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**MEDIEVAL JEWISH ASCETICISM:
A COMPARISON OF ASCETIC PRACTICE AS PROPOSED IN
BAHYA IBN PAQUDA'S HOVOT HA-LEVAVOT AND
THE SEFER HASIDIM OF THE HASIDEI ASHKENAZ**

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Ordination**

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Referee: Prof. Barry S. Kogan

To Barbara, Ben, Lou and Hannah, who have taught me
about the most powerful force in the universe, love...
and who posed the daily question:
"Daddy, when will your fesis be done?"

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I am greatly indebted to my advisor and friend, Rabbi Barry Kogan, who possesses the great gift of clarity of thought, in addition to his kind and pacifying manner. These attributes were of much comfort and value to the author of this thesis. I would additionally like to express my appreciation to Dr. Alvin Reines who in my final two years at the College has reintroduced me to the absolute joy of creative thinking.

DIGEST

The purpose of this thesis is to explore two very distinct varieties of asceticism as proposed by the Hasidei Ashkenaz in Sefer Hasidim (c.a. 1200) and by Bahya Ibn Paquda in Hovot ha-Levavot (c.a. 1080). I will seek to compare the two ascetic systems, and offer historical, cultural and psychological explanations for their different quality.

This study begins with a chapter which seeks to define the term "asceticism", and its relationship with mysticism. We then proceed to describe the varieties of ascetic practice as they have appeared in the context of history in general and Jewish history in particular, contrasting such practices with those of neighboring religions.

In the next chapter we take an in-depth look at the ascetic practice as proposed by Bahya in the ninth chapter of Hovot. The chapter considers Bahya within the context of his times and some of his supposed influences, and how these influences shaped the tone of Hovot in general and his asceticism in particular. Through a glimpse of the "duties" as a whole we will come to understand the purpose of his asceticism as a step in achieving the highest goal, the love of God.

The third chapter is a brief study of the Sefer Hasidim of the Hasidei Ashkenaz. Here, as in the preceding chapter, we examine the Sefer Hasidim in its cultural milieu and historical context, and how the variety of asceticism proposed by the Hasidei Ashkenaz as an atonement for this-worldly sin fits into

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the overall scheme of sin and repentance in the Sefer Hasidim.

The next logical step is to compare the two types of ascetic practice and to show how the practice of denial and/or self-infliction of pain has a distinctly different purpose in each work. At this point an attempt is made to further explore the psychological dimension or motive behind the practice of asceticism in order to show the most fundamental distinctions between Bahya and the authors of the Sefer Hasidim.

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ASCETICISM

The term "asceticism" is derived from the Greek word askesis, meaning practice, training¹ or exercise², and reflects that people's appreciation of bodily development and physical prowess. The modern understanding of asceticism has come to be a religious regimen often involving pain or self-conquest in either a spiritual or physical sense. This asceticism has as its object, not the perfecting of the physical body, but the development of the higher powers of the spirit.³

Historically, asceticism has been characterized by the practice of various austerities, ranging from the denial of comfort, emotion, desire, and activities, to the actual self-infliction of pain.⁴ Asceticism is found in practically all religions, especially in those containing some concept of dualism or opposition of soul and body.⁵ It is generally recognized in various religious traditions that the body tends to please its

1 Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Asceticism," p. 561.

2 Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1973 ed., s.v. "ascesis."

3 Hardman, Oscar, Asceticism: An Essay in the Comparative Study of Religion (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1924), p. 5.

4 New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967 ed., s.v. "Asceticism (Non-Christian)", by R. Arbesmann.

5 Encyclopedia Britannica, p. 561. We shall see, in the course of this paper, however, that not all asceticism is dualistic. One example might be the two Pharisaic weekly fasts which were quite simply a self understood expression of piety.

own senses, and this distracts the spirit from its more ethereal tasks. In virtually all religions man seeks a transcendent state. Reliance on some form of asceticism as a means to such an end is almost universal. Most spiritual disciplines involve the person's exercising control and restraint over his or her physical body.⁶ If for religious reasons, or for any reasons of personal satisfaction, a person aims at the acquisition of temperance, patience, chastity or meekness, he is attempting to train himself in a certain degree of asceticism by entering into a struggle with his animal nature. The ascetic regimen subjects the material part of his nature to the spiritual.⁷

Generally, two varieties of asceticism may be distinguished - the spiritual and the physical. The spiritual type includes vows of silence, the internal guarding of thoughts, spiritual reading, prayer, obedience, and acceptance of humiliation. Among the physical there are again two kinds - the negative and the positive. Negative physical asceticism includes the abstention from food, drink, or sexual relations, either permanently, temporarily or on a decreasing level. The positive physical type includes causing oneself to endure extreme heat or cold, homelessness, hard beds, wearing rough clothing, denying oneself sleep, omission of bathing, pilgrimages, flagellation and other

⁶ Encyclopedia of Religion, 1986 ed., s.v. "Spiritual Discipline," by William K. Mahoney.

⁷ Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. "Asceticism."

forms of self-mutilation.⁸

Upon closer examination of some of the most prevalent forms of asceticism, we find the negative practice of fasting in most traditions. Fasting serves to ward off demonic forces that may enter and harm the body. The aim of fasting is to reach a state of ritual purity and to thereby enter communion with the supernatural. In general, the control of the lower appetites promotes the cultivation of virtues.⁹ The positive asceticism of self-inflicted pain and mutilation has been practiced primarily by primitive societies with the aim of attaining spiritual liberation and freedom from the limitations of matter so as to attain the realization of the ultimate reality of God.¹⁰

For our own purposes, an important and primary criterion for determining the nature of asceticism is that the renunciation must be for a higher moral or religious purpose.¹¹ George Foot Moore maintains that it is the end or goal of self-deprivation which marks it as asceticism.¹² Additionally, ascetic acts must

8 Britannica, p. 562.

9 New Catholic Encyclopedia, p. 939ff.

10 Britannica, p. 563.

11 Bahya be Yosef ibn Paquda, Sefer Hovoth ha Levavoth, trans. Yehudah ibn Tibbon, IX:C, pp. 532-3, referred to by Allan Lazaroff in his article, "Bahya's Asceticism Against its Rabbinic and Islamic Background," in the Journal of Jewish Studies, etc. We will be using the Mansoor edition of Hovot. This citing may be found on page 408 of that translation.

12 Moore, George Foot, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim, Vol. II, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 263.

be voluntary.¹³ As we will learn from the asceticism of Bahya Ibn Paquda, an ascetic is one who is able yet refrains.¹⁴

ASCETICISM AND MYSTICISM

Asceticism is often associated with mysticism, and to a large extent this is a false assumption. Although genuine mysticism cannot exist without asceticism, the reverse is not true. One can be an ascetic without being a mystic.¹⁵

In mysticism, an ecstatic union with the divine is usually sought, and the soul prepares itself for deliverance from its material habitation.¹⁶ In most cases the earthly existence is regarded as illusion and evil, and God is conceived of as the source of spiritual life. Asceticism is practiced for the ultimate deliverance from the one and absorption into the other.¹⁷ In third century gnosticism the mystical ascent of the

13 Although it might seem obvious that asceticism would be voluntary, it is noted by Walter Kaelber in the Encyclopedia of Religion (s.v. "Asceticism") that some ascetic forms such as have been observed in preliterate societies, ie: fasting, seclusion, infliction of pain, and bodily mutation, have a more compulsory, less voluntary character.

14 Bahya Ben Joseph Ibn Paquda, The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart, trans. Menachem Mansoor, (London: Rutledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), IX:A, p. 403.

15 The Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. "Asceticism."

16 Hardman, Oscar, The Ideals of Asceticism, An Essay in the Comparative Study of Religion (New York: MacMillan Co., 1924), p. 74.

17 Ibid. p. 75.

soul from earth was always preceeded by ascetic practices.¹⁸

In Christianity asceticism was employed to gain a purity of the body and to achieve thereby a perfect union with deity. The Christian mystic would systematically strengthen and purify his soul in preparation for this high privilege.¹⁹

HISTORY OF ASCETICISM²⁰

Asceticism is often considered to have had its beginnings in primitive societies, or prehistory. The original Greek word askesis, as we have noted, referred to the attainment of the highest possible degree of physical fitness. With the development of philosophy and the training of the mind Isocrates would later say: "But above all, train your intellect; for the greatest thing in the smallest compass is a good mind in a human body."²¹

Asceticism appears in the religions of ancient India and in Buddhism,²² and seems to have entered Western philosophy around

¹⁸ Scholem, p. 49.

¹⁹ Hardman, p. 116.

²⁰ This is admittedly a general overview of the history of ascetic practice in a number of different religious traditions. Greater depths will be explored in the subsequent chapters with regard to Islamic and Christian practices and their relationship to Bahya and the Sefer Hasidim respectively.

²¹ Judaica, s.v. "Asceticism."

²² Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, s.v. "Asceticism." The principle in Buddhism is that the cause of suffering is craving, and thus renunciation and the practice of austerities are advocated.

the 6th century B.C.E. with the Pythagoreans and later Plato. Although at that time Greek ethics were predominantly naturalistic, Plato sometimes argued that one ought to repress bodily desires in order to free the soul in its search for knowledge.²³

Hellenistic²⁴ asceticism was predominantly a reaction against the materialism and hedonism of society, and against social immorality. The Cynics²⁵ and Stoics of the second century B.C.E. held to a narrower concept of complete detachment from the comforts and enticements of the world; the predisposition to accept every hardship in the pursuit of this ideal.²⁶ The Pythagorean principle held that the soul was to be purified by the denial and inhibition of the body and its impulses.²⁷

The undercurrent of asceticism rose to the surface in medieval philosophy with its emphasis on religious

23 Social Sciences, pp. 171ff .

24 For our purposes, the word "Hellenistic" designates that period of time between Alexander and Constantine, or approximately 336-331 B.C.E.

25 When the Cynics referred to a "life according to nature" this meant a life in which all necessary things were cut down to the barest minimum, the life of a wandering beggar, going barefoot and wearing a single rough garment...their food was lentils and cold water. It was in complete poverty and detachment from all worldly ties that the Cynics sought tranquility. From Armstrong, A.H., An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld), p. 117.

26 New Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. "Asceticism and Religion."

27 Ibid.

otherworldliness.²⁸ In the Christian world it was concluded that asceticism was necessary for the purification of the passions, as a means of loving God more, and as a gateway to mysticism.²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas called for "perfection" in the fulfillment of the commandments to love God and one's neighbor. Asceticism, in some instances extreme, was conceived as a means to progress in that "perfection" of holiness and as a help in the struggle against sin.³⁰

ASCETIC PRACTICE IN JUDAISM

It seems unusual to consider asceticism an integral part of Jewish practice, either in the present or in the context of any part of Jewish history. Certainly asceticism in the rabbinic period was limited since God was the acknowledged creator of both the world and the body. There has been discussion, however, on the issue of whether or not early Judaism actually possessed qualities of true asceticism.

George Foot Moore, while agreeing that Judaism cannot be described as purely ascetic, says that neither can it be called anti-ascetic.³¹ Yitzhak Baer, on the other hand, proposes a period in Jewish history, corresponding to the Hellenistic

²⁸ Social Sciences, pp. 171ff

²⁹ Britannica, p. 562.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Moore, p. 263

period, which begins with an idealistic ascetic stage.³² He claims that early Jewish pietists³³ were influenced by dualism and practiced a significant moral and spiritual discipline of asceticism. The Tannaim leaned toward it, and though it was later clearly rejected by Halacha, traces can be found in all walks of Jewish life after that period.³⁴

In a critical essay on Baer's theory, Ephraim Urbach writes that he doubts that early rabbinic piety was part of an ascetic discipline.³⁵ According to Urbach, the two primary characteristics of asceticism, the establishment of a special group of ascetics and actual mortification of the body, are missing in rabbinic piety.³⁶ Urbach feels that what we might witness in these early Jewish sects does not necessarily

32 Baer, Yitzhak, Israel Among the Nations: An Essay on the History of the Period of the Second Temple and the Mishnah, and on the Foundations of the Halacha and Jewish Religion (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1955).

33 Baer considers the Essenes to have been ascetics and regards them as the early pietists who founded rabbinic Judaism. The Essenes renounced personal property, practised obedience and silence and engaged in hard labour. Neither the Essenes nor the Qumran community, considered the most ascetical of all Jewish sects, ultimately regarded asceticism as an end in itself. (In Britannica, p. 562)

34 E.J. Vol. III, pp. 678-9. Baer also postulates that here lies the origin of the ascetic and monastic elements of Christianity.

35 Urbach, Ephraim E., "Ascesis and Suffering in Talmudic and Midrashic Sources", in Yitzhak F. Baer Jubilee Volume (Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel, 1960), p. 56.

36 Ibid., p. 67.

indicate an asceticism of the Hellenistic kind.³⁷

The themes and forms of rabbinic renunciation are peculiar to Judaism and are as such not ascetic in any historical (Hellenistic) sense.³⁸ The primary themes running through rabbinic renunciation are sin, the destruction of the Temple, and mourning, which are quite different from the dualistic Hellenistic motivations for ascetic practice.³⁹

Although abstinences could be self-imposed as a penance for a mortal sin, the prevalent characteristic of rabbinic asceticism was not pain and privation as such, but as a means to achieve an end. The following words from the book of Isaiah in the prophet's admonition to the people regarding the true intentions of their Yom Kippur fast perhaps describe the rabbinic attitude best:

...your fasting today is not such
As to make your voice heard on high
Is such the fast I desire,
A day for men to starve their bodies?
Is it bowing the head like a bulrush
And lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Do you call that a fast,

³⁷ The Essenes and the Therapeutae (ca. 130 B.C.E. - 70 C.E.), for example, represented independent movements of a definitely ascetic type indicating the emergence among the early Jewish sects of a monastic spirit.

³⁸ Lazaroff, p. 17.

³⁹ A good example might be that of Rabbi Zeira who is known to have fasted for a period of one hundred days in order that he might forget his Babylonian mode of teaching before emigrating to Palestine. Similarly, R. Sheshet, an Amora of the third century had his fasting serve as a substitute for sacrifice...his own fat and blood diminished by the fasting (since he was not able to make sacrifices at the temple). To call either of these men ascetic in the Hellenistic sense would be erroneous.

A day when the Lord is favorable?⁴⁰

For the prophets, then, any mortification of the body in and of itself could not please God. Rather, these acts could only be justified if they in some way altered one's moral actions.

Whatever the motivation for ascetic acts, national or personal, the rabbis disapproved of it. Asceticism was essentially a sin against the will of God. "A man who takes a vow⁴¹ is like one who builds an illegal altar, and if he fulfills it, like one who sacrifices on such an altar."⁴² And R. Isaac (ca. 300 C.E.) said: "Are not the things prohibited you in the Law enough for you that you want to prohibit yourselves other things?"⁴³

In Hovot, Chapter IX, Bahya provides us with the following definitions of asceticism given by the sages as requirements for the people of the Law:

One of them said, "Asceticism is the abstention from anything which may distract a man from God." Another said, "Asceticism is the avoidance of this world and putting little hope in it." Still another said, "Asceticism is tranquility of the soul and the severance of all its ties of attachment to the things which give it only pleasure and rest." "Asceticism is confidence in God," said one. "Asceticism is breaking one's hunger, covering one's nakedness, and the avoidance of all attachment to the rest," said another. "Asceticism is freeing the heart from all creatures, and the love of solitude." "Asceticism is

⁴⁰ Isaiah 58: 4-5.

⁴¹ Although we cannot be sure that asceticism is necessarily intended by or included in this statement, we can presume that one who takes the ascetic path must make a vow of some kind.

⁴² Ned. 22a.

⁴³ EJ, Vol. III, p. 679.

gratitude for God's graces and endurance of His trials;" and finally, "Asceticism is the soul's abstention from every pleasure and bodily comfort except the natural needs, which are absolutely necessary, and the driving away of all the rest from the soul.⁴⁴

Fasting is the only ascetic practice mentioned of universal application⁴⁵ and the practice most commonly referred to in a Jewish context. It appears in the Bible as a constant element of religious practice, as for example, in 1 Samuel:

They assembled at Mizpah, and they drew water and poured it out before the Lord; they fasted that day and there they confessed they they had sinned against the Lord.⁴⁶

In 1 Kings, Ahab resorts to fasting upon hearing Elijah's announcement of the judgment against him:

When Ahab heard these words, he rent his clothes and put sackcloth on his body. He fasted and lay in sackcloth and walked about subdued.⁴⁷

Perhaps the earliest account of such positive asceticism in the Bible may be found in Exodus:

And he (Moses) was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread and drank no water; and he wrote down on the tablets the terms of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.⁴⁸

The book of Daniel provides a classic precedent for the practice of positive asceticism⁴⁹. Although scholars of

⁴⁴ Hovot, Chap. IX, pp. 404-5.

⁴⁵ E.J. Vol. III, p. 678.

⁴⁶ 1 Samuel 7:6.

⁴⁷ 1 Kings 21:27.

⁴⁸ Exodus 34:28

⁴⁹ That is, asceticism for the purpose of attaining divine illumination.

Biblical asceticism have overlooked this section, it is a clear example of study combined with self-mortification which, as we pointed out earlier, are key elements in classical positive asceticism:

At that time, I, Daniel, kept three full weeks of mourning. I ate no tasty food, nor did any meat or wine enter my mouth. I did not anoint myself until the three weeks were over.⁵⁰

He (the man in a vision) said to me, "O Daniel, precious man, mark what I say to you and stand up, for I have been sent to you." After he said this to me, I stood up trembling. He then said to me, "Have no fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to get understanding, practicing abstinence before your God, your prayer was heard, and I have come because of your prayer.⁵¹

In the rabbinical view, fasting is mostly an expression of remorse over a sin, or sadness and grief, in order to aid concentration in prayer. Fasting is not a religious practice in its own right.⁵² In general, rabbinic "renunciation" is a negative act in that one afflicts the self by refraining from worldly goods and pleasures. It is important to note that there is no attempt to destroy the body through "positive" mortification.⁵³

During times of persecution throughout the medieval period, in the face of extermination or forced conversion, the Jewish

⁵⁰ Daniel 10: 2-3.

⁵¹ Ibid. 10: 11-12.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Lazaroff, p. 19 The term yisurin refers to a suffering as dictated by God. This would not be regarded as strict asceticism because it lacks the characteristic of being self-imposed.

doctrine of Kiddush ha-Shem emerged.⁵⁴ More specifically, during the period of the crusades acts of asceticism and the acceptance of suffering were numerous.⁵⁵ It is worth noting that even in this most difficult period there emerged no unusual acts of self-denial contradicting human nature, that is, there was no "positive mortification" nor was a special society of ascetics established.

ASCETICISM IN JUDAISM, ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

There are some fundamental differences between the major religions with regard to the motivations for ascetic practice. Perhaps the most important facet of both Jewish and Islamic systems of discipline is that they are ultimately dependent upon the will of God. The implication here is that love of God and duty to God are the ultimate achievements of both religions and thus asceticism is a means to such an end for both systems. Such a dependency serves to take complicated and varied systems of laws and regulations and relate them to a single "mind."⁵⁶ In the case of Judaism and Islam where traditionally there is a

54 Literally: Sanctification of the Name (God).

55 For a detailed account of such persecutions, see below, Chapter II, note 11, p. 4.

X 56 Hardman, p. 143. This provides for an intelligibility which guards against the type of superstitious observances found in more primitive sects.

strict adherence to a designated code of law⁵⁷, the ascetic is tempted to go beyond what is specified in that Law in order to win merit. He proceeds to add to his obligatory service something over and above the requirements of the Law, so that he may more securely establish his position.⁵⁸

In The Ideals of Asceticism, Oscar Hardman provides this illuminating, albeit apologetic, comparison of the fundamental characteristics of Christian ascetic motivations and those of Judaism and Islam:

The ascetic rule adopted by the Christian and that (practiced by the adherents of a) legalistic code (i.e. Jews and Muslims) serve entirely different purposes. To the legalist the Law is the all important basis of right relationship with God, received as containing His ultimate requirements, and observed in the hope of winning the reward of righteousness. The rule of the Christian, on the contrary, is in no sense a covenant or final standard or means of earning a coveted position, but only a statement in definite form of that which he proposes to himself for the adequate expression of the moral and spiritual power that has been added to him by grace. The legalist seeks to deserve his position by fulfilling the requirements of his code, but the Christian endeavours to live up to his rule because by the obligation of love he must thus give ethical expression to the sacramental fellowship which he enjoys.⁵⁹

Hardman further explains that while the legalist may repair any moral failure by a reattachment to his observance, in the case of the Christian the moral failure is implicit in his sin

57 In Judaism "Law" would be synonymous with Halacha, and in Islam with Shari'a.

58 Hardman, p. 147.

59 Ibid., pp. 154-5.

and no adjustment may be made by compensation.⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the best summary of the prevalent Jewish attitude toward asceticism may be the explanation of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, that while it is proper for a person to limit his superfluous enjoyments to guard against debasement of his character, it is wrong and sinful to deprive oneself of enjoyments in a manner that will cause one needless suffering and be detrimental to one's bodily and spiritual health.⁶¹

There are endless varieties of ascetic practice in different religious traditions. As we will come to see in our examples from Bahya's Hovot and the penitential sections of the Sefer Hasidim, the practice of asceticism is generally rooted in a well developed philosophical and theological system. Such a system provides the rationale or justification for the ascetic activity. It is for this reason that we will approach the subject of asceticism in the context of the overall religious system in which it is found.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 155. It should be noted that Oscar Hardman is presenting a standard argument of the Jewish "religion of law" vs. the Christian "religion of love." As we will come to see in the next two chapters, both Bahya and the authors of the Sefer Hasidim strive, in their ascetic systems, to go beyond the dictates of the law (for different reasons).

