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## DIGEST

It has been the purpose of this dissertation to analyze the inner spirit of early Hasidism, particularly as evidenced in the life and teachings of the founder of the movement, Israel ben Eliezar Baal Shem Tov. The accomplishment of this task necessitated the following plan of study: First, an examination of the historical forces which brought forth the movement. Second, a consideration of the nature of mysticism, both general and Jewish, of which Hasidism constitutes a unique expression. Third, the collation of those materials which appear to be authentic teachings of the Besht, and the selection from that body of literature of those items most indicative of his conception of inwardness, together with an analysis of the various elements which comprise it. Fourth, an attempt on the basis of the foregoing, to determine the essential character of early Hasidism, and to relate it to the more inclusive fields of Jewish and non-Jewish mysticism.

In pursuing the above outlined course of study, the author reached a number of conclusions, the more important of which are indicated here. Mysticism cannot be properly defined either in terms of its doctrines and ideas or in terms of any of its highly developed forms e.g. ecstasy or trance. Mysticism is more accurately a temper, an attitude. It is the disposition to view reality in terms of the canons of inwardness, of inner experience. It is concerned, therefore, with the intensification of the feelings and emotions,

and holds these feelings and emotions to be legitimate indicators of the nature of ultimate reality. Put another way, mysticism is the attempt to feel religion, to capture in experience its spirit, and hence its truths, its reality.

Furthermore, it was discovered that the centrality of inwardness among the interests of early Hasidism compelled the conclusion that Hasidism, to begin with at least, was an expression of religious mysticism in its most elemental or fundamental form and was not so much concerned with the "popularization of Kabbalistic doctrine," as it was with the development of the "mystic way". Hasidism was first and foremost an attempt to live religion, not to speculate about it.

Finally, underlying this entire study is the implication that whatever its weaknesses--and they were many--Hasidism can yet teach us the importance of developing the inner spirit of Judaism if we would make ours a living religion capable of influencing for good the lives of men.

RELIGIOUS INWARDNESS IN EARLY HASIDISM

by

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## INTRODUCTION

In that ever unfolding drama which we call by the name of history there is no more fascinating chapter than that which relates man's tireless struggle to comprehend the "true" nature of the universe in which he lives. Certainly there is no chapter more characteristic of that in the cosmos which is human than the one which records man's effort to "know" the nature of "ultimate reality". Omar Khayyam's famous judgment notwithstanding,

"There was a door to which I found no key:

There was a veil past which I might not see:"

the unfolding of human thought so largely concerned with the discovery of the "key", with the lifting of the "veil" is, in a very real sense, itself a refutation of that view which would deny to man success in his quest. And there have been those who believed that they had "found" the key, had lifted the veil. It is with such a man that this study concerns itself, namely Israel ben Eliezar, the founder of the modern Hasidic movement.

A word of caution, however, is necessary to those who would understand the "key" which the Baal Shem Tov fashioned and utilized. No-where is intellectual open-mindedness more essential than in the approach to that body of material which is subsumed under the name of Mysticism. Heirs as we are to the heritage of modern

philosophical logicism and scientific empiricism, the tendency to reject or to ignore those experiences of men which cannot be confined within the stocks of formal logic or subjected to the unnatural scrutiny of scientific experimentation has become almost a part of our intellectual makeup. That student who is unable or unwilling to free himself from these accidents of birth in the intellectual atmosphere of the twentieth century need read no further, for there is nothing here which will fall within the sorely limited boundaries of "knowledge" as so defined.

This is not to deny that the logical or the scientific approach to an understanding of man is a valid and fruitful one. We hold quite the contrary to be true. What is intended, however, is merely to make plain the distinctive character of the materials we shall be handling. For we shall be dealing here with a dimension of man's life outside the realm of reason, though not unrelated to it. What we shall be studying is not a body of facts totally different from that which constitutes the subject matter of philosophy or of the sciences, but a way of organizing and evaluating those facts wholly different from that utilized in either of these spheres. William James expressed this truth when he wrote of mystical states, "They are excitements like the emotions of love or ambition, gifts to our spirit by means of which facts already objectively before us fall

into a new expressiveness and make a new connection with our active life."<sup>1</sup> The life of the Besht can have meaning for us, then, only when we examine it without preconceptions in the light of that "new connectedness" which made it unique.

A further limitation on the scope of the present study must be indicated. It is unavoidable in the course of a study such as this that many questions and problems will arise closely connected to our subject. The entire subject of mysticism is, to say the least, a vast one. Of necessity we must assume a minimal familiarity with its literature, since it will be impossible to discuss in any detail many historical, philosophical, and psychological problems which, though important, are not immediately related to our examination of the experience of religious inwardness in the life of the Besht. Unquestionably much work remains to be done before our understanding of mystical experience, particularly in its psychological aspects, will be adequate.

## I

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

## PART 1

No attempt, however well meaning, to determine the role of "religious inwardness", of mystical experience, in early Hasidism, particularly in the life of the Besht, will be of value which does not relate the life and teachings of the early leaders of the movement to the historical forces at work in the period in which they lived. No movement, however unique, however different it may appear to be from anything which preceded it, is ever cut from whole cloth. While it is true that "men make history", and the truth of this proposition can hardly be exaggerated with regard to religious movements and men of religious genius, it is equally true that "history makes men". Hasidism, of course, was no exception. The problem, therefore, is to extract from the welter of factors--economic, social, political and religious--operative in Southeastern Poland during the 17th and early 18th centuries, those forces the confluence of which can adequately account for the development of a "new" movement in Jewish life.

Jewish historians and scholars have by no means been in agreement in their attempts to identify the factors we seek. It would appear that there are at least two and possibly three major points of view. One of these was expressed by Solomon Schechter when

he wrote: "It was the protest of an emotional but uneducated people against a one-sided expression of Judaism, presented to them in cold and over-subtle disquisitions which not only did they not understand, but which shut out the play of the feelings and the affections, so that religion was made almost impossible to them."<sup>1</sup> Almost immediately we are confronted with an opposing view put forth by Solomon Zeitlin who, referring to this very statement, argued: "Solomon Schechter in his monograph on Chassidism points out that it was a protest against the quibblings and the hair-splittings of the rabbis in their study of Talmud. This doctrine could be accepted if we found that Chassidism or the leaders substituted some other method of studying the Talmud for the one against which they complained, but so far as we know they tried to minimize the importance of any study, particularly that of the Talmud, which shows that their protest was directed not against the method, but against the study itself. It seems to me," he concludes, "that the Chassidic movement was a revolt of the masses against the intellectual aristocracy."<sup>2</sup>

Zeitlin's characteristic penchant for controversy notwithstanding, it would seem that these two points of view are not as disparate as he would have them appear and, in any case, the difference between them is not what he imagines it to be. What Schechter is maintaining is that Hasidism was a reaction to what was primarily



an intellectual expression of Judaism, primarily a Halachic interpretation of Jewish life. Pilpul was only a symbol of the excesses to which such an attitude led. That the importance of study was minimized cannot be denied, but that Hasidism was a revolt against study as such, or even against study of the Talmud, is simply not borne out either by the teachings or the lives of the Zaddikim. It is important that this all too current misconception of modern Jewish scholarship with regard to the attitudes of Hasidism towards learning be clarified. Talmud Torah was important, but no longer central in the hierarchy of Jewish values. In this connection we have only to point out that almost from its very inception not only were there large numbers of scholars within the Hasidic movement--which may help to account for the later development of Habad Hasidism--but there are among the teachings of the Besht himself many forthright statements extolling the importance of study.

A third view, which need not exclude either of the first two, is that which looks upon Hasidism both as a reaction to a prior condition and as a continuation of an earlier development. It was a reaction, according to Dinaburg, to "the failure of the Sabbatian Movement and the decline of Jewish Self-Government in Poland"<sup>3</sup>; while its positive aspect is brought out by Scholem who holds that "Hasidism represents an attempt to preserve those elements of Kabbalism which were capable of evoking a

popular response, but stripped of their Messianic flavor to which they owed their chief success during the preceding period. That seems to me," he writes, "the main point. Hasidism tried to eliminate the element of Messianism--with its dazzling but highly dangerous amalgamation of mysticism and the apocalyptic mood--without renouncing the popular appeal of later Kabbalism."<sup>4</sup>

Only one more element is required and our understanding of the dynamic which gave rise to the Hasidic movement will be complete. To clarify this final factor it is useful to note a remark by Zeitlin. "To say," he writes, "that the Baal-Shem was the founder of Chassidism, ...is not in accord with the real conception of history insofar as no man, even a genius, can bring about a popular movement which is not deeply rooted in the people itself."<sup>5</sup> Without arguing the role of the man of genius in determining the direction which the political and economic events of history will follow in any given period of time, it cannot be denied that in the realm of religion, the realm of the spirit, the importance of the "inspired" individual must not be minimized. Certainly it is true that before an idea, religious or otherwise, can meet with any widespread acceptance on the part of the people there must exist in the people a readiness, a receptivity, a disposition towards the idea in question--perhaps only a latent yearning for that which will reorder, redirect, or revitalize their lives. This is exactly the



point at which the role of the man of genius becomes decisive. For it is he and he alone who determines which of the many possible restructuralizations of life shall be pursued. And the content and validity of his ideas aside, the appeal of the powerful or the attractive personality is itself a phenomenon to be reckoned with. While it is perfectly possible that without the whole series of causes and effects which brought the Jews of eastern Poland to the level of development they had reached by the year 1700 the Besht might never have matured or appealed, it is equally true that without the Besht, Hasidism, as we know it, could never have developed. So intimately is he bound up with the movement that we might well say of him that which has been said of another, if he had not existed they would have had to create him.

Modifying his earlier statement, Scholem maintains that "Classical Hasidism was not the product of some theory or other, not even of a Kabbalistic doctrine, but of direct, spontaneous religious experience."<sup>6</sup> There can be little doubt that it was in the life of the Besht that this "religious experience" achieved the unique and distinctive character which marked Hasidism off from any other movement in Jewish life before or since. It must, however, be emphasized that the Besht's originality did not lie in the realm of ideas. As has been pointed out, "for every part of it (his teachings) parallels and anal-

ogies could be found in the older Hebrew literature."<sup>7</sup>  
 "The new element must therefore not be sought on the theoretical and literary plane, but rather in the experience of an inner revival, in the spontaneity of feeling generated in sensitive minds by the encounter with the living incarnations of mysticism,"<sup>8</sup> The exact character of this feeling will be made clear in another chapter.

For the Jews of Poland the century preceding the appearance of the Besht was a period of strife and ferment, a period during which the incidence of anti-Jewish legislation and persecution increased with each succeeding decline in the economic stability of the country and with each successive weakening in the authority of the Polish monarchy.

The 17th century in Poland witnessed much the same struggle between the rising merchant and trading classes of the cities and towns and the feudal nobility and the monarchy as that which was taking place throughout Europe. In this struggle the Jews could not but suffer. As the municipalities grew in strength and independence, they were more and more able to restrict the economic and social privileges which the Jews had enjoyed during the preceding century, in spite of the fact that the Polish monarchs until 1648, in theory, at least, guaranteed the rights of the Jews. While the situation differed in its details from one community to another, the tendency was generally

in the direction of the increasing limitation of the rights of Jews to operate freely in the Polish economy. Jews were barred from those trades pursued by the Christian Guilds, Jewish shops were confined to the limits of the Ghetto, Jewish merchants were not permitted to engage in export trade, restrictions were placed on the percentage of profit allowed Jewish merchants.

While in large measure these restrictions were dictated by the contracting nature of the Polish economy during the 17th century, there can be little doubt that these developments were hastened by the religious strife which was plaguing Poland at this time. In this struggle between Roman Catholicism and Greek-Orthodoxy, the Jew suffered at the hands of both groups. This conflict was particularly marked in the eastern or Russian provinces of the land where the Greek-Orthodox Russian peasants worked the estates of the Roman Catholic Polish nobility. In these Ukranian areas there was yet a third complication contributing to the general unrest; namely, the dissatisfaction of the peasants with the severity of their Polish masters. Once again the Jew found himself the whipping post of both disputing parties. This was partly the result of the fact that Jews frequently acted in the capacity of supervisor of these estates for the absentee Polish landlords and were hence viewed by the peasant as the source of all his difficulties.

In addition to the peasant groups who populated the

Ukrainian provinces, there existed in the region of the steppes a smaller but even more important group, the Cossacks. Professional soldiers, from time to time in the employ of the Polish government, they shared with the peasant group the religiously and politically motivated hatred of the Polish over-lords, and it was from their group that the leadership for active rebellion was recruited.

Under the banner of one Bogdan Chmelnitzki, a Cossack chief, the Cossacks, in alliance with the Russian peasant class and the Crimean Tartars, began their invasion of Polish lands in 1648. The Polish troops sent to meet them were easily defeated and there then commenced a series of massacres of a most wanton and brutal character. The Jewish population of the Ukraine, of the Polish provinces of Podolia and Volhynia, was almost completely destroyed, while those who managed to remain alive were reduced to a condition of abject poverty.

During the next ten years, it has been estimated, upwards of half a million Jews were slain. For the Chmelnitzki rebellion, concluded in 1649, was only the opening round of a decade of Polish-Russian, Polish-Swedish wars which brought Poland to the brink of ruin. So complete was the devastation wrought by these wars that it took twenty years before Poland was able to regain even a reflection of its former glory, and by the



end of the century this too faded and Poland was ruled by a number of Saxon kings.

It was only natural that in the wake of this violent upheaval which occurred in Polish life during the 17th century, important changes should take place in Jewish life as well. Of particular importance was the transformation which came about in the character of the Kehillot. During the period of reorganization and reconstruction a new group asserted its authority in Jewish communal life. This group was composed of the Takkifim, persons associated with the courts of the local nobles and authorities, who leased land from, and managed it for, the nobility. "This group", writes Dinaburg, "seized power in the Kehillot, abolished the distribution of functions which had been customary in the Kehillot between the heads and the parnassim (administrative), the rabbis (judicial) and assessors (fiscal). They concentrated all these functions in the hands of their group and its associates."<sup>9</sup> "In this way the Kehillot became part of the administrative apparatus of the authorities for the exploitation of the Jews by the nobility,...instead of being organs of Jewish autonomy. This led to the emergence of a 'rebellious' spirit toward the Kehillot, and their loss of moral authority."<sup>10</sup>

The growing corruption in the Kehillot and the consequent perversion of their function in the life of the Polish-Jewish communities contributed importantly to the demise in 1764 of the Vaad Arba Aratsos, that monument

to Jewish semi-autonomy which had functioned so effectively during the greater portion of the two preceding centuries. Long before its disbandment, however, the deterioration of the economic and social position of Polish Jewry restricted the areas of its influence and usefulness. For in the wake of the Chmelnitzki massacre and the catastrophic events which followed after it, the widespread Jewish unrest gave rise generally to a re-awakened interest in Messianic speculation and specifically made possible the blossoming forth of the Sabbatian heresy, a Messianic movement which first openly and then in secret, challenged the Rabbinic basis of religious authority. As Scholem indicates, "Sabbatianism represents the first serious revolt in Judaism since the Middle Ages;"<sup>11</sup> a revolt which can only be understood in the light of the historical events which gave it impulse.

No-where did the paradoxical figure of Sabbatai Zevi have greater appeal than among the dejected, untutored, superstitious masses of Podolia and Volhynia. Indeed, so oppressive had their lives become, so vital the need for something to reawaken their hopes that for many, even the conversion to Mohammedanism of this false saviour did not terminate the movement which he had begun. Nor was the pronouncement of the Herem against this heretical sect able to destroy it. It merely forced the movement to go underground. And it was out of the midst of just such a

group of secret Sabbatians that Jacob Frank, the most infamous of all Messianic pretenders, came into prominence during the mid-eighteenth century years.

This, in broad strokes, is a portrait of the world into which Israel ben Eliezar, the Baal Shem Tov, was born--a world in which the Jews of southeastern Poland, particularly those living in the rural districts and small villages, had sunk to the very lowest levels of economic, social, intellectual and religious existence. Before, however, we examine the means whereby the Besht was able to transform completely the lives, not only of the Jews in Podolia and Volhynia, but of vast numbers of Jews throughout Poland, we must proceed to an examination of the mystical framework within which he operated.

## PART 2

Interesting and important as the earliest expressions of Jewish mysticism may have been, our purpose will be adequately served if we limit our discussion of Jewish mysticism to the form in which it crystallized during the Middle Ages and which is generally referred to as Kabbalah. For Kabbalah, as it was understood and practiced, particularly during the two centuries preceding the birth of the Besht, comprises the intellectual atmosphere in which Hasidism grew.

From about the year 1200 when the Kabbalists began to emerge as a distinct group in Spain and Southern France, throughout the years of its "Golden Age" during the late 13th and early 14th centuries--a development intimately connected with the first stages of the decline of Christian Spain--until the end of the 15th century, the Kabbalah followed two major lines of development: (1) Ecstatic or Prophetic Kabbalah, generally referred to as "The Path of the Names", a title introduced by Abraham Abulafia, its leading proponent; and (2) Rabbinical Kabbalah, generally referred to as "The Path of the Sefiroth". With the appearance of the Sefer Ha-Zohar, written in all likelihood by Moses de Leon, a Spanish Kabbalist of the late 13th century, the latter of these two "paths" became, with some modification, the dominant Kabbalistic doctrine.

The nature of these two antithetical points of view is clearly brought out by Scholem when, in comparing them,



he writes, "That esoteric doctrine (Prophetic Kabbalah) centered round a pragmatic philosophy of ecstasy for the elect, which laid exclusive emphasis on meditation as the way to the cognition of God. By contrast, the Zohar is chiefly concerned with the object of meditation, i.e. the mysteries of mundus intelligibilis."<sup>12</sup> Zoharitic Kabbalah, primarily theosophical in its character, is concerned, as that term indicates, with the attempt to perceive and to describe the mysterious workings of the Divinity. Absorption in the contemplation of the Divine in its forms or emanations, while not entirely lacking, is definitely of subsidiary importance.

