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ADDITIONAL THESIS INFORMATION

- There are six chapters in this thesis: *Hasidic Women Rebbes: Fact or Fiction?*
- This thesis explores a rarely documented phenomenon in Hasidic history: the woman Rebbe.
- The goals of the thesis were tri-fold. First, to introduce the historical circumstances of how and why women were able to attain rabbinic positions in Polish Hasidism from the late 1740's until the mid-1930's. Second, to present the life stories of these women as published in Yiddish and Hebrew documents. Third, to submit English translations of these documents that have not yet been published.
- The first four chapters present a historical basis for how and why these women came into positions of religious prominence. Following these chapters is an introduction to these women through anecdotes and then, a section on the reaction to women as Hasidic Rebbes.
- Research for this thesis came from many sources. The material on women in Hasidism was found in Yiddish articles and books by Shemen, Feinkind and Meckler, Hebrew articles and books by Twersky, Horodezky, Taubenhauz and Geshuri. Further sources include historical books on the Hasidic movement, volumes about the role of women in shtetl society and *halakhic* sources, including the Talmud, on women and their religious obligations.

Hasidic Women as Rebbes: Fact or Fiction?
Renee Goldberg

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

March 10, 1997
Advisor: Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Grandparents, Stanley and Anne Abrams, Zikronam L'ivracha. Their memory has been a blessing and an inspiration.

Acknowledgments

Remember the days of old, consider the years of age's past; Ask your parents, they will teach you, your elders, they will share with you.

(Deuteronomy 32:7)

I am indebted to Rabbi Lawrence Kushner for several reasons, not the least of which is introducing me to Hasidic Women Rebbes. Over the years, Rabbi Kushner has been my mentor and my role model. During the thesis process, he taught me to research and to organize scholarly work properly. I will carry and teach his lessons wherever I go.

The faculty and students at HUC-JIR have been an integral part of my life over the past five years. They have taught me not only what it means to be a Jew, but also that a teacher can be a friend. I would like to especially mention Dr. Lawrence Hoffman and Dr. Sharon Keller who have helped me to realize my true potential.

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My family has been the rock upon which I stand, not only for these five years of Rabbinic school, but for all of my days. They are my ultimate teachers and role models. Not blood of my blood, nor flesh of my flesh, but heart of my heart, and soul of my soul. I would also like to thank my parents and my sister for listening to, and

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PROLOGUE

In 1972, Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, President of the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, stood before Sally Preisand at Temple Emmanu-el of New York. He placed his hands on her head, and granted her *smicha*, thus announcing to the public that the Reform movement had just ordained the first woman Rabbi. He was wrong.

In the 18th and 19th Century of Eastern Europe, several Hasidic women fulfilled the duties of Rebbes and were perceived by the men and women of their communities to be no less important than the male Rebbe of the time. These women advised the people through the Hasidic *Yehidut* (a very intensive counseling session), preached from behind a *mehitzah* (a physical barrier), taught Torah at *Shabbas* lunches and went beyond the confines of traditional women's *mitzvot* by donning *teffilin* and *tallis*. Their stories were unique in terms of their religious practices and spiritual role within the community. Yet, in many ways, they were paradigmatic of Eastern European shtetl women who married and raised children while working outside the home.

Their story begins in the small townships of Eastern Europe at a time when political, economic, and socio-cultural upheavals were beginning to challenge long-standing rules and ways of thinking. Hasidism, a populist movement, sought to equalize Jews of different learning levels and financial backgrounds. Consequently, women were offered an opportunity to step beyond the customary sphere of the home into the sphere of religion. Women were encouraged to be

religiously active, at times to a greater degree than their spouses. They were allowed to meet one- to-one with the Rebbe for counseling, study Torah and read Hasidic tales in Yiddish, as long as they maintained the unwritten rules of Jewish society by marrying and having children.

Within collections of Hasidic tales, stories about religious women abound. Most of these women, who performed the function of a Rebbe, shared a common bond. They were the wives and daughters of Tzaddikim (Hasidic leaders) whose own personal merit guaranteed public acclaim. The one exception to this was Hannah Werbermacher, the Maid of Ludmir. Some Hasidic women were said to have "divine inspiration" and achieved fame for their knowledge of rabbinic literature. Others were sought after by Hasidim for a blessing or a teaching.¹ Of the Chentsiner Rebbetzin, *Der Moment* wrote that she, "conducted herself as a rebbe," and other Yiddish daily newspapers record her special skills².

The most famous of all Hasidic women, Hannah Rachel Werbermacher, the Maid of Ludmir, is written about in great depth. She did not come from a Hasidic dynasty and deviated from the social standards of the period by refusing to marry. Consequently, the Hasidic Rabbinical authorities forced her to take a husband. When she was divorced less than a week later, she was ousted from her position as Rebbe of the Green Shul to relative obscurity, where she

¹Ada Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism" from *Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Chimen Abramsky* ed. by Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein. (London: Peter Halban, 1988) 495.

² Nehemia Polen, "Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought" *Modern Judaism*, (issue 12, 1992) 13.

lived out her days in Palestine. The Maid of Ludmir served as a symbol to those women who thought that they could actively practice religion in the public sphere without being married.

Although several Hasidic women's service to the community was influential, they did not perceive of themselves as trend-setters, or feminists. There are no writings by or about these specific women "Rebbes" which describe their role as breaking barriers. Rather, they are described as women who take part in assuring the survival of the Jewish people through the specific role of teacher. Most often, a woman who served as a Rebbe, inherited the position after the death of her husband. When she proved herself a capable leader in the eyes of the community, she remained the Rebbe until her death, while maintaining her family, raising learned children, and occasionally working outside of the home.

The position of Rebbe provided these women with certain financial benefits. A woman who counseled those in the Hasidic community was given a donation by each person who sought her advice or blessing for upkeep of the rabbinic home and communal tzedakah. These funds, along with the money the woman inherited from her deceased spouse, allowed her to live in relative comfort, even, in some cases, beyond comfort to great wealth. Stories about influential Hasidic women and their fortunes are found in many Yiddish sources.

Although these Yiddish sources describe the ministries of women "Rebbes" in detail, they are written decades after these women lived. The earliest article mentioning the phenomenon of Hasidic egalitarianism was printed in 1939 by Samuel Aba Horodezky, with a reference to a 1905 article by the same author..

Although I searched at Yivo, the New York City Public Library Jewish Division, JTS, and HUC, I was unable to locate the 1905 Horodezky article. The 1939 chapter on "The Woman in Hasidism", from Samuel Aba Horodezky's four volume series, *Hasidut VeHa Hasidim*, does not supply footnotes nor a Bibliography. The fact that there is no scholarly substantiation is not uncommon in Hasidic literature. For instance, the first published Hasidic volume, *Shivtei HaBesht* (1815), records stories about the life and work of the founder of Hasidism, Israel Baal Shem Tov.³ While the stories claim to be based on fact, they are in truth based on hearsay. Israel Baal Shem Tov did exist and function as a religious leader in the 1700's; but, we do not have much authentic data about his ministry. From the circumstances of Israel Baal Shem Tov, we can, therefore assume, that certain women did play a role in Hasidism, as their stories are recorded by later generations. I will set out to prove that they were considered Rebbes.

Overall, in this thesis, I will explore several of these extraordinary Hasidic women and what their example teaches us about the egalitarianism of Hasidic society. Some of these women were famous and recognized leaders within their communities, while others were ordinary women who became recognized as prominent teachers only after their deaths. Whenever possible, I have drawn upon reports of these particular personalities from those who lived at the same time. Several of these women are said to have recounted their stories and experiences to Yiddish and Hebrew authors, but the major phenomenon of women Rebbes was discovered and analyzed by scholars

³H. Rabinowicz, *The World of Hasidism* (Hartford: Hartmore House, 1970) 39.

during the course of the 20th century. Chapter one investigates the origins of Hasidism, its leaders and its themes.

I examine the role of the woman in the Shtetl from homemaker to businesswoman, in chapter two.

In Chapter three, I explore the situation of women throughout the *halakhic* Jewish tradition, from the days of the Talmud until contemporary times. The issues which I will focus on are women's prayer, Torah study, *mehitzah*, *tallis* and *tefillin*.

Chapter four investigates the training, duties and life of a Hasidic male Rebbe, focusing on his charisma and his supernatural powers.

Chapter five explores the phenomena of Hasidic women as Rebbes through their life stories.

In chapter six, I analyze how Hasidic communities and modern scholars respond to the circumstance of those women explored in chapter five. In addition, this chapter looks at why these women are only introduced in historical literature on Hasidism as late as the 1930's.

The primary texts which I will use to demonstrate the Hasidic woman in her role as Rebbe are : M. Feinkind's *Froyen Rabbonim un Barimte Perzenlekheiten in Poylen.*, N. Shemen's *Batsiung Tsu Der Froy* and Samuel Aba Horodezky's *Ha-Hasidut Veba-Hasidim*. I have worked in conjunction with Naomi Rappaport in translating the sections from the above Yiddish documents, as well as an obituary on Sarah the Chetnisner Rebbetzin, which are presented as an appendix to this document.

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Chapter I: Hasidism

The Beginnings

First appearing in the villages of the Polish Ukraine in the mid 1730's, Hasidism was a populist movement that sought to make communal mysticism accessible. Paralleling other religious trends of the period, such as the revivalist movements of German Pietism, the Moravian Brethren and the Methodists, Hasidism stressed the importance of prayer, ecstasy, mass enthusiasm and a respiritualization of the faith over traditional books and services.⁴ Early Hasidism encouraged communal worship reform, a belief in the transmigration of souls, individual salvation and personal communion with God,⁵ through reshaping the nature of Lurianic Kabbalah.

Prayer in Hasidism

From its inception, Hasidism developed its own prayer rite by combining Isaac Luria's Ashkenazic rite and the Sephardic rite of Palestine. Prayer became central to the movement and many groups of Hasidim opened their own small prayer houses called *shtiblach*.⁶ For the Hasid, the origins of prayer lay in conflict with the world of

⁴ Bernard D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100-1800* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973) 272.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁶ "Hasidism", *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1401.

everyday thought and action because prayer brought one to a higher level of consciousness. Prayer also connected the one who prayed with the community and with God. Exultation, as a part of the prayer service, led to the creation of Hasidic song and dance. This form of celebration occurred in the *Shtiblach* and in communal gatherings and increased the cohesiveness among Hasidic groups.

Hasidic Ideology

There are many important ideas within Hasidism, equally significant for both men and women. I have chosen to explore four that I feel are unique to Hasidism: *devekut*, *hitlahavut*, *bittul hayesh* and *zimzum*, interrelate in the way that they connect the human soul to the Spark of all Souls.

Hasidism means devotion, a pious communion with God. Therefore, the ideas of Hasidism all relate to ways that the common man can serve God through everyday actions. One of the focal points of this relationship between God and man is the Hasidic doctrine of *devekut*. Within general Hebrew usage, the word *devekut* merely means attachment or cleaving, but since the mystics of the thirteenth century the term has come to symbolize a deep, "Intimate communion with God."⁷ *Devekut*, as interpreted by Hasidism, was a state of personal bliss, attained by the individual through contemplation, prayer and Torah study. *Devekut* was possible within the confines of

⁷Gershom Sholem, "*Devekut*, or Communion with God" in *Essential Papers on Hasidism: Origins to Present*, ed. Gershon David Hundert (New York: New York University, 1991) 275.

Hasidism because God was omnipresent. Yet, in spite of God's prevalence, there were periods when man could not commune with God. Therefore he consumed external stimulants including drugs and alcohol to attain the state of meditative bliss.

By the virtue of *devekut*, Hasidism urges man to engage in the world around him. The true Hasid is able to see God in all things. Therefore when he partakes in material things, his thoughts are not turned to their pleasures, but rather to the holy sparks by which the material matter is furnished. In many of the Hasidic tales, the Rebbes are occupied with seemingly frivolous or playful actions; yet according to Hasidic thought, their minds are engaged with the sparks of God that are in everything.

Hasidic *hitlahavut*, enthusiasm, is further based upon this notion that man attempts to reach God with uninhibited joy. Man rejoices that he is able to serve God through rapturous prayer. From the beginnings of the Hasidic movement, ecstatic prayer was prevalent. A number of Rebbes were known for their ecstasy in praying. Of Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev it was said that he would cry out, "My heart is on fire."⁸ Another Rebbe was known for banging his head on the wall to the point where it began to bleed. Still others cried out so loudly in prayer they caused terror in the hearts of their followers.

The Chabad movement particularly focused on the idea of *hitlahavut*, providing two models of expressing ecstasy. On one hand, R. Aaron of Starsoselje would pray with such a great shouting that those around him were moved to ecstasy. On the other hand, R. Dov

⁸Tzvi M. Rabinowicz, *The Encyclopedia of Hasidism*, "Ecstasy" (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson Inc, 1996) 100.

Baer, disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, would stand silently in prayer for as long as three hours. At the end of his prayer session, Dov Baer would be soaked with perspiration from the great strain of standing absolutely still.⁹

Another important theme within Hasidism is annihilation of the self or *bittul hayesh*. Within Hasidic theory, a person's ego creates a barrier between the internal soul and God. The ego clouds humility, preventing human beings from reaching the ultimate level of existence. In order to reach God, therefore, the person breaks down this barrier. Yet this is more difficult than it seems. Before man can attain self-annihilation, man must learn to evolve a self that can be annihilated. This comes from the realization that man is insignificant and that God is the true reality.

Bittul hayesh in man relates directly to *zimzum* by God. Central to early Hasidic thought was the idea that God withdrew from Godself into Godself in order to leave a space where the finite world could develop. This idea of *zimzum* was developed from Lurianic Kabbalah in an attempt to explain how and why evil could exist. For several of the Hasidic masters, *zimzum* was a necessary prerequisite for revelation. The seeker needed to take an active role in uncovering God in this world.

The Baal Shem Tov

Hasidic leaders were easily able to move into positions of great societal responsibility and prominence. Each leader or Tzaddik

⁹*Ibid.*

headed a mystic circle of followers who adopted a distinct pattern of life and Hasidic focus. Therefore, the Rebbe molded the outlook and lifestyle of his community. Most *havurot* (groups) had their own synagogue within the community and based their religious values upon the ideals of their Rebbe. At first, these groups were quite small and did not exert much influence over the general Jewish community; but under the leadership of Israel Baal Shem Tov, Hasidism expanded rapidly.

Legend emphasizes that the progenitor of the new movement was the folk healer and charismatic traveling preacher, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov or the Besht (1700-1760). Baal Shem was a title given to scholars who had knowledge of God's special names and who worked miracles through them. They were not Talmudic scholars, yet they gathered a following by providing healing through prayers, amulets and special medications. The Baal Shem Tov was one such healer, who began his career as a heder teacher, but, by 1740, had attracted a considerable following of disciples.

Hasidic stories written by the students of the Baal Shem Tov relate their leader's rise and show how he changed the lives of those around him through his charismatic, religious personality. People came to his court first in Tolstoye and then at Mezibezh to be cured and to join him in ecstatic prayer. The Besht journeyed abroad in order to spread his influence beyond Poland's borders.¹⁰ By the 1730's, the Baal Shem Tov served as the leader of a large Hasidic circle, his followers attracted by his charisma and acceptance of all

¹⁰ "Hasidism", *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1391.

peoples. They were further convinced that he possessed supernatural powers such as clairvoyance. The Besht left few letters of importance, but his disciples published his oral teachings in the 1780's.¹¹ By 1815, the legends of the Baal Shem Tov, *Shivtei HaBesht*, had appeared in print.¹²

At his death in 1760, the Besht left a close knit group of supporters, but no obvious successor. After a period of uncertainty, leadership passed to Dov Baer of Mezritch, known as the Maggid (1710-1772).¹³ Dov Baer was a different type of leader than the Besht. He focused his efforts upon his own scholars, rather than the general community and often refused to see those who came to seek advice. Furthermore, Dov Baer did not possess the charisma of the Besht. Nevertheless, Hasidism continued to propagate and spread.

By 1772, at the death of Dov Baer, Hasidism had attracted many proponents as well as opponents. *Mitnaggdim* (anti-Hasidists) objected against to movement for what they perceived as permissiveness in following the *halakhah*, praying with excessive ecstasy, using the Lurianic rather than Ashkenazic prayer book, and creating a liberal Torah commentary.

The basic model of future Hasidic leadership, the Dynastic Rebbe emerged in the generation of the movement following Dov Baer (1773-1815).¹⁴ From this period on, there were several contemporaneous leaders, who represented different ideas and ideals

¹¹ Robert Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History* (New York: MacMillan,1980) 487.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 488.

