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TEACHING REFORM IDEOLOGY THROUGH TRADITIONAL FOLKLORE

Mark Covitz

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

1999

Referee, Dr. Alvin J. Reines

Dedication

For my family.

For Da, Danny, Mike; Ralph, and Solly
for being there.

For Rabbi Ron Klotz;
Words are only words.
It takes a voice to make them a story.

For Dr. Alvin Reines;
Respect for a man,
honest of thought and clear in vision,
who lives as he believes.

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"A wise man hears one word and understands two."

- Yiddish Proverb

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DIGEST

"A wise man hears one word and understands two." This thesis represents an attempt to do just that - to hear the stories of our Hasidic past and to understand messages that speak to our Reform present.

Chapter One serves as an introduction to the subject of the thesis, delivering a view of what difficulties might exist in using Hasidic literature in a Reform setting.

Chapter Two looks at Hasidic Judaism as a necessary development for Jews of a certain time and place - late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century eastern Europe. It explores of few of the many beliefs maintained by the Hasidic community and publicized in its folklore.

Chapter Three removes some of these ideologies and examines them in a Reform ethos, first coming to an understanding that while Reform Judaism may represent a wide-range of beliefs, some consensus, albeit a vague consensus, may be reached on these issues. It then delves into the topics of the afterlife, the messiah, miracles, and halachah, contrasting Reform belief with that expressed in Hasidic lore. The opinions of a variety of Reform scholars are brought to light; and the final word rests with the three platforms of Reform Judaism.

Chapter Four explores the nature of folklore. It first examines folklore as a medium, the truth of which, is in the moral, not the detail, and is contingent upon the understanding and the interpretation of the listener rather than of the teller. It then looks at why Hasidic literature continues to play an important role in the world of Reform Judaism, despite contradictions not only in detail, but occasionally in moral also.

Chapter Five introduces the classic Hasidic tale of the shepherd boy whose prayer consists only in the music of his flute. This tale will be presented

as consistent, in its message, with Reform belief. Chapter Five will include a program write-up, appropriate for a classroom or for the informal educational setting of a camp or youth group, utilizing this story and leading to discussion regarding how we pray.

Chapter Six tells a less-familiar story, that of the Baal Shem Tov's neighbor. In this case, two lesson plans are needed. The first will look at items of detail in the story which may not concur with the beliefs of Reform students. Discussion will involve a sharing of opinions on the topics of the afterlife, supernatural powers and knowledge, and Halachah. The second lesson will examine the understood theme of the story - making known publicly the oppression of Jews. Ensuing discussion will focus on what an individual Jew's obligations are to inform the world of injustices against Jews as well as crimes against humanity.

Chapter Seven takes a look at how to approach the concept of the Messiah. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav's story of The Lost Princess will be presented as the vehicle for discussion. Because this tale take the form of fable, bordering on fairy tale, the details are not the issue, as they are clearly not meant to be taken literally. The educational program detailed in this chapter will examine the Messianic metaphor of the story, and lead to a discussion of how the development of the Messianic concept has led to the Reform interpretation of a Messianic Age.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis with the story of The Clever Man and the Simple Man. Like the story of The Lost Princess, this tale utilizes the classic metaphor of a king representing God. The question raised is, if we don't see the king, and we don't know where the king came from, and we get by on our own wisdom, then does the king really exist? These same questions, regarding God instead of a fictional king, should be familiar to anyone who hears the story. The

lesson plan for this story raises these questions, and also brings up the Reform philosophy that modern science and faith in God do not necessarily contradict one another.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Hasidic culture is a very real part of Reform Jewish life. Many homes are filled with art work depicting Hasidic rebbes and other scenes, purchased at the gift shops of Reform synagogues. Tales of the Baal Shem Tov are told around campfires at Reform summer camps. The Gates of Prayer and The Gates of Repentance, prayer books published by the Reform movement, both begin with sections of meditations which include passages that relate the actions or the sayings of various Hasidic masters. In retaining much of our traditional flavor, Reform Judaism has given Hasidic stories and symbols a place of distinction in our communal experiences. But this Eastern European tradition often runs counter to ideological views generally subscribed to in Reform Judaism. The question thus presents itself: how can we retain the feeling of the Hasidic tradition without contradicting the Reform ethos?

Stories are often used to help broaden, deepen, and explain the response of humans to the perplexities of life and the world around them. Shared values are by-products of these tales. In the setting of a religious community, stories, especially those of our ancestors, help to amplify communal norms, practices, beliefs, and expectations. They allow a facilitator to discuss values relevant to the modern mind which are also validated by tradition and ancestry. But what happens when the values which are still held, are clothed in observances, rituals, or beliefs that no longer necessarily apply?

Disregarding the past outright would, in my view, be a mistake. Such behavior removes a religious community from its culture and history, severing the chain of identity. Can a society really know where it is going without knowing where it has been? On the other hand, using the past as a teaching tool without

clarifying the differences between past and current ideologies only creates confusion and a muddled sense of identity.

The development of Reform Judaism has seen traditions, rituals, and beliefs, developed over thousands of years, fall by the wayside, while others have been retained. The Eastern European flavor and mythology of our ancestry has been one aspect of the past still alive in Reform Judaism, if not in practice, in lore. Our Hasidic ancestors provided zest and color to Jewish religious experience at one of the bleakest times for Jews; and their culture, I believe, can similarly contribute to Reform Judaism today, which is still seeking to expand its horizons.

But, when we utilize Hasidic folklore in classrooms, in sermons, in our camps, we risk giving the impression that the beliefs and practices described in the stories constitute the ideal for Reform Judaism. The rebbes and Hasidic masters of the folklore are portrayed as "saints", they are the "tzaddikim", the "righteous", perfect in wisdom and motivation, who occupy the exalted status of intermediaries between the ordinary Jew and God. Their scrupulous observance of halacha and belief in rabbinic dogma are essential elements of their righteousness. But the notions of halacha and dogma, to which Reform Jews relate, are not the same. Certain concepts, common in these tales, represent beliefs uncommon in Reform Judaism, such as 1) Olam Ha'bah; 2) the Messiah; 3) supernatural providence; and 4) halachah as binding law.

In this thesis, I propose to examine a representative selection of Hasidic moral and cultural values still extant within the Reform community. I will also, utilizing a variety of Hasidic tales, look at various notions inherent in Hasidic belief and practice that present problems to the Reform mind. Certain stories will then be highlighted and put into an educational format that will allow the values they present, which are pertinent to Reform, to be taught while providing an

understanding that not all aspects of these stories speak to the generality of Reform Jews.

A Yiddish proverb says "A wise man hears one word and understands two."[1] In this thesis, I will attempt to find a way for educators and storytellers of the Reform Jewish community to tell one story and have two understood, one of a by-gone culture, and one of eternal values.

[1]Howe, Irving and Greenberg, Eliezer, eds., A Treasury of Yiddish Stories, The World Publishing Company, Cleveland, Oh., 1961, p. 611.

CHAPTER TWO

HASIDIC BELIEF AND ITS THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, many people - friends, family , and co-workers - have asked me to explain to them the subject of my work. The answer, that I am trying to reconcile Hasidic folklore with Reform ideologies, raises eyebrows. Some respond by questioning how it is possible to do so, believing that Hasidism and Reform Judaism are irreconcilable. And others respond by asking what the issue is in the first place, believing that Hasidic folklore taught in a Reform setting raises no contradictions at all.

In order to show that there are contradictions, but that they can be resolved, I will first investigate Hasidism as a historical phenomenon, as well as a philosophical and theological movement in Jewish thought, to see how and why its ideas developed.

THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Moving into the seventeenth century, the Jews of Poland and Lithuania had experienced a period of period of tranquillity and limited self-authority, which seemed rather lengthy relative to the scope of Jewish history. The Council of the Four Lands, while not always acting in the best interest of the ordinary Jew, was at least run by Jews with control over the day-to-day life of the Jewish community.[2]

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[2]Ben-Sasson, H. H., ed. A History of the Jewish People. Dvir Publishing House, Tel Aviv, 1969, p. 764.

A flourishing Protestant community in Poland-Lithuania worked to the advantage of the Jewish community. Their manner of thinking may have been that if tolerance was exhibited toward the Jews, and the Jewish condition was seen as acceptable, then wouldn't a Christian community deserve even better treatment? Even when Protestant attitudes toward Jews were not so kind, Jews of the region were able to find grace in the eyes of the powerful Polish nobility, who could profit economically and socially from good relations with the Jews. By the middle of the seventeenth century, it was not uncommon for Jews to have moved from the country to the city, and even onto the estates of the nobles. They received privileges and favors from the nobility, were given the means by which they could build synagogues, and were even required to own guns to protect their homes and synagogues.[3]

This period of relative acceptance, however, was short-lived. The disasters that followed would created an atmosphere in which Hasidism would develop. In 1648 and 1649, the Cossack Revolt against Polish nobility was accompanied by cruel massacres of Jews by Cossack leader Bogdan Khmelnitski. The Jewish community of the Ukraine was nearly destroyed. The Jewish community of Poland had its spirit broken. Following this devastation, the development of the Eastern European Jewish community ceased. Jewish leaders lost any small amount of authority and control they may have possessed.[4]

But the time was not yet ripe for Hasidism. First, into the void of despair left by the sudden loss of good-fortune, stepped Shabbetai Zevi and Jacob Frank, men who convinced many in the Jewish world that their troubles were

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[3]Ben-Sasson, p. 655.

[4]Ben-Sasson, p. 657.

over, because the Messiah had arrived in their respective persons. The subsequent Messianic movements that arose were very convincing and rapid in growth. The negative impact of these pretenders' eventual conversions, Zevi to Islam and Frank to Christianity, left a scar on the spirit of the Jewish population as painful as that left by the Chmielnicki massacres on their bodies.

The shock felt in the wake of this disappointment brought some Jews to wonder in which direction they should turn. But many more felt that the correct path was to return to their roots and deviate no more. The trauma endured by the many Jews in the wake of the fervent hope inspired by the false messianic movements of Shabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank, and the shock of their disappointment, resulted in a rigid form of Judaism. That which was new or digressed from a strict view of the Law was disregarded.[5] "During the latter half of the eighteenth century, as the Jews of Poland sensed the imminent collapse of their political and economic security, they turned instinctively to their ancestral religion for courage and consolation."[6]

The Jews of 18th Century Eastern Europe were untouched by the emancipation that liberated their brethren in other parts of the world. They still suffered, were still oppressed, and still were obligated to buy protection from officials who would only turn around and try to destroy them in the end. Large Jewish communities were further troubled by internal dissent, by a division between the wealthy and educated and the poor and ignorant. The average Jewish citizen was oppressed not only by the non-Jewish society, but also by the rabbis and scholars placed atop the Jewish community by wealthy secular Jews.[7]

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[5]Wiesel, Elie. Souls On Fire, Random House, Inc., New York, 1972, p. 22-23.

[6]Sachar, Howard M., Vintage Books, New York, 1990, p. 64.

[7]Wiesel, p. 22.

Life, which was already cruel, frightening, and harsh, became even more uncertain for the Jews with the partitions of Poland. And traditional Judaism as it had developed in theology and liturgy, compounded by the isolation felt by the world of East European Jewry, did not give these Jews the consolation they needed. Judaism as expressed by the study of the legalisms of the Talmud no longer spoke to them; it did not help to soothe the pain and anguish of their plight.[8]

The Jewish world of the time was torn between traditional rabbinic Judaism and the movement toward emancipation and rationalism. Hasidism would grow in the middle, considered to be too revolutionary by adherents of the former, and too orthodox by advocates of the latter.[9]

Social unrest between ordinary Jewish workers and the wealthier Jewish merchants also helped set the stage for the introduction of Hasidism. Moreover, the movement would also draw strength from the atmosphere of anti-intellectual Judaism begun by the Messianism that had given hope to Jews devastated emotionally by the Chmielnicki massacres. In addition, Isaac Luria's Practical Cabala provided significant ideological support.

> These, then were the factors that laid the groundwork for the rise of Hasidism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: the disintegration of the Polish world; the aridity of the Talmudic educational system, the growing separation of the learned from the unlearned; the pseudo-Messianism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and the semirespectable mysticism of the Practical Cabala. As yet, however, a *force majeure* was lacking to build a dynamic movement on the foundations of Polish-Jewish unrest. Such a *force majeure* finally appeared in the person of the Baal Shem Tob - the 'Master of the Good Name.'[10]

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[8]Sachar, p. 65-66.

[9]Wiesel, p. 21.

[10]Sachar, p. 66-67.

Israel ben Eliezer, who would become known as the Baal Shem Tov, now arrived upon the scene. For a time, while living in Podolia, where Practical Cabala had a strong footing, the Besht lived according to its principles and its asceticism. He would soon reject that way of life.[11] The Besht would recreate the Jewish experience as one that spoke to the common man and lifted the hearts of the distraught, giving them hope in a disheartening world. Elie Wiesel described the scenario as follows:

> Remember: all this confusion centers around a man who lived not in the Middle Ages, but in the eighteenth century. This contemporary of Voltaire and Kant, of Lessing and Diderot, built his empire not in a still far removed and backward Africa, but in the heart of Europe, where man in his quest for enlightenment had begun to reduce history to a human scale. People were striving to learn, to travel, to explore and experience. The word everywhere was becoming challenge, instrument of rebellion, heralding revolutionary changes. Men used it to smash idols and altars - and wanted to make certain that the rest of the world knew.[12]

While the term "Hasidism" was used in the Talmud and in the 12th Century, the Hasidism of the 18th Century and the Baal Shem Tov referred to a very different entity. Hasidic brotherhoods of this latter sort, consisting of scholars and Kabbalists, had begun to develop immediately prior to the time of Israel ben Eliezer's influence; but it was the life of Eliezer that began to crystallize the Hasidic movement as it has been known since.

The Hasidism which preceded that of the Baal Shem Tov was of an elitist character, based on knowledge of Talmud and Cabala, asceticism, and a disdain for prophecy. The Besht reinvented this Hasidism, opening it up for the masses,

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[11]Sachar, p. 67.

