

The Ideology of the Hasidic Movement as Developed

in the Kedushat Levi

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I. THE NATURE OF AN IDEOLOGY

An ideology is a construct of ideas which justify a prevailing reality. The most comprehensive ideology is metaphysical. It transcends reality in order to explain it.

The origin of the ideology lies within the needs of the group by and for whom it was created. Often excessive want and oppression become the seedbed in which the proper ideology will flourish. People in the throes of fear, humiliation, poverty, and helplessness will thrash-about for a purposeful and encouraging explanation of their prevailing situation. Eventually the intellectuals among the masses will create a satisfying ideology. These intellectuals arise from a leadership group which has been unable to find outlets for its abilities and creativity within the narrow ranks of a declining leadership aristocracy. These disenchanted intellectuals, experiencing deeply the hurt and humiliation of the masses, eventually create a satisfying ideology which wins the devotion of the masses and vaults them into positions of leadership. Thus a new ideology is created and a new leadership is installed.

An ideology then has two specific functions. First it has to establish the authority of the new leadership. When new leaders replace the old in the affections of the masses the question of their authority always arises. Though the new leaders may be providing them with a better mental and physical adjustment,

the masses still require proof of their authority. The ideology has the second critical task of postulating a satisfying metaphysical explanation for the life of the people. Their every experience, their every need, their every hope must fit into an emotionally satisfying scheme.

The ideology is constructed out of old and new elements. The old elements are the popular ideas and sentiments in the minds and hearts of the people: Their occasionally conscious and often unconscious attitudes towards their life, their behavior, their national group, their economic class, their leaders, their God, and so forth. The new elements that are interjected into the ideology are most often elements of emphasis rather than of original content. Most of the ideological content may be traced to conceptions already present in the past. The true genius of the constructors of the ideology lay in their synthesis of the elements of the past with the experiences and problems of the present.

To accomplish its two functions of establishing the authority of the new leadership and justifying the life of the people, the ideology must begin with a commonly accepted authority. The new leadership will justify its ideology on the truth of this accepted authority. Thus not only the masses but also the opponents of the new leadership must be willing to acknowledge the authority of this sacred text or set of beliefs. Naturally the old leader-

ship will differ from the new in its interpretation of the authoritative text or set of beliefs, but it will have to acknowledge the authority of the text. On this authority, the new leadership will build its ideology.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The situation in Poland after the Chmelniki Revolt of 1648 was one of general decline¹. The struggle for power among the king, the burghers, and the clergy became more intense. While each interest was fighting against the others for power, the country became weaker. Finally, a little more than a century after the Revolt of 1648, the first ignoble partition of Poland occurred.

In September of 1631, after three years of intense fighting, the Polish government concluded a peace treaty with the Cossacks. The peace did not last. The Cossacks, claiming that their demands regarding the placement of Jews in the Greek Orthodox portion of Ukraine had been ignored, sought a new alignment with the Muscovite Empire.² This new alignment was established in 1634.

A short while later, Russia and her Cossack allies attacked Poland. On this occasion the force of the attack was felt in the north, in White Russia and in Lithuania. Just one year later,

1. Raphael Mahler, Divre Y'me Yisroel Dorot Ahronim. (Israel: Sifriat Poahim, 1954), II, 269-298. Also cf. Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1895), V, 1-17, 199-231, and Raphael Mahler, Toldot Ha-Yahadut B'Polin. (Israel: Sifriat Poahim, 1950).

2. Simon Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland. Translated by I. Friedlander. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1916), I, 152.

in 1655, the Swedish armies, under King Gustav, attacked and conquered the central provinces of Poland. The peace treaties which followed included the annexation of the Ukraina by Moscow.

With the annexation of her territories and the devastation of her cities from years of warfare Poland experienced a severe economic decline.³ In the years that followed, her economy continued to deteriorate.

The Saxon dynasty of Augustus II. and Augustus III. (1697-1763) hastened the disintegration of the Polish body politic.⁴ The continuous political anarchy, combined with open class conflicts, permitted a rejuvenated Russia, under Peter the Great, to occupy Poland.

By 1764, with the election of Stanislov Augustus Poniatowski to the Polish throne, the land was, for all intents and purposes, under the protectorate of Russia. Just eight years later the first partition took place. As a result, the Polish border provinces were ceded to Russia, Austria, and Prussia.

The economic conditions in the Jewish communities paralleled the general decline among the Poles. The Jewish communities felt each national shock. No matter which side they took in the constant wars, they were always maltreated at the end of the hostilities.

3. Raphael Mahler, Divre...., 269-298

4. Dubnow, History of the Jews...., 156-157

The horrors of the Chmelnicki Revolt crushed the flower of Polish Jewry. It is estimated that from 100,000 to 500,000 Jews lost their lives during the decade from 1648 to 1658.⁵ Even the slaughter of Jews during the Crusades and the Black Death combined cannot match this figure. A Jewry that had achieved greatness in every area of economic and intellectual activity was plunged into darkness.

During the reign of John Sobieski (1674 - 1696) there were numerous riots and pogroms directed against the Jews. Particularly in the cities, Jews were forced to engage in endless litigation with the guilds and trade-unions. A mask of religious zealotness covered the face of bitter economic jealousies.⁶ During these tragic years, the impoverished and decimated Jewish communities faced a host of Blood Accusations. Not only were tortures employed freely but whole Jewish communities were expelled in the wake of the Blood Accusations.

The last vestige of political protection by the king was lost to the Jews during the decadent reign of the Saxon dynasty. In 1717, at the Diet of that year, the amount of the Jewish head-tax was increased - this, despite the fact that the protracted war with the Swedish king, Charles II., had all but ruined the Jews.⁷

5. Ibid, 156 - 157

6. Ibid, 171

7. Ibid, 169

As the 18th Century progressed conditions became still harder for the Jewish communities. Local burghers vied with the central government for Jewish tax monies. Finally, in 1764, when the king had been rendered politically impotent by the burghers, he ordered that the Jewish taxes be raised and that the variety of occupations in which they might engage be narrowed. Thus from the Revolt of 1648 to the end of the 18th Century the economic and intellectual life of Polish Jewry declined steadily.⁸

The Jewish masses were hardest hit by the severe economic decline. Their few possessions were swept away in the constant wars. The physical devastation had left its ugly counterpart in a mental demoralization among the masses. One author writes: "It was more than a mere coincidence that one and the same year, 1648, was marked by the wholesale murder of the Jews of the Ukraine and the first public appearance of Shabbetai Zevi in Smyrna".⁹

In their fear and helplessness, the masses, particularly in Podolia, Volhynia, and Galicia, turned in desperation to the promises of "messiahs", wonder-workers, and the Caballa. A writer, at the beginning of the 18th Century, made this observation: "There is no country where the Jews are so much given to mystical

8. E. Dinsburg, "The Beginnings of Hasidism and its Social and Messianic Elements" (in Hebrew) Zion Vol. VII, No. 4. (Jerusalem, July, 1943), Chap. IV.

9. Dubnow, History of the Jews..., 204 - 205.

fancies, devil hunting, talismans, and the exorcism of evil spirits, as they are in Poland."¹⁰ The fears of the masses were fanned by the large number of pessimistic mystical books published during the 18th Century. The favorite themes of these books were life after death, the torture of sinners in hell, the transmigration of souls, and the exploits of demons.

Part of the responsibility for the ignorance and fear among the masses lay with their leadership. The leadership might well be termed "absentee leadership". The masses seldom saw or heard their leaders. They paid their taxes for the support of their leaders to collectors sent out by the leaders. The leaders, who formed an aristocracy of wealth and knowledge, separated themselves from the needs and aspirations of the masses. Their intense and often abstruse intellectual activities struck no familiar chord in the hearts of the more mystically inclined masses.¹¹ The Talmudic gilgul of their leaders bore no reality to the lives of the masses. The result was that Talmudic learning became the possession of a narrow circle of scholars while the lower classes were stagnating in ignorance and superstition.¹²

Thus the declining state of Polish affairs was matched by a similar decline in the life of the Jewish communities:

10. Ibid, 203

11. Simon Dubnow, Toldot Ha-Hasidut. (Tel Aviv: Dvir Co., Ltd., 1944), 7

12. Dubnow, History of the Jews..., 199

Jewish leadership had all but relinquished its right to lead, and the masses sought in a potpourri of amulets, wonder-workers, magic combinations of numbers and letters, and ascetic disciplines a new solution to their wretched situation.