⁶¹ E.J., s.v. "Asceticism".

II

BAHYA IBN PAQUDA

Very little is known about the life of Bahya Ibn Paquda. There is even debate as to the precise time during which he flourished and wrote Sefer Hovot ha-Levavot (The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart), the work with which we are concerned. Sefer Hovot ha-Levavot is generally considered to have been written during the last third of the 11th century.

Bahya was a judge (dayan), an ethical preacher, and a "psychologist of religion."¹ Although he was an immediate successor to Saadia Gaon in the realm of religious philosophy, we shall see that he was in fact more influenced by Islamic Sufism than by the prevalent Jewish thought of the period.²

A distinctive feature of Bahya's thought is his attempt to present the Jewish faith as being essentially a great body of spiritual truth founded on reason, revelation (the Torah), and tradition; at the same time the joyful readiness of the God-loving heart to perform life's duties.³ Most important, for

¹ Allan Lazaroff, "Bahya's Asceticism Against Its Rabbinic and Islamic Background," Journal of Jewish Studies, (Vol. 21, 1970), p. 24.

² i.e. "Kalam"

³ Jewish Encyclopedia, 1902 ed., s.v. "Bahya Ibn Pakuda," by J. Broyde.

Bahya there is no blind belief. The Torah, in his view, directs one to use reason and knowledge as a means for proving God's existence. Neither pantheism nor extensive mysticism seem to be present in Bahya's nature. His ideas are sane and rational, and their expression clear and transparent.⁴ It is not the rationalization of Jewish dogma, nor the reconciliation of religion and philosophy in which Bahya is interested, but the purification of religion from within.⁵

THE DATING OF BAHYA'S LIFE

Placing Bahya at a precise time, and in the correct context of the surrounding thought, is important for our purposes. By doing so we are better able to discern what were the most cogent influences on Bahya's ascetic system, and indeed on his entire philosophy.

One solid clue to the dates of Bahya's life and work is in his citing the name of the Jewish grammarian Jonah Ibn Janah who lived in the first half of the 11th century, while skipping over Alfasi who lived in the second half of the 11th century.⁶ This would lead us to believe that Hovot ha-Levavot must have been

⁴ Husik, Isaac, A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1940) p. 81.

⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

⁶ Unfortunately there is no more specific information about the dates of either Ibn Janah or Alfasi.

written before Alfasi's work appeared.⁷ P. Kokowzoff writes:

...it appears highly improbable that a cultivated Spanish Jew in the earlier part of the 11th century or even later may not have had any notice of the most celebrated rabbinical authority of his native land.⁸

A.S. Yahuda, editor of both Arabic and Hebrew translations of Hovot ha-Levavot (publ. 1912), is of the opinion that Bahya wrote after Solomon Ben Judah Ibn Gabirol (1026-1070) and was influenced by him.⁹ It is important to note that Bahya does not always quote his sources, even when they are quite apparent. At the conclusion of Bahya's chapter on asceticism, for example, he quotes from an ethical will, "an excellent piece on asceticism... It was composed by one of the pietists as his last testament..." without naming this pietist. This habit of not mentioning names in his works would lead us to observe that the fact that he did not mention the name of Ibn Gabirol may not be decisive in resolving the relationship between the two men.¹⁰

7 P. Kokowzoff, "The Date of Life of Bahya ibn Paquoda," in Medieval Jewish Philosophy, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Arno Press, 1980), p. 13.

8 Ibid., pp. 17-18. Additionally, Ibn Gabirol was aware of Bahya, and probably borrowed material for his book "Book of Improvement of Moral Qualities" from Bahya's Hovot ha-Levavot. Moses Ibn Ezra also knew of Hovot and mentions it in his "Treatise of the Garden."

9 Husik, p. 80. Yahuda believes this despite the fact that Bahya gives no credit to Ibn Gabirol at any time. This is probably due to the fact that Bahya wished regarded his work as free of the influence of the Jewish philosophical literature which preceded him.

10 Bahya Ben Joseph Ibn Paquda, The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart, ed. Menahem Mansoor (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul), Introduction, p. 37. Hereafter this volume will be

Finally, there is this telling paragraph in the work by Moses Ibn Ezra (1092-1167), Treatise of the Garden:

...In speaking he (an earlier author, the writer of Kitab al-Tanqui) was followed by the pious and excellent R. Bahya ibn Paquda in the Guide-book to the Duties of the Hearts; for he says of such men (bad scholars): they use all efforts in seeking to acquire the knowledge of the Talmud, to open what is closed in it, to elucidate what is difficult in it, and to understand all its exceptional decisions; but they neglect to acquire the knowledge of things necessary for minds and that of the duties of the hearts. He spoke thus when men were men and time was time. But what would he have said if he had seen the men of our time, a generation of orphans...¹¹

This passage, particularly the words "men of our time," gives us good evidence that Bahya must have lived much earlier than the time of Ibn Ezra, who flourished, as we know well, in the earlier part of the 12th century.

From these references and observations we may surmise that Hovot ha-Levavot was probably written between 1080 - 1090.

BAHYA AND THE DUTIES OF THE HEART

For Bahya, the study of religion may be divided into two areas. One is the knowledge of the external duties of the body and its members; the other is the internal knowledge of the secret duties of the heart. The duties of the heart are concerned with man's relationship to God and are rational, not

referred to in the notes as Hovot. Mansoor's translation of Hovot ha-Levavot into English is the primary source of Bahya's work used in this paper, in addition to the material quoted from Mansoor's own introduction to the text.

¹¹ P. Kokowzoff, p. 20.

revelational.¹² That is to say, the duties of the heart are commanded by the mind.¹³ God has graced us with both the outward body and the inward soul, but ultimately it is our rational self which dictates the duty we will perform.

The first of Bahya's duties concerns itself with the unity of God as being the highest principle. The ultimate unity is the love of God. To get to the latter from the former, one must pass through several previous states, including humility, self-reckoning, and abstinence. The soul inclines to this, because it turns naturally toward that which is similar to itself, enlightened as to its true nature by the intellect. Thus the intellect is meant to dominate passion.¹⁴

All the duties of the heart are either positive or negative. Among the positive duties are the belief in the creator of the world, obedience to God, meditation on creation to arrive at the knowledge of God, and the love of those who love Him, the hatred of those who hate Him. Among the negative: One should not bear grudges, take vengeance, and not use mind or heart to sin against God.¹⁵

These are the ten duties in encapsulated form from Bahya's introduction to Hovot: 1) I declared the pure assertion of the unity of God to be the highest principle; 2) Being as it is

12 Lazaroff, p. 26.

13 Hovot, Intro, p. 89.

14 Mansoor, Intro to Hovot, p.64.

15 Mansoor, Introduction, p. 87ff.

impossible to conceive of God by His essence, we must know Him by His creations, (creatures); 3) Observing His sovereignty and the obedience due Him - I establish obedience to God; 4) Since God has no peer in power we should rely wholly upon God; 5) As God has no equal we must purely worship Him; 6) The above results in humbleness He deserves from us, thus humility; 7) Being as people are prone to neglect the obligation of obedience, we can correct this error by repentance and atonement; 8) To realize all obligations both external and internal, we can only achieve it by reckoning with our souls for the sake of God; 9) The pure assertion of the unity of God cannot be truly accomplished in the believer's soul so long as his heart is drunk with wine of love for this world...Only if he endeavors to empty his heart...can he achieve the perfect assertion of unity - thus, asceticism; 10) Our obligation to love and fear God.

The eighth stage, that of self reckoning denies the dogmatism that may be the result of a positive religion. All religious life demands constant re-examination.¹⁶ The penultimate or ninth stage would appear to be the fear of God. Thus the love of God that is the highest stage is actually the dispelling of the fear of God.

It is in the final three stages that one passes from the more outward expressions of the duties to the more inward. In these stages the duties become less those of overt demonstration, and more the kind that alter the spirit on the inside, ie: self

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.61-63.

reckoning, asceticism, and true love of God.

Everyone engages in some level of self-reckoning, but after going through the disciplines of Torah, practice, zeal, abstinence, cleanliness, purity and piety, one enters that mystical state where one no longer needs the senses to perceive. The ten stages are, then, a continuum in which a person proceeds toward the inward, and ultimately to the highest form, that of unity with God. Bahya believed that religious man can never truly view the highest form (God) directly, and therefore needs the polished mirror (his soul) to reflect this form.

In Bahya's system man is understood to be composed of a soul and a body, and so we are obliged to obey God outwardly as well as inwardly. Outward obedience might include praying, fasting, learning (Torah), wearing a tallit, or putting up a mezuzah. Inward obedience would be expressed in the heart's assertion of the unity of God and in the belief in God and the Torah.¹⁷

Bahya discerns between positive and negative obedience.¹⁸ and cites as scriptural evidence for positive obedience the words of the v'ahavta¹⁹; the example of negative obedience may be found

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁸ In Bahya's system this seems to correspond to Toraitic positive and negative commandments, (Mitzvot aseh and Mitzvot lo ta'aseh).

¹⁹ Deut. 6:5ff - You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart...

in the ten commandments.²⁰

"When I learned of the great stress that scripture and tradition put on the duties of the heart I began to train my soul in them, urging my soul to embrace both the theory and the practice. Whenever I discovered one aspect of these duties, it led me to another, and that one to still another, until their magnitude became wide and too difficult to remember with precision. Fearing the oblivion of what I had retained in my heart, fearful that I might forget what I had accumulated in my mind, remembering the little help I could get in this matter from my contemporaries, I decided to put it down in a book..."²¹

Bahya, having studied the post-Talmudic sources, found to his astonishment that the knowledge of the duties of the heart was neglected. He reasoned that because we are not questioned about them they are not adequately regarded. Yet Bahya felt that these duties are the very basis of all human responsibility; if this were not the case, all the "duties of the members" would be of no avail.²²

I turned to the traditions of our fathers and found that their devotion to the duties involving their own souls was much stronger and deeper than their interest in jurisprudence...²³

Bahya regarded the duties of the limbs as limited in number, (613 in all), but the duties of the heart are many and their details innumerable.²⁴ At first Bahya considered that perhaps these internal duties were so clear that they needed no further

²⁰ Exodus 20:1ff.

²¹ Hovot, Introduction, pp. 99-100.

²² Ibid., p. 87.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 92.

clarification, but upon examining history he found that men were far from fulfilling them.²⁵ It was in this spirit, then, that Bahya undertook to carefully define those internal duties which provide a basis for the "duties of the limbs." It is to the ninth degree of the "duties of the heart" which we now turn our attention.

BAHYA'S ASCETICISM

For Bahya, the object of all religious practice is the exercise of self-control, the curbing of passion, and the placing all personal possessions and all the organs of life at the service of the Most High.²⁶ Each of the sections of Hovot ha-Levavot describes one facet of this spiritual life. The chapter on asceticism²⁷ is but one of these sections and, along with the preceeding section on self-reckoning²⁸, make up the "external" aspects of one's religious life.

Ultimately, the goal of all the "duties", including ethical self-discipline, established in Hovot is the love of God. Those who are imbued with this love, writes Bahya, find easy every sacrifice they are asked to make for their God; and no selfish

25 Ibid.

26 Broyde, Jewish Encyclopedia, p. 453.

27 Hovot, Chap. IX.

28 Ibid., Chap. VIII.

motive mars the purity of their love.²⁹ In order for the soul to attain the true love of God, reason must get the upper hand over the soul's desires.³⁰ The pious man is in duty bound to accept life in this world as a task, but he must remain inwardly detached from it, seeing as the true goal of his life communion with God, and the preparation for the world to come.³¹

In Bahya's psychology the faculty of the spirit is sound judgment or the rational soul, and the faculty of the body is desire, or the animal soul.³² In Chapter III of Hovot Bahya describes the Creator's purpose in creating mankind in order to train the soul and test it in this world. God combined man's soul with the appetitive faculty for the sake of his body's growth and well-being, and as long as the two are joined together, man craves various kinds of objects and ends.

When instinct overcame reason, and the soul submitted to it, then the soul inclined man to excesses which lead to the downfall of his affairs. Then it was that he needed

29 Broyde, p.453.

30 Husik, pp. 104-5.

31 Guttman, Julius, Philosophies of Judaism (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1964) p. 109.

32 Lazaroff, p.27 It is important to note that despite the dualism between the "animal" body and the "spiritual" soul Bahya did not have a negative attitude toward the body. In Hovot II:E Bahya preceeds a "tour" through the wonderous workings of the human body with the following: ...having seen the mark of goodness, wisdom, and ability manifested in (man) turn now to thorough meditation upon the origins of his exterior composition, namely, his body and soul. You see that the body of man is composed of incompatible elements and various natures, all combined by the Creator's ability and united by His wisdom to form an orderly and sound body, uniform in appearance although divergent in nature.

asceticism...to abstain from pleasure and relaxation so as to restore balance and reorganize his affairs in the world.³³

In his citing an ethical will at the close of chapter X Bahya writes:

...therefore O brother, choose for yourself what constitutes your deliverance and success both in the world and in religion. Try always to refrain from evil habits and prefer rather to strive for the affairs of the other world. Make reason your emir and prudence your vizier. Make knowledge your leader and asceticism your companion.³⁴

In Chapter IX of Hovot, Bahya begins by distinguishing "general" asceticism, which is for the welfare of our bodies and the better management of our affairs in this world, from "special" asceticism, which is for the welfare of our souls in the other world. Those who practice special asceticism will act as "physicians of religion and the soul."³⁵ Inasmuch as instinct has conquered most of the people of the Law, these "physicians" must fight back with a special asceticism. They must confront the instincts if they are to go back to the limits of moderation prescribed by the Law.³⁶

Bahya claims that abstinence has two causes: religion, and the world itself. Those who follow the ascetic way for the sake

33 Hovot, Chap. IX, p. 402.

34 Ibid., Chap. X:G, p. 444.

35 Ibid., Chap. IX, p. 403.

36 Ibid., p.404 - According to Bahya the purpose of the Law (as regards asceticism) is to give the mind mastery over the entire soul (including the pleasures and desires) and to establish the superiority of the mind...."It is known that dominance of the instincts is the root of every sin..."

of religion are the "true ascetics" and they are divided into the following three categories:

1) The most perfect and highest ascetics. They resemble the spiritual beings. They abstain from anything that will distract them from God. They wander in the wilderness, etc.³⁷

2) The moderate ascetics. These people abstain from luxuries and patiently conquer their soul's desires for them. They do not, however, flee the inhabited world.

3) The lowest ascetics. Asceticism is in their hearts and consciences, but they share with others the cultivation of the world.

Strange as it might seem, this last and weakest form of asceticism is the one which Bahya defines as closest to that prescribed by the Law. Bahya was led by his reason alone to advocate a type of monasticism, but it was the Torah, the Law, which kept him to a middle path.³⁸

When Bahya refers to the golden mean, his source for this is not reason as such, nor is it the Aristotelian text³⁹, but a

37 Bahya points out that this particular branch of the true ascetics is far removed from the moderate view the Law proposes for askesis, for they lose the world completely and the the Law is against this. (note Isaiah 45:18 - "...The Creator of heaven who alone is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who alone established it. He did not create it a waste, but formed it for habitation.)

38 Heinemann, I., Ta'ame ha-Mitzvot Be-sifrut Yisrael. Jerusalem, 1954, p. 55.

39 Aristotle's doctrine of the mean signifies that there is a due and right proportion which should be observed in all our actions. Each virtue is considered as a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of defect. "We must take into account the things to which we are easily inclined. Some of us are more prone by nature to one thing than another. Our natural inclination will be made known from the pleasure or sorrow we experience. We must then draw ourselves to the opposite, for by leading ourselves far away from sin we shall arrive at the mean."

biblical precept. One of the biblical sources for Bahya's stress on moderation comes from Proverbs:

Put fraud and lying far from me;
Give me neither porverty nor wealth
Provide me only with the food I need.
If I have too much, I shall deny thee and say:
"Who is the Lord?"
If I am reduced to poverty, I shall steal
And blacken the name of my God.⁴⁰

The true ascetics mentioned above are considered by Bahya as the farthest removed from the way of moderation prescribed by the Law.

The Law is against completely abandoning the cultivation of the world. We find the most blatant scriptural reference to the avoidance of extreme asceticism in Numbers, where we read that the Nazirite "shall make atonement for himself for sinning against the soul."⁴¹ The Rabbis would ask: Against what soul did he sin? Against his own, depriving himself of wine. Does it not follow kal va homer that if one who abstains from wine must make atonement, then one who deprives himself from all comfort and enjoyment must all the more so make atonement?⁴²

Bahya makes clear in an earlier chapter of Hovot that "overdoing it" will not be pleasing to God, for one is

St. Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics, trans. C.I. Litzinger, O.P. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), p. 165.

⁴⁰ Proverbs 30:8-9

⁴¹ Numbers 6:11.

⁴² Nazir, 19a.

likely to be led to things forbidden by God.

If a man does something permissible in a moderate manner, he is doing good, as it is said (Ps. 112:5): 'Well is it with the man that dealeth graciously and lendeth, that ordereth his affairs rightfully', but if he strays from moderation, he is failing, for in doing so he is led to things forbidden by God.⁴³

It is clear that Bahya rejects complete withdrawal from the physical life of the community, but he asserts that it is proper for an elite group, that is, for the physicians of the soul. Even they may not withdraw completely from organized society, but must direct the moral life of the community.⁴⁴ Such people have always been present - in the prophets, and among the pious of every generation who have followed the ascetic way.

BAHYA'S ASCETICISM AND THE "LAW"

As we have seen, Bahya considers man to possess traits which drive him to pursue bodily pleasures, thus throwing aside the constraints of his mind. In addition, there are those traits which drive him to despise this world and to abstain from its affairs because of the misfortune and grief in it. Neither of these traits are good exclusively. One of God's greatest gifts to us, therefore, is the Law "...which gives a man his part of the pleasures of this world while preserving for him his reward

⁴³ Hovot, Chap. III:C, p. 192.

⁴⁴ Guttman, p. 425, n. 87.

in the next."⁴⁵ The purpose of the Law is to give the mind mastery over the entire soul, including its desires for pleasure, and to establish superiority of the mind.⁴⁶

Bahya outlines the three areas in which asceticism properly applies, as prescribed by our Law:

1) Our mutual relations with other people: Our greeting them warmly and happily, with humility and selflessness; our mercy and compassion toward others in ways that will please God.

2) That which is special to us - our bodily senses and outward members: Those things forbidden to us, ie: the 365 negative commandments; and those permissible, ie: the various lawful pleasures we are allowed to enjoy.

Those things forbidden fall into one of the following categories:

- I. Those things which it is our nature to desire.
- II. Those things which we neither desire nor reject.
- III. Those things which the soul either hates or rejects.

Thus one abstains from everything from which God has ordered one to abstain, and trains one's soul until it comes to hate and reject all the pleasures forbidden it. When you have reached this stage of asceticism, that is, abstaining with no strain on your nature, then you are in the class of those immune to sin and error.⁴⁷

Those things permissible fall into one of the following three categories:

- I. Eating what one needs to survive.
- II. Eating lawful delicacies, but not overindulging
- III. Immoderate indulgence until they drive one to forbidden pleasures.

⁴⁵ Hovot, Chapter III:C, pp.185-6. This particular translation is of the Oxford manuscript. The Paris manuscript has this variation: "(the Law) denies man his desire, or his purpose in this world."

⁴⁶ Ibid., Chap. IX:B, p.404.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Chap. IX, p. 412.

Practice asceticism in the lawful pleasures up to the point where you rank them with the forbidden ones.⁴⁸ Do not let the asceticism of your heart prevent you from caring for your sustenance.⁴⁹

3) That which is special to us in our conscience and inner characteristics: Thoughts must not turn to bodily pleasures, attainment of rest, mastery, pride in the perishables of this world, but rather asceticism for the sake of God alone. Cut short hopes in this world, reckon with yourself, and rely only upon God.⁵⁰

Finally Bahya asks the question: "What is the difference between our asceticism and that of our ancestors?" The implication seems to be that our ancestors were of a different nature, as they preceded the dictates of the Law. He points to the examples of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Job as men of pure minds, and thus fewer laws were required to keep them in perfect obedience to God. They did not need the type of asceticism that departs from the moderation prescribed by the Law.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Bahya is saying that one must be as zealous in the asceticism of those things permissible as one is with the things forbidden by the law. In this way, one strengthens one's ability to abstain.

