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RABBI NAHMAN OF BRATZLAV

HIS LIFE AND TEACHINGS

by

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I - LIFE

Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav was born the first sabbath in Nisan 5532. His birthplace was Miedzyboz (Podolia, Russia), the same town in which the Besht lived and labored for many years. But Nahman had more than this in common with the founder of Hasidism. His mother Feiga was a granddaughter of the Besht. And Rabbi Simhah, his father, was the son of Rabbi Nahman Horodenker, a disciple of the Besht. Rabbi Simhah himself had been a hazan in the synagogue of the Besht.

The pedigree of Nahman, then, was distinguished on both sides: his mother's genealogy rooted back to the Baal Shem-Tob while there had been rabbis for many generations in the family of Simhah. For some reason, however, the latter did not distinguish himself in any way. But not so in the case of the mother: Feiga enjoyed a more than local reputation as a woman of exceptional learning and outstanding piety. The belief prevailed among the Hasidim that "the holy spirit" rested upon her.[1]

The saintly character of the mother had a significant influence on the development of the child, as did the personality of her two brothers, Ephraim of Soldikov and Boruk of Tulchin, both of whom were Zaddikim of repute. "When he was but a youngster of six," we read, "it already occurred to him to cut himself off from the world."[2] The statement is no doubt an exaggeration, and apt to induce a smile. But we must remember the environment in which the boy was reared.[3] The personality of the deceased Besht no doubt still filled the atmosphere of the home. And the conversation which reached the ears of the child from his earliest years abounded in mystical phrases and cabalistic allusions. The first stories to which he was treated by his mother initiated him into a strange

world of miracles and marvels, demons, angels, and amulets. Small wonder that Nahman's earliest thoughts involved notions of a strange and curious, almost incredible, character.

Sitting before his melamed the boy sought to fulfill the implications of the biblical phrase, "I have set the Lord before me continually." And we are told that "he used to weary himself (in the attempt) to picture before his eyes the Ineffable Name; and because his mind was so occupied he did not know what he was studying, so that his instructor had to become very angry with him."[4] But his childish passion for piety was companioned before long with the earnest ambition to assimilate the material of his instruction. Anxious to learn as much from his melamed as he could, he would supplement the fee paid the latter by his father; the teacher would be given so much for each additional page of Talmud taught him.[5]

The Bible, the Talmud, Ain Ja'akob, the Poskim, the Tikkunim, the Zohar, all the writings of Isaac Luria, a large number of ethical works, besides a great deal more--all these, according to the testimony of his disciples, he mastered and even knew by heart.[6]

But the boy Nahman, it seems, wished that no fuss be made over him by his proud parents and others. He tried to keep his inner life to himself; and his studies he sought to pursue as unobtrusively as he could. He behaved and misbehaved like any normal youngster. This served to divert attention from his precocious intellectual and spiritual interests.[7]

His unusual temperament is delineated by a number of accounts which have been recorded of his childhood practices. According to one account,[8] he would take special pleasure in making mysterious and secret visits to the synagogue. Access was gained through the window. Once

inside he would bring forth a number of small coins from his pocket. These he would deposit one by one in the collection box designated, "Matan B'seter". But each time a new coin was deposited the youngster would repeat an appropriate prayer, each time strive to generate new spiritual enthusiasm. Between the deposits he would allow himself a sufficient interval so that the respective deposits might each one constitute an emotional unit, as it were, a separate act of piety.

His reverence for the memory of the Besht was displayed in striking form. At night, when chances of detection were slightest, he would steal away to the grave of his great ancestor, remaining there for some time. This would be followed by a visit to the Mikveh. Returning home, he managed to keep his head covered, so that the dampness of his hair might not lead to embarrassing questions on the part of his mother. It thus was taken for granted that the youngster had been merely spending his time at some prank or other. Nor was the immersion dispensed with even in winter. What is more, of the two pools, one indoors and the other out in the open, the boy invariably used the latter--regardless of the temperature.[9]

Another of his habits consisted in searching out some lonely spot in the fields surrounding the town and there pouring out his young heart to God in prayer. These were uttered spontaneously and were of course in Yiddish. The burden of these prayers was a fervent request, reinforced with every manner of naive argument, that he be brought near to the Deity. He also had a favorite spot in the house where he was wont to seclude himself--"under the roof in the bin where the straw and fodder were kept." Here "he used to recite psalms and pray quietly to God to render him worthy of being brought near to Him." Those prayers which

he considered especially effective he preserved in writing so that he might practice them and become fluent in them.[10]

When Nahman reached the "advanced" age of fourteen his parents considered him ready to assume the role of husband and accordingly arranged a match with the daughter of a well-to-do family in Hussatin.[11] Following the customary procedure, Nahman went to live with his in-laws. But his new state had no restraining effect on his pious activities and aspirations. If anything, he became more absorbed than ever in all forms of the divine service. Intimately associated with his worship of the Deity was his intense devotion to the beauties of nature in their every manifestation. Hours on end were spent out in the fields under the open sky. Nahman would frequently mount a horse, ride off into the county, allow the horse to find its way home and himself remain in the outdoors as long as his fancy dictated. At first the sight of the horse returning minus its rider would cause something of a panic among the members of the family. What had happened? Had Nahman met with an accident? Soon, however, his eccentricities were taken for granted. And his prolonged absences, once the occasion for considerable anxiety as to his welfare, were simply taken as indicating that he was indulging his desire for solitude and contemplation amidst the glories of a rural setting.[12]

It seems that not all of the time spent by Nahman in solitude, whether indoors in some corner of the house set apart for himself, or outdoors in the open fields, was devoted to pious meditation or mystic communion with the Deity. His thoughts began during these years to take a more practical turn. He commenced to reflect on the great spiritual "inheritance" which he had been privileged to receive from his grandfather the Besht--the sublime Hasidic tradition which had been transmitted to him.

And so he took stock of the movement in its present form; he sought to appraise the quality of its leadership; he attempted to clarify in his own mind the ideals of Hasidism which were worthy of preservation, those requiring modification, those which needed a new emphasis.[13]

In any case, Nahman felt that he had kept his silence long enough. The moment had arrived for him to assert himself. Only by delivering himself of his message, which he felt to be unique, could he be at peace with himself. And Hasidism was ready for just such an energizing influence as Nahman was to have upon it. "For Hasidism was then on the lookout for a man of truth who would come and declare that which it needed and lacked"--forthrightly and with no mincing of words. "And was not Rabbi Nahman just such a man of truth?"[14] Did he not express himself to the effect that "it is better for a man that he should die than that he live and be a dissembler in the eyes of men"?[15]

So long as Nahman lived at the home of his father-in-law, he failed to assert his leadership. He contented himself with study, prayer and solemn reflection. It is shortly after his settlement in Medvediovko, whither he removed after certain disagreements with his mother-in-law, that he makes his first appearance as a leader in his own right--as a Zaddik. The direct cause of his leaving was the insistence of his mother-in-law that he give up the private chamber which had at first been assigned to him for his own purposes. But as we have suggested, the departure was fortunate for Nahman. In his new place of residence many disciples gathered about the young Zaddik, even streaming to him from outlying districts and towns. Many were so impressed with the force of his teachings that they lost no time, once having been exposed to his personality, in going forth to spread his torah abroad

among the masses.[16]

At first the young Nahman supported himself in Medvediovko with the dowry money which he had received. When the money was gone, his band of followers saw to it that he get a weekly stipend sufficient to take care of all his needs. In return Nahman was expected to teach those who would congregate about him the ways of Hasidism as he understood them. His fame as an inspired and original teacher soon spread; even his fellow Zaddikim paid him their respects. To be sure, they said to themselves, this descendant of the Besht was destined to raise the glory of Hasidism to even greater heights than his illustrious grandfather.[17]

On his part Nahman had little regard for the Zaddikim of the time. Neither did he think much of the rank and file of the Hasidic group. For the first time he had the opportunity of studying the movement at close range and seeing it in action. His impressions were everything but favorable. So far as he could make out Hasidism had sunk to a low spiritual ebb indeed. Its condition was nothing short of precarious.[18]

Only fifty years or so had passed since the death of the Besht, only forty since the demise of the Maggid of Mesritz. But already Ukranian Hasidism at any rate was on the down grade. Numerically, of course, the movement was growing. This, however, was no index to its real spiritual health, its inner vitality. Its achievements were superficial and of no great significance: the "great things" once expected of it were not visible to the dispassionate eyes of Rabbi Nahman. "The Hasidim had begun to grow cold."[19] The blame for this state of affairs Nahman laid to the Zaddikim. The vast majority of them were unworthy of their reputations, unfit to occupy positions of leadership. They had failed to carry on the work of the Besht and the great Zaddikim of earlier

generations. As a result, the light which had been kindled by the latter was in danger of going out. "The Besht and a select group of Zaddikim had labored and accomplished that which they had accomplished in the world. But afterwards, when they passed away.....the light with which they had illumined their disciples and brought them back to God did not carry on from one generation to another; in fact it had ceased."[20]

It must not be understood that Rabbi Nahman disparaged the role of the Zaddik. As we shall see when we examine his teachings, he exalted the status of the Zaddik to an exceedingly lofty eminence. The ideal Zaddik could not be praised too highly, could not be invested with too much authority. In fact Nahman made of the Zaddik almost a deity. It is precisely for the reason that he thought so much of the strategic importance of the Zaddik in the progress of Hasidism that he was so critical of his own contemporaries: if the movement was to flourish, it must do so by having men at its head capable of preserving its dynamic values.

And here we meet with a paradox. The Zaddik was of key importance to the spiritual vitality of the movement; yet it was not through them that it could best maintain itself. Their influence was after all limited. In the last analysis Hasidism would live or die depending on the hold which it had on the minds and hearts of the lowly masses. Unless they were inspired with the vision which animated the distinguished pioneers of the movement, Hasidism must end in futility. The essential spirit must be communicated from Hasid to Hasid, rather than from Zaddik to Zaddik, or even from Zaddik to Hasid. Success or failure rested in the hands of the disciples, the talmidim. If Hasidism was to be purified and regenerated, the process must be undertaken and carried through by the rank and file. With them rested the ultimate responsibility. "It is

imperative to leave behind disciples who shall win over other disciples, and so the other disciples shall continue the process of illumination to remotest generations."[21] And the work was to be done not by selected disciples but by the entire group. Only in this way could there arise generations made up entirely of genuine and impassioned Hasidim.

Rabbi Nahman conceived it to be his function to breathe new life into the dying movement. And he was to do this by inspiring the masses with a new inspiration, which they would in turn communicate to succeeding generations. He wished to reach and move the people themselves. He saw no need of relying upon the abilities and influence of an ephemeral leadership. It was, in fact, his conviction that most of the Zaddikim were doing more harm than good. He set out, accordingly, to give the movement a profounder intellectual, and a deeper emotional, basis. But in order to carry out his mission he recognized the necessity of being able to speak to his people with authority. Already he had something of a reputation in the neighborhood of Medevediovko, and the size of his following was increasing steadily.[22] His aristocratic lineage, he knew, helped him not a little in gaining the ear of the people. But this was not enough. And especially in view of the fact that his continued criticism of their practices was leading more and more Zaddikim of influence to treat him with hostility, he came to the conclusion that the one thing he needed to build up his prestige was a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Then, perhaps, he would be able to contend with rival Zaddikim with more assurance of success. So far the endorsement of outstanding leaders had not been forthcoming. And for a good reason, as we have noted. Very well. Let the endorsement come from another source: let the holy atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael sanctify him. Such sanctification, certainly, was better

than any mere semika by an individual Zaddik.[23]

Returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he would commence upon his great work of regeneration in earnest. Then perhaps he might even dare join in combat with such a mighty figure as his uncle Rabbi Boruh, then holding undisputed sway in the camp of Podolian Hasidism. In any case, he could make little headway against such intrenched rulers at present. Did not his uncle make it clear that he resented quite definitely the outspoken disparagements of his presumptuous nephew? What right had this upstart to invade the precincts of his authority and make pretensions to his own greatness?[24] No, so far Nahman was but a minor Zaddik alongside such "great" Zaddikim as Rabbi Boruh and Rabbi Lewi Yizhak of Berditchev. And what made his lot still harder, was his refusal to grovel in the dust at their feet. If he was really to build that "new way" of which he dreamed he must see to it that he cease being reckoned as a second-rate Zaddik or worse.

The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that nothing must stand in the way of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Here was the surest means of raising himself to a position of dignity, prestige and power. Here was the indispensable preliminary to the performance of his mission. He must proceed without delay. A serious obstacle to his ambition was the opposition of his wife to such a journey. What was to become of her and of their three daughters? Who was to look after them in the meantime? Rabbi Nahman was not to be detained by such considerations. When one of the girls came from her mother to plead with him, he suggested a solution to their difficulties: the mother was to obtain work as a cook in some home while the girls were either to obtain some form of domestic employment or impose upon the hospitality of friends

and relatives. At any rate, they were to get along as best they could. His mind was set. And, according to the account, there was weeping for many days in his household; "but he had no pity upon them whatsoever."[25]

In his opinion there depended on this journey both his own life and the future of Hasidism. And when the members of his company realized the seriousness of their master's intention, they lost no time in going out among the people to gather funds to be used on the trip. On the 18th of Iyyar, in the year 1798, a bright spring day, Rabbi Nahman accordingly set out on his journey from Medvediovko. He went to Stambul by way of Odessa, although he was informed that it entailed a hazardous journey by sea. He remained in the Turkish capital until the end of the summer.[26] When he was about to leave he received warnings not to continue with his plans to go on to the Holy Land in view of the military activities of Napoleon in the Near East at the time. The warnings went unheeded and Nahman took ship for Jaffa. For some reason, however, the boat did not make port at Jaffa but at Haifa instead.

Nahman remained in Haifa during the months of September and October 1798, observing the High Holy Days in this community.[27] After Sukkot he went on to Tiberias, headquarters of the famous Rabbi Abraham Kolisker.[28] The old man treated him to a cordial reception. Jacob Samson, the Rabbi of Shipitovko, similarly outdid himself to be nice to the grandson of Rabbi Israel. While in the Holy Land, Nahman visited the grave of Rabbi Naphtali (author of "Semikot Hahomim", who had died on his way to Palestine in the year 1709), the Cave of Elijah, the Cave of Hillel, the graves of Shammai, Simeon ben Yohai, Nahman Horodenker, and others.[29] At each of these sacred shrines the Rabbi would pray, prostrate himself and read selections from the Zohar.

Proceeding to Sepphoris at the beginning of 1799, he discovered

that the Napoleonic forces had overrun the country, and that it would be a dangerous matter to remain longer in the Holy Land.[30] So he moved to Akko where he together with his travelling companion stowed away on a Turkish warship.[31] At Rhodes, through the efforts of his companion, the two were ransomed from the captain by the Jewish community of the island.[32] The Zaddik remained here only long enough to celebrate the Passover, after which a Greek ship brought him to Stambul, whence he returned home by way of Moldavia in the summer of 1799.