III. HASIDIC LEADERSHIP

The rise of the Hasidic leadership was phenomenal. By the beginning of the 19th Century, less than one-hundred years after the birth of the Baal Shem Tob, the Hasidic sect had acquired a following in Eastern Europe larger than the following of the Rabbinic group.¹³ A major part of their phenomenal success lay in who they were and what they had to say, that is, their social origins and their ideology.

The Hasidic leadership arose primarily from the middle classes. Intellectually, of course, they were of the upper classes. Indeed, as we shall point out below, in better times their learning would have moved them easily into the ranks of the upper classes. However, through their literature, including of course the Kedushat Levi, they maintained the ideological position of poor origins and an absence of material desires.¹⁴

We are told that the Baal Shem Tob, for example, came from a poor Jewish family. He earned his livelihood at menial labor; a hazzan, a teacher's assistant, and so forth. From his earliest beginnings and throughout his years of meditation in the mountains, he was continually faced with the spectre of

13. Dubnow, Toldot, 3.

14. See below, Chap. VI.

poverty. According to the literature, similar economic difficulties faced most of the future leaders of the new movement. Most of the students who flocked to the courts of Dov Baer were poor and hungry. We are told that they, like the people they were to lead, knew the bitterness of poverty.

The new leaders could never become "absentees" in spirit. They had been too close to the poverty and sorrow of the masses. They enjoyed the distinct advantage of understanding the hearts of the people they were to lead. Their early stories and sermons reveal that they knew how to speak directly to the moods of the masses. In all but one respect they were part of the masses.

The new leadership differed from the masses in this single respect: they were learned while the masses were ignorant. The Baal Shem is reputed to have pierced the secrets of the Caballa through intensive study during the long hours of the night. Dov Baer impressed his visitors with his wide grasp of Talmud and Caballa. Jacob Joseph expressed a profound knowledge of the law in his classic, Toldot Yaakov Yosef. In fact, the courts of the early leaders were filled with young Talmudists, many of whom were originally arch-Rabbinites from White Russia and Lithuania.¹⁵ Brilliance and poverty met in the man who gathered at the courts of the early Hasidic leaders.

15. Dubnow, History of the Jews..., 229

This combination of poverty and brilliance proved to be the yeast which stirred the new movement to activity. Perhaps, had times been better and rabbinical positions more plentiful and rewarding, these men would not have sought to rise to power through the process of revolution. Their brilliance would have found ample opportunity for expression. Fame and wealth would have been theirs for the taking. However, at the beginning of the 18th Century, opportunities were few and far between. Poverty stalked the footsteps of Polish Jewry.¹⁶ Everywhere the doors were closed. The only opportunity these young men had to move into the ranks of leadership was through the mobilization of the masses behind a new ideology, and this is exactly what they did. The explosive mixture of poverty and brilliance produced a new leadership among the masses of Polish Jewry.

The new ideology had its foundations in the practical and speculative Caballa.¹⁷ Yet its greatness came from its ability to transcend the ascetic rites of the Caballa and replace them with new expressions of joy. By new emphases and omissions, the ideology achieved a synthesis of the ideas of the past with the needs of the present.¹⁸ This synthesis was eminently successful.

16. B. Dinshurg, "The Beginnings of Hasidism...", 127 - 133, also cf. Raphael Mahler, Divre... 269 - 298

17. Dubnow, Toldot... 4.

18. For a fuller description of the nature of an ideology see above page 1 ff.

The new ideology may be conveniently divided into two parts. The first part establishes the authority of the new leadership. It does this by describing the functions, qualities, position, and powers of Israel's ideal leaders. The authority for this description rests in the sacred literature of the people, acknowledged to be Divine by the opponents as well as the proponents of the new movement.

As the picture of Israel's ideal leader gradually unfolds, it becomes increasingly obvious how similar it is to the nature of the new Hasidic leadership and how foreign it is to the characterization of the old Rabbinic leadership. The latter, being wealthy, arrogant, impatient, and absent in body and spirit from the masses failed utterly to meet the standards of Israel's ideal leaders. Only the poor, humble, and patient Hasidic leaders seemed worthy to be Israel's leaders.

The second part of the new ideology justified the position of the masses. It explained the special nature of the Jewish people; of God's unique love for them, of the immense significance of Israel's prayers and deeds, of the advantages in the present economic and mental states of the people, and finally of the certain brightness the future holds for Israel. Throughout the second part of the new ideology the masses were pictured in a new light. The little they could actually do to help themselves was magnified into acts of cosmic significance. Their poverty

and ignorance were shown to have hidden benefits. They were complimented, flattered, and encouraged throughout the second part of the ideology. Thus the new ideology captured the hearts of the masses by its glorification of the Hasidic leadership and its emulation of the position of the people. So great was its success, that in less than a century the Hasidic leadership was vaulted into control of the largest following of Jews in Eastern Europe.

IV. LEVI YIZHAK AND HIS WORKS

Levi Yizhak, popularly called the "Defender of Israel", was born into a poor but knowledgeable family, in the year 1740. The ideas of Rabbinism and mysticism were blended in his home. His father, Meir, a rabbi himself, was a scion of learned forbearers.

As a youth, Levi Yizhak was extremely tense. He was a brilliant and conscientious student, devoting himself not only to the Talmud but also to the musar.¹⁹ His first introduction to the Caballa, and indirectly to Hasidism, was at the hands of Samuel Hurewitz, of Riezivol. He apparently enjoyed the study of Caballa at the home of his new mentor. It was not long before he heard of the fame of the Preacher from Meseritz, Dov Baer.

When he had completed his studies with Rabbi Hurewitz, he decided to visit the court of Dov Baer. He must have been overawed by the opulence and brilliance of the Maggid's court. The magnetic personality of the Maggid captured Levi Yizhak's mind and heart.²⁰ It is related that when Dov Baer died Levi Yizhak saw a halo around his head and fully comprehended his teacher's doctrine.²¹

19. Johanan Tversky, Geulah al y'de Ahavah, (Tel Aviv: Masadah, 1960), 53.

20. Dubnow, Toldot...., 156

21. S. A. Horodensky, Ha-Hasidut V'Ha-Hasidim, (Tel Aviv: Dvir Co., Ltd., 1932), II, 78.

Under the compulsion of financial difficulties, Levi Yizhak left Meseritz and assumed the pulpit of his late teacher, Samuel Harewitz, in Biczivol. Unfortunately, his experience was most unpleasant. His Hasidic leanings and his lack of tact brought him into open conflict with the leaders of the community.²² In the midst of the conflict, he left the community.

With the help of Rabbi Aaron, of the city of Karlin, a suburb of Pinsk, Levi Yizhak was elected to a pulpit in Pinsk. In 1772, a year after he had assumed his new pulpit, a "holy war" broke out between the Orthodox and Hasidic camps throughout Poland and Russia. The "declaration of war" was the ban of the Vilna Gaon against the Hasidim.²³ In Pinsk too hostilities broke out. Soon the rift became so great and the hatred so intense that Levi Yizhak was forced to leave his pulpit once again.

A period of inactivity ensued. It ended with the acceptance by Levi Yizhak of the pulpit of Barditchev. Barditchev, celebrated as the "Jerusalem of Volhynia", had a proud 400-year old history. The colorful Russian city, being a cosmopolitan commercial center, enjoyed a condition of relative tolerance. Here Levi Yizhak found peace and fulfillment. After initial difficulties with the established Orthodoxy, he was able to carry on his teachings in peace and quiet.