⁴⁹ Bahya details here the control of the senses and movements of the exterior members (eyes, ears and most important, tongue) as crucial to ascetic practice. It is the most difficult of all to master, (v. Psalm 34:13). Bahya writes: "Try to restrain your hand from handling anything of this world which is not yours. Rather, use your hands to perform duties to God." (Hov., Chap. IX, p. 416) The control of our senses can never be completed if even one of them is neglected - for they are pearls on a string... (Ibid., p. 418)

⁵⁰ Hovot, Chap. IX:E, p. 419.

⁵¹ Ibid., Chap. IX:G, p. 422.

THE POSSIBLE INFLUENCES ON BAHYA'S THOUGHT

Although Bahya quotes frequently from Bible, Talmud and Midrashim, he does so rarely from post-Talmudic sources. As we saw earlier, he deplores the absence of a post-Talmudic ethical work. Bahya felt his own work to be the compensation for that loss, and regarded himself as more or less free of the influence of Jewish philosophical literature.⁵²

Saadia Gaon (892-942) is often cited as a probable influence on Bahya. Like Bahya, Saadia finds the sources of knowledge of God's Law and religion in sense and reason, written Law and tradition.⁵³ Saadia also differentiates between the "rational" commandments - those which reason determines as right or wrong - and those which revelation alone characterizes as obligatory - the "traditional" commandments.⁵⁴ Yet as we look to Saadia's writings on the subject of asceticism, we see that by and large the Talmudic approach was followed.⁵⁵ Saadia mentions asceticism among the various conceptions of an ideal life. But he finds asceticism unacceptable as the correct way, since if it were practiced by everyone it would lead to the end of human existence on earth. For Saadia, man is constituted of both body and

⁵² Mansoor, Intro to Hovot, pp. 36-7.

⁵³ Husik, pp. 82ff.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Encyclopedia Judaica, 1972 ed., s.v. "Asceticism," v.III, p. 683.

spirit, hence, both must be attended to.⁵⁶

Now I considered carefully their allegations (the ascetic renunciation and rejection of this world) and found them to be for the most part correct, except that they go to impossible extremes in abandoning the amenities of civilized existence. For they leave out of consideration the essentials of sustenance, clothing, and shelter. Nay they fail to think of their very lives, for by renouncing marriage they cause the process of procreation to be interrupted. But if this were proper, all men would have followed such a course, and if they were to do so, then the human species would die out...⁵⁷

Bahya highly recommended Saadia in the area of theology, but asceticism is a different topic. As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Bahya is not so much the rational theologian and philosopher as he is a psychologist of religion and an ethical preacher. It has been speculated, therefore, that he probably did not consider himself to have borrowed much from Saadia in these areas of thought.

As we begin to understand more about the role of Islamic Sufism in Bahya's philosophy of askesis, we will see that Jewish tradition acted much as a filter. Bahya accepted only those aspects of Sufism which did not oppose the concrete forms or principles of the tradition.⁵⁸ Allan Lazaroff, in his thorough study of the influences on Bahya's asceticism, states that he is not certain Bahya accepted only those teachings which were supported by the rabbis. In his dualistic neoplatonic

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Saadia Gaon, The Book of Beliefs and Opinions, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), Treatise 10, Chapter 4, p. 366.

⁵⁸ Lazaroff, p. 31.

psychology, Bahya, in fact, went beyond the rabbinic position.⁵⁹ Reason itself could not be trusted if it contradicted the Torah. Reason might take you beyond the Torah, but it must not go against it.

It is obvious from his terminology, style and language, that Islamic Sufism had a great influence on Bahya. At the same time it is difficult to establish the exact sources upon which he drew. Before we endeavor to explain that connection, it is advisable to briefly note the origins and definitions of Sufism and Zuhd, Islamic Asceticism.

In the first century of Islam the Muslims lived on a scale of luxury unknown to their ancestors. The pious members of the community looked back nostalgically to the simplicity of their origins in Medina, and were concerned that Islam might already be endangered. As a protest to this they dressed in a rough wool (suf) and held themselves aloof from the lower material world.⁶⁰

59 Ibid. For Bahya, Neoplatonism provided the mediating agency between the intelligible and the sensible, between God and the world, between unity and plurality. Bahya has been credited with being the first thinker in the history of religious philosophy to identify God with unity.

Still, Bahya did not adopt the vital neoplatonic doctrine of emanation. Bahya is thought to have been influenced by Plotinus in his equating pantheistic with monotheism. It was this type of influence which lead Bahya to understand "mind" as a necessary component of religious life - for without knowledge of God there can be no relation to God. Mind proclaims the intelligible world and guides the soul to it. It is important to understand, however, that Bahya did not intend to further philosophical speculation; rather it was his desire to deepen and internalize the religious life.

60 Williams, John A., Islam (New York: George Braziller, 1962), p. 137.

The early manifestations of asceticism in Islam arose out of fear of divine punishment or reaction to materialism.⁶¹ Islam developed a practical unsystematic renunciation. This developed into a mysticism through its contact with neoplatonism, and it lost its purely Islamic Orthodox character.⁶²

Zuhd began as an abstinence from sin, from all that estranges one from God, and evolved into a renunciation of all that is created. By the third century of Islam, the meaning of Zuhd became fixed: a renunciation not only of dress, lodging and pleasant food, but also of women.⁶³ The earlier rabbinic renunciation similarly received a new basis in dualistic neoplatonism.

To the extent that Bahya was Sufi-influenced, this dualism likewise affected his thinking.⁶⁴ It is important to understand,

61 Lazaroff, p. 32.

62 Ibid., p. 22. The juxtaposition of the earlier Orthodox Islam to the neoplatonic mysticism which developed might be understood in this way: The earlier Islamic belief would attempt to close the gap between God and the world by understanding this gap to be reflected in duality of mind and body. This could be accomplished by the proper use of reason. In contrast, the ensuing mysticism denied the duality - there is no world apart from God. They understood everything in terms of a dynamic pantheism derived from the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation.

63 Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, 1922 ed., s.v. "Zuhd," by L. Massignon, p. 661.

64 Lazaroff, p. 23. The question arises as to whether Bahya's neoplatonic development turns rabbinic renunciation into a Hellenistic variety of askesis in the same way it did with Islamic asceticism. It should be noted that while Bahya's dualism of body and soul might give that impression, he never truly departs from the themes or concrete forms of rabbinic renunciation.

however, that Bahya did not consider the freeing of the soul to be for a mystical union with God, or for knowledge of the spiritual world. Rather, he sought to free the soul for the proper worship of God with one's heart.⁶⁵ The distinction between the duties of the heart and the duties of the limbs derives originally from a Mutazilite source.⁶⁶ In the Islamic world this evolved into an ascetic literature which regarded the outward expression of piety as less significant than internal devoutness.⁶⁷

Bahya never specifically identifies a source from another religious tradition and he quotes Islamic sources anonymously. Thus we can only speculate as to his influences from any given area. Some say that Bahya's work shows the literary influence of moral-ascetic writers in the Islamic tradition who used the term "qulub" (hearts) in their titles. One such writer is al-Makki (d.996) who uses a classification of devoutness corresponding to Bahya's own. Al-Makki's highest degree, coincidentally enough, is the love of God.⁶⁸ Islamic writer al-Basri calls asceticism a science of the heart - "a grain of genuine piety is better than a

65 Mansoor, Introduction, p. 31.

66 The Mutazilites were of the great theological school of Islam, al-Mu'tazila (750-900). Among their main theses is the duty to "command the good and forbid the bad," that is, to take an active part in making the true doctrine of God effective. Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, s.v. al-Mutazila, p. 421, and Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. "Kalam," Vol. 10, p. 703.

67 Mansoor, Introduction, p. 30.

68 In the case of al-Ghazzali, with whom we will deal below, the love of God is only number six on his continuum of duties.

thousand-fold weight of fasting and prayer."69

All Muslim writers on asceticism and Sufism used the ideas of al-Muhasibi (d.857) who stressed the need for inner purification by self-discipline.70 Al-Muhasibi wrote a Remedy for the Sickness of the Heart emphasizing the importance of the correlation between the external actions of the limbs and the intentions of the heart.71 There seems to be a strong link between Bahya and al-Muhasibi with respect to asceticism. Al-Muhasibi engages in an introspective analysis, inasmuch as stress is laid on inner and subjective asceticism - renunciation of intentions and desires.72 In al-Muhasibi man is angel and beast combined - the angel being pure reason and spiritual; the beast being the lower consciousness whose function is to preserve the body. There is a permanent tension between them. There can be neither pure reason nor complete independence from the material world.73

THE INFLUENCE OF AL-GHAZZALI

The outstanding theologian-mystic al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) is the only specific example scholars have been able to advance of

69 Lazaroff, p. 22.

70 Yahuda, p. 72.

71 Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, s.v. al-Muhasibi, p. 410.

72 Ibid., s.v. "Zuhd," p.661.

73 Mansoor, Introduction, pp. 32-3.

Sufi influence on Bahya.⁷⁴ Al-Ghazzali's greatest work on Sufism is Ihya 'ulum al-din, (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) - a complete guide for the devout Muslim to every aspect of religious life - worship and devotional practices, daily conduct, purification of the heart, and the mystic way.⁷⁵ Al-Ghazzali wrote this because he felt that religious knowledge had become, in his day, a means of worldly advancement, whereas he believed such knowledge was for the purpose of attaining salvation in the world to come.⁷⁶ Al-Ghazzali wrote:

...the mystical element in Islam is the most essential, vital part... the Sufi must cut off his attachments to the world completely, and free his heart from them, until their existence or non-existence is alike to him. Then he should go into retreat alone and occupy his mind with nothing but

74 This opinion comes from editor Mansoor's introductory comments to Hovot. It should be noted that Hava Lazarus-Yafeh points out in a minor note, (#2, p.452) in her Studies in al-Ghazzali, that Bahya was not influenced by al-Ghazzali. Rather, they both drew from a common Christian source.

A.S. Yahuda claims that Bahya depended on al-Ghazzali to a great extent. His evidence is the discovery that passages from Hovot, Chapter II were largely identical with the teleological treatise of al-Ghazzali's: Al-hikma fi mahlugat allah. Yehuda admitted, however, that both might be traced to an earlier common source.

D.H. Baneth, writing in the Magnes Anniversary Volume, (Jerusalem 1938) cites a work, ascribed to an unknown Christian author, as containing passages common to Bahya and al-Ghazzali in Hovot and Al-Hikma respectively. There are also passages in Hovot that appear in the Christian work that do not appear in al-Ghazzali implying that the former is more likely the source for Bahya than the latter.

Baneth notes that Bahya could have found his ideas in Sufi works that preceeded al-Ghazzali. But as the great theologian virtually eclipsed the Sufi world, Bahya's independence of his work should be all the more appreciated.

75 Encyclopedia of Islam, s.v. al-Ghazzali, pp. 108ff.

76 Ibid.

God...then the light of God will shine upon him.⁷⁷

For al-Ghazzali this world is no more than the antechamber to the great hall of the world to come. It is only in this world that a person can prepare himself for the world to come. He wished to give deeper content to the religious life of those Muslims who, while keeping the commandments, were doing so mechanically and without any inner devotion. At the same time al-Ghazzali insisted upon the rigorous observance of these commandments.⁷⁸ For al-Ghazzali, the purpose of the commandments were to enable man to master his baser impulses, to purge his heart of its vices and fortify it with virtues, and to bring him near in thought to eternal knowledge.⁷⁹ Ultimately, virtue and moral perfection are the necessary conditions for the supreme degree of knowledge and love of God. The commandments alone are not sufficient.

Al-Ghazzali did not preach an extreme asceticism like that practiced by many Sufis. He regarded such an attempt to escape from the world as no less an enslavement to it than the eager pursuit of its vanities.

The world, wealth, and body are like the deadly poison of a snake... A man must be abstemious in his enjoyment of these worldly blessings and not rush headlong after his appetites, knowing the harm they can do... He must choose only what will stand him good on his way to the next world. Above all he must beware of having his attention deflected from his

⁷⁷ Smith, Margaret, An Introduction to the History of Mysticism (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1930), p. 64.

⁷⁸ Lazarus-Yafeh, p. 12.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 422-23.

main purpose by undue occupation with these accessories which are of no value in themselves.⁸⁰

The object of the knowledge that al-Ghazzali encourages is the understanding of the "states of the heart." To eradicate it is sinful; to strengthen it is virtuous.⁸¹ One strengthens this understanding by teaching a person to recognize the symptoms, causes, and consequences of the attributes of the heart, good and bad.

CONCLUSION

At the close of the chapter on asceticism, Bahya expounds upon the "conditions of special asceticism, as proposed by a pious man."⁸² It is a description of a moderate Moslem ascetic (a Sufi), perhaps al-Ghazzali, but we cannot know for sure. The conflict between stressing the "inward" or the "outward" was one to which both Bahya and al-Ghazzali both vigorously addressed themselves.

Despite what seems to be the obvious influence of al-Ghazzali, Bahya's system of asceticism is by comparison very limited. One concludes from this that Bahya was, all in all, an independent thinker. Rejecting the Sufi extreme of endangering one's life, Bahya restricted self-abnegation primarily to fasting. As we have seen above, placing oneself in danger is a

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 428-9.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 12ff.

⁸² Hovot, Chap. IX:D, p.410.

form of "trying" God, and is therefore forbidden by the Law.⁸³

Despite the influence of the Sufis, Bahya remained true to the themes of traditional Judaism in his description of the love of God. One might say that Bahya gave a philosophical interpretation to rabbinic doctrines. Bahya, it seems, drew heavily on the pre-existing Islamic philosophies, and investigated the subject of asceticism as well as other ideas from a Jewish perspective. Especially appealing to Bahya were those philosophical ideas which could be supported by references to Biblical and Talmudic sources.⁸⁴ For example, we have witnessed many a discussion of outward as opposed to inward devotion in the prophetic works. Where Bahya departs from the Jewish tradition is in his replacing the focus on "intention and deed" with an examination of the distinction between the two kinds of duties.

However, neither Bahya's dualism, nor his relationship to Sufi mysticism lead him to negate his own religious practices and norms of action, or his traditional theological themes. The goal of both Islamic and neoplatonic mysticism was, in some respect, a union with God. The purpose of asceticism was to prepare one for this union.⁸⁵

⁸³ v. Deuteronomy 6:16 - "Do not try the Lord your God, as you did at Massah," (Ex.17:1-7: the matter of the thirsty Israelites and the challenge to Moses: "Why did you bring us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?").

⁸⁴ Mansoor, Introduction, p. 29-30.

⁸⁵ Lazaroff, p. 32.

III

HASIDEI ASHKENAZ

The Hasidei Ashkenaz were German Jewish pietists, considered to have flourished between the years 1150-1250. The rise of this movement of Jewish pietism is regarded by some to be one of the most considerable religious events in the history of German Jewry. It succeeded in its time in bringing about the triumph of new religious ideals and values which were acknowledged by the mass of the people.¹

German Hasidism was molded primarily by the three heads of the Kalonymus family - Samuel the Hasid, (mid-12th century), his son, Yehuda the Hasid (c.1150-1217), and Eleazar ben Yehuda of Worms (d. 1165-1230).²

German Jewish Hasidism presented a special development within the history of Jewish mysticism. Gershom Scholem describes it as a "new mystical psychology," in which there was extensive speculation concerning the "reasons for the Torah," and the true motivations for the commandments.³ An important feature

1 Scholem, Gershom, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), p. 81.

2 Ibid. Eleazar of Worms, also known as the Rokeach is the author of the same, including a chapter on hilchot teshuva.

3 Ibid., p. 90. In contrast to this point of view, A. Rubin notes the rarity of allusions to mystical doctrines, ie: kavod or gematria, in the Sefer Hasidim. Rubin claims that in no sense can it be termed a mystical work. A. Rubin, "The Concept of Repentance Among The Hasidei Ashkenaz" in Journal of Jewish

of the thought of the Hasidei Ashkenaz is the fact that they did not describe any ancient, traditional source which had influenced them. The writers discuss the requirements of everyday life, and the relationship between man and God without citing authority to authenticate their teachings.⁴

The Hasidei Ashkenaz devoted most of their activity to teaching popular ethics, while keeping their theology hidden and esoteric. Thus, their theology is not what reaches us today, while their ethics became a dominant system that influenced subsequent generations.⁵

In the attempt to fulfill the mitzvot in a new way, the pietists believed that "man must be crafty in the fear of God."⁶ The pietism of the Hasidei Ashkenaz placed special emphasis upon the following characteristics: A passionate and selfless love of God, the supreme manifestation of which was Kiddush ha-Shem, or martyrdom; a strong sense of the omnipresence of God; a conception of various intermediary powers between God and the

Studies, (London: Jewish Chronicle Publications, 1967) p. 161. There is, however, much use of gematria (the study of the numerical harmony existing in the number of words, letters and names, or the value of groups of letters, in the sacred literature) and similar mystical elements in the Rokeach of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms.

⁴ Dan, Joseph, Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1971), p. 47. As we shall see below, however, the Hasidei Ashkenaz were most assuredly influenced by thought prior to their own time as well as that of the current milieu.

⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

⁶ Brachot: 17a.

created world; a fascination with the holy names of God and with combinations of Hebrew letters, (gematria); a great concern with demons and the spirits of the dead; and an exacting attention to prayer and meticulous concern for ritual, as long as the heart was directed totally to God. But the most central and original aspect of the teaching of the Hasidei Ashkenaz was their concept of the Hasid, "the pious one," who lives by the highest moral and religious standard.⁷

While the Hasidei Ashkenaz built their own understanding of "piety" upon the cumulative foundation of earlier preachings, they moved creatively in new directions. Their world-view was grounded in the idea that God's will is only partially revealed in the words of the Torah. God's will requires of the Hasid, i.e. the truly faithful and observant Jew, a search for a hidden and infinitely demanding additional Torah, which God encoded in the words of scripture.⁸ The Hasidei Ashkenaz believed that even in the most norm-oriented society, law can only be the skeletal structure. The patterns of thought and of imagination, the values of ideas, of conduct, are the flesh and blood of any civilization.⁹

7 Seltzer, Robert M., Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), pp. 423-4.

8 Encyclopedia of Religion, 1986 ed., s.v. "Ashkenazic Hasidism," by Ivan G. Marcus, p. 458.

9 Soloveitchik, Haim, "Three Themes in the Sefer Hasidim," in Association of Jewish Studies Review, Vol. I, (1976, Association of Jewish Studies, Cambridge, Mass.) p. 323.

The Hasidei Ashkenaz sought to mold their lives in accord with the will of God, referred to as razon ha Borei (the will of the Creator), and to guide others in a similar path. They believed that man's relationship to himself and to God, to Divine worship, and to his fellowman, to the dead, and to places and things, was in need of unremitting guidance which the halakha and the aggada could not provide.¹⁰

Various sources came to influence the esoteric thought of the Hasidei Ashkenaz. As we shall see further on, there is little denying that some Christian sources seriously influenced their thinking, especially some of the medieval Neoplatonic writings. In the area of Jewish sources, the influence of the Hekhalot and Merkavah literature was strong.

Of special significance was the thought of Abraham Ibn Ezra, but then there is hardly a Hasidic work which does not directly or indirectly reflect his influence.¹¹ The basic ideas of Ashkenazic Hasidic thinkers, however, came from Saadia Gaon, whom they considered a mystic.¹²

There have been many attempts to attribute the esoteric thought of German Jewish Pietism to various historical factors.

¹⁰ Soloveitchik, p. 315ff.

¹¹ Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. VII, s.v. Hasidei Ashkenaz, p.1378.

¹² At the beginning of paragraph 36 in the Sefer Hasidim we see the words: "It is written in the Book of Repentance of Rabbi Saadia." At the end of this paragraph we find these words: "Up to here, I have copied from the book composed by R. Saadia Gaon." (see paragraph 36 in the Appendix)

Among these factors are the Christian influences, the anti-Jewish persecution of the crusades still fresh in their memory, and Jewish martyrdom inspired specifically by the riots of 1096.¹³ With regard to these influences, Yitzhak Baer writes:

The tradition of self-sacrifice for the sanctification of God's name (kiddush ha-Shem) was renewed among Jews of France and West Germany from the beginning of the 11th century, who were filled with a unique form of enthusiasm in the wake of the general persecution.¹⁴

Those who chronicled the persecutions of 1096 wrote about the "pious ones" of the Rhineland communities, stating that they undertook death for the sanctification of the Name with the certainty that their souls would "return to God who gave it, and to the place of the great light, which is with God."¹⁵

13 This refers, of course, to the riots of the crusades. One particular account by the little known Solomon bar Samson (written c.a. 1140) depicts the attack upon the city of Mayence by the German noble Emico and his army of plunderers:

"The children of the holy covenant were there, martyrs who feared the Most High, although they saw the great multitude, an army numerous as the sand on the shore of the sea, still clung to their Creator. The young and old donned their armor and girded on their weapons, and at their head was Rabbi Kalonymus ben Meshulam, the chief of the community. Yet because of the many troubles and the fasts which they had observed they had no strength to stand up against the enemy....