The account of Nahman's pilgrimage to the Holy Land, as contained in the "Nesiyḏto l'erez Yisrael", is written in some detail. It must be confessed that the Bratzlaver does not emerge from the account as any very great and brave hero.[33] We see him rather as a very human sort of man acting in emergencies as would most of us: whenever he got into a tight place he tried hard to get out of it. But it must be admitted that one does not get the impression from a reading of the "Nesiyḏto" that Nahman played the role of a pious pilgrim with any particular distinction. He is throughout the journey more the human being than the saint. This did not, however, prevent him from boasting the rest of his life of the great spiritual insights which he was vouchsafed as a result of the pilgrimage.

Perhaps the most interesting episode of the journey, from the point of view of the reader, is his behavior in Stambul on the way to Palestine.[34] Here he did such strange things as going about barefoot in the streets without hat, girdle or outer garments, and playing at "war" with groups of children. Such actions strike one as nothing short of pathological.[35] His disciples and admirers have another explanation. Before one may enjoy any great spiritual "ascents", they assert, he must first experience "descents" of a peculiar character. And the higher the

"ascent" the lower the preliminary "descent". Hence Nahman's strange childish behavior in the Turkish capital: it was to prepare the ground for the sublime and exalted visions and insights which were to be his once he set foot on holy soil.

Whether or not Nahman actually underwent a spiritual revolution by reason of his short stay in the Holy Land, he came back to his Hasidim with more confidence in himself than he had ever had before.[36] The young Zaddik of twenty-eight was now more sure than ever of his power to play a decisive part in remaking the movement and establishing it on at least as high a plane as it had been in its heyday. His conceit knew no bounds after his settlement upon his return in Zlatopoli. He would continually refer to the incomparable and profound influence which the short stay in the Holy Land had effected on the deeps of his personality.[37] At last he felt himself ready for his work of reformation and reconstruction. And he missed no opportunity of impressing the fact of his greatness and superiority upon his followers and fellow Zaddikim.

He possessed wisdom, he said, "which if I were to reveal even a small part of it, men could, by reason of the ecstasy afforded by the comprehension of it, live by this wisdom alone and without food or drink....."[38] No living scholar could compare to him, since he could prove to the very greatest of them that up until the moment of their contact with his teachings and inspiration they had learned nothing at all, knew nothing at all.[39] There was none among them who deserved more than to be "put under the soles of his feet."[40] He was <u>the</u> leader of the generation.[41] The Big Four in mysticism since the beginning were: Simon ben Yohai, Isaac Luria, the Besht--and Rabbi Nahman.[42]

The serious young man who, in the isolation of his "study"

in the home of his parents and in the hills and fields on the outskirts of Hussatin, had dreamed great dreams of spiritual conquest upon his reaching maturity--this queer youth, now grown into manhood and sanctified by a colorful pilgrimage to the Holy Land, was at last asserting his claims to supreme leadership and in no uncertain terms. Completely gone was that earlier timidity about locking horns with established Zaddikim in a struggle to prove the fundamental impregnability of his authority. Nor would he be content with enjoying a status of <u>equal</u> prestige with the others. He would go the limit; the Hasidim must somehow be convinced that in him they must recognize the paramount spiritual leader of the age, no less.

It was inevitable that Nahman's disparagement of the entrenched leaders in the movement should arouse their bitter hostility.[43] An intense spirit of hatred was generated against this brazen upstart who dared to assert that "all the Zaddikim are in need of me because even they are capable of improvement."[44] It was unavoidable that a furor should be created by the arrogant claim that "I rule even over all the Zaddikim of the generation."[45] Why, even Rabbi Boruh, uncle of Nahman and grandson of the Besht, biggest Zaddik of his time, had not ventured to put forth such claims.

It was to be expected, then, that many of Nahman's former friends and associates should leave him once he had started on this wild path of self-aggrandizement. Some of his most ardent followers became his utter enemies.[46] Especially did Nahman and his group have to contend with the opposition which went forth from the camp of the Old Man of Shpola, Aryeh Loeb. Nahman had asserted himself. And he was beginning to pay the price for his fantastic conceit. From this time forth the

band of Rabbi Nahman was branded and hounded. Slanderous statements against the leader and his men came out regularly, almost daily. The whole Hasidic movement was thrown into a state of confusion and agitation as a result of the unbridled enthusiasms of the utterly immodest pretender to the Hasidic throne at the turn of the century.[47]

The Old Man of Shpola certainly had good reason to resent the intrusion of Rabbi Nahman upon the latter's setting up headquarters in his sphere of influence. Here he had risen to his present position of power only after long years during which he had climbed from the position of mere sexton in the community of Zlatapoli until he was the chief of Hasidism in the Kiev district. And now when he had at last succeeded in obtaining a strong hold on the masses, who saw in him a "holy man" and an unexcelled advisor in all worldly matters, the impudent grandson of the Besht had to come upon the scene to jeopardize his hard-earned position of authority and prestige. The intruder would not even pay him the ordinary respects due an older man! But then how could one expect Nahman to single him out for more considerate treatment than he was lavishing upon other Zaddikim of standing?

The relations between the young and ambitious Nahman and the old Zaddik became more and more strained as time went on. Aryeh Loeb became particularly infuriated when he heard that the new Zaddik of Zlatapoli had not stopped at changing certain practices in the synagogue which had been instituted by him years earlier when he had ministered in the house of worship.[48] The strained relationship was not relieved when tale-bearers brought the Old Man accounts, whether true or otherwise, of new insults directed at him by his successor in Zlatapoli. The verbal combat between the two became vitriolic indeed. Hearing of how Nahman

was bragging about the advanced reforms which he planned to inaugurate, the Zaddik of Shpola exclaimed, "Who asked him to be in such a hurry about coming into this world in our generation. For is not his spirit of the later generations?" Such sarcasm was not too much for Nahman to counter. He could well take care of himself in such a battle of words. "He rebukes me because I came too early. I reprove him for having come upon the world just about three centuries too late."[49] One can imagine that this rejoinder, upon reaching the ears of Aryeh Loeb, caused him to think twice before giving the sharp-tongued adversary similar verbal openings in the future.

What was going on in the mind of the Old Man may be inferred from this violent outburst: "In the whole Ukrainian district I am the authority on herbs. If it were not for the fact that Nahman is the grandson of the Besht, I should know how to take care of him."[50] The controversy must have become acrimonious indeed to lead to such a hot-headed exclamation. And the animosity of the leaders communicated itself to their followers. Hasidism produced the phenomenon of two rival camps, the Zlatapolim and the Shapolim, whose respective members even exchanged blows on occasion with one another. Surely the picture is not a pleasant one to contemplate.

But Nahman was not very much put out by what was going on. It seems that he had been prepared from the start for just such opposition. He had not counted on having an easy time of it. He realized that many a stumbling-block would have to be removed, and not always with the most gentle means, before his grandiose ambitions could be realized. In fact, he took it as a compliment to himself and the vitality of his original teachings that he should have been able to create such a stir, and this

practically at the outset of his career. "How could it be possible that men should not take sides against me, inasmuch as I have embarked on a new path which until now no man has taken?"[51] But as a sort of afterthought he makes this qualification: "Even though it is very old, it is nevertheless completely new." We shall not here undertake to analyze this last statement. A special section of our study shall be devoted to an exposition of Nahman's teachings. All that we shall venture to say at this point is that regardless of the particular content of the young Zaddik's torah, the very aggressiveness, the unreserved impudence with which it was presented would be enough to provoke a battle royal in the ranks of the movement.

It was to be expected that such undignified controversy as that which raged between the Zlatopolim and the Shapolim should meet with the displeasure of the cooler heads in Ukrainian Hasidism. For it was quite evident that a goodly portion of the conflict did not center about differences of point of view with regard to Hasidic doctrine. A considerable measure of the polemics which passed back and forth between Shpola and Zlatopoli could hardly be regarded as le shem shamayim. One of those whom the whole ugly affair impressed as being utterly out of harmony with all standards of propriety was Rabbi Lewi Yizhak of Berditchev.[52] And what especially alarmed this conservative leader was the fact that a grandson of the Besht should be mixed up in such undignified controversy. Things had come to such a point that the Shapoler Zaddik had been blasphemous enough to insult the descendant of the very founder of the Hasidic movement! This would hardly do. And so Lewi Yizhak was at the point of warning the Old Man of Shpola to desist from all disparaging statements directed against Rabbi Nahman, under penalty of suffering excommunication

should he persist in this sacrilege. But the threat to excommunicate him never came to the Old Man. Cautious counselors of the Berditchever persuaded him to pursue a hands-off policy, lest he himself become involved in the fray or aggravate a situation which was already bad enough.

After many months of unceasing bitterness between himself and Aryeh Loeb, Nahman decided that he had had more than enough of this warfare. He would no longer be a source of annoyance and concern to men of the type of the Zaddik of Berditchev. Once he removed himself from Slatapoli the state of friction between the Old Man and himself would probably lose its acuteness. And so he transferred his headquarters to the town with which his name from that time on became inseparable. Apparently he had not relished the very violent and exceedingly acrimonious turn which the hostilities with the Shapoler had taken on occasion. It may well have been more than he had bargained for at the start. Be this as it may, Nahman came to Bratzlav in 1802 after he had been in Slatapoli something less than three years.[53]

It was in this community that he was to do his most effective work. For one thing Bratzlav was Hasidic to its core. It had been a stronghold of the movement now for decades.[54] Nahman could hardly have selected a more congenial place in which to establish himself and use as the base of his activity for the few years remaining him in this life.

It was in Bratzlav that Nahman was to perfect the peculiar system of thought which he had been in the process of evolving for some years. It was in Bratzlav that he was to find the man who would put his teachings in enduring form. It was in Bratzlav that he was to suffer the loss of his young wife. And it was in Bratzlav that he was to show the first serious symptoms of the disease that was to lead to his premature death.

Shortly after his settlement in the new community Nahman seems to have felt the necessity of securing some capable disciple who would serve in the responsible capacity of amanuensis. The two requirements which he laid down for whomever would fill this position were first, that he be a sound student and, second, that he be an expert in literary expression. Both of these virtues, and much more besides, he appears to have found in a former Mitnagid, and now an ardent Hasid, by the name of Nathan (ben Naphtali Herz).[55] This young man had, while living in Nemirow with his father-in-law, been influenced by the latter to despise everything associated with Hasidim and Hasidism. But then a friend had begun to interest him in the movement until, after an appreciable period of independent study and reflection, he determined to repudiate his earlier beliefs and loyalties. He went over to Hasidism, at first reticently and with frequent pangs of doubt as to the propriety of his action. And only upon his coming into contact with Rabbi Nahman in Elul, 5562, did he really become convinced that what he had done had been for the good. From the moment of this meeting he became a Hasid heart and soul. Both the father and father-in-law of Nathan continued to annoy him because of the transfer of his loyalties. But now that he had come under the inspiration of the remarkable Zaddik of Bratzlav, such vexations as these were impotent to dislodge him from his new faith.

And less than a year after his conversion, in the fall of 1803, Nahman initiated the new disciple into his duties.[56] And by the middle of the winter the process of collaboration, which was to continue for the remainder of the master's life, had begun in earnest. It may be said in passing that were it not for the devoted labors of Nathan, who seems to have regarded the Zaddik as nothing short of a saint, the latter

would be hardly more than a name in the records of the Hasidic movement. Practically all the literature which embodies the teachings and aphorisms and fantastic fictional narratives ascribed to Rabbi Nahman, as well as the body of material setting forth the life of the Bratzlaver, are the fruit of Nathan's literary activity. He is the Jewish counterpart of the German Eckermann and the English Boswell.

It seems that Nathan would take notes in the presence of the Zaddik, revise them at his leisure and then submit the material to his master for approval. And whereas Nahman spoke before his amanuensis in Yiddish, the latter translated the Zaddik's words into the holy tongue.[57] Nathan's Hebrew is accordingly replete with Yiddish expressions, betraying the original character of the material. But let us return to our subject proper.

The first years of Nahman's residence in Bratzlav must have been a considerable relief after the more or less hectic period spent in Zlatapoli. They passed in comparative peace. And for the first time he was privileged to see that his vigorous efforts to leave an impress upon the Hasidic movement had not been in vain. He was still in his early thirties and already he could observe the realization of his youthful dreams.[58] The size of his group in Bratzlav was increasing steadily. And he expanded the sphere of his influence by making journeys to various points in the Ukraine, setting out from Podolia, and proceeding to a number of towns in Volhynia, while covering the section in the neighborhood of Kiev with considerable thoroughness. Communities included in his peregrinations included, Uman, Lemberg, Sharigrod, Zaslav, Ostroho, Duvno,[59] and Krimintchok.

When Nahman came to a community, we are told, the Hasidim "would come forth to meet him and pay their respects."[60] Nor would they

express their appreciation of the privilege bestowed upon them by his deigning to spend some time in their midst, during which he favored them with informal lectures on his conception of the fundamental principles of Hasidism by mere intangible gestures of admiration and esteem. They knew the Zaddik could utilize whatever sum of money they might succeed in getting together in the course of his visit. So that upon Nahman's leaving a community he would ordinarily be carrying somewhat fuller a purse than that which he had brought.[61]

It appears further that the Bratzlaver Zaddik was not ignorant of what was going on in the larger world about him, nor indifferent to the fate of the larger body of Russian Jewry. In the year 5563, accordingly, when he learned of the intention of the Russian authorities to impose certain rigorous decrees upon the Jews of the country, the most terrifying of which was that requiring compulsory military service, he attempted to intercede "in the higher regions" on behalf of his Russian fellow-Jews. This was during the reign of Alexander the First. And for some reason the above-mentioned measure was not put into effect until twenty-five years later, when Nicholas the First sat on the Russian throne. What was more natural, then, than for the later Bratzlaver Hasidim to attribute this deferment to the divine influence of their Zaddik? Nor did Nahman himself disclaim such cosmic power. "I postponed it," he is reported to have said in speaking of the decree in question, "I postponed it some twenty years."[62] Whether the Bratzlaver actually made this statement is beside the point. What concerns us here is the fact that the episode reveals him as being concerned with the fortunes of the larger Jewish group and not simply with the welfare of his own sect.

