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DANCING ON A ROPE

**The Role of the Body in Hasidic Prayer
in the Teachings of Rabbi Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz**

RACHEL TATIANA SABATH

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

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

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לאמי ולאבי בכבוד

*For my mother and for my father
who taught me that the only way
is to find my own way.*

לזכרה באהבה
ברנדה קאופמן-ברמן ז"ל
*In loving memory of
Brenda Kaufman-Berman ז"ל*
1963-1994

צמאה נפשי
לאלהים לאל חי
לבי ובשרי ירגנו לאל חי

*My soul thirsts
for Elohim, the living God.
My heart and my flesh will
cry out with joy.....*

-R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, 12th c.

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There are a number of concerns which initially motivated this study. My daily struggle with the "problem" of the body during prayer led me to seek out the various ways that our ancestors have solved it in law, in legend and in the secrets of mysticism. That I have found some closeness to God, if not union with God, in very different physical and meta-physical states, has given me courage and increased the degree to which I define myself as "religious." I have come to accept that I encounter my Creator alone, in the shell of my body and with the shards of my spirit. I have been blessed with a sense that, although no one can teach me how I must dance on the rope, God is never entirely removed.

Together with my own sense of the pulls of "gravity" on the body attempting to cross the abyss between itself and God, my communal theology has prompted this particular study. My theology, spirituality and observance are all informed by a deep sense of the pluralistic nature of the possible ways to approach God and Torah. Because of this sense I believe that God and Torah are limited rather than expanded when individuals are forced apply to themselves religious definitions and categories that prevent them from serving God with the fullness of their lives. Rabbi Pinchas' teachings have affirmed for me that God is shut out rather than brought in by denying the individual's search for his or her own way. Pushing at the boundaries established by my own and other movements has been a method of finding my own way, my own way of dancing on the rope of religious existence and a closer relationship with the

Awesome One.

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¹ PhD Dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel, 1993.

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*Dancing on a Rope*¹
The Role of the Body in Prayer:
The Doctrine of Devekut in the Teachings of Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz

*When I pray before the ark and move to the right certain worlds tremble;
 when I move to the left, other worlds tremble.
 Thus one must be exceedingly careful about every movement....*²

Introduction

While a great deal has been said about the theology of Hasidic liturgy, less has been written about the role of a Hasid's body in prayer. This study is not about what words the Hasid uttered, but how (and if) he uttered them, how he related to them, and what role his body played in the process of prayer.³ Prayer, as a mode of communication between man and God, goes beyond the text. The liturgy of prayer is only one manifestation of prayer.

A study of worship in its fullest context ought to include the full manifestation of prayer: its non-verbal and bodily expressions as well as a discussion about the spiritual standards that the pray-er sought to fulfill. For the Hasidism, a major part of achieving the highest spiritual state, *devekut*, included significant activity of the body. The poses and postures, the movements and gestures of a person at the time of prayer have received very little attention among scholars of Jewish prayer, and even less

¹ Based on *Sefer Imrei Pinchas, Avodat HaShem*, 11.

² *Midrash Pinchas*, 4:10, p. 6.

³ For scholarly treatments of the role of the body in prayer see Zimmer, Eric, "Poses and Postures during Prayer," in *Sidra: A Journal for the Study of Rabbinic Literature*, Vol. 5. Bar-Ilan University, Menachem Press, Jerusalem, 1989, pp. 89-130.

among scholars of Hasidic prayer.⁴ How were the prayers prayed and what was the role of the body in achieving the greatest degree of closeness to God? Central to this study, which focuses on the Hasidic ideal of *devekut* (cleaving to God) in the writings of Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz, will be questions of the role that physical gestures, attire, and voice play in achieving that desired state.

Of the many Hasidic masters, Rabbi Pinchas⁵ of Koretz⁶ was especially interested in the role of the body in prayer.⁷ He saw movement (or its absence) and the use of the body (including the attire and the use of the voice) as essential concerns in what some scholars argue is his unique doctrine of *devekut*.⁸ His teachings on the body reveal an "anti-aristocratic" battle to retain standards that the common HASid

⁴ On rabbinic attitudes toward carious poses and bodily gestures during prayer, see for example, Zimmer, Eric, "Poses and Postures During Prayer." He argues that very few scholars of Jewish prayer have even touched upon this topic and that *halakhic* literature has failed to reconcile a variety of attitudes on posture, direction of one's gaze, position of hands, legs, and movement in general.

⁵ Rabbi Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz (1724/25 or 1725/26-1791) was born to Abraham Abba, son of Rabbi Pinchas, a rabbi in a small Lithuanian town. His great-grandfather was R. Nathan Shapiro (d. 1633), a great Kabbalist and rabbi in Crack. Hereafter Rabbi Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz will be referred to as R. Pinchas or the Koretzer.

⁶ Koretz is situated on the river Korczyk. A Jewish community had existed in Koretz since the sixteenth century, and by 1765 the Jewish population had reached 937. Koretz was an important center of Torah learning as well as a printing center for many of the early and later Hasidic texts. Heschel, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) hereafter referred to as *Circle*, p. 9; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 10, col. 325.

⁷ See Chapter Four.

⁸ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth-Century Hasidic Thought* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), p. 299; Heschel, *Circle*, Chapter One.

could fulfill, without depending on a *tzaddik*. This unique view of the individual during prayer forms the basis of his independent school of thought. A core of his school of thought on prayer was that one may not force entry into the upper spiritual realms, and that there is not a single way to achieve union with God. Unlike the Maggid of Mezeritch, a major figure in early Hasidism, R. Pinchas did not believe that "storming heaven" or that praying in a loud voice with violent gestures would facilitate *devekut*.⁹

There are a variety of ways that scholars of early Hasidism understand and categorize different aspects of prayer and these will become clear as we proceed with our analysis. While the perspective of R. Pinchas does fit more easily into the category of passive -- as opposed to active -- prayer, when his perspective on the body is more carefully elucidated (in Chapter Four) this category too loses some of its usefulness, confirming that even while categories can be helpful, many aspects of R. Pinchas' perspective on prayer will elude categorization. Recently, some newer more pluralistic models have been more successful in explaining the particularities of different schools. Idel's phenomenological "panorama" multiple-model approach, that are more helpful in describing the idiosyncratic nature of the school of thought illustrated in the writings of our particular Hasidic master. Chapter Five will take into account the panorama of influences that were potentially influential for R. Pinchas and which may have contributed to his unique perspective on the body during prayer.

⁹ Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Thought* (New York: Jewish Publications Society, 1976), p. 26.

Before turning to an examination of the issues of Hasidic prayer, we must address two issues that will be crucial to our study. The first is the issue of defining terms, given the considerable evolution of some of these terms in the vast body of mystical literature that preceded Hasidism, namely, Kabbalah. The second issue is the sources used in this study, given the wide variety and discrepancies among them both textually and historically, and the different approaches of twentieth-century scholars.

Lurianic Kabbalah:

Before we can examine R. Pinchas' position on prayer and his attitude toward the body, and even before we can begin to discuss general attitudes regarding prayer and the body in early Hasidism, it will be necessary to define briefly a number of the concepts that R. Pinchas uses in his writing. Although it would be impossible to reconstruct fully the "mystical panorama"¹⁰ that lay before this individual Hasidic master, defining a number of concepts that had their basis in earlier literature will be helpful. Many of the concepts central to the writings of the Baal Shem Tov and of R. Pinchas of Koretz, as well as other early Hasidic leaders, are rooted in a wide variety of Jewish traditions including, but not limited to, the Kabbalah.¹¹ While many of the

¹⁰ This term is used by Moshe Idel to describe the multifaceted, long series of mystical materials written before, during, and after the emergence of Lurianic Kabbalah, as well as the whole range of Jewish cultural traditions to which the early Hasidim were exposed. Idel cites eleven different "speculative paradigms" that were available to the Hasidic masters. Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 9-20.

¹¹ The Kabbalah, literally the "tradition," is, in the words of Gershom Scholem, "the sum of Jewish mysticism." See Gershom G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), pp. 1-2. Buber identified the diverse

central concepts of Hasidism that will be important in this study are central in the Lurianic corpus, at the same time, many are marginal to Kabbalistic literature or are significantly transformed in the Hasidic doctrine. Understanding a few of these terms based on the Kabbalah, however, will give us some of the necessary keys to understand them in Hasidic literature, especially the writings of R. Pinchas of Koretz.

What are the major mystical ideas rooted in earlier literature that were central to early Hasidic literature and particularly to the teachings of R. Pinchas on prayer and the role of the body? They are 1) *devekut*; 2) *kavvanah*; 3) *avodah begashmiut*; 4) *hitpashtut hagashmiut*; 5) *bittul hayesh*; 6) the Godhead; 7) *sefirot*; and 8) *olamot*. For the purposes of our study, these eight concepts form part of an array of ideas that "conveys a very dynamic relation between man and God and between man and his community."¹² At this initial stage, I will briefly define these terms as they appear in Kabbalistic texts and describe how they were used in Hasidic literature with particular emphasis on what role they play in the prayer context. In the chapters that follow I will demonstrate in greater detail the ways in which some of these same concepts are

literature of the Kabbalah with an essentially Lurianic gnostic doctrine, while Idel is careful to separate between different types of Kabbalah and includes Cordoverian Kabbalah among the influences on early Hasidism. According to Idel, Cordoverian Kabbalah, a genre that slightly pre-dates Lurianism, (Cordovera was a teacher of Luria) also influenced the Hasidic masters. Hereafter references to Kabbalah in this study will refer to Lurianic Kabbalah unless otherwise specified. The principal work of Kabbalah is the Zohar, the Book of Splendor, which is an esoteric commentary of the Pentateuch.

¹² Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 24.

used in Hasidic texts attributed to the Besht (d.1760),¹³ the Maggid of Mezeritch, R. Yaakov Yosef, or R. Pinchas. All of these concepts are intricately interrelated and can have a variety of functions even in texts attributed to a single school or a single master. There are no universally accepted canonical definitions.

1) *Devekut* connotes Cleaving unto God, or in a state of union or communion with God. The concept of *devekut* and its development in Kabbalistic and other pre-Hasidic and early Hasidic literature is discussed in great detail in Chapter Two. While the definition of *devekut* is complex, simple translations of the term e.g. "cleaving to God" or "union with God" will of necessity be used in this study. We must also note at this early stage that the term "*devekut*" passed through a longer series of stages of development than any of the other above-listed terms. Together with the complex theoretical and theosophical and historical dimensions, the extent to which *devekut* came to represent an elitist approach to prayer will also concern us.

2) *Kavvanah*, is most often literally translated as "intention" or "purposefulness," is more accurately understood to mean "concentration." The root meaning of the word is "to direct." In the context of prayer it usually means to direct or "adjust" the mind to the act of prayer. Early as well as medieval rabbinic interpretations also seem to equate *kavvanah* with the capacity of the person at prayer to concentrate.¹⁴ Lurianic Kabbalah developed a doctrine of *kavvanah*, in which

¹³ The Besht is an abbreviation for the Baal Shem Tov. ("Master of the Good Name" [of God], R. Israel b. Eliezer, hereafter referred to as the Besht).

¹⁴ Eric Zimmer, "Poses and Postures," pp. 89-95. As Zimmer indicated in his discussion of various early rabbinic opinions on whether one's eyes should gaze

mystical contemplation becomes the focus, even the main purpose of prayer. In the eyes of the Kabbalists, according to Scholem, *kavvanah* was a "mystical instrument," a means through which one can penetrate through the mystical worlds to the depths of the Godhead. *Kavvanah* is the

mystical 'intention' or meditation which accompanies the ritual act. The rite itself, says a Lurianic source, is the body, mystical *kavvanah* is its soul, and **'if anyone performs the sacred action without the right intention, it is like a body without a soul.'**¹⁵

The relationship between the body and soul as an analogy for the relationship between the act of prayer and its *kavvanah* emphasizes the necessity of *kavvanah* in order for the act of prayer to have meaning. This notion that a certain spiritual state of mind is required in order to fulfill the ritual obligation was present as early as the Mishnah¹⁶ but was developed into an extensive system of meditations by the Kabbalists. No longer was directing one's heart to the "Holy of Holies" sufficient in order to fulfill the command to pray with *kavvanah*. The Kabbalist was expected to keep in mind, while he prays, "all the complicated combinations in the sefirotic¹⁷ realm. Each word of the prayers has not only its surface meaning but represents one of the divine names in

upward toward heaven, downward toward the earth, or be closed, some early rabbinic opinions seem to relate the focus of one's gaze to the goal of avoiding seeing something that might disturb or prevent *kavvanah*.

¹⁵ Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 126 based on *Shulchan Arukh* of R. Isaac Luria, 1681, 31d. Emphasis added.

¹⁶ *Berachot* 4:5: "yikhaven et libo k'neged beit kodesh hakodashim." If one is unable to turn and face toward Jerusalem, one should minimally "direct his heart toward the house of the holy of holies."

¹⁷ See definition below.

combination."¹⁸

In the Kabbalah, the doctrine of *kavvanah* becomes the plural, *kavvanot*, and plays a central role in the Lurianic Prayer Book.¹⁹ Whether or not *kavvanah*, in its Lurianic understanding, took place in the mind without any activity of the body is a complicated question. But it is precisely this question, the role of the body given the mental or psychological nature of the supreme doctrines of mystical prayer, which is at the heart of this study. The concepts of *kavvanah* and *kavvanot* will be dealt with at a much greater length in Chapters Two and Three, as core areas of disagreement between R. Pinchas and the Baal Shem Tov. As we shall see, *kavvanah* in its Hasidic incarnation was substantially different from its original meaning.

3) *Avodah Begashmiut*: The dialectical tension in Lurianic theory regarding corporeal worship of God, *avodah begashmiut*, was also influential, but not singularly, on the focus on the same concept in early Hasidism.²⁰ The Lurianic theory, as understood by the Hasidim, asserts that through contact with the concrete material world by means of *devekut* and *kavvanah*, man uplifts the sparks imprisoned in matter.²¹ Although the Baal Shem Tov and his followers, according to some scholars, put little emphasis on the theories of the Lurianic Kabbalah regarding the "uplifting of

¹⁸ Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 74.

¹⁹ Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 74. Jacobs argues that the centrality of *kavvanot* in the Lurianic Prayer Book motivated the Hasidim to adopt it in place of the older Ashkenazi Prayer Book. See Chapter Two.

²⁰ Rivkah Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 7, col. 1409.

²¹ Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," col. 1409.

sparks," they nevertheless served as the theoretical justification for the necessity of *avodah begashmiut*.²² One of the most widespread teachings in Hasidism was *avodah begashmiut*: the doctrine "calling for man's worship of God by means of his physical acts."²³

4) *Hitpashtut Hagashmiut*: *Hitpashtut hagashmiut*, like *avodah begashmiut*, expresses the dialectic tension between matter and spirit in the Hasidic doctrine. Like some of the other concepts described here, *hitpashtut hagashmiut* represents an attempt to solve what the early Hasidim perceived to be the "problem" of corporeal worship. *Hitpashtut hagashmiut*, in Hasidic literature in general uses this term to refer to the "stripping away of materialness," or "letting go of one's physicality." This is usually connected with the next term, *bittul hayesh*, or the "annihilation of self" which assumed an annihilation of the existence of the body, which was especially important during prayer.