"With a whole heart and with a willing soul they then spoke: 'After all it is not right to criticize the acts of God-Blessed be He, and blessed be His name-who has given to us His Torah and a command to put ourselves to death, to kill ourselves for the unity of His holy name. Happy are we if we do His will. Happy is anyone who is killed or slaughtered, who dies for the unity of His name, so that he is ready to enter the World to come, to dwell in the heavenly camp with the righteous...'" from Jacob R. Marcus, The Jew in the Medieval World, (New York: Anthem, 1979) pp. 115-6.

14 Baer, Yitzhak, The Socio-religious Orientation of Sefer Hasidim (Israel: Everyman's University, 1980), p. 4.

15 Ibid. p. 5.

Baer also discusses the element of Christian influence during that period:

In several manifestations of this social-religious atmosphere, one may already sense signs of the emergence of the peculiar "Ashkenazi spirit"--that is, the influence of certain Christian folk beliefs which are, in fact shared by the entire Latin Christian community.¹⁶

Despite various hypotheses regarding the efficacy of the above influences, the essential data is lacking for drawing any firm historical conclusions. We have neither first hand accounts, ie: letters, diaries, nor chronicles or responsa, from which to reconstruct the historical setting of the pietistic movement.¹⁷ What we do have are the legends, and the remarkable writings of three influential men, with whom we now take up our discussion.

THE KALONYMIDES, AND THE AUTHORSHIP OF SEFER HASIDIM

It is difficult to determine precisely the writer of each section of the Sefer Hasidim. Traditionally, the entire work is attributed to Yehuda he-Hasid, yet there is some evidence that certain parts were composed by Yehuda's father, Shmuel. Additionally, some of the passages contained in Sefer Hasidim bear close similarity in language and ideas to the Rokeah, the halakhic work by R. Eliezer of Worms. As R. Eliezer wrote later

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Marcus, Ivan, Piety and Society, The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), p. ix.

in time, it is generally concluded that he edited the book.¹⁸ It is generally considered that Sefer Hasidim is not a uniform work, nor the product of one author. One opinion holds that Yehuda authored as much as the first 26 sections.¹⁹

In their pietistic writings, Shmuel, Yehuda and Eleazar developed a distinctive perception of the ideal Jewish way of life which they thought must be followed for the individual Jew to attain salvation in the afterlife.²⁰

Although all three writers may be regarded as the molders of German Hasidism, most of the legends and lore surrounds the colorful life of Yehuda. He was born in Speyer, (c.a. 1140) and died in Regensburg, (1217).²¹ The story is told that his brother Abraham was the "scholar designate," studying conventionally with father Shmuel, while young Yehuda pursued worldly matters.

R. Yehuda he-Hasid was eighteen years old before he had begun to study. He was a great ignoramus and a boor and did nothing else but shoot with his bow and arrow. One day, his father Shmuel he-Hasid was explaining the halakhah in the bet ha-midrash. His pupils grew angry and said to him: "Dear master, all your ancestors were great scholars like your father R. Kalonymus and your uncle R. Efraim, and yet you allow your son to go about shooting with his bow and arrow like an ordinary highwayman." R. Shmuel replied: "You are right, and you will see that I shall henceforth train my boy differently."

When the pupils had gone home, he called his son Yehuda and said to him: "Dear son, I wish you would study the Torah,

18 Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. VII, p. 1387.

19 Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. VII, s.v. "Judah ben Samuel he-Hasid of Regensburg," p. 357.

20 Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. Kalomynos, p. 458.

21 Singer, xiii-xiv.

for I am ashamed of you." The son replied: "My dear father, I am perfectly willing to study if you would teach me as you teach the other young men." So R. Shmuel took his son Yehuda with him to the bet ha-midrash and placed him by his side, while his other son R. Abraham he placed on the other side. Then R. Shmuel pronounced the holy Name and the whole bet ha-midrash was filled with a great light. Yehuda was overpowered by the light, covered his face with his mantle and fell to the ground, not being able to look into the light. R. Shmuel then turned to his son Abraham and said to him: "This is a propitious hour for my son Yehuda. I know that you have been a great scholar all your life, but your brother Yehuda will learn much more than you. He will know what is taking place in heaven above and what will happen on the earth below, and nothing will be hidden from him. He will not be as great a master in the Torah as you have always been, but he will achieve more than you."²²

Such legends about R. Yehuda abound. Although their reliability is doubtful, through them we come to see the unquestionable impressiveness of his piety and holiness. Yehuda was a man devoted to God. He withdrew himself from the pleasures of life, to the extent that he fasted even on the Sabbath, and tasted no food or drink for two days on Yom Kippur. It was said that Eliahu ha-navi appeared to him on many occasions to reveal to him the secrets of the Torah. It was also written about him that had he lived in the period of the amoraim he would have been an amora; in the time of the tannaim, a tanna; had he lived at the time of the prophets, surely he would have been regarded as a prophet.²³ Yehuda taught and practiced extreme humility. He even forbade an author to sign a book he wrote, because his sons

²² Gaster, Moses, ed. and trans. Ma'aseh Book: Book of Jewish Tales and Legends, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1934), pp. 336-8.

²³ Kramer, Simon, God and Man in the Sefer Hasidim (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 15-16.

might take pride in their father's name.²⁴

R. Yehuda undervalued the study of the Halakha and departed from many accepted religious practices. He emphasized the importance of studying Bible over the study of Talmud, and dealt mystically with prayer, regarding it as more important than study.²⁵ In addition to this religious innovation, Yehuda was most concerned with social responsibility, and as such was severely critical of non-pietistic Jewish society.²⁶

SEFER HASIDIM

The Sefer Hasidim is the culmination of the beliefs and doctrines established by the three founders of the movement. It is a literary testament, giving great insight into the origins of German Hasidism. Sefer Hasidim may be regarded as a collection of ethical and religious precepts for the life of the community and the individual in Germany during this period.²⁷ It is a collection of brief homilies, ethical parables and stories whose primary purpose is their ethical teaching, and a focus on the

²⁴ Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. Judah he-Hasid, Vol. X, p. 352.

²⁵ Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. Yehuda b. Samuel, by Vol. VII, p. 357. It is worthy to note that in most branches of religion of the time there coexisted with the dogmatic side of Church or Synagogue a mysticism dealing more with the personal relationship of the individual to God. At times such a mysticism was in opposition to the religion of the Church or Synagogue.

²⁶ Marcus, Ivan, Piety and Society, p. 15. Yehuda's own works were thus circulated anonymously, adding to our difficulty in ascertaining the authorship of the Sefer Hasidim.

²⁷ Singer, p. xvi.

"profundities of the Creator's Laws" and the profundity of piety.

The beauty of this volume is that it allows the reader to study the religion and the theology of the Hasidei Ashkenaz not in the abstract, not detached from the reality of the period, but in connection with their everyday life. The Sefer Hasidim records in plain words the conflicting motives which determined the religious life of a Jew in Medieval Germany.²⁸

It is Yitzhak Baer's belief that the Sefer Hasidim had two main purposes. The book is addressed to the Jews of Germany in order to teach them how to behave to avoid sin and thereby lighten each one's eternal punishment so they may earn reward in the world to come. Additionally, it contains the harsh demands of Hasidut directed at the pietists themselves.²⁹ According to Baer, however, the primary concerns in the Sefer Hasidim are the problems of practical life for the everyday man.³⁰ The Pietist was the ethical critic and advisor of the community and of the individual.³¹ Sefer Hasidim was an indictment of lawless communal leaders and rabbis who perverted justice, and of the

28 Scholem, p. 82.

29 Marcus, pp. 6ff.

30 Baer, p. 24.

31 As we will come to see, this is one of the primary differences between the Hasidei Ashkenaz and the Christian mystical tradition. While the latter gave far greater latitude for escape and isolation from social contact to its mystics, the Jewish pietists could not avoid involvement in the social scene and the communal enterprise.

rich who exploited the poor.³²

In a lengthy essay, Y.N. Simhoni goes beneath the surface in exploring the motivations for the composition of the Sefer Hasidim and the piety of the Hasidei Ashkenaz. Disagreeing with Baer on the above point, he is of the opinion that these pietists were a small, unpopular group who were primarily concerned with their own personal religious perfection, and not with reforming German Jewry.³³

In his History of the Jews, Heinrich Graetz offers the following description of the Sefer Hasidim:

"(Yehuda) wrote a book in which he endeavors to hold up the higher ideals towards which the truly pious should strive. This work is, indeed, instinct with religious feeling, and of singularly pure morality; but it is also full of perverted ideas of the world, and of crass superstition. It mirrors faithfully the spirit of that time; the religious scrupulousness which fearfully considers at every step whether it does not commit or occasion a sin; that gloomy disposition which detects in every natural impulse the incitement of Satan.... Side by side with sentences of which philosophers need not be ashamed, in Sefer Hasidim there occur absurdities which could have been produced only by the decline in all conditions of life which the Jews had experienced since the reign of Philip Augustus."³⁴

Whatever may be said about Sefer Hasidim, good or bad, it stands as a very meaningful, personal work. It is a prime example of pragmatic and realistic ethical teaching in the history of Jewish literature. It takes into account the special

³² Marcus, p. 3.

³³ Simhoni, Y.N., "Ha-hasidut ha Ashkenazit bi me ha Benayim" in Ha Zefirah, (1917) p. 38.

³⁴ Graetz, Heinrich, History of the Jews, Vol. III, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1956) pp. 408-9.

characteristic of every case, the psychology of the person discussed, the historical and economic situation, and the person's special relationship to other people.³⁵

SIN AND REPENTANCE IN THE SEFER HASIDIM

In order to understand the role which asceticism played in the life of the Hasidei Ashkenaz, we must first explore their views on sin, repentance, atonement, and their system of penances.

For the Hasidei Ashkenaz, sin was defined as a departure from both dimensions of the pietistic ideal, first, the observance of halakha, or Toraitic Law, and second, the subjective inward ability to channel properly the motivation of one's heart in order to resist the evil impulse and the willingness to experience the pain which results from not yielding to its lures.³⁶

Toraitic Law aims at promoting the social order (takanat ha-olam) but the observer of all Jewish Law) is not yotseh (has not fulfilled all). According to the laws of the Holy One blessed be He, God observes man and rewards or punishes him only according to the degree of his motivation, as it is written, "man sees only what is visible, but the Lord sees into the heart" -(I Samuel 16:7).³⁷

The system of sin and repentance in the Sefer Hasidim is

³⁵ Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. VII, p. 1390.

³⁶ Marcus, Piety and Society, p. 13.

³⁷ Sefer Hasidim, Parma Edition, par. 43. From this point on we will refer to this edition as SHP.

actually four-fold; the act of sinning, repentance, atonement (teshuva), and the assigning of the appropriate penances. There is no conception of "original sin" in Jewish ethics, but there is much concern with the origin of sin. The Sefer Hasidim speaks of the evil inclination, or yetser ha-ra, and the inclination to be good, the yetser ha-tov.³⁸ In the struggle between the two, an individual's destiny is determined.

Behold, the evil inclination (yetser ha-ra) is good for for mankind. For if the evil inclination did not dominate in man, how could he receive reward for (doing) good?³⁹ Since his (evil) inclination has mastery over him, and he is prostrate before the Holy One blessed be He, he may receive reward for the good. And for the evil ones, the good inclination (yetser ha-tov) is bad. Had they not savoured the good inclination they could say: "What is the benefit of the good inclination?"⁴⁰

Not only does sin dwell in man in the form of the yetser ha-ra, but also within man is the power to overcome it. It is the victory of the good over the evil in man wherein lies his salvation.⁴¹

The Kalonimides' theory of sin and atonement consists of three stages, each of which parallels a stage in their pietistic ideal. Repentance corresponds to doing "the will of the creator," just as sin was a turning away from God's will. The

38 But it should be also noted that the Hasidei Ashkenaz believed that some possess a more aggressive evil impulse while others are more balanced.

39 That is, the presence of the yetser ha-ra provides the challenge for mankind to do good.

40 SHP, par. 2.

41 Kramer, pp. 85-6.

next step, the proof of contrition, reflects the pietists' need to "be forever resourceful in fearing God." The final assigning of the proportional penances demonstrates the well known rabbinic notion of middah ke-neged middah (measure for measure)⁴², or, in the terminology of the Hasidei Ashkenaz, "reward is proportional to pain."⁴³

It is clear in the Sefer Hasidim that repentance is a matter of this world. It is in the world of deeds that we either win or lose salvation. Repentance, like sin, is part of the life and struggle of man in this world.⁴⁴ Essentially, the reason the righteous person may receive punishment in this world for sinning is so that he may come completely purified to his reward in heaven. Similarly, the wicked may receive "reward" in this world for the good they do, so as to receive their full measure of punishment in the hereafter.⁴⁵

The process of the "Sage Penitential" involved the atonement through confession to a sage, followed by a demonstration of contrition, and then the acceptance of expiating penances. It was a difficult and painful process for the pietist to approach a

42 B. Sota, 8b.

43 Marcus, Piety and Society, p. 14. The idea of "reward is proportional to pain" as a basis for German Hasidism is also taken from Magein Avot, 5:23. See also SHP, par. 38, Appendix p. vii.

44 Kramer, p. 98, also - see Zech. 1:3, II Kings 17:13.

45 Peah, 1:1.

sage, confess and then enact public rituals of self-denial.⁴⁶
The following classification outlines the four elements of the
system of repentance for the Hasidei Ashkenaz:

- 1) Teshuvah ha-ba'ah - This is the repentance of opportunity, that is, when confronted with the opportunity to repeat an offense, a penitent must resist the temptation.⁴⁷ In this way, the sinner demonstrates his contrition.
- 2) Teshuvat ha-katuv - This is the repentance that would be biblically prescribed. In other words, he must inflict upon himself such tortures as correspond to the pain he would have suffered by infliction of the penalty prescribed by the Torah for that same sin.⁴⁸
- 3) Teshuvat ha-gader - This is the preventative form of repentance. The sinner must avoid all things that might cause a repeat of his offense.⁴⁹ This is also a stage at which the sinner demonstrates his contrition.
- 4) Teshuvat ha-mishkal - This is the "correspondence" form of repentance. That is, the sinner must suffer physical pain to such a high degree that it corresponds to the amount of pleasure he had enjoyed when he committed his sin. ⁵⁰

The first of these categories, teshuvah ha-ba'ah is the type

46 Marcus, pp. 78-9.

47 SHP, par. 37, see appendix, p. iv.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid. Also, see Rubin, p. 164. The author notes here how radically this pietistic view of repentance differs from other philosophical schemes of repentance in that all the attention is placed upon the outward act. A good example of this emphasis can be seen in Sefer Hasidim's description of penitence, which derives from the Talmud: 'Yoma, 86b. The Talmud quotes: "Haci dami ba'al teshuva? What is an example of a penitent?" Sefer Hasidim makes a significant alteration in this text: "Ketzad ya'aseh teshuva? How does one do penance?" The Talmudic requirement that one overcome one's temptation as a sign of his repentance is not sufficient. For the Hasidei Ashkenaz this constitutes only one part of the overall process of returning to God.

which the Talmud defines as the criterion for a repentant sinner.⁵¹ As we saw above, however, this is only a minor part of the repentance process. Once the sinner has demonstrated contrition through the ba'ah and gader penances, he must still undergo the expiation, or the penal consequences of his sin, those being included in the mishkal and katuv penances.⁵²

In Piety and Society, Ivan Marcus takes up the subject of the meaning, or meanings we must ascribe to the pietists' understanding of the word teshuvah.⁵³ He notes that in most cases the word seems to refer to the entire atonement process which, as we saw above, includes both the inward resolve to repent as well as the ritualized acts of penance. Thus, whenever we encounter the verb root shuv (שׁוּב), the noun teshuva will mean repentance in its full form. There is no genuine teshuva without "returning" (שׁוּב) to God, and then making the necessary

51 Yoma, 86:b.

52 Marcus, p. 51. Interestingly, none of the latter three penances - gader, mishkal or katuv, can be found in Judaism prior to the Hasidei Ashkenaz. Even the Talmudic teshuvah ha-ba'ah barely survived their reinterpretation. Yitzhak Baer notes that the entire doctrine of teshuvat ha-mishkal is created upon the basis of the assumption that in order to lighten his punishment in the next world, a man must undertake in this life acts of repentance corresponding to each individual sin. Baer believes this doctrine to be alien to the spirit of the Jewish tradition, but a typical creation of the Medieval Christian spirit. See Baer, Y. The Social Orientation of Sefer Hasidim, p. 21.

53 The linguistic ambiguity of the Kalyanides comes from their attempt to use earlier non-technical (midrashic) Hebrew to express a new religious sensibility, this style thereby lending more authority to the claims of their text. Inasmuch as they lacked a single term specifically for the unusual type of penitential system they intended, various terms such as teshuva, kaparah, din, and onesh were employed.

seyag (fence) to insure that one will not sin again.⁵⁴

THE SYSTEM OF PENANCES OF THE HASIDEI ASHKENAZ

We read in the Sefer Hasidim that sinners are guilty even when they are bringing sacrifices for their sins and errors, and they are not forgiven until they do penance and make a verbal confession, as it is written in Leviticus 5:5 - "And he shall confess that wherein he has sinned."⁵⁵

The Hasidim of olden days wrote down their transgressions in order to confess their sins, and in order to remember, regret and do penance. Because if he remembers his transgressions and that in the future he must give an accounting of them, he will do penance...⁵⁶

Yehuda's essential criteria for assigning the appropriate penances are (1) the illicit pleasures the sinner experiences, and (2) the corresponding biblical penalties for the sinful acts - "a penance of suffering equal to the pleasure experienced several times."⁵⁷ The penalties are certainly "scriptural" in the following sense. Yehuda refers to the proper penance for a certain atonement: "If a sin earns forty lashes (biblical) and shame, then he must undergo a penance equivalent to forty lashes

⁵⁴ Marcus, p. 38. See also par. 41 in the appendix for discussion of this very theme in the Sefer Hasidim.

⁵⁵ SHP, par. 38.

⁵⁶ SHP, par. 72.

⁵⁷ SHP, par. 37, see appendix. This corresponds to Eleazer's Hilkhot Teshuvah and his concept of mishkal and katuv penances.

of pain and shame."⁵⁸

The pietists imposed the penances on themselves in the spirit of the rabbinical maxim - middah k'negged middah and they followed this logic: a) God punishes a sinner in a way related to the nature of his sin; b) for a sinner to cancel the otherworldly punishments which his sin earns, he should impose upon himself a penance equal to the divine punishment; c) the punishment is thus based on the nature of the sin; d) however, all sin earn two types of punishment - the penalty provided by the Torah for sinning, and the penalty for the illicit pleasure of the evil impulse.⁵⁹ Thus, one penance should approximate the Torah punishment for that particular sin, and the other should be proportional to the illicit pleasure he experienced during that particular sin.⁶⁰

A special form of penance in the Sefer Hasidim is known as the "sage penitential." This refers to the confessorial role of the Jewish religious leader in that society, usually called a sage, (chacham) or a guide, (moreh). The sage attends to the

⁵⁸ SHP, par. 37. See Appendix.

⁵⁹ In SHP, par. 43 we read that a monetary penance (a worldly measure) placed upon the sinner might be one established in accordance to the Torah, but by the heavenly measure he is not yotseh (i.e. he has not fulfilled or "departed from" his obligation). By the statutes of God a man's sin is only pardoned or given reward for good based on the inclination of his heart.

⁶⁰ Marcus, p. 14.

pastoral needs of the sinners, pietists and non-pietists alike.⁶¹ The sinner must seek out the sage and inquire how he should do penance.⁶² Approaching the sage, confessing, and proving one's contrition by acts of avoidance and then undergoing penances for the particular sin - all center around the sage, but we find this only in the Sefer Hasidim⁶³ and in Yehuda's responsum.⁶⁴

61 Marcus, Ivan, "Hasidei Ashkenaz Private Penitentials: An Introduction and Descriptive Catalogue of their Manuscripts and Early Editions" in Studies in Jewish Mysticism, ed. Joseph Dan and Frank Talmage, (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978), p. 59.

62 A unique fictional illustration of the attitude toward the penitential ritual is found in Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story "A Crown of Feathers":

The rabbi outlined Akhsa's penance. She must fast each Monday and Thursday, abstain from meat and fish on the weekdays, recite psalms, and rise at dawn for prayers. The rabbi said to her, "The chief thing is not the punishment but the remorse. 'And he will return and be healed,' the prophet says."

"Rabbi, excuse," Zemach interrupted. "This kind of penance is for common sins, not for conversion."

"What do you want her to do?"

"There are more severe forms of contrition."

"What, for example?"