Nahman was well satisfied with himself in the first months

of his residence in Bratzlav. His supporters would go to any length for his sake. He was treated with more or less tolerance by his fellow Zaddikim. And he had at last gotten somebody who would take care of preserving his memory for posterity in adequate form. Only one untoward incident of serious proportions seems to have marred the rather peaceful character of his early Bratzlav period. This was the establishment of a definite rift between himself and his uncle Rabbi Boruh of Miedzybodz.[63] The older man had tried his best to treat the ambitious son of his sister Feiga with tact and understanding. When he learned of the young Zaddik's arrogant behavior in Zlatapoli, he had merely let drop the suggestion that perhaps Nahman would do better if he were to abandon his ambitions to play the role of a strong man, a man of action, and give himself over instead to a quiet life of study and pious reflection. The hint, of course, went unheeded. But Boruh did not permit himself to lose his temper even when report after report reached him of the ruthless criticism which Nahman was lavishing upon the whole company of contemporary Zaddikim. After all it was but due to the excesses of youthful enthusiasm. And, besides, he could hardly expect him to state exceptions when he was paying his gentle compliments to the Zaddikate as a group: in all probability, reasoned Boruh, his nephew did not mean to include him in his sweeping indictments. In any case, he would let well enough alone. But then the break came in the summer of '63.[64] The cause? Nahman had finally gone so far as to single out his uncle one sabbath day for individual disparagement. He presumed to speak harsh words before a group of his disciples about the man who had held him on his knee as a child. Such direct affront could not be tolerated, if Boruh was to keep his self-respect. And from this time forth even the superficial bond of friendship which had

existed between the two was broken. It could not have been otherwise.

From now on, it seems, the Zaddik of Bratzlav played a lone hand. No Zaddik of standing would have anything to do with him. He was very apparently not to be trusted. Had he not insulted his own uncle? Dubnow points out that not one of the books which Nathan managed to have printed bears the endorsement of a single Zaddik.[65] So that Nahman now enjoyed a position of perhaps even greater isolation than had been his portion during the unhappy days in Zlatopoli when the Old Man of Shpola had made things so miserable for him. Yet he remained as sure of himself as ever. Suppose his standing in the world of Ukrainian Hasidism did grow increasingly uncomfortable the longer he stayed on in Bratzlav? The fact still remained that nothing could interfere with the decisive influence which his personality and teachings were to play in the long run on the course of the movement. His immortality was assured. Friends or no friends, he would yet take his place in history by the side of the Besht.[66] "My fire shall flame on forever. It will not be extinguished."

Only for a while, upon the death of his thirty-four year old wife in '66, he showed signs of questioning the worth-whileness of it all. Life seems for the time to have lost its fascination. What price immortality? What good was it after all that people should single you out as a celebrity? Perhaps the happiest man was he who could mingle unobtrusively with his fellows, living the unpretentious life, oblivious of the pressure of public opinion, pursuing a life, as it were, of anonymity. Even a trace of cynicism flavored the philosophy of Nahman during this melancholy spell. He confided in his intimate disciples his ambition to be able to go forth into the market-place, unknown and unrecognized, there to mingle freely with the common people--and smile "and poke fun at the whole

world."[67] It was during this period, too, that he experienced a profound nostalgia for the days of his youth when he had lived close to nature, enjoying communion with the Creator, dreaming and scheming and aspiring after some ineffable vision, elusive and mysterious.[68]

Three or four years after his coming to Bratzlav it became evident that Nahman was a very sick man. He suffered from a racking cough and showed other symptoms of tuberculosis. The climate of Bratzlav aggravated his condition. The last few years of his life were accordingly spent in various places where the disease-ridden Zaddik hoped to win back his health.[69] His home, however, continued to be in Bratzlav. There at least were to be found his possessions and followers. And here he kept the precious manuscript which represented the results of Nathan's labors since the commencement of their literary partnership.

The chief opus of Rabbi Nahman, rendered possible, of course, by the indefatigable labors of his amanuensis, is the work known as the "Likkute Maharan". It appears that the first draft of the book was completed by the year 5566 and after its completion kept in a private chest in Nahman's Bratzlav home.[70] But the original version never saw the light. It was destroyed shortly after the finishing touches had been put upon it. The reason for its destruction was Nahman's fear that it contained material of an objectionable personal character. Upon a visit to the town of Lebov early in '68 he told one of his disciples that back in Bratzlav was the manuscript of a book which had been the cause of all the misfortunes which had befallen him. In his mind, apparently, was the thought, which he could not root out, that the death of his wife and his own sickness had been due to the evil invluence of the manuscript in question. He became obsessed by the fear that unless the papers were

burned his own early death was inevitable. One of the men in his party was delegated to proceed without delay, therefore, to Bratzlav and to burn the manuscript.[71] The order was carried out and Nahman felt better.

Why was he so anxious to conceal from the eyes of the world the manuscript of a book which his disciples had hailed as containing "the secret of secrets", as being "holy and awe-inspiring"? What was the nature of the objectionable material the very presence of which in his private chest had led Nahman to believe was responsible for the evils that had come upon him? We have already suggested the answer to these questions. The manuscript contained passages which would have provoked an even more violent storm in the Hasidic camp than any that had yet taken place. So far the outbursts of the censorious young Zaddik had been oral and, therefore, limited in their effect. The influence of the spoken word is at best ephemeral. But now the explosive sentiments of the irascible grandson of the Besht were to be broadcast to the world in black and white, between the imposing covers of a printed book. Nahman showed the manuscript to several of his trusted associates. They at once recognized the perils attendant upon the dissemination of such incendiary expressions as the book contained.[72] The life of the Zaddik, it occurred to them, would surely be jeopardized should he consent to let Nathan put the book through the press. But not for any mystic reason! The hot-headed Old Man of Shpola might not prove to be the only Zaddik in the movement to whom thoughts of a homicidal character occurred when sufficiently aroused. Nor might the others be restrained, as was the Shapoler, by the consideration of Nahman's descent from the sainted Besht.

Nahman seems to have perceived the validity of such arguments. In any event, he may have felt the desire to ease the force of the attacks

to which he and his Hasidim were being subjected. Now was not the time to aggravate the warfare of the Bratzlaver Hasidim against the field. If anything, Nahman's enervated condition demanded an armistice in the hostilities. The manuscript, accordingly, was burned in accordance with his instructions. The wisdom of this action is proven by the none too friendly reception accorded the later version of the "Likkute", which we may reasonly suppose represented a greatly expurgated form of the work originally projected.[73]

In the years 5566 and 5567 Nahman made a number of excursions from his stronghold at Bratzlav through the Ukraine.[74] Nor were these undertaken purely for reasons of health or even in order to buttress his movement. It appears that the persecutions of the Bratzlaver Hasidim had penetrated even to the very headquarters of the sect. The ailing Nahman, further, had become restless after the more or less indigent life which he had been leading since his settlement in Bratzlav. From now on, he writes in a letter sent from Zaslav in 5567, "I shall be going from tent to tent, and not to settle but to sojourn."[75]

That Nahman had grown weary of the unending persecution which is reforming efforts had earned him is no doubt the truth. But he was by no means crushed or subdued. He kept up his own courage and did all he could to encourage those associated with him. When his brother, Yehiel Zewi, leader of the Bratzlaver group in Krimintchok, complained to him of the trials he was suffering at the hands of the opposition, Nahman wrote him as follows: "Just as it is impossible for certain species of seeds to attain full growth except through the (preliminary) withering of the husk in the dust--but after this withering process (the seed) flowers and blooms and becomes a great tree--in the

same way, by (reason of) their lowering you to the dust shall you grow great and flourish in the world."[76]

Included in the '66-'67 itinerary were Zaslav, Ostroho, Dubno, Krimintchok, and a number of towns in the district of Polisia.[77] These journeys through the Ukraine hardly served to endear Nahman to the rival Zaddikim through whose communities he passed. The reason was that the Bratzlaver's presence usually led to a diminution of their income of ransoms.[78] Offerings that ordinarily went to them would be diverted to the visiting Zaddik. Not that he made any money out of these travels. Nathan assures us that the expenses of the tour were considerably in excess of contributions received in the different localities.[79] In view of this consideration and the fact that Nahman's health appears to have been seriously undermined by the rigors of his travels from place to place, his Hasidim were hard put to it to discover the real motive for his peregrinations at this inopportune time. The Zaddik himself is reported to have told his men that "if the world were to know why he journeyes, they would kiss his every step."[80] His visits to Lebov, however, lent themselves to no such mysterious interpretation. Nahman paid fairly regular trips here for the simple purpose of obtaining medical attention. This was in spite of his long-standing antipathy, frequently and vigorously expressed, to doctors and everything associated with them. He would return to his followers each time with new invectives against these diabolical individuals.[81]

From these latter years of his life date the creation of those extremely curious fables, allegories, parables and legends--one may take his choice of these terms--later grouped by Nathan under the title "Sippure Ma'asiyyot". They were told from time to time, whenever

Nahman was in the mood, to his assembled Hasidim. Each tale as a rule would be narrated in installments coming at irregular intervals. The first story was told at the end of the year '66, after Nahman had already begun to display unmistakable signs of a diseased organism. It is for this reason that Dubnow regards them as the product of a feverish mind and dismisses them as mere old-wives' tales.[82] Other students, like Buber and Horodezki, regard in a more favorable light the fantastic tales of Rabbi Nahman, which Nathan succeeded in having printed only after their creator had been dead for some four years.[83]

Any honest appraisal of the stories must take into consideration both the manner of their creation and the audience for which they were very deliberately designed. Their composer had no intention of producing finely chiselled literary masterpieces. In fact, he did not write them down at all. They were recited, spontaneously, and preserved by their author's amanuensis in almost the same form as they had been related. Hence their crudeness, their prolixity. They were, further, intended for the consumption of simple minds. This will explain their almost childlike character. It is, nevertheless, true that certain of the stories, e.g., "The Seven Beggars", and "The Wise Man and the Simpleton", reveal a profound insight and possess a real charm. And practically all, when reworked by Buber, compare favorably with other creations in the same literary genre.

And so Nahman told stories during the last five years or so of his life. And perhaps these represent the most significant concrete results of his activity during this period. His physical condition, becoming more and more aggravated as time went on, hardly enabled him to play the dynamic role in Hasidic life which he had played in his more

vigorous days.

A fire broke out in Bratzlav in Iyyar of the year 5570, which consumed the home of Nahman and led him to take up residence in the town of Uman.[87] By this time the thirty-eight year old Zaddik was in the final stages of disease. It could be only a matter of months at best before his last strength would give out. He seldom left the house during the period in Uman. The largest part of the time was spent in bed. His disciples were heart-broken to see their young leader fade away before their eyes. His terrible paroxyms of coughing, his frequent hemorrhages impressed the members of his household with the awful thought that death could not be far distant.[85]

Nahman's body became more and more emaciated. But his will to power suffered no attenuation. Only once do we see him in a mood inconsistent with his usual spirit of hauteur and assurance. His magisterial manner left him for the moment one sabbath afternoon about two months before his death. The house was filled with people come to pay the invalid their respects and perchance to hear the <u>torah</u> which, in spite of all, he continued to expound. Seemingly irritated by this show of deference, he cried out, "Why have all these people come here? Is it not apparent that I can no longer impart any wisdom to them, that I am now become just an ordinary mortal?"[86]

The fatal affliction which had so prematurely come upon him did not, however, embitter him or impair his faith in the rightness of the moral order of the universe. On Rosh Ha-Shanah, 5571, after a particularly severe fit of coughing, he pulled himself together sufficiently to whisper to those about him his affirmation that: "There is mercy in the universe."[87] He seems during his last days to have looked at himself and that which

was happening to him in a detached philosophical manner. The approach of death he pictured as his coming to "a great and wonderful mountain--but I do not know whether we are moving toward the mountain or the mountain is coming to us."[88]

His poetic faculties, it would appear, remained keen and sensitive through his last days. He imagined himself as being within a step of ascending into the highest heavenly regions. All that interfered was the fact that he was still burdened with a physical body. All the days of his life, he said, it had been impossible for him to attain this rank. Now was his chance. And so he yearned intensely to strip himself of the impediment of the flesh. Death would not find him struggling and protesting; he would welcome it eagerly, face it triumphantly. Did it not mark the perfect culmination of all his earthly strivings? At last he would enter those heavenly regions toward which he had directed his soul in the fervent prayers of his divine service since the days of earliest childhood.[89]

Conscious that the days of their beloved master were numbered, his beloved followers never left his bedside day or night. One watch succeeded another with regularity. And so his last hours drew ever closer. At dawn of the fourth day of Sukkot he instructed those about him to burn up whatever papers they found in his possession while his dead body was still lying on the ground. He knew that his last day on earth had come. As the morning wore on, it was clear that he was sinking rapidly. Those standing about him could not conceal their emotions, could not keep back their tears. Nahman was still conscious. He wished to console them. "What troubles you?" he asked in a feeble voice. "Why do you worry? Am I not going before you?" His disciple could not

restrain himself. "Rabbi, Rabbi," he sobbed, "Why have you forsaken us?" The Zaddik, unable longer to speak, could only turn his head toward the questioner with an expression which seemed to say, "It is not so. I am not leaving you, heaven forbid."[90]

And so the Zaddik of Bratzlav passed away in the afternoon of the eighteenth day in Tishre 5571 in his thirty-ninth year.[91]

"And he looked almost as though he were alive," says Rabbi Nathan in describing his master after life had gone from him. The expression on his face was no different from what it was when "he used to walk back and forth in the house wrapped in thought...and there were pleasant odors emanating from his body." And in truth the Zaddik still lived on among his disciples. "I wish to remain among you," he had said. "You shall come to my grave."[92] These words were engraved on their hearts. From them they drew consolation and strength. Their master was yet in their midst.

And to this day the Bratzlaver Hasidim make pilgrimage to the grave of their great Zaddik, where they converse with him as though he still stood before them in the flesh. To be sure, no great change had taken place. He had merely transferred his abode. Whereas "formerly he lived here, now he has fixed his residence there, in the grave; and there he is alive." He had done nothing but pass "from one room to another. And he shall surely hear when they call to him."[93]

Nahman had realized his great ambition. He had won for himself the profound sort of immortality of which he had dreamed. He had, of course, not converted "the whole world" to his "new way", but the inspiration of his personality and teachings did not cease when his body was laid in the grave. Hasidim may still be found who boast of their spiritual descent from the Zaddik of Bratzlav.

II - PERSONALITY

The personality of a man is an elusive thing. It is not easy to understand the essential character and temperament even of those persons with whom we are on terms of physical intimacy. How much more difficult, then, to reconstruct the personality of men and women merely on the basis of records of their thoughts, doings and feelings as embodied in materials written either by themselves or others. And yet in the case of Rabbi Nahman we are fairly fortunate. By reason of the labors of his amanuensis we may form a rather clear picture of the man. From the account we have already given of his life certain traits and characteristics stand out in bold relief. Nahman is already more than a mere name to us. Further light will doubtless be thrown upon the qualities of his nature by our study of his teachings. It, nevertheless, seems desirable to devote a special section to an attempt at reconstruction of his personality.