[12]Wiesel, p. 15.

for the common folks. "He was constantly on the roads, making sudden appearances here and there, in forests and in marketplaces; accosting strangers, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, making followers of them all. . . The Jewish world was in an uproar; it followed his astounding ascent with fear or hope, or both."[13] As political and social developments in Poland grew more dire, this new movement with its focus on joy and on the celebration of life and of man helped Jews find emotional escape from the turmoil that surrounded them.[14]

While the Baal Shem Tov was certainly the personality who created Hasidism as we know it, his death in 1760 did not bring Hasidism to an end. Rather, the next generation of Hasidim - expanded the movement's philosophy and increased it's following. What mattered most in Beshtian Hasidism was people, not theories. Still, ideological theories are required in a religious movement. Accordingly, disciples of the Besht, such as the Maggid of Mezeritch, Shneur-Zalman, and Nachman of Bratzlav, would complete the work by formulating the theories of Hasidism at a later time.[15]

HASIDIC BELIEF

> What was Hasidism at its inception? A man. The Baal Shem. His was a powerful appeal to consolation, to unity. His Hasidism was neither philosophical doctrine nor system of social

[13]Wiesel, p. 16-21.

[14]Sachar, p. 68.

[15]Wiesel, p. 32.

> ethics and certainly not a new theosophy sprinkled with folklore and rebellion. Yet it was a combination of all of these; a desire to arrive at a synthesis. An acceptance of the fact that one may be a Jew in many different ways. For all paths lead somewhere, provided that God is present at the start.[16]

Yet it must be emphasized that to the Hasidic way of thinking, a common factor in all paths to God was man. Exclusive love of God, without love of mankind, results in an abstract belief system. It is through the love of man that one was to love God. God's actions towards men were seen as reflections of mankind's own actions towards men. While Hasidism should not be confused with pantheism, it's essential notion that God was approachable through man's relationship with others and with the world around him was attractive in a culture in which it was difficult to feel God's presence amidst the constant suffering.

"Every act in the life of a true Hasid mirrored his unshakable belief, as Martin Buber puts it, that in spite of intolerable suffering man must endure, the heart-beat of life is holy joy, and that always and everywhere, one can force a way through to that joy - provided one devotes oneself entirely to his deed.'"[17] The emphasis on reveling in the joy of God's creation and on equal accessibility to the Divine for all who sought him in sincerity helped attract the masses to Hasidism.[18] This value, the true worth of all Jews, provided room for joy and hope in the midst of a pain-filled world.

Perhaps it was easier for the poor to approach the Baal Shem Tov because of his own humble origins. Unlike the spiritual leaders who had preceded him, the Besht was not from a family of scholars or nobles. He was

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[16]Wiesel, p. 31.

[17]Sachar, p. 69.

[18]Ben Sasson, p. 769.

one of the common folk. He was representative of all the downtrodden in the Jewish community. His message and the main thrust of his religious creativity was aimed at telling the people what they most needed to hear, that each of them had a relationship with God, and that each of them had a role in the life of the Jewish people. "He assured them that a simple but sincere prayer has as much merit as a mystical incantation, that the fervor born in a pure heart is greater than the one born of a complex and unfathomable thought."[19]

The teachings of the Baal Shem put emphasis on prayer, rather than study, as the way of reaching God. Moreover, the prayers of the poor and the uneducated, if expressed with sincerity and joy, had equal accessibility to the Divine as any other.[20] This philosophy is the basis of one of the most well-known Hasidic tales, that of the young boy who does not know a prayer or a single letter of the alphabet, but carries the congregation's prayers to God with the song of his shepherd's flute. We will return to this story in chapter five.

According to Wiesel, the basic elements of Hasidism, as seen in the folklore, include "the fervent waiting, the longing for redemption; the erratic wanderings over untraveled roads; the link between man and his Creator, between the individual act and its repercussions in the celestial spheres; the importance of ordinary words; the accent on fervor and on friendship too; the concept of miracles performed by man for man."[21]

Certainly Hasidic thought was filled with superstition. This included, among others, belief in miracles performed by God through the hands of

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[19]Wiesel, p. 25.

[20]Sachar, p. 68.

[21]Wiesel, p. 5.

righteous men, in the coming of a physical Messiah, in angels and angeology, and also in secret divine power hidden in the letters of God's name.[22]

Concerning the mystical power of letters, Meir Margoliouth of Ostrog said, "Now once a man is worthy of understanding the holy letters and once he knows how to attach himself to them he becomes capable of knowing, from these very letters, what will be in the future. This is why the Torah is referred to as 'enlightening the eyes' (Psalms 19:19)."[23] This element plays an integral part in the Hasidic retelling of the Golem legend, in which recitation of combinations of the letters that form *Sefer Yezirah* provide the catalyst for the creation of the Golem.[24]

Regarding miracles, Wiesel was troubled by the abundance of supernatural abilities attributed to the Baal Shem Tov, but hypothesized that perhaps the notion of miracles was needed by the followers of Hasidism in order to give them something to cling to, to maintain the hope inspired by the Besht, even after he had died.[25]

Equally troubling is the concept of the Messiah. Hasidism was, in part, a reaction to the over zealousness of the messianic movements inspired by Shabbetai Zevi and Jacob Frank. Why, then, does the Messiah appear as a central theme in so much of the existing Hasidic folklore? Gershom Scholem suggests that while Hasidism attempted to preserve the popular elements of Kabbalism, without their messianic emphasis, a belief in the coming of the

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[22]Sachar, p. 69.

[23]Jacobs, Louis. Hasidic Thought, Behrman House, Inc., New York, 1976, p. 31.

[24]Idel, Moshe. Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1990, p. 248.

[25]Wiesel, p. 35.

Messiah had to be maintained in some form. "I am far from suggesting that the Messianic hope and the belief in redemption disappeared from the hearts of the Hasidim. That would be utterly untrue . . . there is no single positive element of Jewish religion which is altogether lacking in Hasidism."[26] The coming of the Messiah was present in the Hasidic belief system; but it was not the central theme, as it had been in earlier mystical movements.

However, as did the belief in social equality, belief in redemption through the Messiah and the world to come, imbued the movement with hope. Louis Jacobs asserts that, "All the Hasidim follow the Kabbalah in believing in the transmigration of souls."[27] By detailing the Baal Shem Tov's wanderings in Heaven and meeting with the Messiah, the following classic Hasidic tale also sheds some light on other concepts of importance to the Hasidic community:

> One Yom Kippur Eve the Besht perceived a serious charge brought against the Jews that the oral tradition would no longer be theirs. He greatly grieved the whole Yom Kippur Eve. Toward evening when everyone in the town came to him to receive his blessing, he blessed only one or two and said: "I can do no more." He did not bless them because of his sorrow. He went to the synagogue and preached harsh words to them, and he fell upon the ark and cried: "Woe! They want to take the Torah from us. How will we be able to survive among the nations even half a day?"
>
> He was very angry with the rabbis and said that it was because of them, since they invented lies of their own and wrote false introductions. He said that all the Tannaim and Amoraim were brought before the heavenly court. Afterwards he went to the beth-hamidrash and said other harsh words, and then they prayed the Kol Nidre. After Kol Nidre he said that the charge had become more severe. Since he, himself, always led Neilah, he urged all the leaders of prayer to hurry throughout the day so that he would be able to pray the Neilah prayer while it was still broad daylight. Before Neilah he began to preach in harsh words and he cried. He put his head backward on the ark, and he sighed and he wept.

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[26]Scholem, Gershom. Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, Schocken Books, New York, 1974, p. 329-30.

[27]Jacobs, p. 180.

Afterwards he began to pray the silent eighteen benedictions, and then the voiced eighteen benedictions. It was always his custom during the Days of Awe not to look at the holiday prayer book since the rabbi, Rabbi Yakil of Medzhibozh, used to prompt him from the holiday prayer book, and he would repeat after him. When he reached the words 'Open the gate for us' or 'Open the gates of Heaven,' Rabbi Yakil spoke once and then twice, but he did not hear the Besht repeating after him and he fell silent. The Besht began to make terrible gestures, and he bent backwards until his head came close to his knees, and everyone feared that he would fall down. They wanted to support him, but they were afraid to. They told it to Rabbi Ze'ev Kotses, God bless his memory, who came and looked at the Besht's face and motioned that they were not to touch him. His eyes bulged and he sounded like a slaughtered bull. He kept this up for about two hours. Suddenly he stirred and straightened up. He prayed in a great hurry and finished the prayer. At the conclusion of Yom Kippur all the people came to greet him, since this was always the custom. They asked him what was the outcome of the charge. He told them that during the Neilah prayers he found he could pray, and he moved from one world to another without any hindrance during the silent eighteen benedictions.

"In the spoken eighteen benedictions I also continued to move until I came to one palace. I had but one more gate to pass through to appear before God, blessed by He. In that palace I found all the prayers of the past fifty years that had not ascended, and now, because on this Yom Kippur we prayed with kavvanah, all the prayers ascended. Each prayer shone as the bright dawn. I said to those prayers: 'Why did you not ascend before?'"

"And they said: 'We were instructed to wait for you, sir, to lead us.'"

"I told them: 'Come along with me.' And the gate was open."

He told the people of his town that the gate was as large as the whole world.

"When we started to accompany the prayers, one angel came and closed the door, and he put a lock on the gate."

He told them that the lock was as big as all of Medzhibozh. "And I began to turn the lock to open it, but I could not do it. So I ran to my rabbi - who is mentioned in the book *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, - and I said: 'The people of Israel are in great trouble and now they will not let me in. At another time I would not have forced my way in.'"

"My rabbi said: 'I shall go with you and if there is a possibility to open the gate for you I shall open it.' And when he

came he turned the lock, but he could not open it either. Then he said to me: 'What can I do for you?'

"I began to complain to my rabbi. 'Why have you forsaken me at such a troubled time?'

"And he answered: 'I do not know what to do for you, but you and I will go to the palace of the Messiah. Perhaps there will be some help there.'

"With a great outcry I went to the palace of the Messiah. When our righteous Messiah saw me from afar he said to me, 'Don't shout.' He gave me two holy letters of the alphabet.

"I went to the gate. Thank God, I turned the lock and opened the gate, and I led in all the prayers. Because of the great joy when all the prayers ascended, the accuser became silent, and I did not need to argue. The decree was canceled and nothing remained of it but an impression of the decree."[28]

This story gives a classic representation of how the Baal Shem Tov was viewed after his death. It also utilizes many concepts which frequently appear in Hasidic folklore, and which are characteristic of Hasidic thinking. The action of the story necessitates a willingness to accept the Baal Shem Tov's ability to perform miracles and transport his soul to heaven, to accept the existence of heaven as another realm inhabited by God, the Messiah, and the righteous deceased such as the Besht's teacher, to accept the existence of the Messiah, himself, and to accept the magic contained in holy letters of the alphabet.

Additionally, the story involves a view of prayers as efficacious, flying to God to be answered. And the initial motivation of the story is also of interest - the threat of separation from the oral tradition. While Hasidism stressed prayer over study of the Talmud, this tale clearly shows that the oral tradition still held a valued place in the Hasidic community.

"In addition to depicting the activities of the Besht and his followers, the tales portray the life and concerns of the Hasidic Jew in eastern Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. It is a world structured by the mitzvoth in which the faithful are rewarded and

[28]Ben-Amos, Dan and Mintz, Jerome R. In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, In., 1970, p. 54-57.

> lawbreakers are punished by death or by reincarnation in a lower form of life. . . . The touchstones of the pious are devout prayer, the giving of charity, and in this later phase of Hasidism, studying the Talmud. When a werewolf terrorized the children (in a story), their concern was very pointed: 'Some of them became sick, and, heaven help us, could not continue their studies.'"[29]

Certainly this discussion covers but a fraction of the beliefs and hopes held by the Hasidic community of the eighteenth century. An exhaustive survey of all Hasidic belief is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I will concentrate on these items - the afterlife, providence and miracles, the messiah, and halachah - in search of a way to speak fairly of them, while utilizing Hasidic lore in a Reform setting.

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[29]Ben-Amos and Mintz, p. xxvii.

CHAPTER THREE

REFORM ASSUMPTIONS AS CRYSTALLIZED OVER 200 YEARS

We have seen, through its folklore, that fundamental Hasidic belief entailed a belief in the concepts of Olam Ha'bah, the coming of the Messiah, providence and miracle, the efficacy of prayer as communication between man and God, and adherence to Halakhah as a necessity for the righteous Jew. We may also see that these ideas do not necessarily evoke similar feeling in Reform thought, as it has been developed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the other hand, concepts such as social justice and the fellowship of all men find support in both Hasidic and Reform doctrine.

In the process of seeking out the Reform view on these topics, I will rely heavily on the three platforms of American Reform Judaism. These platforms are not always in full agreement, and represent different stages of development in the Reform movement. The history of Reform has often been compare with a pendulum - at first swinging away from the structures and beliefs of traditional Judaism, and then swinging back towards the middle. The early platforms represented not a fulfillment and completion of Reform thought, but the outermost swing of the pendulum.[30] A religion encompassing many different generations therefore also encompasses many different beliefs. While it is impossible to say what "Reform Belief" may be, due to the liberal attitude of Reform Judaism toward individual belief and theology, these platforms, as well as writings by scholars of Reform, allow one to see what the framework of the movement was intended to entail.

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[30]Plaut, W. Gunther. The Growth of Reform Judaism. The World Union For Progressive Judaism, Ltd., New York, 1965, p. ix.

In his discussion of how the Centenary Perspective was written, Eugene Borowitz notes that the first half of the document deals with "principles" which are not authoritative, but cover the basic beliefs of the Reform Jewish community. The words "principles" and "beliefs" were not affixed to the document, as they might imply fixed authoritative dogma. Nevertheless, there is cause to discuss certain values and ideas as belonging to the belief system of Reform Judaism.[31]

> "It should also be pointed out that these hundred years of nationally organized Reform Judaism have yielded a certain measure of agreement in the area of beliefs. Or, to put it more precisely, we have arrived at a good working consensus as to what we hold in common and what we can reasonably (though not always comfortably!) leave to personal decision . . . The overwhelming majority of Reform Rabbis - and, I suggest, Conservative Rabbis and American Jews generally - shares a common sense of modern Jewish belief. This commonality is quite limited in its content, to be sure, and it most certainly allows for variety and development in Jewish faith in ways that go far beyond what our tradition knew or more certainly, ever put in explicit form."[32]

In the twentieth century, Reform Judaism finds itself, in a way, in the same position of Hasidism at its inception - caught in the middle between traditional Judaism on one end of the spectrum, and secular Judaism on the other end. Individual Jews find themselves pulled in different directions and comfortably occupying different positions along that spectrum.[33]

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[31]Borowitz, Eugene. Reform Judaism Today: What We Believe. Behrman House, Inc., New York, 1977, pp. 3-4.