In barest outline the major teachings of Zoharitic Kabbalah are as follows. God, the En-Sof, i.e. the Infinite, in His essence has neither qualities nor attributes, and in this sense is generally referred to as the hidden God. Insofar, however, as this hidden Being is active throughout the universe, it has certain attributes which represent certain aspects of the divine nature. These attributes appear to man as so many stages of the Divine Being, as divine manifestations of His hidden life. These emanations or aspects of the En-Sof, called Sefiroth, are held to be ten in number and are conceived of as phases in the manifestation of the Divinity which--unlike the Neoplatonic emanations--do not stand between the absolute One and the world of the senses, but somehow take place in God and yet make possible

human perception of the Deity. This process of unfoldment has its genesis in a divine crisis in which, as the result of the stimulation of the creative power or the break-through of the primordial will, the En-Sof, the inexpressible fullness, is transformed into Ayin, the mystical Nothing. As the process continues, the Sefiroth and the sensible world are created out of Nothing by what is frequently identified by Kabbalistic writers as Hokhmah, the wisdom of God. The creation of the world of the heavens wherein dwell the angels, and the world of the four elements wherein dwells man is not to be thought of as the end point of the process of unfoldment nor as the result of a separate or second act of creation, but rather as the external aspect of the unfolding of the innermost reality. Since creation is nothing but an external development of those forces which are active and alive in God Himself, the "vestiges" of the innermost reality are present even in the most external of things.

The manifestation of the Divine in its various aspects, even in its externalization, was believed by the Kabbalists not to have marred the essential unity of God, for in their original development out of Nothing these aspects (including man) were entirely spiritual in nature. It was as the result of the sin of Adam that corporeal existence was spawned and the inner connectedness of the elements of the process was broken. Having interrupted

the stream of life which flowed from sphere to sphere, and having brought separation and isolation into the world, man is now obligated to restore the original harmony. As the result of man's sin the "Shekhina" became separated, "exiled" from God; hence, it is for man to repair the breach. Redemption which is achieved by the restoration of harmony, a process the later Kabbalists termed Tikkun, is accomplished through the Torah, Mitswoth, and Tefillah. Man's ability to achieve redemption is based upon the following pre-suppositions: (1) the Shekhina, the mystical community of Israel, is immediately present in the earthly community of Israel which is its archetype; and (2) the intimacy of this connection makes possible, through individual and communal acts, the influencing of the higher reality.

"The supreme religious value," therefore, "which the Zohar, in common with the whole of Spanish Kabbalism, places in the center of its ethical system is devekuth, the continuous attachment or adhesion to God, that direct relationship which...almost takes the whole place of the previous ecstatic experience. Although devekuth is definitely a contemplative value, it is not predicated upon special or abnormal modes of consciousness. Indeed,...true devekuth can be realized in the normal life of the individual within the community. It is therefore capable of being transformed into a

social value, a point of great importance in the subsequent influence of Kabbalism on popular ethics."<sup>13</sup>

So extensive is the Zoharitic literature, to say nothing of the writings of other Kabbalists, that it is very likely that the lacunae in the above presentation of Kabbalistic doctrine are both numerous and large; nevertheless, what has been here developed provides ample ground for the understanding of those later Kabbalistic developments which bear upon our subject. What we have presented remained the orthodox viewpoint until the end of the 15th century when, as the result of the cataclysmic expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Kabbalah underwent important change. To quote Scholem's words: "In the great material and spiritual upheaval of that crisis, Kabbalism established its claim to spiritual domination in Judaism. This fact became immediately obvious in its transformation from esoteric into a popular doctrine."<sup>14</sup>

How this transformation took place is not difficult to understand. Under the impact of the hardships being experienced by a large segment of the Jewish population, there developed a renewed and widespread interest in Messianism. "To summon up and to release all the forces capable of hastening the 'End', became once more the chief aim of the mystics."<sup>15</sup> In the intellectually stimulating atmosphere of Safed, under the leadership of the remarkable Isaac Luria, the Ari, the new Kabbalah developed

the technique whereby this aim could be accomplished.

Luria's doctrine, based upon original interpretations of the older Spanish Kabbalah and upon the ideas of his contemporary, Moses Cordovero--according to Scholem, the greatest theoretician of Jewish mysticism--was in essence the following. At its heart stands Luria's modification of the doctrine of Tsimtsum. Originally it had meant "concentration" or "contraction", but now it becomes interpreted as "withdrawal" or "retreat". It is the means employed by the En-Sof to produce within Himself the mystical primordial space in which the work of creation can take place. The first act of God, then, is one of limitation; the second, that of creation, is one of extension. This process is carried further in that it was maintained that every new act of emanation was preceded by one of concentration or retraction. It is by means of this perpetual process of ebb and flow of divine tension, as it were, that everything in the world comes into existence.

His next doctrine is that of the Shevirath Ha-Kelim, or "Breaking of the Vessels". For Luria, the first emanation of the divine light into the primordial space was productive of the configuration called Adam Kadmon, the "primordial man". It is from his eyes, ears, nose and mouth that the lights of the sefiroth break forth. Unlike the light from the other orifices, the light from



the eyes came forth, not in the form of a single beam, but in an atomized form which required the emanation of "vessels" to contain it. While the vessels for the light of the upper three sefiroth were able to contain their respective lights without difficulty, in the case of the lower six, the impact of the light's breaking forth all at once was too great for the vessels to withstand, and they were consequently shattered. In this way does Luria explain the entrance into the world of the individuating principle.

The concept of the "Breaking of the Vessels" leads quite naturally to the next of Luria's doctrines, and in terms of its influence upon later mystical developments, particularly Hasidism, his most important; namely, the doctrine of Tikkun. For the most part, the divine lights or sparks which, as the result of the "Breaking of the Vessels" are held in the power of the forces of darkness, are capable of freeing themselves through their own powers. In the case, however, of those which are not able to free themselves, man's aid is required to secure their freedom or upliftment. It is man, therefore, who completes the divine process. The religious acts of the Jew prepare the way for the final restitution of all the scattered and exiled lights and sparks. For Luria, therefore, the appearance of the Messiah is nothing but the consumation of the continuous process of restoration or redemption.

In Lurianic thought the magic of inwardness, under the name of Kawwanah, or mystical intention, occupies a central position. "The task of man is seen to consist in the direction of his whole inner purpose towards the restoration of the original harmony which was disturbed by the original defect--the Breaking of the Vessels... To unify the name of God, as the term goes, is not merely to perform an act of confession and acknowledgment of God's kingdom, it is more than that; it is an action rather than an act. The Tikkun restores the unity of God's name which was destroyed by the original defect...and every true religious act is directed toward the same aim."<sup>16</sup> And finally, Kawwanah becomes as well the way to devekuth, mystical contact with God.

Again we must confess that the limitations of this study do not permit us to discuss such important Lurianic concepts as the partsufim, the klippoth, reshimu, and gilgul. We have been forced to consider only those elements which exerted significant influence on the mystical developments which followed. The sweeping popularity of these doctrines can be understood when we recognize the fact that in the concept of Tikkun every Jew becomes a "protagonist in the great process of restitution, in a manner never heard of before." While it is true that Luria believed these powers were granted only to the great mystics, nevertheless, every individual becomes in a very real sense a full partner in the business of bringing the Exile to an end. That, in the Lurianic system, this

work was thought to be furthered by the performance of certain mystical rites, by penitential exercises, ascetic practices and meditation, was perhaps due to the mood of his times, for we shall see in a later chapter how Hasidism developed many of his doctrines and yet rejected many of the techniques for their fulfillment which he felt to be so necessary.

With regard to the last stage of mystical development prior to the appearance of Hasidism, namely that of the Sabbatian movement, very little need be said here. It need only be pointed out that the apocalyptic mood which developed out of the Lurianic Kabbalah, coupled with the ever-mounting hardships of Jewish life, particularly in the Polish provinces of Podolia and Volhynia, demanded its resolution in the appearance of the Messiah. Seeing in their own lives the suffering and degradation which was thought to characterize the pre-Messianic period, they listened hungrily to the stories of the "Turkish Messiah", and in the end, saw in him their long awaited redeemer.

Doctrinally, the Sabbatian movement is noteworthy, or perhaps infamous, for the widespread anti-nomianism which it fostered. Nor was this anti-nomian tendency without its rationale. With the Lurianic doctrine of tikkun as its intellectual background, and the fact of the "Messiah's" apostasy a reality requiring explanation, the raw materials out of which an anti-nomian theology



could be fashioned were close at hand. In addition, there is bound up with the very notion of a Messiah another factor productive of anti-nomianism; namely, the concept that with the appearance of the Messiah a "new Law" supercedes the "old". To put it another way, the coming of the Messiah constitutes the completion, the fulfilment of the Torah which is, therefore, no longer applicable to the world in its redeemed state.

With regard to the Sabbatian perversion of the idea of tikkun, it must be borne in mind that, as conceived by Luria and his followers, tikkun was primarily an inner experience, a means whereby the individual in the process of perfecting his own soul accomplished the lifting up of the sparks and the consequent restoration of the divine harmony in the world. In Sabbatianism this kabbalistic symbol of redemption was given an historical application which, with the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi, created an abyss between these two aspects of the drama of redemption. In the writings of Nathan of Gaza, the leading propogandist of the Sabbatian movement, this paradox was given its paradoxical solution. "The attraction of saintliness", it is argued, "is not always sufficient to liberate the sparks from their prisons, the Kelipoth or 'shells'. There are the stages of the great process of tikkun, more particularly its last and most difficult ones, when in order to liberate the hidden sparks from

their captivity, or to use another image, in order to force open the prison doors from within, the Messiah himself must descend into the realm of evil"<sup>17</sup>, there to complete that conquest of the forces of darkness, the prerequisite for the extension of redemption to the external world. It is but a small step from belief in such a doctrine to the intentional performance of "evil" acts as a means of achieving the "good".

With the example of the "Messiah" before them the more radical of the Sabbatians universalized this doctrine that "Evil must be fought with evil", and entered upon lives in complete opposition to everything which traditional Judaism had come to regard as sacred, and in the tragic history of the Frankist movement, the dangerous nihilism of such a doctrine became all too apparent. Even for the more conservative among the Sabbatians who, while they maintained the validity of the basic Sabbatian doctrines, yet lived lives in consonance with Jewish law--a feat made possible by their belief that the law of the "New World" would not come into effect until the Messiah returns--there can be little doubt that the emotional relationships to the tenets and values of traditional orthodoxy had undergone complete change.

As had already been indicated, the Sabbatian movement was by no means brought to a halt with the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi in 1665. Devotees of its doctrines were

to be found in numbers not only in the Sephardic communities of Italy and Morroco, but what is important for our purpose, among the Ashkenazic communities of Eastern Galicia as well. This fact is of inestimable importance for our understanding of the rise of the Hasidic movement, for though Hasidism was in no sense a continuation of Sabbatianism, the receptivity of the Galician Jew to Hasidic doctrine was in large part made possible by the alteration in the attitudes of the populace toward the beliefs, practices, values, etc., of traditional Judaism brought about by the Sabbatian movement.

## II

## MYSTICISM AND HASIDISM

In the first chapter we attempted to discover the nature of those historical forces at work in 17th and 18th century Poland which made it possible for Hasidism to take root and flourish. Strictly speaking, the materials which will be considered in the following pages should have been included in that discussion, for ideas, in so far as they may motivate men to action, are themselves historical factors, perhaps even the historical factors par excellence. Certainly we are well aware of the opposite influence, namely that of given "historical situations" upon ideas. While we do not agree with those historians who would maintain that certain economic and social conditions give rise to particular ideas, surely the acceptance of an idea is so closely related to these other factors as to forestall the possibility of doubt. Nevertheless, once put forth, an idea takes on a life of its own, undergoing development and modification through the years, developing, in a sense, a history of its own worthy of separate detailed study.

We are here concerned, however, not with an idea but with a whole family of ideas, or perhaps, and with greater exactness, with "a temper rather than a doctrine, an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy."<sup>1</sup>

The term mysticism, despite the centuries of careful

analysis of the body of experiences which it is meant to subsume, has by no means been exhaustively defined. So unique and so varied has been the character of mystical experience, that it is almost impossible to identify those elements, common to all its instances, which, when taken together, set it off from other types of human experience. To begin with, it seems clear, as Scholem puts it, that "...there is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract, that is to say, a phenomenon or experience which has no particular relation to other religious phenomena. There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish mysticism and so on."<sup>2</sup> But it would be a mistake to imagine that mysticism is unique to religion, for it is a category of experience which can be identified in human actions and thoughts of a non-religious character as well. Mystical experience as a source of inspiration becomes religious only when it is directed toward what are commonly recognized as religious ends. Since it is true, as Scholem's statement implies, that the content of mystical experiences is drawn from, and even determined by, the ideational frameworks of the various religious communities, we are forced to look elsewhere for that which may be unique to the mystical attitude. Spurgeon indicates his agreement with this thesis when he writes, "The mystic reverses the ordinary methods of reasoning: he must believe before he can know. As it is put in the



Theologica Germanica, 'He who would know before he believeth cometh never to true knowledge.'"<sup>3</sup> We will not find, therefore, in the mystic's account of his own experience, nor in the body of doctrine he deduces from that experience, those elements capable of leading us to a definition of mysticism.

Yet all the while recognizing the basic validity of Scholem's contention--and the idea is by no means original with him--students of the subject continue to seek in the content of mystical experience its essential characteristics. Hence Spurgeon, for example, maintains that "...all (mystics) alike agree in one respect, in one passionate assertion, and this is that unity underlies diversity. This, their starting-point and their goal (a most revealing contradiction), is the basic fact of mysticism, which in its widest sense, may be described as an attitude of mind founded upon an intuitive or experienced conviction of unity, of oneness, of likeness in all things."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Underhill, in writing of the essentials of mysticism, remarked, "We will begin, then, with the central fact of the mystic's experience. This central fact, it seems to me, is an overwhelming consciousness of God and of his own soul: a consciousness which absorbs or eclipses all other centres of interest. Hence we must put first among our essentials the clear conviction of a living God as the primary interest of consciousness, and of a personal self capable

of communion with Him."<sup>5</sup> The clearest refutation of such theorizing was made by William James when he wrote, "In characterizing mystic states as pantheistic, optimistic, etc., I am afraid I over-simplified the truth. I did so for expository reasons, and to keep closer to the classic mystical tradition. The classic religious mysticism, it now must be confessed, is only a 'privileged case.'... To begin with, even religious mysticism itself, the kind that accumulates traditions and makes schools, is much less unanimous than I have allowed...The fact is that the mystical feeling of enlargement, union, and emancipation has no specific intellectual content whatever of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies, provided only they can find a place in their framework for its peculiar emotional mood."<sup>6</sup>

But perhaps it will be argued that what James is here concerned with are the details of mystical theologies and philosophies and not with the goal of mystical experience which is "union with God", however the term God may be defined. A careful examination of the testimony of the Christian and Indian mystics would certainly seem to bear out the thesis that "union with the Absolute" is the supreme mystical experience, the end for which all other levels of mystical attainment are but preparation. On this crucial point, interestingly enough, Jewish mysticism offers contradicting evidence, for it appears that

"union with God" has rarely been the goal of Jewish mystical experience. In discussing the life of Abraham Abulafia, one of the foremost Jewish illuminates, Scholem makes this point with striking clarity. "The fact remains," he writes, "that...it is only in extremely rare cases that ecstasy signifies actual union with God, in which the human individuality abandons itself to the rapture of complete submission in the divine stream. Even in this ecstatic frame of mind, the Jewish mystic almost invariably retains a sense of the distance between the Creator and His creature. The latter is joined to the former, and the point where the two meet is of the greatest interest to the mystic, but he does not regard it as constituting anything so extravagant as identity of Creator and creature."<sup>7</sup> Later in the same chapter he writes, "To a certain extent, as we have seen, the visionary identifies himself with his Master; complete identification is neither achieved nor intended."<sup>8</sup>

On the strength of the foregoing discussion it seems reasonable to conclude, not only that it is not the ideas of the mystic which mark him off from other seekers after reality, but that any attempt to deny the mantle of mysticism to any individual, or to establish qualitative differences between mystical states themselves based upon the doctrines and dogmas to which a given mystic or group of mystics subscribe, is foredoomed to failure. Underhill's attempts in this direction afford us an excellent opportunity, not only to demonstrate the validity



of the above, but to understand the motives behind such efforts as well. Discussing certain of the consequences of widespread mystical activity, she writes, "Man, becoming aware of a new power and new desires within him, abruptly subjected to the influx of new life, is dazzled and pleased by every brilliant and fantastic guess, every invitation which is offered to him. In the condition of psychic disorder which is characteristic of his movement to new states, he is unusually at the mercy of the suggestions and impressions which he receives. Hence in every period of mystical activity we find an outbreak of occultism, illuminism, or other perverted spirituality. In the youth of the Christian Church, side by side with the great Neoplatonists (mystics), we have the arrogant and disorderly transcendentalism of the Gnostics: their attempted fusion of the ideals of mysticism and magic. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance there is the spurious mysticism of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the occult propaganda of Paracelsus, the Rosicrucians, the Christian Kabbalists; and the innumerable pantheistic, Manichean, mystery-making, and Quietist heresies which made war upon Catholic tradition."<sup>9</sup> It should be quite obvious that, contrary to Underhill's bias, orthodoxy of belief cannot be the final test of true mysticism.