The first characteristic of the man which strikes us is the fact that he was something of an introvert. By this we do not mean to imply that this tendency assumed a pathological character. It is just that in Nahman the gregarious instinct does not seem to have been particularly strong. He loved to be by himself. He loved to enjoy nature in solitude. And along the same line, he appears to have been a rather taciturn individual. "Faith," he says, "is the fruit of long silences."[94]

He always insisted upon having a room of his own in which he could study and reflect and pray undisturbed. He did not see how one could intensify the relationship between himself and his Maker unless he could be by himself a great deal. "It is good for a man that he should have a special chamber for himself where he may devote himself to the divine service through study and prayer. A private chamber is especially imperative for

purposes of intimate communion and converse with the Deity."[95] And these periods of solitude must not be interrupted unless absolutely necessary. Even when it becomes necessary to take nourishment, one must see to it that he use up a minimum of time in the satisfaction of such physical needs. If you are hungry, rush out and snatch a piece of bread or some other plain food, and get back to your pious work without delay.[96] Affairs of the world must intrude themselves on one's privacy as little as possible.

But Nahman did not wish to enjoy solitude merely in the stuffiness of his room. His great delight was to be by himself in the outdoors. Especially during his youth and early manhood he made it a practice to retire to the fields and hills on the outskirts of the town. And toward the end of his life, upon revisiting the scenes of his earlier days, he spoke with deep feeling of the beautiful times he used to have as a young man, enjoying the glories of the natural setting with none to break in upon his mystic moods.[97] It was during these periods of solitude, often prolonged into the early hours of the morning, that he was fashioning a world-outlook for himself. He seems to have utilized his privacy for creative mental and spiritual activity, not merely as a means of escape from prosaic cares.[98]

That he was not the extrovert type is indicated also by his genuine fear of facing large groups of people, whether to preach, read from the Torah at a public service, or even recite the Kiddush, before the members of his family circle. His "stage-fright" was of an extreme sort. We are informed by his disciple that he suffered intense torture each time he was compelled to appear before the public.[99] He felt that he would expire, reports Nathan, with the first word that he pronounced. He even felt timid and self-conscious about joining in the singing of zemirot together with his disciples.

A second outstanding characteristic of Rabbi Nahman, suggested

above, was his intense love and appreciation of nature. The feeling seems to have reached its highest point during the period of his residence in Hussatin, shortly after his marriage. And that it was not a mere passive affair, at least at this time, is indicated by the fact of his indulging in such physical activities as rowing and horse-back riding.[100] And already at this time, it seems, he began to see in nature a sort of cosmic melody.[101] Zeitlin offers an excellent description of the manner in which Nahman read into the universe a brilliant conception based upon his own poetic reaction to the external environment.[102]

According to this conception, a portion of this sublime music is to be found in every member of the house of Israel. The Zaddik assembles all the scattered elements and blends them into a perfect harmony. And when he reproduces the perfect melody before his disciples, each of the latter is emotionally stimulated by that particular musical phase which he has himself contributed. The consequence of this stimulation is that the individual experiences ineffable ecstasy and feels quickening within him the germ of a new and exalted spiritual life.[103]

And when a man is depressed for whatever reason, he has merely to recall that he possesses, in spite of everything, an integral part of the great cosmic melody, that there is still within him one spark of the divinity. This thought cannot fail to instil in him fresh spiritual vigor.

It is this poetic conception of his master's which led Nathan to exclaim that all the pains which he had to endure in the world were worthwhile so long as he had been privileged to hear the exposition of this exalted idea from the lips of Nahman.[104] We can well understand Nathan's enthusiasm in this connection, for the above-outlined conception indeed reveals a profound appreciation of the magic inherent in the physical

aspects of reality. Only a temperament attuned to the natural glories of the cosmos could give birth to such a conception. It could have come only from the mind and spirit of one who felt that with each step that he took he entered, as it were, into a different world.[105]

"Just as the harp of David," writes Zeitlin,[106] "when the north wind caressed (reached) it, used to play of itself, so Nahman would be of a sudden filled with heavenly music when he beheld the broad expanse, the blades of grass, the valleys which cover the earth, the great forest, the streams, and the springs." We see here the real reason, perhaps, for Nahman's passionate desire to be alone amidst the hills and open fields. He tells us that when he prayed in a natural setting he felt as though everything around him, every blade of grass, joined in his adoration of the Eternal. The glories of nature seemed to have a special message for his spirit, a message of joy and inspiration. "It is good," he said, "to be pious among them."[107] It seemed to his poetic imagination that he could almost see how each blade of grass struggled with its neighbor in an effort to thrust itself upward so that it might participate in his devotions.[108]

One must be impressed with the rare quality of Nahman's appreciation of nature in all its manifestations, even though he may not go as far as a Zeitlin who decares that "there is not one among all the sages of Israel who understood the value of nature and its effect upon the religious emotion as did the Zaddik of Brazlav."[109] The same student, and this time we must agree with his observations, goes on to point out how in the case of Nahman we have a perfect example of one whose appreciation of nature was so profound that he actually conceived of himself as being an integral part of it, so that the barrier between the "I" and the "not-I" wa

was broken down; he fused himself, as it were, with the natural world about him.[110]

But in addition to being a poet and an artist, both of which facets of his temperament are revealed in connection with his love of nature, Nahman was a deeply religious person. It is often the case with men of artistic temperament that their religion requires no formal expression. Not so with Nahman. From his early childhood he had thoughts and inclinations of a pious character. Thus we have the story of his inability to pay close attention to his studies for a while because of his absorption in the effort to recreate before his mind's eye the Ineffable Name. Again, his disciples record the fact that as a child of six he did all that he could and knew how to gree the sabbath with devotion. And finally, as we have already had occasion to point out, the youngster offered up spontaneous prayers to his Creator as a regular practice. All of which evidence should make it clear that an intense religiosity filled the spirit of Nahman from the first.[111]

And instead of growing weaker with the passing of the years, the religious quality of his temperament grew more and more intense. His increasing sensitivity to the beauties of the external environment served to intensify the quality and to refine it. Particularly in his conception of the nature of prayer do we see the rare religious character of his personality. When did one's prayer assume its noblest form? When it patterned itself after the example of the lowly blade of grass, which, with no feeling of self-consciousness or thought of reward, recites hymns of praise, as it were, to the Master of Creation. To watch the worship of these and to strive to emulate their beautiful example was about as far as one could go in the attempt to express oneself religiously.[112]

Prayer meant much to Rabbi Nahman. He lost no opportunity to impress upon his disciples the great importance of praying with all the devotion and fervor one could muster from his inner being. The words of prayer must be recited with deep feeling and a maximum of spiritual energy: mere mechanical repetition of meaningless phrases had not the slightest worth in his eyes.[113] And that the accomplishment of this lofty objective was something which even he himself did not come by without some effort is indicated by such a representative passage from his "Likute Tefilot" as the following: "Help us....in Thy great mercy that we may be worthy of praying before thee at all times with great fervor, with all our heart and soul, to the end that our prayer may finally succeed in forever being united with Thy Unity."[114] And the passage ends with a typical confession of his own disability to reach the goal of perfect prayer.

More explicit and emphatic perhaps in its expression of the devotional spirit of the man is this extract: "May it be Thy will, O Lord our God and God of our Fathers, that Thou mayest, in Thy great compassion... make me (us) worthy....to pray before Thee with all my vigor, with all the powers which are within me, with my three-hundred forty-eight limbs, and my three-hundred sixty-five veins, with flesh and sinew and bones and vessels and blood, with all the strength which is in the brain of the head and the marrow which is spread through all the body, and all the power which is in the five senses. And may all the rest of my (the) powers be utilized when I am engaged in prayer."[115] What the passage lacks in literary merit, it more than compensates for in sincerity and emotional vigor. In any case, it supports our contention that in Rabbi Nahman we have one to whom the religious experience was anything but a dull and passive affair.

Nathan reports the illuminating episode of Nahman's giving of his prayer-shawl to a disciple.[116] The Zaddik handed it over with these words: "Be very careful about paying due respect to this prayer-shawl, for as many as are the threads in the garment, so numerous are the tears which I shed until I comprehended its real meaning and significance."

To Nahman the relationship between man and the Deity was a very real thing. And the preservation of this spiritual bond depends in large part upon the frequency and character of man's prayerful communion with the Almighty. It is through recourse to the latter that man raises himself above the brute. Here is the real reason for the importance of prayer, entirely apart from its practical effectiveness: it gives man a strong sense of the cosmic importance of his earthly life. Does he need clothes, food or anything else? Then let him pray to God. Whether his prayers are answered is beside the point. What matters is that through prayer one is brought near to the Deity. The man who has all of his physical needs taken care of but feels no sense of relationship to the divine is not one whit superior to the animal. For are not the latter's requirements satisfied likewise without prayer?[117] We have here, then, additional evidence with regard to the quality of Nahman's religious feeling. He was the artist, the poet, the nature-lover--but above all the religionist conscious of the importance of making all of life a kind of divine service.

Before we leave our discussion of Rabbi Nahman as religionist it is essential that we pay some attention to the more extreme manifestations of his religious impulse. For it must be admitted that his religion did not always express itself in normal fashion. One student has even attempted to prove that our subject suffered from a number of serious

complexes, for the most part of a sexual character.[118] Without here committing ourselves as to this appraisal of his admittedly curious behavior on occasion, we must nevertheless agree that Nahman exhibited definite tendencies in the direction of asceticism. Thus we are informed that he would not masticate his food during one period of his life, so as to derive a minimum of satisfaction from eating.[119] It was his intention, it seems, to overcome the lust for food in this way. Jacob Becker, author of the aforementioned psycho-analytic study, attempts to associate such behavior with the "anal erotic complex", whatever that may be.[120] It is sufficient for our purpose to merely point out that Nahman for a period exerted his will-power to the utmost in the attempt to subdue what he thought at the time to be an expression of his animal nature. And Nathan informs us that this ascetic practice had a definitely harmful effect on his health.

Another form which his asceticism took was the practice of frequent and protracted abstention from food. According to the accounts of his disciples, he fasted from sabbath to sabbath the larger part of his adult life; that is, he would eat but once a day and then very frugally, permitting himself a normal repast only on the sabbath. Once he is said to have fasted an entire week without eating anything whatsoever. But his record, we are told, was fasting eighteen times in one year from sabbath to sabbath. These reports are undoubtedly exaggerations. But that they embody a considerable element of truth is very probable. Two other ascetic practices to which we would call attention are his practice of rolling in the snow and that of refraining from scratching himself when he itched. The latter, he said, constituted the severest possible sort of self-torture.[121]

It is only natural that a man with such tendencies should have little use for money and material possessions. And Nahman expressed himself many times unequivocally on this point. One must not be inordinately interested, he affirmed, in the things of this world. What mattered most was the world to come. We hasten to add that Nahman must not be thought of as clinging to the conception of other-worldliness. That is to say, he emphatically did not believe in the rejection of the delights and pleasures of earthly life. His frequent admonitions to flee from melancholy and seek to be joyous at all times prove his interest in worldly pleasures. The point is that he saw no wisdom in spending one's days and energies in the pursuit of material possessions. Such pursuit was to him the height of futility.[122] He accordingly decried the practice of the poor and those in moderate circumstances to be envious of the rich and the well-to-do.[123] Why did he disparage the giving rein to one's lust for money, food or the various delights of the flesh? The answer is fairly obvious, knowing as we do the personality and outlook of Nahman: too much attention to the material, the tangible and the fleshly is quite apt to have a baneful influence on one's spiritual life.[124] Religion and sensuality were not compatible. So that we have here the apparent paradox of a Hasid emphasizing and living a form of asceticism. We must, however, guard ourselves, as has been suggested, against putting too much faith in the literal truth of the above reports, or the tendency to see in Nahman a pathological personality on the basis of these. But with regard to the latter we shall have more to say below.

Those who might wish to prove that Nahman was mentally diseased would perhaps find their strongest support in the fact of his tremendous conceit. We have already seen, in our discussion of Nahman's

life, how as a youth he began to give evidence of having exalted ambitions of becoming one of the great Zaddikim of the generation, if not the greatest of them all. It is not too much to say, along this line, that his strenuous efforts to raise himself to a higher and ever higher heavenly rank (madrega) were colored by his egoism. The latter spiritual achievement, in other words, was not sought purely for its own sake; it was necessary before he could reach the strategic position of leadership after which he aspired.[125] He accordingly recognized the necessity of being accepted by the Hasidic world as an important personality in his own right. That he was aware of the practical value in enhanced prestige of being a descendant of the Besht goes without saying. On the other hand, such distinction of birth might do him as much harm as good: instead of being regarded as an important individual on his own merits, he might have to go through life being known merely as the grandson of so-and-so, even though the "so-and-so" be the Baal Shem Tob himself. This prospect certainly had no appeal to the conceit of a Nahman. And so he early made it clear that whatever spiritual distinction he had attained, or might in the future succeed in attaining, came as the result of his own efforts and merit, and that his aristocratic lineage had nothing to do with it.[126]

In this expression of self-conceit we are afforded direct proof of Nahman's egotism. Less direct but no less revealing are his numerous statements with regard to the character and significance of the Zaddik to which we shall call attention in the third section of this study. Here we shall see the tremendous importance which he ascribed to the ideal Zaddik. Thus, for example, the latter is represented as having the power of raising the dead to a higher heavenly sphere,[127] of averting death,[128] of instructing God how to deal with His earthly children.[129] And it is

fairly apparent that Nahman often had himself in mind in making such statements. We can well understand, accordingly, the irritation of his contemporaries at the not-so-subtle posturings of Nahman as an almost Messianic figure implied in these apparently innocent characterizations of the "Zaddik-type".[130]

The arrogance of Nahman is not so amazing when one appreciates the fact that early in his career he already found a number of disciples who took him at his word, and accepted him as the leader of the generation, drank in his every word thirstily and did not stop at praising him, in his presence, to the skies. Any doubt he may have had earlier about his greatness was undoubtedly dissipated when he saw a Nathan treating him almost as a divine being, taking his every word as a holy revelation worthy of preservation for posterity. And when he spoke of himself as "the great innovator" and as one who could, if he wished to reveal himself for the unique being that he was, have "the whole world" running after him--he very probably felt that he was merely stating a fact. For was not his appraisal of himself reinforced by the worshipful attitude of his disciples? Whatever modesty he may once have possessed could not easily survive the extreme adulation accorded him after he had embarked in earnest upon his Zaddikist career.[131]

Whether one calls him a "narcissist", or by some other fancy term taken from the current jargon of psycho-analysis, is unimportant. Neither are we interested in proving, with a Becker, that the reason for his exaggerated ego is to be found in the maladjustment of his sex life.[132] It is sufficient for our purpose to point out that here was a man who undubitably suffered from an undue sense of his own importance. One characteristic of Nahman's conceit is worthy of mention: he had a strong

conviction that he could be of great spiritual good to his generation; and it is for this reason that he felt impelled to wield his influence as widely as possible. Or, put otherwise, his conceit seems to have had an unselfish aspect. He felt, for instance, that the mere sound of his voice would have a good effect on the hearer, even though the content of his words escaped the latter.[133] Hence he had an irrepressible urge to expose as many men as possible to this elevating experience. To be interpreted similarly are his statements that the whole world would pray for his recovery if they knew how much they needed him, that men who were exposed to his wisdom could live without food and drink, that not until men reached the other world would they grasp the full significance of his most casual remarks.[134] A rather feeble extenuation of a serious fault in his psychic makeup? Perhaps. Our primary interest is not to whitewash our subject anyhow. Such a statement, further, that the time would come when one man would ask another whether he really had been in his house, or known him, or even enjoyed the acquaintance of his disciples, is indicative of a conceit impossible to consider in any very favorable light. In the same class are his boasts that he was one of the four greatest mystics in Jewish history and the greatest scholar of his generation, that he revealed to those about him only an infinitessimal part of his <u>torah</u>, that he was easily the greatest Zaddik of the time.[135]

Once, while talking about the preternatural insights of the Zaddik, he asserted that their power in this connection was almost divine in character. As for himself, "he revealed to a number of men the fact that he knew all the sins which they had committed."[136] But then, the claim to possessing profound powers of intuitive perception is insignificant alongside most of the pretensions which we have noted above. Was

Nahman's conceit pathological? Very possibly.