¹⁴ "Hasidism", *Encyclopedia Judaica* ,1392.

within Hasidism. Leadership and allegiance to these leaders were passed down from generation to generation. The leader was called the Tzaddik or Rebbe, and was the religious authority within the Hasidic community.

The Tzaddik, Rebbe and Master

The Baal Shem Tov's personality and style of singular leadership, determined the character of his successors and was central to the Hasidic movement. At its core was the relationship of Tzaddik to Hasid, and participation in this relationship defined one as a Hasid. The Tzaddik, also called the Rebbe or master, was the sole authority within his community, who had been given his authority by God. The student who did not live in his master's court, traveled there for the High holidays and Shabbat in order to seek the master's blessing and to find God. In addition, the Hasid sought advice from his Rebbe on every aspect of life. This relationship is further described in the works of Yaakov Joseph of Polonnoye and the teachings of the Maggid of Mezhibezh.¹⁵

The Hasidic community believed that the Tzaddik possessed certain mystical powers that grew out of his relationship with God. He had the ability to look deep within the human soul and call upon God for its healing without amulets and herbs.¹⁶ Rebbes were also

¹⁵ ed by Tzvi M. Rabinowicz, *The Encyclopedia of Hasidism* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc, 1996) 187.

¹⁶ Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality from the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present*. "Typologies of Leadership and the Hasidic Zaddiq" (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co, 1987) 120.

said to possess clairvoyance and prophecy, and were thought to have been reincarnated.

Further, the Tzaddik was seen as the very center of the cosmos who could intervene to reverse even the decree of Heaven.¹⁷ He was the sole member of the Hasidic community who served as a channel to God, and could therefore, intercede on behalf of the people. The Tzaddik was more than a mere leader, he was the heart, soul and lifeblood of the community. Through his merit the entire universe was sustained.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter II: The Jewish Woman in Eastern European Shtetl Society in the Late 18th Century

Hasidism was concerned not only with religious ideals, but also with the everyday life of the Jew. In this section, I will explore women within the Shtetl during the late 18th century, focusing on their domestic and economic responsibilities.

Domestic Work

A Yiddish song of the time tells of the life of a Jewish wife:

He runs to the synagogue
And reads all the laws,
He runs here and there
Growling like a bear.

To market she must hurry
Wood to buy and worry
Bread she must bake
Kindling she must break;
The children she must care for
That's what she's there for,
Put this one to bed,
Smear up that one's head;
Soothe this one's ache
To the out-house that one take,
And for measure full or near
A baby every year.¹⁸

Although the lyrics seem bitter, the way of life it illustrates is accurate. Not only did wives have an economic role to play outside the family structure, they also organized the internal family life. Women

¹⁸ Mirian Shomer Zunser, *Yesterday: A Story of Three Generations of Jewish Life* (New York, 1939) 153-154.

cared for and taught the children, maintained the home, and prepared meals. They also assured that their husbands fulfilled the man's religious duties, and performed their own duties by "being fruitful and multiplying," lighting Shabbat candles, tearing the *Hallah*, and keeping *niddah*. Any daughters of the family assisted in domestic chores and shared in the responsibility of earning a living.

Work Outside of the Home

Jewish women in Eastern European shtetl society played a central role in the family's economic life, but their domain was not home-limited. Women did the buying and the selling of products in the marketplace and therefore, had better control of the local language, climate and society, than did their husbands.¹⁹ Women also supplied the bulk of the family's money by working in clothing factories and artisan shops, making cigars, cigarettes, stockings, food products and supplying domestic labor.²⁰ Other women possessed talents that were needed to run family businesses. And, the most fortunate women, inherited wealth enough to avoid the necessity of work.

In the shtetls of Eastern Europe, Jewish men were legally responsible for bread winning, but most women assumed economic responsibility, in order to enable the men in their lives to study the religious tradition. If a woman could sufficiently support her family,

¹⁹Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herog, *Life is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995) 132.

²⁰Susan A. Glen, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 8.

she could marry a scholar who would bring honor to the family name, because religiously accomplished men were more important in the shtetl than those who possessed wealth.

Those scholars who were unable to find a suitable wife, received the economic support of the community. But such cases were far and few between, as marriage was an imperative in the Jewish world. Ordained Rabbis also had their salaries paid by the Jewish community yet, the number of men who achieved Rabbinic status was small. Therefore, most scholars sought to marry a woman who had, or who could provide, wealth.²¹

A hierarchy of female occupations existed in the Eastern European Jewish Shtetl. Business, any job that was not domestic, was the most prized because it provided a degree of economic independence and allowed for more flexible hours. Moreover, Jewish women felt that it was better to "work for oneself than for someone else,"²² and business provided this kind of opportunity. In addition, business was identified with intellectual challenge, a prized ethic to the Shtetl woman who could not participate in the study of Jewish tradition.

Towards the lower end of the scale was domestic work. For these women, an occupation in which one woman worked for another was perceived as humiliating. The pay was low, the work was difficult, and once the young woman married, she could no longer work for another and keep up her own home. Yet a domestic position re-

²¹ *Ibid*, 10.

²² *Ibid*, 16.

quired no prior talents, training or skill; therefore, even the poorest women of the town could find domestic employment immediately.²³

Possessing even less status than the domestic worker was the prostitute within the Shtetl walls. Usually girls whose families were extremely poor were forced to sell themselves into the Shtetl brothel.²⁴ The girl with the least standing was the prostitute, who could not find work within the Shtetl walls, and supplied sexual favors to the gentiles.

Education of the Hasidic Women

The education of a young Jewish girl was dependent upon the nature of her community and the status of her family. In some municipalities, girls studied with their brothers, learning from the same *melamed* (teacher), even though their sessions were much shorter. For them, study was marginal to the more important activities of their existence such as care for siblings and running the household.

Most women could write letters and read Yiddish literature. Books of both a religious and a secular nature were translated into Yiddish. The most famous book for women was *Tse'eno u-Re'eno*, "Go out and See," a Yiddish version of the Torah, which was divided into parshiot, paralleling the synagogue cycle. Interwoven with homilies, sections from the Torah connected the Shtetl problems with those of historic Israel. They were also encouraged to read religious *khinnos*; Yiddish prose poems composed by the Rabbis. These poems provided

²³ *Ibid*, 17.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 16.

insight into the Jewish Holiday calendar and other special life cycle events.²⁵

Although women were encouraged to read Yiddish, they were deterred from learning Hebrew as it was part of the male domain. In order to sway girls away from the temptation of studying Hebrew, they were taught music and languages in secular schools.²⁶ Nevertheless, many women did study Hebrew as a result of the need for a "*zogerkeh*," a woman who could lead the service in Hebrew on the women's side of the *mehitzah*.

Although studying was reserved for men, some women did acquire a considerable amount of learning through their brothers and fathers, either because the family was more open-minded, or the girl expressed an interest in study. Women needed some knowledge of commandments in order to create a Jewish home and teach their children the religious precepts. Furthermore, a woman was responsible for keeping her own three commandments of lighting Shabbat candles, tearing the *hallah* and *niddah*, and would not be able to do so without attaining a minimal level of Jewish knowledge.

²⁵Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herog, *Life is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995) 126.

²⁶*Ibid*, 127.

Chapter III: Women and Halakhah

Those Hasidic women who were educated beyond the standard for women, were known for wearing a *Tallis* and *Teffillin*, and teaching Torah from behind a *mehitzah* (an opaque partition). These customs dated back to the time of their mothers and grandmothers who followed traditional *halakhic* observances similar to that of men. In this chapter, we will consider five areas of *halakhic* observance and their evolution for women: prayer, women behind a *mehitzah*, Torah study and the commandments of *tallis* and *teffilin* as performed by women.

Prayer

Women are generally dismissed by several Talmudic Rabbis from the obligation to perform positive time-bound commandments. Prayer is one such time-bound commandment, but women, do, nevertheless, pray. Talmud *Yerushalmi Berakhōt* 3:3 teaches that: *v'hyyavyn B'tephilah- k'day sh'yhe' kol ehad v'ehad m'vaqesh rahamiym al asmo-* women "are required to pray, so that each person may invoke God's mercies on himself."²⁷ Women must act as their own petitioners, following the example of Hannah, mother of Samuel the prophet (1 Sam. 2:1). The Babylonian Talmud includes the same summons with different words: *V'hyyavyn B'tephilah- drahamay nynhu-* "They [women] are required to pray, for prayer is pleading

²⁷Talmud *Yerushalmi, Berakhōt*, 3:3.

for mercy."²⁸ Although both editions of the Talmud agree that women must pray, they do not determine which prayers women are required to recite.²⁹

Yalkut Shimoni supports women's recitation of the *Amidah*: *V'titpalele Hanah- mikan anu lamdyn shenashim hyyavot b'tephillah, shekain Hanah haytah mitpalelet shemoneh esreh brachot-* "And Hannah prayed (1 Sam 2:1) From this we learn that women are required to pray, for Hannah was reciting the *Shemoneh Esreh*."³⁰ Further authorities such as Ramban and the author of *Mishneh B'rurah*, instruct women to recite the *amidah* for both *shacharit* and *minhah*³¹. Yet most later codes such as *Magen Avraham*, *Shulhan Arukh ha-rav* and *Arukh ha-Shulhan*³² determine that women need not recite prayers at the set time.

While most Rabbinic authorities supported women reciting the *amidah*, the reading of the *Kaddish* prayer by women was prohibited. Our tradition ruled that only a man could say *Kaddish* for a parent. Where there are no sons, a daughter still could not recite *Kaddish*. Yet during the Hasidic period, several women leaders were described as having said *Kaddish* for their parents. In spite of past injunctions against women reciting *Kaddish*, this did not cause an uproar, rather,

²⁸ Talmud *Bavli*, *Berakhot*, 20b.

²⁹ Irwin Haut, "Are Women Obligated to Pray" in Grossman and Haut, ed. *Daughters of the King* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992)91.

³⁰ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Section 80.

³¹ *Mishnah B'rurah* 106:4.

³² Gertsel Ellinson, *Serving the Creator: A Guide to Rabbinic Sources*, Eliner Library Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora(Israel: The World Zionist Organization, 1968) 175, Note 9.

it was seen as a sign of their great religious spirit. From that period on, women were able to recite the *Kaddish* in synagogue as *minhag*. In 1963 a formal, authoritative responsa on the subject was written by Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin.³³

Mehitzah

Over time, a *minhag* was established that a woman could only pray publicly from behind the *mehitzah*. This custom arose from the idea that a man cannot wholly focus on his prayers if he can set eyes upon a woman. According to Rabbinic tradition, the Second Temple had a separate *Ezrat Nashim*, a women's court. This one instance of separate women's seating is used to support the idea of praying from behind the *mehitzah* in later tradition. Yet, the Talmud only indicates a need to separate men and women for the *Simchat Beit ha-Sho'eva*, the Water Drawing Festival, determining that separation was due to the notion that drinking alcohol would result in inappropriate behavior.³⁴

There are no codes where a *mehitzah*, or separate seating is required, but during the Medieval period, we find within the responsa

³³ Irwin Haut, "Are Women Obligated to Pray" in Grossman and Haut, ed. *Daughters of the King* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992)98.

³⁴ Norma Baumel Joseph, "*Mehitzah : Halakhic Decisions and Political Consequences*" in Grossman and Haut, ed. *Daughters of the King* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992) 198.

literature, that a screen was erected for the Rabbi's lecture.³⁵ The placing of a *mehitzah* seemed to be common practice from the Middle Ages on, to keep men's prayers free from the impure thoughts that could ensue from sitting beside a woman.

During the Hasidic period, where *halakhic* restrictions were somewhat lessened, and women performed various religious obligations formerly associated with men, the *mehitzah* was maintained. As prayer leaders and lecturers, women spoke from behind the curtain.

A formal responsa requiring *mehitzah* for all Orthodox prayer services was written only when the Reform Movement removed separate seating.³⁶

Torah Study for Women

In several *halakhic* works, especially in the Talmud, women are prohibited from studying Torah. Yet there is a tradition amongst several Rabbis of the Talmud that encourages women to take part in the study and teaching of Torah.

According to Mishnah *Sota* 3:4: *Ben Azzi omer: eish hyav lamdan-* "Ben Azzi said that a man must teach his daughter Torah." There are two apparent reasons for his ruling. First, women are required to maintain the laws of the Jewish community and teach them to their children. And second, women need to understand the mechanisms that govern the establishment of the laws and to make deci-

³⁵ Norma Baumel Joseph, "*Mehitzah: Halakhic Decisions and Political Consequences*" in Grossman and Haut, ed. *Daughters of the King* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992) 118.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

sions based on precedents. Further sections of the Talmud, determine that Torah study is not a time-bound commandment, therefore, women can learn its precepts if they have the time and the inclination. *Bava Batra* 119 b teaches:

The daughters of Zelophehad were wise; they spoke up at the appropriate moment, when *Moshe Rabbeynu* was in expounding the section on Levirate marriage, whereupon they said to him, "If we are considered like a son, then give us an inheritance [in Eretz Israel] like a son; if we are not like a son, then our mother's brother-in-law should marry her." They knew how to expound law, for they declared, "Had there been a son [to our father] we would not have spoken... even if the son had left a daughter we would not have spoken."³⁷

This Talmudic discussion teaches that these wise women needed to study Torah in order to respond to Moses. They were considered wise because they knew the ways of the Torah.

Tosefta Berakhot 2:12 comments further that women who are in various stages of impurity may study scriptures and mishnah. From the Middle Ages until the present, legal codes and various commentators preclude women from the study of Mishnah altogether and the study of Torah during the period of *niddah*.³⁸

In the middle ages, Maimonides comments on the study of Torah by women stating:

A woman who studies Torah is rewarded, but not to the same degree as is a man. This is so since she is not commanded. Anyone who does that which one is not commanded to do does not receive the same reward as one who is commanded, but a lesser reward. However, even though she is rewarded, the sages command that a man should not teach his daughter Torah. This is because most women are not attuned to study and so will turn the words of Torah into distortions according to the inadequacy of their minds. Our sages say that anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is to be considered as if he had taught her

³⁷ Talmud *Bavli*, *Baba Batra* 119b.

³⁸ Shoshana Pantel Zolty, "And All Your Children Shall be Learned": *Women and The Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History*. (Northvale, NJ,: Jason Aronson, 1993)56.

distortions (tiflut). This statement refers to the Oral Torah; as for the Written Torah, he ought not to teach her, but if he has done so, it is not as if he had taught her distortions.³⁹

Maimonides makes several important points in reference to the discussion of women as students of Torah. First, he determines that there is inherent merit in the study of the Oral Torah by women, even though it is forbidden by the sages. Women need to study several parts of the Torah in order to teach their children the commandments, and in order to follow those commandments. Second, he states that women can study from the Written Torah, an activity that was discouraged but not prohibited. Finally, Maimonides draws a distinction between the Written and the Oral Torah determining, that while the study of one by women is strictly forbidden, the other could cause no harm.

A response to Maimonides' position comes from the commentary of Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher in the *Arba'ah Turim*. In quoting Rabbi Joel Sirkis (17th C. Poland), Asher writes:

Maimonides distinction between Written and oral Torah is based on a passage in Tractate Hagigah: "Assemble the people, the men, the women and the children" (Deut. 31:10). If the men come to learn and the women come to listen, why then do the children come? We see from here that women have an obligation to listen to the Written Torah in order that they will know how to perform commandments. Of necessity we must conclude that when Rabbi Eliezer said, "It is as if he teaches her Tiflut," he was referring to the Oral Law....Thus it is preferable that women not be taught formally and routinely, but only by informal listening...⁴⁰

³⁹ Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Talmud Torah* 1:13.

⁴⁰ Shoshana Pantel Zolty, "And All Your Children Shall be Learned": *Women and The Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson, 1993) 59.

Rabbi Sirkis bases his comments on the recognition that women were commanded to listen to the Written Torah at Mt. Sinai. Listening, in this case, designates informal learning while teaching, indicates intense study. From these sections, we can understand that while there was no formalized study for women until later, women were encouraged to "listen" to the Torah in the synagogue.