"Wearing pebbles in the shoes. Rolling naked in the snow in winter-in nettles in summer. Fasting from Sabbath to Sabbath."

"Nowadays, people do not have the strength for such rigors," the rabbi said after some hesitation.

"If they have the strength to sin, they should have the strength to expiate."

"Holy Rabbi," said Akhsa, "do not let me off lightly. Let the rabbi give me a harsh penance."

"I have said what is right."

63 Ibid., pp. 59-60. It should be noted that "private penitentials are found in other works as well. Eleazar's Rokeach, for example, was a tract written for personal use by the sinner because people were simply too ashamed to go to a sage and confess their sins. Eleazar attests to the failure of Judah's "innovation" of confession to a sage.

The act of approaching a sage was by and large a means of initiation into pietism. By repenting and undergoing penances administered by the sage one necessarily atones for one's past sins, and thus the initiate enters into pietism through the "doors of repentance."⁶⁵

ASCETICISM OF THE HASIDEI ASHKENAZ

Now that we have acquired a general understanding of the systems of sin and atonement in the Sefer Hasidim, we may examine more closely the ascetic characteristic of that system. Gershom Scholem writes about this distinctive character of the German Hasidic movement:

Three things above all others go to make the true Hasid as he appears before us in the Sefer Hasidim: Ascetic renunciation of the things of this world; complete serenity of mind; and an altruism grounded in principle and driven to extremes.⁶⁶

The ascetic quality of the Hasidei Ashkenaz is based on the central role played in their thinking by the divine scales of judgement. The Hasidei Ashkenaz are continuously weighing this worldly inward enjoyment (hana'ah) against otherworldly reward and trying to reduce it so as not to diminish otherworldly

⁶⁴ It is believed that Yehuda received questions about atonement and wrote several responsa. In paragraph 38 of Sefer Hasidim Yehuda writes: "...therefore I wrote the Way of Repentance (Derech Teshuva) in order to inform those who fear God." (see appendix p. ix) This sounds like a digest of responsa which was gathered together to form the Sage-Penitential we now have in the Sefer Hasidim.

⁶⁵ Marcus, Piety and Society, p. 77

⁶⁶ Scholem, pp. 91-92.

reward.⁶⁷

God's reward for the pietist derives in large part from his continuous resistance of the evil impulse. One result of the resistance to temptations of the flesh was this tendency toward asceticism. In order to maximize otherworldly pleasures, the Hasid was told to avoid all illicit physical or psychological pleasure during his life.⁶⁸ This asceticism enjoined the renunciation of profane speech, of playing with children, and of many other innocent pleasures.⁶⁹ Basically, it amounted to turning one's back on ordinary life as lived by ordinary people, (azivat derech eretz).⁷⁰

Essential to the way of the pious life is the Hasid's ability and willingness to bear insults and shame without flinching. It is in this way that the Hasid proves himself worthy of his name.⁷¹ Due to their extremist ways and the singular manner in which they led their lives, the adherents of Hasidism soon learnt to associate this way of life with the suffering of humiliation. From the very outset of the movement

⁶⁷ Marcus, Piety and Society, p. 11.

⁶⁸ Encyclopedia of Religion, v. "Ashkenazic Hasidism" by Ivan Marcus, Vol. II, p. 459.

⁶⁹ The renunciation of things in this world finds its antithesis in the promise of the world to come. The prime example of this might be: A Hasid who turns his eyes from women becomes worthy of an afterlife in which he will see the glory of the Shechinah with his own eyes.

⁷⁰ Scholem, p. 92.

⁷¹ Ibid. The word Hasid is a play on words to make "one who bears shame."

they proclaimed the cornerstone of Hasidut to be the capacity to persist in God's will despite scorn and mockery.⁷²

Assuredly, thus said the Lord to the House of Jacob, who redeemed Abraham:

No more shall Jacob be shamed,
No longer his face grow pale.⁷³

The Hasidim saw this verse in Isaiah to be a specific reference to their own situation in life.

There is an ancient Talmudic tradition of a special "Mishnah" whose commandments place far heavier demands upon the Hasid than the ordinary standards of the Law, or Torah as interpreted by the Halacha.⁷⁴ Despite the stringency and high level of self-abnegation imposed by the Hasidei Ashkenaz, the Sefer Hasidim discouraged excessive fasting and other self-afflictions, except for ethical purposes.⁷⁵ This was an important concept for Yehuda to stress, as it somewhat contradicts the Hasidic doctrine that one must not be satisfied to fulfill the Law of the Torah (ie: Talmud), but must strive to be in accordance with the law of heaven (ie: the natural law of conscience born within man himself).⁷⁶ This ideal is the most

⁷² Soloveitchik, p. 329.

⁷³ Isaiah, 29:22.

⁷⁴ Scholem, p. 94.

⁷⁵ Kramer, p. 115.

⁷⁶ Baer, pp. 15-16. Baer points out, on the other hand, that the ethical religious outlook of the Talmud and Midrashic literature is in fact more ascetic and less optimistic than contemporary rationalist apologetics would have us believe.

central to understanding the extremes to which the Pietist would go in fulfilling the will of the creator (razon ha-Boreh).

Fear of the Lord is greater than wisdom. Among the Hasidim there are who are wise in (matters of) Torah and there are those who follow the will of the creator in their hearts. The good deeds of the wise (schooled in Torah) Hasid are no greater because he received (his instruction) from his teacher. And the other is also not greater because he did not receive from his teacher (knowledge) and thus was not wise enough to understand (the message from) his heart.⁷⁷

INFLUENCES ON THE ASSCETICISM OF THE HASIDEI ASHKENAZ

As we noted earlier, the pietistic ideal of viewing life as a continual divine trial was more than likely a reaction to the traumatic memory of Jewish martyrdom of the 1096 crusades.⁷⁸ The concept of Kiddush ha-Shem was one long treasured by the Hasidei Ashkenaz. The well-known acts of martyrdom and the legend that surrounded them served to prepare the people of Israel for the day when God would test Israel.⁷⁹ R. Meir of Rothenberg's famous statement: "...those martyrs who feel no pain as they are taken to be killed..." belongs to this Hasidic tradition.⁸⁰

It has been argued that the Hasidim wished to emulate the ascetic tendencies of the period and thus could not help but be

⁷⁷ SHP, par. 1.

⁷⁸ Encyclopedia of Religion, p. 459.

⁷⁹ Baer, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

influenced by the current Christian ethos.⁸¹ Because many of those Christian ethics were largely based on rabbinic teachings, the Hasid happened to find many of his ethical ideas and strivings echoed in the the pages of the Talmud.⁸² Baer writes, however, that "the Talmud's social regulations lacked the dimension of anxiety for the potential loss of the eternal soul which accompanied medieval man's every step..."⁸³ In other words, the doctrine of "sacred poverty" extolled by the Christian heretics was found as well in the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and, of course, New Testament material.⁸⁴

Prior to the existence of Baer's essay, scholars had assumed that one could understand the pietistic system of penances from

81 A description has been given regarding Christian mystics that may well apply to the Hasidei Ashkenaz; that in every mystic there is an ascetic and that asceticism is at the very source of mysticism. (Dom Berliere, quoted by Ray C. Petry in *Late Medieval Mysticism*, Vol. XIII of the Library of Christian Classics, ed. John Baillie and others, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953, p. 19) This helps to explain some of the severe forms of penance and self-denial that we witness in Sefer Hasidim.

82 It should be noted that although Yitzhak Baer has suggested that the Hasidei Ashkenaz were familiar with contemporary Christian theology, it is now generally agreed that they did not know Latin, and that they harbored a deep hatred of the Church and the culture that surround it. (From Joseph Dan's Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics, p. 48, and p. 124, n. 10).

83 Baer, p. 25.

84 But the Hasid did not accept the Christian doctrine of "sacred poverty", nor did Hasidut advocate the abstention from contact with women. Although the extreme self-affliction and self-debasement seems to reflect a Christian influence, the piety of the Hasid could not nullify certain elements within the Jewish tradition and, as we have already noted, could not override conditions of the Law.

an entirely internal Jewish perspective.⁸⁵ For Baer, Yehuda emerged as a major religious ethicist and socio-religious reformer, and thus he may have crossed the boundaries between the various contemporary religious systems.

The similarity between the patterns of behavior revealed in the Sefer Hasidim and the contemporary Christian practices might be seen as mere chance results, but it seems as though they reflect the influence of Christian beliefs which were known to Yehuda (or to whomever authored a particular section of Sefer Hasidim) by way of study, or exposure to the sermons of the contemporary Christian clergy.⁸⁶ Baer notes that Sefer Hasidim greatly resembles the collections of exempla/sermons preached among circles of Christian Monks from the thirteenth century onward.⁸⁷ It has been argued that Baer's thesis does not really explain why it is that the Hasidic penitentials emerged as late as the 12th century. If indeed the Christian influence was a key factor, then how would one account for hundreds of years of Christian penitentials without the slightest effect on the

⁸⁵ Marcus, pp. 7ff.

⁸⁶ Baer, p. 25 It can be argued that in their vehement hatred and fear of the Christian Church the Hasidei Ashkenaz more than likely did not attend the sermons of Christian preachers.

⁸⁷ Ibid. pp. 7ff. It is noted in Medieval Handbooks of Penance by John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 30, that the prevalence of elements from the Monastic discipline of asceticism and some of the extreme forms they take are frequently observable in the Penitentials. The initial expressions of repentance are accompanied and ultimately replaced by a series of ascetic acts.

neighboring Jewish communities?⁸⁸

In both traditions, the desire was to bring religion closer to the hearts of the people. St. Francis of Assisi and his fellow Franciscans were popular preachers, and conveyed in their talks matters of great relevance to the people. The Hasidim sought to imitate the "pious men of old" in the Talmud and the Midrash just as the Franciscans saw themselves following in the footsteps of Jesus and the early Christian monks.⁸⁹

The penitential section of the Sefer Hasidim in many ways resembles the Latin penitentials. The Sefer Hasidim catalogues different sins, prescribes specific penances to atone for each, and advises the confessor how to administer the regimen.⁹⁰ The book is designed to assist the sage as a confessor⁹¹ primarily to the non-pietists who wished to be initiated into pietism.⁹²

Regardless of the possible influences of Christianity, which may or may not be well-founded, there are great differences between the "regula" or the laws of penance governing the Christian monks and the penances prescribed in the Sefer Hasidim. One major difference is the principle of midah keneged midah

⁸⁸ As we will see in Chapter V in our discussion of the psychological motives for ascetic practice, chances are great that the trials of the time period led Christians and Jews to a similar kind of ritual penance, and not so much the effect of one group upon the other.

⁸⁹ Baer, p. 8.

⁹⁰ See paragraphs 19 and 38 in the appendix.

⁹¹ See the above discussion on the "sage penitential".

⁹² Marcus, p. 75.

(measure for measure) in the Sefer Hasidim. Here one makes atonement by means of penances weighed against the magnitude of the sin and the pleasure entailed in its performance.⁹³ This is a view alien to the related Christian texts. We read in the Sefer Hasidim of the proportional nature of atonements:

...He must endure suffering corresponding to the enjoyment he received from the transgression, and so it is with all transgressions. This is not only with regard to negative commandments, but also within the case of positive commandments which, of course, override negative commandments.⁹⁴

We find no analogous idea in the various Christian penitential handbooks. Although they are in similar fashion guides for the confessor (sage) with which he is to do his job, and they both aid the repentant sinners to complete atonement, they do not contain the "corresponding" style penances that we see in the Sefer Hasidim. Rather, the penances are graded according to the status of the sinner and the nature of sin, and the penance imposed was of a limited duration (in order that the penitiant might perform it repeatedly). The standard types of penances included fasting, the recitation of psalms, giving alms, and some commutations.⁹⁵

The Corrector of the Burchard of Worms from the 11th century contains questions to be asked by the confessor, and

⁹³ Baer, p.21.

⁹⁴ SHP, par. 37 in the appendix.

⁹⁵ New Catholic Encyclopedia.

prescribes an "appropriate" penance for each sin confessed.⁹⁶ In the following penance, Burchard of Worms (ca.1008-12) prescribes a ritual of fasting for the crime of robbery:

If thou hast committed robbery, thou shouldst have a heavier penance; for it is more distressing that thou hast seized something by force in the owner's sight than that thou has stolen from him in his sleep or absence. It thou hast committed theft because of necessity so great, I say, that thou hadst no means of life and on account of the pinch of hunger and hast stolen only food outside the church and if thou hast not had the habit of doing it, restore what thou hast carried off and do penance for three Fridays on bread and water. But if thou art unable to restore it, thou shalt do penance for ten days on bread and water.⁹⁷

Most of the penances in the "Corrector" are of this type; that is, the penances prescribed do not relate in any specific form to the nature of the transgression.

In contrast, we find the following paragraph in the Sefer Hasidim:

If one has stolen or one has taken and plundered he must be expelled. whoever has (the booty) in his hand should return it to the owner. whether or not he (the thief) returns it he shall be expelled because there are witnesses (who attest to the fact) that he stole. If he returned (the goods) one should not tell of his disgrace or make him known. Even if he swore and afterward went back on his word, one does not embarrass him in order to slam the door on repentters.⁹⁸

In Christian society, the spiritual penances given out were additional to the secular legal system. In the Jewish community,

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

⁹⁷ from "The Corrector of the Burchard of Worms (ca. 1008 - 12)" in McNeill and Gamer, Medieval Handbooks of Penance, p. 329. The later penitentials, including this one, became general guides for confessors and not "tariff books" - not simply lists of corresponding penances.

⁹⁸ SHP, par. 20, in appendix.

the sacred and secular domains were not divided. Thus, the penitential system was by and large a concern of the individual. At a certain point, however, when the political power was at a low, the "laws of heaven" became decisive for public discipline, and the established penitential system was necessary.⁹⁹

As we noted earlier, the Sefer Hasidim served not as an abstract treatise, but as a practical guide for the sage by which he might guide sinning individuals to repent. These sages were the rabbinic authorities of their generations, and they served as spiritual guides in the same sense as did their Christian counterparts.¹⁰⁰ Consider the following from Sefer Hasidim:

Should the teacher ask him at the beginning, "do you regret your sins?"... If he says, "Give me other penances, but this one I cannot do" they do not listen to him... One never weighs evil deeds against good ones, but figures each one separately.¹⁰¹

In comparison we cite this from The Corrector of Burchard of Worms:

Then the priest shall softly and gently question him first on the faith, as he holds it, and shall say: Believest thou that thou shalt arise in the day of judgment in theis same flesh in which thou art now, and receive according to what thou hast done, whether it be good or evil? Answer: I believe. Wilt thou forgive the sins of those who have sinned against thee, as saith the Lord: "If ye will not forgive men their sins, neither will your Father forgive your sins"? Answer: I will.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Baer, p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ SHP, par. 43.

¹⁰² McNeill and Gamer, p. 324.

Baer notes that the Hasid will never go beyond a certain point in his self-denial because of the legal prohibitions of the Law.¹⁰³ It is similar in the Christian system in that they also will only go to the extreme permissible by their faith. In the case of the latter, the extent of self-denial is far more generous, and thus by comparison the extremes of the Hasidei Ashkenaz appear foreshortened.¹⁰⁴

An important element for us to keep in mind, regardless of the conclusions we draw about the Christian influences, is that the times produced a specific type of ascetic practice for the purpose of this-worldly self-punishment. As the reader will have noticed thus far, it is quite a different asceticism from that described in Spain in or about the same time period. We proceed now with a comparison of the two systems.

103 Singer, p. xix

104 Ibid.

IV

A COMPARISON OF ASCETIC PRACTICE IN BAHYA'S "DUTIES" AND THE SEFER HASIDIM

THE PHILOSOPHICAL/RELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEFARDIC AND ASHKENAZIC JUDAISM

In order to begin a discussion of the similarities and differences between Bahya's ascetic "system" and that of the Hasidei Ashkenaz, it is helpful to examine first the relationship between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewry in the 11th and 12th centuries.

Compared to the Ashkenazim, the Sephardic Jews living in Spain between 950 and 1150 thrived in a relatively "free" atmosphere. This period of time marked a "golden era" of Judaism in Spain, not only referring to their intellectual output, but also to the free political, social and economic prosperity they enjoyed. This milieu of freedom and good social standing in turn gave them the leisure and the incentive to engage in pursuits of philosophy, theology, treatises on ethics and the like.¹

This was not true for the Jews in Germany at this time. As we noted in Chapter III, Ashkenazic Jewry was still reeling from

¹ Kramer, God and Man, pp. 16-17.

the disaster of the crusades, and their basic effort was that of survival. Hardly an officially constructed philosophy, scientific doctrine or any significant secular work came from the Ashkenazim during this period. Although the Hasidei Ashkenaz were aware of the advances in theology, metaphysics, science and other areas of thought that were being made in Spain and France, they themselves were not involved in such pursuits.² Because of the relative isolation of the Ashkenazic community, they had no need to reconcile their thought with that of Greek philosophy and recognized no other authority besides the Torah and rabbinic tradition.³ Sephardic Jews, on the other hand, were as much devotees of philosophy as of the Torah and the rabbinic tradition.⁴

As we have pointed out in the two previous chapters, the effects of both the Christian milieu on the Hasidei Ashkenaz and the cultural heritage of the Arab world on Bahya were notable. As the condition of life for the Sephardic Jews was generally freer, they were better able to expose themselves to that which was available to them. The Ashkenazim, on the other hand, were subject to political and economic restrictions and thus accepted the concepts and definitions of their Christian surroundings,

2 Scholem, Major Trends, p. 80.

3 Schechter, Studies, Vol. III, p. 12.

4 Ibid. Ironically, as Schechter points out, this proved to be one of their greatest weaknesses; most of the Sephardic commentaries on the Bible have become obsolete while we still have those of Rashi and Ramban, etc.

adapting them to their own unique situation.⁵ In essence the same effect was gained by two different sets of circumstances, yet we will come to see that each society incorporated the values and traditions of its "host" country in greatly varied ways.⁶

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BAHYA'S DUTIES OF THE HEART AND THAT OF THE SEFER HASIDIM

A primary objective that both these works share in common is the desire of the authors to bring religion and particular Jewish practice into the hearts of the people. Both strive to bring man closer to the will of God. Hovot and Sefer Hasidim are works written for the people to read and utilize in their day to day lives.

It can be shown that many of the strikingly new ideas of both Bahya and Yehuda he-Hasid were but extensions of the ethical teachings of the Bible and of the rabbinic sages. Although at times Bahya's dualistic notions of body and soul make his

5 Baer, Socio-religious Orientation, p. 1. We will see in a further discussion in Chapter III that there is serious disagreement with Baer's assessment of the Christian influence upon the Hasidei Ashkenaz. One such argument is that Christian penitentials existed for hundreds of years over much of Europe, but only in the 12th century did the Hasidim embrace a similar mode of atoning.

6 It is accepted by most scholars that the Jews of Spain (a select few) were aware of the Ashkenazic customs by way of their ethical literature, and that Judah he-Hasid was acquainted with Ibn Ezra, Saadia, Maimonides, but in general the German Jews were not well informed of the goings on of their brethren in Spain and France.

asceticism appear more Hellenistic than Jewish, he does not depart from either the themes or the concrete forms of rabbinic renunciation.⁷

Bahya goes to great lengths in IX:E of Hovot to clarify that one must not go beyond the Law. Relying upon God means adhering to God's Law. The Law, as we understand Bahya to say, is against abandoning the cultivation of the world. The Hasidim were obeying the law in "extra" measure, beyond its requirements, but by no means were they departing from the Rabbinic understanding of the text. They established the "laws of heaven", or the natural laws of the conscience which placed heavier demands upon the Hasid than did the ordinary Law. But, as we have noted, Yehuda was quick to stress in the Sefer Hasidim that excessive fasting or any other self-inflictions were to be discouraged, except for ethical purposes.

Both kept within the confines of the Law, however it appears that they did so for different reasons. For Bahya the danger in "overdoing it" was that the ascetic may be led to do things forbidden by the Law, and thus he would not be acting for the sake of God. Bahya states that the very purpose of the Law is to give the mind mastery over the active soul. As we have noted, one of Bahya's primary influences, al-Ghazzali regarded the attempt to escape from the world as no less an enslavement to it than the eager pursuit of its vanities.

⁷ Lazaroff, p. 25.

MATTERS OF STYLE

In terms of style the two volumes are greatly different. Although they are both very much "how-to" manuals, instructing the reader on the social as well as individual level, Bahya's Hovot is constructed in a very logical, specific style, outlined in an introduction, and presented in a comprehensive order. To a great extent Bahya drew the elements of this concise style from Muslim, Arabic and Neoplatonic sources.⁸ The Sefer Hasidim, on the other hand, is a more difficult volume in terms of its organization. Lacking the philosophical training of his Sephardic counterparts, Judah was not able to reduce his mystic-theosophical theories to a system, and they are therefore difficult to survey.⁹ All the various elements of the Sefer Hasidim are intermingled throughout, showing that the authors or editors seemed unable to develop these elements of thought in order to produce anything like a synthesis.¹⁰

A great strength of the style of Sefer Hasidim, however, is the manner in which Judah illustrates using anecdote and parable. This approach serves to bring his argument down to earth, and indeed reflects the art of the popular preacher during that

⁸ Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. IV, p. 105.