Before passing on to a discussion of the more natural and normal aspects of Nahman's personality, we shall deal briefly with additional evidence pointing in the direction of, shall we say, mental disease. There is some ground for believing that Nahman suffered from more or less severe conflicts of a sexual character. He seems, for one thing, to have been preoccupied with the problem of suppression of sensual desires to a rather suspicious degree. He talks so much about sex that one cannot help wonderning whether the reason is that his own sex life was not all that it should have been. We offer a few quotations at random: "The first step in the improvement of the mind is the eradication of lewd desires."[137] Again: "Even Zaddikim can lose their positions by giving way to sensuality."[138] And this one: "The man who does not look at women will be blessed with sons able to write biblical commentaries."[139] Still more revealing, perhaps, is the following: "The severest trials a man encounters in this world are in connection with his sensual desires. Even the lust for money, powerful though it is,....is not to be compared to one's lewd inclinations."[140] Finally, there is the report of his conversation with a disciple regarding a certain Zaddik. The disciple praised the latter to Nahman because he had succeeded in getting his desire for food and drink under control. "But what about his sexual appetite," asked Nahman, "has he got that under control?" "How can anyone know anything about a thing like that?" responded the other. "Well," said Nahman, "there you have the crux of the whole thing. It is easy to master all the other desires and subdue them. The merit of a Zaddik and his sanctity depends in the last analysis upon his ability to deal with his sexual appetite."[141]

It is, of course, very possible that our point is not well taken. One must, we suppose, have more adequate evidence to support such a contention as that we are making. Our familiarity with the diagnostic technique of the psycho-analyst is not what it should be. We must confess, however, that the analysis of Becker in this connection strikes us as fairly convincing.[142] The material which this student brings forward to support his contention that Nahman suffered from very definite sexual disturbances, it appears to us, hardly capable of any other interpretation. In any case one cannot help being struck by the fact that Nahman was not a happy man, whether the cause of such melancholy lay in a disturbed sex life or elsewhere. One has an idea that he may well be talking about himself in the following: "There is the man who has his own pains, he who feels the pains of his neighbors, he who feels the pains of his family, he who feels the pains of his community; and there is the man who feels the pains of the whole world."[143] And that sex had something to do with this extreme condition may be inferred from his own expressed belief that a definite relationship exists between the state of melancholy and the imperiousness of the sexual urge.[144] His reversal, in this statement, of the cause-and-effect nexus is, we should say, not particularly relevant to the point.

Even though Nahman strongly affirms the necessity for one's being in a continual state of cheerfulness, there is conclusive evidence that he was a good deal of the time far from being in such a state himself. Happiness, he tells us, is the best cure for, and preventative of, all ills.[145] We are warned that allowing oneself to fall prey to melancholy can lead to all sorts of trouble.[146] And no prayer should be undertaken until one has put himself in a joyous mood.[147] But he himself

was unable to follow his own suggestions. Thus during his stay in the Holy Land there are several occasions when he could not get himself to share in the general merriment going on around him. For a period of several weeks, we are told, he was in a continual state of mental depression which gave his companions great concern. Even the joyousness of the Simhat Torah celebration failed to lift him out of his melancholy condition. While the others were indulging in all sorts of ecstatic physical expression, he merely sat passively by with head lowered, even failing to join in the parading around the synagogue.[148] And when his company visited the Cave of Shammai, he is reported to have had another of his fits of intense melancholy. In this case, however, he claimed that there was a definite reason, which he would not divulge.[149]

During his adolescence he tells us that he was obsessed with the fear of death. And feeling the latter to be imminent he would offer up prayer after prayer that he be allowed to die the death of a martyr to the faith. This condition continued for a long time, though he tells us that he cannot recall its exact duration. His guess is that it lasted about a year.[150] Again we feel obliged at least to indicate a possible psycho-analytic interpretation of this phenomenon. Becker would have it that Nahman was the victim of this melancholic condition because he was "bowed under the burden of a subconscious incestuous yearning." More specifically, the reason was that he longed subconsciously for the death of his father![151]

One more point and we shall be through with our attempt to suggest the possibility that the mental condition of Nahman was not exactly normal. This final point is that he seemed to suffer on occasion from hallucinations. A typical hallucination of the visual type was that which

he experienced while living as a youngster with his in-laws. He thought at the time that a dead man had entered his room. His cries of terror at the "discovery" brought the entire household to the chamber, into which they could effect an entry only after considerable difficulty.[152] A typical aural hallucination came upon him while in Palestine. The report comes from a disciple who was out walking with him at the time. It was Shebuoth and they were on the way to Mikveh. Suddenly Nahman stopped and asked his companion whether he had heard any noises. Upon receiving a negative reply, he remarked that he could not understand how it was possible that he should have heard noises which were inaudible to his walking companion.[153] Those interested in a psycho-analytic study of our subject must concentrate their efforts on the material outlined above. The remainder of this section shall deal with the more normal phase of the Brazlaver Zaddik's personality.

Very possibly the impression one might get from all that we have said about the personality of Nahman up to this point would be that he was not a particularly pleasant or attractive individual. We, accordingly, make haste to correct such an impression. The fact of the matter is, if we are to put any stock at all in the records left us by his disciples, that Nahman had a tremendously dynamic personality and one which was in large part responsible for whatever influence he exerted both upon his own and succeeding generations. His every word, we are told, was "like a flaming coal";[154] everything which he said made an indelible impression upon the hearer. It was not necessary for him to teach <u>musar</u> directly and obviously. He could talk about any subject whatever, and the color of his personality would give the words weight and significance.[155] And his biographers surpass themselves in superlatives when they try to

describe the effect which his spoken word had when he dealt with specific matters of torah.[156]

That his disciples exaggerated the merits of their master is certain. It is equally certain that the high compliments which they pay him, as Zeitlin points out, could not have been pure fabrications.[157] This student, accordingly, is inclined to the opinion that the spiritual intensity and emotional fire of Nahman were of a rare quality. He is no less fervent in his admiration of the Zaddik than Nathan himself. And we may say that our own feelings in this connection are very much akin to those of Zeitlin: we too cannot but feel that he was a man of tremendous force and fire.

What the mature man was, so too was the youth. Those who describe Nahman as he was in his younger days picture him as already having a sort of spiritual radiance about his features which impressed all those coming in contact with him.[158] Nathan calls special attention to the brightness of his eyes. He likewise calls attention to the charm of his master's singing while seated at table with the members of his intimate group. We are told that "if all the seas were ink" and one were to try to convey by the written word a fraction of the "beauty and wonderful holiness and intense reverence" displayed by Nahman at these gatherings, the ink would not suffice.[159] His utterances in ordinary conversation were "superlatively pleasant and sweet" and embodied "all the charm in the world." "Sweeter than honey and the honey-comb," every word he pronounced entered straight into the heart. Coming into his presence, one had no choice but to drink in his speech: one was literally forced by the power of his presence to listen to whatever he had to say. To Nathan all the sufferings and pains which he had to endure in the world were more than

compensated for by the fact that he had been able to hear his master's exposition of a single biblical interpretation.[160]

We have tried to indicate earlier in this discussion the almost incredible extent of Nahman's arrogance and conceit. This distinction, however, must be made: regardless of his tremendous pretensions and ambitions, these did not keep him from being modest and congenial in his direct personal contacts. He knew when to give rein to his egotism and when to do otherwise. The probability is that most of his expressions of vanity were confined to his immediate circle of followers. Thus we have the story of the extent to which he carried his modesty while attending a banquet in the Holy Land at which were present a considerable number of scholars and rabbis. In the course of the learned discussion the question came up as to the location of a certain comment by Rashi in the latter's Talmudic commentary. Some time went by and still none of those present could recall the place where the passage occurred. Finally, after it was clear that everyone had given up the attempt to recall the reference, Nahman volunteered the information.[161] The episode would indicate, it seems to us, a reticence which one would not be inclined to associate with a man of arrogant temperament. And so we are again struck with a paradox: Nahman was vain--and yet modest. The difficulty is cleared up if we understand that the modesty characterized his behavior in public, as it were, while the conceit manifested itself in his expressions to his trusted friends and disciples.

There is, however, reason to believe that Nahman's ability to show appropriate modesty on occasion, as well as other evidences of interest in being congenial to people, was cultivated. Naturally egotistic, he might have become a most difficult person to get along with. But he

early recognized his failings and deliberately set out to overcome them. He himself tells us that he had to strive consciously to develop a genuine feeling of friendliness toward, and sympathy for, other people.[162] The result of his efforts in this direction was, on his own word, that whenever men later told their troubles to him, he felt them more keenly than they did themselves. And he would become considerably wrought up whenever it was suggested that the superior spiritual and moral character of the Zaddik was inherited. How does one merit high spiritual attainments? There is only one way, and it is as available to the simplest Hasid as to the greatest Zaddik. And that way is the way of hard and persistent effort. The moral life is an active and not at all a passive affair.[163]

One may get an idea of the ability of Nahman to get others to like him from the account, for example of his contacts with Rabbi Ze'ev while in the Holy Land. Even though he did a number of things which offended the Rabbi, the latter took them in good grace for the reason that he had a definite affection for the eccentric young Zaddik.[164] We may also refer, as evidence of Nahman's conscious desire to prove congenial in his personal contacts, to the incident which took place when his travelling-companion expressed the desire to journey to Tiberias. Nahman did not care to make the trip. But inasmuch as his companion seemed to have his heart set on visiting Tiberias, Nahman yielded gracefully, much as it conflicted with his own desires.[165]

So that Nahman knew what it meant to bend his desires to the will of others. He recognized the importance, it follows from what we have been saying, of doing things which would lead others to feel friendly toward him and refraining from the doing of other things which might antagonize people. But this must emphatically not be taken to mean that

the character of Nahman was essentially mild and pacific. It was not. Nahman was a fighter if ever there was one. No attempt at description of his personality would be complete without the inclusion of this observation. His entire life was one long battle. He dared already as a young man, as we have seen in our first section, to set himself up in opposition to all the Zaddikim of his generation. It need hardly be said that such a procedure involved courage of a real sort. The undertaking would hardly have appealed to one of a non-combative temperament. And that Nahman entered into the fray with spirit and vigor is clear from the large number of aggressive statements which he made in the course of his short but active life. He was a hard-hitter in a very real sense. In his attacks on the Maskilim, his fellow Zaddikim, the medical profession, the Mitnagdim, and others, he expressed himself in anything but gentle terms. And his fighting mood stayed with him to the last. Never once, it appears, did he yield to his adversaries. Only the collapse of his health was able to influence him to leave the arena of active combat. Poet, mystic and introvert that he was, Nahman was also the fighter. Does the combination seem strange? We can only say in explanation that human personalities are entities not easily capable of accepting facile labels; and the personality of Nahman, to us at least, appears especially difficult to catalogue under some simple and convenient heading. Merely to characterize him as a fighter, or a poet, or a mystic would hardly do. His personality was too rich to be treated in so arbitrary a fashion.

One might expect Nahman to have been something of a pessimist in his outlook on the world, in view of his many difficulties of one sort or another, as well as the poor state of both his mental and physical health. Such is not, however, the case. We are impressed by the fact that he was fundamentally an optimist. Did he not even hold the belief that

ultimately the "whole world" would be converted to the point of view of the Brazlaver Hasidim? And one finds his essential optimism expressing itself in larger terms in his conviction that a reign of universal peace would not be long in coming--and this, without the arrival of any Messiah.[166] He had no use for those who insisted in believing that the world was growing progressively worse. To those who spoke to him of the "good old days" when there were fewer men of great wealth and more people in the lower classes in a state of relative affluency--to these he would reply: "Is it not true, on the contrary, that God now directs the world much more satisfactorily than before?"[167] Every generation, he said, has its economic ups and downs. And as far as there being a great mass of poor people in his generation, that was nothing new. In fact there were fewer really poor people than formerly. The reason there were so many complaints about the times being bad was that a lot of people from the lower social levels had become accustomed to new comforts and luxuries; and the more they had of these, the more they wanted. No, said Nahman, the truth of the matter is that the world is definitely on the up-grade.[168] Such language strikes one as being rather relevant to contemporaneous conditions. But then, one must remember that the world is not radically different from what it was something over a hundred years ago. And the optimistic temperament, such as Nahman's, is a phenomenon of every age.

In the early paragraphs of this section we revealed the presence of a definite streak of eccentricity in the personality of our subject. It, therefore, seems hardly necessary at this point to dwell on the fact of Nahman's temperamental and impulsive character. We shall content ourselves, accordingly, with pointing out one or two bits of evidence in this connection and then passing on to the next trait which

we have selected for discussion. The first item, then, which we would offer is the impulsive trip to the Holy Land.[169] The plans for the pilgrimage, when revealed to Nahman's family, came as a complete surprise to them. And once the idea of making the journey had entered Nahman's mind, he promptly carried it out. That he had a deep affection for his wife and children is clear from several sources. Yet nothing stopped him from acting on this impulse. He got the idea of going to Palestine, and he went. And the fact that he did not have enough money for the journey bothered him not a bit.[170] Such behavior is clearly not to be associated with an individual of a settled and poised and prosaic temperament. And what did he do after he got to the Holy Land? He had hardly been in the country four or five months before he was restless and anxious to return to his home--even though he had seen only a small number of the sacred spots which he had originally set out to visit. It was only because of the persistence and persuasion of his travelling-companion that he did not leave for home directly from Tiberias.[171] Undertaken under circumstances similar to those surrounding his departure for the Holy Land, were the frequent journeyings to various communities in the Ukraine: one could never tell what new impulse would seize him and cause him even to give up his residence in a certain community and establish himself elsewhere. Illustrative also of his temperamental nature is the manner in which he composed his stories.[172] Nathan tells us that he never knew when his master would decide to tell a new story, or continue one already begun, or bring a story to the close. The creation of the stories was sponteneous, impulsive, haphazard. It is, of course, just what one would expect from the type of individual that Nahman impressed the reader of Nathan's accounts of his behavior in various situations as having been.