[32]Borowitz, pp. 5-6.

[33]Meyer, Michael A., Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Mi., 1995, p. 385.

The nature of present-day Reform enables the inclusiveness of these different positions, while hopefully maintaining threads of common principles running through them all. In the constant search for identity at a time when many people, even within the Reform movement, believe that Reform stands for nothing and has no beliefs, it has become important for Reform Jews to understand what these common threads are.

> "What does Reform Judaism say? It is a question that is asked concerning countless topics, ranging from ancient rituals to contemporary issues. It is posed by Jews of all persuasions as well as by many non-Jews. The interest reflects the way in which the Reform Movement has acquired a reputation for being deeply committed to the traditions of Judaism yet willing to make certain changes in the light of modern understanding and new conditions. The result is to keep Judaism as dynamic in the twentieth century as it was in previous generations, with a clear message of faith and values for today."[34]

For the sake of discussion, in this work, the terms "Reform Belief", "Reform Principles", "Reform Ideology", and "Fundamentals of Reform", will be used to describe the ideas, sometimes unfortunately vague, that find agreement in the thought process of a large number of Reform Jewish individuals and leaders. While departing from the literal meaning of such phrases, they will be used with the understanding that in this work, they do not imply complete consensus or authoritative mandate on belief.

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[34]Romain, Jonathan A. Faith and Practice: A Guide to Reform Judaism Today. The Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, London, 1991, p. viii.

The Afterlife in Reform Doctrine

Judaism has never entailed any one definite understanding of life after death. Interpretive readings of the Torah initially gave rise to two modes of thought. Proverbs 12:28, "*In the way of righteousness is life; and in its path there is no death.*", led to the idea that the soul lives on after the demise of the body. Daniel 12:2, "*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*", resulted in the notion that both body and soul are resurrected upon the arrival of the Messiah. Rabbinic Judaism, in particular, took hold of this concept. Eventually, the predominant thought became a combination of the two, that the soul survives death, and is eventually reunited with the body upon resurrection.[35]

The position that developed in Reform Judaism was akin to that derived from the passage in Proverbs - immortality of the soul, without bodily resurrection. This stance is taken with the acceptance that the exact nature of the soul beyond physical life is beyond the grasp of human reason. Because the condition of the soul beyond this life is unknowable, Reform places the emphasis of religious duty on existence in this world, not the next. Righteous deeds should be performed for the sake of righteousness, rather than for the sake of reward or fear of punishment in the next realm.[36]

Here, Reform Judaism departs from the thought process of many other religions and religious movements, including Hasidism. As described in the previous chapter, the political and societal hardships endured by the Jews of Eastern Europe made a necessity out of the belief that reward for piety in this world was awaiting the Hasid in the next world. In the tale of the Baal Shem Tov

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[35]Romain, p. 36.

[36]Romain, pp. 36-37.

and Rabbi Gedalia, which will be programmatically developed in chapter six, the Besht finds that his neighbor in Olam Haba'ah will be a common pitch-maker, whose life seems to be dedicated to eating rather than to religious duty. For most of the story, he is puzzled with regard to what Rabbi Gedalia has done in this life that will earn him a place in Paradise.[37]

Early reformers did not do away with this point of view completely, making the claim that our deeds in this life would find merit in the next life, which would occur not in a heavenly palace, but here on earth. As stated by Emil G. Hirsch in 1895, "Other religions speak of a paradise lost to be regained somewhere beyond the clouds. Judaism points to a future to be won here, and not by one, by all humanity. . . The '*Olam Habba* of our religion is not a state *in heaven*. It is God's Kingdom *on earth*."[38] But even in Hirsch's assessment that a future life awaits us, his claim that this future will be earned by all of humanity points to the theme developed by twentieth century Reform Judaism that social responsibility, not future reward, is the focal point of religious endeavor.

The development of Reform thought on the topic of the afterlife from the time of Hirsch to the present day, can be traced by way of the three major platforms designed over the past 115 years. The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 firmly stated that man's soul is immortal, and that its condition of happiness or misery is dependent upon righteousness and wickedness, respectively. It is here that the leading thinkers of Reform Judaism made a strong departure with tradition, denying the concepts of physical resurrection, Gehenna (Hell), and

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[37]Wiesel, p. 27-28.

[38]Blau, Joseph L. Reform Judaism: a historical perspective. Ktav Publishing House, Inc., New York, 1973, p. 35.

Eden (Paradise).[39] This is quite obviously also a departure from the belief system of Hasidism as seen in its literature.

The passage of time brought with it the increasing belief in Reform Judaism that what lay beyond this life is incomprehensible to the human mind. As a result, we see that the later platforms have less to say about the topic, reaffirming only that the soul lives on after death, and leaving the rest tot he individual imagination. The Columbus Platform of 1937 offers only the following simple statement, "Judaism affirms that man is created in the Divine image. His *spirit* is immortal."[40]

The San Francisco Platform of 1976, the most recent attempt to make an official statement on behalf of Reform Judaism similarly accepts the idea of immortality, and through ambiguity, evades being pinned down to anything more definite, stating only that, "Amid the mystery we call life, we affirm that human beings, created in God's image, share in God's eternality despite the mystery we call death."[41] Attempting to add meaning to this sparse statement, Eugene Borowitz explains that since we have no way of experiencing what is on the other side of life, while we are still living, death is a complete mystery. But if we believe that life comes from God, then we must surely believe that death also come from God. And as God showers us in goodness while we live, we must also trust that God is good to us in death; thus, we believe in some sort of existence beyond the grave, despite the fact that it cannot be characterized with any certainty.[42] In defense of his committee's decision to make a statement that

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[39]Meyer, p. 388.

[40]Meyer, p. 389.

[41]Meyer, p. 392.

[42]Borowitz, p. 48.

seems to lack content on behalf of Reform Judaism, Borowitz explains, "This is a most modest affirmation - one sentence with its several evocative but limited terms. For all that, it is an important belief for those of us who share it to acknowledge and articulate. Perhaps that is the way of modern Jewish faith. We find ourselves unable to say very much. But we are able to say something. So what we do say is very important."[43]

True to the nature of Reform, no particular belief in the afterlife is mandated for all to believe. But while the individual may or may not choose to accept the notion of life after death, in any of its multitude of forms, Reform Judaism, as a movement positively supports only the vague idea of immortality of the soul.

Providence (Hashgachah)

Isaac Mayer Wise, the driving force behind American Reform Judaism vehemently denied the possibility of miracles that violate the laws of nature.[44] Kaufmann Kohler, another motivating force in the development of Reform Judaism in America made a strong case for this belief, stating that "miracles occur only among people who are ignorant of natural law and thus predisposed to accept marvels. They are the products of human imagination and credulity.

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[43]Borowitz, p. 49.

[44]Meyer, p. 240

They have only a subjective, not an objective value. They are psychological, not physical facts."[45]

In Kohler's opinion, the entirety of creation and the universe comprise one large miracle, the only miracle. Everything that exists within that miracle adheres to its structure, that of natural law. Regarding the miracles detailed in the Torah, unless one wishes to cling to a completely literal interpretation, such instances are seen as poetic expressions of divine goodness. Miracles from God occur within the human, as we recognize God's power within ourselves. Occurrences that have been viewed as miracles are not to be taken as proof of any religious claims. After all, if many different religions claim miracles as proof of their truth and validity, then the supposed providence received by any one religion is canceled out by the providence received by another.[46]

But Kohler's notions on this subject belonged not only to him. The authors of the Pittsburgh Platform approached the issue with similar thoughts in the following statement, "We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age, and at times clothing its conception of Divine Providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narratives."[47]

The Columbus Platform has considerably less to say concerning the topic of miracles, expressing belief that mankind has the power to conquer the evils of the world, and saying nothing at all about God's possible intervention. "As a child of God, (man) is endowed with moral freedom and is charged with the

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[45]Plaut, pp. 220-21.

[46]Plaut, p. 221.

[47]Meyer, p. 387.

responsibility of overcoming evil and striving after ideal ends."[48] The San Francisco Platform never even brings the subject up for discussion.

When developments during the course of the century have caused the Reform Movement to change direction completely on an issue, such as the importance of the State of Israel to the American Jewish community, the later platforms have displayed the need to express the newer system of thought, so as not to be confused with the previous opinions stated in the earlier platform.[49] The absence of firm opinion concerning miracles in the Columbus Platform, and of any opinion at all in the San Francisco Platform, imply that the thought process has not changed much since the original statement in Pittsburgh. God provides miracles in the regular workings of nature, not outside of nature. Certainly the miracles done by God through the hands of the tzaddik, in Hasidic folklore, fall far outside the Reform interpretation.

The Coming of the Messiah

The concept of the Messiah has undergone dramatic changes, not only in Reform Judaism, but throughout the entire history of Judaism and Christianity. As it appears in the Torah, the word "mashiach" simply means "anointed one". As such, it was used in reference to the anointing of kings such as David and even non-Jewish kings like Cyrus. Biblical mention of "mashiach" does not carry with it an inference of a future redeemer or savior. According to Leopold Stein, an early reformer in Frankfort, "we may pronounce with full biblical conviction that the personal Messiah has no foundation in our Holy Scriptures, and

[48]Meyer, p. 389.

[49]Meyer, p. 388-93.

whatever mention is made of David's descendant is . . . allegory, figurative speech . . . "[50]

The notion of meshiach, or messiah, as a future redeemer who will eradicate all of the world's problems, appeared later. It became crystallized during Talmudic times, as an answer to desires for national restoration that were unable to come to fruition.[51] From this definition arose the Christian doctrine of Jesus as the Messiah already arrived. In the Jewish view of the time, the Messiah was to come and ease the ills of the world; and since the world was still filled with chaos and turmoil, Judaism would continue to look toward a redeemer yet-to-come, rather than a redeemer of the past. And although Judaism looked ahead to a human Messiah, it did not see that human becoming divine or an object of worship. Nor did Judaism accept that the Torah would be abrogated by the coming of this Messiah.[52]

Reform Judaism continued the process of change in the idea of the Messiah. Rejected by early reformer was the traditional role of the Messiah bringing the exiles back to the land of Israel, rebuilding the Temple, and restoring the sacrificial cult. From there, a major leap was taken transforming a desire for the coming of the Messiah into a desire for the coming of the Messianic Age, thus taking the emphasis off of a single personality and placing it on the quality of life for all mankind.[53]

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[50]Plaut, W. Gunther. The Rise of Reform Judaism. The World Union For Progressive Judaism, Ltd., New York, 1963, p. 144.

[51]Plaut, The Rise of Reform Judaism. p. 145.

[52]Romain, p. 31.

[53]Romain, p. 32.

The remaining question, central to Reform thought regarding the Messiah, is how and when this era of peace, justice, harmony, righteousness, and universal tranquillity will occur. One traditional Jewish thought is that when the world has sunk to its lowest depths of evil, chaos, and depravity, then the Messiah will come to put a halt to the world's destruction. The opposing traditional thought, that the Messiah will arrive when the world is on the brink of perfection to complete the process, is what has been adopted and adapted by the Reform movement. As a result, Reform Judaism has increasingly put an emphasis on *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world, and on man's role in this process. "In Reform thinking, therefore, the Messianic Age is not dependent purely on God's intervention but is an aim towards whose attainment humanity can play an active role."[54]

The Pittsburgh Platform expresses the shift from hope for the Messiah to hope for the Messianic Age. In doing so, it also rejects the traditional hope for restoration of the Temple and of the sacrificial cult:

> We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.[55]

The Columbus Platform simply states the hope for the Messianic Age, briefly detailing mankind's role in achieving this state through cooperation. "We regard it as our historic task to cooperate with all men in the establishment of the

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[54]Romain, p. 32.

[55]Meyer, p. 388.

kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth and peace on earth. This is our Messianic goal."[56] And the authors of the San Francisco Platform produced a similar statement, solidifying the emphasis on Tikkun Olam. "We affirm that with God's help people are not powerless to affect their destiny. We dedicate ourselves, as did the generations of Jews who went before us, to work and wait for that day when 'They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.'"[57]

While Hasidism shares in the Reform view that man's actions affect the coming of the Messianic Age, a great difference still remains between the philosophies of the two movements. As seen in the story of the Baal Shem Tov's meeting with the Messiah retold in chapter two, the Messiah, as a person, plays a large role in the Hasidic school of thought. In numerous stories, the Messiah appears as more than a future redeemer, but also as a personality living in Paradise in the present-day, who visits the earth-bound on occasion to see if mankind is ready for redemption. Often in these stories, the short-sighted actions of men send the Messiah away, and delay the coming of Paradise.

In this manner, it is central to the Reform system of belief that man see his actions and the coming of the Messianic Age in a cause and effect relationship. Through righteousness and good works, man will hasten the day when "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares" (Micah 4:3) and "the wolf will lie down with the lamb" (Isaiah 11:6). But the Reform movement cannot share in the Hasidic, Talmudic, or Christian belief in the Messiah as a person come to save the world.

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[56]Meyer, p. 389.

[57]Meyer, p. 394.

Halachah as Binding Law

Without a doubt, Reform's greatest departure from traditional Judaism, the departure which enables all other departures, involves the attitude toward Halachah, Jewish law as developed from the Torah through the Talmud.

Through the science of biblical criticism and a sense of Jewish tradition as a historical development in the life of the religion, Reform Judaism has come to see Jewish law, not as the direct will of God, but as a function of human creativity inspired by changing understandings of God throughout history. In the sense of "halachah" as Jewish Law seen through Orthodox interpretation, "Reform is non-*halachic* for it does not accept the theory, methodology or practice of Orthodox interpretations of Judaism: the *Torah* is not regarded as the literal word of God; subsequent Rabbinic rulings are not accepted as binding; and many centuries-old practices have been abolished."[58]

While many traditional practices are maintained by Reform Judaism and by individual Reform Jews, the reasons for observance have changed. "Because the Talmud says so. . . " is not an acceptable explanation for why Reform Judaism endorses traditional practices. Rather, changing realities have produced changing reasons; and often, the main rationale given for an observance is that it continues the chain of tradition. Franz Rosenzweig noted

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[58]Romain, p. 9.

that regardless of when and why the Law originated, it is important because "it alone guarantees the unity of the people in space and through time".[59]

The need to maintain a place for Halachah, in some form, within the context of Reform Judaism has always been understood by leaders of the movement. A great many influential thinkers, including Solomon Freehof, Joseph Krauskopf, Jacob Lauterbach, Max Lilienthal, Franz Rosenzweig, and Jacob Voorsanger, expressed differing views on how Jewish Law should be incorporated into the life of the liberal Jew. While views ranged from the desire for a set code; to the need for a Reform synod that might keep the movement from expanding in too many directions; to the understanding that Judaism has always been a changing religion, that much of what is seen as Halachah actually began as custom, and that Judaism can continue in this way; to the possibility of a Reform Halachah, to Rosenzweig's belief that the essence of mitzvot resides in the decision-making abilities of the individual Jew.[60]

The three Reform Platforms have given a consistent idea, from one to the other, of how Reform Judaism views Halachah. From the beginning, the Pittsburgh Platform made it clear that much of Jewish Law was relative to a different place and time, and only the moral regulations were still in effect. The platform made a very strong statement that the rituals of ancient Judaism are foreign to our modern sensibilities, and are therefore not a necessity in present-day life:

> We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and to-day we accept as binding only the moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject

[59]Plaut, The Growth of Reform Judaism, p. 209.