22. Ibid, 71 - 75.

23. Abraham Kahana, Sefer Ha-Hasidut. (Warsaw: Hatzfirah, 1922), 246 -248.

Levi Yizhak always exhibited sensitivity for the poor and the ignorant. He was invited once to a meeting of the town council to hear a new resolution which was to be voted on. The regulation was planned to prevent beggars of other cities from entering Berditchev. When Levi Yizhak heard the nature of the proposed regulation, he rose to his feet in anger. "This", he said, "is not a new regulation. It is as old as the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah!"²⁴

His most well known characteristic was his intense love of Israel. On occasion he would berate God for the treatment he gave Israel. Once, on the holy day of Yom Kippur, he called God to trial. After complaining about the heavy burden his people had to bear, and explaining to God how many other nations he might choose from to do his work, Levi Yizhak concluded, "And I, Levi Yizhak, son of Sarah, of the city of Berditchev, say, 'Magnified and sanctified be his great name in all the world!'"²⁵

The primary work of Levi Yizhak is the Kedushat Levi. This work is a collection of his comments on the weekly Torah portions, the Torah portions for the High Holydays, the major and minor holidays, and selections on a variety of subjects.

24. Kohane, Sefer..., 252 - 253.

25. Mattathias Gutman, Migdalay Ha-Hasidut: Rabbi Levi Yizhak May-Berditchev. (Bilgura: H. Kronenberg, 1930), 129 - 130.

The Kechushet Levi has been printed in several editions. The earliest edition was printed in Slovits, in 1798, and contained expositions on the High Holydays in addition to several miscellaneous hassides.²⁶ Eighteen years later, in 1816, the finished book was printed in two parts, in Berditchev. The first part contained expositions on the weekly Torah portions, the Prophets, and the Writings. The second part of the Berditchev edition included new interpretations of laws and Rabbinic stories. The writings of Levi Yizhak's son also appear in the second part.

A second work, alleged to be his, was published in 1863, in a collection of writings by Israel Meiksinits. In this collection, published in Lvov, there appears a booklet entitled Kechushet Levi al Pirke Avot. However, the authorship of this booklet is in doubt.²⁷

26. Julius Furst, Bibliotheca Judaica. (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1851), II, 243.

27. Dubnow, Telosef..., 196 (footnote).

V. FUNCTIONS OF ISRAEL'S IDEAL LEADER

A major portion of the Kedushat Levi is devoted to describing the functions of Israel's ideal leader. This is as we should expect it to be. For the Hasidic leaders faced the challenging task of explaining how their activities on behalf of the people most closely paralleled the ideal functions of Israel's true leaders and dramatically surpassed the activities of the Rabbinic leadership.

Levi Yizhak begins with the principle that Israel's ideal leaders must be near their followers. They cannot afford to permit barriers to develop between themselves and the people, for their primary task is to bring Israel closer to God. When God elevates a man, making him a leader, it is not for that man's personal pleasure but rather to enable him to raise the people closer to God.²⁸ Such a task, according to Levi Yizhak, is not without its dangers. The zaddik, in his descent to the level of the people, may temporarily lose contact with God.²⁹ However, the ideal leader is willing to face this danger. He stands ready to serve Heaven and his people by bringing them nearer each other:

"Good for heaven and good for her creatures"; this is the zaddik who serves the Lord and also brings the wicked to the service of the Lord. Such a one is called

28. Levi Yizhak, Kedushat Levi, (Jerusalem: Foundation for the Publication of Books on Ethics and Piety, 1958), 75.

29. *Ibid.*, 25 (cf. Martin Buber, Hasidism (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 80 - 84, 90 - 95, 173 - 175).

"good for heaven" because he serves the Holy One, Blessed be He, and "good for her creatures"³⁰ because he also brings her creatures to the service of the Lord.

According to the Kedushat Levi, Israel's ideal leaders have performed their task of bringing the people closer to God through the spoken word. Of course, this fits in perfectly with the successful preaching roles the Hasidic leaders enjoyed. Their stories and parables, told no doubt with a flair for the poetic and the dramatic, captured the hearts of their listeners. In this respect they were functioning in the manner of Israel's ideal leaders.

Of course, there are more and less talented speakers: "When a zaddik speaks with people who are inferior to him, they confuse him. However, a great zaddik is able to raise them by means of his speech."³¹ Moses, the prototype of Israel's leaders, was commanded by God to speak to the people in order that they might be brought closer to him:

Behold, when they (Israel) sinned with the calf and were separated from their holiness and returned to their moral impurity, Moses was afraid to speak to them. Thus the command came to him from God: "Speak to the Children of Israel!", meaning that they are the seed of Israel, the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. So that when you (Moses) speak with them, you shall certainly raise and uplift them to the state of holiness, and they shall cling to me and to my name. Therefore, you speak with them. (italics mine)³²

30. Ibid, 9. (see also 10, 65, 143, 162).

31. Ibid, 128 (cf. Louis D. Newman, Maggidim and Hasidim: Their Wisdom. (New York: Eloch Publishing Co., 1968), XLVII - LV.)

32. Ibid, 143

Levi Yizhak does not approve of every type of speech. He draws a significant distinction between the angry and embarrassing speeches of some leaders and the loving and flattering speeches of other leaders. As we might expect, only the latter are worthy to be Israel's leaders. The notoriously quick-tempered and intellectually haughty Rabbinic leaders could neither compose nor deliver the kind of loving and flattering speech Levi Yizhak deems an essential requirement for leadership. He who admonishes Israel by accenting her good qualities deserves to be her leader:

There are two types of admonishers who admonish Israel to do the will of her Creator, Blessed be He: one who admonishes with pleasant words, that is, telling each Israelite of his high station... and there is an admonisher who admonishes Israel with unpleasant and embarrassing words... The difference between them is that he who admonishes in a pleasant manner raises Israel's soul higher and higher... and deserves to be Israel's leader. (*italics mine*)³³

In another text, where the evil inclination is contrasted with the good inclination, the latter is said to raise the people with kind and complementary words, while the former speaks harshly to them.³⁴ This then is a clue to the identity of Israel's ideal leader: "It is the good trait of the zaddikin to draw Israel closer (to God) with ethical reproofs and pleasant words which the heart receives well."³⁵

33 Ibid, 125

34. Ibid, 4

35. Ibid, 5

The sharp wall which existed between the lives of the people and the lives of their Rabbinic leaders was contrary to the ideal relationship of Israel and her leaders. If the leader is to effectively bring his followers closer to God then he has to understand them. He has to be intimately aware of their physical as well as their emotional needs. He must be able to stand in their place and see the world through their eyes. To do this he must be mentally at one with them. Only such a man, says Levi Yizhak, in obvious support of the leaders of his own movement, deserves to be Israel's leader. In fact, Moses prays to God for leaders who will lead the people at their own level, as does God:

May the Lord appoint a man over the congregation as its leader who will lead Israel as you (God) conduct yourself with Israel... In truth, Moses asked God to appoint a good leader over Israel, not only for his own generation, but for all future generations. (italics mine)³⁶

The good leader, understanding the needs of his people, will also understand why they cannot always serve him:

One must plead the merit of Israel, who, unlike the angels, do not continually perform the will of their Creator, because they are occupied in earning their living... Moses requested that God place a leader over Israel who would continually plead Israel's merit.³⁷

Moses was not permitted to remain on a plane intellectually or religiously above the people. He was commanded to descend to the

36. Ibid., 238

37. Ibid., 237

level of the people and see how their physical needs prevented them from serving God as perfectly as did Moses:

And the Lord said unto him (Moses): "Go and descend, etc." God said to Moses: "You occupy a high level at which you are continually clinging to me, so therefore it is difficult for you (to understand) how it is possible for a man to transgress my commandments. "Go and descend", that is, descend from your level and see the lower level (at which) a man is able to transgress my commandments."³⁸

The duty of Israel's ideal leader is to love Israel. Without this love, Levi Yishak teaches that a man cannot qualify as the people's leader. Levi Yishak himself was famous for his love of Israel, a love which was shared by many of the Hasidic leaders. Of course, the Rabbinic leadership, being absentee in body and spirit, could hardly qualify as lovers of Israel. Pinhas was given the priesthood forever because he did not separate himself from his people:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, gave him (Pinhas) two rewards: the covenant of peace, because he was zealous for the Lord of Hosts, and the covenant of the priesthood forever, because he remained in the midst of the Children of Israel and did not separate himself from them, bringing merries upon them and atoning for them according to (the duties of) a priest. He was loyal and atoned for the Children of Israel. (italics mine)³⁹