5) *Bittul Hayesh*: "The annihilation of selfhood" was a state, like *devekut*, that was sought after during prayer. The Kabbalists saw this state of non-existence as better than existence: by removing the boundaries of the self, the mystic achieves a greater degree of closeness with the divine. *Bittul Hayesh* is one of the many concepts that was marginal in Lurianic Kabbalah but that became central in Hasidism. It was a stage of expanded consciousness, "the breaking of the ego-centered personality, in order to assimilate to the divine and thereby to receive the influx from

²² Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," col. 1409; Idel, *Hasidism*, Introduction.

²³ Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," col. 1408.

above."²⁴ This must occur before one can reach the divine Naught, which is the most remote and highest plane of the divine. The Safedian Kabbalists do not relate *bittul hayesh* to *devekut*²⁵ yet they are very closely linked in early Hasidic texts, where the concept of union or communion of man and God is dependent upon the annihilation of self.

6) Godhead: The Godhead was the mystical name for the divine, emerging from various mystical interpretations of Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot. According to some of these interpretations, one who ascended to the divine throne may also merit a revelation of the image of the Godhead, the "Creator of the Universe," who is seated on the throne. In other words, the Godhead represented to the early Jewish mystics, to the Kabbalists, and often to the Hasidim as we shall see, the body of God. God's body is otherwise concealed and it is only through this type of ascension or through *devekut* that one can be at one with and know God's full glory.²⁶ This concept will be important in our study given that a physical and spiritual unification with God was the central aim of the Hasidic doctrine of *devekut*.

7) Sefirot: The concept of the *sefirot* was the main tenet differentiating Kabbalah from Jewish philosophy which became increasingly complex with the development of Kabbalah. The *sefirot* represent a theosophic conception of the

²⁴ Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 108-109.

²⁵ Jacobs, Louis, "Hasidism," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 7, cols. 1404-1405.

²⁶ Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), pp. 20-21. Scholem describes the early mystics' focus on the interpretation of the *Song of Songs* as one of the first contexts for understanding God's body.

Godhead, dividing it into realms or planes, each with its own name and relationship to the Divine. Usually, the *sefirot* are ordered in the following way (in descending order) and are given the following names: 1) *Keter Elyon* (supreme crown); 2) *Hokhmah* (wisdom); 3) *Binah* (intelligence); 4) *Gedullah* (greatness); 5) *Gevurah* (power) or *Din* (judgment); 6) *Tiferet* (beauty) or *Rachamim* (compassion); 7) *Netsach* (Lasting endurance); 8) *Hod* (majesty); 9) *Tzaddik* (righteous one) or *Yesod Olam* (foundation of the world); 10) *Malkhut* (kingdom) or *Atarah* (diadem). The *sefirot* were often grouped according to the kind of relationship to the Divine that they share and the stage of emanation, or that which flows from the Godhead, that man passes through in order to meet the Godhead. The tenet of *sefirot* was the backbone of Spanish Kabbalistic teaching though the term itself occurs much earlier, going back all the way to *Sefer Yetsirah*. Like *kavvanah*, we have here an ancient concept that takes on new meaning in Kabbalistic circles. Many other themes can be included in any discussion of this term and reflect the many varieties of the doctrines associated with this term.²⁷ The *Sefirot* were understood in psychological terms in ecstatic Kabbalah and then in Hasidism as well. Moshe Idel argues that "this phenomenon is probably related to their shared intense interest in extreme forms of *devekut*."²⁸

8) Olamot: This concept is closely linked to the idea of the system of *sefirot*.

²⁷ Scholem, "Kabbalah," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 10, cols. 563-583.

²⁸ Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 146. Hereafter referred to as Idel, *Kabbalah*.

Idel continues: "When a certain mystical system focuses on inner experiences more than on theurgical activity, the entities to be activated are no longer the objectively existing divine *Sefirot* but rather the human spiritual *Sefirot*."

Each *sefirah*, according to some Kabbalists, represented a "World," or even "worlds," which in turn represents a different kind of spiritual existence. For example, the lower set of ten *sefirot* form the "world of making"-- *Olam Ha'asiyah*-- which is directly connected with our world, the lowest form of material existence.²⁹ The *Sefirot* each represented a different world; the lowest being this world; the third being the world to come; and the uppermost being the Godhead itself. The idea that there were different spiritual worlds that one passes through in different spiritual states is crucial to the understanding of *devekut* which was possible only after these lower worlds were traversed.

As we shall see below, each of these ideas has its own history in Jewish mysticism and was also an essential term in the Hasidic lexicon of R. Pinchas of Koretz and his students. It is important to note, however, that these terms are not always used consistently and that statements attributed to R. Pinchas are sometimes contradictory.

In terms of human spiritual existence, the central difference between the Kabbalists and the early Hasidim, according to Gershom Scholem, was that the Kabbalists rarely spoke of an individual's own way to God. [In Hasidism], each individual was the totality.³⁰ If "the Kabbalists had attempted to penetrate and even to describe the mystery of the world as a reflection of the mysteries of divine life,"³¹ the

²⁹ Idel, *Kabbalah*, pp. 145-146.

³⁰ Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 2.

³¹ Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 2-3.

Hasidim were more interested in the mysteries of the individual's relationship to the Divine. This focus on the individual also allowed individual Hasidic masters, like R. Pinchas, to focus more attention on the individual's body as well.

Both the relationship between the body and the soul, and the relationship between the mind and the body, were necessary focal points for the Hasidim as they formed their own spiritual system for attaining ~~openess~~ with the Divine. The early Hasidism were especially concerned with the dialectical relationship that operates between matter and spirit. In order to reach their spiritual goal of union with the Divine, they were forced to pass first through the material stage. "In other words, there is no way to be liberated from the captivity of matter except by ostensibly cooperating with it. This ambivalent relationship to reality forms a supreme religious imperative."³² We saw this notion implicit in the idea of *avodah begashmiut*, as opposed to *hitpashtut hagashmiut*.

Even while they sought to disable the body or to rid the body of its problematic corporeality (attempting at least spiritually to strip it of its physicality, *hitpashtut hagashmiut*), by turning it into nothingness and therefore irrelevant in the search to be united with God, the early Hasidism could not escape the existence of the body. Rather than denying the reality of the body, the Kabbalists and the early Hasidim seem to have felt quite at home with a large number of references to the

³² Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 7, col. 1408.

anthropomorphic nature of God's "body,"³³ and refer with great regularity to the status of a man's body during prayer and ultimately of its physical and not only spiritual unification with the Godhead. In the imagination³⁴ the mind and the body are not a duality, with a conflict between them which must somehow be resolved. The imagination, for the Jewish mystic, is what is real.³⁵

An Introductory Note on the Sources

Our sources, both primary and secondary, are problematic. The primary sources are a collage of sources which vary in their historicity and in their accurate reporting of events and statements appearing in previously published texts. In addition, the sources do not necessarily represent the actual teachings of the particular Hasidic master in whose name they are taught. The sources used here were culled from a number of highly edited and in some cases anthologized collections of the teachings of R. Pinchas of Koretz as his students transmitted them. While a number of different

³³ For a recent assessment of God's body in Judaism, see Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*. Regarding a specific aspect of God's body in different historical periods, see, for example, Wolfson, Elliot, "Images of God's Feet: Some Observations on the Divine Body in Judaism" in Eilberg-Schwartz, *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 143-181.

³⁴ See Elliot Wolfson's recent work: *Through a Speculum that Shines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

³⁵ Per my conversations with Elliot Wolfson, Winter 1994-1995.

editions of some of the texts were consulted,³⁶ for the most part, a single edition of each of the texts attributed to R. Pinchas were used. To the extent that we have the teachings of the Besht, they exist often in the form of legends and generally represent the teachings of a school that developed after his death.

This difficulty in the primary sources is significant to note at the outset of this study because often the debates regarding our particular issues will involve assertions that one leader or another has the "correct" teaching from the Baal Shem Tov himself. Whether or not one particular teaching is closer to the "original" teaching of the Besht will be nearly impossible to determine given that the Besht wrote nothing that has survived and his teachings are relayed to us by way of the various schools that developed later.

Given these textual concerns, it will be important to maintain a critical attitude and at the same time to report accurately the portraits that are painted for us by the students of the various Hasidic schools as representative of how they understood their masters. To the extent that some statements appear in one context attributed to one leader and in another context attributed to another leader, we may discern only that the statement itself expresses an idea that a given school sought to claim as its own.

The next set of sources are those written by early twentieth-century scholars who tend to anthologize the legends of particular masters and glorify them and present

³⁶ Many different editions of *Nofet Tsufim* and *Midrash Pinchas*, in particular, exist as part of the Scholem Collection at the National Library of the Hebrew University, Givat Ram, Jerusalem. I was able to consult some of these editions. Footnotes to sources here, however, refer only to the editions listed in the bibliography.

them as leaders of a personality cult. This approach is largely phenomenological and religious and is represented by Martin Buber and Matityahu Guttman. Like many of their colleagues who touched upon Hasidic themes, these scholars focused on the legendary aspects of the figures rather than on theoretical issues that emerged in the literature itself. Martin Buber emphasized Hasidism's "experiential side"³⁷ and focused more on the legendary aspects of Hasidic literature, rather than on the theoretical aspects of Hasidic teachings.³⁸ Buber saw Hasidism as a departure from the major form of Jewish mysticism that preceded its emergence. Hasidism was original in that it introduced a unique type of religiosity, which did not have a predecessor in any of the earlier mystical groups. Buber takes the position that Hasidism is not a continuation of any mystical trend within Judaism, but that it is *sui generis* and not incomparable with all other Jewish and non-Jewish forms of mysticism.³⁹ Guttman's writings in particular fall in to the literary category of "Great Man Myths" which say more about the school that developed around the figure and after his death than about the man himself, much less the ideas he may or may not have taught.

A second type of secondary source is best represented by Simon Dubnow who sought to explain Hasidism as a phenomenon linked closely to the national-historical events of the period. Between these two groups and the Scholemian and Idelian schools, is the approach of Abraham J. Heschel who combines Buber's nostalgic

³⁷ See Martin Buber, *Origin and Meaning of Hasidism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1960; 1988).

³⁸ See also Idel, Moshe. *Hasidism*, pp. 2-9.

³⁹ Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 3.

phenomenological approach with attempts at delineating the historical and sociological causes of the emergence of Hasidism as a movement.

In contrast to Buber's phenomenological-religious approach, we find the approach of Gershom Scholem and Rivkah Schatz-Uffenheimer. Both of these scholars sought to de-emphasize the nostalgic religious focus and instead emphasize the importance of a historical analysis on the development of Hasidism. He also emphasizes the inner dynamic of an idea, and not always an external cause and effect brought about by poverty and persecution. Scholem was largely scientific, not necessarily a historicist, however, they contested Buber's approach and asserted that he ignored the more theoretical aspects of Hasidism.⁴⁰ Scholem, in contrast to Buber, saw Hasidism together with Sabbateanism, and Lurianic Kabbalah as outgrowths as "stages of the same process."⁴¹ Scholem saw Hasidism and Sabbateanism as reactions to Lurianic Kabbalism, which necessarily forms the basis of all Jewish mystical movements. One recent view, offered by Mendel Piekartz, emphasizes the dissemination and influence of the moralistic and ethical literature written under the influence of Safedian Kabbalah as motivating the emergence of Hasidism.⁴² The explanations for Hasidism of all of the major twentieth-century scholars, according to Idel, share one common denominator: "they all explained the mid-eighteenth-century

⁴⁰ Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 3. Scholem and Schatz-Uffenheimer also took Buber to task for his "existential and subjective readings of the sources."

⁴¹ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), pp. 327-29; see also pp. 338-39, cited in Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 3.

⁴² Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 4.

mystical movement as the continuation of the religious phenomenon that immediately preceded it."⁴³

In the past two decades a new group of scholars of Hasidism has emerged, led in large part by Moshe Idel of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Supporting many of his claims and developing theories of their own are Elliot Wolfson, Zeev Gries, Rachel Elior, Ada Rappoport-Albert, Art Green, Eric Zimmer, among others. Idel's recent book on Hasidism proposes new models of understanding the movement and the panorama of mystical influences that were available to its early leaders. All of these views will be important as we analyze the role of R. Pinchas of Koretz and his particular perspective on the role of the body during prayer.

Before turning to an analysis of R. Pinchas' view of the role of the body in prayer, however, it will be necessary to situate R. Pinchas in the historical context of Hasidic worship and the role of the body in Beshtian Hasidism. In Chapter One, we will also examine preliminarily the Besht's other followers' understanding of prayer and the role of the body, given their respective doctrines of *devekut*, as well as how R. Pinchas' views related to them. Consequently, the principal topic of this study, R. Pinchas' perspective on prayer and the role of the body will come into focus only in Chapters Four and Five. In Chapter Three I will describe R. Pinchas and his approach to prayer; in Chapter Four I will analyze his perspective on the body in general and in Chapter Five I will focus on the role the body plays in prayer.

⁴³ Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 4.

Chapter One: Pinchas of Koretz in the Context of Early¹ Beshtian² Hasidism

Viewed with suspicion by the early Hasidim because of his Lithuanian rabbinic background,³ the entrance of Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz into the Hasidic community in the Ukraine was not smooth. R. Pinchas first encountered the Baal Shem Tov together with his father who had previously opposed the Besht and his teachings.⁴ After their first meeting, for which he had hoped for many years, R. Pinchas immediately attached himself to the Besht. While R. Pinchas met the Besht

¹ "Early Hasidism" refers to 18th and early 19th century Hasidic leaders in Russia, Ukraine, and Poland. For extensive discussions on the beginnings of Hasidism see Simon Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut* (Tel Aviv: D'vir, 1967;) Safran, ed., *Hasidism: Continuity or Innovation?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Etkes, Emanuel, "Hasidism as a Movement-- the First Stage," pp. 1-26 in Safran.

² In an essay entitled "Hasidism as a Movement: The First Stage," in Safran, ed., *Hasidism: Continuity or Innovation*, pp. 1-26, Emanuel Etkes argues that there were Hasidim before the Besht and those who became Hasidim without any connection to the Besht. According to Etkes, there are three criteria for belonging to what is known as the "circle of the Baal Shem Tov," namely personal and intimate contact between each member of the group and the Besht; a common spiritual orientation shared by the group and the Besht; and, finally, acknowledgement of the unique virtues, or spiritual superiority of the Besht.

³ R. Pinchas' father, Abraham Abbah, a well-known Lithuanian rabbi who opposed the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and restrained his son from visiting the Baal Shem Tov for many years. See Guttman, *Rabi Pinchas M'korets* and Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, edited by Samuel Dresner), p. 11, hereafter referred to as Heschel, *Circle*.

⁴ According to a number of sources, (*Shivchei Habesht*, Heschel, *Circle*, p. 11, note 52 [based on MS *Kitvey Kodesh*, Chap. 10, folio 5a] Guttman, Matityahu, Rabinowicz, Harry, *Hasidism: The Movement and its Masters*, 1988, pp. 51-52; Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*.) R. Pinchas met the Baal Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name" [of God], R. Israel b. Eliezer, hereafter referred to as the Besht) only three times. Sources agree that this first meeting occurred not long before 1760, the year the Besht died. For a contrast between the "historic" and the "aggadic" Besht, see Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, pp. 41-42.

only three times "these meetings changed his life."⁵ Some scholars of Hasidism even go so far as to claim that R. Pinchas had a unique understanding of the Besht and inculcated the Besht's teachings among his students in a way unlike that of any other member of the "Circle" of the Baal Shem Tov.⁶ "In the Besht," writes Heschel, "R. Pinchas saw one who blazed a new path in serving God. He used to emphasize the fact that he followed 'the way of the Baal Shem Tov,' with whom a new era in Judaism had begun."⁷ Among those who have written about the early leaders of Hasidism, some portray R. Pinchas as one of the closest companions of the Besht and one of his most important students, while others emphasize his independence from the Besht, his unique presentation of Hasidism, or argue that R. Pinchas never formally joined the movement and remained on the sidelines.⁸ Whether or not R. Pinchas' perspective of the Besht was "closer" to the Besht's teachings, more "true", more "unique" or simply just "idiosyncratic," is impossible to determine with certainty.⁹ This study, however, will argue that he pioneered a school of thought independent of --yet deeply influenced by-- the teachings of the Besht and other masters of his

⁵ Rabinowicz, *The Movement and its Masters*, pp. 51-52.