[60]Plaut, pp. 236-45.

> all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization. . . We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.[61]

The Columbus Platform reaffirms the earlier assessment that Halachah has a historical rather than a universal basis, and is therefore not binding. It is up to every generation to interpret Jewish Law as necessary for its time and place. "The Torah, both written and oral, enshrines Israel's ever-growing consciousness of God and of the moral law. . . Being products of historical processes, certain of its laws have lost their binding force with the passing of the conditions that called them forth. . . Each age has the obligation to adapt the teachings of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism."[62]

While the San Francisco Platform once more acknowledges that tradition is to be interpreted anew with each passing generation, it also emphasizes the obligation on every Jew to make an educated interpretation, to become knowledgeable regarding tradition and law, and then make individual and communal decisions. "Within each area of Jewish observance Reform Jews are called upon to confront the claims of Jewish tradition, however differently perceived, and to exercise their individual autonomy, choosing and creating on the basis of commitment and knowledge."[63]

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[61]Meyer, pp. 387-88.

[62]Meyer, p. 389.

[63]Meyer, p. 393.

Present in the latter statement is the idea that Halachah should not control Reform life; but it should influence it. When making informed religious decisions, Reform Judaism should begin with the Halachah as a starting point; but should not feel bound to it. In the end, the process should hopefully result in decisions and ways of life that may or may not reflect the letter of Jewish Law, but will always resonate with the spirit of Judaism.[64]

[64]Romain, pp. 9-10.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROLE OF HASIDIC FOLKLORE WITHIN THE REFORM COMMUNITY

Two points must be made about the usage of folklore in a Reform setting. First, one should understand that stories from the Hasidic tradition have a place in the Reform community. Countless Reform Jewish children attend Reform summer camps. At many of these camps, Hasidic tales are routinely shared around campfires and in educational programs. Statues and pictures of Hasidic masters and Hasidic scenes can be found in many Reform Jewish homes, as well as in Reform synagogues and gift shops. Gates of Prayer, the Reform prayer book, opens with a section of meditations that includes a variety of Hasidic sayings.

One such passage comes from the opening of the story that will be examined in the next chapter, that of the shepherd boy and his flute.

> Once the Baal Shem stopped on the threshold of a House of Prayer and refused to go in. I cannot enter, he said. It is crowded with teachings and prayers from wall to wall and from floor to ceiling. How could there be room for me? When he saw that those around him were staring, unable to understand, he added: The words of those whose teaching and praying does not come from hearts lifted to heaven, cannot rise to heaven; instead, their words fill the house from wall to wall and from floor to ceiling.[65]

When a child sees a Jew portrayed in the media, especially on television, they are most likely to see a caricature of the Hasidic Jew. It is important that their view of Hasidism not be that of a foreign culture and a foreign people with no relevance to themselves. While we have seen that there are striking

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[65]Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook. Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York, 1980, p. 3.

differences between the Hasidic and the Reform ways of thinking, there are also vital connections. The free-thinking attitude and open-mindedness of Reform owes its origin, not only to the works of the Jews of Western European Enlightenment, but also to the revolutionary freedom of thought established by Hasidic creativity.

Hasidism, then, does have a place in the Reform classroom, as a link to our past which is essential to understanding who we are as Reform Jews. Therefore, since an understanding of Hasidic Judaism is found most readily in the folklore of Hasidism, these stories are an invaluable resource in our educational settings.

In addition to Hasidic folklore having a place in Reform Judaism due to the importance of Hasidism to the development and philosophy of Reform, we see that folklore, in general, is essential to the sense of identity of any community. In stories, we find answers to some of the most basic questions - who are we and where do we come from? Questions, the answers to which resonate for individuals and for entire communities. Through folklore we are able to see universal truths and life-lessons from an outsider's objective view, much more clearly than we are able to see them in our own experiences. The lesson of the story can then be extended to speak to the listener's own life. "It is a story that enables us to see things on many levels. It is the original scientific thinking. Cause and effect. Many prisms through which you view a single event. The story within the story within the story."[66]

Part of the importance of storytelling in the history of the Jewish people derives from the perpetual status of being considered foreigners in strange lands. Centuries of "wandering Jews" were able to find some sense of identity in

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[66]Cunningham, Marge. "The Moral of the Story". Storytelling 5, no. 2 (Spring, 1993), p. 10.

their stories. Filled with humor, recognition of the struggle and suffering endured by Jews, and witty pokes at those who tried to keep Jews down, the lore of the Jewish people also gave a sense of comfort.[67] Even in the United States, where many Jews feel accepted like never before and many do not worry about the future of Jewish people, a sense of being different still exists. Except in a few communities, Reform Jews in America are for the most part surrounded by non-Jews. Regardless of whether or not this makes one feel insecure, the needs for a sense of identity and for comfort, which are addressed by our folklore, are present.

Raphael Patai notes that tradition plays only a small part in creating the identity of any particular Jewish community. Through the travels of the Jews, throughout the world, and throughout the ages, what defined any one Jewish community became more and more a reflection of the surrounding gentile communities. In the long-run, communities were set apart from each other by way of the different environments in which they developed. Tradition was important in that it was the common denominator.[68] And through the ages, this common denominator has been transmitted through the telling of stories. After all, this is the manner in which we have received the Tree of Life, our Torah, that which sustains the Jewish people. This classic Hasidic saying demonstrates the dynamic of storytelling in the Jewish tradition:

> When the Baal Shem had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer - and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later the 'Maggid' of Meseritz was faced with the same task he would go to the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers - and what

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[67]Ausubel, Nathan. A Treasury of Jewish Folklore. Crown Publishers, New York, 1948, p. xvii.

[68]Patai, Raphael. On Jewish Folklore. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1983, p. 23.

> he wanted done became a reality. Again a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said: We can no longer light a fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayer, but we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs - and that must be sufficient; and sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rishin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said: We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done. And, the story-teller adds, the story which he told had the same effect as the actions of the other three.[69]

Maintaining a religion over thousands of years is not as simple as the Talmud makes it seem. It is unrealistic to think that an entire system of practices and laws could be passed orally from Moses through the generations, to us today, with no flaws in transmission. However, wherever and whenever the Jewish tradition began, changes and development are to be expected. The Hasidic saying mentioned above points out that even over a period of three or four generations, it is inevitable that the details of a practice will get lost, but the spirit and the intention of the tradition remains in stories. Thereby, as it is said that the Torah is what keeps the Jewish people, this thought may be expanded to all of our lore. It is our stories that keep us - that keep us in line with the chain of our ancestors. Not to include Hasidic folklore in the life of our community is to risk losing sight of an important link in that chain.

Our second task is to see how stories are open to the interpretation of the listener, so that even a tale which hails from a tradition different from our own, and containing details that contradict our own beliefs, can speak to our individual and communal system of values.

Elie Wiesel makes the statement that " . . . the tales (the Baal Shem Tov) told and those told about him appeal to the imagination rather than to reason.

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[69]Scholem, p. 349-50.

They try to prove that man is more than he appears to be and that he is capable of giving more than he appears to possess. To dissect them, therefore, is to diminish them. To judge them is to detach oneself and taint their candor - in so doing, one loses more than one could gain."[70]

But this cannot be the case. If one is unable to read a Hasidic tale with a critical eye, then one is obligated to accept all that the story proposes to be true. We have seen that Reform Judaism does not accept all that Hasidism proposes, and also that Reform Judaism has a place within its structure for the telling of Hasidic lore. Therefore, a way must be found to appreciate the literature, and find purpose in it, without contradicting the values that we hold dear. The answer lies in the common literary assumption that the underlying truth in any work of literature is subject to the interpretation of the listener.

There are two levels of truth, that which is historically accurate, and that which is morally true. A child may learn the value of honesty in the telling of the story about a young George Washington chopping down his father's cherry tree. The story may not have actually happened, but the lesson learned contains a valued moral for all generations. Therefore, whether it is historically accurate or not, on a deeper level, it is true.

> (Story) is reality at its deepest level. It is ambiguous and therefore open to new meaning, capable of being understood in new ways and related to new circumstances and experiences. It is the experience of truth told in a creative and symbolic way. Delving into the resources and the wellspring of self, we attempt to vocalize what we perceive as truth. Story is the sharing of a personal message. We receive the message of the storyteller according to who we are and where we're at. What I tell you today could change tomorrow; not that the verbalization differs but rather the receiving as we enter into another level of reality.[71]

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[70]Wiesel, p. 7.

[71]Leary, Catherine. "Parables and Fairytales," Religious Education 81, no. 3 (Summer 1986), p. 486.

Despite the high regard that Wiesel has for the tales of the Baal Shem Tov and despite his lack of willingness to question these stories, outside of that genre he expresses an understanding to find truth in stories that may not be factually valid. He describes a meeting with a former teacher and Hasidic master, after the war.

> (This story) has to do with my teacher, who was a Hasidic rabbi, and me. Many years after the war I came to see him in Israel, but by then I had changed. He had not. He still looked like a Hasidic rabbi, but I no longer looked like a Hasid. When I came to him and was properly introduced, he looked at me and suddenly said "You are Dodye Feig's grandson." My grandfather was a Hasid. And I said, "Rebbe, I've worked so hard for so many years to make a name for myself, but for you I still remain his grandson."
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> "But what are you doing?" he asked. "What *were* you doing for so many years?"
>
> "I am writing," I replied. "That's what I'm doing," I said.
>
> "What are you writing?"
>
> I said, "Stories."
>
> "But what kind of stories?"
>
> I said, "What do you mean, Rebbe?"
>
> He said, "Stories of things that happened?"
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> And then I caught him. I said "Rebbe, it's not so simple. Some events happen that are not true. Others are true but did not happen." At that point he was lost. And he simply said, "What a pity."[72]

This last sentiment is the most telling - "Some events happen that are not true. Others are true but did not happen." According to Ellen Frankel, a people's collective memory, conscience, formative experiences, vision of the world, and connection to the divine are contained in its tales.[73] For one to accept the truth

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[72]Wiesel, Elie. "Myth and History", Olson, Alan M., ed., Myth Symbol and Reality. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame and London, 1980, pp. 20-21.

[73]Frankel, Ellen. The Classic Tales: 4,000 Years of Jewish Lore. Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, New Jersey, 1989, xxiv.

of that conscience and vision, one does not necessarily need to accept the truth of the details.

The stories with which I will be dealing are a result of the creativity of rabbis and scholars who lived in remote parts of the world, long ago, shut off from many of the advances that the rest of the world was making. And yet, "the work of our modern men of intellect and sophistication does not go beyond their fundamental conceptions, for no one can go beyond truth."[74]

[74]Levin, Meyer. Classic Hassidic Tales. The Citadel Press, New York, 1966, xv.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE YOM KIPPUR FLUTE

The story presented in this chapter is ideal for teaching students in a Reform setting. This tale is one that is very well-known; and it may already be familiar to many students. This story may be found, with slight differences in wording, in a multitude of anthologies. For the write-up of this educational program, I have combined two different versions, one from Meyer Levin's Classic Hassidic Tales, and the other from Ellen Frankel's The Classic Tales: 4,000 Years of Jewish Lore, in order to include some nice nuances from both of them.

> When the Baal Shem Tov was about to enter into a synagogue, he stopped outside the door and said, "I cannot go in there. There is no room for me to enter."
>
> But the chassidim said, "There are not many people in the synagogue."
>
> "The house is filled from the ground to the roof with prayers!" said the Master.
>
> But as he saw the chassidim taking pride because of his words, he said, "Those prayers are all dead prayers. They have no strength to fly to heaven. They are crushed, they lie one on top of the other, the house is filled with them."
>
> There was a villager who, during the Days of Awe, used to pray in the Baal Shem Tov's synagogue. This man had a son who was such a simpleton that he could not even recognize the shapes of the letters nor recite a single prayer. Each year the man left his son home when he went to the synagogue, for he told himself, "What good will it do to bring such a fool to pray?"
>
> But when the boy became thirteen, the age of *bar mitzvah*, his father decided to take him to synagogue on Yom Kippur, for he feared that the boy would eat out of ignorance during the fast day.
>
> Now the boy always carried a flute with him because he spent his days tending sheep on the mountain. This day, too, as he and his father traveled to Medzibozh, he carried the little flute in his pocket. That evening during *Kol Nidre*, he resisted many times the urge to take out the flute and play it. And all the next morning, during the long morning service, he tried to put the flute out of mind and instead concentrate on the strange black letters swimming

before his eyes in the prayer book. But when it finally came time for the *musaf* prayer, he saw the men all about him raise their little books, and read out of them in praying, singing voices. He saw his father do as the other men did. He pulled at his father's arm.

"Father," he said, "I too want to sing. I have my flute in my pocket. I'll take it out and sing.".

"Heaven forbid!" cried his father in alarm. "Not now!"

So the boy restrained himself. But when the time for *minhah* came, and the men arose to repeat the *minhah* prayer, the boy also arose. "Father," he said, "I too want to sing."

His father whispered quickly, "Where have you got your fife?"

"Here in my pocket."

"Let me see it."

The boy drew out his flute and showed it to his father. His father seized it out of his hand. "Let me hold it for you," he said.

The boy wanted to cry, but was afraid, and remained still.

As the service drew to a close, the boy could no longer restrain himself. Just before the start of the concluding *Neilah* prayers, he seized the flute from his father's hand, set it to his mouth and began to play music.

A silence of terror fell upon the congregation. Aghast, they looked upon the boy; their backs cringed, as if they waited instantly for the walls to fall upon them.