Levi Yishak went so far in fact as to nullify the service of a priest if such a service was not performed out of his love for Israel: "A priest, even though he perform his services and offer the

38. Ibid, 132

39. Ibid, 236

sacrifices, has performed an imperfect service if he is not filled with the love of Israel."⁴⁰

Israel's ideal leader must never confuse Israel's good with his own. This seems to be the temptation to which the Rabbinic leadership succumbed. In the eyes of the people they thought more of themselves than of their followers. Levi Yizhak insists that a leader's primary duty is to seek not his own but Israel's good. This was the outstanding quality of Israel's earliest leaders, Abraham and Joseph.⁴¹ The story of Korah's unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the rightful leadership of Moses offers Levi Yizhak an opportunity to illustrate the nature of bad leadership. Korah, it seems, was thinking only of his own good when he sought the mantle of leadership:

There is a saddik who serves (God) only to give the Creator, Blessed be He, joy. This saddik utters no complaint if it is he or another saddik who brings the Creator joy. But he who seeks to receive a reward for his service wants to be the only one who gives the Creator joy. Thus it reads: "And Korah took" - that he (alone) took and not another.⁴²

40. Ibid, 149

41. Ibid, 36, 65

42. Ibid, 223

VI. QUALITIES OF ISRAEL'S IDEAL LEADER

The Kedushat Levi devotes a large number of pages to the description of Israel's leader's qualities. His major quality, without question, is his humility. It is the one virtue which is unmistakably his. It is also the one virtue which was undeniably lacking in the character of the Rabbinic leader. His haughtiness, his intellectual aloofness, made it impossible for him to assume the posture of humility. In the eyes of the masses, his bearing was the very opposite of humble. Only the quiet, patient, and simple Hasidic leaders could justifiably be characterized as humble. Such paragons of humility would, in the opinion of Levi Yizhak, deserve to be elected Israel's true leaders.

After all, Abraham, Jacob, and Moses displayed this excellent virtue. Of Abraham, Levi Yizhak says:

Abraham was the first soul in the world that was able to nullify the decrees of God, yet the truth is that although Abraham was able to nullify the decrees of the Holy One, Blessed be He, he nevertheless knew that the Holy One, Blessed be He, was the Lord over him.
(italics mine)⁴³

It is asserted, in the Kedushat Levi, that pride will lead a man to the lust for material satisfactions.⁴⁴ This is particularly true for the leader, the "important man":

⁴³. Ibid., 32 (see also 52, 97)

⁴⁴. Ibid., 259

He (God) causes his great name to be sanctified through men who are really important and who perform the commandments and do good deeds, but who nevertheless are as nothing in their own sight.⁴⁵

The ideal leader is humble not only in his estimation of himself but also in his evaluation of his service to God. He always considers the quality of his service to the Holy One far less than perfect:

The entire service of Abraham, in which he served God with love and great understanding, appeared as nothing in his (Abraham's) sight. It did not seem important to him when compared with the goodness of God and the wonders he had performed for him. Therefore it (his service) was insufficient to him, and he thought to himself: "Even if I perfect myself with all manner of deeds and good services, what am I?"⁴⁶

The ideal leader's humility extends well into his past. He takes no pride in his genealogy. Unlike the Rabbinic leaders, who claimed a high lineage and preened their genealogical feathers before their colleagues and the masses, Israel's ideal leader displayed absolute humility, though he might enjoy a fine lineage. Levi Yitzhak emphasises this point in a reference to the pride likely to be felt by the priests who served in the sanctuary:

The Lord commanded Moses to say to the priests that they must sanctify themselves lest they... lift up their hearts over their brother Israelites... A man should pride himself only on that which he labored and struggled to achieve and not on something for which he did not labor, such as his genealogy.⁴⁷

45. Ibid, 198

46. Ibid, 28 (see also 51, 61, 75)

47. Ibid, 200, 201

This same point is made in another connection in relation to the undue pride the Israelites themselves might take in their noble lineage.⁴⁸

Another quality of Israel's ideal leader is that he has no material desires. Again the Rabbinic leadership with their egocentric and conspicuous living could not claim this virtue. It appears to be the sole possession of the poorer and (originally) less ostentatious group of Hasidic leaders. The lusts, we are told, which drive other men are missing from the nature of Israel's ideal leader: "The zaddik must cling to the Infinite and suspend his existence if he is to bring, afterwards, all the blessings to the world."⁴⁹ There is only one exception which Levi Yizhak makes to this rule: the zaddik may temporarily experience material lusts when he engages in his struggle with evil.⁵⁰ But it is clear that by nature he has no material desires.

Naturally, as we might expect, Israel's ideal leader has certain powers which can be of immense benefit to his followers. As we shall see later, this was a quality which the Hasidic leaders claimed for themselves, in distinction to their opponents, the Rabbinic leaders.⁵¹ It was very important that the ideal leader believe in himself and thus be willing to use his beneficial powers:

48. Ibid, 205

49. Ibid, 14

50. Ibid, 10

51. See below, Chap. VII.

Noah, though he was a great and perfect gaddik, was nothing in his own sight and had no faith in himself, namely, that he was a ruling gaddik, able to nullify decrees. Rather he considered himself (only) as important as the rest of the generation and thought to himself: "If I shall be saved in the ark, and I am no more a gaddik than the rest of the generation, then they too will be saved. Therefore he did not pray on the behalf of (his) generation."⁵²

Along with his special powers, the ideal leader also commands certain beneficial esoteric knowledge. No doubt this knowledge, in the generation of the author, Levi Yishak, came from the study of the Cabalab, works which were banned by the Rabbinic leadership. Therefore whatever powers the masses believed were hidden in the Cabalab, they could only find utilized by the Hasidic leaders. Levi Yishak claims that the ideal leader can see secrets hidden in the Torah.⁵³ Moreover, his prayers are efficacious because he knows the right combination of letters to employ.⁵⁴

52. Yishak, Kedushat Levi, 9

53. Ibid, 115

54. Ibid, 50

VII. POSITION AND POWERS OF ISRAEL'S IDEAL LEADER

As we mentioned above, Israel's ideal leader enjoys extraordinary powers through his exalted position. These ideas were part of the bedrock upon which the Hasidic movement rested. Thus, as we might expect, Levi Yizhak spares few adjectives in describing the ideal leader's powers and position.

In one instance the ideal leader is said to stand in the position of Moses to his generation: "Behold, a raddik is as Moses in relation to his generation."⁵⁵ Elsewhere in the Kedushat Levi, he is described as the son of God.⁵⁶ He is even called the "sign" that exists between God and Israel, much as is the Sabbath.⁵⁷ But the most emphatic statement of his exalted position is the one which places him in the category of God and then draws the obvious conclusion: "Because he (the raddik) fulfills the entire Torah, he is in the category of God... and it is permissible to worship him."⁵⁸

The leader's extraordinary powers (which play such a prominent role in the development of the Hasidic ideology) flow from his exalted position. As we noted above, the leader has the power to draw Israel closer to God.⁵⁹ This power is present even

55. Ibid, 121

56. Ibid, 199

57. Ibid, 168

58. Ibid, 262

59. Ibid, 4, 5, 128, 143 (also see above Chap. V)

when the leader has fallen. A fallen zaddik had the power to raise the "sparks" with him when he rises.⁶⁰

The Hasidic leaders were known for their devotion and concentration in prayer. Stories of their ecstasy in prayer fill the annals of the movement. Thus, as we might expect, Levi Yizhak attributes the most marvelous powers to the ideal leader's prayers. The zaddik's prayers, we are told, initiate the flow of God's abundance:

The zaddikin, through their prayers, effect whatsoever they desire. They change severe decrees to merciful and loving decrees for Israel, and they bring, through their prayers, abundance and blessing to all the worlds.⁶¹