⁶ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 229; and Heschel, *Circle*.

⁷ Heschel, *Circle*, p. 11.

⁸ Among those sources that discuss the relationship between R. Pinchas and the Besht are Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*; Heschel, *Circle*; Jacobs, *Hasidic Thought*; and Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*.

⁹ For a brief discussion on the idiosyncraticism of Hasidic masters and related issues, see Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 15: "The plurality of the mystical and non-mystical sources, the panoramic landscape, is one of the reasons for the diversity of Hasidic mystical phenomena."

generation.¹⁰

This "new era of Judaism," the beginnings of the Hasidic movement in Poland and the Ukraine in the eighteenth century, can be viewed as a response to the social, political, economic and religious context in which Jews in these regions lived at the end of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Only thus can its rapid growth in a relatively short time into a popular movement be explained: it must have struck a chord deep within the Jewish masses in Poland.¹¹ The eighteenth century was one of the worst times communally and economically for all of Polish Jewry, but especially for the Jews in the small Polish villages, who experienced intense oppression both by the government and the church, culminating periodically in violent pogroms in the first half of the eighteenth century¹² and suffering on a variety of different levels.¹³ Dubnow argues that Hasidism "filled a vacuum left by 'rabbinical religion' by providing a religious framework which met the intellectual level and emotional needs

¹⁰ Regarding the individual uniqueness of the schools that developed around each leader prior to the third or fourth generation, see Rapoport-Albert, Ada, "The Hasidic Movement After 1772: Continuity and Change," (Hebrew) in *Zion: A Quarterly for Research in Jewish History*, Vol. LV, 2, 1990, pp. 183-245.

¹¹ Etkes, "Hasidism as a Movement," in Safran, p. 1.

¹² Dubnow, *op. cit.*, Chapter One.

¹³ The Jews themselves, according to Simon Dubnow, did not understand the larger historical context of their suffering and only understood it as punishment. Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, chapters 1-2; Samuel Dresner, *The Zaddik: The Doctrine of the Zaddik According to the Writings of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Palnoy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1960), pp. 23ff.

of the common Jew."¹⁴ This intensive external suffering made the possibility of internal joy described by the early Hasidim even more appealing to the average Jew.

The Beshtian focus on joy and ecstasy as a way of serving God, while nonetheless admitting the reality of the pain and identifying its higher theological meaning, was attractive to the Jewish masses, R. Pinchas among them.¹⁵ R. Pinchas and his family exemplify the transition that many Jews made to Hasidism following persecution from the surrounding community. His father, R. Abraham Abbah b¹⁶. R. Pinchas, however, was a well-known Lithuanian rabbi who had opposed the Besht and his movement. Accused by Christian leaders of a blood libel because of his efforts among the Jewish converts to Christianity, however, R. Abraham Abbah and his family had been forced to flee the town of his birth (Shklov, in the province of Mogilev) and settle in Miropol in Volhynia,¹⁷ and it was there that both R. Abraham Abbah and R. Pinchas came into contact with Hasidism and its emerging leaders.

Although R. Pinchas' father initially refused to allow him to visit the Besht, a

¹⁴ Etkes, "Hasidism as a Movement," in Safran, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵ Dubnow, pp. 8-18. Part of the external oppression of the Jews included tremendous taxes on the Jewish community. The most drastic increases between occurred between 1717-1764. In addition there were strict limitations on areas for work and living; minimal if any civil rights, and no official citizenship.

Jewish communities also experienced religious oppression from the Catholic clergy, including periodic blood libels. There were some twenty different trials (or more) between 1700-1760. (p. 14)

Similarly, there was significant legal oppression of the Jews by the Polish Catholic landowners; near enslavement of some Jews, conversions of Jewish children, ransoming by and pleading of leaders of the Jewish community.

¹⁶ "son of"

¹⁷ Heschel, *Circle*, pp. 3-4.

reticence characteristic of the *mitnagdim*¹⁸ who came to oppose Hasidism as a movement, according to legend their initial visit with the Besht inspired them both to become instant adherents to his "way." Rather narrowly, some scholars see Beshtian Hasidism as a rebellion against the elitist aspects of the entrenched rabbinic leadership which they believed did not respond to the needs of the hour. This same school of scholars argues that early Hasidim pushed at the boundaries of rabbinic law, because the circumstances of life for the average Jew demanded, in their eyes, alternatives for those who did not have the knowledge to engage comfortably in Judaism according to the rabbinic law.¹⁹ Most notably, this school of scholars asserts that the central difference between the Hasidim and the *mitnagdim* was the issue of Torah study, said to be considered by Lithuanian rabbinic leadership as the most important way of serving God, while in the eyes of the Besht and his followers, it now was of only secondary importance.²⁰

This easy distinction between the Hasidim and the *mitnagdim* based on the emphasis and de-emphasis of Torah study and rabbinic law fails to describe, much less to explain, the complexity of the conflict between the two groups. While there were two opposing camps by the end of the eighteenth century, recent scholars are more apt

¹⁸ The *mitnagdim*, literally "the opposers," were those who opposed the Baal Shem Tov and his teachings. They feared that turning the focus from Torah study to prayer would lead to the destruction of Torah and of Polish Jewry.

¹⁹ See Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, Chapter 2.

²⁰ Some scholars argue that the pietistic movements of eighteenth century Poland influenced the development of Hasidism, however, a full analysis of this tension is beyond the scope of this study. See also Biale, *Eros and The Jews*, chapter 6, pp. 130ff; and Campbell, Ted, *The Religion of the Heart*, pp. 130-151.

to describe a wider range of influences that generated the conflict. Yaacov Hasdai divides the scholars into two schools: one school maintains that

the decisive factor was the emergence of Hasidism as a movement that challenged the status of the rabbis and the *parnassim*, communal leaders. Consequently, the latter fought to protect their positions and the entire status quo. Another theory has it that Hasidism challenged the existing scale of spiritual values, placing faith and piety before learning.... These two schools, then, share the view that the Hasidim were a rebellious element, while the *Mitnagdim* were Establishment people defending either the social status quo or the traditional spiritual values.²¹

To the extent that Hasidic leaders took positions of alternative rabbinic authority in the eyes of their followers (especially on the issues of ritual slaughter and the liturgical formulation of some of the prayers) or to the extent that they represented a spiritual rebellion against Torah study, non-Hasidim and pre-Hasidic Jewish authorities were threatened by the powerful influence of the new movement. It should be noted, however, that in spite of the intensity of the conflict between the two groups, even in 1775, when the Hasidic movement was supposedly firmly established, two Hasidic leaders regarded their greatest foe, the *mitnagdim*, as the true authority.²²

Without a doubt, however, the change in emphasis according to the Hasidism, from Torah study to prayer, represented a significant re-articulation of how one might best "serve God." For the Hasidim, prayer took center stage in the Jew's relationship to God. While it did not deny the authority of *halakha*, this shift in focus, generated a

²¹ Hasdai, Yaacov, "Hasidim and Mitnagdim," in *Hasidism: Continuity or Innovation?* Edited by Bezalel Safran, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 29-30.

²² Hasdai, "Hasidim and Mitnagdim," p. 45.

variety of substantial spiritual and communal consequences which are often cited to describe the extent of the impact of Hasidism on Judaism.

The Besht sought not only to rekindle a "spiritual flame"²³ among the people but to "democratize" the experience of the sacred among all Jews. "Democratization," for the Besht and later for R. Pinchas and his followers,²⁴ meant bringing the possibility of inner spiritual fulfillment to the educated as well as to the uneducated non-Torah scholar.²⁵ R. Pinchas affirmed the Besht's view of making the greatest teachings of Judaism accessible to the common person. Yet it is exactly the extent to which the prayers of every Jew ought to have the same spiritual potential that concerned R. Pinchas. With the Besht, all Hasidic masters agreed that the spiritual ecstasy of prayer with *devekut* should be universally available, not just in the possession of a few. The response to those whose prayer did not achieve such a lofty state.

A sense of what prevented prayer with *devekut*, the highest goal of the Hasid, also characterized the early leaders. Like R. Jacob Joseph, whom we will discuss in the next chapter, R. Pinchas believed that there were dangerous consequences which

²³ *Hitlahavut*. Literally, "enflamedness," a spiritual state usually referring to that state which the Hasidim strove to reach in prayer.

²⁴ Whether or not the Maggid, as we shall see later, wanted to preserve the degree of democratization and accessibility that R. Pinchas said the Besht taught is unclear.

²⁵ Some discount the theory that the Hasidic movement "hailed the prayers of the unsophisticated offered in simple faith," and assert that the tales of the Besht and his followers refusing to reject the prayers of the untutored [...] are not peculiar to Hasidism.... It is nowhere suggested that the Hasid with spiritual aspirations dares rest content with simple, untutored prayer...." Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 34.

followed from the "pride of the learned." R. Jacob Joseph could have been speaking for R. Pinchas when he described three aspects of pride in learning as a potential barrier between an individual and God:

1) *The breakdown of the place of Torah*, which became, for the scholar, a means of achieving glory and fame; 2) *The drive for personal security*, which resulted in corruption and subservience to the rich; 3) *The concern for spiritual security*, the salvation of the leader's own soul which led to the neglect of the people's salvation.²⁶

These concerns with the elitist, intellectualist rabbinic approach to Judaism were so central for R. Pinchas that he was quickly persuaded by the Hasidic de-emphasis of Torah study and its focus instead on the prayer of every man. He was concerned, he told his students, that he might become more learned than pious.

For the early Hasidim, there were essentially two ways of approaching God: through prayer and through Torah study. But while some argue that Torah study was de-emphasized, it was never abandoned, much less seen as unimportant. In fact, the two are always linked, given that words and letters themselves serve as vehicles, as the means through which God can be reached.²⁷

The Besht believed that it is more desirable in God's eyes to serve Him joyfully and, whenever possible, ecstatically in prayer.²⁸ The duties of "Torah

²⁶ Dresner, *The Zaddik*, p. 86.

²⁷ Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, pp. 55ff; conversations with Elliot Wolfson.

²⁸ Rabinowicz, pp. 51-52.

study and prayer" have to be fulfilled, "but above all else is the yearning, the spark of flame which sets fire to *hitlahavut*-- the craving and the longing for His love."²⁹ Prayer was a way of seeking unity with the *Shekhinah*,³⁰ (which had sexual implications for the role of the Hasid's body in approaching God and not merely one's mind, as we shall see later³¹). It should be noted, however, that throughout the history of Hasidism, Torah study was also seen as a kind of prayer, a way of praying-- because it draws the thoughts of the person upward. In spite of the sacredness of studying Torah, knowledge was less important to the Hasid than *kavvanah*. The less learned, less strictly observant Jew, was not a travesty, but rather a meaningful achievement, compared to the child that stutters, who in spite of his imperfect articulation, still has his requests fulfilled.³²

The central principles of the Besht's "Torah" were all aimed at the same goal and fit well together. He emphasized feeling and emotion over knowledge and understanding; faith over study and research; a joyful awakening over ascetic suffering; love over fear; and *kavvanah* over external discipline.³³ The

²⁹ *Shivchei Habesht*, p. 64, quoted in Dresner, *The Zaddik*, p. 35.

³⁰ The divine presence of God, understood by the kabbalists and by the Hasidim as the feminine element of the Godhead; female because it is the "passive" aspect of Deity. See Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 23.

³¹ See Chapter Four.

³² Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, chapter 2.

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 60-62.

quality of the intention, or the intensity with which a *mitzvah* is performed, was seen as more important than the exactness of its execution. For the *Mitnagdim*, this was a rebellion against the rabbinic obsession with exact details of rabbinic law.³⁴ Others argue the Hasidim did not engage in any serious departures from the *halakhic* requirements.

As a descendant of a well-known Lithuanian rabbi, R. Pinchas' role in the conflict between the Hasidim and the *Mitnagdim* had to be navigated delicately. As a Lithuanian Jew and a descendant of a Lithuanian rabbi who had initially rejected the teachings of the Besht at that, R. Pinchas was suspect in the eyes of the other Hasidim as not having the same spiritual commitment to Hasidism.³⁵ As each group strove to define itself more clearly and the political dangers of being associated with the other increased, R. Pinchas chose to remain as neutrally situated within the Hasidic camp as possible. Regarding the split between Hasidism and anti-Hasidism, R. Pinchas advised against speaking about it at all.³⁶ "About the great debates of our time," he said, "it is best to remain silent."³⁷ This unique position of neutrality is one of many reasons why scholars assert that R. Pinchas occupied a unique place among the Hasidim.³⁸

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Shivchei Habesht*, 20c-d.

³⁶ Dubnow in Hundret, *Essential Papers*, p. 79; relying on *Likutim Y'karim* and *Midrash Pinchas*.

³⁷ *Nofet Tsufim*, 16:53.

³⁸ *Shivchei Habesht*, 20c-d.

For R. Pinchas, the Besht's focus on the intention and feeling of the individual in his relationship to God rather than his exactness of observance, seemed appropriate to the times. "In this generation," he wrote:

people do not occupy themselves with the study of Torah as in early days, for now there has spread a great fear [of God] throughout the world, and in the early days there was not such fear, wherefore they used to occupy themselves with torah. There are few places [now] where they study; there is no fear.³⁹

For R. Pinchas, as for most of the early Hasidim, fear of God and the nourishment of this sense of the Divine was more important than occupying oneself with Torah study. Shmuel Ettinger understands this statement by R. Pinchas as characteristically emphasizing "the essential antagonism between the way of the Hasid and the way of the non-Hasid, for in Jewish society at that period the scholar, the man devoted wholly to study, was the ideal, and study of the Torah the commandment that outweighed all others."⁴⁰ The ideal in Hasidism, however, was the spiritual union with God achieved through *devekut* in prayer which could be supported by study in the *Beit Midrash*.

Scholars disagree regarding the extent to which the Hasidic elevation of prayer was or was in keeping with the Jewish tradition. Rivkah Schatz-Uffenheimer argues that the "pride of place" of prayer in Hasidic life was in keeping with Jewish tradition,⁴¹ while Louis Jacobs argues "the Hasidim here were innovators."⁴² Scholem

³⁹ Ettinger, Shmuel, "The Hasidic Movement--Reality and Ideals," in Hundret, *Essential Papers*, p. 231.

⁴⁰ Ettinger, "The Hasidic Movement," in Hundret, p. 231.