⁹ Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. VII, p. 358.

¹⁰ Scholem, p. 86.

time.¹¹ In contrast to the somewhat more dry philosophical style of Hovot, it is the charm of Sefer Hasidim, and the earnestness of the writer, that made it popular; a possession of the masses. While Bahya seems to direct his instruction and advice more to the individual reader, the Sefer Hasidim presents its ascetic ideal as a socio-religious program not only for the individual pietist but also for sectarian groups organized under the leadership of the Sages (Hachamim).¹²

THE INTELLECTUAL IDEAL AND THE PIETISTIC IDEAL

Two major trends of Jewish mysticism are the intellectual and the pious/devotional. Bahya's love of God, for which he strives in all the sections of Hovot, lacks some of the passion that is evident in the Sefer Hasidim. His love of God is more an intellectual illumination that occurs when the mind instructs the soul.¹³ Bahya's asceticism therefore is not an attempt, in the classically mystical sense, to bridge the gap between God and

¹¹ Kramer, p. 25 This "preacher style" of the Sefer Hasidim cannot be over-emphasized as a basic difference from Bahya's own tone.

¹² We note here the difference between Bahya's "special ascetics" and the Sages of Sefer Hasidim. Bahya's special ascetics were "physicians of the soul", and practiced a special variety of asceticism. In the words of Bahya: "They resemble the spiritual beings. They abstain from anything that will distract them from God..." The Sages of the Hasidei Ashkenaz acted as penancers. They prescribed the appropriate penances to fit the sins of the people.

¹³ Mansoor, Introduction, p. 7.

man. Man's awe and fear of God always maintains a respectful distance between himself and the object of his love.¹⁴

In contrast, the asceticism of the Hasidei Ashkenaz posits that one must be forever resourceful in fearing God. That is, one must be engaged continuously in the search for the hidden will by striving to discover new prohibitions and make new proscriptive safeguards around the forbidden.¹⁵ Perhaps the following best sums up the non-philosophical nature of the Hasidei Askenaz:

Be wise and prudent in your behavior, and indulge not in the wisdom of words, for it will be your deeds that will accompany you to the hereafter - the wisdom of words will remain in this world.¹⁶

The ultimate objective of asceticism for Bahya is the object of all religious practice, self-control. As we have read in Bahya, the soul inclines toward asceticism because asceticism is like the soul itself. In other words, it is human nature for the intellect to dominate the passions, and that is what we are training ourselves to do. According to Bahya, "reason must get the upper hand."

In contrast, ascetic practice for the Hasidei Ashkenaz provides the opportunity to increase their ability to withstand life's trials and obstacles, thus to continue weighing the joys

¹⁴ It has been argued that there is a kinship between Bahya and Hasidism in that Bahya identifies the pure fear of God with love and devotion to God, and from his conception that the fulfillment of the divine will becomes an act of love.

¹⁵ Marcus, Piety and Society, p. 11.

¹⁶ SHB, par. 285.

and pains of this life with that of the next. The object of the Sefer Hasidim is to establish an ethical moral, and to acknowledge the profundities of the Creator's Laws. Just as Bahya discouraged the ascetic practice of fasting unless it was specifically an expression of inward devoutness, the Sefer Hasidim discouraged fasting except for ethical purposes.

THE OUTWARD AND THE INWARD

We come now to the essential difference between ascetic practice as understood by Bahya and the authors of the Sefer Hasidim. For the Hasidei Ashkenaz, the outward signs or physical expressions of asceticism were the very essence of penitance. Any manifestations of penitence on the emotional plane paled in comparison to the physical aspects of repentance.¹⁷ But for Bahya, these external signs were permissible only as indications of an inwardly repentant disposition. Bahya regarded the inward abstention "of the heart" as clearly a higher form of asceticism than physical abstention. Ascetic acts such as fasting or wearing sackcloth may be commendable, and according to Bahya are encouraged and regarded as a manifestation of repentance, but they remain merely symbols of an inward state of mind, and are not themselves a sine qua non

¹⁷ Rubin, Concept of Repentance, p. 165.

of penitance.¹⁸ Of central importance to Bahya's understanding of the "duties of the heart" is that fact that they are not punishable, nor are they rewarded. This is why, says Bahya, they have been so neglected. We recall that Bahya's "most perfect and highest ascetics resemble the spiritual beings...abstaining from anything that will distract them from God."¹⁹

We have discussed that for the Hasidei Ashkenaz, repentance, sin, and atonement are matters of this world. Thus the asceticism that one brings upon himself for the purpose of atoning is so that he will come purified to his reward in heaven.²⁰ If we examine the four elements of repentance once again, we see that two of them, teshuvah ha-ba'ah (wherein the penitent resists the temptation to repeat an offense) and teshuvat ha-gader (the sinner avoids that which might cause a repeat of an offense), are demonstrations of contrition. Thus we might see them as outward displays of inward repentance. But lest one think that this completes the atonement process, we note that teshuvat ha-katuv (self-inflicted pain equal to that which one would have experienced from a Toraitic punishment) and teshuvat ha-mishkal (pain equal to the amount of enjoyment from

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 164.

¹⁹ Hovot, IX:C, p. 404.

²⁰ Interestingly, Bahya, in his introduction to Hovot says that only if one endeavors to empty his heart and purify his mind of the vestiges of this world (through asceticism)...is the perfect assertion of the unity of God achieved in his heart and only then can the virtue of his soul be saved. For the Hasidei Ashkenaz, the purpose of the ascetic acts was to save the soul itself.

the sin) both call for a physical punishment quite distinct from the world of inward atonement. Stated quite simply in the Sefer Hasidim: "Sin cannot disappear without injury."²¹ Therefore, atonement is neither exclusively an intellectual-psychological process, nor is it a set of mechanically prescribed acts of penance, as some might at first argue upon reading the ascetic rituals contained therein.

Perhaps in the following statement by Bahya we may best see the common ground between the two systems:

Those that are imbued with this love (the love of God) find easy every sacrifice they are asked to make for their God, and no selfish motive mars the purity of their love.²²

Ultimately it is in this theme of love that we might look further to discover the true meaning of these two varieties of ascetic practice. Bahya's major premise is that when the individual has moved through the duties and arrives at the love of God, the ultimate destination, then he will find his future sacrifice easy. For the Hasidei Ashkenaz the sacrifice must be difficult. The more pain, the better the demonstration of contrition.

Just as we have heard it said that a person must love themselves to be able to love another (i.e., to love God), so we

²¹ SHP, par. 43. The primary textual basis for this is from Isaiah 6:6-7 which reads: Then one of the seraphs flew over to me with a live coal, which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched it to my lips and declared: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt shall depart and your sin be purged away."

²² Hovot, X:F, p.440. (see also Broyde, p. 453)

also find it hard to conceive of a self-hating or self-destructive person being able to love another (i.e., to love God) in a mature sense. It is this theme we will take up in the following chapter on the psychological motives for ascetic practice.

PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIVES FOR ASCETIC PRACTICE

Why at this point in our study of the ascetic practices in Hovot and Sefer Hasidim do we deem it necessary or appropriate to enter the complicated area of the psychological motivations for religious practice, and for asceticism in particular? The first reason is that the very universality of asceticism causes us to wonder what dynamics might have caused such a practice to find its way into virtually every major religious system known to humankind.

Another source of our interest in this topic might be the relevancy of ascetic practice to our identities as modern American Jews who in fact engage in a certain amount of asceticism in our own religious practice, at least once a year. Is it simply a coincidence that Yom Kippur is one of the most observed of all Jewish practices? Even the "once a year" Jew will for a period of 25 hours sacrifice his or her daily pleasures on the altar of appeasement; satisfying God through denial. Are we truly repentant when we fast on Yom Kippur? Do we need to be? Is fasting an end in itself, or is there a greater psychological dimension to our observance of this ritual?

While the causes for which people are prepared to suffer now are different from what they were were hundreds of years ago, the desire, and perhaps even the need to suffer is also present in

the individuals who make up modern society.¹ If we look carefully we can see that contemporary forms of abstinence and asceticism are employed for reasons similar to those of our ancestors.²

The third, and perhaps most important reason for our purpose in this chapter is the hope that a discussion of psychological motives will further illuminate the most profound differences between the ascetic practices advocated by Bahya and those prescribed in the Sefer Hasidim.

Up to this point our discussion has focused on the differences between Bahya's ascetic system and that of the Hasidei Ashkenaz primarily on the level of ritual practice and law. For the most part our examination has been descriptive rather than analytical or explanatory. But there is an even more profound difference between the two systems to be discovered in the realm of psychology. It would not only be difficult, but also inadequate to end our comparison of Bahya and the Hasidei Ashkenaz before we have sufficiently entered that realm, for it is in the area of psychology that we may find the most illuminating explanation for the distinctive formations of asceticism by these two groups of people. This discussion will also enable us to answer the central question proposed by this paper: Why have two Jewish religious systems embraced ascetic

1 Constable, p. 7.

2 Pruyser, Paul W., A Dynamic Psychology of Religion, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 151.

practice in such dissimilar ways and for such diverse reasons?

Typically, upon first encounter, readers tend to regard most ascetic practices as bizarre, and perhaps even the product of a "disturbed" personality type. In our day and age, it is usually assumed that seeking what is easy and pleasant is instinctive. Any deliberate tendency to pursue what is hard and painful might well strike one as purely abnormal.³ The benefit of a psychological approach is that one is better able to see how specific forms of asceticism might be understandable responses to the circumstances produced by the age, and how the purpose of one group's asceticism may be greatly different from that of another.

Admittedly, there are many perspectives and levels to the study of the psychology of religion, and in the context of this paper we are able to examine only a few as they relate to our texts. The first of these perspectives is an explanation as put forth primarily by William James in the form of an outline of levels of ascetic practice. We will follow this with an examination of the concept of asceticism as "religious submission" vs. "moral masochism", and the related Freudian theory of ego development. I will endeavor at that point to explain how Bahya and the Hasidei Ashkenaz fall into these categories, in the hope that this will sufficiently illustrate the true distinction between the two varieties of ascetic.

³ James, William, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature, (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), p. 291.

practice.

In his classic work, The Varieties of Religious Experience, William James outlines several psychological levels⁴ which may serve as criteria for classifying examples of ascetic conduct. For our purposes we will examine four out of his six levels.⁵ They are as follows:

- 1) Asceticism may be a mere expression of organic hardihood, disgusted with too much ease.
- 2) (Ascetic expression may be in) temperance in meat and drink, simplicity of apparel, chastity and non-pampering of the body generally; (it) may be fruits of the love of purity, shocked by whatever savors the sensual.
- 3) (Ascetic acts) may also be fruits of love, that is, they may appeal to the subject in the light of sacrifices which he is happy in making to the Deity whom he acknowledges.
- 4) Ascetic mortifications and torments may be due to pessimistic feelings about the self combined with theological beliefs concerning expiation. The devotee may feel that he is buying himself free, or escaping worse sufferings hereafter by doing penance now.⁶

The first of these levels might well apply to both Bahya and the Hasidei Ashkenaz. For widely varying reasons, both systems tend to view excesses as counterproductive to ascetic practice.

4 By the term "levels" it does not appear that James implies any type of hierarchy. Rather, they are simply different varieties.

5 The last two levels do not concern us in this paper, but are included here as follows: 5) In psychopathic persons, mortifications may be entered on irrationally, by a sort of obsession or fixed idea which comes as a challenge and must be worked off, because only thus does the subject get his interior consciousness feeling right again. 6) Ascetic exercises may in rarer instances be prompted by genuine perversions of the bodily sensibility, in consequence of which normally pain-giving stimuli are actually felt as pleasures.

6 James, p. 291.

For Bahya excesses or involvement with worldly concerns impede fulfillment of the duties of the heart. The Hasidei Ashkenaz would be concerned that an excess of pleasures in this world would no doubt mean punishment by God in the world to come.

The pleasures of the soul should be dearer to you than the pleasures of the body, for the pleasures of the soul are eternal and certain, while the pleasures of the body are temporary and doubtful.⁷

The second and third explanations can be seen to describe, to some extent, the ascetic values of Bahya's system. As we have noted, the goal of all Bahya's duties are for the purpose of attaining the love of God. For Bahya asceticism will become, as James puts it, "the fruit of the the love of purity." Bahya's moderate ascetics "will patiently conquer their soul's desires" for the luxuries of the world. But Bahya warns us well about the dangers of excess in this venture. His "most perfect and highest" ascetics, who refrain from anything that will distract them from God, are regarded as being furthest removed from the moderate (and most acceptable) view which the Law expounds.⁸

From a psychological standpoint one might interpret Bahya's concern over excessive asceticism (that which is practiced by the highest ascetics) to be the following: The result of a lifestyle which views religious expression as "denial" will engender a negative view of God as a punishing, demanding reality, and a

⁷ SHP, par. 13.

⁸ Hovot, IX:C, p. 408.

view of life as full of sordid enticements that must be avoided.⁹ One might claim that in Bahya's system denial is only proper when it will lead to a more wholesome embrace of life. It becomes improper when it leads to the conclusion that the world in and of itself is full of evil, and that God is a punishing God. Certainly Bahya must have believed that if purity of the heart and sincerity of purpose are present, then any human act consistent with divine dictates is meaningful.

The fourth of James' psychological levels corresponds to that type of asceticism we have witnessed in the Sefer Hasidim. Because of the immense guilt and anxiety which adherents of its teaching harbored in their hearts, there was certainly a pessimistic attitude towards their situation and towards themselves. For the Hasidei Ashkenaz, any pain and punishment not incurred in this world was most assuredly coming in the next. With all the pain they witnessed around them day to day, is it not reasonable for us to suppose that they assumed guilt for not feeling pain themselves? If the scales of divine justice were in operation and there was pain in this lifetime, then surely there would be reward in the afterlife. It then follows that if one were not personally experiencing such suffering in this world, he could expect to suffer in the world to come. Certainly they felt such guilt for any pleasures they might have experienced while committing a sin. For the Hasidei Ashkenaz there had to be a

⁹ Bulka, Reuven P., The Jewish Pleasure Principle, (New York: Human Services Press, 1987), p. 22.

reason for the incredible amount of suffering to which they were witness. This gave way to their concept of the divine scales of judgment.

We consider the following description of a similar phenomenon from late antiquity:

A wave of pessimism swept over Pagans and Christian almost all of whom practiced asceticism in one form or another. Contempt for the human condition and hatred of the body was a disease endemic in the entire culture of the period, an endogenous neurosis, an index of widespread guilt feelings.¹⁰

The same kind of pessimism was widespread in the time of the Hasidei Ashkenaz and we have good reason to believe that they might have incurred a not dissimilar contempt for themselves and a strong sense of guilt at their simply surviving the massive physical assaults on their society. It is no great surprise then that the ascetic practices of the Hasidei Ashkenaz we have described¹¹ developed during a time so pervaded with a sense of failure and guilt which expressed itself in an intense dislike of the material world and especially of the human body.¹²

James sums up this important dynamic and compares it with the dynamic of our own time:

10 E.R. Dodds, as quoted in Constable, pp. 9-10. This perspective also helps us to better understand how the parallels between Christian and Jewish asceticism might have come about. We can see now that both religions might have developed comparable ascetic systems due to the similarity of their exposure to the trials of that period. Thus one can still hold the view that the Hasidei Ashkenaz were not necessarily influenced by Christian sources.

11 See Chapter III and the appendix for detail.

12 Ibid.

A strange moral transformation has within the past century swept over our Western world. We no longer think that we are called on to face physical pain with equanimity. It is not expected of a man that he should either endure it or inflict much of it, and to listen to the recital of cases of it makes our flesh creep morally as well as physically. The way in which our ancestors looked upon pain as an eternal ingredient of the world's order, and both caused and suffered it as a matter of course portion of their day's work, fills us with amazement.¹³

James is saying here that there is no real way in which we in the 20th century can appreciate the role that pain and suffering played on the societal level during those periods, as well as the great part it played in the religious practice of the times.

It is important to note that whereas we might look at the system of reward and punishment in the Sefer Hasidim and consider it as having been calculated and carefully contrived, it was in reality a reflection of a psychological dynamic of pain and suffering in which the Hasidei Ashkenaz were involved. Such misery was a part of life, and thus their ascetic system must be understood as an organic development and not simply as an intellectually contrived set of rules.

Whether we are discussing Bahya or the Hasidei Ashkenaz, it seems clear that the psychological effect of asceticism has everything to do with a given person's religious equilibrium. Once again, William James states this most concisely:

Each individual has his own best conditions of efficiency. Some are happiest in calm weather; some need the sense of tension, of strong volition, to make them feel alive and

¹³ James, p. 292

well. For these souls, whatever is gained from day to day must be paid for by sacrifice and inhibition, or else it comes too cheap... When characters of this latter sort become religious, they are apt to turn the edge of their need of effort and negativity against their natural self. Thus, asceticism becomes involved.¹⁴

To summarize James' point: Each and every person needs to have balance in order to live his life in a mentally healthy way. There was tension everyday in the life of the Hasid because he felt as though his existence did not contain enough suffering to merit reward in the afterlife. All the suffering that he witnessed, and had learned from recent history led to the belief that it was part of the natural order to suffer in this life. The Hasid, then, was doing the work of God by placing the duty of this-worldly punishment into his own hands.

It is very possible to stop at this point in a discussion of the psychological motives for the practice of asceticism. Sometimes it is a good idea to stop in such discussions because in-depth psychological examinations of religious phenomena tend to make some fearful that religious faith will be explained away altogether in a calculated, scientific fashion.¹⁵ Without going

14 James, p. 294.

15 In Future of an Illusion, trans. & ed. James Strachey, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961), p. 38, Sigmund Freud states the following: The scientific spirit brings about a particular attitude towards worldly matters; before religious matters it pauses for a little, hesitates, and finally there too crosses the threshold. In this process there is no stopping; the greater the number of men to whom the treasures of knowledge become accessible, the more widespread is the falling-away from religious belief - at first only from its obsolete and

further into the argument of whether scientific proof of a religious motive denies its validity or the validity of God, I wish to proceed with the following discussion, while asserting my own conviction that psychological explanation does not render the practice of asceticism, or most other aspects of religion, in any way meaningless or invalid.

MORAL MASOCHISM AND RELIGIOUS SUBMISSION

In their book Religion and the Unconscious, Ann and Barry Ulanov discuss two types of defenses which human beings use to deal with the dislocation from reality, both in the sense of a retreat from reality and a loss of the sense of value in life.¹⁶

One such defense is called "religious submission". It can act as a passageway from self to neighbor and God:

For the person open to religious value is one in whom the heart is restless until it finds its rest in ultimate reality. It is a simple heart, no matter how complex the being it gives life, for it circulates around the central value of a God who encircles and makes large the human self with his divine otherness, establishing his reality in all our subjective and objective dwelling places. God is. Knowing that, the self knows that it is. Finding value for oneself through the subjective routes of religious

objectionable trappings, but later from its fundamental postulates as well.

¹⁶ Ulanov, Ann and Barry, Religion and the Unconscious, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 173. The authors further discuss how a sense of reality is intricately interwoven with a sense of value.

submission leads one to objective certainty.¹⁷

When the religious submissive seeks the experience of suffering he is seeking a positive change in his soul. He is endeavoring to acquire a purification, a cleansing, through his pain, whether physical or emotional so as to meet with a reality that clearly possesses value.

The other defense, which is somewhat more complicated psychologically, is that of the "moral masochist". The moral masochist is characterized by the tendency to submit one's ego to a sadistic superego operating within himself. Indulged in long enough, this submission of ego to superego can settle into a fixed character trait in which one regularly calls down upon oneself ill-treatment, humiliation, and every kind of mental suffering.¹⁸

To understand this dynamic of moral masochism, we must first briefly discuss the Freudian concept of the stages of ego development. This will ultimately provide us with an interesting view and an essential understanding of the unconscious dynamic of self-inflicted pain.

The first stage of ego development is when the ego lives in a state of identity with the larger unconscious. Just like the infant who lives in the safe, warm world of his/her mother, the ego feels secure, magically in touch with all that exists. In the second stage the ego is differentiated strongly from the rest

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 174.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 175.

of the unconscious. The ego concentrates on exercises of the will hoping to channel its aggression and focus the desires of the id on obtainable objects. In the third stage the ego may choose to stay with this ego-centered existence, viewing and relating to the entire world from an "I" point of view, or it may give its energy to the service of a larger reality beyond itself.¹⁹

The moral masochist may be seen as living entirely in the first stage of ego development, resisting movement into the second or third stages. At the same time it might appear as though he exists in the third stage, seeming to devote his ego to values (ie: God) beyond himself but, as we will see, that is not the case.