In fact, the zaddik, by means of his prayers, is actually able to rule over God:

When the Holy One, Blessed be He, declares (his) decrees, the zaddikin nullify (them); for God has given the strength and power to zaddikin so that, by their prayers, they are able to nullify all the evil decrees. Therefore they are called, as it were, the "zaddik who rules over me (God)."⁶²

Levi Yizhak amplifies this line of thinking with the startling observation that the will of the zaddik is stronger than the will of God.⁶³ The author adduces a number of examples to show how the ideal leader can change the Divine decrees in Israel's favor:

60. Ibid., 215

61. Ibid., 102 (see also 14, 37, 65; of. Aaron Weingarten, Halachot V'Halichot B'Hasidut. (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1950), 83 - 143)

62. Ibid., 72

63. Ibid., 27

God is not like flesh and blood, for the latter are unhappy when they are beaten. God, however, is happy when he is beaten (by the zaddikim)... for the Holy One, Blessed be He, declares decrees and the zaddikim nullify them.⁶⁴

In sum, the prayers of Israel's ideal leaders are her constant protection.⁶⁵

Levi Yizhak ascribes two other remarkable powers to the prayers of the zaddik. In the first case, they are said to have the power to draw the future into the present.⁶⁶ In the second case, they possess the extraordinary quality of raising the dead and bringing the rain, qualities which are traditionally ascribed to God:

Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like unto thee, except in Israel where there are (others) like unto thee. For as the Holy One, Blessed be He, quickens the dead, so also the zaddikim quicken the dead; as the Holy One, Blessed be He, brings the rain, so also the zaddikim bring the rain.⁶⁷

Thus we see the remarkable picture Levi Yizhak has drawn of Israel's ideal leader. In general outline, as well as in fine detail, it matches the nature, whether fanciful or true, of the ideal Hasidic leader. In all respects it clashes with the caricature of the Rabbinic leader, with his pomposity, haughtiness, intellectual pride, disdain for esoteric studies, aristocracy, and wealth. Thus, through his description of Israel's ideal leader, the author of the Kedushat Levi has established the authority of the new Hasidic leadership.

64. Ibid, 39 (see also 9, 65, 102)

65. Ibid, 162

66. Ibid, 30

67. Ibid, 72

VIII. THE NATURE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

In the ideology of the Hasidic movement, as reflected in the pages of the Kedushat Levi, the Jewish People play a critical role. In reality the people were beaten, killed, and broken; in the ideology they were divinely chosen and loved. The ideology masterfully fused these two dichotomous truths and held up for its followers a picture of a suffering people whose very agony had cosmic significance. Thus, by finding significance and meaning in the life experiences of the people, the ideology was able to win their allegiance.

According to Levi Yizhak the Jewish People are extraordinary. Not only are their powers remarkable, but their origin is unique. In the mind of the author of the Kedushat Levi, the entire universe was created on the foundation of Israel:

Ya'akov, our father, grasped the unity of the Almighty... and saw that the foundation of all the worlds is the community of Israel... They (Israel) are the chiefstones from which the world was born, for they are the support of all the lower and upper worlds.⁶⁸

Israel's origin is as unique as her place in the universe: "In truth, the soul of Israel was born from the Divine throne."⁶⁹

We can imagine how these conceptions of Israel bolstered the self-esteem of Levi Yizhak's listeners! Even the land of Israel,

68. Ibid, 46 (see also 43)

69. Ibid, 225

according to the author, is spiritually higher than the other lands.⁷⁰ Israel's greatness is reflected in the fact that only she is worthy to hear God's summons from Sinai each day:

As our rabbis have taught: "Everyday a voice issues forth from Mount Horeb: 'Return rebellious children, etc.'"⁷¹ The truth is that every Israelite is worthy, according to his level, to hear this voice.⁷¹

Israel has indeed been honored in having been chosen to serve God.

Levi Yizhak expatiates on the nature of this honor:

The essence of joy and gladness is that we are worthy to serve our Creator... for (through) all the worlds, the serafim, the hayot, and the ofanim serve him, nevertheless the Lord chose Jacob that they should serve him.⁷²

The uniqueness of Israel's origin is matched by her remarkable ability to intuit God's presence. Unlike the other nations, which surround her, she needs no signs or miracles to recognize God's existence and unity. Though they mock and despise her, Israel may take pride in her unique religious sensitivity:

Behold, the nations are unable to grasp the Creator, Blessed be He, through his works but only through the miracles in nature, such as the plagues in Egypt... But Israel, his treasured people, are able to grasp him even as distinct from nature.⁷³

Israel has another cause to be proud, according to the Kedushat Levi. She possesses the merit of the forefathers. Levi Yizhak places these words in the mouth of Abraham:

70. Ibid, 48

71. Ibid, 264

72. Ibid, 115 (see also 177)

73. Ibid, 104 (see also 114)

"It is not sufficient that I fulfill the commandments for myself, with a deep understanding"; rather he (Abraham) set another purpose in his mind; that when he performed a commandment it would be in the name of all Israel. All Israel was included in the mind and thoughts of Abraham...⁷⁴

The Jewish People may be joyful that they are the unique recipients of God's love. Whatever they see about them to the contrary, no nation is loved as much by God. In fact, his natural desire is to bestow blessings upon his treasured people. In a typical statement, Levi Yizhak writes: "It is known that God, Blessed be He, yearns continually to bestow good things upon Israel, his people..."⁷⁵ In his love for Israel, God remembers only her good deeds:

"And God saw the Children of Israel, and God knew, etc."; that is, he saw that they were to become the Children of Israel who would accept the Torah, even though at that time they were idolaters... For he allied himself, as it were, with their good deeds and did not ally himself with their bad deeds.⁷⁶

The author notes that Israel was redeemed from bondage in Egypt though she was really undeserving.⁷⁷ God's love for Israel remains with her even in exile. She does not suffer alone. God suffers with her:

(Jacob said:) "I imagined - God forbid! - that when the community of Israel would be in exile God would desert them, hide his face, and not watch over them; but now I see that God will be with them."⁷⁸

74. Ibid, 28 (see also 43)

75. Ibid, 52 (see also 100, 174, 206, 236)

76. Ibid, 86

77. Ibid, 95

78. Ibid, 47

And, as a gesture of his love, God will personally teach Israel Torah in the world-to-come.⁷⁹

Of all the tokens of God's special love for Israel, none is so precious as the Sabbath. Levi Yizhak spares no superlatives in describing the quality of this day. This is as we would expect; for a day of rest, companionship, spiritual renewal and encouragement, as well as good food meant a great deal to the poor, hungry, and tired followers of the Hasidic leaders. Levi Yizhak was mirroring the experience of his listeners when he said that the Sabbath is like living for a day in the world-to-come:

When Israel is at the greater level, they do not think at all of entreating (God) for their needs. Behold, this is the level of requesting everything (only) in order to serve God; this is called sabbath. For the Sabbath is like the world-to-come and has no association with this world.⁸⁰

According to the author, the soul of the Jew, on the Sabbath, is reunited with its Creator.⁸¹ All the Jew's defects and sins are removed on the Sabbath. In the words of Levi Yizhak: "Through the sanctity of the Sabbath, I (God) shall remove all your defects, brighten and sanctify your souls, and forgive your iniquities."⁸² The Sabbath is a gift whose benefits remain throughout the rest of the week.⁸³ Extraordinary powers belong to Israel on

79. Ibid, 254

80. Ibid, 202 (see also 162)

81. Ibid, 161

82. Ibid, 162

83. Ibid, 161, 163

the Sabbath. On that special day, the heavenly light, which usually travels from the upper to the lower worlds is reversed; on the Sabbath, the light goes from Israel to the upper worlds.⁸⁴

Thus the author of the Kedushat Levi succeeded in bolstering the spirit of his people by convincing them of their superiority and of God's special favor. In the next chapter, we shall see how the Hasidic ideology attached particular significance to the prayers and deeds of the people.