⁴¹ Schatz, "Contemplative Prayer in Hasidism," *Studies in Mysticism and Religion presented to G. Scholem* (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 209.

cautions us against any essentialist argument, preferring to emphasize the milieu in which the doctrinal debate occurred:

When the Besht put forth his doctrine of *devekut* as more important than study of books, it aroused considerable opposition and was used in all the anti-Hasidic polemics as proof of the movement's anti-Rabbinical tendencies. But the exact same theory had been advanced two hundred years before by a no lesser mystical authority, by Isaac Luria⁴³ himself in Safed, without arousing the slightest antagonism. **It was not the thesis that had changed but the historical climate.**⁴⁴

Scholem links *devekut* as the central concept of Hasidism with its marginal namesake in Lurianism, going further to identify it as at the core of the debate between the Hasidim and the anti-Hasidim.

Other scholars have taken issue with the extent to which Scholem identifies Hasidic thought with ideas that go by the same name in Lurianic Kabbalism. Moshe Idel, for example, argues that *devekut* played a much more limited role in Lurianic Kabbalah, which preferred to emphasize *kavvanot* and *yichudim* (unification with the divine name) were far more instrumental.⁴⁵ *Devekut* was one of a number of marginal concepts in Kabbalah. It was therefore derived from Lurianism yet played decisively

⁴² Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 17; see also: Safran, Bezalel, ed., *Hasidism: Continuity or Innovation?*.

⁴³ A great Kabbalist (1534-1572) born in Palestine, moved to Egypt and later back to Palestine. A well-known Kabbalistic synagogue in Safed is named after him and a prayer book is attributed to him, *Siddur HaAri*, that was used by the some of the early Hasidim.

⁴⁴ Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 25. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵ For a more extensive discussion on the differences and connections between Lurianic Kabbalah and Hasidism, see the Introduction.

different roles in the theology and theosophy of Hasidism.⁴⁶

Whether the Hasidic focus on prayer represents continuity with or a break from Jewish tradition,⁴⁷ or whether it was derived directly from Lurianic Kabbalah, is not the subject of this study, but rather how the role of the body was understood in the Hasidic doctrine of *devekut*, particularly in the writings of R. Pinchas of Koretz.

The doctrine of *devekut* was especially valued by R. Pinchas when he first encountered the Besht and thereafter sought to maintain its centrality, claiming that he was guarding it from any non-Beshtian misinterpretations. Not all of the students of the Besht, however, understood the concept in the same way. Before we examine how R. Pinchas understood *devekut* and what role the body plays in achieving it, it will be necessary to turn our attention to the concept of *devekut* and its development in earlier mystical and non-mystical Jewish traditions.

⁴⁶ Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 45.

⁴⁷ "Jewish tradition," itself is not easily defined, nor are there singular opinions on the importance of prayer within the rabbinic texts usually associated with this tradition.

Chapter Two: Prayer, *Devekut*, and the Role of the Body in Beshtian Hasidism

1. *Devekut* in Beshtian Hasidism

*The quintessence of the worship of God is to comprehend His divinity, blessed be His name, and to cleave to the Infinite, blessed be He.*¹

While all eight of the concepts outlined in the previous section were central to Hasidic prayer,² its highest goal, *devekut*, was often linked to two other concepts: *achdut*³ (unity) and *hitlahavut*; (enflamedness or burning enthusiasm).⁴ The idea of *devekut*, that "union" or "communion" with God was the highest goal of prayer,⁵ appears thousands of times in Hasidic literature.⁶ According to Avraham Rubinstein, *devekut* was the "banner under which Hasidism went forth to revitalize religious life and modify the traditional values in Judaism."⁷ One who reaches this high *madregah* (level or stage), that of *devekut*, serves as a go-between or mediator between the

¹ A Hasidic dictum which appears in a wide variety of early Hasidic texts, often attributed to the Besht. Quoted in Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 86.

² Some scholars divide Hasidic prayer not into three principles but into two types, "petitionary" and "contemplative." See Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, and Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*.

"upper" and "lower worlds."⁸ Some Hasidim understood *devekut* to mean a "clinging to" or a communion of thought with the Godhead (*devekut hamachshavah b'elohut*) as the goal of prayer,⁹ having already "annihilated" the presence of the body.

Whether this union was understood to occur in the mind or in the body differentiates the early Hasidic leaders, according to the manuscripts of their students.¹⁰ Before analyzing the role of the body in Beshtian Hasidic prayer and then in Koretzian prayer, we must first briefly clarify the historical development of *devekut* as a concept in the Bible and in the Kabbalah.¹¹ In its biblical context, *devekut* most often means attachment to God by observing God's commandments, by "walking in His [God's] ways" and by following the laws of the ancient Israelite community.¹² The idea of *devekut* in the Bible does not refer to the context of prayer and is concerned with the "devoutness" of the community rather than with the spiritual life of the individual.

While there is some discussion of the concept in the earlier mystical literature, only in the thirteenth century did Kabbalist texts define the term more specifically and utilize it as a rubric of a spiritual system. While there is no universally accepted

⁸ See the discussion of *olamot* in the Introduction. See also, Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, p. 57.

⁹ Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, Chapter 2.

¹⁰ Jacob Joseph's *Toldot Yaakov* was the earliest of such writings (See Chapter 2, Part III.) See also Heschel, *Circle*; and Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, pp. 51, 121, 185.

¹¹ *Devekut* also appears in earlier Jewish mystical texts, such as the *Heikhalot* literature.

¹² See for example Deuteronomy: 4:4; 11:22; 13:5; 30:20. "You shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him, and hold fast to Him." (Deuteronomy 13:5).

canonical definition or translation, words like "attachment" or "union" are used most often. In defining *devekut* in Kabbalism, Gershom Scholem notes that:

The idea of *devekut* as the ultimate fulfillment of the mystic's path permeates the theosophical and ethical literature of the Kabbalists. Isaiah Horovits¹³ connects the state of *hasidut* with that of *devekut*: 'Who is a Hasid? He who acts in piety towards God and gives great pleasure to his Creator and all of whose intention is bent on cleaving to Him and thereby becoming a chariot for God.'¹⁴

According to the kabbalah, and according to Early Hasidism in an even more exaggerated form, the individual is suddenly singled out from the larger community as one who can relate independently to God within and without the communal context. *Devekut* is transformed from a minimal requirement of the collective to a spiritual goal of the individual:

Essentially a private experience.... *devekut* can be reached alone. The only exception, when *devekut* became an experience of the whole community of Israel, was -- at least according to some Jewish theologians -- the revelation at Mt. Sinai, but even then it was more in the nature of a multiplied experience of many single individuals than of the community as an integrated whole.¹⁵

We must note here that because Scholem regards Lurianic Kabbalah as the primary influence on the development of early Hasidism, he does not focus on the ways in which *devekut* was transformed as it was taken from the margins of the Kabbalah and

¹³ 1565?-1630, author of *Hashelah Hakadosh*, rabbi, Kabbalist, and communal leader. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 8, cols. 990-994.

¹⁴ Scholem, "Devekut: Communion or Union?" in *Hundert*, p. 278. Scholem makes reference to Moses Haim Luzzato's *Path of the Upright*, in which *devekut* is seen as the last stage on the path of seeking oneness with God.

¹⁵ Scholem, "Devekut: Communion or Union?" in *Hundert*, p. 276.

made central in Hasidism. Scholem's understanding of the minimal difference between Hasidic and Kabbalistic *devekut*, is defined in the following passage:

For the understanding of the new turn of the ideal of *devekut* in Hasidism, however, no passage is more important than Nachmanides' commentary on Deuteronomy 11:22, "To love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to cleave unto Him." The old commentaries are divided on the question of whether this cleaving, which is *devekut*, is to be understood as a promise held out to the faithful, or as a commandment binding on everyone.¹⁶

That *devekut* was no longer held up as a possibility only for the unusually learned and pious person, but rather accessible and "binding on everyone" represents one of the greatest impacts that Hasidism had on Jewish prayer. Each person was encouraged -- and according to some, required -- to strive for a spiritual union, a state of *devekut*, with God. The individual was no longer merely responsible for the correct *halakhic* performance of the act of prayer, but for the spiritual heights reached in that process. According to the Scholemian school, this was the most revolutionary aspect of the Beshtian perspective on prayer.

Disagreeing with Scholem's approach to Hasidism, Idel elucidates the importance of the influence of *non-Lurianic* forms of mysticism and emphasizes the *difference* in the Kabbalistic versus the Hasidic understanding of *devekut*. That it is de-emphasized, but not rejected, in the Lurianic texts, "represents a retreat even from the...*Zohar*, whose impact on Lurianism was overwhelming. Thus the increase in the importance of *devekut* [in Hasidism] either with Lurianism or with Sabbateanism" or

¹⁶ Scholem, in *Hundret*, pp. 276ff. The statement resembles Maimonides' on the highest rank of prophecy (see *Guide of the Perplexed*, III: 51).

with the rejection of either of these movements.¹⁷ This refusal to link Hasidism either directly or indirectly with or against Lurianic streams of mysticism alone is but one example of the areas in which Idel takes issue with what he calls Scholem's characteristic "history of ideas" approach, or "proxism." Idel criticizes Scholem's assumption that Hasidism was both reactive to some elements of Lurianism on one hand, and that it also represented a continuation with respect to its other elements, or the other.¹⁸

Essentially, Hasidism is a choice between, rather than a reaction to, already existing mystical values, numerous and often diverging speculative themes, and religious models in Judaism --a selection emphasizing topics that were active and effective in the earlier states of Jewish mysticism and were still propagated in some forms of ethical literature.¹⁹

The emphasis on *devekut* in early Hasidic literature, argues Idel, is one of the issues where "there is a certain phenomenological convergence of spiritual concerns between these two forms of Jewish mysticism"²⁰ [ecstatic Kabbalah and Hasidism].

In the development of the Hasidic perspective on prayer, *devekut* was understood by the mystics in the sense of "close and most intimate, personal, communion with God."²¹ The doctrine of *devekut* means that ideally one should

¹⁷ Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 86.

²¹ Scholem, Gershom, "Devekut, Or Communion with God," in Hundret, Gershom D., ed., *Essential Papers on Hasidism: Origins to Present* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 265.

always have God in his thoughts, seeing beneath appearances only the divine vitality that infuses all things.²² Or, according to Schatz-Uffenheimer, the state marking the climax of *devekut* is the uplifting of the divinity latent in man's soul from a latent to an active condition, which is a true union with God.²³

Devekut, however, was not limited to the context of prayer:

Two basic motifs in connection with the doctrine of *devekut*²⁴ ... reappear and are given prominence in the Hasidic teaching of the Baal Shem: 1) the sanctification of the profane sphere in the life of the perfect Hasid, its transformation into one single sphere of holy action which leaves no room for the concept of a separate state of 'profane' action; 2) the paradigm of eating in holiness as the perfect example of the supreme state of man. What is generally considered as an earthly performance *par excellence*, is transformed into a holy, nay, a mystery rite. This paradigm, by the way, is by no means a late addition, nor is it a specific trait of Hasidism, as it is sometimes considered to be. It is common to the whole Kabbalistic renaissance of Safed.²⁵

Among the "mystery rites" of earthly behaviors was the striving for a loss of sense of physicality, or *bittul hayesh* ("the annihilation of self") and yet a sense of ecstasy in having achieved closeness to or union with the Divine. According to some of the early Hasidic writings, "one must think of oneself as a limb of God, not as separate."²⁶

The initial main promoter of the practice of *devekut* was the Besht, his

²² Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 21.

²³ Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," p. 1411.

²⁴ Scholem in Hundret, pp. 278-279.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, Chapter Two.

students, while clarifying the dimensions and requirements of Hasidic *devekut*, did not always agree on his teachings. While members of his circle frequently claim to have received their tradition directly from the Besht, and yet these "traditions" do not always concur. Some argue that they possessed instructions from the Besht himself regarding the practice of *devekut*. They assert that the Besht would "grant permission"

to desist from *devekut* during prayer in order to respond to some social need. He indicates that should a man be approached during a period of *devekut* by a person wishing to talk to him or seeking his assistance he is permitted to stop praying since in this latter action....'God is present'.²⁷

While *devekut* was considered a state to be achieved only in the realm of prayer, this statement implies that there were other values held equally high, through which one could also achieve a similar if not equal closeness with God. Nearness to God, therefore, can occur not only in prayer but in every act, so that every act has cosmic significance. Inherent in the whole doctrine of Hasidic prayer was the notion that it could influence the "upper worlds."²⁸ Because every single act could have significance in the relationship of the individual with God, close attention was paid even to every bodily movement. R. Pinchas, as we shall see, stressed the notion that every movement had significance more than most Hasidic leaders of his time.

In the doctrine of *devekut* according to the early Hasidim, there are two stages of prayer. The first is that of speech (*dibbur*) and the second is the state of thought

²⁷ Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," p. 1409.

²⁸ See Introduction.

(*machshavah*).²⁹ *Dibbur*, actually speaking the words of the prayers, was a necessary primary state of action which allowed for the second less physical state, *machshavah*. Together the two states which were two stages that allowed for the ascension of the one praying. Initially, neither of these stages involved a clear delineation of the role of movement, and other than the role of the voice, they ignore the role of the body. In the first state the act of prayer is visible and audible but in the second state -- *machshavah*-- the one that leads to *devekut*, there is nothing audible or visible. Here there is a clear separation between the visible and the invisible stages of prayer, emphasizing the latter as a higher state. These two stages then emphasize the necessity of the annihilation of self, *bittul hayesh*, before one can ascend to an upper world, much less achieve the state of *devekut*.

The Hasidim saw the body as a vessel through which man could worship God, but which had to be transformed in order to be unified with God. This tension between matter and spirit, between the corporeality of the body and the ultimate goals of prayer gave rise to two contrasting evaluations of prayer, its corporeal form, *avodah b'gashmiut*,³⁰ and that in which the body has been stripped of its existence, *hitpashtut hagashmiut* when, therefore, *bittul hayesh*, can occur. The worshipper, moved from mere speech to thought, achieves communion with the upper realms, moving from corporeality to speech to thought itself and then with the mind of God.

²⁹ Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," pp. 1411-1412.

³⁰ See definitions of terms in Introduction.

As is now clear, there was a tension between "outwardness" and "inwardness"³¹ in prayer. Schatz-Uffenheimer explains the tension in this way: "There is no way to be liberated from the captivity of matter except to be ostensibly cooperating with it. This ambivalent relation to reality forms a supreme religious imperative."³² The struggle to accept and at the same time transcend the "captivity of matter" gave rise to the development of differing ideas within the Hasidic movement regarding the role of the body in prayer; specifically, whether or not and how the body should move or remain still, and whether or not one should be vocal or silent.

2. The Role of the Body in Hasidic Prayer

*If you wish to adhere to God with some form of worship,
allow yourself some kind of material desire and lust.*³³

One of the most widespread teachings in Hasidism was *avodah b'gashmiut*: the doctrine "calling for man's worship of God by means of his physical acts."³⁴ Given the capacity for a person to worship God in physical acts, the body is clearly present in the Hasidic notion of certain types of prayer. At the same time, however, this acknowledgement of the body and its movements at all times gave rise to the possibility of evaluating the spiritual activity others based on the external signs of the

³¹ See *Imrei Pinchas*, especially "Inyanim Shonim" (Miscellaneous Topics).

³² Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism", p. 1408.

³³ Benjamin of Zalozce, *Ahavat Dodim* (Lemberg, 1795), 35:3, on the Song of Songs, quoted in David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 131.