In horror the father looked toward the Baal Shem Tov, expecting to see fierce anger blazing in his eyes. But to his great surprise, the Baal Shem Tov's face was calm, and his voice betrayed no agitation as he swiftly chanted the *Neilah* prayers. Listening more closely, the father heard in the rabbi's voice a marvelous sweetness he had never heard before.

At last the service was over. As soon as the final *shofar* blast was blown, the father rushed forward to apologize for his son's improper behavior. But before he had a chance to say a word, the Baal Shem Tov smiled at him and said, "Do not be angry with your son, for the voice of his flute eased my burden. In his heart burned such purity of purpose that his prayer lifted up all the others, carrying them straight up to the gates of heaven." [75-76]

In addition to the fact that this story is well-known, it is an excellent teaching tool because few difficulties arise, either in its details or in its moral, that

[75]Frankel, pp. 475-77.

[76]Levin, pp. 132-34.

would be unsettling to a progressive Jew. Thus, one straight-forward approach to presenting Hasidic folklore in a Reform setting without philosophical contradiction, is to simply utilize stories whose features in no way come in opposition to our Reform sensibilities. In the story of the shepherd boy who wishes to play flute during Tefillot, the main value, that an uneducated soul has equal access to the divine, as do educated ones, and that faith readily picks up where education leaves off, can be discussed with comfort in a Reform setting. These values are at the heart of our Reform communities.

Is the Reform belief system fully congruent with that of Hasidism where this matter is concerned? Not completely. The battle waged between the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim, as expressed in the resulting literature, was the cause of a great deal of strife among the Jews of Eastern Europe. For the latter, the letter of the law is most important. Study of the Law, knowledge of the Law, and strict practice of the Law, was the only way. For the former, while knowledge of Judaism was important, what mattered more was the spirit of the Judaism. It is irrelevant that the boy prayed through his flute. It is irrelevant that he did not know the words to the prayers. What is relevant is that he prayed; and because he did it in a way he truly knew and felt, it was the most genuine of prayers.

Reform Judaism does not come down cleanly on one side or the other. Yes, good intentions have a value of their own. We recognize that in our modern world, most Jews are unable to be full-time scholars. We also appreciate that Jewish law is to be interpreted by the individual and by individual communities, to be in accord with what is in our hearts, not just with what is in our books. The Columbus Platform states, "Each age has the obligation to adapt the teachings

of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism."[77] And in the San Francisco Platform we read. "Within each area of Jewish observance Reform Jews are called upon to confront the claims of Jewish tradition, however differently perceived, and to exercise their individual autonomy, choosing and creating on the basis of commitment and knowledge."[78]

But, Reform Judaism has also maintained, in both of these platforms, that education and study are also vital parts of our religion. From the Columbus Platform, "The perpetuation of Judaism as a living force depends upon religious knowledge and upon the Education of each new generation in our rich cultural and spiritual heritage."[79] And in the San Francisco Platform, ". . . the claims made upon us may begin with our ethical obligations but they extend to many other aspects of Jewish living, including. . . life-long study. . . "[80]

But this middle-of-the-road position, held by Reform Judaism, with one hand outstretched to the scholar and the other outstretched to the common man, is brought up and discussed in the educational program designed for the story. And outside of this, the only other conflict in belief systems that might be raised by the tale, involves how prayers are depicted in the story as physical entities that actually rise to be received in heaven. Of course, this may easily be viewed as a clever literary device, with the prayers remaining inside the synagogue and failing to rise being representative of a stagnation of thought behind the prayers, and the prayer of the boy lifting the others symbolizing its genuine nature. This, too, shall be addressed in the lesson.

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[77]Meyer, p. 389.

[78]Meyer, p. 393.

[79]Meyer, p. 390.

[80]Meyer, p. 393.

The program that follows is meant to familiarize the students with the story, to open discussion regarding the value of prayers (both written prayers and prayers direct from the heart), and to permit students the opportunity to find new, creative ways to pray. .

* * * *

THE YOM KIPPUR FLUTE

Goals: to familiarize students with the story of the shepherd boy and his flute

to examine students' views of prayer

to understand the meaning behind some of the prayers in the prayer book

to explore creative ways to express the same feelings expressed by traditional prayers

Materials: a copy of the story "The Yom Kippur Flute", descriptions of the prayers already familiar to students, paper, pens, art supplies (markers, scissors, glitter, glue, etc.), a cassette or compact disc player, a variety of music on tape or compact disc (instrumental music such as jazz or classical is preferred)

Timetable:

00-05 settle in

05-15 read and act out the story

15-35 discussion of prayer

35-40 move to a new location

40-60 divide into groups, create prayers

60-80 conduct creative service

85-90 wrap-up/discussion

Method:

00-05 Settle in. Students have a seat in the chapel, sanctuary, or Bet T'filla - whatever location is most commonly used for services.

05-15 The facilitator selects a handful of students to act out the story, on the bima, as it is being read. Allow the students to have fun with this, but go slow enough and make sure that the action is clear enough for the class to hear and to understand the entire story.

15-35 Discussion. Gather the students in a circle and ask the following questions. Use these questions as a guide. If any particular question or answer sparks a lot of discussion, allow the students to go with it.

1) What happened in the story?

2) Why did the father not want his son to play the flute? Why did he think the Baal Shem Tov would be angry?

3) What was the Baal Shem Tov's point to the father?

4) In your opinion, what is prayer? Is it an actual conversation between man and God? Is it an inner-conversation that one has with oneself? Is it something else?

5) What is the point of prayer?

6) What are the different types of prayer? (thanks, praise, requests, etc.)

7) Do you pray?

8) Do you feel more comfortable with written prayers or with your own silent prayer?

9) When and where can people pray other than at synagogue during services?

10) What do you hope is the result of your prayers?

11) What ways, other than verbally, can one pray?

35-40 Move to a new location. Explain that we are going to create our own service; and we want it to be as creative as possible. Therefore, since we can pray anywhere, and not just in the chapel, the class will move to a new location for the service. Take suggestions. In nice weather, the outdoors would be a good setting for this activity.

40-60 Divide into groups, create prayers. Once at the new location, divide participants into seven groups. Each group will be given the text of a prayer that they know. They will also be given a written explanation of what the prayer is about. Assign a format, such as dance, song, or poetry, for each different group to create their own prayer which expresses the same sentiments as they one they have been assigned. Make it clear to the participants that they do not have to duplicate the prayer; they only have to express its meaning in some new way. Ask the students to put all of their creative energies into it, to take it seriously, but also to have fun. The assignments are as follows:

Group 1: Barechu - art

Group 2: Shema - create something out of nature

Group 3: V'ahavta - poem

Group 4: Mi Chamocha - dance

Group 5: Amidah - skit

Group 6: Aleinu - song

Group 7: Mourners' Kaddish -- dance

60-80 Conduct creative service. Gather the groups back together. Conduct a service; but instead of reading prayers, have students present or display their creative prayer. When needed, also have them explain what their prayer is about. In the middle of the service, have a few moments for silent prayer. Be sure that enough time is given for this for students to really think and pray.

80-90 Discussion and wrap up. Ask students to share feelings about the service that was just experienced. Did anyone feel like they were able to communicate with God? Did anyone feel like it was beneficial to themselves? What role does prayer play in each person's life? How, when and where do they feel most comfortable praying?

Be sure that, in closing, it is mentioned that the story is not professing a belief that written prayer is bad. Playing the flute, or any of the creative exercises performed by the class, are not necessarily any better than the formalized prayer. The point of the story is that the best prayer is a genuine prayer, performed with understanding. And this may take any form, including that of written prayer.

CHAPTER SIX
THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S NEIGHBOR

In the previous chapter, we saw that one straight forward approach to presenting Hasidic folklore in a Reform setting without philosophical contradiction, is to simply utilize stories whose features in no way come in opposition to our Reform sensibilities. The story of the shepherd boy teaches the Hasidic value that everyone has equal access to the Divine. Whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated, the person who genuinely directs his heart towards God utters a prayer every bit as meaningful as the one on the written page. This philosophy is valued in the Reform community as it is in Hasidic ideology. Furthermore, there are very few details of the story, if any, that create confusion with what a student may have been previously taught about Judaism.

But what of other stories? What should be done with stories which students may enjoy, which contain general themes that are worthy of discussion and values that apply to our community, but also contain a variety of other themes which do not fit well in a Reform context? Is there a way to present a folk tale, which insists on Halachah as binding, or on Olam Haba'ah as truth, without creating confusion in the mind of the student as to what Reform Judaism does or does not believe?

The answer is to plunge straight ahead. Before teaching from Hasidic folklore, I suggest that the class or camp facilitator first engage students in a discussion dealing with the development of various segments of the Jewish community throughout the ages. In an educational setting in which such a discussion has already been presented, giving students an idea of some of the basic differences between Hasidism and Reform (discussed in chapters 2 and

3), a facilitator should be able to introduce a Hasidic tale, point out some of the conflicts of belief, and discuss them with the class.

The following story is a prime example. Sitting around a campfire, summer after summer, and hearing this story, it has become a favorite of many. For the actual text of the story, I turned to the musical production "Ish Hasid Haya", by Dan Almagor. The translation is my own, and leaves much of the tale in dialogue form. This allows the students to perform the story dramatically; but it may also be easily adapted into narrative form. The tale may be found in narrative form in Elie Wiesel's work Souls on Fire.[81]

> One day, the Baal Shem Tov, may he rest in peace, was seized with great curiosity. Who would be his neighbor in the next world? He shut his eyes, and focused his heart, and the answer was not late in coming. In a certain village is a Tzaddik, and his name - Gedalia.
>
> The Rav decided to go to the Tzaddik, to stay for a short while with his other half. After all, it is necessary for neighbors to get used to living together, isn't it? The Rav went to the above-mentioned village. It was a small village. And Jews? No sign of them.
>
> The Baal Shem Tov approached a farmer. "Excuse me. Maybe you've heard, where one can find here the Tzaddik Rabbi Gedalia?"
>
> "A Jew? In our village there is only one Jew. He is not a rav, and not a Tzaddik. He is pitch maker. A pitch maker. There. At the edge of the village. He lives there."
>
> "Pitch maker! Certainly he must be a secret Tzaddik. A great Tzaddik!"
>
> What is this? An appalling house, falling in ruins. A big, angry dog, and not even a mezuzah.
>
> "Who's there?!"
>
> "Rabbi Gedalia?"
>
> "Who is it?"
>
> And finally, there was the pitch maker. A giant (Goliath). An incredibly tall man (Og, king of Bashan). Wide shoulders. And

[81]Wiesel, Elie. Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters. p. 27-28.

beneath them, a belly enormous and bursting. A Tzaddik as big as this, there never was!

"Who are you?!!"

"Rabbi Gedalia?"

"That's me."

"Rabbi?"

"Nonsense! I don't even know the shapes of letters. I work with pitch. What do you want?"

"Is it possible to stay here at your house?"

"To stay? At my house? Here?"

"Only for a day or two."

"This is not a hotel. And I have nothing."

"In exchange for money. . . ?"

"Money?"

"Half a ruble per day."

"Half a ruble? I don't have a bed."

"I will sleep on the stove."

"I sleep there!"

"On the floor then."

"But. . . "

"A ruble a day."

"A ruble? If you please, the floor is all yours."

Morning came. From the floor, the Baal Shem Tov opened one eye. The pitch maker opened his eyes and rose. Without washing his hands. Without prayer. Without a blessing. He went straight to eating! And what a meal! He sat. And ate. And ate. And ate. A full loaf of bread. Was he a secret Tzaddik? And another loaf. A strange Tzaddik. And another loaf continued in the way of its friend.

And he returns, without a word, straight to eating. He didn't wash. He didn't bless. A leg on top of a thigh! A whole lamb. Was he a secret Tzaddik? He sits, and he rips, and grinds, and grinds.

"Why is he worthy of being my neighbor?" wonders the Baal Shem Tov.

An in the evening - just as before. He sat. And he neglected his obligations.

"Him in heaven," thought the Baal Shem Tov, "What a miracle! If they just let him enter, he would eat up, in a short time, the wild bull and the Leviathan!"

And the next day, same pitch maker. Eat, and eat, without stop. Eat. And grow. And grow. And grow. . . True that a Lamed-vavnik is not required to be lean; but another Lamed-vavnik had not been created with an appetite like this.

The Baal Shem Tov knew that there are secret Tzaddikim that reveal themselves only on Shabbat. "If I can remain here a little longer, until Sunday. ."

"Forget it. You haven't paid the bill."

"Two more rubles?"

"Two rubles? On one condition. Only until the end of Shabbat."

Shabbat morning, and the rabbi awoke with hope. Maybe now? Maybe this morning? A little prayer? Where? He turned his attention to the glutton. At the first meal, he was no longer astonished. The same with the second meal. "Maybe at the third meal, it will be apparent why this man is pious."

But this one continued without end. The man looked like he would explode. But he was still hungry.

"Don't forget. You are leaving immediately after the meal!"

"Why is he worthy? Why is he worthy? Perhaps for the merits of our fathers."

"My father?" said Gedalia, "My father was a simple rag-picker, collecting rags. An old robe here, patched trousers there. From village to village. A rag collector. And also, I went around with him, when I was a boy.

"One time, on Erev Shabbat, in the beginning of autumn, in a forest, two Cossacks came with a cross. They said to my father, 'Kiss it.' And father refused. 'Kiss it, dirty Jew, or be crucified!' And father refused. My father. And he simply said, 'I am a rag collector, but I am not a rag.' 'Kiss it!' But my father was stubborn. My father.

"And they tied him to a tree, and lit him on fire. My father. A little Jew. Thin. A rag. A tiny flame. One moment, and suddenly - nothing. My father. And since then, I swore to eat - and eat - and eat. No stopping. To grow - and grow. All my life. Without a break. Without feeling shame. So that if, one day, the Cossacks captured me too, and lit me on fire, this would be a flame!

"Not a tiny flame and that's it, like my father. I will burn slowly. I will burn great. So that they will see. They will see the flame in remote places. To the ends of the earth. To the end of the Diaspora. They will see. They will know. That a Jew was lit on fire, inexplicably, with frivolity."

And he was quiet.

Thus said the Baal Shem Tov to his students, "I obtained a great understanding of why the pitch maker named Gedalia was worthy of Olam Haba'ah. Only one thing I didn't understand," said the old rabbi, "Why was I worthy to be his neighbor?"[82]

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[82]Almagor, Dan, "The Baal Shem Tov's Neighbor", Ish Hasid Hayah, 1968, pp. 29-34..