In Freud's thinking, moral masochism is a manifestation of the death instinct. Functionally it involves the use of someone else's superego in place of one's own, making oneself the victim of a borrowed authority. It can produce a mitigation of guilt by the transformation of pleasure into pain.²⁰ In short, the moral masochist is a person without a fully emerged ego; one that remains locked in the first stage of development.

Another characteristic of the moral masochist is the lack of self-love or ability to receive love that leads to self-

¹⁹ These concepts are covered generally in the lecture "Anxiety and Instinctual Life" in the New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1964), pp. 92-97.

²⁰ Ibid.

annihilation. The masochist takes pride in the battle fought against the self, and develops the need to pay, through guilt, for any pleasure received.²¹ Ultimately it is love that provides the ego with the possibility of emerging from dependency to autonomy, of going from the early stage to the later.

In The Art of Loving, Erich Fromm discusses the notion of self-love as a prerequisite for loving one's fellow human beings and for loving God. Fromm cites Meister Eckhart as providing the best summary of this idea:

If you love yourself, you love everybody else as you do yourself. As long as you love another person less than you love yourself, you will not really succeed in loving yourself, but if you love all alike, including yourself, you will love them as one person and that person is both God and man. Thus he is a great and righteous person who, loving himself, loves all others equally.²²

In discussing his own departure from Freud's concept of religious belief, Fromm states that the truly religious person does not love God as a child loves his father or his mother. "He has faith in the principles which God represents; he thinks truth, lives love and justice, and considers all of his life only valuable inasmuch as it gives him the chance to arrive at an ever fuller unfolding of his human powers..." For Fromm, to "love God" means the attainment of the full capacity to love. To understand what God stands for in oneself.²³

²¹ Ulanov, p. 181.

²² Fromm, Erich, The Art of Loving, (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 53.

²³ Ibid., pp. 59-60.

We began this section by mentioning that both the religious submissive and the moral masochist deal with the dislocation from reality and the loss of a sense of, and desire for, value. The moral masochist desires the enduring values and is terrified of falling into valuelessness. Still, he will never actually confront this valuelessness. It is a void that menaces him.

Viktor Frankl has said that one can activate value on a spiritual level only in confrontations with unavoidable suffering, where there is no way out but through the darkest center of a painful experience. One has no choice whether to face this suffering or not, but just because of that fierce limitation, one great possibility does remain - of choosing how one will react to the unavoidable suffering.²⁴

While both the religious submissive and the moral masochist are faced with the confrontation of unavoidable suffering, they each call upon acts of pain, suffering, or deprivation in distinctively different ways to achieve their spiritual need. The masochist desires the enduring values, and lives in constant fear of slipping into "valuelessness". The religious submissive, on the other hand, will open himself to suffering and seek to obtain value from the experience. The moral masochist is working to steer clear of the void, and the religious submissive actually seeks this great abyss of being. The religious submissive endeavors to open himself to all of life, the good and the bad.

²⁴ Frankl, Viktor, The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), pp. 87-89.

Erik Erikson is quoted as saying: "Out of the acceptance of nothingness emerges what can be the most central and inclusive, timeless and actual, conscious and active position in the human universe." The Ulanovs discuss what is occurring as the individual faces this great nothingness:

In the process of facing nothingness, the ego undergoes a radical differentiation of consciousness. Borrowing from religious tradition, we might call this new level of consciousness the state of the spiritually "poor" or "purged" ego, or, in psychoanalytical terms, the "disidentified" ego. The person seeking experiences that will force upon him the separation of the real from the false and the essential from the trivial repeatedly undergoes a process in which he is scourged and freed of unconscious identification with bits and pieces of his own personality and fragmentary parts of his world.²⁵

So, the religious submissive and the moral masochist confront valuelessness in different ways, but both employ acts of self-inflicted suffering. The religious submissive seeks to confront the valuelessness with the aim of discovering, by this process of purification, a reality that clearly possesses value. He accomplishes the purge of ego through suffering. In contrast, the moral massochist remains paralyzed by his fear of valuelessness, and thus he avoids it, or rather, actively attempts to stave it off. He does this also by self-punishment and suffering. Such suffering brings a value into his life as he assumes the role of the judge and punisher.

The reader at this point might see the direction our discussion will now take. The goals of the ascetic system of Bahya Ibn Paquda resemble to a great extent those of the

²⁵ Ulanov, pp. 188-189.

"religious submissive". As we have seen, the goal of asceticism for Bahya is part of the overall exercise of self-control; the curbing of passion in order to place all at the service of God. It is at the very essence of the "duties" to purge the ego; to disidentify it with the aspects of the world which are of lesser importance in order to focus upon that which is of ultimate concern, the love of God. Once the ego has separated the false from the true, the essential from the inessential, there is space for transcending consciousness and surrendering to a presence of being that surpasses the small scope of the ego.²⁶ In Bahya's own words, the purpose of asceticism (actually, the purpose of the Law in enacting asceticism) is "to give the mind mastery over the entire soul, with its desires for the pleasures of the body, and to establish the superiority of the mind."²⁷ Bahya's ascetic is the person open to attaining knowledge of ultimate reality and a loving relation with God. In order to do so he is prepared to accept, within limits, deprivation and even suffering.

In our examination of the goals of their ascetic practice, the Hasidei Ashkenaz may be seen to possess many of the attributes of the moral masochist. We have suggested that there was a great deal of pain and guilt in their lives. The horrific events of their time and during the century immediately preceeding the rise of the German Pietistic movement could be seen as producing a traumatic dislocation from reality. It must

²⁶ Ibid. p. 190.

²⁷ Hovot, IX:B, p. 405.

have been dramatic to view their own fortunes in the context of the martyrdom and the slaughter that surrounded them. Accordingly their asceticism took on the form of punishment for any sins they might have committed and perhaps more importantly to compensate for whatever enjoyment they might have experienced in this life.

The need for such punishment seems to have been an integral part of their existence. Their great emphasis on sin and repentance, and the system they built to reinforce it reveals a truly compulsive concern for the maintenance of value and a profound fear of valuelessness. The price to be paid for valuelessness in this world was eternal punishment in the world to come. We can sense the fierce pride and devotion the Hasidei Ashkenaz had in their desire to make physical atonement for their sins:

May the loss of my blood make atonement for me like the blood on the horns of the altar. May the scanty portion of my fat be as the fat of the portions of the sacrifices...²⁸

From the understanding of ego development we have outlined above, and the need for love contained in that process, we may additionally postulate that their relationship to God was of an "immature" variety (in the Freudian sense). That is, by submitting the ego to a punishing internal super-ego by way of self-inflicted pain and denial, it can be suggested that their egos never moved into a more mature level of development. The

²⁸ SHP, par. 41. Note the identification with the sacrificial animal.

Hasid was perhaps a man without a fully emerged ego, an ego that remained unarticulated and undifferentiated from the unconscious.

Thus it might be argued that unlike Bahya's variety of asceticism, their suffering was not of the type that could lead them to a grasp of ultimate reality, but acted primarily to mitigate the tremendous guilt that they had harbored in themselves.²⁹ Thus, their relationship to God was not one of a truly independent person, rather, of a person trapped at a dependent ego-centered level.

From a qualitative standpoint it could be suggested that the eventual relationship with God that comes from religious submission is far more desirable than that of the moral masochist. Nobody wants to suggest that one group of Jews has a "better" relationship with God than another, but it can be seen in the preceding discussion that the need for God, and the manner in which each system sought to relate to God is significantly different. It might be suggested that the religious submissive such as Bahya possesses the superior religious experience (if one can make such a statement). The masochistic tendencies of the Hasidei Ashkenaz render them unable to achieve a truly fulfilling relationship with God because the Hasid has never gotten to the point in his own ego development

²⁹ For a discussion of guilt and repentance in the Hasidei Ashkenaz see Chapter III. It is always dangerous to attempt to psychoanalyze historic figures. You never have the benefit of having them "on the couch". Thus it must be admitted that psychoanalytical conclusions about the Hasidei Ashkenaz contained in this paper are purely speculative.

where he established a "self" capable of having a relationship with any type of being, divine or otherwise. While we must believe that for every individual there is a unique relationship with God, it would seem that the person who seeks God with independence and autonomy is in a better state than the person who greatly depends on God for the mitigation of guilt and psychical pain.

SUMMARY

For the Hasidei Ashkenaz, the times were filled with pain, physical as well as psychical. Suffering was the order of the day. Suffering had to have a purpose because it was an integral part of their existence, and that purpose was a this-worldly payment for their sins. An all-consuming guilt and anxiety pervaded their lives for which the only panacea was the medicine of asceticism. In such a situation, an asceticism "of the heart" could not suffice. Their renunciations and denials had to mirror the kind of pain and suffering that they witnessed. Once they had proved contrition, the logical next step to achieving total teshuva would by needs have to be a physical punishment.

Bahya did not live in an environment where constant suffering was the norm. He was by comparison a free man, free to engage in metaphysical speculation and concern himself with "purity of the heart." For Bahya, perhaps one's own arrogance

and self-indulgence in the material world, two bi-products of an age of freedom and enlightenment, were the greatest threats to man's relationship to God. His asceticism served the purpose of removing the distractions of the world from consciousness so that unity with God might be achieved. At best, physical pain and outward denial could act only as outward symbols of an inward penitence.

It is hard to imagine that these two worlds, a liberated world, and a world of captivity and fear, existed at the same point in history. It is fascinating to consider that two such disparate Jewish variations on one theme could have occurred simultaneously in such nearby parts of the world. Out of these systems of thought emerged two thoroughly different expressions for one of the most universal of all human religious tendencies, asceticism.

APPENDIX

TRANSLATIONS FROM SELECTED PARAGRAPHS OF THE SEFER HASIDIM¹

Paragraph 19 (Selection)

If one who has cohabited with a married woman asks how it is he may repent, and (the sin) is the same sin for which the punishment is caret (excommunication), in Tractate Hagigah it says: There is a difference of opinion as to when the crooked cannot be made straight and when repentance has utility.² In regard to those cases in which repentance has utility it says: Those culpable for excommunication who were whipped are removed (excused) from their punishment of excommunication.³ Thus he must do something that is the equivalent of whipping and expulsion.⁴ If it is winter and he comes asking (for a penance),

1 These paragraphs represent specifically some of the attitudes of the Hasidei Ashkenaz toward teshuva, or sin and atonement. The numeration of the paragraphs is according to their appearance in the Parma Edition of the Sefer Hasidim. For a detailed discussion of the relation of paragraph numeration between editions Parma and Bologna, see Ivan Marcus's "The Recensions and Structure of Sefer Hasidim."

2 Hagigah 9b.

3 Megilah 7b.

4 Corresponding to teshuvat ha-katuv, in which the penitnant must perform some type of penance equal to the severity of that punishment prescribed in the Torah.

if there is ice on the river he may break it and sit in the water up to his mouth or up to his nose for the amount of time from when he first spoke to the woman (with whom he sinned) to the time he completed the sin.⁵ He should do this as frequently as there is ice (on the river). During the summer he should sit in a ditch, or in a vessel in which there are ants, and shut his mouth. Afterwards there should be another vessel filled with water with which he may wash himself. If during these times none of the above items are available he should fast, eating only bread and water in the evening. For it is said of Reuven that he sat in his sackcloth and fasted even though Judah had not yet told, and the matter of Tamar had not yet occurred.⁶

Why sit in water? Because it says in the Midrash: Adam sat for 130 years in water up to his nose to repent for the sin of the tree of knowledge which was a judgement upon all generations to come.⁷ Also, his body was heated by that sin, and thus he

5 This is an example of Teshuvat ha-mishkal, being that the essence of the penance should equal the enjoyment attained by the commission of the sin.

6 Bereshit Rabbah, Chapter 74: He was before us in his sackcloth and his fasting; found in Tosaphot Bava Kama 82:a - the words of the sages: "He who sits in his sackcloth and with his fasting," we see there that these words are the words of our teacher here.

7 Pirke d'Rabi Eliezer, Chapter 20: On one Shabbat Adam immersed himself in the waters of the upper Gihon until the water reached his neck. In Zohar Bereshit 55b: Adam bumped his head and cried and immersed himself in the waters of Gihon up to the back of his neck, etc. Thus in Midrash Ruth ha-Hodesh, Chapter I and in the Yalkut (Shimoni) Bereshit it makes references to these above ideas. Our sages wrote: 130 years he had sinned, so in Eruvin 18b it says: He sat fasting for 130 years.

cools himself and fasts until he can continue to sit in the water when it is icy. When there are ants and bees during the days of the summer, (he will sit) among the ants and will tie his mouth or nostrils with a cloth so they cannot enter therein.

In the case of excommunication, or (a transgression with) a young girl⁸: If he has had sexual relations with a woman, but it is not rape, or with the wife of a Priest⁹ by rape, or if she gives birth to a bastard, she becomes forbidden to her husband. It is told of one (who had committed the preceding type of sin) who went amongst the ants. Day and night he would lie on the ground during the summer so that fleas would cover him. This became an easy thing for him, so he would go naked in a place where there were beehives until his flesh was swollen, and when he healed he would go there again. What we have written here he did many times. If he had sinned many times with a woman he would need to do this many times.

⁸ This means: when one has transgressed in a matter for which the punishment is expulsion.

⁹ Should read: "Israel".

Paragraph 20

If one has stolen or one has taken and plundered¹⁰, he must be placed in herem. Whoever has (the booty) in his hand should return it to the owner. Whether or not he (the thief) returns it, he shall be placed in herem because there are witnesses (who attest to the fact) that he stole. If he returned (the stolen goods) one should not tell of his disgrace or make him known. Even if he swore and afterward went back on his word, one does not embarrass him, thereby locking the door on repenters.

Paragraph 37

Four times teshuvah¹¹ is written in the parashah "Atem Nitzavim"¹² corresponding to the four types of teshuvah: Teshuvah ha-ba'ah, teshuvah ha-katuv, teshuvat ha-gader, and teshuvat ha-mishkal.

Teshuvah ha-ba'ah means that if a certain transgression (that he has previously committed) once again becomes within his power to commit, he will keep himself from repeating it.

¹⁰ These two words ("taken" and "robbed") can be removed, unless the intention is to state that he took legitimately, and then afterwards he plundered.

¹¹ The term teshuvah is of a sufficiently ambiguous nature in the Sefer Hasidim so as to warrant the assigning of several meanings to it.

¹² Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20.

Teshuvah ha-katuv is the case in which (the sinner) is strict (with himself) and makes for himself a rule according to what is written in the Torah. Teshuvat ha-gader means that he will restrict himself from all matters that might bring him into contact with (the opportunity to commit again) that particular sin he committed. Teshuvat ha-mishkal means that because the enjoyment of sin brought on his troubles, the essence of the penance should be equal to the enjoyment attained by the commission of the sin. That he has done it and will stop himself from doing what his heart desires, this is a great principle of teshuvah. According to the enjoyment of the sin must a man do his penance; a remorseful penance with the same woman in the same place, vigorously. At the same time, it must be in the usual manner in which it was first done. In the case of teshuvat ha-gader he is warned not to speak with the woman that is forbidden to him; that he should not look upon the woman.¹³ The penance is a punishment from the Torah. If (the Toraitic punishment) is forty lashes and shame¹⁴, he must accept the suffering and the shame of forty lashes, the equal shame (he would feel) at being whipped publically. The penance of suffering must be many times (greater than) the enjoyment (experienced in the sinful act). He must endure suffering corresponding to the enjoyment he received

¹³ This could be seen as a conflict between teshuvat ha-mishkal and teshuvat ha-gader in that the former calls for the man and woman to engage in the penance in the same place, and the latter prohibits the sinner to look upon the woman.

¹⁴ public humiliation

from the transgression, and so it is with all transgressions. This is not only with regard to negative commandments, but also in the case of positive commandments which, of course, override negative commandments.¹⁵

Paragraph 38

THIS IS THE LAW FOR THE ONE WHO REPENTS WITH ALL HIS HEART.

One who has cohabited with a married woman must keep away from all future enjoyments with women, excepting his own wife, as they (the Sages) said: One who loans money at interest is such that he may not take interest (on any loans), even from Gentiles.¹⁶ Thus he must keep himself from even looking at the face of a woman, and the Sages forbade even looking upon her garments.¹⁷ Whoever stands at the bed in which a man and woman lay together, is as though he is standing on the stomach of that woman.¹⁸ He must keep himself from any contact with the woman, from any laughter or togetherness. For if he enjoys any further

¹⁵ In other words, the punishments are not only for the commission of negative acts but the failure to perform a positive commandment as well.

¹⁶ Sanhedrin 25b.

¹⁷ Avodah Zarah 20b. It is forbidden to look upon the colorful clothing of a woman.

¹⁸ Shabbat 140b. However he has sinned there because (the Talmud continues:) "And this is incorrect," meaning that this is not acceptable behavior.

pleasure with her, his soul will become filled with joy, and this will cause further thoughts (inuendoes) with regard to the woman. Nevertheless, the Holy One Blessed be He knows all deeds and knows all thoughts¹⁹, as it is said: I, the Lord, probe the heart, search the mind, to repay every man according to his ways with the proper fruit of his deeds (Jeremiah 17:10).²⁰

These are the deeds, and they affect him with respect to his thoughts. Even if they were to depart from their transgression they would yet be harboring these meditations in their hearts, which could cause the matter (the transgression) to be done (again), and there would be cause for regret (anxiety, terror) regarding the first cases (of the transgression).

If a man is in the bath house or in some place of filth, and the woman passes by him, let him think about the words of the Torah, and let him not think about another woman. This is because the words of the Torah were given for the purpose of purifying the heart and driving out the evil inclination.²¹

One must keep himself from having a nocturnal emission and from drinking wine. It is measure for measure. It is written: "Lechery, wine, and new wine destroy the mind" (Hosea 4:11) and pay serious attention to what one does each day, as it is written: "For I recognize my transgressions and am ever

19 Kidushin 39b.

20 This is a very central theme; that of middah keneged middah, measure for measure, upon which the system of penances in Sefer Hasidim is based.

21 Kidushin 30a.

conscious of my sin." (Psalm 51:5) He shall repent with weeping,²² as it is written: "My eyes shed streams of water because men do not obey Your teaching" (Psalm 119:136). He shall take upon himself hardship corresponding to this (evil) inclination he possesses; corresponding to it (the inclination) he shall receive punishment. And thus our sages said: "Exile atones for half of a transgression," even if there is repentance (remorse). The exile which expels one from knowledge, as in the case of Cain, we have already seen explicitly in Brachot, section ha-roeh.²³ And as in the case of Judah who brought about the selling of Joseph and so grieved his father. Thus Judah endured exile from his brothers, and because he accepted exile upon himself more than did his brothers, he merited that "Judah should become his Holy Place."²⁴ It is written: "The Lord will take Judah to Himself as His portion" (Zechariah 2:16) and he shall dress in old clothing. As it is said: "Leave off your finery and I will consider what to do to you." (Exodus 33:5) It is written: "And all who don a foreign garment I will also punish on that day," (Zephaniah 1:8), garment which causes (one to engage in) foreign deeds and compromise one's happiness.²⁵ As

²² Presumably, according to middah kenegged middah, the "weeping" would be the proportional penance for a nocturnal emission.

²³ Brachot 56a.

²⁴ Bereshit Rabbah, Chapter 85. See also Psalm 114:2.

²⁵ One should additionally read: "I will punish the king's sons, and all who don a foreign vestment..." (Zephaniah 1:8)

it is said: "Why should My beloved be in My House, who executes so many vile designs? The sacral flesh will pass away from you, for you exult while performing your evil deeds." (Jeremiah 11:15)

A man should not say: "I will be insolent in order to explain the sin."²⁶ And how shall I tell it then to a sage? It says: "He who covers up his faults will not succeed." (Proverbs 28:13)

And it is also written: "Happy is he whose transgression is covered over, whose sin is forgiven." (Psalm 32:1)²⁷ Whoever says that he will cover up his sins will not succeed. This is a person who relies on his own understanding. Rather, it is better that he should tell (confess to) a discreet sage in order that he (the sage) may tell him which penance will give him rest in the world to come. The sage will know whom he must instruct with regard to repentance, from where the penance should come, and how to instruct the penitant. Therefore I wrote these things as a way of repentance in order to inform those who fear God. I did not intend to instruct all the sages in whose hearts God has placed the fear of Him, the fear of His Word. Let them see my words and where I have erred; let them understand these words according to what is correct. I am not a sage among sages, but a student who fears God.

26 Brachot 34b.

27 It should be noted that SHP has switched the Psalm verse around to read as it does in the version above. The Psalm itself says: "Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered over."

Paragraph 40

The adulterer shall not say: "I am an adulterer" in a place where no one knows him. Rather, he should say: "I am a sinner." And thus it says: "They seek Me daily, eager to learn My ways. Like a nation that does what is right, that has not abandoned the laws of its God, they ask me for the right way, they are eager for the nearness of God" (Isaiah 58:2). It also says: "Behold, I will bring you to judgment for saying, 'I have not sinned'" (Jeremiah 2:34). For he has said it to the Holy One Blessed Be He, but to humankind he has not said it.²⁸ He should say to them: "I have sinned." It is written: "Whoever says 'never shall the evil overtake us or come near us'" (Amos 9:10) should therefore say: "I am a sinner."