Although most responsa and other Jewish literature written after the Middle Ages urge women not to study Torah or Talmud, there are sources that suggest, that women did study the Torah. In the *Sefer Sibuv Rabbi Pethiah* it is said of Rabbi Shmuel⁴¹ "that he had no sons, only one daughter. She is well versed in *Tanakh* and Talmud. She teaches *Tanakh* to young men through a window; she is closeted inside the house while the pupils are below outside so that they are unable to see her."⁴² This story of Rabbi Shmuel's daughter proves that women did study the Torah despite the injunctions of the Talmud. Another similar instance is the wife of R. Yehoshua Falk, Madame Belah. As described by her son:

My mother, my teacher, Madame Belah of blessed memory...we ought to honor her and place on record some of her good deeds for the enlightenment of future generations, so that all Jewish daughters may learn from her and practice accordingly....Every day, winter and summer, she would promptly arise several hours before daylight and recite many prayers and supplications with great devotion. She had the key to the *ezrat nashim*, being the first to enter the synagogue and the last to leave, an hour or two after the congregation left. After the prayers, rather than waste her time, she diligently devoted herself to the study of Torah- the weekly portion with Rashi and other commentators. As is well known to each of my father's pupils who ate at his table and graced it with words of Torah, my mother would "gird her loins" like a man and join in

⁴¹ Shmuel ben Ali, Rosh Yeshivah and Gaon of Bagdad during the 12th C.

⁴² Getsel Ellinson, *Serving the Creator: A Guide to Rabbinic Sources* (Israel: Eliner Library Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, The World Zionist Organization, 1986) 246.

the discussion. Occasionally she would add her own interpretations of a passage- in words- "sweeter than honey" -especially laws concerning women... in which her learning approached that of a halakhic authority.^{4 3}

Although much of the above statement may be a son's ruminations on his beloved and somewhat sainted mother, there are most likely some elements of truth to the story. *Shemirat Shabbat k'Hilkhatah, Appendix Hinukh ha-Banim l'Mitzvot 13, 14* describes other women in the same manner. In this text we learn that:

It is told of Rabbi Yosef Hayyim Sonnefeld, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, that he taught his wife Orah Hayyim, half an hour every day... It is similarly told of the Hatam Sofer that he personally taught his daughters the Aggadot of the Sages. En route to Israel, the Gaon of Vilna wrote to his wife and mother that on Saturday's they should study only mussar (moral tracts), inspiration and inner resolution being the goal, rather than the mere Reading.^{4 4}

These reports indicate that there were several scholars who instructed their wives and daughters in Jewish learning.

Practical knowledge for women is openly discussed in the sources. The complex nature of Jewish society required that women understand the framework of the legal system. Each rabbi, in his code or commentary, tried to determine to what extent women should master certain aspects of the law. For instance, Rabbi Moses Isserles, the 16th century Eastern scholar, determined in his introduction to *Schulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 246:6* that women should study those laws that apply to themselves. This opinion had been held by many great teachers throughout the ages such as Rabbi

^{4 3} *Ibid.* From *Sefer D'risha u'Prishah*, introduction by the son of R. Yehoshua Falk.

^{4 4} Getsel Ellinson, *Serving the Creator: A Guide to Rabbinic Sources* (Israel: Eliner Library Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, The World Zionist Organization, 1986)259.

Abraham ben David (Provence 12 C), Isaac of Corbeil (France, 13th C.), Jacob Landau (Germany, 15th C.) and Solomon Luria (Poland, 16th C.)⁴⁵

With the publication of *Sefer Hasidim* in 18th Century Poland, the responsa on women and Torah scholarship differed from those previously introduced. *Sefer Hasidim* required that women be taught the legal aspects of Torah so that they would know and be able to perform practical duties. Rabbi Judah he-Hasid, author of the *Sefer*, is the first arbiter to require women's Torah knowledge:

One must teach his daughters the mitzvot, the Halakhic rulings. The statement in the Talmud that "he who teaches his daughter Torah is as if he taught her *tiflut* refers only to the depths of learning: the rationale for the mitzvot and the mysteries of the Torah; these are not taught to a woman or a minor. However, a woman should be taught the laws concerning the mitzvot, for if she does not know the laws of the Sabbath, how can she properly observe the Sabbath? And the same goes for all the commandments in order that she be mindful in their performance. However it is not permitted for a bachelor to teach girls even if the father was to stand right there and watch over them, so that they are not secluded together. For [even then] his desires or hers might overwhelm them. Rather, the father should teach his daughter or his wife.⁴⁶

Rabbi Judah he-Hasid makes many important points. First, he determines that women should study Torah so that they can serve the Jewish community through following its laws. At the same time, however, he claims that women should not be taught the intricacies and deeper hidden meanings of Torah. Learning should be done for practical purposes rather than for scholarship in itself. Second, although Rabbi Judah he-Hasid permits the hiring of a male to tutor

⁴⁵ Shoshana Pantel Zolty, *"And All Your Children Shall be Learned": Women and The Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson, 1993)61.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 62.

women; he also notes, that the man must not be a bachelor in order to prevent sexual temptation. Overall, Judah he-Hasid believes that women should be taught certain aspects of Torah.

Support for the study of Torah by women is furthered by the work *Ma-ayan Ganim* written by the Italian Rabbi, Samuel ben Elhanan Jacob Archivolti:

Perhaps the words of our sages, i.e., "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is as if he teaches her tfillut" referred to a father teaching a girl when she is young. This is so even if through her actions it can be recognized that she acts in a pure and upright manner. Certainly under such conditions [her youth] there may be cause for concern since most women are presumed to be light-headed, wasting their time on nonsense... However the women who dedicate their hearts to approach the service of God by choosing good for its own sake will surely rise to the summit of the mountain of the Lord and dwell in His holy place, for they are exemplary women. The scholars of their generation should treat them with honor and respect, and encourage them and strengthen their hands by saying, "Go forward and succeed, and may Heaven send you all necessary assistance."^{4 7}

Archivolti admonishes scholars to support the intellectual endeavors of female Torah students. He assumes that there will be very few women who will wish to attain this level of scholarship, yet, he maintains that those women who do, should have the endorsement of the leading Rabbis of the period.

In reading about several extraordinary Hasidic women, we will see that they were not only encouraged and permitted to study Torah, but also allowed to teach its words to both men and women.

^{4 7} *Ibid*, 66, Rabbi Barukh Epstein, *Torah Temimah* (Vilna, 1904).

Tallis and Tefillin

According to *minhag*, Jewish women are not permitted to don *teffilin* and *tallis*; yet according to *halakhah*, this is permitted and Rabbis have suggested that women may wear *teffilin* and *tallis*.

There are several passages in early Rabbinic texts that discuss this matter. From the *Mekhilta*, *Masechet D'Pisha*, Bo 17, we learn that:

Michal, the daughter of the Kushi [King Saul] used to don Tefillin. The wife of Jonah [the prophet] went up [to Jerusalem] for the pilgrimage festivals. Tabi, R. Gamliel's bondsman, used to don Tefillin.⁴⁸

Further references to Michal and her habit of donning *tefillin* appear within the Talmud text. *Berachot* 12:3 teaches:

Taniy' Miykhal bat khushi haytah manhat tphiylin...

We have learned elsewhere... Did not Michal, the daughter of the Kushi don Tefillin.... R. Hizkiah answered in the name of R. Abbahu... the sages did object.⁴⁹

Rabbi Hizkiah agrees with R. Abbahu's opinion that women should not observe *mitzvot* from which they have been exempt but it is very interesting that the Talmud collector left in the reference to Michal and her *tefillin*.

Later authorities within the Rabbinic tradition are more lenient in regard to women's practice of *tefillin* and *tallis*, determining that a woman who follows additional commandments is not a threat to

⁴⁸ *Mekhilta*, *Masechet D'Pisha*, Bo 17.

⁴⁹ Talmud *Yerushalmi*, *Berachot* 12:3.

Judaism. Both Maimonides and Rabbi Yitzhak Alfasi state that a woman may wear *tefillin*⁵⁰ and so does Rabbenu Tam.⁵¹

On the issue of *tallis*, there are a variety of responsa because the commandment was optional even for men.⁵² Rambam, not distinguishing between *tallis* and other positive precepts based upon a set time, asserts that women can wear the garment without reciting the blessing:

Women who wish to wear a garment with Tzizit do so without reciting the blessing. Similarly, with all Positive Precepts dependent upon a set time; if they wish to observe them without reciting the blessing we do not object.⁵³

The Rema takes the Rambam's statement one step further; "If women wish, they may wear a *tallis* and recite the blessing thereof as in other time bound positive commandments. However, where it appears to be a case of false religious pride, they should not do so."⁵⁴ Therefore, women who wish to wrap themselves in *tallis* to honor God may do so and recite the accompanying blessing. Both Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel (12th C. France) and Rabbi Solomon Ibn Adret (13th C. Spain) argue that if a woman wishes to carry out this custom, she is to be permitted to do so. On a final note, modern scholar Rabbi Moshe Feinstein concurs with the statement that a *tallis* must be worn in the Name of Heaven rather than for individual pride.

⁵⁰ Moshe Meiselman, *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* (New York: Ktav, 1978) 149.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 150.

⁵² *Ibid*, 152.

⁵³ Rambam, *Hilkot Tzizit* 3:9.

⁵⁴ Rema, *Orah Hayim* 12:2.

In addition to general discussions about women and the wrapping of *tallis*, there are also several specific stories told about women who wore *tallises* prior to the rise of Hasidism. For instance, Medieval Ashkenazic responsa note that Rabbi Moshe ben Jacob of Coucy, the 13th C. author of *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, reports that his teacher, R. Yehudah of Paris (1166-1224) ordered his wife to wear a *tallis*. In addition, Rabbi Mordechi ben Hillel in *Hilkot Tzizit* 949 writes that a specific woman wove her own *tallis* under her husband's direction. Moreover, the standard edition of *Maharil* recounts that Rebbetzin Bruna of Magenza of the 14th-15th C. wore a *tallis* at all times.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Shoshana Pantel Zolty, "And all your Children Shall be Learned": *Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson, 1993)46, Note 120.

Chapter IV: The Life of a Hasidic Rebbe

In contrast to the *halakhic* restrictions enforced on women, men were able to fulfill the religious tradition. Further, those men who taught the tradition, including the Hasidic Rebbe, required an even more rigorous education. In order to gain the authenticity required to lead a Hasidic community, the Rebbe also needed to possess both supernatural and personal qualities that were not taught by tradition, such as clairvoyance, telepathy and miracle making. These qualities, although God given, required further honing through the process of training to benefit the community at large. Without training, a Hasidic Rebbe was unable to perform certain duties including counseling, officiating at lifecycle events, and serving as the community politician. Therefore, the Rebbe's qualities, sense of authenticity and training worked together in assuring his success.

Qualities of the Rebbe

A Hasidic Rebbe's various spiritual and personal attributes were the most important factors in determining his success. Although he needed to possess a high level of Jewish scholarship his primary focus was on bringing God, rather than the ancient texts, to the people in order to alleviate their pain.⁵⁶ Each Rebbe was said to possess a

⁵⁶ Samuel H. Dresner, *The Zaddik: An Inspired Study of the Mystical Spiritual Leader of 18th C. Hasidism* (London: Ram's Horn Book, Abelard-Schuman, 1960)124.

piece of God's Holy Spirit and therefore, could commune with the Holy One on a higher level than common man.⁵⁷ Through his acts, the Rebbe served as a living example of how life was a reflection of God's presence on earth. Even the most mundane transactions were gifts from the Holy One and needed to be recognized as such.

The Rebbe also had to possess more practical attributes in order to serve as a communal leader. First, he had to have great charisma. Second, the Rebbe needed to project an aura of unpredictability about his person, whereby, his Hasidim would never know what he would teach or do next.⁵⁸ This unpredictability was to promote and encourage a method of personal change. Third, as leader of a diverse community, the Rebbe was obliged to accept all who came to him for counseling with open arms. There was no sense of hierarchy or classism; therefore, each person who wanted a meeting with the Rebbe received one in a timely manner. During these meetings, the Rebbe practiced a method of empathy whereby he identified with the Hasid or Hasidah, incorporated their problem within himself, reverberated with these feelings and finally detached himself and provided his follower with *etzah* or advice.⁵⁹ Hence, the Rebbe needed to be able to understand and connect with very diverse personalities. Fourth, the Rebbe was understood to be reincarnated, not for his soul's own needs, but for the needs of his Hasidim. This gave the Rebbe authority from the ultimate source. R. Yitzhak Isaac Kalov in *Rishonim Aharonim* describes how the Rebbe was able to connect

⁵⁷ Zalman Meshullam Schacter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson, 1991) 70.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 160.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 183.

intensely with souls: "When you find one who can take out your innards, wash them, and replace them while you are still alive- that is a Rebbe."⁶⁰ The Rebbe was charged with maintaining purity of his followers' souls. Moreover, supported by his teachings, the entire community profited from their Hasidic leader. It was said that "The Rebbe was for whom all the world was created, and for whose sake it was sustained."⁶¹ Therefore, the Rebbe was of the utmost importance to the community's survival.

There were several designations or appellations given to the Rebbe that relate to his characteristics. He was called the *Rashey Alafim* after the Biblical designation for leadership, "Head of thousands." As such, each Hasidic Rebbe was considered the "official" head of Israel. Other appellations relate to the specific qualities or powers of the master: the "seer" followed the prophetic model of leadership, the "miracle worker" and "healer" had special powers associated with supernatural talent and the "*moreh derekh*" was a guide to serving God.⁶² Overall, the designation Rebbe represented one who was a vehicle for earthly salvation and redemption, guiding even the most circumspect of characters toward the Holy One.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 50.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 67.

⁶² *Ibid*, 70.

The Path Towards Becoming a Hasidic Rebbe

In order to understand the highly specialized education of a Hasidic Rebbe, which will be discussed later in this section, it is important to first discuss the general education of a Jew during the Hasidic period. During the late 1700's, there was a great discrepancy in the religious education of different Jews. Most could not read Hebrew or Aramaic and were therefore unable to study the tradition.

With the spread of Hasidism in the mid-1700's, teachers, also called Rav or Rebbe, began to win the support of the masses. Most often they were *Baalei Shem* who possessed certain characteristics and special supernatural powers.

When a student was considered to have these certain characteristics and special supernatural powers, he was encouraged to become a Hasidic Rebbe by the Tzaddik in his community.⁶³ During the education of a student, the teacher or master would become a father figure, encouraging the student to follow his every action. When the student demonstrated an aptitude towards this study, further educational steps were taken.

The professional studies towards becoming a Rebbe occurred in several stages, each stage to be mastered before ascending to the next. During training, oral prescriptions were preferred over written, as most of the work of the Hasidic leader was oral. First, the disciple would study Hebrew books from the master's library according to the discipline of the Rebbe's ministry. These books would be inaccessible to others, his access to these works thereby marking the

⁶³ *Ibid*, 77.

student who studied them. The disciple was to be prepared for unexpected oral or written examinations on his reading. Once this literature was memorized, the student would begin the second stage of study-the hearing and repeating of Torah. Through special discourse, an oral instruction on Torah was imparted to the student who would then practice the tractate until he could repeat it word for word with the same intonation and movements as the Rebbe. Next, the student would study through serving the master and internalizing all his teachings. In general, the disciple would spend every waking moment of the day following in his master's footsteps, even sleeping on a pad next to his bed or outside of his door. Privacy was completely surrendered because the student was required to learn both the public and private ways of his Rebbe. At this stage, the student participated in several special tasks. Sometimes these chores were menial such as making tea or cleaning the house, while others required acts of heroic proportions such as rescuing people from burning buildings. Most often the responsibilities were answering letters posted to the Rebbe, participating in and offering advice during counseling sessions and taking over some of the courses taught by the Rebbe.⁶⁴

Two types of Rebbes could be granted rabbinic authority in Hasidim: those who were descended from a Rabbinic dynasty and those who had no prior connection to a Rabbinic family but who demonstrated apt characteristics. Each type of Rebbe faced certain challenges related to attaining legitimacy within the community.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 89.

The first type of Rebbe, the dynastic trainee, was assured authenticity through the merit of his family. Sons and daughters of the great Rebbes were linked to redemption through the spirits of their fathers. Even grandchildren were considered, by proxy, to have the merit of their grandfathers.⁶⁵ This sense of entitlement was both a gift and a yoke for children of the Rebbe. They were often scrutinized from the time of their birth. Most did not even have playmates because of the community's sense that they were superior. Yet these children did have a sense of genuineness as a result of being born into a certain family.

In spite of their dynastic backgrounds, most Rebbes-to-be would hide their calling from both the outside world and their families, their talents awakened and sharpened in silence. Parents and teachers treated the dynastic student with great stringency in order to strengthen their character so that they could earn their birth title.⁶⁶ Therefore, the student needed to cope with a sense of overwhelming responsibility and the effort involved in earning the title of Rebbe in silence.