If, then, the essence of mysticism is not to be found

in its doctrines, perhaps it is to be found in the character of its experiences. Numerous indeed are those who would distinguish the mystic from all other, not in terms of the knowledge he achieves, but by means of the way in which he achieves that knowledge. Spurgeon expresses this attitude well when, in discussing the beliefs of the mystic, he writes, "Finally, the mystic holds these views because he has lived through an experience which has forced him to this attitude of mind. This is his distinguishing mark, this is what differentiates him alike from the theologian, the logician, the rationalist philosopher, and the man of science, for he bases his belief, not on revelation, logic, reason, or demonstrated facts, but on feeling, on intuitive inner knowledge. He has felt, he has seen, and he is therefore convinced."<sup>10</sup>

Here, one might imagine, we have come upon a factor which is universally recognized as an essential element of the mystical approach: the direct, immediate, unequivocal apprehension of reality. Whatever other qualities, e.g. ineffability, passivity, or transiency, mystics and students of mysticism may, with some differences of opinion, feel are necessary characteristics of mystical experience, they appear to be in universal agreement on the fact that immediacy, union, inner connection is an essential element of that phenomenon. Whence Jones' statement: "I shall use the word (mysticism) to express the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate

awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence."<sup>11</sup> Therefore also Hall's thesis that "Mysticism as a system makes the religious goal the metaphysical union of the soul of the worshipper with God,"<sup>12</sup> or Underhill's pronouncement that "...Mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and ...the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to know about but to Be, is the mark of the real practitioner."<sup>13</sup> Finally, we have James' assertion concerning mystical experiences that "The records show that even though the five senses be in abeyance in them, they are absolutely sensational in their epistemological quality, if I may be pardoned the barbarous expression,--that is, they are face to face presentations of what seems immediately to exist."<sup>14</sup>

The weight of such testimony notwithstanding, there yet appears to be legitimate ground for setting aside, if not for actually doubting, the claim of immediacy--or for that matter that of any of the other qualities mentioned--as an essential element of mystical experience. For, consequent upon the development of the science of psychology, important insights have been brought to bear upon our understanding of mystical phenomena, insights which, for the most part, explain away in psycho-physical terms the divine nature and

origin of so-called mystical experiences. The work of such men as Janet, Mitchell, Dunbar, Ellis, Leuba et al, whether or not we accept all of their conclusions, has raised questions too important to be ignored. We cannot here enter into an analysis of their objections and an evaluation of their conclusions. On one point, however, their work is unquestionably sound, namely their demonstration of the fact that the sense of immediacy, of ineffability, of passivity, and, for that matter, of enlargement, of presence, of intensity, of confidence, of freedom, etc., etc., are not the exclusive province of mystical experience alone, and hence cannot be considered defining features of such experiences. So friendly an interpreter of mysticism as Underhill evidences her recognition of the problem raised, in this regard, by the psychologists when she writes, "It is an interesting question whether this consummation of the mystic way need involve that suppression of the surface consciousness which is called ecstasy. The majority of mystics think that it must,...but this should not make us regard trance-states as any part of the essence of mysticism. The ecstatic condition is no guarantee of mystic vision...We have a test which we can apply to the ecstatic; and which separates the results of nervous disorder from those of spiritual transcendence...ordered correspondence with each level of existence, physical and spiritual, successive and eternal--



a practical realization of the proportions of life-- is the guarantee of the genuine character of that sublimation of consciousness which is called the mystic way; and this distinguishes it from the fantasies of psychic illness or the disguised self-indulgences of the dream-world."<sup>15</sup> In an earlier volume she had written, "So too both mysticism and hysteria have to do with the domination of consciousness by one fixed and intense idea or intuition, which rules the life and is able to produce amazing physical and psychical results. In the hysteric patient this idea is often trivial or morbid but has become--thanks to the self's unstable mental condition--an obsession. In the mystic the dominant idea is a great one:...Hence the mono-ideism of the mystic is rational, whilst that of the hysteric patient is invariably irrational."<sup>16</sup> Once more we find Miss Underhill attempting to apply her evaluation of the intellectual content of the mystic's experience as the standard by which the spiritual nature of mystical experience is to be determined. So obvious is the subjective nature of such a criterion that further comment seems unnecessary.

In presenting, then, our own views with regard to the problem we have been discussing: namely, what is mysticism? we would recall a statement made by Spurgeon which was quoted above, "Mysticism is a temper rather than a doctrine, an atmosphere rather than a system of



philosophy." Rooted in a complex of related psychological phenomena whose mechanics are not yet completely understood, the mystical "attitude" is nurtured by the sensitive personality until, like the emotions of love or hate, it can completely color and dominate the individual's entire life. These psychological phenomena, or more accurately, these psycho-physical phenomena, and the bodily states and feelings which they entail, when reflected upon and intentionally nurtured, give rise to the entire pantheon of subsidiary activities which have traditionally gone by the name of mysticism. The elemental nature of these genetive activities, however, should not lead us to believe that they are in any fundamental respect less mystical than other more complex or intense experiences of the same sort. For, in truth, it is the very mystifying nature of these more primitive experiences which gives rise in the individual to the mystical disposition. William James identified some of the phenomena to which we are referring when he wrote: "The simplest rudiment of mystical experience would seem to be that deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula which occasionally sweeps over one... A more pronounced step forward on the mystical ladder is found in an extremely frequent phenomenon, that sudden feeling, namely, which sometimes sweeps over us, of having 'been here before', as if at some indefinite past time, in just this place, with just these people, we were already

saying just these things...Somewhat deeper plunges into mystical consciousness are met with in yet other dreamy states...The next step into mystical states carries us into a realm that public opinion and ethical philosophy have long since branded as pathological...I refer to the consciousness produced by intoxicants and anaesthetics, especially by alcohol."<sup>17</sup> James might well have included in his list a whole host of similar experiences: sudden comprehension of the solution of an involved problem; feelings of aloneness or of insignificance which frequently impress themselves upon one when in the presence of the vast panoramas of nature; feelings of presence or of enlargement or of freedom from the body which follow upon periods of intense concentration or which frequently accompany periods of lowered intellectual and physical activity such as mark the moments immediately prior to or immediately following deep sleep. These experiences, and many more too numerous to mention, which, from time to time, and in sickness or health, occur in the lives of all, are the raw materials, as it were, out of which the mystical mood is fashioned.

Why it is that some individuals feel constrained to place one interpretation rather than another upon these and related experiences we cannot here discuss. Suffice it to say that the reasons are complex in the extreme and are intimately bound up with such factors as the

intensity, the duration and the frequency of such experiences themselves, as well as with such other factors as the integration of the individual's personality, the nature of his adjustment to society, his intellectual powers, and, perhaps of utmost importance, the cultural climate in which he lives.

In the light of the foregoing discussion we are now in a position to understand how it is that something so completely personal as mystical experience can give birth to a movement, and also what it is which constitutes at once both the appeal of, and the authority for, the pronouncements of the mystic. Returning once more to the discussion of mysticism in James' Varieties of Religious Experience we find, in answer to the question: "Do mystical experiences furnish any warrant for the truth of those theological and philosophical attitudes which they favor?", the following three points. "(1) Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individual to whom they come. (2) No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically. (3) They break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other sources of truth, in which, so far as anything in us

vitality responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith."18 Whether or not James' assertion that mystical "open out the possibility of other sources of truth" be valid, the importance of his closing statement is in no way affected: "so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith." It is this presence within us of what James in another place calls the "mystical germ" which alone can account for the pull of mystical doctrine and the formation of mass mystical movements such as Hasidism. Such movements have little in common with those mystical movements in which the intellectual elements have been emphasized, such as that of Kabbalah. It might even be argued that were it not for the fundamentally arational character of the premises upon which Kabbalistic speculation is based, the Kabbalah is much more closely related to rational philosophy and theology than it is to the emotionally oriented Hasidic movement. And it may well be that Hasidism was as much a reaction against the highly intellectualized Kabbalah, whose secrets were known only to the initiate, as it was to the over-intellectualization of Rabbinic Judaism. In any event, one did not have to be an ecstatic or an illuminate in order to accept the teachings of Hasidism, for any man who lived and loved, laughed and cried, worked and wondered, experienced in his own existence sufficient of the rudimentary mystical phenomena to enable him to understand



and to appreciate the Hasidic way of life.

Lest it appear from the nature of this very brief account of the general phenomena of mysticism that we hold the consciously cultivated mysticism of the "grand" mystics, Jewish and non-Jewish, to be in any way merely an unwarranted exaggeration of what we have chosen to view as the basic mystical experiences, the following statement should clarify such a misconception: The deepening of the mystical sense brought about by the careful exploration of the means whereby the most heightened forms of mystical experience could be achieved, has led not only to a remarkable refinement of religious sensitivity, but to some of the most remarkable achievements in the realms of philosophy and the arts as well. Just as the man of unusual intellectual gifts has contributed to the ever expanding development of human thought by refining those basic powers of cogitation possessed by all, so the ecstatic has been able to make his noteworthy contribution by the development of a second order of powers also possessed by all men. This it was which led Leuba, one of mysticism's severest antagonists, to write, as it were, in spite of himself, the following words: "The development of the mystical technique for the realization of a quasi-physical presence of the Perfect One constitutes the most remarkable achievement of religion in man's struggle to overcome adverse external circumstances, his own imperfections, and



those of his fellowmen. It is one of the outstanding expressions of the creative power working in humanity. It is paralleled in the realm of reason by the development of science. Both lead, if in different ways, to the physical and spiritual realization of man."19

## III

## INWARDNESS AND THE BESHT

## PART 1

In the preceding chapter we developed the thesis that mysticism is essentially nothing more than a disposition to view the world in terms of the categories of feeling and emotion rather than that of reason. We also indicated there the nature of those experiences which not only give rise to this disposition or attitude, but which furnish it with those psycho-physical qualities commonly used to distinguish the mystical from the non-mystical states. Religious "inwardness", then, as we understand it, is little more than the intensification of those feelings of sympathy, love, sincerity, kindness, humility, etc., experienced by all men. The externalization of these qualities, the belief that they are characteristic of the nature of ultimate reality, results from reflection upon the meanings or implications of the direct experience of the qualities themselves. This process of externalization is productive of theosophical systems, systems of mystical philosophy. With this aspect of the Besht's contribution to religious thought we are not here concerned. Rather are we concerned with the attempt to understand the extent to which the intensification and the deepening of the emotional sensitivity of the Baal Shem colored and gave "meaning" not only to his own life, but to the lives of all those who came under his sway.

The paucity, nay even the lack, of authentic autobiographical or biographical materials concerning the early life of the Besht makes difficult the determination of the role played by specific environmental factors in molding the character of this man. But while the details may be lacking, the legends which recount his birth and childhood do provide sufficient material with which to reconstruct a portrait of his early years. Such reconstructions, of course, based primarily on the Shivhe Ha Besht, can be found in any history of Hasidism, e.g. Horodezki and Kahana, and will not be reproduced here. Certain parts, however, are important for our discussion.

The Besht was born of undistinguished parents who lived lives of economic impoverishment. While still very young he lost both mother and father and was forced to support himself by any means he could. Whatever the nature of his native intellectual abilities, it is certain that he had little opportunity to develop them in any formal or systematic way, and as Horodezki points out, "He knew the Torah, but was not a 'prominent scholar', not 'ingenious', not 'extremely well read'. He was capable of studying a simple Gemara, and of reading a Mishnah. Of the Pilpul and its finesses he knew nothing. He knew also the Kabbala in all its simplicity, without any of its sophistries."<sup>1</sup>

He was, quite obviously, a simple, sensitive, perhaps also shy and retiring, youngster who found little to interest

him in the Heder, and was probably uncomfortable and ill at ease in the presence of learned elders. He seems to have found his work with the children, as "behelfer" to a "Melamed", both enjoyable and satisfying. Though he is no-where portrayed as lazy, his favorite pastime seems to have been to go out into the fields and forests surrounding the village and "commune with Nature". He early came to know "the language of the birds and the bees" and he found among the trees and grasses, shrubs and flowers, a world whose "secrets" he could learn and whose "ways" he could understand. How much of his time was spent in these solitary treks through the woods and into the mountains we cannot know, but it seems safe to conclude that it was considerable. In any event, we have here the potential for those musings, day-dreams, "atunements" of spirit which, as they deepened and intensified through the years, could become a source for the "mystical disposition".

How he came into possession of a knowledge of the medicinal values of various herbs and herbal mixtures is of no consequence to us. Likewise, it is of little importance for us to know how and where he learned the other arts of the faith-healer or "Baal Shem". What is of significance is the fact that he seems to have been deeply concerned with the physical and psychical welfare of the simple, poverty-stricken people among whom he lived, and used whatever means were at his disposal to

comfort them and to alleviate their suffering. In this connection it is important to point out the intimate relationship between the practices of "folk-magic" and of mysticism in the life of the Besht. It is frequently very difficult to draw a sharp and distinct line between the operation of these two forces. It may well be that in their simplest, least developed forms they are indistinguishable, one from the other. In any event, the impact upon him of the beliefs and practices of the superstitious world in which he lived must not be minimized, and it is not inconceivable that the "practical" bent of his teachings is to be traced, in part at least, to the concern for efficaciousness so characteristic of the folk-magician. It is certainly safe to conclude that the combination of these two forces in the person of the Besht (the magical, whose usefulness and whose methods were well-known to the people, and the mystical) is in some measure, responsible for the popular acceptance of his teachings. His success as a Baal Shem certainly contributed to his success as the founder of a popular mystical movement.

The tendencies noted in his youth became, after his marriage and during the years of early middle age, a way of life. Certain of the legends notwithstanding, it was during this period that the Besht's mystical disposition matured and deepened. The solitary, marginal, at times hermit-like, life which he led during these years afforded



ample opportunity for reflection and meditation and for the interaction within him of his kabbalistic ideas, of his understanding of the principles of Judaism and his experiences, feelings and emotions. It was during this period that the transition from Baal Shem to Baal Shem Tov took place. Needless to say, this transformation did not occur suddenly or abruptly. The addition of ethical and religious teachings and guidance to those who sought his services as a Baal Shem took place quite gradually. The transformation was not complete, of course, until two things had happened: (1) there developed within the Besht himself a self-consciousness of the new role which he had come to play and of his qualifications to play that role; and (2) the recognition on the part of the people of the unique character of the Besht's teachings, and of the ability of his doctrines and attitudes to affect in a positive and meaningful way their own lives. The former of these factors led to the Besht's "revelation" to the people; the latter, to his elevation by them to the status of "Rav". The event which marked the dawning in the consciousness of the people of the significance for them of the personality of the Besht is simply and revealingly recounted in the following passage from the Shivhe Ha

Besht:

„אמר זה מרדכי (הבשר) ... שילך לכת  
 בחסידים בן צוים. אשר היו בוים, קם ארם בקבילם.  
 ויארם בזה בלשון, פנה ים אור קול הסביבות קהילותם.



or adequacy; rather are they to be studied from the point of view of the light they cast upon those feelings, attitudes and emotions of the Besht, which, when taken together, we term the "experience of religious inwardness".

## PART 2

In his excellent study, "Kawwana: the Struggle for Inwardness in Judaism", Enelow correctly observes that "All religion is rooted in emotion. Whether it be awe, fear, or love, it originates in a sentiment that comes from, and goes to, the heart. Founders and reformers of religions," he continues, "have recognised this fundamental truth. The difficulty, however, has lain in preserving the spirit of inwardness. It has been the common fate of religious ideas, no matter how vital and genuine at first, to lose their inner meaning and force in the course of time, and religious institutions are wont to drift away gradually from the spirit that created them, and to continue in sheer mechanical fashion."<sup>3</sup> It cannot be denied that in 18th century Poland, both among the Kabbalists and non-Kabbalists--though for different reasons--much of the inner spirit of Judaism had been lost. During its early "heroic" period, at least, Hasidism was distinguished by its attempt to restore this spirit of inwardness to Jewish life. It is perhaps not irrelevant to point out here that the founders of Reform Judaism attempted, albeit in totally different manner, to accomplish exactly the same thing. History has already demonstrated the failure of Hasidism in this regard, and as for Reform Judaism, the best which can be claimed is that the issue has not yet been decided.

The term which has most consistently been used in

Jewish thought to express this spirit of inwardness is Kavvanah, and it is the term which is used by the Hasidim. As used by them, however, it retained both its traditional and mystical connotations. In its former sense it indicated "the degree of intention, concentration and devotion that is necessary for the proper performance of a religious duty."<sup>4</sup> In its latter sense it meant "mystical meditation on the words of prayer while they are being spoken."<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, one is not always able to distinguish in Hasidic writings the exact sense in which the word is used. It may mean intention, concentration, devotion; it may mean purpose and the right spirit; it may mean pondering, meditation, and mystery; it may, in fact, mean all these things at once. Nevertheless, it is our contention--and the material quoted below appears to bear us out--that Hasidism in its earliest phase, and particularly in the teaching of the Besht, emphasized the traditional meaning of the word Kavvanah, and sought to reawaken the slumbering inner spirit of the Jewish people.

It is impossible to appreciate adequately the role of Kavvanah in Hasidism without understanding first the nature of the Divinity as conceived by the founders of that movement. Kavvanah, after all, is more than just a means of giving expression to the emotional sentiments which are at the root of Jewish religious experience; it is the means whereby those attitudes are channeled so as to permit the individual to stand in an intimate and direct



relationship with his God. And the more intimate the character of the God envisaged, the more meaningful and successful the techniques of inwardness, of Kavvanah, become as means of achieving the desired rapport with God. For this purpose the Hasidic God-concept was tailor-made.

As Schechter expresses it, "The keynote of all Baalshem's teachings is the Omnipresence, or more strictly the Immanence, of God...the universality of the Divinity is the foundation of the entire Chassidic fabric."<sup>6</sup> We have already explored the Kabbalistic background for this point of view, and need not repeat here what has been said, but we would recall the notion of the Divine "Sparks". It was this idea which transformed the transcendental En Sof into an innmanent deity, for it was by means of the sparks, exiled from the hidden God, that the Divine entered into the world. Not the doctrine itself, however, but the implications of the doctrine are important for us here: since God is in all things (1) it is possible for man to stand in direct or immediate relationship to God, it is possible for man to experience God; (2) there is good, actual or potential in all things; (3) the distinction between the profane and the holy falls away. Within the framework of such a world-view, Hasidism developed its characteristic set of values, e.g. abodah, shiflut, tefillah, simha, etc.