³⁴ Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," col. 1408. See Introduction.

extent to which they cleave to God. "To be especially noted," writes Schatz-Uffenheimer,

is the extraordinary emphasis placed on the value of such worship [*avodah b'gashmiut*] and the subsequent attempt to limit it to a devotional practice suitable only for spiritually superior individuals. In the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, this doctrine developed in uncontrolled fashion....³⁵

The development of a hierarchy of spiritual capacity was not new in the doctrine of the Besht, but its emphasis in the teachings of some of his students distinguished their interpretations.

R. Jacob Joseph, in the name of the Besht expressed the idea of *avodah b'gashmiut* in early Hasidism:

I have heard from my teacher that the soul, having been hewn from its holy quarry, ever ought to long for its place of origin, and, lest its reality be extinguished as a result of its yearning, it has been surrounded with matter, so that it may also perform material acts such as eating, drinking, conduct of business and the like, in order that it [the soul] may not be perpetually inflamed by the worship of the Holy One blessed be He, through the principle of the perfection [*tikkun*] and maintenance of body and soul.³⁶

A separation between the spiritual, non-corporeal existence and the carnal existence of man was delineated early in rabbinic thought.³⁷ Yet the reality of the physical body

³⁵ Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," col. 1408.

³⁶ R. Jacob Joseph, *Toldot Yaakov Yosef*, on portion *Tazria*, quoted by Schatz-Uffenheimer in "Hasidism," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 7, col. 1408. Schatz-Uffenheimer argues that the point made in this passage in advocacy of corporeal worship is largely psychological and not theological.

³⁷ See Boyarin, Daniel, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*, pp. 37-39.

remained problematic to the extent that various methods of transformation in which the body was made "naught," stripped of its physicality. The idea that one could rid oneself of the problem of one's body by complicated meditations was crucial to the Early Hasidim especially during prayer, when the body would otherwise be a barrier between the worshipper and God. The soul must necessarily be separated from the body in order to be united with God. The body, therefore, must be transformed into nothingness so as not to interfere with the soul's search for God. Our study, however, focuses on the extent to which the Early Hasidim, and later in particular, R. Pinchas of Koretz, accepted the reality of the corporeal *presence* of the body even during prayer, even while he sought its annihilation.

Recent scholarly literature analyzes the history of the body in Judaism.³⁸ Its focus on the role of the body in Hasidic texts, however, has been limited. Even more limited are those sources which focus on the role of the body in Hasidic prayer. While a great deal has been said on the liturgy and the theology of Hasidic worship, treatment has only begun on the subject of the "how" of the prayer rather than the "what." This literature does describe the body in prayer to some extent, but it does so from a narrow theological perspective which does not take into account the wide variety of schools of thought among the early Hasidim. A common focus of this literature when it addresses Hasidic sources is to highlight the extent to which ecstatic

³⁸ See, for example, Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*; David Biale, *Eros and the Jews*; Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The People of the Body*, and *Gods Phallus*; and Elliot R. Wolfson *Through a Speculum that Shines*. See bibliography.

prayer can be compared to sexual intercourse.³⁹ Beyond an analogy to the sexual act, we are given little insight into the role of the body in that experience. We do have some treatments of the use of gestures and melody among early Hasidic communities, but these are limited in the degree to which they take into account contemporary scholarship on the anthropology of body and physical movement in the religious context.⁴⁰

The custom of swaying during study and especially during prayer has roots the Zohar.⁴¹ The early Hasidim, according to the earliest prescriptive literature, ruled that the practice of swaying in prayer is obligatory, that one's prayer "must be animated, in a vibrant body, and not in a body which is motionless as death."⁴² Aaron Wertheim asserts that the swaying motion was

not necessarily forwards and backwards, as quoted in various sourcesIt did not have any fixed pattern, and each *Tzaddik* observed his own custom....There were those who swayed back and forth while others swayed from side to side. Others, again, would step forward with one

³⁹ Some of the Hasidic texts suggest that achieving union with the divine occurs when one imagines having intercourse with the *Shekhinah*. See references in Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, Chapter Three.

⁴⁰ Scholarship on the implications of the role of the body in Hasidic prayer is only now emerging. See references in the bibliography to works by Idel, Wolfson, Biale and Eilberg-Schwartz.

⁴¹ Zohar, *Pinchas*, 218: "I asked him why all the other nations of the world except for the Jewish people, do not sway, for when they study Torah, they sway back and forth." Quoted in Wertheim, Aaron, *Law and Custom in Hasidism*, translated by Shmuel Himelstien, (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1992), p. 157.

⁴² *Testament of the Baal Shem Tov*, 42, cited in Wertheim, *Law and Custom in Hasidism*, p. 157.

foot and backward with the other, seeming to dance where they stood.⁴³

That there was no specific mandate on the particular direction of a Hasid's swaying during prayer, does not indicate that one also had the freedom to stand still, sway during only part of his prayer, which, as we shall see, was the custom of R. Pinchas of Koretz. His lack of swaying or his partial swaying was criticized. Yet he believed that one cannot imitate the movements of another during prayer, that each person must find his own way to move, or to remain still.⁴⁴

Hasidic doctrine on the role of the body during prayer, however, was defined largely by the teachings of the Besht on the importance of *devekut*. A repertoire of gestures for prayer to expedite achieving *devekut* also developed, generating a new atmosphere which was criticized vehemently by those outside the Hasidic community. Unlike some of the rabbinic leaders of his time, The Besht opposed self-mortification as impeding and not facilitating the goals of prayer because, he argued, strength of body and of soul is necessary to worship God with love.⁴⁵

Directly related to the Hasidic understanding of the role of the body in serving God and in prayer is the doctrine of *yeridah l'tsorech aliyah* (descent for the sake of ascent). One was permitted, according to this doctrine, to confront actual evil, even to engage in practices propelled by the evil inclination in order to "transform" evil into

⁴³ Wertheim, *Law and Custom in Hasidism*, p. 158.

⁴⁴ *Imrei Pinchas, Avodat HaShem*, 11.

⁴⁵ *Shivchei Habesht*. At the same time, however, some argue that it was known that the Besht fasted and that fasting and other self-flagellation made his body weak. See Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, chapter Two.

good. This confrontation with evil and with one's physical desires, was scorned by others but permitted, even prescribed by the Besht who suggested: "A man should desire a woman to so great an extent that he refines away his material existence, by virtue of the strength of his desire."⁴⁶ As Schatz-Uffenheimer understands it, "The significance of this statement lies in its granting a warrant to exhaust the primordial desires without actually realizing them; it is not a dispensation for the release of bodily desires through physical actualization but through their transformation."⁴⁷

How far the Besht was willing to go in his belief that "evil" urges could be confronted and transformed is not clear. Some argue that he "rejected the radical doctrine of actively seeking out temptation in order to achieve spiritual elevation," an idea which was popular elsewhere in the milieu of eighteenth-century Hasidism.⁴⁸ According to David Biale, R. Jacob Joseph, the consummate follower of the Besht, explicitly labeled these practices "heretical,"⁴⁹ while Elliot Wolfson argues that R. Jacob Joseph cautioned against the dangers of those who descend to the demonic.⁵⁰ Taken together, the teachings of the Besht affirm the desires of the body were perceived positively as vehicles through which a person could come to serve God: "Every *mitzvah* or act of holiness," he taught, "starts with thoughts of physical

⁴⁶ Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," col. 1410.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 1410.

⁴⁸ Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 130.

⁴⁹ Jacob Joseph, *Toldot Yaacov Yosef*, (Koretz, 1780), pp. 88b-c, quoted in Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 130.

⁵⁰ Elliot Wolfson, note to the author.

pleasure,"⁵¹ and "It is proper for a man to have physical desires and out of them he will come to desire the Torah and the worship of God."⁵² According to the teachings of the Besht, "Neither the body nor women are to be regarded negatively....[for] the body conveys spirituality."⁵³ Instead of preaching the suppression of bodily desires, the Besht taught that one should use them and their power to achieve spiritual transcendence.⁵⁴

Spiritual ecstasy was equated with sexual ecstasy in the teachings of some Hasidim, giving rise to the accusation that the Hasidim encouraged ejaculation during prayer. Among the radical portrayals of this notion was Leib Melamed, a marginal member of the Hasidic camp, who advocated a radical use of sexual temptation in the prayer context: "One should imagine during prayer that a woman stands in front of him and then he will rise to a great height.....One is even permitted to have an ejaculation as a result of the great arousal of prayer."⁵⁵

It may be this sort of teaching that generated the criticisms of the *mitnagdim* of Hasidic ecstatic prayer. David of Makov, a follower of the great Lithuanian rabbi Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna, cited the sexual excesses during prayer of the "ecstatic"

⁵¹ *Toldot Yaacov Yosef*, p. 151a, quoted in Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 131.

⁵² Jacob Joseph, *Ben Porat Yosef*, (Koretz, 1781), p. 66b, quoted in Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 131: "The saying is based on a misinterpretation of Saadia Gaon. See Joseph Weiss, 'The Beginnings of Hasidism' (in Hebrew), *Zion* 16 (1951):101."

⁵³ Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 131.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Leib Melamed, *Shever Poshim*, pp. 37b-38a, quoted in Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 126.

Hasidim:

The Hasidim commit the sin of involuntary ejaculation at all times during their prayers, for they deliberately give themselves erections during prayer according to the commandment of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem who said....in prayer, it is necessary to unite [sexually] with the Shekhinah. It is therefore necessary to move back and forth as in the act of intercourse.⁵⁶

David Biale seizes this passage as an instance of his more general theory that "It is not unusual for new religious movements that challenge existing power structures to arouse sexual anxieties...."⁵⁷

But what about the Besht himself? Was David Makov correct in his charge regarding the founder of Hasidism or was he intentionally confusing him with fringe elements in the Hasidic movement? This is an issue on which his disciples were mixed, as we shall see in the next section. We note here, however, that as important as the body was to the Besht, he taught his students that one should strive to worship without the body altogether, neither with voice, nor with movement:

Sometimes you must worship in thought, with your soul alone. Sometimes you can pray with love and awe and with greater intensity without moving at all. Another person looking on might think you are merely reciting the words without any feeling. When you are very closely bound to God, you can serve Him with great love, with the soul alone....This is the best type of worship. It moves quickly, and can bring you closer [to God] than prayer whose intensity is visible outside

⁵⁶ David of Makov, *Shever Poshim: Zot Torat Ha'kanaot*, pp. 33a. Quoted in Biale, p. 121, n. 1.

⁵⁷ "....as if sexual license must necessarily accompany a revolt against authority. Sexuality came to embody the critique of Hasidism as a whole, as a coarse lower-class movement of illiterates." Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 122.

through your body. Such prayer is all inside; therefore the husks⁵⁸ cannot grab onto it.⁵⁹

The Besht therefore appears to have believed that one need not use -- and certainly not excessively -- the body or the voice. The issue of the role of the body and the voice become central in the doctrine of *devekut* as articulated by his students. Differences in their various doctrines of *devekut*, however, often flow from the differences in how they understand the role of the body. We will now turn to a brief discussion of how the students of the Baal Shem Tov understood the doctrine of *devekut* and then how R. Pinchas opposed their interpretations of the doctrine.

3. The Split in Understanding of *Devekut*: The Maggid and Jacob Joseph

*The Baal Shem Tov's doctrine of using material desire as the basis for achieving spiritual desire for God would seem to affirm the erotic, and some of his followers understood him in this way. But there were those among his most influential disciples who rejected this understanding of his teaching....*⁶⁰

Among the Besht's followers, were two chief disciples: ⁶¹ R. Jacob Joseph of

⁵⁸ "Husks" refers to the external physical shell of anything material which must be ripped away in order to release the holy sparks inside.

⁵⁹ Besht, *Tzava'at HaRivash*, p. 231; translated in Kaplan, *The Light Beyond: Adventures in Chasidic Thought* (New York: Moznayim Press, 1981).

⁶⁰ Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 133.

⁶¹ See Heschel, *Circle*, pp. 14ff; Schatz-Uffenheimer; Dresner's *The Zaddik*; Dov Baer of Mezeritch, *Maggid D'varav L'ya'akov*. Critical edition published by Schatz-Uffenheimer (Jerusalem: 1990), 1781; Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," pp. 1410-1411.

Polonye⁶² (d. 1782) and the Maggid of Mezeritch (d. 1772).⁶³ Some Hasidic traditions argue that both the Maggid and R. Jacob Joseph were transformed into disciples of the Besht only after meeting with him; others suggest that the Maggid was a Hasid even before his first encounter with the Besht;⁶⁴ and still others question whether there is any historical proof of their meetings. Before becoming disciples of the Besht, both the Maggid and R. Jacob Joseph were known as scholarly rabbis. Their relationships with the Besht and their interpretations of his doctrine, however, were significantly different. Among the conflicts between the Early Hasidim in what is called the "circle of the Baal Shem Tov," was the tension regarding who would become the next leader of the movement. R. Pinchas was among those who opposed the Maggid and supported R. Jacob Joseph arguing that the *Toldot's* interpretation of the Besht was the most accurate and authentic.⁶⁵

1. The Maggid of Mezeritch

One of the followers of the Maggid said that "he did not journey to the Maggid in order to study Torah but to see how the master tied his shoe-laces."⁶⁶

⁶² Also known as "the *Toldot*," after the name of his most famous major work, *Toldot Yaacov Yosef*.

⁶³ *Shivchei Habesht* quoted in Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 10. According to Dubnow, (*Toldot Hachasidut*) R. Dov Baer of Mezeritch became a follower of the Besht between 1735-1745. Hereafter R. Dov Baer will be referred to as the Maggid.

⁶⁴ See Etkes, "Hasidism as a Movement," pp. 12-15; and Heschel, *Circle*.

⁶⁵ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 234.

⁶⁶ Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 11.

Initially, before their first encounter, the Maggid is said to have resisted getting close to the Besht. He was later convinced of the Besht's special qualities, however, when someone near to him was ill and needed the magical healing of the Besht.⁶⁷ Their relationship was quick to develop, according to the legends, and soon the Besht would scold [the Maggid] for his interpretations of a given text; even if he thought that the Maggid's *peshat* (interpretation) was correct, the Besht would say that it lacked soul (*neshamah*). The Maggid's followers say that he learned "secrets" of the Torah from the Besht including how to replace self-mortification and sorrow with joy and spiritual alertness, as methods of *devekut*.⁶⁸

Known as a great student of Torah, Mishnah, Talmud and Kabbalah, the Maggid embraced an elitist intellectual approach.⁶⁹ Focusing on the learned elite, the Maggid became the teacher of many Hasidic leaders throughout the Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania, and consequently, had a tremendous influence on the development of a number of Hasidic dynasties.⁷⁰ Just as the Besht was able to influence the masses,⁷¹ the Maggid was able to influence those already learned in Torah, the rabbis and the

⁶⁷ Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, pp. 87-93.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 12.

⁷¹ There is little historical evidence to indicate the actual numbers of his following. This statement is made, however, as a reflection of how the Maggid was portrayed vis-a-vis the Besht.

"mekubalim."⁷² The characterization of the Maggid as an elitist intellectual became a focal point of R. Pinchas' the symbol of his opposition to the Maggid's leadership in the movement.

In spite of the opposition, the Maggid took over the leadership of the Hasidic movement after the death of the Baal Shem Tov⁷³ and Mezeritch became the new center of Hasidism.⁷⁴ The main influence of the Maggid was among the learned. He preached what became known as the "Torah of the Maggid,"⁷⁵ and which came to be understood by later Hasidim as the basis for the movement itself.⁷⁶

A debate exists among scholars about the extent to which the teachings of the Maggid remained consistent with the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and the extent to which they departed from his teachings. Schatz-Uffenheimer argues that to some degree both assertions are true; that some Hasidic leaders who emerged from the Maggid's school "cast doubt on the bulk of accepted Hasidic doctrines"⁷⁷ so that some aspects of the Besht's teachings were actually shunned. Biale, however, charges the Maggid himself with attenuating the cause of the Beshtian doctrines in that "[he]

⁷² Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, pp. 87-93.