Once the training of the dynastic son was complete, his father sent him to another Hasidic community incognito. Ordination needed to come from a Rebbe who did not know the background and identity of the heir, but who would "discover" the student's abilities and declare him Rebbe. Therefore, if the disciple was not "discovered," the process of revelation could take decades. Often, children were not "ordained" in the lifetime of their parents.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 67.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 95.

A non dynastic trainee faced another set of problems, more complex than that of the heir. First and foremost, he had to determine whether he had truly been called to service by God. Was he reaching above his station or was he meant to be a Rebbe? Did he possess the special talents and supernatural powers required for the profession? Doubts about his own authenticity were a difficulty for the non-dynastic trainee, but not the dynastic trainee. Dynastic trainees and their communities, knew from birth who and what they were. On the other hand, the non-dynastic trainee had to secure his own sense of authenticity. He had to either face the ridicule of his peers or wear a mask of conformity until his revelation.⁶⁷

As young children, both dynastic and non-dynastic trainees were permitted to discuss their true role and calling, but after the age of ten, they were expected to conform to peer groups and Shtetl norms. The trainee had to go "underground" until he could reveal himself in a timely manner and handle the responsibility of the position. To announce himself early would cause great problems for his ministry. Older and more settled Rebbes would consider him foolish, denying their support for him, while younger students would scoff, refusing to see him as Rebbe.

A Rebbe-to-be could not teach Torah until crowned by a master. He had to acquire a certain amount of knowledge and demonstrate a deep understanding of the Torah text and make the text accessible. This required using text in homilies, stories and teachings in a way that even the most unlearned person could understand. Furthermore, the disciple would be closely observed to see what he

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 96.

did with the teachings he had received and how he integrated them into his own life. Further tests included the practical elements of the Rabbinic position: pastoral abilities, soul searching, healing and reading of the prayer service. When he had passed the test, the disciple could act as the Rebbe's proxy through ordination.⁶⁸

When the disciple was ready to accept the responsibilities associated with the position, he was coronated. Coronation or ordination took place either in public or in private. The disciple could be asked to read from the Torah or take over the Rebbe's duties.⁶⁹ There was no set formula, time or place for the creation of a Rebbe; but, acceptance of an appointment meant that the Rebbe committed his entire life to guiding Hasidim to a higher state of perfection. Once the disciple was crowned, the Hasidim considered him a full Rebbe. Even his predecessor came to the disciple for advice. Nevertheless, the newly ordained Rebbe saw himself as beginning and in a state of creation. Zalman Meshullam Schacter-Shalomi describes this state in *Spiritual Intimacy*:

For all the help that he [The Rebbe] offers to other people, he will insist that he is still learning from them. He will meet with colleagues from time to time and learn from them. He will face ambivalent feelings of satisfaction and frustration when the time comes for him to train his own successor. Only then will he fully see what his master, in training him in the *Yehidut*, has done for him. ⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 100.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 107.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 110.

The Rebbe's Duties

Once one became a Rebbe, his duties revolved around the special gifts that he was thought to have been given by God and which had been refined through training. These gifts included: telepathy, clairvoyance, creating miracles, and seeing and speaking with Elijah. We will discuss each of these supernatural powers in depth throughout this chapter.

The Rebbe was thought to have been reincarnated for the sole purpose of helping his Hasidim. Therefore, when he formed relationships with other masters, the community saw the Rebbe's close colleagues and friends as being part of a chain, connecting the past with this world, in order to better their lives. Rebbes were also thought to possess the ability to communicate telepathically with other Masters. Since Rebbes and their colleagues were reincarnated together, it was assumed that they could communicate in this way. R. Pinhas of Koretz once sent a letter to the Maggid of Mezritch thanking him for thinking of him during the time of the Shofar blowing.⁷¹ Several other letters discussed by R. Joseph Isaac Schneersohn comment on the topic of telepathic communication.⁷²

In addition, the Rebbe possessed an aptitude for creating miracles through clairvoyance. Consequently, the Rebbe could read the lives of his Hasidim and counsel them accordingly. Most Rebbes were accredited with the power to read the souls and thoughts of their

⁷¹ J.I. Schneersohn, *Liqutey Diburim*, 4.

⁷² Zalman Meshullam Schacter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1991) 103.

followers. At times these visions would come spontaneously and at other times only when specifically sought. The ability to read souls was taught by the Rebbe to his disciple as part of the training process and was an integral part of the meeting between Rebbe and Hasid. The Hasid expected the Rebbe to know him completely and therefore did not need to reveal every aspect of his history during the meeting. Once the Rebbe saw the Hasid face to face, he would be able to present solutions to his problems.

The Rebbe was also able to see people's sins written on their forehead. In *Galicia* it is taught that R. Michal had this ability.

R. Michal was reputed to be able to read the thoughts of people, and to be able to read on their foreheads the damage they had done to their souls. Once R. Michal came to a city where many people came to see him their caps pulled low over their foreheads. When R. Michal saw them he said: "It is foolish for you to do this. The eye that can see the interior can look past the cap."⁷³

Hasidim also attributed to their Rebbe, the power of seeing and speaking with the prophet Elijah. Stories throughout Jewish tradition indicate the importance of this communication that gives the human individual greater authority, and serves as a harbinger of future religious glory.

A further function of the Rebbe was *Ba'al mofet*, the master of miracles or wonders. Using the powers described earlier in this chapter, the Rebbe performed miracles and healed those in the community using practical Kabbalah. The Besht, for example, could work miracles by reciting the *Ana B'Koach* prayer.⁷⁴ Miracles could not be attained through book knowledge, or the recitation of prayers,

⁷³ *Ibid*, 166.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 62.

rather, it came from the connection of the master with the Great Mystery of Being. According to the Bible, sickness was a punishment from the Holy One of Being, while health was a reward for good deeds. The Rebbe, therefore, would intercede for the soul, curing the illness by restoring the Hasid's favor in the eyes of the Maker. Healing was dependent upon repentance. Therefore the Hasid was responsible for praying on his own behalf and performing acts of loving kindness.

Although these gifts were endowed by the Holy One, individual Rebbes had to master them in order to manipulate them fortuitously. A clairvoyant Rebbe who could not control his clairvoyance could go mad from his visions, while a Rebbe who could not fully use his power of sight could not serve as a successful counselor.

The paradigm of a Hasidic leader who could successfully dominate and use his gifts was by the first master of Hasidism, the Baal Shem Tov. Martin Buber, in his *Tales of the Hasidism: Early Masters* teaches:

Every evening after prayer, the Baal Shem Tov went to his room. Two candles were set in front of him and the mysterious book of creation put on the table among other books. Then all those who needed his counsel were admitted in a body, and he spoke with them until the eleventh hour. One evening, when the people left, one of them said to the man beside him how much good the words the Baal Shem Tov had directed to him, had done him. But the other man told him not to speak such nonsense, that they had entered the room together and from that moment on the master had spoken to no one except himself. A third, who heard this, joined in the conversation with a smile, saying how curious that both were mistaken, for the Rabbi had carried on an intimate conversation with him the entire evening. Then a fourth and a fifth made the same claim, and finally all began to talk at once and tell what they had experienced. But the next instant they all fell silent.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974) 55.

The Baal Shem Tov was able to speak to the entire company of Hasidim as if he were speaking to each individually. His followers each felt separately advised by the Rabbi.

There were several duties of a Rebbe that pertained to his special gift; but the primary obligation was to meet with individuals in a *Yehidut* (a counseling session). The function of the *Yehidut* meeting was for the Hasid or Hasidah to understand his/her individual purpose on this earth. Both men and women were encouraged to participate in the *Yehidut* relationship. Through question and answer, the Rebbe helped his Hasid attain a sense of inner perfection and peace. The most frequently noted description of the *Yehidut* meeting is a *nefesh to nefesh* dialogue, or in Buberian terms the I-Thou relationship.⁷⁶ Sparks between two souls are one way that God reveals Godself to humanity.

The process of *Yehidut* is multi-layered. Each phase contributes to the success of the *Yehidut* as a whole entity, affording both the Rebbe and the Hasid a sense of comfort and expectation about the meeting. Before the meeting can take place, the Hasid writes a *Kvittel*, an intercessory note, requesting the intervention of the Rebbe on a certain matter. Each Hasidic dynasty had a special formula for writing the *Kvittel* but most include the name of the master, the name of the Hasid as well as his/her mother's name, and an enclosed cash donation to aid the Rebbe's work. In the case of a Hasid who could not write, the *Gabbai*, assistant to the Rebbe, would write the *Kvittel* on his behalf. Generally, the Rebbe read the *Kvittel*

⁷⁶ Zalman Meshullam Schacter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1991) 115.

before the encounter in order to prepare himself for the meeting. If there were too many people who submitted requests then occasionally the Rebbe, as was the habit of the Rebbe from Apt, would take the slips together and bless all the people whose names were upon them.⁷⁷

Once the Rebbe received the *Kvittel*, the meeting of the two souls could take place in a counseling setting. The Rebbe focused and cleared his mind of external factors, readied himself to accept the soul as it was, and then greeted the Hasid with a sense of warmth and welcome. In addition, the Rebbe gave a portion of the Hasid's donation money to Tzedakah so that the Holy One would open to the possibility of *Teshuvah* for the individual.⁷⁸

When the Rebbe was spiritually ready, he told his *Gabbai* to admit the Hasidim. Depending upon each individual Rebbe, the order was determined by urgency of crisis, status within the community, or the amount of time that the Hasid had been waiting. Ironically, some Rebbes chose to see non-Jews before Jews, in order to further good relations within the town or Shtetl.⁷⁹ The Rebbe could also strike the name of one who was waiting off his list after determining that the Hasid was not yet ready for this type of encounter.

As the Rebbe prepared for the interview, so too did the Hasid. He first visited the *mikveh* and then garbed himself in *Shabbas* clothes and a prayer sash to honor the Rebbe. Appearing before the Rebbe, the Hasid seemed somewhat penitent, and handed his *Kvittel*

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 118.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 122.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 123.

to the Rebbe. The Rebbe read the *Kvittel*, studied the student and began to question him.

Finally, the Rebbe offered *etzah*, advice, which had to be accepted. In giving *etzah*, the Rebbe served as power of attorney over the Hasid, seeking to keep him whole in body and soul. Counsel, therefore, needed to come in a variety of forms. The Rebbe offered oral advice on the matter or wrote prescriptions for spiritual healing. Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz stated in *Midrash Pinchas* that in responding to a problem the Rebbe listens to the Hasid's inner soul:

When a man conducts himself properly, he can see with an eye that is not an eye, and hear with an ear that is not an ear. Therefore, when anyone comes to ask for counsel, I hear how he tells me how to answer him.⁸⁰

The correct *etzah* came from the innermost part of the person who asked the question; therefore, the Rebbe's answer was based upon the words and attitudes of the Hasid. Yet the talent for giving accurate advice was based upon the honing of a particular skill through the Rebbe's training.

Commonly, the Hasidic leader would give his Hasid a *s'gulah*, a charm of significance.¹⁰⁷ Since the *s'gulah* possessed part of the Rebbe's charisma as well as the strength of the Holy One, it was seen to be very powerful. *s'gulot* ranged in variety from herbal medicines to fecal matter mixtures or creations from ritual objects such as *etrogim* after *Sukkot*, *Matzah* after *Pesach*, and wine or even oil from the Shabbat lamp. The agency of the *s'gulah* came directly from the Rebbe; hence, charms, cameos or other sorts of symbols did not need to contain the name of God. The written name of the Rebbe was

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 234.

enough to infuse them with certain powers.⁸¹ After providing the Hasid with *etzah* or a *s'gulah*, the Rebbe blessed him with a personal formula required for liturgical matters of intercession, which ended with the words; "The Tzaddik decrees and God fulfills."⁸² When those words were uttered, the *Yehidut* was finished.

Throughout the course of the *Yehidut*, the Rebbe attempted to bring the to Hasid a sense of *shlemut*, completeness. Every problem was considered worthwhile of the master's attention, even those which seemed mundane. In general, the Rebbe counseled his constituents on issues of marriage, children, health, economic survival and questions of spiritual renewal.

The Rebbe performed many other practical roles in the Hasidic community. He officiated at life-cycle events, such as circumcision, weddings and funerals. The Rebbe was also responsible for the political well-being of the Jewish community, often interceding to establish peace and promote justice. Occasionally, the Hasidic leader spoke to those in governmental positions on his community's behalf. Some of the Rebbe's decisions focused on the issue of avoiding army conscription by sending children to live in the woods, advocating name change or supporting temporary adoption.⁸³ Several Rebbes defended proscription into the army and offered advice on how to survive hardship.

Within the Jewish community, the Rebbe was seen as an agent of commerce. He often possessed knowledge unavailable to most

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 249.

⁸² *Ibid*, 302.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 284.

merchants, and was therefore able to encourage trade between certain of his Hasidim, thereby affording them enough income to focus on study. Furthermore, the Rebbe served as an aid to the *shadkhan*, matchmaker, in creating marriages through his supernatural powers.⁸⁴ Through the agency of the Rebbe, financial, spiritual and familial success of the community was possible.

The Rebbe was seen as God's advocate on earth and served as the channel which brought the Divine Sparks of the Holy One into contact with the human element. The Rebbe was thought to have been reincarnated not for his own purpose but, rather, to complete the souls of his Hasidim through counseling and life cycle interaction. The moment of *Yehidut* was one where the individual Hasid learned the path he should take through the Rebbe's counsel. This is the most intimate role that one human being can perform for another.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 283.

Chapter V: The Woman Rebbe in Hasidism

Introduction

It is clear that certain women occupied positions of religious prominence in several Hasidic circles. According to period historian, Samuel Aba Horodezky, "the Jewish woman was given complete equality in all religious matters among the Hasidic followers of the Baal Shem Tov."⁸⁵ Professor Jacob Minkin goes one step further and determines that, "Hasidism claims the credit for having emancipated the Jewish woman."⁸⁶ Although this assertion may be highly exaggerated, in truth, several women did indeed play an important leadership role within the movement.

Articles written in the early 1930's present interesting historical facts about women in Hasidism. There was evidence in almost every Hasidic dynasty of women who performed some of the duties of the Rebbe, such as counseling, teaching Torah, matchmaking and performing marriage ceremonies. Whether or not they were considered full-fledged Rebbes by their communities has not yet been determined, but in period descriptions, they are said to have conducted themselves as Rebbes. This furthers the idea that they were perceived as authentic within their communities.

⁸⁵ Samuel Abba Horodezky, "The Jewish Woman in the Hasidic Movement" in *Ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Hasidim*, Vol 4 (Berlin, 1922) 67.

⁸⁶ Jacob Minkin, *The Romance of Hasidism*, (New York: Macmillan, 1935) 345.

The first claim that a woman served a Hasidic community as its Rebbe was published by Samuel Aba Horodezky in a 1905 article. I was not able to find this article at Yivo, Jewish Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union College or the New York Public Library Jewish Division, but its existence is mentioned in a later essay on the subject of women in Hasidism written by Horodezky in 1939. One chapter in Horodezky's four volume series on Hasidism highlights the religious role of several extraordinary women. Parts of his chapter, translated from the Hebrew, will be included in the next section of this thesis. Although Horodezky provides specific information on several women, he does not supply any source material through footnotes or bibliography. Overall, the work is a aggrandizement of Hasidism rather than a discriminating study; yet, subsequent books by Hasidic historians Meckler, Shemen, Feinkind, Minkin and Rabinowicz cite Horodezky as the definitive historian on the subject. Yiddish books written by such authors as Meckler, Shemen and Feinkind, published in the late 1930's through the 1960's, furnish stories of Hasidic women in great detail; yet once again do not document their sources. We can assume that several of these stories were transmitted orally and may not be wholly accurate. But the fact that they were even considered publishable, reflects a later acceptance of those women who assumed a prominent role in Hasidism.

This section will introduce several of these women through the Hasidic stories about them. Their stories, taken from several Yiddish articles and books, substantiate the fact that they functioned within their communities as Rebbes. Most of the women who will be discussed, are the wives and daughters of famous Tzaddikim beginning

with the Baal Shem Tov, except for the case of Hannah Rachel Werbermacher, the Maid of Ludmir.