Kavvanah, though itself one of these values, yet stands apart from the others. Conceived of as an active

principle, as the manner in which all the others are to be performed, it constitutes an aspect of all of them. While it is true that the state of Devekuth, of "union" with God, was the ultimate goal of the Hasidim even as it was of the Kabbalists before them, it was Kavvanah, the means of achieving that goal which, in practice, became the distinguishing characteristic of the Hasidic community. Perhaps it was this fact which led Scholem to write, "To me not the doctrine (of God's immanence in all things) seems new, but rather the primitive enthusiasm with which it was expounded and the truly pantheistic exhilaration evoked by the belief that God surrounds everything and pervades everything."<sup>7</sup>

It is apparent that in Hasidism Kavvanah reached its fullest development. During the Talmudic period Kavvanah as "proper intention" received expression in the principle *מצוות צריכות כוונה* --the fulfillment of religious duties requires Kavvanah.<sup>8</sup> In the philosophic literature, especially in Saadia, Bahya, Halevi, and Maimonides, Kavvanah signified pure devotion and became an adjunct of prayer. In Hasidism it was extended further until it applied to all of life. Most expressive of this development is the Hasidic teaching, "With his every action a man can work at the figure of the Glory of God, so that it may step from its hidden place. It is not the nature of the action which gives it its character, only its consecration. He who prays

and sings in holiness, eats and speaks in holiness, in holiness performs the appointed ablutions, and in holiness reflects upon his business, through him the sparks which have fallen will be uplifted, and the world which have fallen will be delivered and renewed."<sup>9</sup> This, then, constitutes both the uniqueness and the originality of Hasidism; its reinterpretation of the values of personal and individual existence to the point where general ideas, through the transfiguring medium of Kavvanah, of inwardness in its profoundest sense, become individual ethical values.

In summarizing the characteristics of the Hasidic movement, Scholem comments to the effect that in popularizing the mystical ideology of the Kabbalistic heritage, Hasidism evidences the "inevitable tendency toward terminological inexactitude."<sup>10</sup> This is no-where more clearly demonstrated than in the usages of the two terms "Kavvanah" and "Hithlahavus". Hithlahavus, a term developed by the Hasidim, which means "enthusiasm" or "ecstasy" and which is most frequently used to describe the emotional or sensual aspects of the experience of Devekuth, (and also the condition of the individual immediately prior to achieving the state of Devekuth) is very often used as a synonym for Kavvanah. This confusion is further aggravated by the fact that, in common with the entire vocabulary which attempts to describe the individual's feelings and emotions, the two

states are not separated by clearly drawn boundaries. The point at which Kavvanah, in its most highly developed examples, ceases to be Kavvanah and becomes Hithlahavus cannot be determined with exactitude. Nevertheless, in its more technical sense, Hithlahavus is distinguished from Kavannah in that the latter describes the attitude of the individual toward the performance of religious acts, etc., the spirit in which they are performed, while the former describes the emotional state of the individual when he performs any act with the proper spirit or "Kavvanah".

Hithlahavus, however, is not to be identified in its normative or more usual forms with those ecstatic trance states so common in the experience of the Christian mystics. Except in rare instances, the term is used to indicate an active and not a passive condition. To describe the state of trance the Hasidim use the Kabbalistic term Devekuth, which was discussed in an earlier chapter. Hithlahavus means the burning, the ardor, the frenzy which consumes the individual who has completely given himself over to the performance of a religious act. And as with Kavvanah, it is not restricted to those acts and duties which are commonly thought of as religious, but applies to everything a man does. Hithlahavus is mysticism in its most vigorous and dynamic form: it is mysticism in motion.

Among modern Jewish scholars, no-one has captured more completely the spirit of Hithlahavus, nor expressed

it more sensitively than Martin Buber. "Hithlahabut", he writes, "can appear in all places at all times...it can turn all that is corporeal into that which is spirit. He who is in it is in sanctity...(it) is rekindled over and over again by the most ordinary and uniform events... Though it seems to offer finality to achievement, to attainment, or to comprehension, it does not offer a final end. But it is the finality of thralldom, the shaking off of the last fetter, the release that comes from the dismissal of all that is earthly...The man who is aflame with ardour has command over life, and no outward event that intrudes within his ken can disturb his sanctity... The purest form of manifestation is in dance. In this the whole body becomes subservient to the ecstatic soul. Out of a thousand waves of movement it evokes in a kindred and visible form an image of the many fluctuations of elation and dejection of the enraptured soul...In ecstasy all the past and the future turn into the present. Time crumbles, the limits of Eternity vanish; only the moment remains, and the moment is Eternity. In its indivisible light all that was and that will be appears simple and united. There it is, as a heartbeat is there, and it becomes evident as that is."<sup>11</sup>

In its highest manifestations, however, neither bodily movement nor ecstatic speech, nor song is required to express Hithlahavus. There is a stage of holiness which, once attained, can best be expressed in silence and complete



immobility, but which is yet active and not passive. To use a modern simile, it is like the silent, unseen discharge of magnetic energy by a giant electro-magnet which, though visibly unaltered, affects everything about it.

The ideas which have thus far been developed here can no-where be better illustrated than in the teachings of the Besht himself, and we submit, therefore, the following representative materials. A few of the items have been reproduced in the original to indicate the "flavor" of Hasidic literature, so easily lost in the process of translation.

-A-

A villager, who year after year prayed in the Baal Shem's House of Prayer in the Days of Awe, had a son who was so dull-witted that he could not even grasp the shapes of the letters, let alone the meaning of the holy words. On the Days of Awe his father did not take him to town with him, because he did not understand anything. But when he was thirteen and of age according to the laws of God, his father took him along on the Day of Atonement, for fear the boy might eat on the fast-day simply because he did not know any better.

Now the boy had a small whistle which he always blew when he sat out in the fields to herd the sheep and calves. He had taken this with him in the pocket of his smock and his father had not noticed it. Hour after hour, the boy

sat in the House of Prayer and had nothing to say. But when the Additional Service commenced, he said: "Father, I have my little whistle with me. I want to sing on it." The father was greatly perturbed and told him to do no such thing, and the boy restrained himself. But when the Afternoon Service was begun, he said again: "Father, do let me blow my little whistle." The father became angry and said: "Where did you put it?" And when the boy told him, he laid his hand on his pocket so that the boy could not take it out. But now the Closing Prayer began. The boy snatched his pocket away from his father's hand, took out the whistle and blew a loud note. All were frightened and confused. But the Baal Shem went on with the prayer, only more quickly and easily than usual. Later he said: "This youth raised up, with the sound of his whistle, all our prayers and made things easy for me."<sup>12</sup>

-B-

In this is the mystery of the oneness of God: that no matter at what end I grasp it, I seize the whole. And as the law and commandments are emanations of His being, he who fulfills one commandment in all love and piety and in this commandment grasps one point of God's oneness, holds all of it within his hand, as if he had fulfilled all the commandments.<sup>13</sup>

-C-

Said the Besht: "God's abundance fills the world at all times, since there is no time above us; and it always seeks a channel through which it may descend unto men. If our words of prayer or learning are concentrated upon God, they unite with His abundance and form the channel through which it descends upon the world."<sup>14</sup>

-D-

Said the Besht: "It is not good for a man to be alone, for he cannot know his own defects. By observing the acts which he dislikes in a fellowman, he can see his own defects as in a mirror. He would not have been given the opportunity to note his comrade's offense if he had not been unconsciously guilty in some degree of the same offense. Likewise, if a man is disturbed in his study or worship by his neighbor's revelries, it is a sign from Heaven that his interest has been turning in the wrong direction, and he should commence afresh with the proper intention."<sup>15</sup>

-E-

Said the Besht: "A king built himself a palace and surrounded it with guards. Many of the people came to behold the king, but when they saw the guards they departed. Others gave presents to the guards, and were permitted to enter. But when they saw the ornaments in the great halls, they halted to look at them and forgot

their mission to see the king. Still others looked neither at the guards nor the decorations, but walked straight into the presence of the ruler.

"Some people," continued the Besht, "who wish to commune with the Lord, retreat at the first hindrance. Others bring the gifts of charity and kind deeds before they commence their prayers, but they become engrossed in a wise comment or fine saying in the prayer book. Still others, however, concentrate their mind immediately upon God, and refuse to be diverted by any distraction, however appealing."<sup>16</sup>

-F-

Once the Baal Shem stopped on the threshold of a House of Prayer and refused to go in. "I cannot go in," he said. "It is crowded with teachings and prayers from wall to wall and from floor to ceiling. How could there be room for me?" And when he saw that those around him were staring at him and did not know what he meant, he added: "The words from the lips of those whose teaching and praying does not come from the hearts lifted to heaven, cannot rise, but fill the house from wall to wall and from floor to ceiling."<sup>17</sup>

-G-

Said the Besht: "When you are laboring on work which brings you either pleasure or wealth, you know you must concentrate upon it all your thoughts. Do likewise when

you are laboring on that which will bring you into communion with the Lord and His Holiness. If you fail to do so, your work is fruitless."<sup>18</sup>

-H-

The Besht was asked: "If a man prays without concentration upon the meaning of the words because of foreign thoughts, should he say the prayer over?" The Besht replied: "Since even foreign thoughts contain a spark of God's Holiness, it is not fitting that a worshipper should audibly repeat his prayer. This would be a slight on the holiness of his first prayer. Let him add in meditation the attention lacking in his words, and thereby complete the holiness of the prayer."<sup>19</sup>

-I-

"We should be cautious, however, lest we be deceitful in our intention: we must not affirm that we offer prayer and acts of piety for love of God, and not for anticipated rewards, whereas in our hearts we remember that we will profit thereby. There is a story to the effect that a poor man asked his rich brother: 'Why are you wealthy and I am not?' The other answered: 'Because I have no scruples against doing wrong.' The poor brother began to misconduct himself but he remained poor. He complained of this to his elder brother, who answered: 'The reason your transgressions have not made you wealthy is that you did them not from conviction that it matters



not whether we do good or evil, but solely because you desired riches.'

"How much more applicable is this to doing good with the proper intention!"<sup>20</sup>

-J-

לפי מציאות קטנות ומהו קצוות. ע"מ כמאמר ומה  
לומד חורף לא הכנה הוא הקטנות שאין שכל  
עם. אלא כמאמר לומד הכנה והתורה הוא לא קטן  
המציאות קצוות מקושר המציאות חזקת. וכן הנה  
והנה מציאות שמונה האדם מ קטנות וקצוות.<sup>21</sup>

-K-

Said the Besht: "A man sometimes becomes drunk with the ecstasy of rejoicing over the Torah. He sometimes feels his love for God burn within him. The words of prayer come pouring out of his mouth, and he must pray quickly to keep pace with them."<sup>22</sup>

-L-

Said the Besht: "We read in the Talmud that Fastday Services in which men of impiety take no part are not genuine Services. How is this to be explained?

"A wet log placed in a stove will not burn, but if placed between ten dry logs, it will also burn if the kindling is adequately done. Likewise the worship of pious men which cannot kindle by its ardor a similar fervor among men of impiety is not genuine worship."<sup>23</sup>

-M-

Said the Besht: "We should strive to pray and sing hymns in a low voice, but with all the strength that is in us. This applies also to learning. Any cry to the Lord from a heart at one with Him should be in silence, as we read: 'Their heart hath cried unto the Lord.' "24

-N-

Said the Besht: "Laugh not at the motions of a man who prays with fervor. He makes these motions in order to save himself from foreign thoughts which intrude upon him and threaten to engulf his prayer. Would you laugh at a drowning man who makes motions in the water in order to rescue himself?"25

-O-

"On a certain day of the New Moon, the Baal Shem joined in the morning prayer standing in his own place, for it was his custom to go to the reader's pulpit only when the reading of the Psalms began. Suddenly he trembled and the trembling grew greater and greater. They had seen this happen before while he prayed, but it had never been more than a slight quiver running through his body. Now he was violently shaken. When the reader had ended, and the Baal Shem was to go to the desk in his stead, they saw him stand in his place and tremble violently. One of his disciples went up to him and looked him in the face: it was burning like a torch and his eyes were wide

open and staring like those of a dying man. Another disciple joined the first, they took him by the hands, and led him to the desk. He stood in front of it and trembled. Trembling he recited the Psalms and after he had said the Kaddish, he remained standing and trembled for a good while, and they had to wait with reading the Scriptures until his trembling had left him."<sup>26</sup>

-P-

The Baal Shem said: "When I weld my spirit to God, I let my mouth say what it will, for then all my words are bound to their root in Heaven."<sup>27</sup>

-Q-

"Once they asked the Baal Shem to preach after the prayer of the congregation. He began his sermon, but in the middle of it he was shaken with a fit of trembling, such as sometimes seized him while he was praying. He broke off and said: 'O, Lord of the world, you know that I am not speaking to increase my own reputation...' Here he stopped again, and then the words rushed from his lips. 'Much have I learned, and much have I been able to do, and there is no one to whom I could reveal it.' And he said nothing further."<sup>28</sup>

-R-

הוא היה, הנהגתו, הנהגתו, הנהגתו  
הוא היה, הנהגתו, הנהגתו, הנהגתו

כקד אני קם בן התפלות הכוונות וקראתי בסדרה  
 שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום, ופוזבכתי לשכה ולנוח,  
 ואחרי צורך ודוד ודוד למוצותיך? ... אך פאזיר  
 זו פאדעט: "כשני מקצ' אליבול מליה מליה ...  
 ואני מכונן כונת ילודים האולן נשמות מליה לאפים  
 ולרבהות, ואני צריך להם דם כל אחד ואחד מפי מפה  
 נחש מעליצתי, ואני דושה לו תיקון ומחולל הדב  
 ומחולל, והחלטה חטא קידם. ופס רבים, ששם רבית  
 לפירות כלם פיית צריך לדמות שמונה דמיה של  
 שנים. אך כשני שומע הכרז שמכריז: "מקודם  
 מקודם" ואי אפשר עוד לפירות הנשמות, אי פוסד  
 מן השמונה דמיה".

-8-

לא יאמר אדם השבח אלהיך הכוונה ולא האול  
 ולא ירא כדברים המשתנים את פולק וכשהולק  
 דומה לפניהם מלכהקים הדומה בשאין פולק לפניהם  
 אין מעברין הדומה ואין קם דוד נאמן אלא יודע לו  
 האמונה שכל או הלא פולק וידעה כל המשתנה דם  
 שיהא לפי פולק אל על פי שאין יבא להם לפניו

ואין ראוי להאגל לפניו אל-על פי כן יצטרף לו רצונו  
כי רחמנות גדול עליו דבר מאד. 30

לא יאמר אדם כשאול<sup>-T-</sup> להיפולו ההחלפה  
אחפלו ואם לאו לא אאנוס אי"צ להיפולו כי לא אצדקה  
המשל הפלג כשהוא למחש' משה אל הקדיו אולם שם  
שם קדושים ומלכות מכירים את הפלג הקדושותיו  
ואולם אין קדושים ומלך כואים כשצדק משמרים יחזק  
באותו מקום מסתמא שם הפלג כק הוא כשמים יכח  
להיפול משמרים את הפלג שלא להקשות אותו לפניו  
ואם כן יחזיק אי"צ יוחזק כי הוא הפלג הבא  
ומסתמין אותו בפניו. 31



## PART 3

In analyzing the Hasidic concept of "Abodah" or "service", we enter an area in which both the similarities and dissimilarities of Hasidism to traditional Rabbinic Judaism stand in bold relief. Unlike its forerunner the Sabbatian movement, Hasidism neither advocated nor practiced the flaunting of the prescribed rituals and practices which characterized the orthodoxy of their day. Though the Hasidim frequently didn't understand the reasons behind the law, and were not meticulous or strict in its observance--as in the case of the laws of shechita and tefillah--they still regarded the Shulchan Aruch as an authoritative and binding legal code, and, within limitations, attempted to follow its regulations. In terms of a general statement of aims such as the following there is nothing to indicate the sharp disagreement which separated Hasidism and Rabbinic Judaism. It is related that "Once the Besht was asked, 'What is the essence of service?'...and the Besht answered: 'I have come into this world to show a way, that man shall make the observance of three rules his aim in life, namely: Love of God, love of Israel and love of Torah.'<sup>32</sup> On the surface, at least, there is nothing here to which traditional Judaism could object. The differences arose, however, the moment it became apparent that, for the Hasidim, the application of these rules

meant something totally different than it meant for traditional Judaism. "By the service of God was generally understood a life which fulfilled the precepts of the written and oral law. Baalshem understood by it a certain attitude towards life as a whole."<sup>33</sup>

Once more the complete dedication of Hasidism, or at least of its founder, to the canons of inwardness evidences itself, and in a sphere of activity which, by its very nature, might be expected to nullify the applicability of this principle. For traditional Judaism *תורה, מצוות, ומעשים טובים* --the study of Torah, the observance of the commandments, and the performance of "good deeds", of meritorious acts, were the recognized means of serving God. Contrary to certain current opinions, Hasidism rejected none of these categories of service. What it did do was to alter the emphasis which tradition had placed upon each of them, and extend the last to such a point that its original meaning was lost. Talmud Torah, study of the law, was no longer the foundation upon which service to God was fashioned. What took its place was the attitude with which one served God. Not service out of knowledge, but service out of love was what was sought.

The same basic attitude was maintained with regard to the observance of the mitzvot as was maintained in connection with Torah. Here, however, a new consideration becomes important--Kavvanah. As was indicated in the

previous section of this chapter, it was not the performance of the mitzvah itself which was of primary concern, but whether or not the act in question was fulfilled with the proper intention and devotion.