⁷³ For a discussion of the transitions in leadership in the early Hasidic movement, see Ada Rapoport-Albert, "The Hasidic Movement after 1772: Continuity and Change," (Hebrew) in *Zion* LV, October, 1990, pp. 183-245.

⁷⁴ Dubnow, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-93.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, pp. 10ff.

⁷⁷ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 59.

introduced into Hasidism a much more radical antipathy to the material world than had obtained in the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov."⁷⁸ In Schatz-Uffenheimer's view, the main impact of the Maggid was a more "restrained" approach to spiritual experience, which led some of his followers to shun the "mystical adventurism of the Baal Shem Tov and even of the Maggid of Mezeritch."⁷⁹ "The teachings of the Maggid reveal a more restrained doctrine, on the one hand, and an interiorization⁸⁰ of spiritual problems, on the other, evidenced by the greater degree of introspection and inwardness characteristic of the mystic."⁸¹ At the same time, however, according to other scholars, it was not the "interiorization of spiritual problems" that bothered R. Pinchas but, ironically, the intense external use of the body in prayer that it prescribed, which led, in his eyes, to an "aristocratic mysticism."⁸² R. Pinchas fought against the narrow descriptions of what role the body must play in prayer and fought for a wider understanding of the possibilities of movement or lack of movement, as we shall see in Chapter Five.

Moshe Idel joins those scholars who differentiate between the doctrine of the Besht and that of the Maggid. "The mystical panorama of the Besht does not appear to

⁷⁸ Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 134.

⁷⁹ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 59.

⁸⁰ According to Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*: "interiorization" refers to "a greater degree of introspection and inwardness characteristic of the mystic." p. 59.

⁸¹ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 59.

⁸² *Ibid.*

have been identical, or even similar to, that of the Great Maggid."⁸³ One example of differing panoramas is evident in the debate between R. Pinchas of Koretz and the Maggid of Mezeritch regarding the relationship between the physical and the spiritual. The sense that the body must be present and visibly moving at initial stages of *devekut*, conflicted with R. Pinchas' belief that every individual must learn how much, if at all, he must move his body in order to achieve the highest spiritual state.

R. Pinchas thus not only opposed the Maggid's position on prayer, but also the Maggid's interpretation of the Besht's ways of serving the Creator. In *Nofet Tsufim*, R. Pinchas writes that the essence of Creation (i.e. the purpose of creation) was "to apprehend His godliness"⁸⁴ and thus *devekut* only of that nature should be sought. In spite of the fact that the Maggid also taught the principle of *ayin*, "nothingness," the state in which one has lost all self-hood and can be united with the Godhead. It is used in Kabbalistic literature to name the innermost part of divinity, out of which all being flows. R. Pinchas understood it differently.⁸⁵

2. R. Jacob Joseph

The Maggid's opponent in the struggle to become the next leader of the emerging movement was R. Jacob Joseph, a faithful student of the Besht and the

⁸³ Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 15.

⁸⁴ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 232.

⁸⁵ Pierkarz, Mendel. *Between Ideology and Reality* (Hebrew), pp. 110-112.

author of *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*,⁸⁶ the first Hasidic work actually to be printed. "While staying with the Besht," As Etkes explains,

[While staying with the Besht] Yaacov Yosef experienced for the first time in his life a very moving and heartbreaking prayer. This was followed by a change in Yaacov Yosef's scale of values. Ecstatic prayer as a means to achieve intimate contact with God now became his supreme value, while traditional scholarship lost its previous superiority.⁸⁷

In a statement attributed to R. Jacob Joseph himself in *Shivchei Habesht*, one tradition asserts "the *tzaddik* Yaacov Yosef, God bless his memory, used to say that it was easier for him to discuss ten subtle halakhic questions than to say the eighteen benedictions one time."⁸⁸

Why R. Jacob Joseph was not chosen to succeed the Baal Shem is not clear.... it may have been the wish of the Baal Shem to grant another active leadership so that Yaakov Yosef himself could be spared to sit within the quiet walls of his study and create the lasting works which his pen produced.... He must, indeed, be considered as sharing the leadership of the movement, for while outer guidance was in the hands of the Maggid, the inner instruction, the truest teachings of the master himself, remained with Rabbi Yaakov Yosef."⁸⁹

This is one example of the kind of glorification and "Great Man" myth-making that is characteristic of some scholarship on Hasidism, discussed in the Introduction. But

⁸⁶ The *Toldot*, first published in 1780, was only one of Jacob Joseph's works which relayed the teachings of early Hasidism. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 11; Dresner, *The Zaddik*, p. 63.

⁸⁷ Etkes, "Hasidism as a Movement," p. 14.

⁸⁸ *Shivchei Habesht*, p. 101; also quoted in Etkes, "Hasidism as a Movement," p. 14.

⁸⁹ Dresner, *The Zaddik*, pp. 61-62.

because of the nature of this text, one can discern the explanations some felt were necessary to explain the transition in leadership following the death of the Besht, and the extent to which the vast differences in the early schools are sometimes minimized.

It is not clear whether or not the writings of R. Jacob Joseph influenced the thinking of R. Pinchas. Weiss argues that it is possible that R. Pinchas "could have read Jacob Joseph's works in the last decade of his life but was probably too old to assimilate the book's ideas or was not interested in assimilating them."⁹⁰ Similarly, Weiss argues that the absence of any reference in the writings of the Maggid to differences of opinion with the Besht should be expected since the Maggid was "unaware of the....theme in the Baal Shem traditions because Jacob Joseph's manuscript writings were not available to him, since the Maggid died in 1772, eight years before the first publication of Jacob Joseph's works."⁹¹ "All of these [early Hasidim]" argues Weiss, "taught their Hasidism independently of the new fascination that emanated from Jacob Joseph's works...."⁹²

3. Pinchas of Koretz

Pinchas of Koretz occupied a unique place in the group as a Lithuanian Jew. Like all the leaders of Lithuanian background, he was suspect in the eyes of the other Hasidim, vulnerable to the accusation that he did not have the same spiritual

⁹⁰ Weiss, "Some Notes on the Social Background of Early Hasidism," p. 24, note 20.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

depth and may question the holiness of the Besht.⁹³ But R. Pinchas was concerned with who the successor to the Besht would be. The debate between the early Hasidic schools is evident in the way in which texts praising one or both of them are cited. In texts attributed to the Maggidic school he is cited as the singularly chosen successor to the Besht. Yet in other texts we see the extent to which both the followers of the Maggid and the followers of R. Pinchas sought to establish their authority based on the relationship that the leaders of these two schools allegedly had with the Besht:

When Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov lay dying, his disciple, Rabbi David of Ostrog asked him sadly: 'Rabbi, how can you leave us alone?' Comfortingly, if cryptically, the Great Master, replied: 'The bear (i.e. Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezeritch) is in the woods and Phineas is a sage.'⁹⁴

This dictum came to represent the dual leadership that the followers of R. Pinchas posit to their leader. That R. Pinchas was part of the Besht's inner circle in some way at least is clear from the fact that the Besht's grandson through his daughter, R. Barukh, grew up in the house of R. Pinchas of Koretz, and was also an opponent of the "Maggid's way."⁹⁵ The fact that the initial Hasidic dynasty was not established with the assumption of a familial heir to the throne of leadership distinguishes early Hasidism from later Hasidism. The Maggid and R. Jacob Joseph were more probably candidates to succeed the Besht as the leader of the burgeoning movement

⁹³ *Shivchei Habesht*, 20c-d.

⁹⁴ Rabinowicz, p. 54.

⁹⁵ Ettinger, Shmuel, in Hundret, *Essential Papers*, p. 239. [R. B based his pretensions to be the single leader of Hasidism on his illustrious descent.]

than was the Besht's own son.⁹⁶

As the next generation, however, R. Pinchas developed many of his own teachings including a unique view of the body in prayer, especially in the state of *devekut*.

For Schatz-Uffenheimer, the uniqueness of the position of R. Pinchas on prayer "lies in his opposition in principle to the Maggidic doctrine of *devekut*."⁹⁷

R. Pinchas, who was an outstanding example of a popular charismatic leader and held a very concrete understanding of the Besht's doctrine, did not view the spiritualistic tendencies of the Maggid in a favorable light, and argued with him....It seems clear from his words that he and his school attributed prayer with *devekut* to an explicitly Maggidic doctrine, and that he did not consider this to be the proper interpretation of the Besht."⁹⁸

The focus of all Hasidic leaders in the generations following the Besht who were not squarely situated in the Maggidic camp, was to defend the doctrine of the Besht against, as they saw it, its corruption by the Maggid. R. Pinchas charged the Maggid with misunderstanding of the Besht's doctrine of *devekut*, but also that he encouraged a split between the elite and the common person in the Hasidic movement. *Devekut* came to symbolize everything that R. Pinchas opposed in the Maggidic school.⁹⁹

R. Pinchas opposed Maggid's *Maggid D'varav L'ya'akov* and instead

⁹⁶ See Rapoport, *op. cit.*

⁹⁷ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 229.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Heschel, *Circle*, pp. 14-34.

preferred *Toldot Yaakov Yosef* as the "authentic repository of Hasidic teaching."¹⁰⁰

R. Pinchas had an anti-aristocratic tendency (which, as we shall see, influences his understanding of the role of the body in prayer) and therefore rejected the Maggid school which asserted that prayer without *devekut* lacked significance. Maggid asserted that the value of prayer is rooted in its spiritual element.¹⁰¹ R. Shmerl, a disciple of R. Pinchas, rejected the Maggid's position because he, like R. Pinchas, believed that most of the community could not live up to the Maggid's standards. He therefore attempted to "fix the value of prayer in terms of the criteria of good will and individual ability."¹⁰² The Pinchas School sought, it is argued, "to protect the ordinary person who is unable to 'dance on the rope' of spiritual meaning, required in the [Maggidic] doctrine of *devekut*."¹⁰³

Schatz-Uffenheimer describes the nature of R. Pinchas' opposition in theological terms as well as going beyond the issue of elitism, R. Pinchas objected to the Maggid's attempt to achieve knowledge through *devekut* even that which God wished to keep hidden.

Among all the Hasidic thinkers during the time of the Maggid, I know of only one *tzaddik* who explicitly opposed this [the Maggid's] mood of resignation, specifically instructing his Hasidim to pray for their livelihood-- R. Pinchas of Koretz. This demand logically follows from the thrust of his arguments with the Maggid of Mezeritch; R. Pinchas objected to contemplative prayer in principle,

¹⁰⁰ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 234.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 237.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 238.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*.

and saw the Maggid as the representative *par excellence* of the dissemination of the doctrine of contemplation and *devekut* in prayer. There was a controversy between the immediate circle of R. Pinchas and the hasidim of the Maggid in Koretz concerning this matter....¹⁰⁴ At this point I merely wish to emphasize that R. Pinchas' repeated statements concerning the matter of prayer for livelihood are to be understood in the context of the larger controversy concerning the theoretical image of Hasidism.¹⁰⁵

The Maggid taught that the purpose of prayer was to attempt tirelessly to break from the world of divine thought into the Infinite. A diametrically opposed view is reflected in this statement's preference for avoiding the urge to sneak in upon areas that God does not wish to reveal. These areas that remain unrevealed, the *sod*, accessible only to a few. Schatz-Uffenheimer describes a student from the school of R. Pinchas or R. Pinchas himself as accepting

another, quieter and more 'polite' principle of divine service, according to which those worlds which God does not reveal and which remain hidden away in the attribute of *sod*....are not subject to human apprehension, and we are not even allowed to inquire of them, 'for this is not the main intention of the Creation.' He explains that paradoxically, the 'principle' that the Creation of the world was in order to 'apprehend' His Godhead only applies insofar as God wished us to apprehend Him, and not regarding those attributes which are hidden from us. In other words: it seems that the Hasidic breakthrough of the type found in the teaching of the Maggid was not directed towards the correct address--and this is the meaning of the remark, 'and understand this.'¹⁰⁶

R. Pinchas' opposition to the Maggid,¹⁰⁷ was centered in his disagreement with

¹⁰⁴ See chapter 7, Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*.

¹⁰⁵ Dov Baer of Mezeritch, *Maggid D'varav L'ya'akov*, p. 259.

¹⁰⁶ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 232.

¹⁰⁷ Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Hasidism," p. 1393.

the Maggid's position on *devekut*. For R. Pinchas, the Maggid's "dangerous innovations," included his interpretation of the Besht on *devekut*, "according to which one must lift the deed up to the taught and thereby attain *devekut*," which R. Pinchas saw as an unauthentic interpretation of the Besht. "In Koretz," according to the work of Schatz-Uffenheimer, "the Baal Shem Tov's doctrine was not understood as a spiritualistic teaching, so the Maggid was perceived as a dangerous 'innovator'." Elsewhere, too, it seems to me that R. Pinchas' sayings are directed against the 'innovations' of the Maggid, whether in his customs or in his teachings as such."¹⁰⁸

From the Rav. [R. Pinchas], the eyes of the congregation, that is, of those who have eyes to see the hidden light from one end of the world to the other: Therefore, the righteous are able to perform great deeds and new customs, because they see what is pleasing before Him, may He be blessed. But for us who do not have eyes, it is forbidden to innovate any thing or custom but only follow the way of the *Shulchan Aruch* and of the righteous of yore.¹⁰⁹

There was an on-going tension and severe competition between the two leaders, R. Pinchas and the Maggid regarding "fundamental questions in Hasidism."¹¹⁰ Schatz-Uffenheimer argues that R. Pinchas' opposition to the Maggidic perspective on *devekut* stems from R. Pinchas' support [indirectly] of the Baal Shem Tov's idea of *kavvanot*. R. Pinchas did not believe that the Maggid doctrine was a correct interpretation of the Besht.¹¹¹ R. Pinchas' relationship with R. Jacob Joseph and his

¹⁰⁸ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁹ Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 234, based on Manuscript, Jerusalem 3759, 184b.

¹¹⁰ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 230.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 229-230.

perspective on *devekut* after the Maggid assumed leadership is unclear. It would appear to one scholar of Hasidism, Louis Jacobs, that R. Pinchas' position on the role of the body in prayer separated him as well from the *Toldot*:

R. Jacob Joseph writes that **prayers have to be recited verbally** and it is not sufficient for a man simply to have the prayers in mind. Although God knows all thoughts, when a man gives verbal expression to his prayers he provides a 'vessel' through which the divine grace can flow to the material world, otherwise it would only be capable of flowing into the spiritual 'vessels' provided by thought.¹¹²

Jacobs, continues:

In his *Toldot Yaacov Yosef*, the first Hasidic book to be printed, R. Jacob Joseph remarks that a prayer for man to cleave to God (where the question of the divine flow of blessing is not involved and is purely spiritual) can be simply thought of in the mind and requires no verbal expression.¹¹³

R. Pinchas was attracted to R. Jacob Joseph's interpretation of the doctrine of the Besht on prayer and, at the same time, he found himself alienated from the *Toldot* as well. On three major tenets of Hasidism R. Pinchas differed with the other early leaders: *kavvanot*, *devekut*, and the elitist practices that supposedly facilitated those process.