⁸⁴. Ibid, 112

IX. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRAYERS AND DEEDS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The primary task of the Hasidic ideology was to justify the lives of its followers. It had to begin with the acts they could reasonably perform and then proceed to show the cosmic significance in these acts. The state of the people was such that their sphere of activity was narrow. The actual activities they could engage in to improve their unfortunate lot were few. In point of fact, they were limited essentially to two spheres: prayer and performance of the commandments. Therefore it devolved upon the formulators of the Hasidic ideology to describe how important prayer and the commandments were, both for God and for the alleviation of the wretched state of the people's life. The results of this effort are reflected throughout the pages of the Kedushat Levi, which we are now ready to examine.

Levi Yizhak taught that the performance of each commandment has cosmic repercussions. Each action holds a significance for God beyond the comprehension of the imagination. God, for example, experiences great joy from Israel's performance of the commandments. This thought is expressed in several places throughout the text in words similar to these:

One truly loves God when one loves to give him joy and pleasure, through every detail in the Torah, through prayer, charity, and (the performance of) every commandment; each brings happiness and joy to the Creator.⁸⁵

85. Ibid, 144 (see also 44, 53, 56, 100, 206, 223, 253, 256)

Levi Yizhak insist that a Jew ought to serve God only for the pleasure God receives from his service:

The principle is that a man must continually serve the Creator, Blessed be He, with the guiding thought in his soul that the service will not be for the receipt of a reward, (but) only that the Creator, Blessed be He, will derive joy from the deeds of Israel, his people.⁸⁶

Giving the Creator joy is the true reward of the commandment.⁸⁷

Thus when material rewards from the performance of the commandments were not forthcoming, Levi Yizhak consoled his followers with the thought that the true reward, that of giving God joy, has taken place.

According to the Kedushat Levi, the joy God experiences from Israel's behavior is conditioned by her attitude at the time she fulfills the commandments. When the Jew's attitude is one of love and devotion, God's joy is most intense:

When a man performs a particular commandment with a strong desire and an inner fire, it brings pride to the Creator, Blessed be He, for the Creator preens himself before all the angels, (saying:) this man has displayed love for the commandments of the Creator and has fulfilled the will of the Creator with great happiness.⁸⁸

Levi Yizhak asserts that there are zaddikim who can actually see the joy God experiences when Israel fulfills his commandments: "There are many zaddikim who are on such a high

86. Ibid, 194 (see also 14, 33, 55, 59, 84, 100)

87. Ibid, 84, 258

88. Ibid, 49 (see also 82, 174)

plane they can clearly see how they bring joy to the Creator, Blessed be He."⁸⁹ In sum, an Israelite must believe that his performance of the commandments is of great importance in the sight of God:

If - God forbid! - a man feels (too) humble over (his performance of) the commandments of the Lord, and says: "Why are my deeds important to the Lord?" - this is atheism. It is just the opposite with (the importance of) the commandments of the Lord. A man must say: "My acts, which I perform, are the will of God (and are) important in the sight of the Creator. He derives joy from my acts..."⁹⁰

Levi Yishak describes a second positive effect in Israel's fulfillment of God's commandments. Not only does God derive joy from them, but Israel's life and fortune is improved. Even the most insignificant act can alter Israel's fortune for the good or for the bad. God, in truth, returns our behavior in kind. Using a simile of the Baal Shem Tov, the author says:

Just as a shadow does what a man does, so does the Creator, Blessed be He, do, as it were, what a man does. Therefore a man must perform the commandments, give charity, and take mercy on the poor, so that the Creator, Blessed be He, will (in turn) do good things for him.⁹¹

According to another text, Israel's behavior brings an abundance of blessings into the world:

We, of the Children of Israel, through our prayers and our good deeds, stir-up mercies, many good things, abundance, and blessings upon the entire world.⁹²

89. Ibid, 50

90. Ibid, 256 (see also 27)

91. Ibid, 206 (see also 37, 115, 118)

92. Ibid, 120 (see also 34)

In this last example the author is magnifying the value of the commandments to the point where Israel could reasonably consider herself the provider of the world! For a poor and downtrodden people, who looked enviously at the wealth and power of her neighbors, this suggestion must have held a great appeal.

The fulfillment of the commandments enables Israel to purify herself.⁹³ Through their fulfillment she is permitted to achieve union with God:

The principle is that there are men who perform the commandments of the Creator, yet still are not at the level where they are in union with God, by means of the commandments... (for) a man must perform the commandments in order to achieve, through them, union with the Divine Presence.⁹⁴

Levi Yitzhak asserts that the effects of the commandments go beyond time and space. True, we can expect to be rewarded in this world, but we shall also be rewarded in the world-to-come.⁹⁵ Portions of the Holy Land constitute part of Israel's reward.⁹⁶ The Messiah is brought closer by Israel's fulfillment of the Divine commandments: "It appears that the way a man occupies himself now in exile, through (his) faith, will be the cause of the coming of the Righteous Redeemer."⁹⁷ This last thought is emphasized by the author when he states that Adam's blessing is healed when Israel pronounces the proper blessings over her food and koshers her meat properly.⁹⁸

93. Ibid, 55, 199

94. Ibid, 174 (see also 82)

95. Ibid, 40, 54

96. Ibid, 218

97. Ibid, 254

98. Ibid, 11

Equally as important as are her deeds for Israel, so are her prayers. The Kedushat Levi, reflecting the Hasidic ideology, assures Israel that her prayers produce real effects in this world. In a typical statement, Levi Yizhak says:

Everything depends on the acts of those in the lower world... on our prayers, and our songs, and praises. Thus we perceive his greatness: for although he is the great King, as we said above, still, when we are engaged in Torah or prayer, our words are precious in his sight.⁹⁹

No doubt it was a great comfort to the childless women who were among the followers of Levi Yizhak to hear their teacher say that God was particularly receptive to their prayers: "God restrains nature (natural processes) from the saddikim... for he desires their prayers. It is known that this is why our matriarchs were barren, namely, so that they would pray for sons."¹⁰⁰

Devotion, according to the author, increases the effectiveness of Israel's prayers. Using a simile with the fire-offering in the ancient temple, Levi Yizhak expounds:

If our offering (of prayer) is made with fiery devotion so that he is made King out of (our) fearful inner conflagration, then it (our prayer) rises to God, and the Lord will fulfill all our requests and pleas...¹⁰¹

In line with his theme of the cosmic significance Israel's prayers and deeds, Levi Yizhak explains the effectiveness of her acts of repentance, joy, and spiritual exile.

99. Ibid, 80 (see also 79, 87)

100. Ibid, 55 (see also 34, 51, 120)

101. Ibid, 238 (see also 57, 80)

Israel's acts of contrition have transcendental value. Such acts of repentance give God joy - more joy even than from the perfect saint;

The Holy One, Blessed be He, receives more pleasure from a repentant sinner than from a perfect zaddik, for the perfect zaddik had no evil inclination, and therefore it was easy for him to serve him. However the repentant sinner had been under the control of his (evil) inclination and had to break and subdue it. Thus God derives greater joy from him.¹⁰²

In fact, when the Jew labors to subdue his evil inclination and succeeds in his effort, God experiences great joy and honor.¹⁰³

When Israel experiences happiness and joy, she may be sure it has cosmic repercussions. Her joy, we are told, raises the "sparks".¹⁰⁴ Moreover, it enables God to bring abundance to his people:

It is known that God, Praised be He, continually yearns to bestow good things upon Israel, his people, but that the "evil side" restrains, as it were, the flow of abundance. Only when Israel is moved by happiness can the restraints of the "evil side" be pushed aside, and God, in the greatness of his mercies and kindnesses, bestow abundance and blessings upon his people Israel.¹⁰⁵

Levi Yizhak assures his followers that their experience in exile also has cosmic significance. The exile has the effect of bringing nearer the Messiah by raising the "sparks":

Behold, it is known that the essence of the exile is to raise the sparks which fell with the "shell" through the sin of Adam. Israel shall bear the pains of exile until that time when the wicked are destroyed and the sparks are raised.¹⁰⁶

102. Ibid, 178 (see also 81, 264)

103. Ibid, 26, 91, 178, 222

104. Ibid, 195

105. Ibid, 52

106. Ibid, 80 (see also 31, 47, 81, 254)

X. ADVANTAGES IN THE PRESENT STATE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

As we pointed out, in the preceding chapter, the Hasidic ideology magnified the value in the deeds and prayers, which the people performed. But these deeds and prayers did not cover the entire range of the people's experiences. Their actual psychological state of being was left untouched by their fulfillment of the commandments. What was the meaning, for example, in their experience of humility, of poverty, and of faithfulness? If the ideology was to fulfill its task of justifying the life of its followers, then it had to address itself to this area of the masses' life. In this chapter we shall see how the Hasidic ideology, as it appears in the Kedushat Levi, fulfilled this task.

