the rabbi of Roptchitz, asked a fellow pupil to find out what their teacher thought of him. For half a year his friend made every effort to get the rabbi to say something, but he said nothing about Naftali, nothing good and nothing bad. So his fellow disciple told Naftali, saying: "You see, the master has a golden scale in his mouth. He never passes judgment on anyone, for fear he might wrong him. Has he not forbidden us to judge even those who are supposed wicked through and through? For if anyone were to wrong them, he would be wronging God himself."
page 112
- 2 Once, after the Additional Prayer on the Day of Atonement, the rabbi of Roptchitz said: "I wish that I could be reborn as a cow, that a Jew might come to me in the morning to take some of my milk to refresh himself before beginning the service of God."
page 193
- 3 The Rabbi of Roptchitz told the following incident:
"During the siege of Sebastopol Czar Nicholas was once riding along one of the walls when an enemy archer took aim at him. A Russian soldier who observed this from afar screamed and startled the emperor's horse so that it swerved to the side and the arrow missed its target. The Czar told the man to ask any favor he pleased. 'Our sergeant is so brutal,' the soldier faltered. 'He is always beating me. If only I could serve under another sergeant!'"
"'Fool,' cried Nicholas, 'be a sergeant yourself!'"
"We are like that: we pray for the petty needs of the hour and do not know how to pray for our redemption."
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WIESEL 1-3

- 1 Naftali's wife would often boast about her own erudition and piety, and remarked once that her father regretted that she was born a girl and not a boy, for then his son would have become the greatest of the great scholars alive. "In this case I agree with your father," said Rebbe Naphtali. "I also regret that you were not born a boy."

page 103

- 2 Even as Rebbe, he adopted an attitude of amused sobriety towards himself. One day he remarked: "In the more distant provinces I am called Rebbe Naphtali of Ropshitz. In Ropshitz, where I am well known, I am referred to as the Rebbe of Ropshitz. But my wife, who knows me best, simply calls me Naphtali." He himself preferred the surname Naphtali der Belfer--the tutor.

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- 3 On another occasion he remarked: "What is a Hasid? Someone who possesses a precious key, a key that opens all the doors, even those that God keeps closed. And that key is . . . the Nigoun, the song of joy that makes our hearts thrill. The Nigoun opens the gates of heaven. Melancholy closes them."

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GLOSSARY

ABD"K--transliterated acronym for Av Bet Din Kehillah, meaning the leading rabbinic authority in a community.

am-ha'aretz--an uneducated Jewish yokel. Literally, a "man of the earth."

Amidah--a collection of nineteen benedictions (sometimes less) said at every service. It is also known as the Tefillah and the Shmoneh Esreh.

badchan--a jester, usually employed at weddings.

Beit Ha-Shoavah--a processional held during the Sukkot festival while the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing. It involved the carrying of pitchers of water and/or torches.

Birkat Ha-Shanim--the Prayer for the Year.

Birkat Ha-Mazon--the grace after meals.

Blessed Name--a euphemism for God.

Book of Life--According to legend, Jews are either written in the Book of Life or the Book of Death, based on their deeds during the preceding year.

brit milah--circumcision.

Days of Awe--The ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, which are devoted to repentance.

drash; drasha; (drashot=pl.)--an explanation (often sermonic) of the biblical text.

d'var torah (pl.=divrei torah)--also an explanation of a biblical text, although it can also mean any short piece of religious instruction delivered orally.

einikel--a child or grandchild or a tzaddik whose authority is based on his lineage.

Evil Inclination--according to tradition, every man has an inclination for good, and one for evil, which motivates his actions.

fabrengen--a gathering of Hasidim, usually for celebration.

Four Species--four forms of vegetation that are waved together to celebrate Sukkot. They include a citron, a palm branch, a sprig of willow and one of myrtle.

gabbai--while in other contexts it is a title of respect, in our stories it usually refers to the occupation of manservant.

Gan-Eden--the Garden of Eden, i. e. , Paradise or heaven.

ga'on--a talmudic genius.

gartel--the waist-band worn by Hasidim to separate the upper and lower (genital) halves of their bodies.

Gehinnom--the Jewish version of Hell; it is more akin to Purgatory.

halakha--Jewish law.

hanukkah menorah--the nine-branched candelabrum used to celebrate the holiday of Hanukkah.

hiddush--an insight.

hol ha-mo'ed--during a week-long festival, the intervening days, which are not as holy.

hoshannot--prayers of supplication said during sukkot that usually involve a procession and the waving of some or all of the Four Species.

Hoshannah Rabbah--the seventh day of the festival of Sukkot.

KB"H--transliterated acronym for Kadosh Baruch Hu--"the Holy One, Blessed be He"--God.

Kiddush--the sanctification (of the day), which usually involves wine.

kohen--a person descended from the clan of priests active during the Temple Period.

Kol Nidre--the famous prayer which begins the evening service of Yom Kippur.

kosher--ritually fit.

lamdan--a scholar well-versed in the traditional legal sources.

lulav--the palm branch waved on Sukkot.

machzor--the prayer book used on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

maggid--an itinerant preacher, although usually not a lamdan.

Mitnagid--one who held the prevailing Jewish values before Hasidism, and who therefore opposed the Hasidic movement.

musaf--the additional service held on Shabbat and festivals.

parasha(t)--the weekly Torah portion.

pidyon--the fee the tzaddik received for counselling his followers and interceding with God.

pidyon ha-ben--the "redemption of the first-born son," accomplished by paying a kohen the money equivalent of five shekels.

pilpul--the mode of dialectics involved in understanding Jewish law.

pitkah--a small piece of paper, which could either contain a request from a Hasid, or a blessing from a tzaddik.

rebbetzin--the wife of the rebbe.

Rosh Yeshivah--the head of a talmudical college.

Seudah Shlishit--the third meal held late Shabbat afternoon, which was the forum for hiddushim and divrei torah.

Shmoneh Esreh--see Amidah.

sukkah--a thatchroof booth in which one celebrates Sukkot, by eating and sometimes sleeping in it.

tefillin--the phylacteries worn by a Jew while praying the morning prayers.

teshuvah--repentance.

tikkun--spiritual repair. The concept is explained in more depth in Part One.

tisch--the rabbi's table, at which Hasidim would gather to eat and hear divrei torah.

trefe--ritually unfit.

tzaddik--a Hasidic leader.

World-to-Come--either heaven, or the redeemed world of the Messianic Age.

yihis--lineage to learned rabbis and sages.

yihud(im)--mystical associations that can achieve tikkun.

ZA"L--transliterated acronym for zichrono livracha--"May his name be a blessing."

ZATZ"L--transliterated acronym for zecher tzaddik livracha--"May his righteous name be a blessing."

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