With the *mitzvos*, the "good deeds", the tendency to minimize is replaced by the tendency to emphasize, perhaps even to exaggerate. The importance attached to the performance of meritorious acts unquestionably identifies them as the foundation upon which the Hasidic way of life was based. Under the influence of the doctrine of Kavvanah, however, and flowing naturally from the concept of the immanence of God, the category of good deeds is extended to include a whole host of common, ordinary, day-to-day actions, so numerous as to completely overwhelm those ethical acts which had traditionally comprised the subject matter of this category. There was almost no human action through which God could not be served. Equally important was the corollary of this proposition which maintains that, not only man, but all things, possessed of a spark of divinity, are capable of serving God.

As with every other Hasidic value, so also with abodah; the final test which alone determines whether or not a given action can be designated as an act of service to God is the test of inwardness. And the emotional quality which distinguishes service is love. Only through love, with love, and in love can God truly be served. Here the Besht dis-

tinguishes two kinds of love--"the love of a man for his wife, which should be expressed in privacy and not in the presence of spectators, for only in a place hidden from all can it perfect itself, and the love of brothers and sisters and children which needs no concealment. So in the love of God there are two kinds. There is the love through doctrine, prayer, and the fulfilment of that which is commanded. This should be practiced in silence and not in public, so that it should not become diverted into a love of fame or of pride. And there is the love when a man mingles with his fellow-creatures, talks, listens, gives and takes with them, and cleaves to God in the secrecy of his heart, and never ceases to turn his thoughts towards Him. And this is a higher grade than the other."<sup>34</sup>

Through love does man accomplish the divine task for which he is destined, that of restoring the divine harmony. Through the "labors of love" does he reunite the Shekhina, the Glory of God, with Elohut, His ultimate being. But man's concern cannot be for himself alone. The cosmic task cannot be completed until all the sparks of divinity which have been exiled into the world are reunited with their source. For its success, therefore, the task demands service in community, and this is what is intended by the Besht's teaching mentioned above. Love of man, then, becomes the most exalted form or expression of love of God, and such love can only be developed

and nurtured in society. Furthermore, the very vastness of the task which confronts man imposes upon him the necessity of working together with other men for its accomplishment. The following parable related by the Besht illustrates this point with dramatic clarity:

"Some men were standing under a high tree, and one of them had eyes to see. He saw on the tree-top a bird glorious to behold. But the others did not see it. And the man was overcome by an immense desire to reach the bird and take it, and he could not go away without the bird. But by reason of the height of the tree this was not in his power, and no ladder was to be found. But through his great and mighty anxiety counsel came to his soul. He took the men who stood about him and placed one upon the other, each upon the shoulders of his companion. And he climbed himself upon the topmost, so that he was able to reach the bird, and he took it. And the men, though they had helped him, knew nothing of the bird and did not see it. But he knew of it and saw it and saw he could not have reached it without them. If, however, the lowest of them had deserted his post, then the man on the top must have fallen on the ground."<sup>35</sup>

Once again let us turn to the Besht himself for an understanding of the subject we have been discussing. Before doing so, however, let us point out the fact that there frequently can be found among the materials attributed to the Besht parallel statements differing only slightly one from the other. Where variant versions exist, only



one has been included here, the others being indicated in the notes. Furthermore, it must be clear that the attempt to impose our classification upon these sayings and stories is based upon a purely arbitrary decision. Many of them could lend themselves readily to illustration of other categories as well.

-A-

A man should serve God with all his strength, for all his services are necessary. It is God's will that man should serve Him in all ways possible.

And by this is meant:

If a man be busy in converse with the people and be unable, therefore, to learn and study, he should, nevertheless, cleave to God and unite his soul with God's Name; and if he should be upon a journey and so be prevented from praying according to his wont, he should serve God in other ways. And let him not be grieved thereat, for it is God's will that man serve Him in all ways, sometimes thus and again thus; and for this reason He has appointed these journeys and conversings with the people, that all the services may be performed.<sup>36</sup>

-B-

Said the Besht: "In the verse: 'I have set the Lord always before me' (Psalm 16:8), the word 'shivithi'

may also mean: 'I equalized.' Everything becomes of equal worth to me because I serve the Lord constantly. I care not if I am praised or blamed; whether I eat dry bread or goodly viands. I serve equally in every circumstance in every place...I believe that God's care is never absent from me. Not I, but He, my God, knows what is for my good, and what is not."<sup>37</sup>

-C-

Said the Besht: "The Torah commands us: 'Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out' (Levit. 6:6). Our heart is the alter. In every occupation let a spark of the holy fire remain within you, so that you may fan it into a flame."<sup>38</sup>

-D-

Said the Besht: "No two persons have the same abilities. Each man should work in the service of God according to his own talents. If one man tries to imitate another, he merely loses his opportunity to do good through his own merit, and he cannot accomplish anything by imitation of the other's service."<sup>39</sup>

-E-

אין: הארץ נא כרשה" לא חלה בידם  
הכונה הוא שבו כוונתו לרצות סגור  
כדי שיבואו לרצות כשה" וזכך לא חלה

הימים. ולא יבון גדודות רב אצות נחל כוח  
 אורא ית' אלה, ולא שיהא אצות. וכשהוא  
 כואב שגדודות גדולות מלאו ית' אלה,  
 כשהוא: ולא יאמר אצות גדול מלאו ית' אלה.<sup>46</sup>

-F-

A man may realize at times that there is an infinite number of firmaments and spheres and that he himself but stands upon a tiny spot of our little earth; and he may reflect that this great universe is as nothing before God Who is boundless and Who Himself set bounds and found space within Himself wherein He created worlds. But, however fully a man may comprehend this, he will still be unable to rise to the upper worlds; the reason for this is that he is contemplating God from afar. But when he serves God with all his strength, great power gathers in him and his spirit rises and in an instant he penetrates the firmaments and soars above angels and the zones of Heaven and seraphim and thrones; and this is full service.<sup>41</sup>

-G-

By a perverse humility a man may remove himself from the service of God; that is, when in his very self-humiliation he does not believe that prayer and teaching can bring down abundance upon the world and that the angels

themselves are nourished by his piety. For if he did believe, with what fear and joy he would serve God and note his every word and movement that he might be sure of the justice of his speech and action.

A man should think of himself as a ladder placed upon the earth with its top touching Heaven and of all his gestures and acts and words as tracks and footsteps leading to the upper world.<sup>42</sup>

-H-

...If the vision of a beautiful woman come suddenly to a man's eyes, or if he perceive any other fair and lovely thing, he should unhesitatingly ask himself: Whence comes this beauty except from the divine force which permeates the world? Consequently the origin of this beauty is divine, and why should I be attracted by the part? Better for me to be drawn after the All, the Source of every partial beauty! If a man taste something good and sweet, let the taster conceive that it is from the heavenly sweetness that the sweet quality is derived. Such perception of beauty then is the experience of the Eternal, blessed be He.<sup>43</sup>

-I-

Said the Besht: "Our love of God should be like the love between brother and sister, or between a mother and her child, rather than like the love between man and wife or between lovers. The first may show their love

both in private and in public; whereas the latter do so in private only. We should not imitate those who say that our love of God should be demonstrated only in the synagogue or at home, but should not be shown on the street or in public places. In the Song of Songs (8:1), the author conveys the above lesson to us in the words: 'O that thou wert as my brother, or as he that sucked the breasts of my mother! When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, and none would despise me!"<sup>44</sup>

-J-

Said the Besht: "When you fall in love with an earthly pleasure, consider that the power of love was vouchsafed unto you for the purpose of loving God, not for unworthy things. Then you will find it easy to serve God with the love awakened in your heart. We read (S.S. 7:7): 'How fair and how pleasant thou art, O love, for delights!' Without the feeling of love, stimulated by pleasures, it is difficult to feel true love of God."<sup>45</sup>

-K-

"Once the spirit of the Baal Shem was so oppressed that it seemed to him that he would have no part in the coming world. Then he said to himself: 'If I love God, what need have I of a coming world!'"<sup>46</sup>

-L-

Said the Besht: "Trust in God's mercies, and His kindness will encompass you. Fear God's punishments,



and His strict judgment will surround you. Wherever your mind abides, you will find yourself cleaving unto it. Serve the Lord in love and in complete trust, and you will receive His mercies."<sup>47</sup>

-M-

Said the Besht: "We find the words: 'Who is mighty? He who subdues his passions' (Pirke Aboth 4:1). They may be illustrated as follows: 'A watchman heard a thief seeking to break into a house; he cried out, and the burglar escaped. Another watchman who heard of this, prepared handcuffs. When the thief sought to break in, he captured him and bound him with chains.'

"One good man, when an evil desire overtakes him, drives it away. Another Zaddik subdues the desire unto service of God. Hence we are taught: 'Who is mighty? He who forces his passions, his desires and his every quality of character to serve the Lord.'"<sup>48</sup>

-N-

"Had they but forsaken Me, and kept My commandments!"

"This is to be interpreted thus: The end of knowledge is that we can have no knowledge. But there are two ways of being unable to know. One is immediate: here one does not even begin to examine or to perceive because it is manifestly impossible to know. But there is another way whereby one examines and seeks until he realizes that it is impossible to know. And the difference

between these two--to what shall we compare them? To two who desire to have knowledge of the king. The first visits all the king's chambers, rejoices in his treasure-rooms and stately halls, and in the end learns that he can have no knowledge of the king. The other says to himself: 'Since it is impossible to have knowledge of the king, I have no wish to enter his palace and will content myself with ignorance.'

"Thus we may understand what is meant by these words of God: They have abandoned Me--that is, they have given up trying to perceive Me, as it is impossible; but it were better if they had abandoned Me after examination and perception, thus obeying My teachings."<sup>49</sup>

-0-

The Besht commented on the phrase: "Our God and God of our Fathers." He said: "Some persons have faith because their fathers taught them to believe. In one sense, this is satisfactory: no philosophical axioms will break their belief; in another, it is unsatisfactory, since their belief does not come from personal knowledge.

"Others come to belief through conviction after research. This is satisfactory in one sense: they know God from inner conviction; in another, it is unsatisfactory: if other students demonstrate to them the fallacy of their reasoning, they may become unbelievers.

"The best believers are those whose beliefs are satisfactory in every way: they believe because of

tradition and also through their own reasoning. This is what we mean when we say: 'Our God and the God of our Fathers.' The Lord is our master, both because we know He is our God, and because our fathers have taught us that He is our God."<sup>50</sup>

-P-

The Besht commented on the verse: "And ye turn aside and serve other gods." He said: "The moment ye turn aside from God, ye serve other gods. For all your living forces are from God, and if ye use these forces for purposes not desirable in the eyes of God, it means that ye wish to please other gods."<sup>51</sup>

-Q-

Said the Besht: "It is written (Lam. 3:23); 'They are new every morning: great is thy faith.' A man should believe that each day the world is recreated, and that he is reborn each morning. His faith will then be increased, and he will take a fresh interest daily in his service to the Lord."<sup>52</sup>

-R-

"Take heed that everything which you do for the sake of God should be in the service of God. Thus with eating: do not say that the end of eating is that you may gain strength for the service of God. For, though this may be a good end, too, the true good is

accomplished only when the deed is for the sake of Heaven, when the holy sparks are raised higher."<sup>53</sup>

-S-

השם יתברך מלא כל הארץ כבודו, איתן איתן  
 פני מניח, והמקום שנתקן אדם שם כבודו יתברך  
 מצוי... הקד"ה דמה שיראה לו לאדם שהוא רחוק  
 ויחלף' אלהים קרה מלא, כמו שאמר החז"ל צו  
 מלא, שאמר קודם תקיפת אפר:  
 מלאך אלה חכם גדול הנה האחיזת צינים פולין  
 גדול מלא ובו הרבה חברים זה לפניו מלא, והקד"ה  
 במה מחזיקו צו לפניו מלא. אך שם אלה היה  
 פולין, וכמוהו היו מכוונים פולין הרבה מלא, וברך  
 שם באו הצדדים היפים. וכל כלי הבית יתקדם שנתקן  
 שם. והמלאך ישה אחד הארון, רחוק רחוק מלא  
 מברואים. כשנמנה הנין הפולין נקראו שני המלאכה  
 וקדוה המדינה אלה וראוהו והכנסו אלהים קדו  
 ואלהים ואלהים הוא עם המלאך. כשאלו וצדקו הפולין  
 הפולין נמצא השם ונסקרו הפולין, והחלילו תמרים  
 זה לזה איך אפשר להכנס בו, אחר שבעה קורות

ופסוק וכתלים חוצצים לפניכם. הסתכלו  
 והתבוננו בקרואים הללו, ולא כאלו כי את חומה  
 לפניכם מחומה ומחיצה לפניכם מחיצה. צמדו כק  
 זמן הרבה עד שאלו הן ה' חלק ואמר להם: "הלא  
 יצאתם מאבי חכם גדול הוא, ויורד וברקו הוא גם  
 בחכמתו לחינת ציונים. כל החקליון כלו אין לו  
 ממש, ואין כאן לא שום חומה ומחיצה, ולא שום שער  
 ודלת, אלא הכל לחינת ציונים קמורה, שנצמח ארואים  
 שמש וברכה, אלה האמת הלא מקום פנוי ופועל  
 ומפואר מכל צדדיו, והרי אבי החלק לפניכם..."  
 ואין שום מחיצה מעצמות בין האדם והיט יחבר  
 בידיעה זאת. 54

-T-

וזהו מדינה גדולה לאדם שיראה תמיד הדין  
 שבו פשי' כמי שמסתכל על אדם א' ויחשוב שגם ההווה  
 ית' מסתכל עליו כמי אדם אחר המסתכל עליו כ"כ  
 יהי תמיד במחשבתו ובמחשבה נכח וברוח  
 וצלוה. 55



-U-

התורה חסה על מעשה של ישראל וזאת כן  
 כי זה כלל קדוה של דבר שאדם יודע או אוכל או  
 מתעמק בכלי הוא נהנה מהחיות של האותיות הדבר  
 כי יראה אותו הרוקניו לא היו שום קיום לאותיות דבר  
 ויש גם ניצוצי קדושים השייכים לשורש נשמתו  
 וכשהוא מתעמק האותיות בכלי או אוכל מתאכל אפילו  
 לצורך קיום הוא מתקן הניצוצין כי אלה דוגמה  
 ה' בכל הפעולות שהם לקדושה ופירוש או מתאכל או שאר  
 דברים. 56

-V-

הכל דרכים דברו זה כלל קדוה דברו לשון  
 חיבור דבר' הוי' הכל מעשיו אפילו הדברים גמלים  
 נוצר צריך שתפיה דוגמה לצורך קדוה וזה וזה  
 אכונת ד"א אפילו המצא מן המצא לא תפיה אכונת  
 דבר רק כולו וזה. 57

-W-

יאותו במדות צרכיות מאד יקום הצרכיות מעשיות  
 כי תחלה נוצר אדם אלפי ופיא כאן הפועל נוצר

כמדת הקד"ש שהוא יצא למות וכן כל דבר שחש  
 יצא הקד"ש כי כל דבר יכול לעמוד עליו. 58

-X-

[illegible]

לא דנה אמת דהר. צוה בהצטרף אליו גיבור  
 וט המקהל. אמר לו אמת האש. שמה חתמה הפחית  
 מעבד ואזי? אמר לו: "אילו רציתי הפחית ב"י  
 אומר הסוד האמת הפחית. שילק או בהצטרף הרב  
 צוהית בהצטרף.

גאל אולתו: מה אלה צושה? אמר: אני צושה  
 אומנותי: גאל אולתו: איך אלה מתנהג? אמר: אני  
 צושה לא פחות מארבעים זון או חמשים זון, והפסם אלה  
 אני מניח אולם הצריחה גדולה עם נעים חמץ, ואני דורך  
 אולם עד שנצטין כתיקון: גאל אולתו: איך אלה מוכר?  
 כשיה' לו: אני איני יוצא מפתח ביתי, אלא רחמנומים האים  
 אהית וקונים ממני, והם מביאים לי צמר שקונים  
 בשבילי, ואני טוחן רפס ריוח הצד טרחתם, וגם אל  
 רום מאלתו לא רציתי אלא אכבודו, ואני הולך מפתח  
 ביתי כי אם אהיה בכנסת, אם יש מעין אני מלפני הברכה  
 ואם אין עם מעין אני מלפני היחידות על מקומי: גאל  
 אולתו בהדגל: אם הוצרכתי לנשיא הניק מעד אלה צושה?  
 כשיה': השם יתברך צוה לי מענה והיה מן האומנותי

ואני דומה נשואין לפני. אמר לו הבעל: כשאתה קם  
 באמנוחת הבקר מה אתה עושה? אמר: "אני עושה  
 פונדקאות קטן". גאל אוחיו: ותפלים סוים אתה אומר?  
 אמר לו: "מה שאני יכול לומר הרי זה אני אומר".  
 אמר עליו הבעל, כי הוא יסוד בית הכנסת וזה  
 הלאה בקולו במערה בימים, אמר סוף! <sup>59</sup>

## PART 4

It has long been recognized that the development within Hasidism of the institution of Zaddikism constituted one of the most glaring corruptions of the principles upon which the movement was founded. That such a complete perversion of the role of the Zaddik could have taken place is only an additional proof of the difficulty of perpetuating the spirit of a movement once that movement has developed to the point of institutionalization. This unfortunate mutation of the Hasidic conception of the ideal religious personality notwithstanding, the definition of that ideal shall ever constitute one of the most remarkable contributions of Hasidism to religious thought. Something of the nature of the Zaddik can be gleaned from the following remarks by Scholem on the growth of Hasidism as a movement. "The whole development," he writes, "centers around the personality of the Hasidic saint; this is something entirely new. Personality takes the place of doctrine; what is lost in rationality by this change is gained in efficacy. The opinions particular to the exalted individual are less important than his character, and mere learning, knowledge of the Torah, no longer occupies the most important place in the scale of religious values... The new ideal of the religious leader, the Zaddik, differs from the traditional ideal of rabbinical Judaism,



the Talmud Hakham or student of the Torah, mainly in that he himself 'has become Torah.'<sup>60</sup> Somewhat the same idea was expressed by Schechter when he wrote, "To the Chasidim Baalschem is not a man who established a theory or set forth a system; he himself was the incarnation of a theory and his whole life the revelation of a system."<sup>61</sup>

We have already examined some of the ingredients which go into the making of the Zaddik. One of the most important, however, and the one which called forth the comments with which this section was opened, remains to be discussed, namely "Shifluth" or humility. In a sense, this quality is more important than any of the others, for it was only the extremely rare individual who, cognizant of his spiritual capabilities, could yet retain those attitudes toward himself and toward others which comprise the attribute of humility. We use the expression "attitudes toward himself and toward others" advisedly, for the Hasidim treated Shifluth from two sides: a negative side in thinking humbly of one's self, a positive in thinking highly of one's neighbor, in other words, the love of our fellow-man. The latter of these two aspects of humility we have already had occasion to consider; it is the former which remains to be discussed. Only theoretically is such a division possible; in practice, the two are like the obverse and reverse of a coin, and they cannot be separated one from the other.