The story, itself, is delightful for children to hear. But it also contains some disturbing images. It is best utilized as an educational tool for mature children, who are able to deal with issues of Jewish persecution. The story lends itself well to a discussion about global awareness of crimes against humanity. Upon first reading, one must ask, "What does the Baal Shem Tov see in Gedalia that changes his opinion? What, in the Baal Shem Tov's appraisal, is Gedalia's great virtue?"

His virtue is his desire to make known the plight of the Jews. Gedalia's obesity is merely a metaphor for the grand scale on which he might publicize the oppression of his people. The next time the Cossacks burn a Jew, he wants for the entire world to know about it. The lesson to be learned is not that Gedalia is a righteous man because of the obscenely extreme measure he takes for his dedication to his ideals. The lesson is that Gedalia is a righteous man because he is dedicated to a certain ideal in the first place, that of raising humanity's consciousness of its wrong-doings. Implicit in this program is discussion of how the Holocaust was a real-life "Gedalia" that changed the world's vision of crimes against humanity, and a discussion of what responsibility a modern Jew does or does not have for speaking out against present-day injustices.

While this topic certainly has a place in a Reform educational setting, the plot of the story is filled with other details which are not commonly accepted in Reform life. It would be a great oversight for an instructor to teach this story, and gloss over the ideas of Olam Haba'ah, supernatural knowledge and powers, and the binding force of Halachah. All are prominent features of the story, and must be explained and discussed with students. To combat confusion, the lesson plan needs to explain the differing Hasidic and Reform views of these concepts, and also provide students with an opportunity to express their own personal views.

Having isolated two very different goals for the teaching of this story, two different programs may be necessary in order to do justice to each goal without losing focus. The first lesson plan is to introduce the story and to understand the Hasidic details. The second lesson plan is to remind students of the story and to examine public awareness of crimes against humanity.

* * * *

THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S NEIGHBOR - Story Introduction

Goals: to familiarize students with the story of the Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Gedalia

to question whether or not we must agree with a story in totality, in order to find personal meaning in it

to familiarize students with the Hasidic and the Reform beliefs concerning the issues of life after death, supernatural knowledge, and Halacha - all features of this story

to explore the students' own personal beliefs concerning the issues of life after death, supernatural knowledge, and Halachah

Materials: a copy of the story "The Baal Shem Tov's Neighbor", paper, pens (enough for one per student)

Timetable:

00-05 Settle in

05-10 Read the Story

10-25 Question and Answer about the Story

25-30 Give assignment

30-45 Rotation One

45-60 Rotation Two

60-75 Rotation Three

75-85 Rewrite

85-100 Present stories

Method:

00-05 Settle in. Have the participants gather around in a circle, so that everyone is comfortable

05-10 Read the Story. Ask everyone to listen careful to the details of the story. Read "The Baal Shem Tov's Neighbor".

10-25 Question and Answer about the Story. Ask the following questions, allowing for questions and discussion from the participants:

1) Who was the Baal Shem Tov?

2) What is Hasidism?

3) Why was the Baal Shem Tov interested in meeting Gedalia?

4) What is Olam Haba'ah?

5) How did the Baal Shem Tov know that Gedalia would be his neighbor in Olam Haba'ah?

6) What was the Baal Shem Tov's initial impression of Gedalia? What did Gedalia do that troubled the Baal Shem Tov?

7) In the Baal Shem Tov's mind, what kind of person does someone have to be to become his neighbor in Olam Haba'ah?

8) Why does Gedalia live the way he does?

9) What changes the Baal Shem Tov's opinion of Gedalia?

10) What is your opinion of Gedalia?

25-30 Give assignment. Explain to the participants that they are book editors. They are going to research the story, and rewrite it for publication as a Reform Jewish story. They will want to keep as close to the original story as possible; but if a part of the story does not fit in with what they want to express, they should change that part of the story.

Divide the participants into three groups. Give each participant paper and a pen, for research, and send each group to one of three stations around the room. Each station should have chairs set up in a circle, and a facilitator.

30-75 Rotations. The facilitator at each station will play the part of an expert on one of three topics, either life after death, supernatural powers, or Halakhah. The facilitator will express the Hasidic view of the topic, and the Reform view of the topic. Questions will then be asked to encourage the students to share their own views of the topic at hand. Each station will last 15 minutes; and students will then rotate to the next station.

STATION 1: LIFE AFTER DEATH

1) What is the Hasidic view of life after death? (When the messiah comes, all of the righteous will be resurrected and live in Olam Haba'ah, the world to come).

2) Why was this belief necessary for the Hasidim? (In order to maintain faith in God, despite the hardships faced by Jews in this world, it was necessary to believe in another world through which the righteous are rewarded).

3) What do you like about this view? What do you disagree with?

4) What is the Reform view of life after death? (The soul is immortal. Bodily resurrection, heaven, and hell, are all rejected. Pittsburgh Platform), (Life and death are a mystery. San Francisco Platform)

5) What do you like about this view? What do you disagree with?

6) Which view makes the most sense?

7) Which view is the most comforting?

8) What are your own personal views of life after death?

STATION 2: SUPERNATURAL POWERS

1) What are miracles, in the traditional sense? (events which defy the laws of nature).

2) What is supernatural knowledge?

3) How did the Baal Shem Tov use supernatural knowledge in the story?

4) What is the Hasidic view of supernatural power? (God created the world with special places where miracles happen, special times - Shabbat - when miracles happen, and special people - prophets - who perform miracles.)[83], (The Baal Shem Tov was unique. Not since he, has anybody been able to make miracles happen through decree or prayer.)[84]

5) What is the Reform view of miracles and supernatural knowledge? (They are a primitive remnant of our ancient culture. Pittsburgh Platform), (Man is responsible for his own destiny. God does not interfere with miracles. Columbus Platform).

6) Which view makes the most sense?

7) Which view is the most comforting?

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[83]Jacobs, p. 236.

[84]Jacobs, p. 97.

8) What do you believe?

STATION 3: HALAKHAH

1) What is Halakhah? (Literally, the path, the way, the rule), (Laws from the Talmud and rabbinical literature which involve the ritual, social and economic life of the community and the individual.)[85]

2) What is the difference between Halakhah (ritual law) and moral law? What are some examples of each?

3) How does Halakhah affect the Baal Shem Tov's impression of Gedalia?

4) What role does Halakhah play in our lives, according to Hassidic thought? (It is binding upon us.)

5) What role does Halakhah play in our lives, according to Reform thought? (Only moral laws are binding upon us. Rituals that sanctify our lives should be maintained. Pittsburgh Platform), (Each generation has the obligation to adapt the laws to a new age. Columbus Platform), (Decisions regarding ritual must be made by the individual, based on commitment and knowledge. San Francisco Platform)

6) What does the Baal Shem Tov learn about the value of Halakhah after he hears Gedalia's story?

7) What makes a person righteous, following ritual laws, following moral laws, or both?

75-85 Rewrite. Each group should remain at its last station, and the facilitator from that station will help them with the next activity. The group needs to rewrite

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[85]Wiesel, Elie. p. 262.

the story in their own words, for a modern audience. The students should be allowed to have fun with this; but remind them to make sure that they don't write anything they don't believe in. They may have to drastically change parts of the story.

85-100 Present stories. Each group will present their rewritten story to the larger group. They may do so by reading, through a skit, in song, or in any other creative manner.

* * * *

THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S NEIGHBOR -

The Jewish Response to Crimes Against Humanity

Goals: to reacquaint students with the story of the Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Gedalia

to examine how the bonfire of the Holocaust changed the way the world sees crimes against humanity

to question what a modern Jew's responsibility should be with regards to making injustices known

Materials: copy of the story "The Baal Shem Tov's neighbor, paper, pens, markers, posterboard, information on the Holocaust and on contemporary genocide

Timetable:

00-05 settle in

05-20 reread story with interruptions

20-40 discussion about theme/three-corners activity

40-50 assign task and brainstorm

50-75 students work on publicity

75-90 share projects

Method:

00-05 Settle in. As students enter the room, the chairs should be arranged in a semi-circle. Students should have a seat facing the center of the room. Turn the lights down low, and give instructions for the first activity.

05-20 Review story with interruptions. Explain that we will be re-reading the story of The Baal Shem Tov's Neighbor, which we discussed in the previous class session. The story will be read slowly, and the students should pay careful attention. Any time a student thinks that they understand an emotion that might be felt by one of the characters, he/she should raise their hand. The facilitator will stop reading and call on that person, who should then say which character they are, and how they feel at that moment. For example, "I am the Baal Shem Tov, and I am confused about why this man doesn't pray," or "I am Gedalia; and I am scared at watching my father die, but I am also angry." Allow the students to stop the story as many times as necessary in getting through the story. The facilitator should pay careful attention to what the students say, especially at dramatic moments in the story, such as when Gedalia speaks of his father's death. They may say things which can be brought up in discussion.

20-40 Discussion about theme/three-corners activity.

1) What is the message of the story?

2) Why is Gedalia a righteous man?

3) Is it a Jew's responsibility to make sure that the world knows about our oppression and suffering?

4) Does the Holocaust remind you of Gedalia? Did it create a fire so big that the rest of the world could no longer ignore what was happening to Jews? Did the world continue to ignore it? Does it still?

5) Is it possible to publicize oppression too much? For example, does the non-Jewish world tire of hearing about the Holocaust, and stop caring about what happened?

6) As Jew's, do we have a responsibility to let the world know about all crimes against humanity?

7) Do we have a responsibility to urge the world to stop crimes against humanity?

8) What is genocide?

9) Are there places in the world where it still happens today?

10) We are taught by Holocaust survivors to keep retelling the stories so it won't happen again. But genocide is happening. What can we do about it?

Ask the following multiple choice question and designate a different corner of the room for each answer. Instead of answering out loud, students should go and sit in the designated corner that corresponds with how they truly feel. Students in each corner should take a few minutes to discuss why they are there. The facilitator will then ask one representative from each group to stand and explain that group's opinions to the rest of the class. Debate may follow.

**Today, people are routinely slaughtered in Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and many other places simply because of their religions and their races. As children of the Holocaust, we have a responsibility to:

a) Let the world know what is happening

b) Get active in finding a solution

c) Do nothing; we should mind our own business and stay out of other countries' affairs

40-50 Assign task and Brainstorm. Explain to the participants that they will receive information about the Holocaust, as well as about contemporary genocide in other countries. Their task will be to help others in the community understand that people in the world are still being oppressed. Brainstorm ways of publicizing their opinions. Some possibilities are making posters, writing articles for the temple or camp bulletin, writing letters to congressmen, and writing a sermon for the congregation (with the rabbi's approval). If the class wishes to work on one large group project, they may want to compile their own essays and artwork into a book, which can be bound and sold through the synagogue, with proceeds going to an organization that fights oppression.

50-75 Students work on publicity.

75-90 Share projects/Discussion. Anyone in the class who feels comfortable sharing with the rest of the class what they have been working on should do so. After everyone has had a chance to share, discuss what it feels like to do this kind of work. Do they think that their efforts can have any effect? What kinds of things can they do in the future to fight oppression and let the world know about the suffering of others? Do they plan on doing those things?

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LOST PRINCESS

The story in this chapter is different from the previous two, in that it is purely fable. It may be likened to a fairy tale. The Baal Shem Tov does not make an appearance, nor do any other Tzaddikim. It could be told in any context, and does not necessarily appear to even be of Jewish origin. It could just as well have been written by the Grimm brothers. But it was not. It originated with Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. And a Jewish fable is not just any fairy tale; it represents something. Every aspect of the fable is representative of something in the living Jewish world. And every lesson has a parallel in the Jewish pantheon of ethics, belief, and morality.

> There was a King who had six sons and but one daughter; he loved his daughter more than any of his other children, and passed many hours in her company; but one day while they were together the princess displeased the King, and he cried out, "May the devil take you!"
>
> There seemed nothing amiss that night when the princess went to bed. But in the morning she could not be found.
>
> The King tore his hair for grief and guilt. "It is because of what I cried out," he said, "that she is gone."
>
> Then the Second to the Throne, seeing the King in despair, arose and cried, "Give me a servant, and a steed, and gold, and I will go out and seek the princess."
>
> For a long time he rode through waste land and desert in search of the missing maiden. Once as he passed in a desert he saw a road at the edge of the sand, and he thought, "I have ridden so long in the desert without meeting anyone. Perhaps the road will lead me to the city."
>
> The road led him to a great castle guarded by hosts of warriors. The prince was afraid they would not allow him to enter the castle, but nevertheless he dismounted from his steed, and went up to them; and they allowed him to pass through the gate. Then he came in upon a magnificent courtyard, and saw a marble palace before him. He went into the palace and walked through halls that were studded with alabaster pillars. Guards stood in all

the passageways, but no one questioned him, and he went from room to room until he came to the chamber of the throne, and there a king was seated. Tables laden with delicate foods were along the walls of the room; they prince ate of the delicacies; then he lay down in a corner of the chamber where he might not easily be seen, and he watched to see what would happen.

Musicians played upon their instruments, and sang before the king; soon the king held out his hand and commanded that the queen be brought. Then the music became more joyous, and people danced in the court, and made merry, and drank, for the queen would soon appear.

When the queen came into the chamber she was given a smaller seat next to the throne; the wanderer looked upon her and saw that she was indeed the princess he sought. And as she looked out over the room she saw the man withdrawn into an obscure corner, and she recognized him. She got down from her throne and went to him and said, "Do you not know me?"

"You are the princess!" he said. "But how have you come to this place?"

"The King let fall an angry word," she said. "He cried, 'May the evil one take you!' and this is the palace of evil."

"The King is grief-stricken because of what he has done, and I have sought for you these many years," the wanderer told her. "How may I take you away?"

"You cannot take me from this place," she said, "except that you first go and select a place for yourself, and there you must remain for an entire year, thinking only of my deliverance, longing and hoping to rescue me, and on the last day of the year you must not eat a particle of food, but must fast, and on the last night of the year you must not sleep; then you may come to me."

He did as she told him to do. He went into the desert and remained there an entire year, and at the end of the year he did not sleep, and did not eat, but returned toward the palace of the evil one. On the way, he passed a beautiful tree heavily laden with ripe fruit, and a terrible desire came over him to taste of the apples, so he went and ate. At once he fell into a deep sleep, and he slept for a very long time. When he awoke he saw his servant standing beside him, and he cried out, "Where am I?"

"You have slept many years," the servant said; "I have waited by you, while I lived on the fruit."