Women and The Besht

Throughout the tales written in the name of the Baal Shem Tov there is a sense of humanity and equality towards women. The BESHT recognized that women could form a relationship with God on the same level, or perhaps even a higher level, than could men. However, he did not come to this conclusion until he made the acquaintance of Riveleh the Pious in the mid 1700's. A famous tale was told about their first meeting where the Baal Shem Tov, with his special powers, is able to see a light above the head of Rivele the Pious, marking her as a "Holy Spirit." The people of the town seem to be comfortable with the holiness of Riveleh, yet the Baal Shem Tov has difficulty with the notion of the light appearing above a woman rather than a man. He wants to send for her, but the people persuade him to wait, stating that she will come to ask him for Tzedakah in order to heal the ill. When she does come to meet with him, Riveleh proves that she is able to repeat words that had been uttered in heaven, thereby cementing her connection to the Holy One. She is therefore depicted as a strong woman with a mission, able to stand before the BESHT and urge him to donate the amount of money that she needs. Riveleh is neither cowed by his religious spirituality nor by his greatness in heaven. In fact, she sees him as just another man. It is further notable that Riveleh prevails in this argument with the BESHT.

According to legend, she changed the way the BESHT understood the role of women in religion.⁸⁷

Yente the Prophetess was the daughter of Reb Yosef Sprevedliver, a Baal Shem Hasid. Her husband once brought her to the Baal Shem Tov where she engaged in a Torah discussion with the great Hasidic leader. As it is taught in the *Sipuri Tales*, from that moment on she began to fast and to pray, physically separated herself from her husband, and visited the mikveh incessantly. When her husband complained to the Baal Shem Tov about his wife's behavior, the Baal Shem Tov responded that Yente "has eyes that see and ears that hear" and further called her "Yente the Prophetess."⁸⁸

Edel, Daughter of the Besht

The first of the Hasidic women to occupy a place of religious prominence was Edel, the only daughter of the Baal Shem Tov.⁸⁹ Her father was reported to have said about her that, "she was taken from the treasury of most holy souls."⁹⁰ To her he applied the verse in Deuteronomy 33:2, "At his right hand was a fiery law unto them," because the first letters of the Hebrew words *eish dat lamo* (a fiery law

⁸⁷ Translated and edited by Dan Ben Amos and Jerome R. Mintz, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993)120.

⁸⁸ N. Shemen, *Batsiuing Tsu Der Froy* (Buenos Aries, 1969) translation, Naomi Rappaport.

⁸⁹ Sondra Henry and Emily Taitz, *Written Out of History* (Fresh Meadows, NY.: Biblio Press, 1985)177.

⁹⁰ S.A. Horodezky, *Ha-Hasidut vehe-Hasidim* (Tel Aviv:Dvir, 1923)

unto them) make up the name Edel.⁹¹ She was learned in Torah and disseminated Hasidic thought and philosophy to her father's followers.⁹²

As a teacher, Edel far surpassed the popularity of her brother, and gained fame for her counsel and wisdom. When the BESHT went on a journey, he entrusted his daughter, rather than his only son, to prescribe blessings for his Hasidim. She was given his agency of proxy. A letter, written to Edel from the Besht, proves that she fulfilled some religious duties. She is asked to take over her father's ministry, providing *s'gulot* to those who were ill.

To My daughter Edel,

The righteous one who fears the Lord may she live, Since I must remain a little longer on my journey, I therefore permit you to issue *S'Gulot* from my book of prescriptions, which is in the possession of my trusted majordomo... However do not send these through any third party, but with your own mouth tell the *S'Gulah* to the one who needs it. This is the word of your father who blessed you with all good forever.⁹³

During the course of her father's life, Edel served as his second-in-command, authorized to give prescriptions in his absence. Upon the Besht's death, Edel continued good works in his name. A story is told about her activity as a Rebbe within the Hasidic community:

The Baal Shem Tov had a son and he did not give his son a place after he died. Only the Maggid of Mezrich took over his place. They say a lot of things about the son: that he was famous, he went away, he was in Germany, he was a very hidden person, he didn't want to become a rabbi. His name was Reb Zevi. And he had a daughter, the daughter's name was Edel. And this Edel left two sons: one was Ephraim and the other was Borukh. And they were both big rabbis. His daughter- she was like a rabbi. She saw very deep things. When she was at the weddings of her sons or daughters or grandchildren, she never went to the ceremony until her father came. He was dead already, but until she saw her father, she stayed in a separate room and it sometimes took an hour or two or three. Once it happened that she waited there about five hours. The people were ashamed. You know, people came from the whole world to the wedding and they are waiting and sitting, doing nothing, waiting till she

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Judith Harari, *Isha V'Em B'Israel*, (Tel Aviv:Massada Press, 1959)109.

⁹³ Zalman Meshullam Schacter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy* (Northvale,NJ: Jason Aronson,1991)250-251.

is going to come out. Till suddenly she came out. She saw her father. So she asked her father, "What took you so long to come this time?" So he said that she should never again arrange a wedding between such a bride and a groom. "You should never take into the family persons that you don't know. You took a stranger, and you don't know who he is." So he said, "When I come to the wedding every time I don't go by myself." Usually when you come to a wedding you take all the relatives of the bride and the groom. So now he said, "I came to take those relatives of the groom. I didn't find them in Paradise. I had to pull them out of Gehenna. That's why it took me so long."⁹⁴

In this tale, Edel has received her supernatural talents from her father and can commune with her dead father in order to protect the bride and groom at their wedding. Noteworthy, there is no similar tale or description of her brother and his abilities. Edel is perceived as her father's sole heir and progenitor.

In addition to fulfilling religious duties, Edel also cared for her husband, Yehiel Ashkenazi and their three children and managed their grocery store. Two of her sons achieved fame in their day: Moses Chaim Ephraim was a scholar and writer and Baruch succeeded his grandfather.⁹⁵

Edel's only daughter, Feige, was said to be endowed with "divine spirit."⁹⁶ She was credited with influencing her son, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav's Hasidic education.⁹⁷

M.Sh. Geshuri, researcher of Hasidic song and dance, points out that one of the Hasidic customs of the period is for a Rebbe to take

⁹⁴ Jerome R. Mintz, *Legends of the Hasidim: An Introduction to Hasidic Culture and Oral Tradition in the New World* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995) 380-381.

⁹⁵ Sondra Henry and Emily Taitz, *Written Out of History: Our Jewish Foremothers* (Freshmeadow, NY.: Biblio Press, 1983) 178.

⁹⁶ Harry M. Rabinowicz, *Hasidism: The Movement and Its Masters* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1988) 343.

⁹⁷ Sondra Henry and Emily Taitz, *Written Out of History: Our Jewish Foremothers* (Freshmeadow, NY.: Biblio Press, 1983) 178.

the name of his mother, rather than his father. Reb Leib Soreh is therefore known in the Hasidic literature as the son of Sarah (Soreh). Reb Soreh was the subject of more Hasidic stories than any other Tzaddik, excepting the Baal Shem Tov. He traveled endlessly, rescuing Jews from dangerous situations.⁹⁸

From Geshuri's research we also learn of Frieda, daughter of Reb Schneur Zalman, the leader of Habad Hasidism. She was taught Torah by her father and passed Torah teaching on to her brother Reb Duber, the middle Rebbe.⁹⁹ Frieda is also credited with writing her father's aphorisms and writing several manuscripts that are now lost.¹⁰⁰ Zalman's other daughters Devorah, Leah and Rachel, were also learned, but Frieda is the most famous.¹⁰¹

The Late 1700's : Perl of Kozienice

Perl, the daughter of the Kozienicer Maggid, was known for her clairvoyant dreams. It is related that she had a dream in which she saw a child of hers who had died at a young age. This child told Perl that her expected baby would be a son who would "enlighten all the worlds." She soon gave birth to Hayyim Meir Yehiel, the wonder-

⁹⁸ Harry M. Rabinowicz, *Hasidism: The Movement and Its Masters* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson Inc, 1988) 343.

⁹⁹ N. Shemen, *Batsiuing Tsu Der Froy* (Buenos Aries, 1969) translation, Naomi Rappaport.

¹⁰⁰ Shoshana Pantel Zolty, "And All Your Children Shall be Learned": *Women and The Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson, 1993) 249.

¹⁰¹ N. Shemen, *Batsiuing Tsu Der Froy* (Buenos Aries, 1969) translation, Naomi Rappaport.

worker. Israel Moshe Bromberg of Lodz, recorder of this tale, writes that he learned the story from Perl herself. He further inscribes: "it is well known that she was of very elevated spiritual stature. She enjoyed revelations, in the waking state, with the souls of the Tzaddikim."¹⁰² Perl also wore *tallis*, fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, and received *Kvittelach* from her followers. Her father, the great Rebbe, encouraged his followers to seek her blessing.¹⁰³

It was said that she "needed neither her father's nor her husband's pedigree; she proved herself to be pious and extremely learned."¹⁰⁴ Although we have none of her teachings, dynastic writings state that she taught Torah so well that Rebbes came to hear her.¹⁰⁵

Rebbetzin Perl gave birth to many children. All but one died young, her son Reb Chaim Meyer Yechiel known as the "Seraph of Magelnitze." It was told once that after losing a child of seven years, a child who the Koznitzner Rebbe described as having the soul of Moshe Rabeynu her sorrow-filled father spoke these words: "Because of the lofty thoughts you bring when you mate, you also bring lofty souls who cannot be here...you must therefore dress in the most fashionable clothing and you will be considered rude- impudent-and then you will have human souls...they will be healthy children,

¹⁰² Nehemia Polen, "Miriam's Dance: Radical Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought," *Moment Magazine* 12 (1992).

¹⁰³ Harry M. Rabinowicz, *Hasidism: The Movement and Its Masters* (Northvale,NJ.:Jason Aronson Inc, 1988) 343-344.

¹⁰⁴ N. Shemen, *Batsiuing Tsu Der Froy* (Buenos Aries, 1969) translation, Naomi Rappaport..

¹⁰⁵ Harry M. Rabinowicz, *Hasidism: The Movement and Its Masters* (Northvale,NJ.:Jason Aronson Inc, 1988) 345.

durable seeds."¹⁰⁶ So it was, she later had a child who became a Rabbi.

The Magelnitzer Rebbe always praised his mother, Perl, as did the Kosnitzer Hasidim. They related that she performed miracles and was, "as capable a community leader as male rabbis."¹⁰⁷

The Early 1800's: Sarah Frankel

Similarly, Sarah Teumin Frankel, daughter of Rabbi Joshua Heschel Teumin Frankel, disciple of the Seer of Lublin, also achieved great recognition for her teachings. During her life time, Sarah presided over a *tish* (festive meal), distributed the remains of the Rebbe's food to his Hasidim, and received *Kvittelach*. She was married at a young age to the Hasidic master R. Hayyim Shmuel Horowitz Sternfeld, great-grandson of the Seer of Lublin and R. Kalonymous Kalman Epstein of Cracow.¹⁰⁸ When her husband died in 1916, Sarah, with her impressive Hasidic lineage, essentially took his place within the community.

It was taught that she died a day after Purim, on a Friday before the evening meal. She made the *motzi*, tasted the *hallah* and then fell asleep, her soul leaving her at midnight.¹⁰⁹ At the time of her death, her fame had spread throughout Poland.

¹⁰⁶ N. Shemen, *Batsiung Tsu Der Froy* (Buenos Aries, 1969) translation, Naomi Rappaport.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Nehemia Polen, "Miriam's Dance: Radical Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought," *Moment Magazine* 12 (1992) 12.

¹⁰⁹ N. Shemen, *Batsiung Tsu Der Froy* (Buenos Aries, 1969) translation, Naomi Rappaport.

There were many prominent women who continued Perl's tradition of religious action within the Kosnitzer dynasty. Two of these were: Soreh- Dvorah, daughter of Reb Elimelech Gradzisker and Broche- Tziporah- Gitl, wife of Reb Yirachmiel Moshe.¹¹⁰

Merish, the daughter of Reb Elimelech of Lyzhansk was known for her scholarship and Hasidim would go to hear her discourses and accept her blessings. Rebecca, the wife of Reb Simcha Bunem, achieved fame for her great charity. Upon the death of her husband, she traveled endlessly, helping those in need.¹¹¹

The Mid 1800's: Hannah Havah Twersky

Hannah Havah Twersky, daughter of Reb Mordechai Twersky, was blessed with the holy spirit from birth. Her father deemed her equal in piety and learning to her brothers by calling her one of "the eight candles of the menorah."¹¹² Hannah Havah built herself a beautiful palace and presided over the estate even though she took no riches for her own benefit. In her palace, she spoke words of Torah, mesmerizing those who came to listen. She would say that, "A saint is like a song bird, whose nature it is to sing along when it hears other song, and that is why they are liked and brought into homes thus the Tzaddik, when he sings, is joined by the angels on high and those

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Harry M. Rabinowicz, *Hasidism: The Movement and Its Masters* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson Inc, 1988) 344.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 345.

from below and therefore, we must love the Tzaddikim who sing and make others sing." 113

The Mid: 1800's: Malkele Twersky

Another daughter of the Twersky family known for scholarship and religious devotion was Malkele the Triskerin, daughter of Reb Abraham of Turisk. Widowed with children at an early age, she began to practice rabbinics. Crowds of Hasidim came to her seeking advice and blessing. She conducted *tish* and presided over all holiday meals. M.Sh. Geshuri mentions that she was a strong advocate of song and organized a choir and a dance troupe within the community. One song which Geshuri believes she sang is as follows:

We all believe
That God should be served
and we must serve Him
Serve Him through dances
Serve Him through song
Serve Him through blessing.

A further tale illustrates with great detail her charismatic personality. "She would preside over the Passover Seder dressed as a queen, wearing a crown of precious stones. Her sons and guests who led her to the table would sing "On the merits of women's saintliness Israel was redeemed from Egypt." The *Gabbai*, Reb Ezriel Yaacov, made sure that everything was in order: the sextons around the table were dressed in white and they filled the wine cups. At *Sh'foch Hamasiach* she opened the door herself. This door was opened once a

113 N. Shemen, *Batsiuing Tsu Der Froy* (Buenos Aries, 1969) translation, Naomi Rappaport.

year, and when it was open all called out "Baruch Habah"! As long as she stood at the door everyone remained standing. After a while she returned to the table, and drank all of Elijah's cup."¹¹⁴

The Belzer Women

In the court of Belz there were a number of women who conducted themselves as Rebbes. N. Shemen relates that the first Beltzer Rebbe's wife Malkah was sanctified by the Belzer Hasidim.¹¹⁵ She was encouraged to take her meals with her husband and participate in Torah discussions. Malkah's daughter Eidel was also known for great saintliness. While her husband, R. Isaac Rubin of Sokolow was reticent to serve the community in a rabbinic capacity, Eidel was more than willing. She delivered Torah discourses, distributed *shirayim* and gave advice.¹¹⁶ A story is told that Eidel, while practicing Torah signification magic, once suggested to a man suffering from leg cramps that he donate a box of candles to the synagogue. Later, her father asked her why she prescribed this measure and she quoted Torah, "A lamp unto my feet is thy word."¹¹⁷ Her father, R. Sholem Rukach, would say, "My Eidel is only lacking a fur hat."¹¹⁸ The Belzer Rebbe was able to perceive

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Harry M. Rabinowicz, *Hasidism: The Movement and Its Masters* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson Inc, 1988) 344.

¹¹⁷ Belz, *Sefer HaHasidut*, Vol. 1 (Israel) 240.

¹¹⁸ N. Shemen, *Batsiuing Tsu Der Froy* (Buenos Aires, 1969) translation, Naomi Rappaport.

greatness in his daughter and therefore allowed her to participate in traditional Judaism. Several other Hasidic dynasties permitted women's religious interest in similar ways.

Hannah Rachel Werbermacher

The most renowned of all Hasidic women was Hannah Rachel Werbermacher (1805-1892), who became known as the Maid of Ludmir. A myth surrounds the circumstances of her birth, but it is said that the Seer of Lublin predicted her future rabbinic greatness. She was the only child of Monesh Werbermacher, a merchant who possessed some level of learning. After she had completed the level of learning available for girls, she began to study the midrash, agadah and books of musar with her father. When Hannah reached the age of marriage, matchmakers came from many communities with offers of young men. Her father refused all their efforts at matchmaking and betrothed his young daughter to a scholar, a playmate of the girl from childhood. As was the tradition, Hannah could not speak to her future husband unchaperoned until the wedding. She longed to tell him her dreams, but she was unable.

At the same time, her mother fell gravely ill and died. Hannah became withdrawn, spending solitary days in her room. Once, during a fit of depression, she fell asleep at her mother's grave. Upon awaking she noticed that it was night, grew frightened, and ran to find the way home. Hannah tripped over a gravestone and fainted. She was found and returned to her father's home, afflicted with fever. The doctors feared that she too would die but, on the third day

of her sickness Hannah awoke, speaking of an odd vision. She had dreamed that she was in the Beit Din on high and had received a new and sublime soul. From that moment on, Hannah Rachel conducted herself as a man, praying with ecstasy, wrapping herself in *tallis* and *tefillin* and studying Torah. When her father died, she recited Kaddish for him, and subsequently, broke her engagement to the young man.