One who would expect to find in Rabbi Nahman a man of fanatical tendencies would be disappointed. His religion was his life, but it did not lead him to surrender his reason. There is a refreshing sanity and independence in his attitude toward the Law. Again we see the individualist in action: the intensity of his faith and fervor could not quench the spirit of originality which was a part of him. He was firmly opposed to any slavish conformity to religious precept and injunction. The Holy One, he said, does not wish to tyrannize over His creatures. To the man who wished to distinguish himself by the meticulousness of his religious devotion, he gave the suggestion that he select one mizvah to carry out with all possible scrupulosity and precision. The other mizvot are, of course, not to be disregarded; they are merely to be carried out in more or less formal fashion. And even in the case of the single positive command which has been chosen, one must be very careful not to let himself carry his observance of it to insane extremes.[173]

He did not let himself, further, emulate those who were continually concerned about whether they were performing the divine service in perfect accordance with the will of the Deity. He did not worry too much as to whether his every movement met with divine approval. It is, of course, almost superfluous to say that he would not consciously violate a religious principle. His point of view was that one do what he thinks right and let it go at that.[174] Excellent proof of the way in which he actually carried out this principle in his daily life is afforded by his behavior on a number of occasions while in the Holy Land. Did he think the sabbath was over? Then he commenced to smoke his pipe, whether Rabbi Ze'ev liked it or not. As far as he was concerned, he was sure he was doing the right things; and that was all there was to that. Why allow

oneself to be constantly worried about trifles? All you had to do was make certain in every case that you were doing no harm or evil.

Nahman recognized the therapeutic value of prayer, and did not hesitate to utilize the knowledge in helping others. Instead of resorting to various magical devices in helping the sick, he would suggest the expedient of prayer and meditation. A favorite recommendation of his to the sick was that they read the "Song of Songs"; all the cures in the world, he said, were included in it.[175] And apparently his method worked. Thus we are informed of the man who was sick to whom he suggested that he rise before dawn and recite the above-mentioned biblical book. The suggestion was carried out and recovery followed.[176] Nahman, it seems, understood human nature quite well. He knew how to help people in their spiritual dilemmas. He sensed that one of his followers was passing through a period of doubt as to the worth-whileness of serving God, when there seemed no evidence that such service was gaining divine recognition. And so, without directly referring to this individual's problem, he merely let drop the suggestion that there are many men who serve God all their days without seeing during their lifetime whether their religious loyalty has borne fruit.[177] And yet, apparently, for all the reasonableness and sanity which he seems to display in his religious thinking and living, Nahman was naive in his belief in certain of the current superstitions. Typical of this naivete was his belief in the baneful effects of "the evil eye" and the way of counteracting such weird influences.[178]

Illustrative, too, of his common-sense attitude is the manner in which he regards the use of older authorities when engaged in the work of biblical interpretation. One must not let himself be confused, he says, by his own erudition. When desirous of working out a novel interpretation,

the best thing for a man to do is forget the comments of others and try to think the thing out for himself. And that original elucidations of the text are desirable is, of course, his basic premise.[179]

In the remainder of this section we shall try to show the essential humanity of Nahman as evidenced by his understanding of human nature and his sympathy toward the various manifestations of human frailty. It is clear, in the first place, that he himself was quite normal with respect to being sensitive to the acts and words of others. Regardless of how great a Zaddik one was, he declared, or how much wrapped up in prayer, if people commenced to ridicule him, he could not help being upset and distracted.[180]

Nahman, therefore, sought at all times to reduce the pains and troubles of others as well as he could. And that he knew the technique of relieving men in difficulties of one sort or another is apparent from a variety of sources. Typical is the incident of the man who came to him complaining of his intense physical pains. The Zaddik consoled him with the assurance that all the pain which he had to endure in this world was as nought compared to the suffering one must endure in Gehinom.[181]

Nahman was an artistic healer of souls.[182] To one man he would speak mildly, to another with severity: he modified his attitude to fit the specific situation. He realized that every individual suffered from a different type of sorrow, and he altered his manner and his speech accordingly. What, he asks, is the most important requisite in a Zaddik? That he know how to be harsh toward the individual who is inordinately proud of his spiritual achievements, how to be gentle toward him who lacks confidence in his spiritual possibilities. The humble and unduly modest individual must somehow be convinced that he is closer to God than he

thinks. On the other hand, the man who is arrogant about his spiritual accomplishments must somehow be humbled.[183] He was especially interested, it seems, in taking those who had lost self-confidence and assisting them in the rehabilitation of their morale. "God is with you, near to you, close to you," he would say to the discouraged sinner. "Do not be frightened, dear child, you must not give way to despair."[184]

We have seen how he told the sick individual that his pains were all of no account alongside the tortures of Gehinom. This obviously was said with the idea of minimizing the invalid's discomforture. His technique at the bedside of one about to pass away was quite different from that used with those suffering from some temporary ailment. To one in the former plight he would say, "Why are you so afraid? Why are you so worried about death? Is not the future world really a much pleasanter place?"[185] In general, it was Nahman's policy to implant in men's hearts a firm faith in the world-to-come, a strong belief in God as the loving Father, a strong sense of confidence in one's own powers and resources. Nahman especially appreciated the necessity of getting men to <u>believe in themselves</u>.[186]

Recognizing the fact that the world was full of frustration and suffering, Nahman's object was to elevate man's spirit so that he becomes more or less oblivious of life's darker aspects. The way out, ideally, is for one to discover the spiritual beauty of the Universe and to absorbe oneself in it. The Zaddik must strive to raise man to the point where that little bit of beauty resident in the latter becomes at one with the larger beauty of the cosmos.[187] How can he do this? The first requirement is for the Zaddik to have a deep and genuine sympathy for all men. And the reason for Nahman's effectiveness as a healer of souls seems to have resided precisely in the fact that his eye could behold in every

son of man a suggestion, at least, of nobility whether in the form of an appealing smile, a spiritual expression, a graceful gesture, a sensitive word.[188] Everybody, believed Nahman, had something fine and noble in him. Hence his insistence upon the necessity for the Zaddik to develop this germ of moral perfection. The most corrupt and dissolute individual had within him potentialities of an exalted sort.

It is hardly necessary for us to labor the point that only a man of remarkable powers of sympathy, understanding and tolerance could have such conceptions and insights as these. "In judging a man, one must always err on the side of leniency, even in the case, heaven forbid, of the thoroughly depraved individual. One must search and find that little bit of good that is even in such a one. And it is precisely through this attempt to find good even in the character of the wicked, as well as through the effort to judge him mercifully, that one will be able to turn him to repentance."[189]

III - TEACHINGS

Perhaps the most important discovery which a study of the teachings of Rabbi Nahman reveals is the tendency to magnify the role of the Zaddik and to place this figure at the very center of his Hasidic religious system.[190] Nahman was of course not the first Hasidic leader and thinker to make much of the Zaddik and his function in the life of the movement. The novelty of his teachings in this connection lies in the paramount significance which he attributes to the influence of the aforementioned, whom he pictures as the "very foundation of the world" and the "spiritual driving-power" of the generation.[191] Every sincere Hasid has no choice but to bind himself to some authentic Zaddik to whose authority he is willing to submit in all matters large or small, without turning to the right or the left.[192]

A few random quotations from Nahman's teachings with regard to the character of the ideal Zaddik, the nature of his influence and the homage due him should make clear his conception of this figure. "One receives new life by hearing Torah from the lips of the Zaddik."[193] "Praising the Zaddikim is the same as praising God."[194] "The coming of the Messiah is contingent upon the rapidity with which the Zaddikim gain recognition" (free transl.).[195] "Pain is ofttimes inflicted upon the Zaddik so that he may in this way diminish all the pains of Israel."[196] "Opposition to a Zaddik is frequently strong evidence of his authenticity."[197] "In proportion as men contribute to the material support of the Zaddikim are their sins forgiven."[198] "The will of God to send the Messiah is stimulated whenever he sees men pay their respects to the children of Zaddikim."[199] "God sees to it that whoever wishes to do something good for the Zaddik is enabled to do so."[200] "It is possible for a man to be a great

Zaddik even though his learning is meager."[201] "New disciples may be rejected when they ask unnecessary questions."[202] "The mere seeing of the face of the Zaddik brings about the sharpening of one's mind."[203] "Blessings shall rest upon the head of him who praises the Zaddik."[204]

Although Nahman demanded complete submission to the Zaddik on the part of the rank and file of the Hasidim, he did not believe that this obedience ought to be displayed toward leaders of inferior spiritual calibre. The standards, in other words, which he set up for those who would fill this high office with becoming distinction were of a rigorous sort. The ideal Zaddik must be of a compassionate nature.[205] He must, further, concern himself with the needs of his generation, under penalty of divine retribution.[206] And although it is entirely legitimate for the Zaddik to interest himself in gaining necessary material support from his Hasidim, he must be careful not to let himself be carried away by the lust for wealth. "There are cases of Zaddikim who, though they once wielded a wide influence, later dropped to an insignificant status by reason of their inordinate interest in material possessions."[207] The perfect Zaddik, again, will avoid controversy with his fellow leaders: "Opposition against the Zaddikim derives from contention among the Zaddikim themselves."[208] And finally, he will guard himself against the danger of giving insufficient time to the enlightenment of his disciples: "When a Zaddik spends all his time in personal worship of God and disregards his obligation of instructing his followers, he must be prepared to forfeit his position."[209]

In view of the exalted opinion which he has of the genuine Zaddik who fills his role adequately, Nahman sees no extenuation for the failure to accord these superior individuals every possible form of respect.[210] Was not the Zaddik the very "image of God" to his contemporaries? It follows, then, that any form of insult to this figure is tantamount to

blasphemy of the Deity.[211] We cite two or three characteristic statements. "It is difficult for a man to achieve salvation so long as there is a Zaddik in the community and he does not seek him out to pray on his behalf."[212] "The words which men utter against the Zaddik shall come back like a boomerang; and they shall themselves be smitten with illness."[213] "The thoughts of a man who takes issue with the Zaddikim are very apparently evil."[214] The loyal Hasid, moreover, will not only refrain from any form of lese majesty himself, but also recognize his obligation of defending the Zaddik from slander by others.[215]

Illuminating is this report of a conversation between Nathan and his master. "I was once conversing with him," writes the young disciples, "about the fact that people refused to believe that true Zaddikim could be found today who were as exalted in character as those of earlier ages. His answer was that if people believed in God, it necessarily followed that they had to believe that there were just such outstanding Zaddikim. For just as truly as there existed a God in every age, so there could certainly be found great Zaddikim in every period in history."[216]

Also worthy of our attention, perhaps, is such a passage from the "Likkute Tefilot" as the following: "May it be Thy will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, merciful and compassionate, long-suffering and abundantly kind and true, that Thou lavish Thy great mercy and compassion upon us. And mayest Thou, in Thy loving-kindness, strengthen us to have faith in, and to draw nigh unto, the true Zaddikim of our generation, through whom Thou hast chosen to preserve Thy people, the house of Israel. For from them does life issue forth unto us and to all Israel" (free transl.).[217]

The spiritual influence of the Zaddikim, as conceived by Nahman, is admirably illustrated, in the last place, by his affirmation

that "whoever remained near a true Zaddik...for a period of many years, ministering to him and paying heed to his words, even though he heard many things which seemed at the time of little import of spiritual significance, nevertheless the time would come when he would perceive the profound suggestions for the divine service which they embodied." In the course of time every statement which he had been privileged to hear would become precious to him, "sustaining his very life. For he would later be able to say: my teacher once intimated this to me. And there would frequently occur to him marvelous suggestions and great ideas, representing the fruit growing out of the seed which had been planted some time back. But this could only take place if he directed his mind regularly and conscientiously toward that which the Zaddik had told him."[218]

A second important feature of Rabbi Nahman's teaching to which we would call attention is his uncompromising opposition to all study and research of a critical, a philosophic, or a secular nature.[219] Nahman was deeply concerned, it seems, about the popularity of certain philosophical works with various elements of the Jewish people of his time. Any work which gave evidence of a rationalistic or philosophic approach on the part of the author, even though the latter be a Maimonides or an Isaac Arama, impressed him as inimical to true piety and religious devotion.[220] He warns his Hasidim again and again of the poisonous effect which even the perusal of a "heretical" book will have upon the quality of their faith.[221] Not only will the entertaining of notions of a skeptical sort have a corrupting influence on one's religious thinking, but it will have a restraining effect on one's attempt to pray with the necessary joyous and ecstatic fervor.[222]

A number of prayers testify to the intense anxiety of Nahman lest the faith of the Hasidim be undermined through contact with students of a critical bent.[223] So far did his fear of the possible evil effects of

such contact carry him that he even forbade the study of such commentators as Ibn Ezra and Levi ben Gershom: the commentary of Rashi was quite enough for the intellectual needs of the people.[224] It made no difference to him whether the author of a particular philosophic work was Jewish or non-Jewish. He prays that his people be somehow kept from any knowledge of all types of philosophic speculation whether such knowledge be incorporated in the writings of an Aristotle or a Bahya ibn Pakuda. Interest in such matters, he affirms, will cause one to lose both this world and the world-to-come by leading him to outright atheism and apostasy.[225]

What would he recommend as a literary diet for those of his Hasidim with an interest in abstract speculation and metaphysical thinking? The cabalistic writings of Simeon ben Yochai and Isaac Luria, for example, should have much more appeal to them than the "Moreh Nebukim" or the "Akedat Yizhak".[226] "He claimed that he could tell by looking at a man's face whether he had studied the 'Moreh Nebukim'. It invariably underwent a change for the worse: such study was bound to destroy any pious aspect, all trace of the image of God."[227] An absorption in the "Zohar", on the other hand, would inevitably serve to reinforce one's faith in the Holy One and His ways.

Nahman compares those who would attempt to prove the workings of natural laws in the universe, independently of the Deity, to "savage beasts". And in the same passage he speaks of those innocent Jewish souls who are caught as in a net by the intriguing arguments of the rationalistic philosophers.[228] He ridicules those who seek to prove the existence of a civilization on the moon comparable to that existing on this planet; they are talking sheer nonsense; yet such an absurd notion was only typtical of the sort of thing one must expect from these pseudo-scientists.[229]

Another cause for much anxiety on the part of Nahman was the

movement in his day to initiate the Jewish youth into secular studies.[230] "Lord of the Universe," he implores in one of his prayers, "strengthen Thou us to withhold ourselves from paying any attention to non-Jewish writings or languages. For through so doing (i.e. paying attention to the aforementioned) we may mar the holiness of our spirit. And nullify Thou for us all hostile decrees, and particularly the law demanding that we teach our Jewish youth the writing and language of the Gentiles."[231] His great fear was that the "ravaging wolves associated with the new Haskalah" would devour the members of his flock.[232] It was only a lot of foolishness that the leaders of this "wicked sect" wished to teach the impressionable Jewish youngsters. But this new type of instruction was more than merely foolish; it was positively dangerous.[233] The trouble was that although the sort of instruction advocated by the Maskilim might at first seem innocent enough, in the end it was bound to have a disastrous effect on the religious spirit of the people. What possible good could come from teaching Hebrew grammar, let alone foreign languages and literature?[234] The Bible, the Gemara and the Poskim constituted a sufficient program of study for the Jewish youth. Anything else was superfluous.