Levi Yizhak develops the thought that there are many advantages and benefits hidden in the present state of the Jewish People. If they would look more closely, they would see that their present condition gives them a remarkable opportunity to serve God.

Their present state of poverty, for example, has many worthwhile advantages, not the least of which is to free them from material lusts. Thus the people are better able to serve God, for, according to the Kedushat Levi: "He who desires to bring himself near to the service of God must, at the very beginning, ...remove from himself all lusts."¹⁰⁷ In line with this thought, Levi Yizhak

107. Ibid, 224

observes that God rewards only those who have subdued their physical passions.¹⁰⁸ All of creation, as it doffs its materiality, draws nearer to its Creator:

When the worlds cling to their materiality they are unable to attain to the service of their Creator, Blessed be He. When however they remove themselves from their materiality they are then able to attain to the service of the Creator, Blessed be He.¹⁰⁹

The great example of the Jew who demonstrated his Love for God through conquering his desires is Abraham:

The greatness of the test (the binding of Isaac) was the acknowledgment of the Love of Abraham, our father, may his soul rest in peace!, for his Creator; for he subdued his desire in order to do the will of his Creator with a perfect heart.¹¹⁰

It follows from the preceding that one ought not to over-indulge in eating or drinking. Levi Yizhak emphasises the thought that it is best to eat and drink little. Obviously his listeners, for the most part, had little choice but to follow this teaching. Nevertheless, they must have drawn comfort, if not a little happiness, from the thought that the Torah itself approves of their bare cupboards and tightened belts. According to the author:

This world is the preparation for the world-to-come; thus a man (should) eat and drink in order to be healthy and strong and thus be able to serve God - but not for his own pleasure. (italics mine)¹¹¹

108. Ibid, 61

109. Ibid, 86

110. Ibid, 26

111. Ibid, 261 (see also 61, 77)

The ideal, which the Jew ought to seek, is the complete suspension of self.¹¹² Then all of his material lusts would disappear, and he would be in an excellent position to serve God. When the Jew attains this state he is ready to receive the Divine emanations:

He who has prepared himself by attaining the level of suspension of self and is in a state of nothingness, in which there is no feeling of self, is capable of receiving the emanations.¹¹³

Levi Yizhak equates this state of self-suspension with the state of perceiving the Infinite: "In truth, when a man is on that plane, where, with God's help, he is able to perceive the Infinite, then his own perception has been suspended."¹¹⁴

Thus, according to the author, it is best to serve God with no thought of oneself. If one must ask for something let it be only for the strength to continue to serve him and bring him joy:

Behold, this man who serves him thus, not asking for his own needs but only asking to serve him continually... that is, even though he is worried about his sustenance, (he) subdues himself before the Lord, behold, (this man) gives God great joy.¹¹⁵

The perfect service to God is that which seeks no reward.¹¹⁶ Such an ideal service is motivated by pure love: "He who serves through

112. Ibid, 258

113. Ibid, 260

114. Ibid, 14, 176

115. Ibid, 263 (see also 55, 100, 194, 253)

116. Ibid, 57

Love is completely with the Infinite... for he serves (in order) to give God pleasure and has no thought of himself.¹¹⁷

In the ideology of the Kedushat Levi, humility also holds hidden benefits for the Jew. Like poverty, it helps to enrich his service to God. Thus the Jew ought to cultivate this virtue. Naturally, most of Levi Yizhak's followers had little choice but to be humble. Humility, when one is poor and helpless, is the natural. Once again, the ideology is able to enhance the natural and raise it to the level of the ideal.

According to the author of the Kedushat Levi, the great danger of pride is that it causes a man to lust after material goods:

It is a great principle that in a man's service (to God) he must feel no pride... for to the degree that he feels pride in his soul his service will drop from a higher to a lower plane until he will experience material lusts.¹¹⁸

Levi Yizhak urges his followers to strive to achieve a state of extreme humbleness:

A man should not consider himself important but should be despicable and loathsome in his own sight. Nor should he feel his service is important to God, but rather, just the opposite. He should strive to achieve (a sense of) lowliness and cursedness in his own sight.¹¹⁹

117. Ibid, 14

118. Ibid, 259

119. Ibid, 260 (see also 215, 256, 257)

The state of humility enables one to receive the Divine emanations.¹²⁰

It also sweetens the Divine decrees.¹²¹

The author points out that really important men are always humble in their own sight.¹²² They view their service to God as far from being perfect:

The principle is that a man ought to see himself, in truth, as though he had not yet even begun to serve the Lord... but should he think (God forbid!) that he is serving the Lord, then he has certainly not attained the level of serving the Creator.¹²³

When a man is haughty, one may be sure he is sinful and far from God:

In regards to the "commandment which brings (in its wake) a transgression": this refers to (one who) after (performing) a commandment prides himself in his own sight because he has performed the commandment. This pridefulness is considered a transgression.¹²⁴

In a most striking statement, Levi Yizhak summarizes his attitude towards pride: "Immediately, when a man begins to feel pride and preens himself - that is his death!"¹²⁵

Complementary to the sense of one's lowliness is the sense of one's complete dependence on God. The ideology of the Kedushat Levi praises this sense of dependence. Under the

121. Ibid, 31

122. Ibid, 198 (see above Chap. VI)

123. Ibid, 159 (see also 28, 51, 61, 75, 177, 201, 239)

124. Ibid, 260 (see also 97)

125. Ibid, 92

circumstances, the people had little choice but to depend solely on the help of their Maker, and, again, the ideology magnifies the value of the inevitable.

Levi Yizhak asserts that everything is in the hands of God.¹²⁶ The people enjoy God's continual care:

The truth is that God watches over all the creatures in the world and revivifies them each moment from nothingness into existence. His watchfulness extends to every creature in the world, for even in the hour when the gentile prays to him, God listens to his prayer and helps him.¹²⁷

Israel, even in her exile, is enjoying the constant protection of God.¹²⁸ When Levi Yizhak insists, as in the following selection, that God is active in the affairs of men, he may have been answering the argument of the Deists:

The wicked say that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is above everything and does not watch the deeds of those in the lower world, but the truth is that although the Holy One, Blessed be He, is above everything, (still) he watches the deeds of those in the lower world, guiding everything according to his will.¹²⁹

The author counsels that a Jew must have complete trust in God. With complete trust in him, one has nothing to fear:

"For if a man trusts in the Lord, he need not fear."¹³⁰ In fact, at the Red Sea the Israelites sang their song of praise before

126. Ibid, 122

127. Ibid, 130 (see also 31, 86)

128. Ibid, 23, 47

129. Ibid, 86

130. Ibid, 58

they were rescued.¹³¹ Jacob, the Patriarch, according to Levi Yizhak, also displayed this sense of complete dependence on the graciousness of God. He is reported to have prayed:

Even when I have achieved my goal, and will be in the Holy Land, and will have the power to serve you (God), please continue to sustain me out of charity; for it is for your charity that I hope, since I can depend neither upon my deeds nor my prayers.¹³²

Levi Yizhak, perhaps thinking of the wars that ravished his land for more than a century, reflects that God will bring wars at times to strengthen Israel's sense of dependence on him.¹³³

Ignorance, or faithfulness, plays a large part in the Hasidic ideology. Like humility and poverty, it is said to contain hidden benefits. Moreover, as in the case of the former, the ideology is again idealizing a necessity.