Whether or not R. Pinchas merely opposed the Maggid's misinterpretation or incomplete interpretation of the Besht on these major issues, or whether he possessed his own unique understanding of each of them must be the subject of

¹¹² Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 24.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

another study.¹¹⁴ Schatz-Uffenheimer argues that R. Pinchas' position was not anti-*devekut* as a doctrine but rather "a conservative tendency."¹¹⁵ Crucial to this study, however, is an understanding of how R. Pinchas' understanding of the role of the body in *devekut* affected his interpretation of it. As we shall see in the following chapter, the role of the body in prayer, as it developed in the writings of R. Pinchas, identifies him as unique among the leaders of early Hasidism.

¹¹⁴ For some discussion of this issue see lengthy note in Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 230.

¹¹⁵ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 237.

Chapter Three: Pinchas of Koretz, Prayer and *Devekut*

*I am always afraid that I shall not be more wise than pious.*¹

Having discussed the historical context of Beshtian Hasidism as well as its perspective on prayer, *devekut* and the role of the body, we now focus on R. Pinchas himself. Who was R. Pinchas and what was his understanding of Beshtian Hasidism? How did he understand the body and its role vis-a-vis *devekut*? What might have influenced his thinking and his teaching on the role of the body during *devekut*?

One possible argument is that R. Pinchas' view of the body, and how it might be used during prayer was influenced the extent to which he believed that state of *devekut* is possible for every person. Rather than insisting that one must escape the reality of corporeality only through particular means, he spoke for the general admittance into the highest spheres by the means available to each individual. Therefore, he spoke about the body as being part of the process of prayer and never insisted on prescribed movement, believing that only the one who dwells in the body knows how it must move in order to reach the One. He rejected the contention that the elite who are able to follow complicated patterns of meditation and movement during prayer were the only one's allowed entrance to God's kingdom. As the Besht had wanted to democratize Judaism by stressing the potential of every person to have an intense connection with the Divine, R. Pinchas sought to democratize prayer by stressing the potential of every person to achieve *devekut*.

¹ R. Pinchas, quoted in Dubnow, in Hundret, p. 79.

After discussing how various writers have described R. Pinchas, both as an early leader and in terms of his teachings, this chapter will analyze the extent to which a concrete doctrine on the body and its role during prayer can be identified in the collections of his writings.²

R. Pinchas' believed that his own initial interest in Hasidism was a natural outgrowth from his love of the Zohar.³ After attaching himself to the Besht, R. Pinchas moved from his early interest in the philosophy of the Middle Ages which he began to see as "beneath him." He had, however, at one time been very absorbed in the study of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, and studied it over and over again.⁴ R. Pinchas joined the Besht and the circle of Hasidic rabbis who followed the Besht,

² The following texts were the primary sources used for this study of R. Pinchas: *Midrash Pinchas*, *Tosefta L'midrash Pinchas*, *Nofet Tsufim*, *Likutim Y'karim*, *Likutim M'rabi Pinchas M'koretz*, *Shoshanim Nechmadim*, *Sefer Imrei Pinchas HaShalem*. Large sections of *Imrei Pinchas* are based on manuscripts and on another text, *Chacham Harazim*. It should be noted that there is significant overlap in the texts. For example, large sections of *Nofet Tsufim* parallel the same sections in *Midrash Pinchas* (i.e. page 6 of *Nofet Tsufim* is almost entirely found in *Midrash Pinchas*; parallel texts on Passover, etc.). Many pieces in the *Likutim* collections are based on or appear in full in other texts.

³ Heschel, *Circle*, pp. 13-14. Note also: "The Zohar became the light of his [R. Pinchas'] life. 'The Zohar,' stated Rabbi Phineas, 'has kept me alive. The exile is very painful for me to bear, and I can only find relief from it during the hours that I study the Zohar.'....'Be careful....not to allow three days to pass without studying the Zohar. He urged his hasidim to complete the study of the entire Zohar in the course of each year. He repeatedly thanked God that he had not been born before the discovery of the Zohar. (Rabinowicz, p. 51 quoting *Tosefta l'Midrash Pinchas* (Belgoray, 1929) p. 2; see also Heschel, "Rabbi Phineas Koritzer," in *YIVO Bletter*, Journal of the Yiddish Scientific Institute, vol. XXXIII, pp. 1-48.

⁴ Heschel, *Circle*, p. 4; based on manuscripts, *Sipurim Y'karim*.

however, only after years of secluded study of the Zohar.⁵ R. Pinchas' approach to prayer was influenced largely by the Zohar and by the Beshtian interpretation of the Kabbalah, as well by the philosophy of Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides).⁶ These texts formed part of the panorama of influences on his teachings.

Elie Wiesel, romanticizes the role that R. Pinchas played with language similar to that of other twentieth-century scholars,⁷ :

Withdrawn, reserved, modest, with individualist tendencies, he refused to be crowned Rebbe. He held no court, proposed no doctrine, promised no miracles, established no dynasty, declined honors and privileges.⁸

Wiesel's comment reflects how many early twentieth-century scholars perceived R. Pinchas and how they too describe his approach to power and teaching. A close reading of the teachings of R. Pinchas, however, reveals that he did indeed propose his own opposition to that of the Maggid.⁹

Simon Dubnow describes R. Pinchas as "not full of divine thunder and commotion, nor did he display outward excitement; rather he expressed his faith in an

⁵ On R. Pinchas' view of the Zohar, see Heschel, *Circle*, pp. 4-8.

⁶ R. Pinchas makes many references to Maimonides by name. He is the only thinker of that period who is mentioned. For examples of Pinchas' references to Maimonides, see for example *Nofet Tsufim*, 18:101; *Imrei Pinchas*, 203:70; 201:58. A central departure from Maimonidean thought, however, was the Hasidic perspective on "Individual Providence." For the Hasid, God oversees the events of the individual, more intensely than in General Providence and in contrast to Maimonidean thought.

⁷ See introductory note on sources.

⁸ Elie Wiesel, *Four Hasidic Masters*, p.5.

⁹ See Chapter Two

inward yearning for God, a kind of integrity, and the highest ethical standards."¹⁰

That he did not display an outward "divine thunder" is consistent with his position on *devekut*: in order to achieve oneness with God, one is not required to display "divine thunder." This "inward yearning for God" as that which ultimately motivates man to strive for *devekut* characterizes much of R. Pinchas' writings on prayer. In contrast to other Hasidic rabbis of his time, he was not convinced that the deepest yearnings for God must be visible in the body's movement. In contrast to those who insisted that the body must move certain ways during prayer, he argued, as we shall see later, that the body can be entirely still at the greatest moment of *devekut*.

At the same time, there are fragments that describe R. Pinchas slightly differently:

He kept to himself, and was unable to sermonize in public. 'Several times great people came to me, but I could not speak words of Torah before them. Now a man has come from Ukraine who is of a lesser stature, and I speak to him....for when Torah is united with a *tzaddik*, there is union in the holy spheres, and such union cannot take place before [mere] people.¹¹

While this statement bespeaks his humility, it evidences as well a strong sense of the doctrine of "union in the holy spheres," which is clearly connected to the central point of disagreement with the Maggid regarding the doctrine *devekut*. R. Pinchas

¹⁰ Dubnow, Simon. "The Maggid of Miedzyrzecz, His Associates and the Center in Volhynia (1760-1772)" p. 78-79, translated by Eli Lederhendler in Hundret, Gershom, Ed. *Essential Papers*, pp. 58-85.

¹¹ Dubnow in Hundret, p. 79, relying on *Likutim Y'karim m'rabi Pinchas m'Koretz* and *Midrash Pinchas*.

de-emphasized the role of the *tzaddik* as the mediating between the individual and the Divine, often stressing that each individual must find his own way and cannot imitate the personal spiritual practices of another and expect to reach the Holy One. The Maggid, on the other hand, narrowed the scope of those practices and limited the numbers of ordinary pious Jews who might achieve the highest state of union with God.

Dubnow also finds R. Pinchas to be unique because of his lack of public role: "This silent one, who did not set himself up as a *tzaddik* or as a rabbi, or preacher... became known as a 'holy one' among Volhynian Hasidim."¹² Schatz-Uffenheimer and Heschel, among others,¹³ understand him to be a charismatic leader with a concrete doctrine within the Early Hasidic movement.¹⁴

1. R. Pinchas on the Besht, Prayer and *Kavvanot*

In order to understand best R. Pinchas' role in the early Hasidic movement, it is necessary to focus on his particular interpretations of the Besht, his perspective on prayer, and especially on the concepts of *kavvanot* and *devekut*. As we have seen, R.

¹² Dubnow in Hundret, p. 79.

¹³ Elijah, Rachel, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 8. Elijah names R. Pinchas as one of the "charismatic figures" who was active alongside the Baal Shem Tov and who had "an independent and influential spirituality."

¹⁴ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 229; Heschel, Circle, Chapter One; Elijah, p. 8.

Pinchas may have had a "unique understanding" of the doctrine of the Besht.¹⁵ His students' writings often reflect how he learned and understood a given idea from the Besht. As we discussed in the previous chapter, R. Pinchas' generation's varying interpretations of the Besht led to the emergence of different streams of Hasidism. In order to understand, however, R. Pinchas' teachings on *devekut* and the role of the body it is necessary here to discuss in detail how scholars understand R. Pinchas' position vis-a-vis the Besht.

R. Pinchas followed the teachings of the Besht in many aspects of his own daily life, from the rituals associated with waking in the morning to those associated with going to sleep at night; and believed like him that one can attain closeness to God even while eating and sleeping.¹⁶ Together with the revolution of moving the focus from study to prayer, the Besht also taught R. Pinchas that self-deprivation, often celebrated by the non-Hasidic rabbis, was not the only path to the service of God.

Heschel argues that R. Pinchas "accepted the doctrine and a number of the customs of the Baal Shem Tov...." but at the same time "did not simply accept all the Besht taught."¹⁷ One of the many areas in which R. Pinchas sought to maintain the teachings of the Besht against the changes made by the Maggid and others was in the

¹⁵ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 229.

¹⁶ On the Besht's teachings, see *Tzva'at Harivash* (Warsaw, 1853); R. Pinchas' teachings on these daily behaviors can be found in *Imrei Pinchas, Seder Hayom v'inyanei t'fillah*, 76-107.

¹⁷ Heschel, *Circle*, p. 13.

realm of prayer. During the early debates on whether or not to use the *Siddur HaAri*, and whether to permit an extension of the permissible prayer times, R. Pinchas repeatedly took the position of maintaining rather than changing the structure and time of prayer. He argued that prayers should be recited at the prescribed times. (*tefillah bezmano*).¹⁸ He saw his conservative tendencies regarding prayer as a correct interpretation of the Besht's view in contrast to the new interpretations of the Maggid:

It is not permissible to delay reciting the *Sh'ma*. Since Hasidism began with the Besht, we must preserve his ways: Did not the root of Hasidism begin with the Besht? Hence we must be careful for they were careful in the beginning. For who among us is really mighty enough to declare changes?¹⁹

There were other areas, however, where his practices regarding prayer did differ from those of the Besht: "Unlike the Besht, he would don his *tefillin*, on the intermediate days of the festivals, though without the customary benedictions."²⁰ At the same time, however, R. Pinchas spoke in favor of upholding the practice of the Besht for saying the blessings while putting on *tefillin*, asserting that, God forbid, he should take issue with his teacher.²¹

The crux of R. Pinchas' difference with the Besht on issues of prayer focused on the practice of *kavvanot* (meditative prayers said before uttering the prescribed

¹⁸ Rabinowicz, *Hasidic Masters*, p. 52.

¹⁹ *Imrei Pinchas*, 86:83.

²⁰ Rabinowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²¹ *Imrei Pinchas*, 78:22.

liturgy).²² Many Hasidim rejected the Lurianic doctrine of *kavvanot* and saw it as contradicting "the very essence of Hasidic teaching."²³ At the same time, however, the words of R. Isaac Luria,²⁴ became the centerpiece of the Hasidic spiritual world in spite of the open resistance and even opposition to the practice.²⁵ Scholars differ on the Besht, Jacobs holding that "it is not too clear whether the Baal Shem Tov himself practiced the Lurianic *kavvanot*...."²⁶ while J. G. Wiers suggests that it is likely that the Besht preferred the technique known as 'attachment of oneself to the letters.'²⁷ According to the latter view, the Besht taught that the mind of the Hasid should dwell on each letter separately, 'atomizing' the letters, so that his mind embraces "worlds, souls, and divinity," and his soul will then become absorbed in the unification process.²⁸ While the Ari used the approach known as *kavvanot*, the Besht preferred better atomization as a means of attaining *devekut*.

The Maggid, too used *kavvanot*, but caused a "metamorphosis" in the understanding of the older Lurianic doctrine in that he focused on the use of prayer as a means of 'awakening love and fear,' in which the technique of 'attachment to the

²² See Schatz-Uffenheimer, Chapter Ten in *Hasidism as Mysticism*.

²³ Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 215.

²⁴ Also known as the "Holy Ari," 1534-1572.

²⁵ Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 215.

²⁶ Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 74.

²⁷ Weirs, J.G., "The *Kavvanot* of Prayer in Early Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. ix (1968); cited also in Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, p. 74.

²⁸ Weirs, *Ibid.*, and Jacobs, *Ibid.*, p. 76.

letters' was used. A student of the Maggid, R. Tzvi Hirsch, sought to maintain the doctrine of *kavvanot* together with the doctrine of *devekut*. "The question of *devekut* to the Infinite remained in his teaching as something permitted to those individuals who were already able to achieve complete identification with the Infinite at the beginning of their prayer and did not require the doctrine of *kavvanot*."²⁹

His acts and his thoughts are one in the path of Emanation, in which He and His life are one within him....And when he got to *modim* he bowed from his Self, for he and his Self are one....and they did not need to engage in *kavvanot*, for the *kavvanah* indicates that he changes something from his own will, and he forces himself to act according to this *kavvanah*, specifically and not to any other."³⁰

This emphasis on the importance of atomization as opposed to *kavvanot* was central in the teaching of both the Besht and R. Pinchas as well. Yet like *devekut* it became a focal point for the conflict in the first generation. R. Pinchas stressed that while the specific *kavvanot* should be said, the issue of what movements the body should make during their recitation should be left open.

In a later section of the same text he explains that the path of direct *devekut*, without the intermediacy of the doctrine of *kavvanot*, is referred to as "a *mitzvah* in Emanation" where "one does not require *kavvanah*."³¹ In R. Pinchas' view, the Besht taught that one must pray only with the *kavvanot* of the Ari and not with *kavvanot*

²⁹ Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 227.

³⁰ *Peri Kodesh Hilulim*, (Arsciva, 1927), 1d-2a quoted in Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, po, 227-228.

³¹ *Ibid*, 2b; Schatz uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 228.

specified in any other prayer book.³²

The question of whether or not the Maggid and R. Pinchas believed that there was a conflict between the doctrine of *kavvanot* and the doctrine of *devekut* is explored by Schatz-Uffenheimer. She argues that some Hasidic leaders in the Maggid school sought to replace one with the other, while others, like R. Tzvi Hirsch, attempted to create a speculative, harmonistic integration of *devekut* and *kavvanot*.³³ Schatz-Uffenheimer explains R. Pinchas' position on *kavvanot*: *Kavvanot* demanded enormous "intellectual discipline which cannot be expected of every person."³⁴ "Even though he (R. Pinchas) fought for the honor of the act (*kavvanot*) for its own sake, he did not abstain from 'adding a few *kavvanot*' at the time of prayer, though he knew full well that the Besht did not agree with the Lurianic doctrine of *kavvanot*."³⁵ In *Midrash Pinchas*, *kavvanot* attributed to R. Pinchas appear for a variety of different *mitzvot* including the blowing of the *shofar*,³⁶ shaking the *lulav*³⁷ on Sukkot,³⁸ burning leavened bread before Passover,³⁹ preparing for Passover,⁴⁰ and counting the *O'er*.⁴¹ Of

³² *Imrei Pinchas*, 82:50.