Simple piety and absolute and unfaltering faith--these were infinitely more to be desired than any pretensions of an intellectual sort. "The supreme form of wisdom," said Nahman, "consists in not being wise at all."[235] Although most people, he declared, might be inclined to minimize the importance of faith in religion, to him it was a factor of tremendous significance. "And the essence of faith is that one be devoid of all smartness and skepticism, but have only faith of an absolutely simple sort--like that of women and the masses of plain and unsophisticated believers" (free transl.).[236]

It is a very normal thing for people to ponder over cosmic questions. It is altogether proper that there be questions about the character and attributes of God. But the attempt of theologians and philosophers, in the opinion of Nahman, to grasp with their intellects that which is necessarily beyond human comprehension--such attempt cannot but end in futility. For man to think about cosmic matters is natural; but let him understand all the while how inadequate such thinking must,by the very nature of things, be. That which is infinite cannot be conceived by that which is finite: if the Deity were comprehensible to the mind of man, He would not be the lofty and exalted Being that He is. And the fact of the impotence of the human mind in these matters, believes Nahman, is a good thing. It means that there is still an ineffable mystery in and about the universe to intrigue us, which mystery, were it to be resolved, would paradoxically enough, have a depressing effect on the spirit.[237]

Let man, then, be content to pursue the path of faith and simplicity, leaving theological wranglings to those misguided souls who are too stupid to recognize their own inevitable limitations. The true Hasid, says Nahman, has a different conception of intelligence than, let us say, the philosopher. The former is as ready as anyone to admit that the first earmark of civilized man is his intelligence. "And whoever does not possess this quality may not be called civilized or considered deserving the name 'man' at all: such a one merely bears the physical appearance of a human being." But the first characteristic of intelligence is "the recognition of God's rulership in the world" coupled with the readiness to perform His will.[238] In a word, the religionist trusts his heart and his emotions to guide him where he feels the intellect is impotent to function with effectiveness. And it is precisely the heart with its spontaneous inclinations,

rather than the mind, in which the Deity takes most delight.[239]

Nahman has a number of statements which throw light upon his conception of faith as the cornerstone of the religious life, and reveal his disesteem of a religion tresselled upon the conscious activities of the intellect. "Cleverness," we are told in one place, "is of no account at all. What is of crucial importance is the heart and the performance of the body and that one continually direct his heart toward the service of God."[240] How important Nahman regards faith may be seen from his assertion that "the Diaspora continues for no other reason than lack of faith."[241] And along the same line: "There are men who try to explain away all miracles on the basis of natural laws. When these infidels, devoid of any belief in miracles, pass away and faith increases in the world, then will the Messiah come. For redemption is contingent on this very thing, namely, faith."[242] Or stated more briefly: " It is necessary to believe in God by way of faith and not by way of proofs."[243] Illuminating, too, are such excerpts as these: "If one have faith, God will pardon all his sins."[244] "Through his faith a man becomes as beloved of God as a wife of her husband."[245] "Faith is as important as charity."[246] "First it is necessary to have faith in God; afterwards one comes to understand Him with the mind."[247] "He who has no faith will not be receptive to moral instruction."[248] "When a man loses his faith, he has good reason to weep."[249]

One need not be worried lest his faith carry him to extremes. It is much more preferable to be a fool believing in everything than a "wise man" who is skeptical of everything. "It is better that I should be called a simpleton all my days than that I be an offender for one hour before God."[250] In his divine service a man need be interested primarily in only one thing, and that is, that he be sincere in all that he does. Sincerity and simplicity--the two go together. And, as for the latter, the

Deity Himself is its supreme and perfect and most inspiring incarnation.[251] That is why He takes such delight in the unaffected efforts of His children to serve Him and perform His will, even though their spiritual strivings are not always consummated as they feel they would have them. It is the aspiration that counts. And God takes more delight, Nahman assures his Hasidim, in the simple service of his creatures on this lowly earth than He does in the service of the exalted beings who inhabit the upper spheres.[252] We may perhaps best sum up the teaching of Rabbi Nahman which we have been trying to expound in these last paragraphs by this untranslatable phrase: "Rahmana liba bai."[253]

A fourth aspect of Rabbi Nahman's teachings worthy of brief exposition is his belief in prayer as the essence of the healing technique, together with his opposition to the practice and practitioners of medicine.[254] Whereas most of the Zaddikim of the time exploited the credulity of the ignorant masses by encouraging them to believe in the effectiveness of amulets, abjurations, incantations, and the magical healing-power of herbs, Nahman set himself squarely against the reliance upon these in times of physical distress. The only concession which he would make to current practice and superstition was his acceptance of the principle of the "ransom". In the pidyon he saw an important, even indispensable, factor in the bringabout of the recovery of the sick. The Zaddik, he claimed, could not begin his work of interceding in the higher spheres on behalf of the indisposed individual until the ransom had been paid.[255] But in the last analysis, it was prayer and nothing more which played the decisive part in the healing process. Necessary as the ransom was, it was really but the preliminary to the actual work of the Zaddik. And what, precisely, did the Zaddik do? He did nothing but offer up his heart in prayer on behalf of

the Hasid who had come to him for aid. What is more, prayer by the individual himself, without the mediation of the Zaddik, could offtimes be effective. "Prayer accompanied by tears will be answered."[256] And again: "The sick man who prays for himself with tears in his eyes--God will surely accept his supplications and grant him healing."[257] It must, however, be remembered that the ideal procedure is to have another intercede for him on High; it is desirable even that the Zaddik himself have someone else pray for him in situations of emergency.[258] How confident can one be that prayers will prove of real help? He has reason to believe in the possibility that a change in the normal course of affairs can be effected; he has no reason to assume that natural laws will be suspended or amended for his sake.[259]

The pious Hasid suffering from some illness, counsels Nahman, should go, ransom in hand, to some authentic Zaddik to pray for him. If for some reason he fails to do so, he may still implore the Deity on his own behalf. Either or both of these procedures is legitimate. But in no case should he have recourse to doctors. Suppose the latter do give the patient a prescription in the form of some herb remedy. Does not every blade of grass derive its unique quality from God? Well, then, why waste time by employing such secondary sources of healing? One should appeal directly to the Great Healer Himself.[260] An effective prayer is worth more than all the herbs and doctors in the world.

But Nahman is convinced not only that the medical practitioner can be of no positive help; he is equally certain that he can be responsible for aggravating one's condition. The best specialists among them are nothing short of murderers. The prudent man will, therefore, keep out of their way. He will have absolute trust in the efficacy of spiritual as opposed

to physical types of therapy.[261] With a grim humor, Nahman characterizes doctors as the instruments of the Destroying Angel. Since the task of slaying was too difficult to carry out by himself, the Malak Hamavet decided to associate the medical profession with him in his nefarious work so that it might be performed with a maximum of efficiency.[262]

The emphasis of Nahman is at all times on the psychological, the spiritual aspects of religion and life. He seems to have appreciated to the full the tremendous value of rising above the physical realities of existence. Our discussion above has indicated Nahman's pronounced leanings in the direction, let us say, of mysticism. We come now to a somewhat more adequate manifestation of this tendency, as disclosed by his teachings in connection with the necessity of escaping the blackness and sordidness of reality by the conscious striving to cultivate a happy and joyous spirit that will remain with one under any and all circumstances.[263] Nahman starts with the assumption that the world is a dissapointing place and life one long frustration. The foundation of human existence on this earth is pain and sorrow. What then is to be done? One must somehow escape the grimness of reality. The way out is the way of the spirit. Even though one can often do nothing about changing his external and physical environment, he may nevertheless cultivate an inner life which will prove his salvation.[264]

Nahman recommends the life of renunciation and resignation as the way to inner peace and harmony--renunciation of inordinate desires after material things and worldly success; resignation to whatever one's lot in this life happens to be. The surest way of winning for oneself a satisfying life in the here-and-now as well as a promising future in the world-to-be is the absorption of one's self in the torah, by devoting a maximum of

time and energy to study, prayer and pious meditation. The only thing in this world really worth having is inner spiritual harmony; and this can come only as the prize of the sincere religious life.[265] But we hasten to add that the religious, the spiritual life was not, according to the conception of Nahman, a dull or depressing or melancholy affair. The escape he advocates is an exceedingly pleasant procedure. This is because the chief distinguishing characteristic of the religious life which Nahman favors is its happy and joyous character. Religion, in his eyes, is never a burden, always a delight; and it is what one makes it. To serve God when one is melancholy is actually a transgression.[266] And because of this fact and the further consideration that melancholy can lead to all sorts of harm and mischief, one must use any means that occurs to him which will serve to put him in the proper mood of merriment: even doing things that will impress others as silly and clownish may be resorted to if considered necessary.[267]

The advantages and value of a joyous spirit, as well as the baneful results of the reverse feeling, may be seen from this series of citations: "Through joy the heart is opened up."[268] "He who is habitually cheerful will prosper."[269] "God leaves a man who is melancholy."[270] "One is prevented from accomplishing anything so long as he is a victim of depression."[271] "It is supremely meritorious that one should be continually joyous. And it is necessary that one struggle at all times and with all his powers in order to ward off sadness and melancholy and be ever cheerful. And this is a cure for all ills, since sickness comes only from being downcast and depressed."[272] Obsession with sex, further, will be obviated by the cultivation of joyousness and the deliberate striving to keep oneself from becoming gloomy.[273]

A few more quotations, and we will then have a rather satisfactory notion of Nahman's unique point of view in this connection.

"Proximity to the Zaddik," he suggests, "will keep one in good spirits."[274] And in fact if one happens to be away from the Zaddik and becomes depressed, then a mere visit to the Zaddik and the looking upon him will change his mood.[275] "When one gives another good advice, he thereby becomes worthy of the blessing of joyfulness."[276] The same is true of the giving of charity.[277] "The man who is chronically depressed should give gifts regularly to the Zaddik."[278] "Through leaping and dancing and other activities of the body the feeling of joyfulness is stimulated."[279] "The joyous feeling of ecstasy in prayerful devotion comes after one has purified his body of all profanities."[280] And so on. We trust that the point of view of Nahman as regards the whole matter of escape from the disappointing earthly realities, together with his suggestions as to the ideal manner of such escape, is by this time fairly clear. Let us pass on, then, to the sixth point in his teachings which stands out in fairly bold relief.

We have seen above the great stress laid upon faith by Rabbi Nahman. We have seen, too, what in his opinion were the characteristics of faith in the case of the pious Hasid. Religion, it would seem, roots in faith. And faith--its roots are in the power of the imagination. This observation of Nahman's strikes us as quite original, although Zeitlin indicates its cabalistic origins.[281] The imagination, according to Nahman, is the creative, the synthesizing, the organizing faculty of the mind which weaves the various physical and spiritual realities of the universe into an inspiring pattern. And this imaginative power, as distinct from the intellectual faculty, was possessed by the prophets in its most exalted form, though present to some degree in the most simple individual.[282] These religious geniuses had the gift, in other words, of beholding visions of the Deity and of His cosmic plan not vouchsafed to the average man. And it is this gift, primarily, which explain their uniqueness.

The barrier between the Creator and His created is for the latter most difficult to surmount. The vivid awareness of the Deity, as well as the insight into the nature of His functioning in the cosmos, may not be had in equal measure by all. But the road to the acquisition of this deep feeling of the reality of an Organizing Spirit in the world does not in any case lie in the activity of the intellect, in the approach of the rationalist or the philosopher.[283] The first desideratum before one may hope to acquire this wonderful faculty of the imagination is the living of the pure and holy life. Then, provided one's yearnings after divine visions are sufficiently intense, may he enjoy the ecstasy of actually beholding, as it were, the very Being of the Holy One. A deep sense of the immediacy and reality of God is as precious a spiritual boon as one can wish for. And yet it may be won provided only that one understands the requisite technique; utilize every possible means of strengthening the power of the imagination, and the acquisition of faith, in its noblest manifestations, will be the inevitable reward.[284]

Perhaps the most stimulating of all of Nahman's teachings, however, is that in which he elaborates the conception that the world is in steady process of improvement. Surprisingly modern is his notion of the nature of the Messianic era, as indicated in connection with his conviction that mankind is progressively evoluting upward toward a state of spiritual perfection. What is the Messianic Millenium? Nothing but a time when the world will have been completely won over to the ideals of love and peace and righteousness.[285] To believe that by the coming of the Messiah is meant the taking place of stupendous external events is absurd. The ushering in of the Golden Age will be marked simply and solely by the culmination of a great inner and spiritual revolution.[286]

Nahman is conscious of the arguments of those who are pessimistic of the future. Have there not been efforts of an idealistic character now for thousands of years? Is it not true that hundreds of years have gone by since the preachings of the prophets, and still the world gives no evidence of having taken their profound suggestions seriously to heart? Men go their evil ways the same as they always have. What reason, then, is there for believing that the world is headed in the direction of Utopia instead of disaster? To such contentions Nahman's answer is that although on the surface the world seems as blind to the great principles of justice and righteousness, nevertheless, in point of fact, their spiritual vision is becoming ever more penetrating, ever clearer. He illustrates his optimistic conviction with a cabalistic figure the import of which is that noble yearnings and high aspirations and exalted ideals are filling the hearts and consciousness of men to an increasing extent with the passing of the years, until ultimately all men will concretize their worship of the one true God by living lives of true moral grandeur.[287] The Messianic Era will be distinguished from the present chiefly by the fact that all men will then be ashamed of their wrongful practices.[288]

Nahman uses a homely figure to clarify his conception. The Holy One conducts Himself differently, he says, from His flesh-and-blood human creatures. The latter makes a garment for himself. The longer he wears it and the older it becomes, the less value it has in his eyes. It becomes torn and decrepit with age, until finally it is discarded. But the Holy One created a word for himself which at the beginning was exceedingly imperfect. And gradually it grew better and better. Instead of having a harmful effect upon it, time definitely improved it. Especially was it regenerated with the appearance of the patriarchs, Moses, the

prophets and all the succeeding Zaddikim of later times. Its complete regeneration, moreover, will be effected with the advent of the Messiah.[289]

The amusing feature of Nahman's Messianic conception is his representation of the difference in moral status that will obtain even during the Messianic Era between Jews and non-Jews: the former, he says, will have attained absolute spiritual perfection, while the latter will only have reached to the level of the pious and upright Jews of the present.[290] We must, nevertheless, be impressed by the generally high character of this teaching of Nahman's. That he could have risen to such ethical heights in his thinking, considering the nature of his environment and the character of his associates in the Hasidic movement, is to be marveled at. For it cannot be denied that he departed in his interpretation of the Messianic doctrine very radically from the conventional one of the period.[291]