It must be made clear that the humility which is here

under consideration is no voluntary and practical virtue. It is nothing but an inward state, feeling and expression. It is never forced, never a self-abasement, self-command, or determination made by the individual. To quote Buber, "It is as involuntary as a glance of a child, and simple as the speech of a child."<sup>62</sup> It is the natural result of true love of man, that love which makes it possible for the individual to share in and participate in the lives of others, that love which enables a man to "experience" the feelings, the emotions, the sorrows and joys of another. Or as Buber succinctly puts it, "He dwells in true humility who feels for others as himself, and who feels himself in others."<sup>63</sup> And how does one attain such a spirit and outlook? In a badly preserved parable commenting on the verse of the Proverbs "As in water face to face, so the heart of man to man", the Baalshem taught that "one must bow down low towards one's neighbor as when someone wants to approach his reflection in the water and bows down low so that it comes towards him until his head touches the water and he sees nothing more because both have become the one that they really are; so does man's heart come to man, and not just this one to that one, but all to all. So is the 'humble' Moses said to have bowed down to the 'earth's surface' and mutual love to have inspired the whole of Israel."<sup>64</sup>

As ardent as the early Hasidim were in their espousal of the virtue of humility, just so vehement were they in

their denunciation of pride and vanity, for in them they recognized the disavowal of the true love of man and hence of the true love of God in which humility is rooted. And it is interesting to note that among the sources from which pride develops they identified self-conscious humility.

The truly humble man, aware of the uniqueness of every individual, a uniqueness which he related to the divinity which dwells in all, was held to be capable of loving not only those whose lives were evil, but those who hated him as well. This was the acid test of the Zaddik, and it was this the Besht had in mind when he enunciated the doctrine of "loving more". The surplus of love, reasoned the Baalshem, might be just that which was necessary to evoke a favorable response from such people, and to encourage them to alter their way of life.

In terms of its ideas concerning the quality of Shiflut, it may be that there is little that is unusual about Hasidism; in the degree, however, in which it was capable, at least in its early period, of stimulating men to live by those ideals, it was a movement whose deep sense of inwardness would distinguish it to its credit from any other mass movement in Jewish life.

The stories and sayings which follow are illustrative of the Hasidic concept of Shiflut.

## -A-

The Baal Shem said: "I let sinners come close to me, if they are not proud. I keep the scholars and the sinless away from me if they are proud. For the sinner who knows that he is a sinner, and therefore considers himself base--God is with him, for He 'dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses'. But concerning him who prides himself on the fact that he is unburdened by sin, God says, as we know from the Gemara: 'There is not enough room in the world for Myself and him'."65

## -B-

Said the Besht: "A king was told that a man of humility is endowed with long life. He attired himself in old garments, took up his residence in a small hut, and forbade anyone to show reverence before him. But when he honestly examined himself, the king found himself to be prouder of his seeming humility than ever before. A philosopher thereupon remarked to him: 'Dress like a king; live like a king; allow the people to show due respect to you; but be humble in your inmost heart'."66

## -C-

The Besht commented upon Daniel 2:22: "He knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with Him". He said: "He who knows himself to be insignificant, even among the uncultured and the ignorant, who live in dark-

ness, shall have the Divine Light dwell within him."67

-D-

Said the Besht: "False humility can be illustrated by this story: 'A man was learned, gifted and charitable, but he was afflicted with the blemish of pride. He was told that if he learned humility he would become a perfect man. He acted upon this counsel, and studied humility until apparently he had learned it by heart. One day a man failed to show him deference. The man of supposed humility turned to him and said: "You fool! Do you not know that since I have learned humility, I am a man of perfect character?".'68

-E-

Said the Besht: "It is so natural for a gifted man to attain pride that he scarcely is aware of it. It is only when he strives to humble himself in his intercourse with people that he realizes how full of pride he has been. It is like a man who travels in a stagecoach and falls asleep. The driver has to ascend a hill; after he reaches the summit, there is a long stretch of smooth road. When the man awakes and is told he is now on a hill, he can hardly believe it. Only when the descent is made, does he realize how high he had been."69

-F-

"Say not in your heart that you are greater than your



neighbor because you serve God with passion. You are no different from all creation which was formed for the service of God...How should you be singled out more than any worm? For it, too, serves its Creator with all its strength."<sup>70</sup>

-G-

Said the Besht: "Man should learn pride, and not be proud; he should learn anger, but not feel angry. For man should be a complete personality, possessing all human traits. Does not the Torah picture God as possessing both justice and mercy?"<sup>71</sup>

-H-

Said the Besht: "A farmer held an egg in his hand, and mused: 'I shall place this egg under a hen; I shall raise up the chick and it shall hatch other chicks; I will sell them, and purchase a cow and...' While planning thus, he squeezed the egg and it broke in his fingers.

"In the same fashion some people are satisfied with the sum of holiness and knowledge they have attained, and think constantly that they are superior to others. But they do not perceive that by doing this, they lose even the little they have attained."<sup>72</sup>

-I-

Said the Besht: "When a man serves God constantly he has no leisure for pride or other disagreeable traits. He

feels that he does not belong in this world. Neither the respect nor disrespect of men concern him. He is then able to perform any good deed without feeling pride in doing it."<sup>73</sup>

-J-

גאון יאמר האלו שהוא קדוש מחבירו שהוא  
 דומה בהיקונו שהוא כשאר הנבראים הנבראו לצורך  
 צרכיו יתברך והש"י נתן לחבירו שכל כח שנתן לו  
 שכל ומה שהוא חסד יותן מה חסדו שהחלוצות  
 דומה למה שהוא יתן הכל שכלו וכלו והאדם נשכח  
 רמה וחלוצות כמ"ס ואנכי חלוצות ולא איש ואמר לו  
 נתן לו הש"י שכל לא היה יכול לצדדו רק כח  
 חלוצות וא"כ אפילו מחלוצות אינו חסד למעלה כ"ס  
 מעני אדם. ויחשוב שהוא חלוצות ואנכי חלוצות קטנים  
 הם חסדים כח חסדים גדולים שכלם נבראים ואין  
 להם יכולת רק מה שנתן להם הבורא יתן ומה  
 זה יפיר חסדו במחשבתו.<sup>74</sup>

-K-

בלימוד יהיה הכח והשמחה קדושה וזה מעני  
 מחשבות נכון כשאר דומה חסד אלה יתן

הכל רגע אין לו פנאי לפרנקאונג וואלדאם און  
 פראנקאם וואר אדער אדער <sup>75</sup> הרצות.

## PART 5

In the light of our knowledge of the hardship and privation which pervaded the lives of the Jews of Podolia and Volhynia during the 17th and 18th centuries, the Hasidic stress on "Simcha" or "Joy" is remarkable indeed. We have already noted that, in the wake of the disastrous expulsion from Spain, Lurianic Kabbalah embarked upon a development in which asceticism, mortification of the flesh, and penance became dominant characteristics. This psychological reaction to a world which had rejected the Jew is not difficult to understand. We are aware, too, of the fact that a century later the despondency and suffering of many of those Jews who survived the catastrophic Chmelnitzki Massacres gave rise to an apocalyptic mood which made possible the acceptance of Sabbatianism together with the messianic claims of its central figure, Sabbatai Zevi. The rejoicing which coursed through the body of Israel with the appearance of this "Messiah", while real enough, was yet illusory, and in the end proved as false as the "Messiah" who had evoked it. Despair and disillusion once more reigned supreme. This was the psychological climate of the Jewish world into which the Baalshem entered. Outwardly, it was little different from what it had been during the preceding two centuries, and if we think to find in the political, economic or social events of the 18th century that which can

account for the joy which Hasidism brought into the life of the Jewish community, we shall seek in vain. If we find anything at all, we shall find only that which could have sharpened the despair, for this was a century of continuing decline, a century during which the Polish Jew continued to eat of the bitter fruit of oppression.

Hasidic joy was the product of naught but the re-awakened inner spirit of Judaism. It proclaimed the victory of inwardness, of true spirituality, over the externals of life. Though it had its physical manifestations, it was primarily a spiritual quality; housed in the body, it yet transcended the body. It was the by-product of a life of inwardness which elevated man to a level of spirituality where the mean realities of daily existence could no longer shake his faith in the meaningfulness and purposefulness of his existence.

"Once believe that you are really the servant and the child of God and how can you fall again into a gloomy condition of mind? Nor should the inevitable sins which we all must commit disturb our glad serenity of soul. For is not repentance ready at hand by which we may climb back to God? Every penitent thought is a voice of God. Man should detect that voice in all the evidence of his senses, in every sight and sound of external nature. It is through his want of faith in the universality of God's presence that he is deaf to these subtle influences and can read only the lessons which



are inscribed in books."<sup>76</sup>

"The earlier Kabbalists had rendered the word t'shubah (repentance), by taking its constituent letters as the initial letters of the proper words, as follows: taanit, sak, v'efer, b'kiyah and hesped; that is--fasting, sack-cloth and ashes, wailing and lamentation; these are repentance. But the Baal Shem took the letters of the word t'shubah to be the initial letters and therefore the indications of the following: Tummim--thou shall be whole before thy God! Shiviti--let there always be the sense of the Divine Presence before me! V'ohabta--thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul! B'kol--recognize thou thy God in all thy paths! Hoken--be thou armed and ready before thy God!"<sup>77</sup>

It follows from the intimacy of the relationship between man and God, not only that man should serve Him in joy, but that even backsliding and error are no cause for despair. The God of love is a merciful and ever-forgiving God, desirous of man's good intentions, aware of the weaknesses of his flesh.

To serve God with joy, then, became one of the fundamental characteristics of the Hasidic way of life, and song, its purest expression, a symbol of its fecundity. Hasidic niggunim or melodies became an important element in Jewish folk music, and have continued to this day to brighten the worship of our synagogues and temples. But

far more significant, Hasidic song became a living demonstration of the power of the spirit to make life, under any circumstances worth living.

-A-

"Weeping is evil indeed, for man should serve God with joy. But if one weeps from joy, tears are commendable."<sup>78</sup>

-B-

Sometimes the evil yezer (inclination) betrays a man, persuading him that he has committed a deadly sin. Possibly he has failed in some stringency of the law, possibly he had done no wrong at all. The yezer's purpose is to drive him into despondency over the supposed lapse and by inducing a condition of gloom render him incapable of service. Let man beware of this dastardly trick! Let him retort on the yezer: "I perceive thy design to lure me from service. Thou speakest a lie! If indeed I have sinned a little, the more gratified will my Creator be if I refuse to let my offense interrupt the joyousness of my service. On the contrary, I will go on serving Him in a happy mood. For I serve not for my own ends but to give God pleasure. If I do not worry about this peccadillo, with which thou chargest me, God will not take it amiss. For I ignore it that my service be not stayed for a single instant." This is

the great rule of service: Bid melancholy, avaunt!<sup>79</sup>

-C-

Said the Besht: "The chief value of a Mitzvah is its performance with pleasure. But continuous pleasure loses its relish, and therefore it is natural for a man to descend at times in his service to the Lord. But when he ascends again to his former place, he experiences new pleasure therein."<sup>80</sup>

-D-

Said the Besht: "The strength thou wert willing to lose through fasting, devote to the Torah and to worship. Thereby wilt thou ascend to a higher state."<sup>81</sup>

-E-

"Once a Jew in great tribulation of heart came to the Besht, inquiring: 'How many days have I to fast, to make atonement for a grievous sin?' The Besht replied: 'Not through fasting is the ire of God averted, but through joy of which the Psalms are harbingers. Say the Psalms with inward rejoicing, and you will be quit of your sin!'"

"Men learned in the Law came to the Besht on an errand of dispute. 'In times gone by,' they protested, 'there were pious men aplenty, fasting from Sabbath to Sabbath, and inflicting their own bodies with self-devised torments. And now your disciples proclaim it to all who care to listen

that much fasting is unlawful and self-torment a crime.'

"The Besht made answer: 'It is the aim and essence of my pilgrimage on earth to show my brethren by living demonstration, how one may serve God with merriment and rejoicing. For he who is full of joy is full of love for men and all fellow creatures.'"82

-F-

Said the Besht: "What if thou hast never transgressed, if the source of sin is in thy heart! Thou mayest not have offended because thou wast prevented by shame. Dost thou know that anger is like unto idolatry? That pride is like unto idolatry? Dost thou know that evil thoughts are worse than evil acts, for thoughts give life to deeds? Thou art righteous only when thou feelest more joy in cleaving unto the Lord than in any material pleasure."83

-G-

The Sadigurer Hasid, Reb Leibush Istriker, related the following legend, while seated at the communal third meal of the Sabbath:

"When the Besht was still seeking the proper way to serve the Lord, he found that the observance of the Sabbath according to the injunctions of the later Rabbis practically prohibited any movement, and filled a man with anxiety lest he transgress some strict regulation. He believed that this contradicted the command of Isaiah

to 'call the Sabbath a delight' (Isaiah 58:13). He pondered on this for a long time, and in the night he had a dream:

"An angel took him up to heaven and showed him two vacant chairs in the highest place in Paradise, brilliantly illumined, as if with vari-colored gems. 'For whom are these intended?' he asked. 'For thee,' was the answer, 'if thou makest use of thy intelligence; and also for a man whose name and residence I am writing down for thee.'

"He was next taken to Gehenna at its deepest spot, and shown two vacant seats, burning with a hellish flame. 'For whom are these intended?' he asked. 'For thee,' was the answer, 'if thou makest no use of thy intelligence; and also for a man whose name and residence I am writing down for thee.'

"In his dream the Besht visited the man who was to be his companion in Paradise. He found him living among non-Jews, ignorant of Judaism, except that on the Sabbath he gave a banquet for his non-Jewish friends, wherein he greatly rejoiced.

"'Why do you hold this banquet?' asked the Besht. 'I know not,' replied the man, 'but I recall that in my youth, my parents prepared admirable meals on Saturday, and sang many songs; hence I do the same.' The Besht wished to instruct him in Judaism, inasmuch as he had been born a Jew. But the power of speech left him for the moment, since he realized that the man's joy in the Sabbath would be marred



if he knew all his shortcomings in the performance of religious duties.

"The Besht then departed, in his dream, to the place where his companion in Gehenna dwelt. He found the man to be a strict observer of Judaism, always in anxiety lest his conduct was not correct, and passing the entire Sabbath day as if he were sitting on hot coals. The Besht wished to rebuke him, but once more the power of speech was taken away from him, since he realized that the man would never understand that he was doing wrong.

"Thereupon the Besht meditated on the whole matter, and evolved his new system of observance, whereby God is served in joy which comes from the heart."<sup>84</sup>

-H-

"Once, just before the New Year's, the Baal Shem came to a certain town and asked the people who read the prayers there in the Days of Awe. They replied that this was done by the rav of the town. 'And what is his manner of praying?' asked the Baal Shem.

'On the Day of Atonement,' they said, 'he recites all the confessions of sin in the most cheerful tones.'

"The Baal Shem sent for the rav and asked him the cause of this strange procedure. The rav answered: 'the least among the servants of the king, he, whose task it is to sweep the forecourt free of dirt, sings a merry song as he works, for he does what he is doing to gladden

the king.'"85

-I-

The Besht was asked: "What is the chief point in service to the Lord, if it be true, as you teach, that fasting and self-chastisement are sinful?"