Hannah Rachel was left a large inheritance with which she built a *Beit Midrash* with an adjoining apartment for her living quarters. During the week she would remain in her apartment studying Torah and meditating. On Shabbat, at *seudah shlishit*, the door of Hannah's apartment would be open and she would deliver discourses from the shadows. Her fame spread near and far. Both learned Hasidim and the pious unlearned came to hear her teach. A special group of Hasidim was formed which became known as the Hasidim of the Maid of Ludmir.

Although Hannah was admired by many, she was a radical within the Jewish traditional community because she refused to marry. Prominent Tzaddikim tried to persuade her to do so, raising a *herem* against those who became Maid of Ludmir Hasidim. Finally at the age of 40, she succumbed to the request of R. Mordechai of Chernobyl and wed a scholar from amongst her followers. After less than a week, the marriage ended and with it, the popularity of the Maid. Hannah emigrated to Palestine where she married again at the age of 50. She continued her studies until her death in 1895, at the age of 100. From the moment Hannah arrived in Palestine until her death, she was concerned with finding a way to bring Moshiach

through Kabbalah. She died in a cave near Safed, while waiting alone for the Messiah.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Samuel Aba Horodezky, *Ha-Hasidut veha-Hasidim* (TelAviv:Dvir,1923).

Chapter VI: Twentieth Century Reaction to Women who Conducted Themselves as Rebbes

Introduction:

It is impossible to gage how the early Hasidic women were accepted, by both the male Rebbes, and the Hasidic society during their ministries. I was unable to find any published material, manuscripts or letters from the late 1700's- early 1800's that record the names or actions of religious women in Hasidism. For the most part, we learn about the daughters and wives of the early masters through legends recorded several generations later. We know that much of Hasidic history is told in the form of lore. For example, the stories of the Baal Shem Tov were recorded long after his death. Therefore, tales that we now accept as fact, may have been exaggerated over time. Stories about these women, may too have been exaggerated over time, but the basis for their functioning as Rebbes may be true.

From the research that I did for this project, I believe that several Hasidic women did serve their communities in the capacity of Rebbe. There is evidence that documents this phenomenon in Hasidic stories, letters and obituaries, although most of this evidence is written after the death of these women. It is common in Jewish history to record stories only after they have been passed down for generations. Our Torah is one such document, written centuries after the action occurred. And yet, we accept some of the stories as fact. We have even found archeological evidence for several of the occurrences. Stories about these women are similar.

In the mid to late 19th century, Hasidic masters begin to write about the talents of their daughters and wives. They do not claim that these women were Rebbes, only that they performed tasks traditionally performed by male Rebbes. Further, they describe their family members as endowed with the "Divine Spirit." This may reflect more on the agenda of the men who are writing in trying to establish their own authority, than in the implied holiness of the women. Hasidic society revolved around dynasties, therefore any blood relation to the master, possessed part of his charismatic powers. This would be true of women as well.

Only in the early 20th century did historians begin recording the remarkable role that several women played in Hasidism. Over time, these women and their talents, may have assumed grandiose proportions. Therefore, we can only see these women as they are illustrated, through the bias of the historian. The basis for these later explorations of the woman in Hasidism may be a direct result of the women's suffragette movement across Europe and the United States. By the 1930's, when historians began to record the names of active Hasidic women, women had already gained the vote in many nations. Awareness of women's causes was a flourishing part of active politics, therefore; many groups set out to prove that women had always been granted certain rights within their movement. Hasidism may be no different.

Samuel Aba Horodezky

Samuel Aba Horodezky is thought to be the first historian who recorded the role of women in Hasidism. A chapter, entitled "*Ha'isha B'Yehidut V'Hasidut*," in his 1923 work *HaHasidut v'eha-Hasidim* describes this phenomenon and is cited as the definitive source in proving that several Hasidic women served as Rebbes. As we shall see, through a partial translation of the above mentioned chapter, Horodezky believes that women in Hasidism were granted absolute religious equality. He compares the woman's role in Hasidism with that of her husband and finds it parallel. In fact, he states that the woman is actually the more religious party, encouraging her husband to visit the Tzaddik. To prove his point, Horodezky illustrates the religious fervor of several special women, focusing on the Maid of Ludmir. What follows is a partial translation of the chapter on women from his *HaHasidut v'eha-Hasidim*.

The Jewish woman was given equality within Beshtian Hasidism. She is called a Hasidah just as her husband is called a Hasid. She is permitted to go to the Tzaddik, hand him a *Kvittel*, speak with him and he offers her advice on matters material and spiritual. Hasidism awakes in the heart of the woman a strong, spiritual faith. She returns home from the Tzaddik full of spiritual joy and strong faith. With this strength of faith she organizes her home, educates her children, and protects her husband from his struggle for daily bread. She encourages her husband to visit the Tzaddik and brings him to his source of faith in God. She complains to the Tzaddik about the problems of everyday life. Her husband remains silent, locked in his difficulties.

Hasidism does not close books to women. She is not prohibited from study, therefore books are written in Ashkenazic Judaism so that she can understand.

Hasidism also accords the right for the Jewish woman to rise to the level of a Tzaddik. If she was worthy, no obstacles stood in her way. Indeed there were women who rose to this level. The daughter of the Besht, Edel was one such Tzaddik. The Besht said that her soul was taken from the store of pure souls. He called her Edel after the name of the abbreviation from Tanakh. Her

daughter, the mother of R. Nachman of Bratslav was a Tzaddek. The Rabbis said that his religious fervor came from his mother and not his father.

The daughter of the Tzaddik, R. Joshua Heschel, the Appter Rebbe, Rachel was famous in the Hasidic world for knowledge of Aggadah, the Sages and discussions of the Tzaddikim. She was also known for her charity of heart and spirit. The daughter of the Tzaddik, R. Mordechai, the Maggid of Chernobyl, was famous. Indeed many Hasidim came to hear her words of blessing and teaching. The Tzaddikim said that she was like them.

The most famous of all the Tzaddekets was the Maid of Ludmir. She was born in 1815, in the town of Ludmir, Poland and was the only daughter of Monish Werbermacher, a man of wealth who was also intelligent. She acquired from her father knowledge of Aggadah, Midrash and ethical literature. She would pray like a man, prayers that inspired an awakening within the city. A voice went out to all Israel that she was deserving of becoming a Tzaddik. Her rare talents caused people to knock on the door of her father's home. Each one came to propose a match for his daughter, the Tzaddik. In the end she was betrothed to a young man from her city whom she knew from childhood. She loved him greatly and longed to speak alone to him. As it was forbidden for a man to speak alone with a woman, she was unable to express to him her deepest wishes. This situation influenced her soul for the worse; but no one noticed her suffering. She cried at the grave of her mother daily and slowly drew away from people. She remained all the time alone in her room. A legend is told that once she fell asleep at the grave of her mother. When she awoke it was dark and there wasn't a soul around. The girl was afraid and ran towards home. She stumbled over a grave and cried out a great cry, fainting from fear. The grave caretaker took her home, but she fell gravely ill. Doctors said that she would not live. Suddenly a miracle from Heaven opened her eyes and she called for her father. "Father," she said, "I have been in the Beit Din of Heaven and there they gave me a new and sublime soul." From that day on, it was as if she were truly created a new. She began to conduct herself as a man. She would don Tefillin and wrap in a Tallis and pray daily. She broke off her engagement to the young man and raised herself from physical desires.

Meanwhile her father died and left her a fortune. She built a special House of Study with a separate living quarter for herself. In this room, she spent all her time involved with study and prayer.

Soon the name of the Holy Maid of Ludmir went forth to all cities and villages near and far. Men and women came to her in Ludmir to take blessing from her. Even learned men and Rabbis visited her. She sat in her room and spoke to these men through the closed door.

Slowly a group of special Hasidism gathered around her. They became known as the Hasidim of the Maid of Ludmir. They prayed in her Beit Kenneset and would gather to hear her teach Torah.

Famous Tzaddikim traveled to see her with their own eyes. They said that an evil spirit was in this virgin and wanted her to be like other women, married to a man. She paid them no attention and only when R. Mordechai of Chernobyl spoke with her, did she marry.

After her marriage she was weakened. In the end, she traveled to Eretz Israel and died there.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Samuel Aba Horodezky, *Ha-Hasidut v'ha-Hasidim* (Tel Aviv: Dvir) 65-71.

Horodezky sets out to prove that the woman was given complete equality in the emotional, mystical and religious life of Hasidism through illustrating the lives of several unusual women. Horodezky wrote down Hasidic lore that was orally transmitted from generation to generation. Yet, interestingly, several notable Hasidic historians, writing during the same time period, ignore the subject of women in Hasidism altogether, either betraying a bias against women or supporting the idea that women did not play an active role in Hasidism. Horodezky did have a solid reputation as a historian. In fact, he is so prominent in recording Hasidic history that the *Encyclopedia Judaica* series includes an article on his life.¹²¹

Ada Rapaport-Albert

Ada Rapaport-Albert, a noted Judaic scholar, refutes Horodezky's scholarship in a 1988 article, "On Women in Hasidism, S. A. Horodezky and the Maid of Ludmir Tradition." Rapaport-Albert sees women in Hasidism as deviant and crossing gender boundaries, rather than mainstream. She further argues that Hasidism separated, rather than strengthened the family, by drawing young men away from their wives and children to study with the Tzaddik. Women were left to support the family both financially and emotionally during holidays and Shabbat when the man's influence was impor-

¹²¹ "Samuel Aba Horodezky", *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: The MacMillan Co., 1971) vol. 8 HE-IR, 978.

tant.¹²² Rapaport-Albert acknowledges that women were permitted to see the Tzaddik for matters of personal advice, but they were not active members of the Tzaddik's court. In general, women could not take meals with the men nor pray in the Beit Kenneset.

On Horodezky's point that Yiddish literature was produced to educate women, Rapaport-Albert comments that it was created for the sole purpose of educating the masses, not specifically aimed at women. She further states that Hasidism did not possess any explicit ideology of women's education. But in attempts to make Hasidism accessible to all, include women peripherally.¹²³

In response to Horodezky's claim that women could become Tzaddekets (the female version of the Tzaddik), Rapaport-Albert argues that women were active within Hasidism, but not to the extent which Horodezky allows. She asserts that Horodezky does not supply enough detail about these women nor state his sources to support his hypothesis.¹²⁴ His research seems to be based more on fiction than scholarship.

Regarding the Maid of Ludmir, Rapaport-Albert sees her as deviant rather than successful. She states that the Maid denied her role as a woman in society, crossed gender and sex boundaries, and attempted to live as a man. Hannah Werbermacher is more false male than female Rebbe. When forced to resume her life as woman

¹²² Ada Rapaport-Albert, "On women in Hasidism" from *Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Chimen Abramsky* (London: Peter Halban, 1988) 495.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 498.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 500.

and marry, the Maid collapsed, unable to continue her ministry that led, in turn, to her downfall.¹²⁵

Rapaport-Albert is somewhat correct in noting that the story of the Maid of Ludmir is one of failure. Hannah Werbermacher was unable to continue her teaching in a society where she was required to follow the norm. Yet according to Rapaport-Albert's criteria, several of the women who served rabbinical functions, could be seen as successful. The Chentsiner Rebbetzin, for example, married, raised children and grandchildren and performed several rabbinic duties. Judging by the articles describing her ministry, she was considered to be fully legitimate within her domain. People came to her to seek advice, blessing and assistance. A court developed with the Rebbetzin as the focal point and she achieved a great deal of recognition and fame for her teachings. Yet, she did not perform other duties of the Twentieth Century male Rebbe, such as traveling to the Rabbinic conferences, taking part in intercommunal politics or leading prayer services. Her leadership, like most in Hasidism was based on charisma. Therefore, those rabbinic duties that she did not perform, did not detract from her position in any way.

Nehemia Polen

Rabbi Nehemia Polen, Ph.D., Associate Dean of Students and Associate Professor of Jewish Thought at Boston Hebrew College, has done extensive research on women in Hasidism. Part of his contribution to the subject, has been the analysis of stories written by Malkah

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 506.

Shapiro (1894-1971), daughter of Rabbi Yerachmiel Moshe Hapstein of Kozienice (1860-1909). Women and their role within Hasidism figure as a major theme of her work, which seems to be highly autobiographical. As Polen notes, Malkah Shapiro's stories may be the only literary enterprise on Polish Hasidism by a woman.¹²⁶ Although Malkah Shapiro is of a later time period than the women of this study, it is important to mention her literary contribution to Hasidism.

In Polen's article, "Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought" he studies the earlier women active in Hasidism. Polen points to several popular Yiddish journals that describe the Chentsiner Rebbetzin in her day. I was only able to locate one obituary, but will supply the information as offered by Polen. He finds that New York's *Morgen Zshurnal* delineated her activities "as conforming precisely to the pattern of male Rebbes" and labeled her a "froi Rebbe" while *Der Moment* wrote that she conducted herself as a Rebbe ("*hot zikh gefirhrt vi a Rebbe*"). Further, Agudah's *Togblatt* "applied the traditional midrashic category" of righteous women (*shim zidkonios*) to her. Polen later notes that in an authorized history of the Chentshin-Ozherov dynasty, published recently, a lengthy description of the Rebbetzin mentions that she accepted *Kvittelach*, but does not use the term *froi-Rebbe* (like a Rebbe). The work also reproduced a letter on which her official seal is affixed. Evidence of an official seal does

¹²⁶ Nehemia Polen, "Where Heaven and Earth Touched: The Sublime Hebrew Works of an "astonishing" writer, Malkah Shapiro, take us into a lost world." *Jewish Action*, (Dec. 1995)30-32

suggest that her activities were considered by her community to be fully legitimate.¹²⁷

Legitimacy

The issue of legitimacy is certainly the most difficult to prove as there are no specific documents, popular histories, personal memoirs or newspaper articles before 1930, which I was able to find, that document the phenomenon of Hasidic women functioning as Rebbes. Therefore, we have no direct evidence for believing that women attained this level of religious influence. Horodezky's entire treatise, the foundation of many further works, may be based on hearsay, rather than fact.

The Hasidic movement did not set out to make changes in gender roles; yet, it did. Women were allowed to participate in religion in a way that had not been available to them before. They were able to take counsel from the Rebbe, study Torah and wear a *Tallis* and *Teffilin*. This permissiveness allowed women to move into positions of religious prominence, especially those women who were related to the Rebbe. Yet, the women who were involved did not consider themselves to be feminists in any way. Nevertheless, we find in several Hasidic treatises, themes that present ideas of egalitarianism. These themes are not categorically developed yet they play out in each dynasty where women were allowed to assume a position of religious prominence.

¹²⁷ Nehemia Polen, "Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought" *Modern Judaism*, (issue 12, 1992) 13.

It is interesting to note that the first writings about these women were published in conjunction with the beginning of the Women's Rights Movement. Therefore, these women from the 1800's are described with a 1930's consciousness. In addition, as is true with any historical record, the author's bias is undeniably disclosed. Therefore, even Horodezky, who was not an avid feminist was certainly aware of the women's movement, choosing to include Hasidic women in his tome on Hasidism.

With our twentieth century awareness of feminism and women's roles, we tend to view early Hasidism as egalitarianism. Several modern scholars read these women as folk heroes, assuming roles equal to the men of the time.

We will end this discussion of legitimacy with the case of the Maid of Ludmir. Greta Fink, author of *Great Jewish Women*, says of her:

To us it may seem that the Maid of Ludmir was a slightly eccentric nonconformist. However, she was part of the mainstream of mysticism, the basis of Hasidism, no different from the sainted Baal Shem Tov and other famous Rebbes. Erudite, a mystic who possessed considerable charisma, she was able to overcome the strict and confining limitation that the ghetto imposed on women, and become a famous Hasidic leader. Had she been able to resolve the problem of marriage and spinster hood, she might have become one of the greatest of the Rebbes. As it is, she can lay claim to being a most noteworthy Hasidic leader, one of the most original, and the first to settle in the Holy Land. She not only dreamt of hastening the end of Jewish exile, but actually attempted to accomplish it. ¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Shoshana Pantel Zolty, *"And All Your Children Shall be Learned": Women and The Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, NJ.: Jason Aronson, 1993) 251.