Then the wanderer went to the palace and came to the princess; and she cried, "See what you have done! Because of a single day, you have lost eternity! For if you had come on that day, you might have rescued me. I know that it is difficult to refrain from eating, and it is especially difficult on the last day, for the evil spirit was strong in you on that last day. But you must go again and

choose a place and remain there another year, praying, and longing, and hoping to deliver me; on the last day of that year you may eat, but you must drink no wine, for wine will cause you to sleep, and the most important thing of all is not to sleep."

He went back to the wilderness, and did as she had told him to do, but on the last day, as he was returning toward the palace, he saw a flowing spring. He said to his servant, "Look, the fountain of water is red, and it has an odour as of wine!" Then he knelt and tasted of the spring, and at once fell to the ground and slept. He slept for many years.

And in that time a great army of warriors passed on the road, among them were mounted riders, and carriages, and at last there came a great carriage drawn by fourteen steeds. The princess was in that carriage; but when she saw the wanderer's servant on the road, she ordered the carriage to be halted, and she went down and saw the wanderer sleeping, and she sat by him and wept. "Poor man," she said; "so many years you have sought me, and wandered so far, and endured so much pain, and yet because of a single day you have lost me, and see how you must suffer, and how I suffer because of that day!" Then she took her veil from her face; she wrote upon the veil with her tears, and left it beside him; and she got into her carriage and rode away.

After he had slept seventy years, the man awoke and asked his servant, "Where am I?" The servant told him what had happened, of the army that had passed, and how the princess had wept over him. Just then the wanderer saw the veil lying beside him, and he cried, "Where does this come from?"

"The princess left it for you," the servant said. "She wrote upon it with her tears."

He who was Second to the Throne held the veil up to the sun, and saw the marks of her weeping, and read of her grief at finding him so, and read that she was gone from the first palace of the evil one, but that he must now seek her in a palace of pearls that stood on a golden mountain. "Only there, you may find me," the princess had written.

Then the wanderer left his servant and went alone in search of the princess.

For many years he wandered among mankind, asking and seeking for the palace of pearls upon the mountain of gold, until he knew that it was to be found upon no chart, and in no land inhabited by men, and in no desert, for he had been everywhere. But still he searched in the wilderness, and in the wilderness he came upon a giant who carried a tree that was greater than any tree that grew in the world of men. The giant looked upon the wanderer and said, "Who are you?"

He answered, "I am a man."

"I have been so long in the wilderness," said the giant, "that it is many years since I have seen a man." And he looked at the man.

The man said, "I seek a palace built of pearls upon a golden mountain."

The giant laughed, and said, "There is no such place on earth!"

But the man cried, "There is! There must be!" and he would not give up his seeking.

Then the giant said, "Since you are so obstinate, I'll prove to you that there is no such place on earth. I am the lord over all the animal kingdom, and every beast that runs over the earth, from the greatest to the tiniest, answers to my call. Surely if there were such a place as you seek, one of my creatures would have seen it." So he bent and blew on the ground, making a sound that was narrow as the call of wind in the grass, and wide as the rustling of leaves; his call spread like spreading water, and at once the beasts of the earth came running, leaping toward him: the timid gazelle and the wild tiger and every creature from the beetle to the great elephant, all came, and he asked of them: "Have you seen a palace of pearls built on a golden mountain?"

The creatures all answered him, "No."

Then the giant said to the man, "You see, my friend, there is no such place at all. Spare yourself, and return home."

But the man cried, "There is, there must be such a place! And I must find it!"

The giant pitied him, and told him, "I have a brother who is lord over all the creatures of the air; perhaps one of them has seen this place, for birds fly high."

Then the man went further into the wilderness, until he found another giant who carried a great tree in his hand. "Your brother has sent me to you," he said. And he told the giant his quest. The giant whistled into the air, and his cry was like the sound of all the winds that murmur and shriek high over the earth; at once every winged creature, insect and eagle, answered his call. But none had seen a palace of pearls upon a golden mountain.

"You see," said the giant, "there is no such place at all. You had better return home, and rest yourself."

But the man cried, "There is, there must be such a place, and I will not rest until I find it!"

At last the second giant said, "I have a brother who is lord over all the winds. Go to him, perhaps he can help you."

After many years the wanderer came to the third giant, who carried a still greater tree in his hand; and the wanderer told the giant what he sought.

Then the giant opened wide his mouth, and the call he hurled over the world was like the tumult of colliding heavens. In that instant, all the winds over the earth came rushing to him, and he asked them, "Have you seen a palace of pearls upon a mountain of gold?" But none of them had seen such a thing.

"Someone is jesting with you, and has sent you on a fool's quest," the giant said to the man. "Better go home, and rest yourself."

But the man cried, "There is, there must be such a place!" Just then another wind came hastening to the giant, and lay breathless and weary at his feet.

"You have come late!" the giant cried angrily, and he lifted the great tree to last the wind. "Why did you come tardily to my call?"

"Master," the wind said, "I came as soon as I could, but I could not come sooner, for I had to carry a princess to a mountain of gold on which there stands a palace built of pearls."

The man heard, and was overjoyed. "Can you take me there?" he begged. The wind answered, "I can."

Then the master of the winds said to the man, "You will have need of gold, where you are going, for in that city all things are of high worth." And he took a wonderful purse, and gave it to the wanderer. "Whenever you put your hand into this bag," the giant said, "you will find it filled with gold, no matter how much gold you draw out of it."

Then the wind took up the wanderer and set him down upon the golden mountain.

The wanderer saw the palace of pearls that stood within a wonderful city, and the city was surrounded by many walls guarded by warriors. But he put his hand into his marvelous purse, and gave them gold, and they let him pass, and when he came into the city he found that it was a pleasant and beautiful place. Then he lived there for a long while, and there the princess lived, but in the end, with wisdom and righteousness, he took her home to the King.[86]

This story is an enjoyable one; and it is unlikely that the students will realize right away that there is a message, or that they will see the Jewish values inherent in the tale. In discussion, the facilitator may have to help direct students to see the tale's inherent Messianic ideals. In his introduction to this story, Meyer

[86]Levin, pp. 190-97

Levin gives an interpretation that will lend itself well to a classroom discussion of the Messianic Age and of mankind's responsibility to bring the world to that state:

> "There is the story of the King (God) who unwittingly sends his beloved Daughter (the Shechina, Glory of God) into the place of the Evil One (Earth); then He grieves at her loss until the Prince (Israel of the Messiah) goes out to find her. Twice he meets her but fails, through his own weakness, in delivering her from the palace of the Evil One; twice he must wait in the desert (Egypt and Babylon); the third time he is sent wandering over the earth (the present exile); but at last he comes to her in the Palace of Pearls upon the Golden Mountain (the Holy Land); he remains there a long time, and then they return to the King (but how the return is effected, we do not know).[87]

Because this story is a fable, we do not have issues dealing with Hasidic-Reform contradictions on the surface level. The details of the story are not meant to be taken literally; it is understood that it is metaphor. Thus, discussion does not need to focus on whether or not students really believe, for instance, that a man could sleep for seventy years. That is far from the intention of the story. Instead, a classroom or camp activity can focus on doing a mature analysis of the story, and relating it to the lives of the students.

Because the story's focus on mankind's obligation to work for the betterment of the world is couched in terms of reuniting God and God's Glory, or helping make the universe whole, a discussion of Messianism and Tikkun Olam is a natural follow-up. Therein lies the opportunity for a facilitator to distinguish between the Hasidic ideal of man working for the coming of the Messiah and the Reform ideal of man working for the coming of the Messianic Age. In addition to educating students about the concept of the Messiah and Tikkun Olam, the following lesson plan also enables students to internalize the ideas, and make a practical application, thinking about how they can take part in Tikkun Olam.

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[87]Levin, p. xiii.

The main point that is brought up by the fable, and that can be made clear in the following program is that if we have the opportunity to help make the world a better place, Reform Judaism says that we should not wait even a day. The longer we wait, the more difficult the task becomes

* * * *

THE LOST PRINCESS

Goals: to familiarize students with the story of The Lost Princess

to analyze the story and uncover its message regarding the Messianic Age

to familiarize students with the Hasidic and the Reform beliefs concerning the Messiah

to understand the message of the story, and of Reform Judaism, that Tikkun Olam must not be delayed

to encourage a commitment to Tikkun Olam on the part of the students

Materials: television, snacks, butcher paper, magic markers, fake money, copy of the story "The Lost Princess", costumes and props for story (optional), slips of paper with assignments written on them, posters with the names of assignment locations, video games, magazines

Timetable:

00-05 Settle In

05-20 Tikkun Olam game

20-35 Discussion of game

35-45 Story

45-60 Discussion of story/Messiah concepts

60-90 Tikkun Olam activity

Method:

00-05 Settle In. Give each student a piece of paper with an assignment written on it. Most students should receive one that says "Middle-class America". Two students will receive "Victim of war and ethnic cleansing", two will receive "Endangered Wildlife", two will receive "Poverty-stricken", and two will receive "Natural disaster victims". Have signs placed around the room which correspond with the assignments that have been given to the students.

05-20 Tikkun Olam game. Send students to the locations in the room that correspond with their assignments. Explain that everyone will receive a certain amount of currency, called "life dollars". There are activities that must be performed at each location. The money can be used to buy certain privileges. The two goals of the game the class is about to play are for everyone to survive (have at least one Life Dollar left at the end) and for everyone to achieve happiness. The class has fifteen minutes to accomplish this. A facilitator will come around and give instructions and money to each location.

At the middle-class America location, students will receive 20 Life Dollars each. Their activity is to just enjoy themselves. This station will have a television, video games, magazines, and snacks. Everything at this station costs money; but it is all affordable on the $20 budget. Prices are as follows:

A seat near the television - Five Life Dollars

Something to eat - Four Life Dollars

Something to drink - Four Life Dollars

Changing the channel - Two Life Dollars

Magazine - One Life Dollar

Video Game - Four Life Dollars

Traveling to another location - Ten Life Dollars

At the less-fortunate stations, students will only receive $2 each. They must work in order to earn more money. The tasks at these locations are tedious and near-impossible. For instance, they may have to sort a pile of glitter into different colors, cut letters out of newspapers and glue together the Star Spangled Banner, or count the number of times the word "the" appears in the Gates of Prayer. Due to the difficulty of these tasks, students at these locations will be unable to earn extra money. Food is also available here; but it is too expensive. For them to survive and be happy, and possibly save enough money to move to a better location, students from the middle-class America location will have to help them out. But it costs ten Life Dollars to go from one location to another. Every five minutes, a facilitator should go to the less-fortunate stations and take some of their money away, so that unless they receive aid from others, they will be out of resources before the game is over. Thus, if near the end of the game, the more well-off students have not tried to help those less-fortunate, it will be too late. Once a student has no Life Money left, they have failed to survive. But if the well-off students try to help their classmates before they spend their money, it is possible for everyone to survive and to achieve happiness.

20-35 Discussion of game.

1) How did it feel to be at one of the less-fortunate stations and not receive help from anyone? How did it feel if you did receive help? How did it feel to watch others enjoying themselves while you were unhappy?

2) How did it feel to be at the middle-class station, enjoying yourself, and see others suffering? Did you want to help them? Did you choose to help?

3) As a class, did we succeed? Did everybody survive? Did everybody end up happy?

4) What did we do as a class that helped us succeed, or what did we fail to do as a class that prevented us from succeeding?

5) You were given fifteen minutes for this game - was there a time to help others that would have increased the chance for success? Would it have been possible to succeed if we waited too long? Why/Why not?

6) How does the simulation that we just went through relate to real life?

7) With all of the problems in the world, is it possible to solve them all? Is it possible to solve any, or is suffering just a part of life and any struggle against it just a waste of time and effort?

8) Is there any urgency to solve any problems at all?

35-45 Story. Read the story of The Lost Princess. If there are enough facilitators, as in a camp setting, use costumes and props and present the story as a brief play. If not, then simply reading it should suffice, as it is an enjoyable story.

45-60 Discussion of story/Messiah concepts.

1) What happened in this story?

2) What might the author have been trying to say?

3) In Jewish fables, a king usually represents God. If that is the case, what does the rest of the story represent? (King = God; the princess = God's glory who is accidentally banished to earth; God grieves over this loss; Prince = Israel of the Messiah trying to regain the Glory of God; Prince's failure to redeem the Princess

and twice having to wait in the desert = Jew's residing in Egypt and Babylon; Prince's wandering over the earth = the present exile; Palace of Pearls = the Holy Land; return to the King = future redemption)

4) How does the Prince's quest describe the Hasidic view of the quest of the Jewish people? (to act immediately to help bring the Messiah)

5) What is the traditional Jewish view of the Messiah? (A redeemer in the form of a person who will lead the world into a state of peace and harmony)

6) What is the Reform view? (There will be no individual redeemer, but a Messianic Age brought about by mankind working together to make the world a better place - Tikkun Olam)

7) Which view do you prefer?

8) What does this story say about man's obligation to bring about the Messianic Age? (We should not miss an opportunity to improve the world. The longer we wait, the more difficult the task becomes)

9) Is this true of the real world?

10) How does the message of the story relate to the game we just played? (If everyone helped out in the beginning, total happiness could have been achieved)

11) Just as the Prince in the story had weaknesses and temptations that kept him from completing his task, what weaknesses do we have that keep us from fulfilling our obligations to the world?

60-90 Tikkun Olam activity. Ask the students to brainstorm as many different ways they can think of that the world could be improved. (ex. stop war, stop hunger, save the ecology, etc.)

Write each idea at the top of a separate sheet of butcher paper, and tape the sheets of paper on the walls of the room. Have the students go around to

each piece of paper and write on it different ways that they could help solve that problem. When students have had the opportunity to write on all of the papers, ask them to read what everyone else wrote, find one solution they like the most and think they could do, and stand by that paper. Have each student tell the rest of the class what they chose. Ask if they think this is something they could realistically do. Ask what effect they think it would have, and if it would help make the world a better place. Finally, ask what is keeping them from actually doing that thing, that would contribute to Tikkun Olam and bringing about the Messianic Age. Remind them that, according to the story, when we have the opportunity to help out, and we fail to follow through, we delay the perfection of the world. Finally, give the students an assignment to get involved in the area of social action that they have chosen, and to continue it throughout the year.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CLEVER MAN AND THE SIMPLE MAN

As a conclusion, I would like to introduce a story belonging to the Hasidic tradition, which raises an issue that is ageless in the realm of religion, and that should not be unfamiliar to anyone who has ever pondered the nature of God. Told in parable form, similar to the story of The Lost Princess, the tale of The Clever Man and the Simple Man, asks the eternal question, "How do we know that God exists?"