According to Levi Yizhak, faith is the essential mode of serving God:

The first category of serving God is through the perception of the unity of the Creator by an intellectual investigation... The second category of serving God is through faith... The essential service is through faith, for that is the highest plane.¹³⁴

Miracles are real. The author tells his hopeful and expectant listeners that they must retain their faith that God can alter nature for their benefit:

131. Ibid, 118

132. Ibid, 51

133. Ibid, 64

134. Ibid, 253

Behold, the generation in the desert were on a high level, for they did not concern themselves at all with the nature of the universe; rather they believed continually in the Holy One, Blessed be He, that he was able to alter (the course of) nature.¹³⁵

The continued faith that a miracle can happen is the very seat of that miracle.¹³⁶

Faith that evil will turn out for the best plays a significant role in the ideology of the Kedushat Levi. The wretched condition of the people necessitated a statement concerning the reason and end of evil. The author counsels his people to maintain their trust in God, for the evil will turn out to be good:

When the Holy One, Blessed be He, sends an event that is not good to a man, then he (the man) must not respond with any physical reaction; rather he must trust in the Lord, and he (God) will certainly change the event for the better.¹³⁷

Intellectual reasonings either upon the nature of God or upon the reasons for the commandments are not worthwhile, in the opinion of the author. Union with God is superior to proofs and to understanding:

There is no proof or understanding, but only the state of attachment (to God), the state of suspension of self. This was the level of the prophets... (which is) higher than that of conceiving proofs or intellectual understanding.¹³⁸

135. Ibid, 219

136. Ibid, 119

137. Ibid, 63 (see below Chap. XI)

138. Ibid, 98

Moreover, the reasons for the commandments are hidden in God's will.¹³⁹ Therefore one ought to do the commandments without seeking reasons. Then one's service is truly motivated by love.¹⁴⁰

139. Ibid, 225

140. Ibid, 33

XI. THE FUTURE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The future plays a very important role in the Hasidic ideology, as developed in the Kedushat Levi. Certainly the present life of the people held little joy. The past too was bleak. Therefore it fell to the task of the Hasidic leaders to describe in glowing terms the promise held by the future.

Their description of the future was not limited to the Jewish nation as a group. It also spoke to the dreams and hopes of the individual. He too was to share in the bright future.

Levi Yizhak bases his statements concerning the happy future on the thought that God always creates the pain before he deals the blow.¹⁴¹ The Jew can be sure that all evil will turn out to be good at the end:

God continually bestows kindnesses upon Israel, and though they occasionally appear unkind at the beginning, nevertheless, the truth is that they will be good at the end.¹⁴²

According to the author, only good can come from the hand of God:

"One must trust and believe that in this (event) there lies a great good; for from him (God) there cannot come any evil."¹⁴³ The author's proof is that even the Egyptian plagues were for the best.¹⁴⁴

Therefore, one must not react physically to suffering, but one must keep faith that it will turn out for the best.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹. Ibid, 30, 78

¹⁴². Ibid, 174 (see also 236)

¹⁴³. Ibid, 61 (see also 44, 88)

¹⁴⁴. Ibid, 90

¹⁴⁵. Ibid, 64

Indeed, according to Levi Yizhak, suffering can have hidden benefits:

A man who experiences suffering (will find) that because of it he will be better able to receive the Divine abundance; for God's purpose in everything is for the good.¹⁴⁶

The reward will be sure to come after one has suffered.¹⁴⁷ In fact, it is really better that way. For real happiness, according to the author, can only be experienced after one has suffered.¹⁴⁸

Therefore it is best to prosper after one has suffered:

Anything which comes (too) easily, without any pain, can contain no (real) happiness... For when God gives a man good things in his youth, he does not recognize that they are from God, and he says: "This (comes) by chance." However, if he experiences trouble at the beginning, and, afterwards, the Creator, Blessed be He, makes him happy through deliverance and redemption from trouble, he then will recognize the providence of God.¹⁴⁹

Israel's suffering magnifies and sanctifies the name of God in the world. Thus it is of value not only to the Jews but also to God:

Because of the desire of our hearts and souls we martyr ourselves out of our love for our Creator... For through the blows (we receive) his great name is magnified and sanctified.¹⁵⁰

Levi Yizhak assures his listeners that Israel's exile will also turn out for Israel's good.¹⁵¹ He insists that those

146. Ibid, 79

147. Ibid, 62

148. Ibid, 31

149. Ibid, 21

150. Ibid, 88

151. Ibid, 47

who mock Israel's suffering now will see her redemption later.¹⁵²

Israel can have confidence in the brightness of her future; for

God does not withdraw his promises, even when they are conditional.¹⁵³

Finally, in our description of the ideology in the Kedushat Levi, we come to Levi Yizhak's final hope and consolation: the world-to-come. According to the author, the next world offers Israel the promise of better things. This world, after all, is only the threshold to the next world.¹⁵⁴ We have God's promise, asserts the author, that in the world-to-come he will personally teach Israel Torah.¹⁵⁵ Whatever the situation now, Levi Yizhak assures his people that they will be amply repaid in the world-to-come:

When God bestows good things upon the nations, it is done in order to give them all their goods and rewards in this world. He will exact payment for them in the next world. But this is not the case with Israel; for her reward will be multiplied in the future!¹⁵⁶

152. Ibid, 80

153. Ibid, 30

154. Ibid, 261

155. Ibid, 254

156. Ibid, 81

XII. THE IDEOLOGY IN THE KEDUSHAH LEVI

It is the conclusion of this thesis that there is a highly developed ideology in the Kedushat Levi. It is an ideology which grew naturally out of the broken and impoverished mental and physical condition of 18th Century Polish Jewry. Their economic and intellectual level, paralleling the general social decline in Poland, suffered a severe setback during the dark decades of the late 17th and 18th Centuries. The result of this severe economic and social jolt was a general demoralization among the Jewish masses and their leadership. The Rabbinic leadership failed to meet the challenge of the situation and divorced itself from the needs of its followers. Meanwhile, those potential leaders, against whom the poverty of the times and the jealous cohesiveness of the Rabbinic party conspired to inhibit their ambitions, began to exert a powerful influence on the masses. Their phenomenal success was due, in large measure, to the excellence of their ideology, which we have seen fully developed in the Kedushat Levi.

Levi Yizhak roots his ideology in the unquestioned authority of the Torah. His description of Israel's ideal leader is unquestionably a caricature of the popular image of the Hasidic rabbi or zaddik. There is little doubt that in his description of the humble, soft-spoken, and understanding Jewish leader his listeners saw him as well as the other Hasidic leaders. And when

he contrasted this ideal picture with the prideful, avaricious, "absentee" leader (like Korah), there is little question that Levi Yizhak's listeners pictured their previous Rabbinic leaders. Thus Levi Yizhak was able to establish the rightful claim of the Hasidic leaders to the powers of leadership on the unquestioned authority of the Torah.

Levi Yizhak also succeeded in justifying the life of the people. Each element in their experience was dramatized and given cosmic significance. Their prayers sustained all mankind. Their fulfillment of the commandments brought the Messiah closer. Their intense faith brought them closer to him. And, perhaps most important, the future was bright. Whatever the people were able to do to help their lives was exalted beyond all measure. Jobs and food were scarce - thus prayer and suspension of self would satisfy their needs. Ignorance and humiliation were plentiful - so faith and humility became virtues. Whatever the people were able to do on their own behalf was praised and encouraged. Thus the Hasidic ideology performed the critical task of satisfactorily explaining to its followers who they were, why they suffered, and why their behavior was important. In providing a satisfying answer to each of these questions the ideology was eminently successful.

As an ideology, the Hasidic ideology, developed in the Kedushat Levi, was a masterpiece. It described a coherent and

purposeful world, in which the Jewish masses and their leaders played complementary and significant roles. If the success of an ideology is to be measured in the following it attracts to its banner, the strength it gives them to persevere, and the significance it adds to their lives then there can be no question as to the outstanding success of the Hasidic ideology.

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