The Besht answered: "The main thing is to encompass oneself in the love of God, the love of Israel, and the love of Torah. A man may attain this if he secures enough nourishment to preserve his health, and if he makes use of his strength to battle against evil inclinations."86

-J-

Said the Besht: "No child can be born except through pleasure and joy. By the same token, if one wishes his prayers to bear fruit, he must offer them with pleasure and joy."87

-K-

"Every month Rabbi Jacob Joseph fasted one week, from Sabbath to Sabbath. Since he always took his meals in his room, no one knew this except his niece who brought him his food. In the month which followed his meeting with the Baal Shem, he fasted as always, because it never occurred to him that the uplifting predicted for him could be attained without mortifying the flesh. The Baal Shem was on another one of his journeys, when he suddenly felt:

if the rav of Szarygrod continues as he is doing, he will lose his mind. He had the horses urged on so vehemently that one fell and broke a leg. When he entered the rav's room, he said: 'My white horse fell because I was in such a hurry to get here. Things cannot go on this way. Have some food brought for yourself.' The rav had food brought and ate. 'Your work,' said the Baal Shem, 'is one of sorrow and gloom. The Divine Presence does not hover over gloom but over joy in the commandments'."88

-L-

The Baal Shem said: "I owe everything to the bath. To immerse oneself is better than to mortify the flesh. Mortifying the flesh weakens the strength you need for devotions and teaching, the bath of immersion heightens this strength."89

-M-

Said the Besht: "Asceticism should be practiced only at the commencement of a man's self-discipline, until his evil inclinations are subdued. Later he should conduct himself in a normal way and be in communication with his comrades. Otherwise he will fall into pride."90

-N-

The Besht told this story: "I once stopped at an inn for the Sabbath. Suddenly a peasant went over to the table and knocked on it thrice. The innkeeper explained that this was a signal agreed upon by the village-

owner and himself that the rent for the Inn must be paid, or heavy penalties would be inflicted. I inquired if he had the money and he replied that he was penniless; nevertheless he had no anxiety and observed the Sabbath with a joyful spirit. In the evening he departed to confer with the village-owner. I saw as I watched, that a merchant halted at the door, and after a short conversation gave a roll of money to the innkeeper. The merchant entered, and in reply to my query, informed me that he had purchased from the innkeeper next season's produce, and had paid him in advance to assure delivery. I then saw that perfect trust in the Lord receives its timely reward."<sup>91</sup>

-0-

ה'פ"ה כ"ט י"א בשמחה גדולה בודאי יוחזק  
 חסד ומקדו' לפני יוחזק מלכות בצדקות ובכח  
 ומלך צ"ח כשני שאלו ומקדו' ומלכות לפני ה'  
 בבכיה גדולה אצל"כ אינו נוהג לו אלא דבר  
 מודט אלו כשהר מסד לפני המלך שמחה גדולה  
 ומלכות השלח מקדו' קם בק שני אל יוחזק המלך  
 מתנה מרובה כמו שנוהגין אחרות.<sup>92</sup>

-P-

מלך אבן מלך שמתחיל אחרות אכסר

אלה, ר' אהרן שמואל העזק, ובהאריך הנזמן פנינו  
 שמה כתב מלאכו המלך, וכלה' אשמוח בו מלא, <sup>א</sup>  
 אק שמה' אהרן הכהן מילדינו דליו, האמרים: -  
 מה יום מיוחד ואשמוח מה זו עושה? - מה עשה  
 בן המלך? קרא' אהרן הכהן וקנה' ארם יין ושאר  
 מיני משקאות מסככים, עד שפס שמו' ביין והוא  
 מלא עזר אשמוח מלאך הכהן על אהרן.

והנמשל מובן: הנשמה הושה' אשמוח בשבח

התענוגי אלה המלך מלכי המלכים הקדושה  
 הנשמה פיתכה, שהיא ארצם אגדת מלכים  
 מלאכו, מלחמת הקודש שפלא כהן כשר. אבן צוהר  
 חורב' אהרן הקודש בשבח' ויום אור, ואז כשהקודש  
 אלה בשמחתו יא פנאי' אנשמה' אשמוח בשמחת  
 דביקו' המלך הקדושה. <sup>93</sup>



## PART 6

There is nothing that will more readily disclose the attitude of a people toward God, toward ultimate reality, than its worship, its prayer; certainly there is nothing more revealing of a people's inner spirit. Yet it is only in relatively recent times that Jewish scholarship has come to recognize the magnificence of the Jewish contribution to the worship literature of the world. Recent too is the realization of the uniqueness of the Jewish prayer-book among the rituals of all religions. As Idelsohn expressed it, "Not only are the religious ideas and beliefs expressed in the Jewish prayers, but also the events, vicissitudes, and hopes of the Jewish people... It is, therefore, a reflection of both the religio-ethical ideals of Judaism and the life of the Jew as an individual and as a member of a suffering people."<sup>94</sup> At no period in Jewish history, however, were these statements more true than during the 18th century among the Hasidim. No-where did the Hasid pour out his heart more freely than in "Tefillah", in "Prayer"; no-where can we better understand him than in his worship.

It was through prayer, more readily than through any other act, that the Hasid could attain to the realization of all of those values--Kavvanah, Hithlahavus, Devakuth--which constituted the ultimate goals of his life. This alone can account for the fact that Tefillah is by

far the most frequently discussed subject in all of Hasidic literature. The value of prayer, the meaning of prayer, the techniques of prayer, the efficacy of prayer-- prayer in all its ramifications-- was a matter of the deepest concern to the Hasidic mind. For, in the final analysis, prayer offered the most direct approach to God and His service, and was the supreme medium for giving expression to the inwardness of Hasidic life.

It was not so much in the prayers themselves, however, that the spirit of Hasidism manifested itself, but in its attitudes toward prayer and the manner in which it was to be performed. As has already been noted, Kavvanah was to prayer what the heart is to the body. It follows, therefore, that until one has put himself in the proper mood or frame of mind, true prayer is impossible. Hence the emphasis which the Baalshem and others placed upon the necessity for a period of preparation, of meditation, before one engages in prayer. Hence, too, the demand for complete absorption or concentration during the recitation of the prayers themselves.

It would be false to imagine, however, that such attitudes reflected the belief that only the prayers of the Zaddik, of the man capable of achieving lofty spiritual heights, were acceptable to God. "There is no prayer stronger in grace, and which forces its way in a straighter flight through the heavenly worlds, than that of the simple

man who has nothing to say, who knows not how to speak and has only the wish to lay his dire necessity before God. God accepts it as does a king the singing of a nightingale in his garden, which sounds sweeter to him than the homage of the princes in the throne room."<sup>95</sup> Hasidic lore abounds in stories extolling the merit of that prayer which comes from a simple or composed and single-minded soul, and a number of such stories are reproduced below.

But for the Hasidim, prayer was more than merely an opportunity for man to express his inmost thoughts and aspirations to God; it was the opportunity, in a mystical sense, to serve God as well. Together with the Kabbalists who preceded them, the Hasidim believed in the ability of prayer to restore the shattered unity of God. This was the underlying motive in prayer, as it was in all of Hasidic life. By means of the Kavvanoth, meditations on the hidden mystical meaning of the words and letters of the prayers, man was not only capable of achieving that inner unity prerequisite for union with God, but he was able to participate in the work of uplifting, of redeeming, the exiled sparks. In the light of this belief, we can understand the use by the Hasidim of the Kabbalistic prayer-book of the Ari, replete with Kavvanoth of a most complicated and abstruse nature.

The Hasidim were attacked by the Rabbis of their day for the mystical nature of their prayer, for the commotion

and excitement which accompanied it, for the frequent insertion into prayer of long periods of silent meditation, for their lack of concern about the prescribed times for prayer, and for much besides.

The excesses, however, which very quickly manifested themselves in Hasidic worship were, to begin with at least, not self-consciously developed. They were but the natural consequence of a way of life which gave itself over to the service of God with an abandon and a wholeheartedness that knew no restraint. In a sense, we have here both the strength and the weakness of the Hasidic movement; its strength in that it was capable of stimulating in some of its adherents the deepest, most compelling sort of emotional religious experiences of which man is capable, its weakness in that this very emotional energy, when unbridled, when not channelled and guided by the intelligence, readily deteriorated into little more than the titillation of the senses for the pleasures attendant thereupon and led to the complete perversion of the inner spirit of the movement.

Most of us today, in assessing the religious value of Hasidic prayer, and perhaps of the Hasidic movement as well, are inclined to agree with that critical attitude of the Rabbis indicated above. In doing so, however, let us not be too quick to forget or to minimize the worthy spiritual motives which lay behind the Hasidic

performance. Never was prayer more excellently used to capture and to express that inwardness which is, after all, the very heart of religion.

-A-

Said the Besht: "The courtiers of a king are accustomed to converse with their royal master only seldom, and then with a few brief phrases. If they observe that the king is angry, they do not approach him. The prince, however, does not hesitate to speak with his father even when the king is in anger, and he holds lengthy converse with him.

"The angels are the courtiers of God, and their singing unto Him is limited. Israel, however, is His son, and he is permitted to praise Him as often as he desires."<sup>96</sup>

-B-

Said the Besht: "The first time a thing occurs in nature, it is called a miracle; later it becomes natural, and no attention is paid to it. Let your worship and your service be a fresh miracle every day to you. Only such worship, performed from the heart, with enthusiasm, is acceptable."<sup>97</sup>

-C-

Said the Besht: "The true worshipper is he who discovers the Shekinah in all his supplications. He acts as



the emissary of the Shekinah to bring thoughts into words."<sup>98</sup>

-D-

Said the Besht: "When a man begins the Amidah and says the opening verse: 'O Lord, open Thou my lips!' the Shekinah immediately enters within his voice, and speaks with his voice. Remember this, and you will have no fear."<sup>99</sup>

-E-

Said the Besht: "When a man prays solely for material benefits, his prayer of supplication is wasted. It forms a material curtain between God and himself, because he has brought matter into the domain of spirit. He receives no answer whatsoever."<sup>100</sup>

-F-

Said the Riziner: "Abraham wished to enable men to devote a portion of the day to the Lord, and he, therefore, instituted the morning service. The Satan conspired against this, and succeeded in capturing it by filling it with distracting thoughts. Isaac said: 'I will institute a brief service, through which men may perhaps be able to pray with the proper concentration.' This proved of no avail. Jacob then said: 'I will proclaim a voluntary evening service; perhaps the Satan will not trouble to introduce alien thoughts into an optional service, since a man may choose not to read it.' But this, too, proved unsuccessful. The 'Ari' said: 'I will introduce the

practice of silent meditation'; but this, too, proved unsuccessful. Hence the Besht said: 'Let the good man who cannot pray properly recite aloud profane phrases or tales, and endow them with holy meaning.' This proved a successful remedy against the machinations of the Satan."<sup>101</sup>

-G-

Commenting on the "Ethics of the Fathers": "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being for my own self, what am I?" the Besht said: "If at the time of worship, I do not feel any material existence, what foreign thoughts can come to me? But if I think of my own self at the time, what am I, seeing that I do not serve the Lord even for the duration of my devotion?"<sup>102</sup>

-H-

The Baal Shem said: "Imagine a man whose business hounds him through many streets and across the marketplace the livelong day. He almost forgets that there is a Maker of the world. Only when the time for the afternoon prayer comes, does he remember: 'I must pray.' And then, from the bottom of his heart, he heaves a sigh of regret that he has spent his day on vain and idle matters, and he runs into a by-street and stands there, and prays: God holds him dear, very dear and his prayer pierces the firmament."<sup>103</sup>

-I-

Said the Besht: "A king announced that every subject of his realm might petition him on his birthday. Men brought their requests for money, position, justice, revenge or honors. One man, however, petitioned for the privilege of free access to the king at all times. The king soon became very intimate with him, and asked his friend what he might confer upon him. As a consequence, this man received more benefits than any other petitioner.

"We learn that God said to Solomon that because he asked for wisdom, he would also receive riches and honors (I Kings 3:11-12).

"When we petition God, let us ask for understanding firmness to do His will. Then we shall also obtain other favors in a form as unlimited as is God Himself."104

-J-

"Rabbi Zevi Elimelech Dinover was seen to go over to the Reader's stand in his synagogue, open up a Prayer Book with the Secrets of the Kabbalah, according to Rabbi Isaac Luria, and begin to pray. The watching people were surprised to notice that the Dinover did not turn any page in the Prayer Book. He was asked why he had opened it if he did not intend to read the prayers therein. He replied with this story:

"In the time of the Besht there died in a village both parents of a Jewish male child. There was no-one

to claim the orphan, and the village-owner took pity on him, and reared him. He did not conceal from the boy the fact of his Jewish birth, and the lad became interested in Jews and their customs. Once he saw passing through the village a company of Jews with their families, travelling towards the city. He was told that it was near the Judgment Day, and they were going to pray for a good year. Since he felt no lack of anything, this made no impression on him. When, however, he saw the Jews again pass through the village a week later, and they told him that it was near the Day of Forgiveness when every Jew's status for life or death was sealed, the lad bethought himself of his non-Jewish life, and he knew instinctively that he had committed grave sins against God.

"The boy unpacked the few belongings that he had inherited from his deceased parents, and found among them a thick prayer-book. This he took with him, begged for a ride, and arrived in the city. In the synagogue he heard everyone praying tearfully. He was the only person who knew not how to pray. The lad's sorrowful face caught the attention of the Besht. Knowing something of the lad's story, the Besht appreciated his plight, and he prayed to the Lord that the lad might receive an inspiration how to act, so that he might not return to his non-Jewish way of life. The lad took the heavy prayer-book in his hand, placed it on the worshipper's stand, and cried out: 'Oh, my Father in Heaven! I know not what to say. But see, I

bring to you the entire prayer-book!' He thereupon bent his head on the stand over the book and wept copiously. His penitence was accepted, and the Besht began to recite the 'Borekhu' with a joyful countenance.

"With respect to this Kabbalist Prayer Book, I am like the lad in the story," said the Dinover. "I open the book and say: 'May it be Thy will that my prayer be as acceptable as if it were recited with all the holy thoughts found in the book itself.'"105

-K-

Said the Besht: "The lion became enraged at his subjects, the animals of the forest. They asked the fox to placate the King of Beasts by relating to him an appropriate fable. The fox replied, however, that fear had caused him to forget his fables. Hence the beasts were compelled to wait on the lion themselves. In the same fashion, on the Awesome Days, the people of the congregation should not depend upon their rabbi to pray on their behalf. Each one should do so by and for himself."106

-L-

"When the bride is led to the altar she is adorned and decorated, but when the time of union is come, she is divested of her garments in order that her body may approach nearer that of her lover. So it is written, 'I shall behold God from out my flesh,' for prayer is the bride who is first adorned with many garments but from



whom, when she is embraced by her lover, all clothing is removed."107

-M-

"Before praying let each one remind himself that he is ready, to insure its fulfilment, to suffer death during this very prayer."108

-N-

"It is owing to God's great mercy that a man still lives after prayer. In accordance with the law of nature, he should die because all his strength has vanished. Has he not put all his strength into the prayer that the great fulfilment may come about?"109

-O-

פעם אלוף היום הכפורים, ההשכמה לא האהבה  
 אלהי המדרג, כפי במנהג, אלהי היום הכפורים  
 ההשכמה. היו שופים עד היום ומהלכו וזיו  
 אלהי היום. אחר כך הא יטה על מקומו, והיה ראשו על  
 הסטינד, מרים ראשו ומניח ראשו, מניח ומניח, כמה  
 פעמים. אחר כך כמז שילכו אלהי אפי היתה.  
 ובא ר' דוד ב"ר אלהי היום, כי הוא פיה מלהי היום  
 נוראים. כמה סמך אלהי היתה ההשכמה אלהי

הפני' כל עם ודעה, ואמר ה'צפ' פלסון: "זקן אשמתא!  
 ביבן אלה פולק?" והי'צפ' וק'נפ' אולי' זקן ח'צ'י' שדה.  
 ובי' כו'צ'פ' אלה' ואל'ק' מן פדמ'ה, כי פיל'ה ח'כ'ה  
 'או ד' מ'א'ד, כי א'מ'ר: ש'מ'א ח'י'ו' כא'פ' ה'י' ד'ה'ר' מ'ק'ו'נ'פ'  
 ונ'ד'ר' ח'י'ו' פ'ה'צ'ט'י' וא'מ'ר: "ד'מ'ו'ד'!" - ופ'ח'ל'ח'י'  
 'פ'ח'ל'ח'י' ופ'ח'ל'ח'י'. ואל' ה'י'ה' י'ו'ד'צ' מ'ה' ש'פ'ט'א' מ'ד'ה'ר',  
 כ'ק' ש'צ'ק' ופ'ח'ל'ח'י', כי נ'ש'ה'ר' א'ה'ו' מ'א'ד'. א'ח'ר' כ'ק',  
 ה'מ'ו'צ'א'י' י'ם' פ'כ'פ'ו'ר'י'ם', ה'א'ק' ר'י' ד'ו'ד' מ'ק'י'ד' מ'י'ש'כ'י'ם'  
 א'ל' פ'ה'צ'ט'י', וא'מ'ר' ח'י'ו' "ד'ה'י'נו", מ'פ' כא'פ' ה'י' ד'ה'ר'  
 מ'ק'ו'נ'פ' ח'י'ו' "ד' - צ'נ'פ' וא'מ'ר: "ח'י'ו', א'ל' כ'א'י'ת' ק'ק'  
 כ'א'ו'ם'. כ'ק' ה'א'ש'מ'ו'כ'ת' פ'ה'ק'ר' כ'א'י'ת' 'א'פ'ס'ט'י' ח'י'ו'  
 פ'ד'ר'ק' מ'ק'ו'ם' ש'פ'ח'ל'ח'י'ת' ח'ו'ל'ב'ו'ת' ור'צ'ה' 'א'ק'ה'ל' ח'י'ו'  
 פ'ח'ל'ח'י'ת' ח'י'ו' "ח'י'ו' ב'ן' ש'פ'י'ת' מ'א'פ'ח'ל'ח'י'ת' ופ'ח'ל'ח'י'ת' ח'י'ו'  
 פ'נ'י'ת' ד'ר'ק' א'ח'י'ת', ש'י'ל'כ'ו' פ'ח'ל'ח'י'ת' ח'י'ו' פ'ד'ר'ק' ופ'ח'ל'ח'י'  
 י'כ'ל' א'ל'ה'י'ם' ה'פ'ן'. ח'י'ו' כ'ן' י'כ'א'ת' ש'מ'א' י'כ'נ'ס' ח'י'ו' ה'ל'ה'ק'  
 וי'ק'א'ק' פ'ד'ה'ר', ופ'ח'ל'ח'י'ת' א'ת' 'א'ה'ק' ב'כ'ד'י' ש'מ'א' י'ה'י'ה'  
 'א'ק' ש'ם' מ'א'ש'ה'פ' צ'ר'פ' ה'ל'ה'ק'. וא'ח'ר' כ'ק' צ'י'ת' 'א'ק'  
 'א'פ'ח'ל'ח'י'ת' "ח'י'ו'

-P-

פדמים י' ארצות הש' השמם אלה דמיו  
 במחשבתו ופדמים י' ארצות הש' השמם  
 ויראה ומהלכה ומהלכה ומהלכה ומהלכה  
 ארצות הש' השמם ארצות הש' השמם  
 שם דמיו ומהלכה ומהלכה ומהלכה  
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-Q-