We now come to the conclusion of our presentation of the teachings of Rabbi Nahman. And we shall draw the present discussion to a close by offering a series of miscellaneous statements, either in direct quotation or paraphrase, without comment, our purpose being to further indicate the mental and moral temper of the man. "One should study only with those who are of a reverent frame of mind"[292] ..."He who fails to review what he has studied is like him who sows but does not go to the trouble of reaping"[293] ...A husband should honor and revere his wife because of all the pain which she must suffer in giving birth to children, and the trouble and anguish she must experience in raising them[294] ...To cohabit with one's wife in the midst of a quarrel will result in children who will commit self-destruction[295] ..."Know that when there is peace in a community it is because there is no aggressive thinker in that community. Where there is such a one present the consequence is dissension, since some men will be found who will

be found to agree with him and support him and others who will take sides against him"[296] ..."Curses are of no effect against the man who conduct his business affairs with a religious spirit"[297] ..."The man who has to borrow from others is comparable to a dumb animal"[298] ..."The prominent business man of a community is that community's shining-light"[299] ..."No man deserves the name who fails to perform acts of charity and benevolence"[300] ...Whoever fails to satisfy the sexual desires of his wife so that she becomes melancholy is deserving of the death-penalty"[301] ..."The man who commits adultery will end up by becoming a murderer"[302] ..."Whoever gives to the poor guarantees his own prosperity"[303] ..."When a man deprives himself for the sake of study of Torah, (he has reason to expect that) God will take care of his every physical want in the world-to-come"[304] ...Many false Zaddikim are under the illusion that their magical practices get results when the real credit should actually be given to some other influence. A woman, for example, comes to this quack for help because she is unable to bear children. Later she gives birth. The pseudo-Zaddik takes credit for the accomplishment. An analogy (says Nahman) will clarify the matter. The episode is comparable to the case of a man who, while walking along the road, encounters a wolf. All that he has with him to protect himself is a stick; so he raises it as though about to shoot. In the meantime along comes a crack shot with a real gun and he disposes of the beast in short order. But the man with the stick deceives himself by thinking he has been responsible for the killing. In the same way, many false Zaddikim take credit for accomplishments which are in point of fact the work of authentic Zaddikim who utilize the potent medium of prayer.[305] ...A man is foolish to work for fame and a place in the spotlight. What happens when one has reached this goal? His every move is watched and criticized; he becomes self-conscious about all that he

does. Instead of being concerned about whether his behavior is acceptable to God, he finds himself in the predicament of having to worry even whether his manner of recital of grace pleases his table-companions [306] ..."When people take issue with a man, he is thereby privileged to come into ever closer union with God. For when men harass him and he takes refuge on each occasion with the Deity, he is thus brought hearer and nearer to Him." [307]

NOTES

1. "Hayye", part I, p. 49, sec. 1; cf. Dub., p. 291.
2. "Shivhe", sec. 1.
3. Ibid., sec. 138.
4. Ibid., sec. 2.
5. Ibid. sec. 4.
6. Ibid., sec. 7.
7. Ibid., sec. 2.
8. Ibid., sec. 13.
9. Ibid. sec. 19.
10. Ibid., sec. 10.
11. "Hayye", part I, p. 50, sec. 2.
12. Ibid., part 2, p. 5, sec. 1.
13. cf. Hor., p. XI.
14. Hor., p. XI.
15. "Sefer ha-Middot", p. 13, no. 21.
16. "Hayye", part I, p. 50, sec. 2; p. 51, sec. 5; p. 52, sec. 9; cf. Zeit., p. 44.
17. "Hayye", part I, p. 52, sec. 9.
18. cf. Hor., p. XII.
19. Quoted by Hor., loc. cit.
20. Same.
21. Cf. Hor., p. XIII
22. Cf. Hayye, part I, p. 52, sec. 9.
23. Cf. Dub., p. 292.
24. Cf. Dub., loc. cit.
25. "Nesiya", p. 46.

26. Ibid., pp. 48ff.

27. Ibid., p. 74.

28. Ibid., p. 83.

29. Ibid., pp. 73, 87f.

30. Ibid., p. 95.

31. Ibid., p. 97.

32. Ibid., p. 123.

33. Cf. Dub., p. 294.

34. "Nesiya", p. 64f.

35. Ibid., pp. 32ff.

36. Ibid., p. 126.

37. Ibid., p. 31.

38. "Hayye", part 2, p. 23, sec. 1.

39. Cf. Hor., p. XVI.

40. Same.

41. "Hayye", part 2, p. 10, sec. 18.

42. Cf. Hor., loc. cit.

43. "Hayye", part I, p. 51, sec. f; cf. Hor., p. XVI f.

44. Cf. Hor., p. XVI.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., p. 17.

47. Cf. Dub., pp. 295f.

48. Ibid., p. 296.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. "Hayye", part I, p. 55, sec. 12.

54. Cf. Hor., p. XVIII.

55. Cf. Dub., p. 297.

56. Cf. Hor., pp. XIXf.

57. Ibid., p. XX.

58. "Hayye", pp. 56ff.; cf. Hor., loc. cit.

59. Ibid.; cf. Dub., p. 299.

60. Cf. Dub., loc. cit.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., p. 299f.

63. Cf. Hor., p. XXI.

64. Cf. Dub., p. 304.

65. Ibid.

66. Cf. "Hayye", part 2, p. 18, sec. 66.

56. Cf. Hor., p. XXI.

67. Cf. Hor., p. XXI.

68. "Shivhe", p. 60a, sec. 162.

69. "Hayye", part I, pp. 68ff.

70. Cf. Dub., pp. 304f.

71. Ibid.

72. Cf. Dub., p. 305.

73. Ibid.

74. "Hayye", part I, pp. 68f.

75. Cf. Dub., loc. cit.

76. Ibid.

77. "Hayye", loc. cit.

78. Cf. Dub., loc. cit.

79. Ibid.

80. "Hayye", part I, p. 68, sec. 5.

81. Cf. Dub., p. 306.

82. Ibid.

83. Cf. Hor., pp. XXI ff., Buber, pp. 40ff.

84. "Hayye", part I, p. 76, sec. 1.

85. Cf. Hor., p. XXXII.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid., p. XXXIII.

89. Ibid.

90. "Hayye", part I, p. 89, sec. 41.

91. Ibid., p. 49, sec. 1.

92. Cf. Hor., pp. 33f.

93. Ibid., p. 34.

94. "Sefer ha-Middot", under "Emunah", no. 24.

95. "Shivhe", p. 78b, sec. 272.

96. Ibid., p. 74b, sec, 247.

97. Ibid., p. 60a, sec. 162; cf. Zeit., pp. 43f.

98. Cf. Dub., pp. 291f.

99. "Shivhe", p. 68a, sec. 209.

100. Ibid., p. 48b, sec. 117.

101. "Likkute", part 2, p. 26; cf. Hor., p. X.

102. Cf. Zeit., pp. 34ff.

103. Ibid., p. 35.

104. Ibid.

105. "Hayye", part 2, p. 67, sec. 108.

106. Zeit., p. 20.

107. Ibid., p. 21.

108. "Shivhe", p. 55a, sec. 144.

109. Zeit., p. 18.

110. Ibid., p. 19.

111. Cf. Dub., p. 291.

112. Cf. "Shivhe", p. 60a, sec. 163.

113. Ibid., p. 36a, sec. 66.

114. "Likkute Tefilot", part 2, p. 42b, sec. 14.

115. Ibid., part I, p. 6a, sec. 5.

116. "Shivhe", p. 61b, sec. 172.

117. Ibid., p.72a, sec. 232.

118. J. Becker, "Rabbi Nahman of Braxlav--A Psychoanalytic Study" (Jerusalem 1928--in Hebrew).

119. "Shivhe", p. 74a, sec. 245.

120. Becker, pp. 13ff.

121. "Shivhe", p. 6a, sec. 24.

122. Ibid., p. 32b, sec. 51.

123. Ibid., p. 72a, sec. 282.

124. "Kizur Likkute", part 2, sec. 3.

125. Cf. Zeit., p. 40.

126. "Shivhe", p. 60b, sec. 166.

127. "Sefer ha-Middot", under "Zaddik", no. 26.

128. Ibid., no. 120.

129. Ibid., no. 123.

130. Cf. Zeit., p. 37.

131. Cf. Dub., p. 303.

132. Cf. Becker, p. 17.

133. "Shivhe", p. 67b, sec. 205.

134. Cf. Niger, art., "Rabbi Nahman Braslaver" (The Day, 1930(?)).

135. Ibid.

136. "Shivhe, p. 75b, sec. 255.

137. Kizzur Likkute", part 2, no. 56.

138. "Sefer Ha-Middot" p. 43b, no. 24.

139. Ibid., p. 89a, no. 5.

140. "Shivhe", p. 48a, sec. 114.

141. "Hayye", part 2, p. 74, sec. 149.

142. Cf. Becker, p. 11.

143. Cf. Zeit., p. 6.

144. "Shivhe", p. 51a, sec. 129.

145. "Kizur Likkute", part 2, no. 123.

146. Ibid., part 2, no. 139.

147. Ibid., no. 140.

148. Cf. "Nesiya", pp. 7ff.

149. Ibid., p. 88.

150. "Shivhe", p. 34a, sec. 57.

151. Cf. Becker, p. 9.

152. Ibid., p. 11.

153. Ibid., pp. 11f.

154. "Shivhe", p. 50a, sec. 124.

155. Ibid.

156. Ibid.

157. Cf. Zeit., p. 26.

158. Ibid., pp. 26f.

159. Ibid., p. 27.

160. Ibid., p. 28.

161. "Nesiya", pp. 93f.

162. Cf. Niger, loc. cit.

163. Cf. "Shivhe", p. 6b, sec. 26.

164. Cf. "Nesiya", pp. 65f.

165. Ibid., p. 75.

166. Cf. Zeit., p. 38.

167. "Shivhe", p. 81b, sec. 305.

168. Ibid., sec. 306.

169. Cf. "Nesiya", pp. 27f.

170. Ibid., pp. 47f.

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172. Cf. "Hayye", pp. 30ff.

173. Cf. "Shivhe", p. 72b, sec. 234.

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175. Ibid., p. 74a, sec. 242.

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178. Ibid., p. 73b, sec. 241.

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180. Ibid., p. 79a, sec. 282.

181. Ibid., p. 73a, sec. 235.

182. Cf. Zeit., p. 28.

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184. Ibid.

185. Ibid., p. 30.

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189. "Kizur Likkute", Part I, sec. 591.

190. cf. Dub., p. 289.

191. cf. Zeit., p. 37.

192. cf. Dub. p. 299.

193. Sefer Hamidot, under Zaddik, no. 140.

194. Ibid., no. 147.

195. Ibid., no. 151.

196. Ibid., no. 167.

197. Ibid., no. 201.

198. Ibid., no. 209.

199. Ibid., no. 178.

200. Ibid., no. 110.

201. Ibid., no. 81.

202. Ibid., no. 83.

203. Ibid., no. 138.

204. Ibid., no. 61.

205. Ibid., no. 21; cf. no. 39.

206. Ibid., no. 7.

207. Ibid., no. 18.

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209. Ibid., no. 208; cf. no. 50.

210. cf. Ibid., no. 101.

211. cf. Ibid., no. 127.

212. Ibid., no. 197.

213. Ibid., no. 153.

214. Ibid., under Merivah. no. 15.

215. Cf. Ibid., under Zaddik, no. 69.

216. "Shivhe", p. 65b, sec. 191.

217. "Likkute", Part I, p. 11a, no. 8.

218. "Hayye", Part 2, p. 64, sec. 97.

219. cf. Dub., pp. 300f.

220. cf. "Hayye", Part 2, p. 36, sec. 1.

221. cf. "Kizur Likkute", Part I, sec. 14; "Shivhe", p. 70a, sec. 219; 22a, sec. 5.

222. cf. "Kizur Likkute", loc. cit.

223. Cf. "Likkute", Part 2, p. 42a, no. 14; Part I, p. 179b, no. 104; Part 2, p. 13a, no. 4.

224. cf. "Shivhe", p. 70b, sec. 222.

225. "Likkute", Part 2, p. 42a, no. 14.

226. cf. Dub., p. 301.

227. "Hayye", Part 2, p. 73, sec. 3.

228. "Kizur Likkute", Part 2, sec. 42.

229. "Shivhe", p. 68b, sec. 217.

230. cf. Dub., p. 302.

231. Ibid.

232. Ibid.

233. cf. "Likkute", Part I, p. 164a, no. 90.

234. Ibid., Part 2, p. 13a, no. 4.

235. "Kizur Likkute", Part 2, sec. 131.

236. "Shivhe", p. 28a, sec. 33.

237. cf. Zeit., pp. 11ff.

238. cf. "Kizur Likkute", Part 2, sec. 76.

239. cf. Dub., loc. cit.

240. "Hayye", Part 2, p. 66, sec. 106.

241. "Kizur Likkute", Part I, sec. 47.

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244. Ibid., no. 33.

245. Ibid., no. 6.

246. Ibid., no. 18.

247. Ibid., no. 20.

248. Ibid., no. 36.

249. Ibid., no. 23.

250. "Shivhe", p. 47a, sec. 103.

251. Ibid., p. 46a, sec. 101.

252. "Kizur Likkute", Part 2, sec. 75.

253. Ibid., sec. 131.

254. cf. Dub., pp. 299f.

255. "Kizur Likkute", Part 2, sec. 115.

256. "Sefer Hamidot", under Tefilah, no. 51.

257. Ibid., no. 64.

258. Ibid., no. 11.

259. Ibid., nos. 19, 28.

260. cf. Dub. p. 300.

261. cf. "Likkute", Part 2, p. 10a, no. 3; "Shivhe", p. 31a, sec. 50.

262. "Shivhe", p. 32a, sec. 50.

263. cf. Zeit., pp. 30ff.

264. Ibid.

265. cf. "Shivhe", pp. 82f., sec. 306.

265. cf. "Shivhe", pp. 82f., sec. 306.

266. "Kizur Likkute", Part 2, sec. 123.

267. Ibid., sec. 144.

268. "Sefer Hamidot", under Simhah, no. 2.

269. Ibid., under Hazlahah, no. 1; cf. under Azevut, no. 20.

270. Ibid., under Azevut, no. 14.

271. Ibid., no. 17.

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273. "Shivhe", p. 51a, sec. 129.

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293. Ibid., no. 50.

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300. "Kizur Likkute", Part 2, sec. 29.

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303. Ibid., under Mamon, no. 23.

304. Ibid., under Limud, no. 57.

305. cf. Dub., pp. 294f.

306. cf. "Shivhe", p. 30b, sec. 47.

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