Fink views the Maid in the most elevated of terms. She sees her as a true Rebbe, who was accepted by mainstream Hasidism in Poland and, the first Rebbe to live in Palestine. Yet, there remains a deep mystery about the Maid's level of fame and acceptance by the men and women of Hasidism. We know that within the confines of the 19th century Hasidic society, she was not accepted by her own rabbinic peers without being married. In contrast, other Hasidic women who were married, yet who performed far less rabbinic duties, were accepted by the Rebbes of the time and lauded for their talents. While these other Hasidic women accepted *Kvittelach*, donned *tallis* and *teffilin*, and taught Torah, they did not have their own *Shul* nor group of Hasidim as did the Maid. It would therefore be interesting to determine whether it was the type of function that the Maid performed within her society, or the fact that she was unmarried, which caused the most disapproval. Unfortunately, during my thesis research, I was unable to find materials that recorded opinions of the male Rebbe's about the Maid of Ludmir. Therefore, the debate remains unsolved in this paper.

Nevertheless, among 20th century Jews, the Maid of Ludmir is the most widely recognized of the 18th and 19th century Hasidic women who performed rabbinic functions as she has been the subject of popular journal articles, a children's book and a 1996 Yiddish dramatization, rendered in New York City. She has become a symbol. Through our 20th century eyes, the Maid is a paradigm of modern womanhood, able to move beyond the conventions of the time and a traditional male-based religion.

Conclusion

Through the course of this thesis, I have attempted to prove that several Eastern European Hasidic women of the 18th and 19th Century fulfilled the duties of Rebbes and were seen by their communities as no less important than the male Rebbe of the time. The circumstances, as set up by Hasidism, do form an environment in which this could occur. Although traditional *mitzvot* were required in Hasidism, other religious acts, such as prayer, were of higher importance. As well, women were given more religious equality and allowed to participate where once the door had been closed to them, as long as they fit into the mold of a married Hasidic woman. They were encouraged to meet with the Rebbe and form with him a relationship parallel to what their husbands had. Further, daughters and wives of Hasidic Rebbes, were encouraged to study Torah, take part in communal Holiday celebrations, wear a *tallis* and *teffilin*, and pray daily. Women, thereby, took on a greater role within religion, based upon *halakhic* imperatives performed by previous generations of women.

Into this atmosphere of evolving Judaism, several women were able to attain prominent positions. Wives and daughters of Rebbes were given authenticity needed to perform certain religious actions, by the merit of their familial relationship with, and physical proximity to the communal leader. This authenticity was furthered by the Rebbe's oral support. In a few cases, this sense of legitimacy allowed the Hasidic woman to move into positions where she would be performing religious functions upon the death of her husband or father.

She was perceived by the community as an extension of the deceased Rebbe, teaching his words and continuing his legacy. Although we know that women did achieve prominence in Hasidism, the question of their legitimacy in the eyes of the community and the male Rebbes of the period, remains unanswered.

In beginning this thesis process, I was excited by the potential of discovering information that had yet to be brought to the general public. I wished to discover writings by and about these Hasidic women "Rebbes" that would prove that early Hasidism was egalitarian. Yet, in spite of my enthusiasm, I hit many walls, not the least of which was my inability to read and understand Yiddish, the language of many Hasidic documents. As well, the amount of information on this topic is rather limited. Most of the material that introduced the phenomena of these women was traced back to the Horodezky volume, which in my copy, had no footnotes for this specific chapter. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the stories had once been oral legends, passed down from one generation to the next. As is possible within this type of story form, facts can take on new dimensions and qualities over the years. A further frustration for me was the limited amount of time that I had to pursue research. Had I been able to spend several years on this project, I would have visited the Yiddish Center in London, England, researched the subject in Poland, and interviewed scholars such as Ada Rapaport Albert.

There are many questions on the topic of the woman "Rebbe" in Hasidism that remain unanswered. The most important of these questions involves the issue of legitimacy. Although these women performed functions similar to that of the male Rebbe, were they

seen as equal to the male Rebbe? Did they have the same authority? Did they possess the same standing within the community? Other questions involve the breadth and depth of their communal responsibilities. What did these women do on a daily basis? Did they perform lifecycle events? How did they balance their rabbinic duties with raising a family? Further inquiries relate to their own self-perception. How did they see themselves? What did they perceive as their challenges? Did they understand that they were breaking boundaries in the area of women and participation in Judaism? And why did they take this role? All of these questions could potentially be answered by further research and the discovery of diaries, letters and manuscripts if they exist.

Questions about the role of the woman in Hasidism are still being asked today. *The New York Times* published an article on "Reading the Torah, an Orthodox Women's Group Takes on Tradition" in the Sunday, February 16th, 1997 Metro section. The article discusses an Orthodox women's group in Queens who pray, study Torah commentary together and publicly read from the Torah. Last month, a local rabbinical association, the Vaad Harabonim of Queens issued an ordination, prohibiting women's prayer groups based solely upon the fact that they read from the Torah. Obviously the same questions that were raised about women participating in certain early Hasidic religious acts, are still pertinent to modern Judaism.

The idea of connecting modern Jewish women and their religious challenges and goals to their counterparts in early Hasidism could be a further direction in which to take this research. It would be interesting to compare the community reaction to women in-

volved with Hasidism in the 18th and 19th Century to the Reform community's reaction to Sally Preisand and other women Rabbis of her generation in the 1970's. As well, I would like to be able to interview women in modern Hasidic communities to explore their level of religious participation. Through my research, I heard about a woman named Rebbetzin Jungreich who teaches Torah study classes at Heneni on the Upper West Side, and has her own cable television show on the subject. After speaking with her secretary, I learned that I would not be able to get an appointment with the Rebbetzin until I had attended several of her classes. Due to time constraints, I was unable to do so. Rebbetzin Jungreich, a member of the Orthodox community, is similar to many of the early Hasidic women. She teaches Torah publicly, involving herself in a realm not usually occupied by women. As well, she was married to an Orthodox Rebbe, conforming to the standards of traditional Jewish society. Were I to continue this project, I would interview her extensively.

I have learned a tremendous amount from the research and writing of this project. Although the women whom I studied lived several centuries ago, I feel a great connection to them. They possessed the same passion for Judaism which I feel and were able to find a way to connect others to Judaism. They raised children, organized a home and worked within the community, all goals for my own future. These women are models of inspiration for me and will continue to be so.

Appendix I

Translation of chapters from Feinkind, M. *Froyen Rabbonim un Barimte Perzenlekheiten in Poylen*. Warsaw, 1939 by Naomi Rappaport.

Perele the Kosnitzer Rebbetzin

(p. 37-42)

A. Perele, the Kosnitzer Rebbetzin was petite, weak and weepy, but unassumingly pious, devout to God and to people. Her virtue was inherited from her famous father, the Kosnitzer Magid, the Rabbi Reb Israel-ele, who was the son of a bookbinder. Even as a child, this only daughter accompanied the Koznitzer Magid to Rabbi Reb Elimelech in Liszensk, who said that the Divine Presence shone from the bright face of this child.

When Perele became an adolescent, the Kosznitzer Rabbi married her off the Reb Ezra Zelig, the son of one of his Hasidim who stemmed from a prestigious family.

During the decades when the pious Kosznitzer Rabbi was bedridden as a result of weakness and daily fasting, his Perele never left him, she nursed him, served him and it is told that he, her famous father revealed divine secrets to her at that time. Even at an early age, when she was barely twenty years old, Perele herself behaved as a Rebbe on Jewish issues. She immersed herself for ritual purification twice a day: at dawn and before minchah. She fasted every Monday and Thursday, wore a long satin robe, belted with a long Talit Katan. She prayed under a large Talit, which covered her from head to foot and she was heavily engaged with Hasidism. And at the time that this great woman prayed, no one was permitted into her private chamber, even her husband.

All the Hasidim who visited her father were told by him to see her because she too had Divine Spirit. He told those who gathered that they could be helped by her. Reb Zisheh, her Gabbai, admitted those seeking her advice, one by one after Shachrit and until Minchah, first bringing her everyone's Kvitlech. When someone came to her she already knew their request. The Kvitlech were already sorted on her table and she had a ready reply for each one, for some a blessing and for others good advice. Payments for advice were not compulsory. The issue for her was to be devout, give Tzedakah and God would help. Our Tzaddekes did not make money from her rabbinic work, as did the women of the Chernobyl estate. She lived as a poor person, in an old fashioned small house on the "Rabbi's Street" in poverty and dressed as a pious woman.

She had a weakness. As long as Rabbi Reb Elimelech was alive, none of her children survived. They all died young. She cried bitterly to her father, the Maggid, who ordered that as a solution she should wear a Lord's garb made with twelve silver buttons, six in each row, as was fashionable in Poland for the wives of the Lord's. It would be assumed that she was a lewd woman and therefore she would be able to bring lasting seed into the world. And so the devout daughter dressed in this clothing gave birth to a son, Reb Yechiel Mayer, who brought great light into her world.

B. Perele the Kosznitzer, like her father, was a distinguished person in the Polish aristocracy. The Pilever Dukes Tschorksis did absolutely nothing without the Maggid's approval. They were also followers of Perele. They sent her refreshments for the holidays, as well as ordinary gifts, for which she sent her blessings in which the Pilever estate believed deeply.

But there was great concern in the Duke's estate. The young Duke, the only son of the old Duke Adam Tchartoriski, had lived for a long time with his wife the Duchess Zamoiska and they had no children. And since the tradition in the family was that inheritance was transferred from son to son, who subsequently distributed the portions of the inheritance to the other inheritors, they longed for a son to continue the succession in Pilev. So the Duke also knocked on the

doors of our "Saint" and he came to Koszenitz, and Zisha the Gabbai, escorted him in to the Rebbetzin before all the other petitioners. When the Duke entered Perele's private room, he removed his hat that is the Christian custom. The Rebbetzin, who did not know him, asked him to put on the hat again and listening to his request, she blessed him with a son and that the Duke's estate should live to see many generations in Poland. This last blessing was made on the spot and greatly surprised the young Duke who recognized that she had divine spirit.

After the unfortunate revolt of 1831, the elder Pilaver Duke was forced to leave the country and emigrated to France. As he was the leader of the so-called national government, his estate was confiscated and it appeared as if Adam Tchartoriski's generation would be erased. Indeed, in a short while, the young Duchess Zamoiska, the old Duke's daughter-in-law gave birth to a son that created a great furor among the Polish magnates, who had previously ridiculed the young Tchartoriski's fantasies and superstitions. So they too began to greatly honor the Kosznitzer estate and particularly Rebbetzin Perele. They sought her advice and sent her beautiful gifts.

C. After the death of the Kosznitzer Maggid, Perele's husband Reb Ezra Zelig became the Rabbi in the small town Granitza near Gnievahjov. He was not pleased that his wife practiced rabbinics. He wanted it to be completely in his own hands. At one time he complained to his father-in-law about this, that she did not behave like most women, and did not live with him as a wife should with her husband. The Maggid resented this deeply and did not want his son-in-law to attain the level of Rabbi and so he remained only a Reb. However, when the Kosznitzer Rebbe died, Reb Ezra Zelig wanted to take his place. The people did not agree to this and ignoring them, Reb Zelig began to lead another group.

The public, however, continued to side with Perele. She led a separate tish and said Torah. Perele often told her following that her father appeared as a living image in her dreams and shared secrets from heaven with her. He also gave her advice on difficult issues and,

when there was trouble for the Jews, he appealed to the "honored chair" and bad decrees became null and void.

Perele left a beautiful generation of Tzaddikim. The Rabbi Reb Meyer Yechiel, the Mogelnitzer "Seraph" was the son she bore through pleading. The Grodzisker Rebbe Reb Elimelech, who was the Resziner's son-in-law, was her grandson from the Mogelnitzer Rabbi. The Blendover Rebbe, Reb Yekele and Reb Moshe Yossele were also the Mogelnitzer's children.

Many other great Rabbis, who were famous in the Hasidic and scholarly world, their generations still exist, stem from this holy woman Perele, the great Kosznitzer Saint.

Rochele The Apter

p. 43-50

A. It was just before the blowing of the Shofar. The eyes of the audience of a thousand heads were peering at the door from which the Apter was to enter the synagogue. Somehow he was delayed this year. The crowd became impatient, they whisper quietly into each other's ears, the Rabbi has somehow not completed his dealings with a person in question- meaning Satan, he is struggling with him and cannot overcome. This battle is lasting a long time, already two hours.

At last he joins the agitated crowd. Sweat pours from him. There is no customary holy smile. He is exhausted and depressed. He is carrying three Shofars and as he enters he sighs deeply. The entire audience trembled and he soon begins to pray fervently. The crowd repeated each verse seven times. The Apter then called a recess and tried again to come to an accounting with Baal Dever wearing his Talit. Satan, however, remained adamant. The Apter doesn't look, he screams with all his might, "Oh God! I am calling to you in my anguish. Help me!" He takes the Shofar in his strong hand, fervently makes the blessing, attempts to blow the first Shofar. It doesn't make a sound. He tries the second Shofar, it doesn't make a sound. The terrified, worried crowd, begins to weep and the Holy One cries with

them. He takes the third Shofar, it still doesn't sound. He screams, "God in Heaven. Are we Jews so full of sin the Satan can prosecute with such strength?" He tells the elders to stand around him, he tries to blow the three Shofarot and again there is no sound. He becomes desperate and screams out, "Rochelle, where are you?"

B. Rochelle was the daughter of the late Apter. A spark from heaven, her father said about her. Reb. Yehoshuah Hershel shared all his secrets with her when she was still young. The Hassidim also knew, how great Rochelle was regarded by the Father in Heaven. Rochelle had the weakness of not revealing her great influence in Heaven in times of trouble. She was, as was her father, a private person, but one thing she did do was to help her father with difficult issues.

During the Shofar blowing, when Satan held steadfast in his attempt to defeat the Apter, he had no alternative but to call on Rochelle for help. Rochelle was at that time praying with the women in the women's section of the synagogue and hearing her father's call, she understood what was happening. She had divine spirit and she called the Tekiot for her father and the Apter could blow the thirty calls in peace. Satan had respect for her and backed away.

C. The Apter Rebbe left Apt and Rochelle left Apt traveling with him. From that Rosh HaShannah on she never left her father. She accompanied him on all his frequent trips. She suffered and wandered full days with her father, partook of his sanctity and helped dismiss the large crowds that came to him or beseeched him on trips. The Apter was wont to say that he would not undertake anything without Rochelle knowing and he consulted with her on what he did and on all issues and heeded her advice. To succeed in getting something from her holy father one had to get her advice first and then her father would accede. With the death of her father, the public looked to Rochelle for comfort. She distanced herself from the people and retired completely from social life, she became a recluse spending her last years in prayer and ritual cleansing.

Sarah'le the Rebbetzin of Cherchsin

p.56-60

A. Sarah'le the Rebbetzin of Cherchsin was an unusual personality. She is famous all over, well known for her piousness and her advice. Sarah'le became an orphan at the age of three months when her father Reb. Herschel Taomin Frankel passed away. Her mother remarried to Reb. Yossele, known as the "Good Jew" who had a grandson, Chaim Hershel, as a ward. Sarah'le and Herschel were married at the age of fourteen.

By the age of eighteen, Chaim was made rabbi of Nostadtd. Rabbi Chaim adopted the religious practices of his forefathers and was very dedicated to Judaism. After some time the Rabbi died and Sarah'le made up her mind to function as a leader of her sisters and brothers in the style that her husband had established. Her genuine motivation was highly respected and people came to her to ask her blessing. Jews came to believe that her prayers were of special value and could help people in distress and sickness.

She took over completely after her husband's death. Women, in particular, came to her in masses. She would wear a black skirt with two pockets. She would put Kvitelach in one pocket and the money donated in the other, not checking how big or small the amount. She would grant each person's Kvitel without checking their donation. Soon other rabbis heard of her greatness and came to take blessings from her as well.

The Rabbi of Radous sent for her and asked if she would pray for him when he was seriously ill. She did and he was healed.

Sarah'le led a very modest life. She ate meat only on Shabbat and wore a Talit Katan.

Her daughter Bracha'le followed in her footsteps, giving advice to all who came to her.

Malkeinu the Triskerin

p. 66-69

A. Malkeinu the Triskerin was born encased in a membrane and raised in luxury. Her father said that she was a spark from Queen Esther and the divine spirit shone from her face when she was still in a crib wrapped in diapers. Governesses were retained for her and she was taught Yiddishkeit and all European languages. And when she reached adolescence, she was engaged to Reb Ephraim with whom she was not destined to be happy. He died young, leaving her with several young orphans.