זכור הארצות הש' השמם  
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 מהלכה ומהלכה ומהלכה ומהלכה

מפיו מצלמים... כשאדם המצריק קנה את  
 טוב יוחי אפילו מלחם הסיפור שמכא נראה  
 באותיות מלחם יוחי הכונה. אלה כמבוא דבור  
 בדורם הציון את יוחי טוב לסמך ציון כדי שלא  
 יהיה אותו כמאיר מלחיות דבור בדורם הציון.  
 בשמחה נאמר להרה [ההצגה] שמה עכב שחל  
 אליו דבורים הציונים לא מפי נאמר דברה  
 מל"ס ופוסקים דברה דק משום חל"ס שפיה  
 מלחם חמדה בכונה קדושה ומשם זכה למחל  
 ציונה. <sup>112</sup>

-R-

פדם אלח הצח אסיפת ודא אכרס אצול דיה  
 הפדנס פראשון דרה פנקי פמפורסס י אברהם  
 אלא. דצ"ץ פדח רפי כלם כי פנה משמח  
 פהצ"ט. ופי השמחה עם פאכר. ואין יכח  
 אפיוח שיפיה לו כוח פקדש. ופכי אין עם פאח  
 חסיד 2 - אלו מן האסיפת אל פהצ"ט שיחא  
 תיכף ומיד אפיפס. הלא אפיפס כשפיה פרה

פניו כאלו רבו המדברים. אמר להם: -  
 "אפי' סדר הנדבקים נראה שרוב הקדש לורח  
 עזיק, ויש אנשים שמצולח הוא עם הארץ. הכן  
 נשמע מפיו אם יודע מצולח איזה בין". והתעורר  
 ביה כחש חדש. גלו אלו: - אם גבא. יצאה  
 "היא" מה דינו - פשיה ההצטט: - בין נע  
 אינו נצחק לא למצולח ולא לי. כי מצולח  
 אפילו אם יחזיר ויחפץ יטבא עוד פסחם  
 כהאמנה כן הוא, גבא. יצאה "היא" גם הפסח  
 פשטיח, ואני הודאי לא אטבא. <sup>113</sup>



## IV

## HASIDISM: A UNIQUE MYSTICISM

"When we have learned at last to evaluate the contribution of Judaism to human effort, it is probable that we will exalt the Baal-Shem as the founder of a realistic and active mysticism, that is to say, a mysticism which does not envision the world as an illusory structure which man must renounce in order to achieve true being, but as the reality between God and him, in which is manifested a reciprocal relationship. In Chassidism the world is the concrete embodiment of the creative message of God to man and of man's responsive service to God; it was created for no other purpose than to offer man redemption through its confluence of divine and human activity...The Yichud (union) it exalts is not the union of the soul with God outside the world, but the union of God with His Glory, as expressed in man and his works, dwelling within the world. But it is a true mysticism, since it preserves the immediacy of the relation, the concreteness of the absolute, and because it demands the pledging, the absorption of the entire being."<sup>1</sup>

These words by Martin Buber offer us a valuable point of departure from which we may assess, for ourselves, the importance of Hasidic doctrine for Judaism today. Most of us have come to understand that beneath the superficial peculiarities of Hasidic life there subsisted a stratum of positive value, which was all too easily overlooked in the furious struggle between rationalistic "enlightenment" and

mysticism during the last century. Let us turn briefly, then, to a consideration of the nature of Hasidic mysticism, for it is here that the positive values of Hasidic life can most readily be discerned. Dubnow, in discussing the achievements of the Besht, wrote: *ההשגה הקריה*

אין האלהות אל האדם ואין האדם אל האלהות התבואה  
 בקירוב - והנה לקח את זה החמץ. יפה אמר חסיד  
 אצל רמב"ם דעות: «כדינו בהשגה מלא אלהי האדם»  
 לקנות האלהות בצורה השלם קרה כל פה ופה.  
 כל אשר קנה האדם הוא הצומח הצלילוני, ולא  
 כל מוחל סה"ל דהא' להשיג מה שאלוהי: וההשגה  
 קנה את האלהות פה האדם, הפה האדם התבואה  
 שאין בו שום אדם ושום כל מה שיש לו חסד בכה  
 אלוהי השמך הקרהו».<sup>2</sup>

Scholem does not limit this phenomenon to the Besht but indicates his general agreement with Dubnow on this point when he states: "Briefly, the originality of Hasidism lies in the fact that mystics who had attained their spiritual aim--who, in Kabbalistic parlance, had discovered the secret of true Devekuth--turned to the people with their mystical knowledge, the 'Kabbalism become Ethos', and, instead of cherishing as a mystery the

most personal of all experiences, undertook to teach its secret to all men of good will."<sup>3</sup>

Whatever we may conclude, then, with regard to the nature of Hasidic mysticism, one thing is clear: it differed radically from any form of Jewish mysticism which had preceded it. Jewish mysticism, prior to this time, like most forms of mysticism, was a secret doctrine in a double sense. It was a secret doctrine because it treated of the most deeply hidden and fundamental matters of human life; and it was secret also because it was confined to a small elite of the chosen who imparted the knowledge to their disciples. It would be wrong, however, to regard the popularization of the Kabbalistic ideas of a "mystical life with God and in God" as the novel or unique contribution of Hasidism to religion. The uniqueness of Hasidism lies in the fact that it was a qualitatively different type of mysticism; had this not been the case, it is doubtful that it could ever have become a mass movement. It is our contention that Kabbalism was the necessary intellectual precondition for the development of Hasidism; further, that the popularization of that doctrine was not the aim but merely one of the consequences of the popularity of Hasidism itself; and finally, that Hasidism differed from earlier Jewish mysticism precisely to the degree in which it minimized the doctrinal, the intellectual aspects of mysticism, of Kabbalah, and em-

phasized the emotional, the experiential aspects of mysticism.

Kabbalah as it developed over the centuries was primarily a highly involved and abstruse theosophical system. To become an initiate into its mysteries required a high level of intellectual ability, considerable powers of comprehension, and well developed facility for dialectic. This fact as much as any other may account for the success which the Kabbalists enjoyed for over 500 years in their desire to keep their doctrines "secret". But these are precisely the same talents and abilities which were required of anyone who desired to master the Talmudical or rabbinic areas of Jewish learning. If, then, Hasidism was in any sense a revolt of the untutored, unlearned masses of the people against the over-intellectualization of Jewish life at the hands of the rabbis, it seems doubtful, in the extreme, that it would have attempted to substitute for the confusions of pilpul the incomprehensibilities of esoteric Kabbalah. And, as a matter of historical fact, with the exception of Habad Hasidism, it never attempted to do this. What it did attempt to do was, in a sense, to reject both and to set in their place something entirely different. Hasidism was not concerned with the development of the religious mind, but with the development of the religious heart. It was concerned not with thinking but with feeling, not with dreaming but with doing.

So far as we have been able to determine, there is nothing in the Hasidic literature which would give us ground for assuming that the Besht ever thought of himself as a popularizer of Kabbalistic doctrine. Furthermore, there is nothing in that literature to indicate that the Besht himself possessed either a comprehensive or profound understanding of Kabbalah. Certain it is that he was neither a scholar nor a systematic thinker. Horodezki, Dubnow and others are completely justified in comparing the life and teachings of the Besht with the life and teachings of an earlier giant of the spirit, Jesus. His references to the Zohar, like those of Jesus to the Bible, indicate a familiarity with the material found therein, but the form of his teachings, parable, aphorism, etc., the import of his message, his profound understanding both of nature and of human nature, and his surpassing concern for matters of the spirit mark him rather for what he was, a "folksmensch" of unusual quality. The Baalshem was an "am ha-aretz", in its literal sense, obsessed with the desire to reawaken the slumbering spirit of his people, to infuse their lives with meaning, even with joy. The Besht was an innovator, or perhaps we should say, a renovator, only in the realm of the spirit, and the mystical doctrine of the Kabbalah was but the language he found best suited for the expression of his message. Scholem hints at this when he writes, "...In its beginnings Hasidism bore a good many revivalist traits. Its



founder had evolved a new form of religious consciousness...  
 For the foundations of his immediate experience he went  
 back to the Kabbalistic books which helped him to give ex-  
pression to his emotional enthusiasm."<sup>4</sup>

In the introduction to the chapter on Hasidism in his book on Jewish mysticism, Scholem makes the following observation: "Attempts have been made to deny the mystical character of Hasidism. Although I do not agree with these views, it seems to me there is something to be said in their favor; moreover they have a value precisely because they show us that we are dealing with a problem. The problem to my mind is that of the popularization of Kabbalistic thought, or to put it a little differently, we have to consider...the social function of mystical ideas."<sup>5</sup> So long as we identify mysticism with any given set of esoteric doctrines, e.g. Kabbalah, or so long as we identify mysticism with certain of its historic expressions, e.g. the ecstatic mysticism of Christianity, the attempts on the part of some to deny the mystical character of Hasidism are understandable and Scholem's statement of the problem is an accurate one. The moment we understand, however, the true nature of mystical experience, and can see Hasidism for what it really was, the attempt to deny the mystical nature of Hasidism becomes meaningless, and the problem as stated by Scholem no longer central.

Mysticism, as was indicated above, cannot properly be defined either in terms of its intellectual content, its

ideas and doctrines, or in terms of those excesses, such as ecstatic trance, which it is capable of inducing or encouraging. For mysticism, at base, is nothing more than that attitude toward ultimate reality which emphasizes the refinement and intensification of the emotions and feelings, of love, devotion, intention, wholeheartedness, yearning, etc., etc., which stand at the very core of the religious experience. Mysticism is the attempt to feel religion, to capture in experience its spirit, and hence its truths, its reality. Understanding mysticism in this way, we are now able to assert with conviction the proposition that Hasidism represents mysticism in its most elemental, most fundamental form, since it was these very things which Hasidism attempted to accomplish. The very words it used to express its interests, e.g., Kavvanah, Hithlahavus, Ahavah, Simha, Aboda, Shiflut, properly understood, do not refer to ideas, to concepts, but to feelings, emotions, attitudes, acts; for it was not the understanding of Kavvanah that was important, but the experiencing of Kavvanah. And the same emphasis is found throughout. Hasidism was first and foremost an attempt to live religion, not to speculate about it.

The problem, then, is not that of the "popularization of Kabbalistic thought", nor the "social function of mystical ideas," but the social function, the social value of the mystic way. The problem with regard to Hasidism is that of evaluating the efficacy, the practical worth for religion

and for life, of its demand for the cultivation of the canons and techniques of inwardness. But stated in this way, the problem posed by Hasidism is the problem which must eternally confront all religious men--how to embody in life the spirit of religion, how to express in the finite "here" and the temporal "now" the infinite and eternal verities which religion proclaims. Only by preserving the awareness of the immediacy of the relationship which exists between man and God, only by "pledging the absorption of the entire being," in the fulfilment of the human aspects of that relationship, can the problem posed here be solved. This, at least, is the import of religious inwardness in early Hasidism; this, at least, was Hasidism's answer and its unique and glorious contribution to the unfoldment of the human spirit which is religion.

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5. Zeitlin, S., op. cit., p. 6.
6. Scholem, G.G., op.cit., p. 347.
7. Schechter, op.cit., p. 19.
8. Scholem, op.cit., p. 338.
9. Dinaburg, op.cit., No. 3, April, 1943, p. 138.
10. Ibid, p. 118.
11. Scholem, op.cit., p. 299.
12. Ibid, p. 205.
13. Ibid, p. 233. The foregoing discussion of the doctrines of Kabbalah has been excerpted from Scholem, pp. 205-243.
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15. Ibid, p. 247.
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17. Ibid, p. 311.

## Chapter II

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2. Scholem, op.cit., pp. 5-6.
3. Spurgeon, op.cit., p. 8.
4. Ibid, p. 3.
5. Underhill, E., The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays, pp. 2-3.
6. James, op.cit., pp. 424-5.
7. Scholem, op.cit., p. 122.
8. Ibid, p. 141.
9. Underhill, E., Mysticism, pp. 178-9.
10. Spurgeon, op.cit., p. 6.
11. Jones, R.M., Studies in Mystical Religion, p. xv.
12. Hall, T.C., Essays in Modern Theology and Related Subjects, ed. Briggs, p. 267.
13. Underhill, op.cit., p. 86.
14. James, op.cit., p. 424.
15. Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, p. 22.
16. Underhill, Mysticism, p. 72.
17. James, op.cit., these statements are excerpted from pp. 382-400.
18. Ibid, pp. 422-423.
19. Leuba, J.H., The Psychology of Religious Mysticism, p. 299.

### Chapter III

1. Horodezki, S.A., Leaders of Hassidism, p. 5.
2. Shivhe Ha Besht, Tel Aviv, 1947, p. 51. All references to the Hasidic texts from which the bulk of the material in this chapter is quoted are to the editions indicated in the bibliography. For purposes of brevity, the following abbreviations will be used throughout the notes:
  - K.S.T.--Kether Shem Tob
  - K.K.--Kithve Kodesh
  - M.R.T.--Midrash Ribesh Tob
  - S.H.B.--Shivhe Ha Besht
  - T.R.--Tsavoath Ribesh Tov



3. Enelow, H.G., "Kawwanah: The Struggle for Inwardness in Judaism," reprinted from *Studies in Jewish Literature* in honor of Kaufman Kohler, p. 2.
4. Cohon, S.S., article on Kawanah, Vol. 6, *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*.
5. Scholem, op.cit., p. 101.
6. Schechter, op.cit., p. 20.
7. Scholem, op.cit., p.347-348.
8. Talmud Babli, Berachoth 13a.
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10. Scholem, op.cit., p. 344.
11. Buber, op.cit., this statement excerpted from pp. 1-8.
12. Kahana, A., *Sefer Hahasiduth*, p. 49.
13. K.S.T. 10b.
14. Ibid, p. 15b.
15. Ibid, p. 21b.
16. M.R.T., part II, pp. 90-91.
17. Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim, The Early Masters*, p. 73.
18. M.R.T., part II, p. 58.
19. Newman, L.I., *The Hasidic Anthology*, p. 344.
20. M.R.T., part II, pp. 36-37.
21. T.R., p. 17.
22. K.S.T., p. 16b. Also T.R., pp. 3-4.
23. Ibid, p. 30a.
24. K.S.T., p. 12b, cf. item Q, p. 116.
25. Ibid, p. 20a. Also T.R., p. 15.
26. S.H.B., p. 103.
27. Buber, op.cit., p. 51.

28. S.H.B., 108.
29. Kahana, op. cit., p.47.
30. T.R., p. 10.
31. Ibid, p. 10.
32. Horodezki, op. cit., p. 12, cf. item I, p. 100.
33. Schechter, op. cit., p.28.
34. Buber, op. cit., p. 11, cf. item I, p. 72, below.
35. Ibid, pp. 15-16.
36. K.S.T., p. 21a.
37. Ibid, p. 21a. cf. T.R., p. 1.
38. Ibid, p. 21a.
39. Ibid, p. 2b.
40. T.R., p. 6.
41. T.R., p. 19.
42. K.S.T., p. 13a.
43. T.R., p. 11.
44. M.R.T., part II, p. 7, quoted from K.K.
45. Ibid, part II, p. 8.
46. Buber, M., Tales of the Hasidim, The Early Masters, p. 52.
47. K.S.T., p. 17a.
48. Ibid, p. 16a.
49. Ibid, p. 2a.
50. Ibid, p. 15b.
51. M.R.T., part II, p. 72.
52. Ibid, part II, p. 24, quoted from T.R.
53. K.S.T., p. 11a.
54. Kahana, op.cit., p. 86.

55. K.S.T., p. 22a.
56. Ibid, p. 21a.
57. T.R., p. 12.
58. Ibid, pp. 2-3.
59. S.H.B., p. 117.
60. Scholem, op.cit. p. 344.
61. Schechter, op.cit., p. 4.
62. Buber, Jewish Mysticism, p. 32.
63. Ibid, p. 30.
64. Buber, Hasidism, pp. 177-178.
65. Buber, Tales of the Hasidim, The Early Masters, p. 72.
66. K.S.T., p. 17b.
67. Ibid, p. 16a.
68. Ibid, p. 22b.
69. Ibid, p. 17a.
70. T.R., pp. 1-2, cf. item J, p. 90 below.
71. K.S.T., p. 16b.
72. Ibid, p. 35b.
73. Ibid, p. 15a. cf. T.R., p. 5.
74. T.R., pp. 1-2.
75. T.R., p. 5.
76. Schechter, op.cit., p. 31.
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78. T.R., p. 5.
79. Ibid, p. 5.
80. K.S.T., p. 9b.
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82. Newman, op.cit., p. 18.
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84. Newman, op.cit., p. 412. cf. T.R., p. 5.
85. Buber, op.cit., p. 70.
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87. K.S.T., p. 3a.
88. S.H.B., p. 62.
89. K.S.T., p. 21a.
90. M.R.T., part II, p. 75.
91. Newman, op.cit., p. 106.
92. K.S.T., p. 22a, also T.R., pp. 13-14.
93. Kahana, op.cit., p. 88.
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95. Buber, Jewish Mysticism, p. 16.
96. K.S.T., p. 18a.
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99. Ibid, p. 15a.
100. Ibid, p. 13a.
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102. T.R., p. 7.
103. Buber, Tales of the Hasidim, The Early Masters, p. 69, cf. Kahana, op.cit., p. 66.
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106. K.S.T., p. 4a.
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108. K.S.T., p. 15b., also T.R., p. 4.

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110. Kahana, op.cit. p. 48.

111. K.S.T., p. 22a, also T.R., p. 13.

112. T.R., pp. 3-4.

113. S.H.B., p.152-3.

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1. Buber, op.cit., p. 52.

2. Dubnow, S., Toldoth Hahasidut, Vol. I, p. 58.

3. Scholem, op.cit., p. 342.

4. Ibid, p. 335.

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