Paragraph 41

One should pray with a broken heart over one's sins. One should remember his transgressions, as it is written: "But we are guilty" (Genesis 42:21). And it says: "Who was it who gave Jacob over to despoilment and Israel to plunderers? Surely it was the Lord against Whom we have sinned..." (Isaiah 42:24). And

²⁸ He means to say: One should not say "I am an adulterer," but rather "I am a sinner" and in this way the author informs us.

it says: "Of what shall a living man (adam) complain? Each one (gever) of his own sins" (Lamentations 3:39). First it says adam and then it says gever. A man needs to complain because he is alive, and so: adam.²⁹ As it says: "But man (ha-adam) sets out for his eternal home" (Ecclesiastes 12:5). So much does man complain when he is living, (how much more) as he considers his day of death! Death shall set upon his heart if he feels that his passion (yetser) threatens to make itself master over him. Thus it says: "Appreciate your vigour in the days of your youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Another matter: Just as he has said that he is remorseful and has complained in his punishments that he is deficient and that his life is not a life, so he must remember that his passion made itself master over him and thus he sinned. He should say: "This is the case of all my sins! May it be God's will that there be a full atonement for all my sins. When he cries over his sins he should say: "May my tears extinguish Your anger, and my heart which has melted, may it be like water to extinguish the burning fire inflamed by Your anger. And the repentance for my deeds, may they remove Your anger from me³⁰, May my fasting and my introspections fill You with mercy over me. And the set

²⁹ This should say: Not at the time that he is adam (flesh and blood), but it means to say: At the time of death.

³⁰ Here the root shuv is used in both teshuvah (the repentance of my deeds) and yashivu (may they remove).

table³¹ that I did not set, may You consider as a set altar. Remove that which I did not perform on burning coals, consider as burning fire upon Your altar that cannot be extinguished. And my eating implements that have not been brought before me, consider as the people of Israel bringing the mincha sacrifice. May the loss of my blood make atonement for me like the blood on the horns of the altar.^{32 33} May the scanty portion of my fat be as the fat of the portions of the sacrifices; the tears of my eyes as the anointing with wine, and the sound of my weeping be like the sound of singing as they would sing³⁴, and the darkening of faces during a fast; and my weeping like the light of the candles³⁵, and the odor of hunger³⁶ like the odor of the incense offering.³⁷ May my conversation be as the Priestly Benediction. May the pouring out of my soul and my heart with the water of my

31 The term arach shulchan while translated literally as "set table" refers to an ordered way of behavior. It was later used in the title of Joseph Karo's Shulchan Aruch, the 15th century law code.

32 This refers to the purification of the "horned" altar by daubing the blood of the hattat, or purification offering on the altar horns (keranot). See Exodus 29:12.

33 As we have seen what is said in Brachot 17:a.

34 Referring to the thanksgiving choirs that accompanied the sacrifices with song and musical accompaniment. See Nehemiah 12:27ff.

35 See Exodus 30:7,8.

36 The odor of one's breath after fasting

37 In Zohar Shemot 20:b: "May it be Your will before You that the odor that issues from my mouth at this time be as the odor of the burnt offering and the sacrifice on the altar fire, should You will it of me."

tears blot out my sins and the weakness of my limbs like the cutting of the sacrificial offering. May the breaking of my heart be like the stones of your altar, and the fragments of my heart like Your sacrifices.

Do not despise my broken heart and my different clothing like the garb of the Priesthood. Account (my) washing as the sanctification of (my) hands and feet, for this washing must be accounted outside of the mitzvah of washing.³⁸ And were it the case that he did not have to change his clothes, it would be good for him, as it says: He who is missing even one part of his life, is not alive.³⁹ The tearing of my heart will tear books in which are written my transgressions, and the utterances of my mouth will stop up the wounds of my flagellations. The weaknesses of my heart will rejoice in Your requests. My belly, empty from fasting, do not return to me empty from before you, and for the sake of my dry soul which You desire, answer my questions. My repentances and penances⁴⁰ shall return You to me so that You will want me. I have repented many of my deeds^{on} my evil way, for I did them either whimsically or with intent. You know, You see kidney and heart. You know that my thoughts are equal to the utterances of my mouth. May it be Your will before You, Merciful and Gracious One, that You remove from me all things that might

38 The mitzvah of netilat yadayim, or the religious ritual of washing the hands before the meal.

39 Beitzah 32:b.

40 Both the Hebrew words nihumim and teshuvot could here be used interchangeably.

things that might keep away repentance so that I may not do any
evil before You.

Paragraph 43 (Selection)

...You have payment and reward according to the (extent of your) enjoyment (when sinning), and according to the pain (you have experienced when performing a mitzvah). As it is written: "I the Lord probe the heart, search the mind - to repay every man according to his ways, with the proper fruit of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:10). The Judge gives to a man according to what is evident and known to him, and the Holy One Blessed be He (gives to a man according to) what He sees in his heart. Therefore the Sages said that you never know the reward for (the performance of) mitzvot, for (the reward of) each and every mitzvah corresponds to the (amount of) enjoyment of the (evil) inclination and to (the amount of) suffering in a matter that is known to humankind either for disgrace or for praise.⁴¹ Everything is for the sake of sanctifying the name of Heaven in the world, whereas in the world to come they follow after the meditations of their hearts.

Subordinate your soul and learn to fear God so you will understand the fear of God. How important is it that all the kinds of inclinations of the heart. There is a transgression whether negative or positive about which the Torah (itself) has set forth a requirement (made one culpable). In the case of a minor transgression your inclination made itself master (over

⁴¹ Avot 2:1.

you) more than in the case of a major transgression. Know that your reward for a minor transgression is greater than that for a major transgression, for God sees into the heart. And what does the Torah prescribe for such (a transgression)? Death.

י"ט. מי שכא על אשת איש אם בא לישאל היאך לעשות תשובה אם בא על אותם שחייב כרת במס' חגיגה (א) אומר חילוק מתי מעות לא יוכל לחקון ומתי יועיל תשובה ומאותן שמועיל להן תשובה ואמרו (ב) חייבי כריתות שלקו נפטרו מיד כריתתן. הרי יש לעשות דבר השקול למלקות או לכרת. אם ימות החורף הוא כשכא לשאל וקרא אם רצה בנהר ישבר הקרח וישב במים עד פיו או עד חוטמו כפי אותה שעה שדיבר עמה על העבירה עד שנמר העבירה. וכן יעשה תדיר כל זמן שיש קרח. ובימות החמה ישב בחצירה שנמלים שם ויסתום פיו או בכלי ששם הנמלים. ויהיה לו אחיז כלי אחר מלא מים שירחוק בו ואם העת באותן ימים שאין זה זה יתענה רק לחם ובמים יאכל בערב כי (ג) בראוכן אומר ששב לשקו ולתעניתו אע"פ שעדיין לא הודה יהודה כי עדיין לא נעשה מעשה [דף ט'] תמר ולמה במים כי אומר במדרש (ד) מאה ושלושים שנה היה יושב ארם הראשון במים עד חוטמו להבסר על שחטא בעץ הדעת שננודה גזירה על כל הדורות. ועוד נופו נתחמם בעבירה ויחקר ויתענה עד שיוכל לקיים לישוב במים בעת הקרח. או כשיש נמלים ודבורים. ובימות החמה בנמלים ויקשור בבגד את פיו ואת נחיריו שלא יכנסו בו. ואם (ה) על כרת וילדה. או אם בא על אשת (ו) בלא אונס או על אשת כהן כאונס הרי אסרה על בעלה או אם ילדה [והוליד] ממזר. זה היה מעשה שהורו לו ועשה בנמלים ביום ובלילות היה שוכב על הארץ בימות החמה כדי שיעלו עליו פרעושים ונקל זה בעיניו והלך ערום במקום כוורת עד שהיה כשרו נסוח וכשמתרפא הולך עוד שם כך עשה הרבה פעמים מה שכתבנו. ואם חטא הרבה פעמים באשה צריך הרבה פעמים כאשר כתוב:

י"ט. (ב) ט' ב'. (ג) מגילה ד' ב'. (ד) בראשית רבה פס"ד ולפינו כשקו ובתעניתו. כובא בתוס' כ"ק צ"ב א' ד"ה ט': ששב משקו ומתעניתו ועיי' שדריהם הם דברי רבנו בכאן. (ז) פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק כ': באחד בשבת נכנס אדם במי גיתון העליון עד שהגיעו המים עד צוארו ובזהר בראשית ג' ב': אדם ספח על ראשו ובכי ועאל במי גיתון עד קדליה כו' וכן הוא במדרש רות החדש פרשה א' וילקט בראשית רמז ל"ד ומה שכתב רבנו מאה ושלושים שנה יעוין עירובין י"ח ב' שאמרו: יושב בתענית מאה ושלושים שנה. (ס) צ"ל עבר על חייבי כרת. (י) צ"ל ישראל.

עד כאן העתקתי מספר שיסד רבינו סעדיה גאון זצ"ל:

SHP PAR. 37

לז. ארבעה פעמים כתוב תשובה בפרשה אתם נצבים. כנגד ד' שמות תשובה. תשובה הבאה תשובה הבת'. תשובת הגדר תשובת המשקל. תשובה הבאה. פי' שאם העבירה הזאת באה לידו שימנע עצמו מלעשותה עוד. תשובת הכתוב שיחמיר עליו ויעשה בעצמו דין כאשר כתוב בתורה תשובת הגדר. פי' שיגדור עצמו מכל דברים שמביאים לידי עבירה זו שחטא בה תשובת המשקל. כי הנאת עבירה יעשה לעצמו צער עיקר תשובה שבא לידו עבירה ומתאוה לעשותה. ויכול לעשות ומעצר עצמו לעשות מה שלבו הפך כלל גדול אמרו בתשובה. כפי הנאת החטא יש לעשות לאדם תשובה תשובה חרטה כאותה אשה באותו מקום ותוקף יצר. ואותו עת מצוי שמתחילה היה עושה. ותשובת הגדר שיזהר שלא לדבר עם אשה שאסורה לו. ושלא לראות על אשה. ותשובה עונש של תורה. אם יש מלקות ארבעים והבשת צריך לקבל עליו עינוי ובשת של מלקות ארבעים. ולאותו בשת שהיו מלקין בפני בני אדם. ותשובת עינוי השוה להנאת [ע"ב] שנהגה כמה פעמים. צריך עליו עינוי כנגד ההנאות שנהגה מן העבירות. וכן לכל מיני עבירה. ולא למצות לא תעשה בלבד. אלא אף למצות עשה שדרי עשה דוחה את לא תעשה:

זאת תורת השב בכל לבו:

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לח. הבא על אשת איש ימנע מכל הנאות הבאות מחמת אשה חוץ מאשתו כמו שאמרו (א) מלוה בריבית שלא יקח ריבית אפילו מן הגוים. כך צריך זה להמנע אפילו לראות פני אשה (ב) וחכמים אמרו אפילו בבגדיה (ג) והעומד במיטה שאיש ואשה שכבו שם כאילו עומד בכריסה של אשה. וימנע מכל מגע אשה ומשחוק ומיחוד. כי נהגה בעוד עמה נפשו מלאה חדות. ועוד גורם לאשה הרדורים. ואע"פ (ד) שאין הקביה מצרפה למעשה מצרפה למחשבה שנאמי' (ירמיה יז י) אני ה' חקר לב בחן כליות ולתת לאיש כדרכו כפרי מעלליו. אילו המעשים וגורם לו על הרדורים ואפילו ניצלו מידי עבירה ירדורו בלכם שהיה יכול להעשות הדבר ויהיה כתוהא על הראשונות. ואם אדם בבית המרחץ או במקום המנוסת והאשה עוברת לפניו ידרור בדברי תורה ואל ידרור אחר אשה. כי דברי תורה ניתנו לסדר הלכ (ה) ותבלץ ליצר הרע: וימנע עצמו מלבא לידי קרי ומלשתות יין. מידה כנגד מידה. שנאמי' (הושע ד יא) זנות ויין ותירוש יקח לב וישים על לבבו מה שעשה בכל יום שנאמי' (תהלים נא ה) כי פשעי אני אדע ומטאתי נגדי חסיד. ויתחרט בבכיה שנאמי' (שם ק"פ קלז) פלגי מים ירדו עיני על לא שמרו תורתך. ויקבל עליו צער נגר יצר זה שהיה לו כנגדו יקבל העונש. וכן

לח. (ב) מנהדרין כ"ה ב'. (ג) ע"ז כ' ב': אסור להסתכל בכגדי צבעונים של אשה. (ד) שבת ק"ם ב' אבל יענין שם כי אמרו ולא מילתא היא. (ז) קדושין ל"ט ב'. (פ) קדושין ל"א א'.

אמר רבננו (ו) גלות מכפרת חצי עין. אע"פ שיש חרטה. והגלות שגולה מדעת כקין וכבר הדיא כדאיתא בברכות בפ' הרואה (ו) וכיהודה שגרם למכור את יוסף ונצטער אביו (ח) וגלה יהודה מאת אחיו ולפי שקיבל עליו גלות יותר מאחיו וזה להיותה יהודה לקדשו. וכת' (זכריה ב' טז) ונחל ה' את יהודה חלקו וילבש לבוש זקנה. כמו שנאמר (שמות ל"ה) ועתה הורד עריך מעליך ואדעה מה אעשה לך. וכתוב (צפניה א' ח) וסקדתי (ט) על כל הלוכש מלבוש נכרי לבוש שגורם מעשה נכרי וימנע משמחת שגאמי (ירמיה י"א טז) מה לידידי בביתי עשותה המומתה הרבים ובשר קדש יעברו מעליך כי רעתני אז תעלי ואל יאמר אדם (י) חציף מאן דמפרש חסאיה. והיאך אנד לחכם נאמר (משלי כ"ח י"ג) מכסה פשעיו לא יצליח. וכתוב (תהלים ל"ב א') אשרי כסוי (יא) פשע נשוי חסאה. מה שאומר מכסה פשעיו לא יצליח. וזהו שנשען על בינתו. אלא טוב לו שיניד לחכם צנוע שיאמר לו איזו תשובה ינחנו בדרך העולם הבא. וידע החכם למי יורה תשובה ומאין וכיצד להורות. לכן כתבתי אילו דרך תשובה להודיע ליראי אלהים. ולא שבאתי להורות כל חכמי אשר נתן ה' יראתו בלבם יראו דברי ואשר שנית יבינו הדברים על מכן. כי לא חכם בחכמים אני כי אם תלמיד לראי ה'.

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מ. והנואף לא יאמר במקום שאין מכירין אותו נואף אני אלא יאמר חוטא אני. וכן הוא אומר (ישעיה נ"ב) ואותי יום יום ידרשון ודעת דרכי יחפצון כני אשר צדקה עשה ומשפט אלהיו לא עזב ישאלוני משפטי צדק קרבת אלהים יחפצון. ואומר (ירמיה ב' ל"ה) הגני נשפט אותך על אמרך לא חסאתי שאומר להקביה אבל לבני אדם (א) לא יאמר בן אלא יאמר להם חסאתי וכת' (עמוס ט' י) האומרים לא תגיש ותקדים בעדינו הרעה לך יאמר חוטא אני.

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מא. ויתפלל בלב נשבר על חסאיו. ויזכור עונותיו שגאמי (בראשית מב כ"א) אבל אשמים אנחנו. ואומר (ישעיה מב כ"ד) מי נתן למשיסה יעקב וישראל לבחזים הלא ה' זו חסאנו לו. ואומר (איכה ג' ל"ט) מה יתאוון אדם חי גבר על חסאיו. בתחילה אומר אדם ולבסוף גבר. צריך אדם להתאוון כשהוא חי (א) אלא אדם. כמו שנאמר (קהלת י"ב ה) כי הולך האדם אל בית [דף ט"ז] עולמו. כמה היה צריך אדם להתאוון כשהוא חי לזכור יום המות. ומיתה ישים על לבו כשיצרו מתגבר עליו. וכן הוא אומר (שם שם א') חכור את בוראך בימי בחורתיך. דבר אחר מה יתאוון כשהוא מצטער ומתאוון בפורעניות שהוא לקי וחיו אינם חיון אז יזכור כשהיה בתגבורת יצרו אז חסא. יאמר על חסאתי כל אלה. ויהי רצון שיהיו כפרה שלימה על כל חסאתי. ובשוכה (ל) על פשעיו יאמר דמעת יכבה חרון אפך ממני. ואת לבבי אשר נמס ויהי לים תכבה נחלי אש אשר קדחה באפך. ותשובת מעשי הם ישיבו אפך מכני ותעניותי ועניותי הם ימלאוך רחמים עלי. וערך שולחן אשר לא ערכתי תחשוב זבח ערך. והסיר אשר לא הצנתי על נחלים תחשוב כאש תוקד על מזבחך לא תכבה. וכלי מאכלי אשר לא הובאו לפני תחשוב כאשר יביאו בני ישראל את המנחה. (ב) ואת חסרון דמי יכפר

(ו) סנהדרין ל"ז ב'. (ז) ב"ר א'. (ח) ב"ר פרשה פ"ה. (ט) צ"ל על השרים ועל בני המלך ועל כל הלוכשים. (י) ברכות ל"ד ב'. (יא) צ"ל נשוי פשע כסוי חסאה.

מ. (ב) ר"ל לא יאמר נואף אני אלא חוטא אני וזהו יזכור דברי הסתבר. מא. (ב) צ"ל ולא בשעה שהוא אדם ר"ל בשעת מיתתו. (ג) כעין מה שאמרו ברכות י"ז א'.

עלי כדמים על קרנות המזבח. ומיעוט חלבי כחלבי אימורים דמעות עיני כהן נסך שכו
וקול בכי נקול שירים שהיו משוררים וחשיבת עינים בצום ובכי כאור הגזרות (ג) וריח
רעבון כריח הקמדות. ושיחי כברכת כהנים ובשפיכות נפשי ולבבי עם מי דמעותי תמחה
משעיי וחלישות אברי כנחתי קרבן ושברון לבי כאבני מזבח ומשברי לבי כזבחך ולא
תבוה לבי הנשבר ושינוי בנדים חמודות כבגדי הכהונה. ומניעה רחיצה כקידוש ידים
ורגלים. כי צריך למנע רחיצות חוץ מרחיצות מצוה. ואילו לא היה לו לשנות בגדיו טוב
היה לו שהרי אמרו (ד) מי שאין לו אלא חלוק אחד היו אינם חיים וקריעת לבבי
יקרעו ספרים שכתובים בהם עונותיי ומצא שפתי יסתחמו פיות שוטניי וחלשות לבי
ישמחו לב מבקשיך ובטני הריקה מן תענוגים אל תשיבני ריקם מלפניך ובעבור נפשי
היבישה אשר מתאוה תמלא משאלותיי. וניחומי ותשובתי ישיבך אליך ותצא אותי
כי נחמתי על רוב מעללי על דרכי הרעים כי עשיתים בין שניונות בין דוונות ואתה יודע
ורואה כליות ולב. ואתה יודע כי שוין מחשבותיי ואמרי פי. יהי רצון מלפניך רחום
וחנן שתסיר מעלי כל דברים המעכבים את התשובה ולא אשיב לדעך לסניך:

יהי רצון מלפניך שיהא חלבי ודמי שנתמעט כאילו הקרבתי לפניך על גבי המזבח ותצאני.
(ג) כזה שמוט כי ב: יהי רצון מלפניך שיהא הריח העולה ספי בשעה זו כריח העולה והקרבן
באש המזבח ותצאני. (ד) ביצה ללב ב.

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ויש לך פרעון ושכו לפי הדגאה ולפי הצער שנא' (ירמיה יז י') (יב) בחן כליות ולב
לתת לאיש כדרכיו כפרי מעלליו והדין נותן לאדם כמו שנראה ונודע לו והקביה כמו
שרואה בלב. לפיכך אמרו חכמים (יג) שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצות כי כל מצוה
ומצוה כנגד הנאת היצר וכנגד הפורענות בדבר הנודע לבני האדם לננאי או לשבח והכל
שיתקדש שם שמים בעולם ומכל מקום לעולם הבא אינם הולכים אלא אחר יצר מחשבות
לבם: כיף כיף כפוף את יצרך ולמד ליראה את ה' אז תבין יראת ה', כיצד חשוב כל
מיני יצר הלבבות יש עבירה שחייבה עליו תורה לאו או עשה ועל עבירה קלה יצרך
מתגבר יותר מעבירה חמורה דע לך ששכר גדול על עבירה קלה יותר מעבירה חמורה
כי ה' יראה ללבב, ומה שחייבה תורה בואת מיתה

(יג) צ"ל אני ה' חוקר לב בוחן כליות ולתת. (יז) אבות פי"ב מ"א.

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