In this story, when the simple man is summoned by the king, he studies and prepares himself to meet the king, with perfect faith in his mission. The man who considers himself to be clever, however, does not respond to the king's summons, because having never seen the king, and having no proof of the king's origins, he refuses to believe that the king exists. It is the "simple" man who prospers in his faith, while the "clever" man becomes "mired in clay".

The message of the fable seems to be that while all of the cleverness and knowledge attained by mankind may lead us to believe that we have all of the answers and that belief in a higher power in the universe is folly, it is through simple faith in God that we attain true wisdom. In a Reform educational setting, we do not want to deny this conclusion that faith has great merit. We may, however, want to refrain from claiming that faith is the *only* source of wisdom. Reform Judaism asks for faith, while at the same time encouraging its members to question God.

The truths discovered by modern sciences are not considered to be contradictory to the idea of God. The Pittsburgh Platform states that, "We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and

history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism. . . "[88] And the Columbus Platform reasserts this philosophy by stating, "Judaism welcomes all truth, whether written in the pages of scripture or deciphered from the records of nature. The new discoveries of science, while replacing the older scientific views underlying our sacred literature, do not conflict with the essential spirit of religion . . . "[89]

In teaching the story of The Clever Man and The Simple Man, the value of faith must be expressed. But in a Reform setting, the students must also be permitted to explore how faith and knowledge can work together without contradiction.

The story is as follows:

> Once there were two wealthy men who each had a son. One son was clever and the other simple. In their youth the two boys studied together and became fast friends. But after a time the fathers' fortunes declined, and they were forced to send their sons into the world to make their own way.
>
> The simple son was content to become a shoemaker. But the clever son had more ambition, so he apprenticed himself to some traveling merchants and came to the great city of Warsaw. There he apprenticed himself to a new master and learned the ways of business. But in time he wearied of that and began to travel throughout the world. When he came to Italy, he became a goldsmith and soon surpassed his teacher and his teacher's teacher in his artistry. But in time he tired of that, too, and so became a jeweler and then a doctor. At last, surfeited with riches and honor, he decided to return to the place of his birth and take a wife, for he wished to show the friends of his youth how great he had become.
>
> Meanwhile the simple son had become a middling shoemaker, barely eking out a living for himself and his wife. Yet he was content with his lot. Each day he would say to his wife: "Please give me some broth or some kash or some meat," and each day she gave him only a dry crust of bread. But the simple

[88]Meyer, p. 387.
[89]Meyer. p. 389.

man ate the dry crust as though it were manna from heaven and thanked his wife with a full heart.

Then he would ask her for his kaftan or sheepskin coat or fur cape, and she would hand him the single pelt they shared between them. And he would put on the pelt and glow with pride at being so finely dressed.

Despite his poverty he was always happy. To the rest of the townspeople he was a laughingstock, for his shoes were poorly made and fetched less than any other shoemaker's. And they would all make fun of him, calling him a fool. But he never became angry with them, for in his heart of hearts he knew that his was the best lot of all.

When his rich friend returned to town, the poor cobbler ran to greet him and invited him to stay in his home, since the other's house had fallen into disrepair after so many years of neglect.

"I will gather all that I own into a bag and leave you the rest of my house for your needs," he said, embracing his friend.

So the clever man moved into his friend's humble quarters, but he was miserable there, for he had returned wanting to impress the townspeople with his wealth and attainments.

Then a rich man came to the clever man and asked him to make him a ring. The clever man used all his art to make an exquisite ring unlike any other. Engraved on it was a wonderful tree with many intricate paths winding around its base. But despite the ring's rare beauty, the buyer was dissatisfied with it, so the clever man's pride in his work turned to ashes in his mouth.

Then a second customer came to the clever man and ordered a ring made to display a certain precious gem. Again the clever man used all his knowledge of precious stones and gold to fashion an extraordinary ring, but when cutting the gem, he made a single mistake discernible only to himself. The customer was delighted with the ring, but the clever man felt only disgust.

And he suffered in his medical art as well, for those he healed attributed their cure to accident, and those he failed to heal blamed him.

And he received no satisfaction from the tailor in the town, for he always found fault with the garments he ordered - a missing stitch her, a crooked lapel there.

Whenever the simple cobbler visited him, he was always surprised to find his friend 's brow furrowed and his spirit vexed. "How is it that you are so clever, yet you are always so unhappy, while I am so simple and always content? Perhaps it would be better for you to have less understanding and be more like me."

"You are mad!" scoffed the clever man.

"May the Lord bring you up to my level some day," replied the simple man.

"Only if my reason should flee or I should become ill," said the clever man. "For you are nothing but a madman and a fool."

"We shall see who is the greater fool," replied the simple man.

"You shall never attain my wisdom as long as you live," said the clever man.

"All things are possible with God's help," said the simple man. "It is even possible that I should acquire your wisdom in the twinkling of an eye."

The clever man laughed heartily at his friend's words.

One night the king of the country was looking through his record books, and he discovered that in a certain town there lived two men, friends from childhood, who were known simply as the Simple Man and the Clever Man.

"I should like to meet this pair," said the king, so he sent a messenger to the town, a clever messenger to summon the clever man, and a simple messenger, the royal treasurer, to summon the simple man.

A short while later, the king learned that the governor of this region was dealing dishonestly and unfairly with the people in his charge. So he removed the governor from office and decided to appoint the simple man in his place. "For," thought the king, "what better ruler is there than a simple man who does not use his cleverness to deceive the people."

The simple man was overjoyed to receive a summons from the king. As he set out, he received the news that he had been appointed governor. So the simple man began to rule the region, bringing to his new position the same simple honesty and love of truth that had always guided his actions. And his people loved him and praised his wisdom.

One day one of his advisors said, "It is time for you to appear before the king, for that is what governors must do. And since the king is wise in the ways of science and languages, it is only fitting that you should learn them, too, so that you can talk to him.

So the simple man learned science and languages, but he still ruled his people with a pure and simple heart. And it occurred to him that his words to his clever friend had indeed come true, for he had now acquired the other's worldly wisdom.

Meanwhile the clever man received his summons to the king, but he said to the royal messenger, "Why should the king want to see an unimportant man like me?"

And the more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that there was no king at all. For wouldn't a king have his own wise men? Why should he send for someone in a distant town?

"There is no king!" he told the messenger. "You have been deceived."

"But I have a letter from the king!" protested the messenger.

"Did you receive it from the king's own hand?" asked the clever man.

"No," admitted the messenger, "one of the royal servants gave it to me."

"Have you ever seen the king with your own eyes?" asked the clever man.

"No," said the messenger. "But if there is no king, who rules the country?"

"When I was in Italy," answered the clever man, "I saw that seventy counselors governed there together. After they had governed for some time, others came to take their place."

And his wise words impressed the royal messenger.

"I will prove to you that what I say is true," continued the clever man. "Tomorrow we will journey together and discover whether this king of yours exists."

The next day they came to the marketplace and asked a soldier there, "Whom do you serve?"

"The king," replied the soldier.

"Have you ever seen him with your own eyes?"

"No," replied the soldier, "but surely my officer has."

But the officer had never seen the king, either.

From town to town the two wandered, everywhere seeking someone who had seen the king, but never did they come upon such a person. At last their money ran out, so they sold their horses, and when that money was gone, they became beggars. No longer did people answer their questions about the king, but instead threw stones at them and called them fools.

Meanwhile, the king heard about the wisdom of his new governor, the simple man. He promoted him to prime minister and built him a magnificent palace in the capital.

One day the two beggars reached the capital and passed by the house of a wonder-worker, a *baal shem.* Outside the house a crowd of afflicted people gathered, waiting to be healed. When the two beggars came to an inn, the clever man made fun of this wonder-worker.

"His healing is all a fraud," he jeered, "an even greater lie than the claim that there is a king!"

When the innkeeper heard his words, he beat him soundly, for the wonder-worker was well respected in the city.

So the clever man came to a judge to protest his harsh treatment at the hands of the innkeeper. The judge, too, beat him, but the clever man continued to take his case to higher and higher courts until he reached the palace of the prime minister.

When the guard brought him before the prime minister, the simple man recognized his friend immediately, but the clever man failed to recognize him, for the simple man was dressed in court clothes and bore himself with great dignity.

"Why are you here?" the simple man asked his friend.

"Because I claimed that the *baal shem* was a fraud, and they beat me," replied the clever man.

"So you still have faith in your cleverness," sighed the simple man. "You see that I have already reached your level, but you have yet to reach mine."

Out of compassion, the simple man ordered new clothes for his destitute friend and had fine food and drink brought before him. While they were eating, the clever man boasted that he had discovered that there really was no king governing the country.

"What do you mean?" cried the simple man. "I see his face daily!"

"Did you know his father and his grandfather?" challenged the clever man. "They just told you he was the king, and you believed their lies."

"How long will you cling to your cleverness and not see life?" cried the simple man. "You shall never merit the grace of simplicity."

Then a messenger came and summoned them to the devil. The simple man became frightened and ran to the *baal shem* for an amulet to protect him. And the *baal shem* gave him the amulet, and he returned home in peace.

But the clever man and his companion scoffed at the idea of a devil and boldly followed the messenger. When they reached the devil's kingdom, they found themselves suddenly mired in clay, and there they remained for several years, suffering torments. Yet all that time, they mistook their tormentors for men, not demons.

Then the simple man went to the *baal shem* and asked him to take him to the devil's kingdom so that he might see what had become of his friend. And they traveled there and found them mired in clay.

"See what these scoundrels are doing to us for no reason!" cried the clever man.

"So you still believe in your wisdom," replied the simple man," and think these are human beings. Despite your faithlessness, the *baal shem* will redeem you and set you free."

And the *baal shem* did. Only then did the clever man admit his folly and acknowledge that there was a king and servants who did his will.[90]

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[90]Frankel, pp. 538-44.

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THE CLEVER MAN AND THE SIMPLE MAN

Goals: to familiarize students with the story of The Clever Man and The Simple Man

to analyze the story and uncover its message regarding faith and science

to familiarize students with the Reform beliefs concerning faith

to understand the message of the story, and of Reform Judaism, that modern knowledge does not necessarily contradict belief in God

Materials: a copy of the story, a summary of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, various science experiments, the Bible, copies of the Reform Platforms, summaries of various philosophic proofs of the existence of God such as the Cosmological Argument, and the Teleological Argument (Watchmaker Theory), judge's robe, gavel, Inherit the Wind

Timetable:

00-05 Settle In

05-10 Read Story

10-20 Discussion of story

20-35 Trial Preparation

35-60 Trial

60-75 Discussion

75-80 Wrap up

Method:

00-05 Settle In.

05-10 Read Story. Read aloud the story of The Clever Man and The Simple Man

10-20 Discussion of story. The facilitator will ask the students to summarize the story. Students will then be asked what different aspects of the story may represent. If they have trouble with this, the facilitator should explain to them that the king represents God. The simple man represents those who have perfect faith in God, despite having never seen him and despite the many mysteries which surround him. The clever man represents those who believe that the knowledge acquired by mankind proves that God does not exist. The message sent to the simple man represents the Torah, which is the way a person of faith knows about God's existence. Then the following questions should be asked:

1) In the story, the simple man becomes prime minister. What does this say about Hasidism's expectations for those who have faith in God?

2) The clever man becomes mired in clay. What does this say about Hasidism's expectations for those who refuse to believe in God?

20-35 Trial Preparation.

The facilitator will explain to the students that we are going to have a court case. God is being put on trial, accused of not-existing. The class will be split into a prosecution team, which will try to prove that God does not exist, and a defense team, which only has to show that the prosecution's testimony does not prove, without a reasonable doubt, that God does not exist. The facilitator will serve as judge. After testimony has been given, the entire class will serve as the jury and vote on whether or not God is guilty of non-existence.

The prosecution team should select a head prosecutor, and everyone else will be expert witnesses. They will be given materials to examine, such as Darwin's theory of evolution, a pamphlet or video on how a fetus develops, science experiments, or any other materials which display man's understanding of how nature operates. The team should use their findings as evidence. They may also base testimony on the notion that nobody has ever seen God, and that we don't know where God came from. They should select members of their team to be witnesses on the stand and present their evidence.

The defense team should select a head attorney, and everyone else will be expert witnesses. They should come up with a defense for the charges they expect the prosecution team to make. Materials they may use to develop their case include the Bible, highlighted sections of the Reform platforms stating that science and faith are not contradictory, philosophic theories such as the Cosmological Argument and the Teleological Argument, and an excerpt from the play Inherit the Wind that explains how the creation narrative of the Bible and Darwin's theory can coexist. They may also develop their own theories and opinions. The defense should be reminded that they don't have to prove that God exists. They only have to show that belief in God is not negated by the prosecution team's claims.

35-60 Trial

The trial will proceed as follows: each attorney will give an opening statement; they will call witnesses who will be examined and cross-examined; and they will give closing arguments. When the testimony is over, the judge will instruct the students to become jurors. They should give up their previous roles

as prosecution or defense, and debate the case on the evidence that was presented. They should try to reach a consensus; but in the case of a hung jury, God will be acquitted. When they have reached a decision, the judge will announce the verdict.

60-75 Discussion

1) How did you vote in the trial; and why did you vote that way?

2) Do you believe that our inability to physically experience God, through sight and sound, is compelling proof that God doesn't exist?

3) Are there any scientific facts about the world that are compelling proof that God does not exist?

4) What is blind faith?

5) What is the traditional Jewish view of the origins of the Torah? (God gave it to the Jews; and it has been passed down from generation to generation without error. Therefore, it is an accurate record of God's words and deeds.)

6) Is the existence of the Torah suitable proof of God's existence?

7) What is the Reform view of faith versus knowledge? (Faith in God and the Torah is not incompatible with science and modern discoveries.)

8) How can belief in God and belief in science be compatible?

9) Do you believe in God, despite sometimes seemingly contradictory evidence? Why or why not?

10) Do you believe in mankind's modern understanding of the world, as achieved through scholarship, despite sometimes seemingly contradictory evidence from religious tradition? Why or why not?

11) What benefits are there to believing in God, even without absolute proof?

12) What place does faith have in our modern lives?

75-80 Wrap up. The facilitator will tie together the story, the trial, and the discussions, and get students' final opinions on the subject of faith.

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