Not having any alternative, Malkeinu became a substitute for her husband and began leading a Rebbe's office in her own right with broad gestures and stature. Using her bewitching charm and wisdom, Malkeinu attracted masses of followers from the Hasidic aristocracy, their numbers exceeding the followers of her husband.

She led an expensive aristocratic life to which she was accustomed with housemaids and lackeys, living in a magnificent palace. Malkeinu needed a great deal of money to maintain her lifestyle. She dressed elegantly in silks and satins, depending upon the weather. Her head was covered with a white or creme colored satin kerchief in the style worn by the rich wives of the Russian Lords, studded with shiny pins and brooches that cast multi-colored fiery rays. Malkeinu would appear twice a day to her followers and they would kneel and bow to her. With genuine feminine gentleness and sincerity she comforted, blessed, gave advice, offered remedies and cures with the blessings of the forefathers.

None of this came easily to her. She first had to immerse herself in the mikveh, then recite several chapters of Psalms, distribute Tzedakah to the needy and poor guests for Shabbat.

Notes for advice were placed in containers and her head sexton brought them first to her private chamber where she served God, prayed, studied and wrote letters. When she familiarized herself with the content of the note she went to the small window that separated her private house from the visitor's room and her Gabbai

then called the name of each one who had already made his large payment for a visit. Through the window the Rebbetzin spoke to each specific Hasid, man or woman, without looking at their faces.

Once the wife of a Russian general from Vilna approached the window and complained bitterly to Malkeinu. She said that her husband tortured her and embarrassed her before both guests and servants. One could not require the wife of the general to go to the mikveh, but a miracle occurred. When the husband came to look for his wife, he was told that she was with the Rebbetzin. He demanded that the Rebbetzin return his wife. Makeinu did not loose herself and promised him long life if he would stop flogging his wife. The terrified general swore in agreement to Malkeinu, and his wife completed a long, peaceful life with her husband. The general and his wife were often guests of the Triskerin "Matrona" as the Christians referred to her.

B. Malkeinu presided over the Sabbath and holiday tish. Her children, relatives and invited guests sat at her table. At every meal during weekdays a house orchestra of the best musicians played, and an entertainer provided improvisation. She herself entertained the audience with amazing tales about miracles performed by the great rabbis in her ancestry, repeating their words of Torah and ending by appealing to the wealthy guests to continue to support her estate in dignity.

Each would surpass the other's donation and shower her with golden coins and to thank these guest. She would distribute "sheraim" with a golden fork. Reb. Ezril Yacov, the head of her wine cellars, served them wine in crystal goblets along with other delicacies.

Her ancestors said that since "fear is the greatest hurdle to overcome" she therefore ordered that after each tish there should be dancing. The audience formed a circle and while they were dancing they sang an awesome nigun, in the manner of the Chernobyler:

We all believe, we all believe.

That God should be served.
And must serve Him.
Serve Him though dances.
Serve Him through song.
Serve Him through rejoicing.
But not like dummies.
Each should to all who come.
We all believe, we all believe.
That God should be served.
But with joy and pride
The redeemer from death and redemption from
slaughter.

Appendix II

Shemen, N. *Batsiung Tsu Der Froy*. Buenos Aries, 1969. Translation by Naomi Rappaport.

Chapter 42: The Woman in Hasidism

A. The woman in the Hasidic Dynasty.

We have a rich literature about women in Hasidism, particularly from the writings of S. A. Horodezky, a researcher of Hasidism, from the historian Shimon Dubnow and from experts on Hasidism: Aaron Marcus, Menashe Ungar and others.

There were women in the movement who were important in Hasidism and were leaders in rabbinics. It was reported that Edel, the daughter of the Besht, founder of Hasidism, had divine spirit. Her father respected her and said that her name was elevated in the Torah. The researchers of Hasidism agree that Reb Israel Baal Shem Tov corresponded with her in Hebrew.

M. Sh. Geshuri, a researcher of Hasidic song, also dedicated part of his studies to the role of women in this folk movement. Her points out that one of the rabbinic customs is calling a rabbi by his mother's name- Reb Leib Soreh, a legendary person at the beginning of the Hasidic era is one such example.

He also mentions Freida, the daughter of Reb. Schneur Zalman (1744-1812) who became an important person among the Chabad. She learned much Torah from her father and passed this on to her brother. She had much influence. The other daughters Devorah, Leah and Rachel were also learned.

The daughters of Reb Schneur Zalman, and other Chabad leaders, were well acquainted with Kabbalah.

There were a number of Rebbetzins who presided over a Tish, spoke Torah, distributed remnants of the Rebbe's food, and received Kvitlach. Among these was the Chetnitser Rebbetzin who lived to about 100 and maintained her Hasidic center in Kielce. It is said about her that she died a day after Purim. It occurred the Friday

before the evening Seudah. She made the motzi, tasted it and then fell asleep and her holy soul left her around midnight, leaving an only son who continued as her substitute, and from her stemmed hundreds of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The author Malkah Shaprio also belonged to her dynasty.

The most famous woman among the rabbis was the Maid from Ludmir, Hannah Rachel, the daughter of Reb Munis Werbermacher, known as a saintly person and master of miracles. Her name was renown among Hasidic leaders and scholars. Hannah was born in 1805, in Ludmir, to a Hasidic father who was a follower of Reb Tzvi Hirsh Ziditchever. She was an only child and her father raised her as a son.

When she was of an age to be married, matchmakers came from all the communities. Hannah refused to get married and instead of being united with a man she began to withdraw from people and in the privacy of her room, studied Torah day and night. She also constantly looked into the Zohar and other Kabbalistic writings. When she left the house, it was only to visit her mother's grave where she spent hours weeping.

Once at her mother's grave when she was weeping bitterly, she fell asleep and when she awoke the doctors gave up on her. After several days she regained her strength and from the moment on she assumed the role of a man; she wore a Talit Katan, wore two pairs of Teffilin every day and became involved in rejoicing in magic.

When her father died, she was left a large inheritance with which she built a Beit Midrash for herself with a private room where she spent night and day. The name Maid of Ludmir reached to far off places. Men and women and children came among scholars, rabbis and ordinary folk. All came to be blessed by the holy virgin maiden. She spoke to them through a window. On the Sabbath at Seudat Shlishi she presided over a tish and preached Torah.

Her unusual behavior created many adversaries and some rabbis tried to persuade her to change her behavior that was not proper for a woman and even urged her to marry. She heeded the request of Rabbi Mordechai and got married. After seven days she divorced and again sank into sorrow.

She then left for Eretz Israel and at the age of fifty married for the second time. After this marriage she did not abandon her holy books. Her diligence was intense and in old age when her vision faded, she studied orally. She died when she was about 100 years old in 1895 in Jerusalem.

In the Hasidic world, there was a saintly woman who was called "Yente the Prophetess." She was the daughter of a simple Jew, Reb. Yosef Sprevedliver, a Baal Shem Hasid. Her husband once brought her along to the Rebbe and she was impressed by the Baal Shem and began to imitate him.

As related in the Hasidic "Sipuri Tales", she began to fast and pray, separated herself from her husband, went constantly to the Mikveh and when her husband complained to the Baal Shem about her strange behavior. The Rebbe told him, "Your wife has eyes that see and ears that hear" and named her Yente the Prophetess and that remained her name,

Geshuri dedicated a chapter to the role of the Rebbetzin among the Chernobyl and tells the story of the previously mentioned Edel, daughter of the Besht and the mothers and the brothers of the Admurin. He tells about Edel's daughter Feige, the mother of Reb Nachman of Bratslav. Both daughter and granddaughter of the Besht had, as the Hasidim say, holy spirit.

To this day in Chernobyl, the daughter of Reb Motele, Channah Chaya, is renown for her saintliness and modesty. Her general good nature is the subject of many stories and legends. Her father commented on her holy spirit. Her eight brothers agreed that her level of learning was not lower than theirs. Very prominent rabbis and famous Hasidim would come to her to discuss important issues and she behaved like a rabbi. Channah Chaya built herself a magnificent palace. She departed from her father's path who led a poor, unassuming life. She presided over a wealthy estate but she was withdrawn and did not partake of the wealth as the Sipuri Tales tells us. She spoke Torah the way that it was spoken by the Chernobyl Triskerin. She repeated Torah words as she heard them from saints. She had extraordinary talent that mesmerized people who came to

listen to her. She was particularly impressive when telling mystical tales.

A saint, she would say, is like a song bird, whose nature is to sing along when it hears other song, and that is why they are liked and brought into homes. Thus the Tzaddik, when he sings, is joined by the angels on high and those from below and therefore we must love the Tzaddikim who sing and make others sing.

The second in the Twersky family who is renown for her scholarship and pious devotion was Malkeinu the Triskerin, daughter of Rabbi Abraham the Trisker preacher. Her husband Reb Ephraim, died young and left Malkah widowed with orphans. She began to practice rabbinics and crowds of Hasidim came to her, some for advice and some to hear her preach. She accepted Kvitelach with high payment for this advice, presided over dinners on Shabbat and holidays and distributed Shirayim.

Geshuri relates from probably authentic Hasidic sources, that she was a strong proponent of song, organized a choir of the best voices and after each feast danced Hasidic dances accompanied by Hasidic songs.

Malkeinu, Hasidim tell, was most radiant and splendid at Passover Sedorim. Then she was a true queen; dressed as a queen with a crown of precious stone. Her sons and guests who led her to the Seder sang both at the start of the Seder: "On the merits of women's saintliness Israel was redeemed from Egypt." The Gabbai, Reb Ezriel, made sure that everything was in order. The sextons around the table were dressed in white and they filled the wine cups. At the moment when Elijah arrived, she opened the door herself and when it was open, all called out "Baruch HaBah!". As long as she stood at the door everyone remained standing. After a while she returned to the table, and drunk all of Elijah's Cup.

One of the last of this dynasty, Khaykele Twersky, daughter of Reb Motele Shpikover was a great scholar.

The Koznitzer Maggid also had a daughter who was regarded as an important Hasidic personality. This is the Rebbetzin Perele, whose father was very proud of her. She needed neither her father's nor her husband's pedigree. She proved herself to be pious and ex-

tremely learned. She prayed in a Tallis and gartel, and as many Tzaddikim did, she fasted Mondays and Thursdays and cleansed herself in the Mikveh every Friday. The preacher was extremely proud of his daughter and he sent Hasidism to her with Kvitelach. They related to her as if she was a Rebbe.

Rebbetzin Perele gave birth to many children. Unfortunately many died very young and only one survived, a son Reb Chaim Meyer Yechiel known as the Seraph of Magelnitze. It was once told that after losing a brilliant child of seven years, a child whom the Koznitzner Rebbe described as having the soul of Moshe Rabbeynu. Her saddened father told her that because of the lofty thoughts that she brings when she mates, she also brings lofty souls that cannot be on earth. Therefore he suggested that she dress in the most fashionable clothing so that she was considered rude and then would have human souls- healthy children. And so it was later than she had a son who became a rabbi.

Hasidic related that she performed miracles and was as capable a community leader as male rabbis. One of the heads of Hasidism, Rabbi Reb. Kalnish, author of the book *M'or V'Shemesh* treated her with the greatest respect.

There were many prominent women in the Kosznitzer dynasty. Suffice it to mention the Rebbetzins: Soreh, Devorah, Tzipporah and many others.

There were many learned women who had important roles in the Hasidic world. We find women in almost every Hasidic dynasty renown for their piety, their shrewdness and their knowledge. In the court of the Lubliner Seer we find a number of saintly women beginning with the Lubliner Rabbi's mother, Maitele, daughter of Reb Kopel Likever, renowned Hasid, scholar and wealthy man. Tehillah, the wife of that court, was the daughter of Reb Tzvi Hirsch Lantzauer. She was an aristocratic woman who had her own yichus. Also the court's daughter Tzirl, wife of the Reicher Rabbi Reb Shmuel, was as well known as the Lubliner's sons.

An extremely renown Hasidic woman was Tamarl, the daughter of Reb Shmuel Zbitkever, well known personality in the history of

Poland. This Tamarl was of great help first to the Lubliner Rebbe and then to the courts of Pshische, Koztk and Voorke.

Belz also has much to tell about women Rebbetzins who played a vital role in Beltzer Hasidism. Manache Ungar relates that "the first Beltzer Rebbe's wife Malka was sanctified by the Belzer Hasidim." He relates wonderful folk stories about this Malka, the saint. The first Belzer Rebbe- Reb Sholom used to say "Malki Tzedek Melech Sholom"- when Malkah is a saint, then Sholom is a king. He sat and ate with her at the same table, which according to M. Ungar is a rare occurrence in the Rebbe's court.

About this Belzer Rebbe's customs, M. Ungar relates several interesting episodes: the Sandzer Rebbe once stated that Reb Sholom Rukach and his Rebbetzin are in the same category as Adam and Eve before their sin and that their house is the Garden of Eden.

The Belzer Rebbe's daughter Edel was also renown for saintliness. She took Kvitlach and worked miracles. Her father Reb Sholom Rukach used to say, "My Edel is only lacking a high fur hat." Hasidim also tell that Reb Sholom used to confer with his Malkele on many matters particularly those concerning marriage arrangements.

B. The "Memorial Book" by Reb Yosef Yitzhack Shneerson, Z"L, has very detailed descriptions about a whole group of educated women who contributed to the spread of Kabbalah and Baal Shem Hasidism.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe starts his memoirs with a mystic from Lubavitch, Reb Wolf, which enables him to tell about his first and second wives, their goodness, their style and their lives in general. He writes about a number of women who accomplished much and changed the spiritual status of women in Vitebsk circles. One of them was Devorah, wife of the mystic Reb Nachum. She was educated and even opened a Yeshivah. Likewise, he mentions the women Zlateh-Chave, Leah, Fraide and many others who participated in the existing organized society and helped the men to strengthen charities and education in other countries.

In the second part where he describes people active in Lubavitch, he tells about the wife and sister of Reb Schneur Zalman. He says that his sister was "a remarkable woman, truly pious and

well learned...." Who learned much from her mother Rachel, a scholar who knew the Shulchan Oruch and was knowledgeable in mysticism.

Within this section he also tells of the Mahar"l and his bride Perl, "who excelled in her rare virtuosity and her scholarship." He tells the following: "Perl also spent much time studying. Every day she studied a Talmud lesson with her husband who considered her a companion in study. They studied not only Gomorra and post-Talmudic commentators, but also mussar and theory. Later when the Mahar"l became world famous and received questions about religious law from various communities, Perl would read these questions to him and then write up her husband's answers. She also arranged and virtually edited all twenty-four of the Mahar"l's treatises. It is even reported that in at least eight places in his treatises she found errors. This was written in the language of Blessed Memory and in the language of Rashi...."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe does not omit the Yichus for the women but he does speak about their own learning. Dvorah-Leah prior to her wedding and even more so after her marriage to Reb Yosef Yitzhack, studied song and mysticism and taught the children of his path in Hasidism. She had a great influence on her brother that subsequently brought great light into the world of Hasidism.

It is interesting that in "Hayom Yom," the chronological summary of the Lubavitcher dynasty, which was created with the consent and direction of the Lubavitcher Admu"rim, there are included in the third genealogical yichus, mention of the Rebbetzins, and the daughters and generations of Chabad leadership. In these memoirs, there is also the request to the Hasidim to organize the wives and daughters to strengthen Judaism. In this appeal it is said that a clever wife builds the Jewish home, which is interpreted as the clever, observant wife can build the Jewish home.

In the biography of Reb Schneur Zalman, the Hasidic researchers describe his mother Rivke, his wife Sterne, his sister Sarah and his three daughters, Freida, Devorah-Leah and Rachel. Their place and role in the Hasidic movement are strongly emphasized. They have a prominent place in the list of spiritual leaders in Hasidic

Chabad, in which the joy of Torah and the mysticism of Torah harmonize.

These women played a large role in the spread of Hasidism and Hasidic folklore that was originally oral history, stories, Torah words, speeches and aphorisms.

To conclude a strange episode relating to the Mitzvah of candle lighting. It is told that at the time when the spiritual leaders of Russian Jewry were negotiating with Graf Ovarov that he not force the Haskalah position of Dr. Lilienthal on the Jewish community, a question was posed to Reb Menachum Mendle of Lubavitch. The question was whether he considered Jewish customs to be a law? The latter answered positively yes!

Ovarav was furious and asked again if the custom of women covering their faces during candle lighting is also Torah? Reb Menachum did not think long and answered yes! This too is Torah, any custom for Jewish women is Torah.

The other Rabbis with him were fearful that this was too daring, but the Hasidic leader had no fear of the Russian minister.

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