³³ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 228.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 2b; Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 228.

³⁵ Schatz-Uffenheimer, pp. 227-230.

³⁶ *Midrash Pinchas*, 8:44; 19:33.

³⁷ A palm branch used as a ritual object during the Festival of Booths, *Sukkot*.

³⁸ *Midrash Pinchas*, 12:15.

³⁹ *Midrash Pinchas*, 18:14.

particular interest for this study are his *kavvanot* for the movements related to shaking the *lulav*.⁴²

"*Kavvanot*," according to Schatz-Uffenheimer, "were no more than 'planned meditations' that could not be adjusted to the Hasidic spiritual climate of activist enthusiasm and ends in the loss of the I and silencing of all the capabilities of the soul....all of this couldn't find 'authentic expression' in the doctrine of *kavvanot*."⁴³ The rejection of the Luranic doctrine of *kavvanot* in Hasidism occurred because it conflicted with their understanding of the intention of the doctrine of *devekut*:

The emotional and intellectual spontaneity of the worshipper tended to blur and to reject the limiting constrictions of the precise mapping of Divine secrets. The Hasid sought to break down the barriers between himself and God without any fixed 'keys', and on the other hand scoffed at any attempted evaluation of religious 'attainments' based upon a measured and planned ladder of *kavvanot*.⁴⁴

The doctrine of *devekut*, on the other hand, "advocated the erasure of the Ego and its nullification in order for one to become repeatedly involved in the infinite reality of the Godhead to the limits of the possible. One might state that the 'uncompromising mystic' within the Hasid consciously rejected the doctrine of *kavvanot*."⁴⁵ Here the issues of *bittul hayesh*, *hitpashtut hagashmiut*, and *devekut*

⁴⁰ *Midrash Pinchas*, 20:5-7.

⁴¹ *Midrash Pinchas*, 18:13; 20:5; 23:27.

⁴² *Midrash Pinchas*, 9:45.

⁴³ Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 241.

⁴⁴ Schatz-Uffenheimer, pp. 240-241.

⁴⁵ Schatz-Uffenheimer, pp. 240-241.

all seem to intertwine: "He sought to be 'negated from existence before Him like a candle in front of a torch,'⁴⁶ as the doctrine of Hasidism taught that there is nothing within man but God Himself, who reveals Himself upon the extinction of the fleshly garments."

R. Pinchas, however, was deeply concerned about the idea of elevation through the realm of action to the realm of thought, by which he meant, theosophically, the movement from the world of *asiyah* to the world of *machshavah*, itself is part of the act of directing one's heart, or using the *kavvanot*. He preferred to think of prayer as a door through which anyone, attempting the greatest intensity of *devekut*, can be allowed into the "King's Palace" in order to approach the Throne of Glory.

Koretzer path was opposed in essence to the spiritualistic approach of elevation of things from the realm of action to that of thought: "The path of the Besht was that, when he would intend a *kavvanah*, he would perform an act with the *kavvanah*. And Shmerl, may his memory be for a blessing, said that they are therefore called *kavvanot*, because one must direct (*kaven*), but it does not state that one must think. For the word *kavvanah* comes from the phrase, 'even and directed' (*shavveh v'mekhuvan*) --that is, that the person should be at one with the *kavannah* --and understand this."⁴⁷

Moshe Idel differentiates between mystical and magical prayer in Hasidism, focusing on the eighteenth-century attitudes to Lurianic *kavvanot*. The Maggid

⁴⁶ *Hayyim va'hesed*, p. 162. Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 241. "This is a variation upon the Midrash, which states that the souls before God are like a candle before a torch."

⁴⁷ *Pe'er la-Yesharim*: traditions of Raphael of Bershad, a disciple of R. Pinchas, Jerusalem, 192, quoted in Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 233.

appreciated the Lurianic *kavvanot* but saw them as part of *devekut*, or inherent in praying with "great attachment." But while some leaders focused on the words of the prayers themselves, the Maggid "considers the sound of these words, which are all-inclusive entities, as the most significant element."⁴⁸ Idel sees the Maggid's view of the importance of the utterance of the words of prayer as stemming directly from the Besht.⁴⁹

R. Pinchas, however, did not place such an emphasis on the utterance of the words as did the Besht and the Maggid and differed from the Besht and many of his followers who prefer prayer to be recited in a loud voice and with violent gestures. R. Pinchas did not believe in trying to "storm Heaven" either with words or with movement.⁵⁰

2. Pinchas: Prayer and *Devekut*:

*If I had the strength, I would know how to pray....*⁵¹

As it was for most of the early Hasidim, *devekut* in prayer was a central focus for R. Pinchas of Koretz. In his commentary on the passage from the Mishnah

⁴⁸ Idel, Moshe, *Hasidism*, p. 152, based on *Or Haemet* and *Likutim Y'karim*, see note 20, p. 334.

⁴⁹ See Idel, pp. 152-156; Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, pp. 75-77; based on *Shivchei Habesht*.

⁵⁰ Jacobs, *Hasidic Thought*, p. 26.

⁵¹ "Im hayah li koach hayiti yodeah ekh l'hitpalel..." *Imrei Pinchas*, 84:70, (said in the name of R. Moses ben Razal and R. Shlomo.)

discussed in the Talmud regarding the "Hasidim"⁵² who would meditate for an hour before beginning to pray, R. Pinchas suggests that they would in fact pray that they might have *kavannah* when they did begin to pray.⁵³ In order to understand his perspective on the role of the body in *devekut* during prayer, it is necessary to examine R. Pinchas' position on prayer itself, liturgical changes, and the use of the *Siddur Ha'ari*.⁵⁴ The issue of *kavvanot*, as discussed in the previous section indicates the intricacy of the differences between the Hasidim in the circle of the Baal Shem Tov.

In a number of different places, the students of R. Pinchas discuss his perspective on the reality of the difficulty of reaching a stage of *devekut*. It was common, R. Pinchas wrote, that "one does not have any desire to pray before praying. Only after he has stood to pray does the desire to pray swell.... Only as he begins to join the letters to each other and thus worlds and souls come closer to each other does one get the intense desire to pray."⁵⁵ In his eyes, there were only a few who really

⁵² The "*hasidim rishonim*" in this text refer to the hasidim of the Mishnah.

⁵³ *Imrei Pinchas, Likutei Shas u'midrashim*, 43:11.

⁵⁴ *Siddur Ha'ari*, an altered version of the Palestinian Sephardic prayer book which gave fuller expression to the Kabbalistic mysteries within the words of prayer. *Siddur Ha'ari* was adopted by the Hasidim and its use was mightily opposed by the *Mitnagdim* for it constituted, in their minds, a radical departure from tradition. The Hasidic prayer book is a combination of the Lurianic prayer book, the Polish Ashkenazi prayer book used at the time of the rise of Hasidism, and the older pre-Sephardic prayer book used in Palestine.

⁵⁵ *Imrei Pinchas*, 83:63.

know how to pray, for the upper worlds resist being pulled down toward this world.⁵⁶

The idea of "pulling down" higher worlds into this world was central in Hasidic thought, yet R. Pinchas rejected the idea that this bringing down of the divine could be forced nor can man force entrance into the realm of the divine.

Since union with the divine cannot be forced, *devekut* was sought but not guaranteed. At the same time, seeking *devekut* alone, whether successful or not was efficacious; it had an effect on the judgements decreed on high: "During prayer one can scream and cleave (*tsoek u'm'dabek et atsmo*) unto God, blessed be He, and thus one can cut away harsh judgments."⁵⁷ Screaming and cleaving during prayer may facilitate changes in the upper worlds, and thus one must be very careful, yet they cannot be forced, rather they must be "given" to the worshipper. R. Pinchas taught that "prayer is not done before God, it is the essence of the Godhead itself,"⁵⁸ which cannot be demanded to descend on command.

The criteria R. Pinchas used to indicate whether prayers had reached God or were accepted in the highest state possible were different from those of his contemporaries. He stressed that each person is capable at least of approaching the Divine and possibly even of achieving *devekut*. Schatz-Uffenheimer calls the

⁵⁶ *Likutim M'rabi Pinchas M'koretz*, 2b:7.

⁵⁷ *Imrei Pinchas*, 89:111. "... *tsoek u'm'dabek et atsmo l'hakadosh baruch hu al yadei zeh chotekh hadinim*."

⁵⁸ *Midrash Pinchas*, 9:52. "*Haolam sovrin shmitpalelim lfi hakadosh baruch hu, v'aino ken, ki hatefillah hu atsmut elohut mamash*."

approach of the Pinchas School an "anti-aristocratic tendency."⁵⁹ The criteria set by the Maggid which made prayer lacking in perfect *devekut* meaningless was a standard that most members of the community could not live up to, and against which R. Pinchas fought. R. Pinchas and his disciples sought to "fix the value of prayer in terms of the criteria of good will and individual ability."⁶⁰ Opposing the standards and hierarchy set by the Maggid, the Pinchas school sought to protect the individual who is unable to "dance on the rope" of *devekut* during prayer.

In the writings of R. Shmerl, a disciple of R. Pinchas, one can also detect "anti-Maggidic motivations," vis a vis the elitist doctrine of *devekut*:

In the name of R. Shmerl: "empty vessels do not spare"....On the face of it, this is difficult. Why does one pray every day, even though one's mind is not clear and one does not have the heart or desire at all, and what good does it do? But in this [respect] they are called "empty vessels": the words are called vessels, and every prayer, even though it is without the heart, is an event effective and not in vain. For when man merits to pray once with *kavannah*, properly, with good thought --for thought is called oil-- by means of this all the empty prayers ascend, and all the empty vessels are filled, and at times they even ascend and are grasped in the prayer of another person.⁶¹

.... I believe it is said.... that there are such things which a person is unable to teach his friend. For example: one who dances on a [tight] rope, when he moves the rope here he must balance his weight over there. But if a certain person should want to learn from him that in this place one leans here and in the at place there and he should wish to do likewise, he would certainly fall. Thus, in matters of

⁵⁹ Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 237.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 237-238.

⁶¹ Quoted in Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 238, based on Cincinnati manuscript 203b.

Divine service, each one must measure himself, etc.⁶²

The idea that each person "must measure himself" was directed against the exclusive standards set by the Maggid School. The Pinchas School saw the relationship between intention and deed very differently. R. Pinchas criticized the doctrine that deed in itself was not enough: R. Pinchas taught that the idea that the deed itself can serve as an "instrument of *devekut*."⁶³

What separates R. Pinchas' view of *devekut* from that of the Besht and of the Maggid, was his assertion that this state of *devekut* was not outwardly visible, not based on a particular approach to *kavvanot*, and not dependent on the utterance of the words themselves. R. Pinchas himself was, in fact, criticized for his lack of use of his voice during prayer:

Once, people asked him why his voice was not audible during prayer and why his body did not move with spiritual frenzy. He replied, 'The essence of prayer is longing for contact with the Creator of the universe, and the essence of that longing is to rid oneself of physicality, which is just the same as the departure of the soul from the body.'⁶⁴

R. Pinchas focused on the internal intent and on the longing within the pray-er

⁶² Quoted in Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, p. 238, based on Cincinnati manuscript 203b; "However," writes Schatz-Uffenheimer, "it is not impossible that this passage is directed against the teaching of *kavvanot*, and not specifically against the doctrine of *devekut*." The image of dancing on a rope is found also in *Sefer Imrei Pinchas HaShalem*, see note #1, Chapter One of this study.

⁶³ Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 232.

⁶⁴ *Imrei Pinchas*, 84:69, based on *Menorah HaTorah*. See also Dubnow, "The Maggid of Miedzyrzecz, His Associates and the Center in Volhynia (1760-1772)" p.79, translated by Eli Lederhendler in Hundret, *Essential Papers*, pp. 58-85.

rather than on a specific physical reality experienced by the pray-er or visible to others. He fought the ideology that one can force a union or communion with God with certain words or with specific movements. He taught that one cannot obtain something that is not given, neither by slaying or storming through what separates or prevents one from achieving union.

3. Forcing Prayer: "Slaying the Dragon" and "Storming Heaven"

A centerpiece of R. Pinchas' perspective on prayer, as we have seen, was his position that it and certainly not the lofty state of *devekut*, cannot be forced. There is no forcing from the heart a desire or a yearning that is not present. "One should be careful not to strive for more from the heart than he has at that moment; for only according to the heart is one able to pray."⁶⁵ Similarly, he said: "One should not trouble oneself to achieve lofty heights, but rather serve God with simplicity, and if one is deserving to achieve them, he will be brought to such heights."⁶⁶

According to R. Pinchas, one should not force the *tefillah* (prayer) but rather say only that which God gives one to pray because, he warned, forcing oneself to pray can lead to idolatry. "One must know whether or not prayer has

⁶⁵ *Imrei Pinchas*, 82:51. "*Gam sh'lo l'hitchazek yoter minhalev sh'yesh lo b'otah sha'ah, rak k'fi ha lev, kakh yitpalel.*"

⁶⁶ *Imrei Pinchas*, 168:3. See also Heschel, *Circle*, Chapter One: "One must not overly trouble oneself to achieve lofty rungs of insight, but rather serve God with unquestioning simplicity; and if one is deserving of ascending to such a spiritual height, this will come of itself."

been given to him. Prayer is something given by *hashamayim* (Heaven) and it should not be taken if it is not given."⁶⁷ This sense that an individual cannot utter certain formulas of prayer or *kavvanot* in order to reach the throne of God, decreased the elitism which prevented the common person from achieving such lofty heights. The entrance to heaven is open to every person, and, in fact, God does not accept one who tries to make a forced entry. R. Pinchas repeatedly draws an analogy between the simple person trying to storm his way into the castle to see the king, or a soldier trying to slay a dragon to receive the hand of the princess, and the pray-er trying to force himself to achieve *devekut*: "One who forces himself with great force comes upon strange thoughts, for it's like a simpleton (*menuval*) forcing his way into the king's chamber of a castle."⁶⁸ "R. Pinchas did not believe in trying to storm Heaven," writes Jacobs. "Rather his approach is that of the passive, mystical way in which the worshipper prepares himself to receive an influx of the divine grace."⁶⁹ Again the contrast between passive and activist prayer is brought to differentiate and to define R. Pinchas' perspective.

In contrast, the Maggid and other contemporary leaders focused on the pronunciation of the words themselves which would demand a state of *devekut*. The pronunciation of the words was less significant to R. Pinchas. While the

⁶⁷ *Imrei Pinchas*, 83:67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 169:13.

⁶⁹ Jacobs, *Hasidic Thought*, p. 26.

Maggid may have seen the letters as the replacement for the human body,⁷⁰ R.

Pinchas saw the body not as replaced by the utterance of words but as a vehicle through which words and intent are directed Heavenward:

Some people always recite their prayers with great force and in a loud voice. But he said, it is stated in the Zohar that he who slays the dragon is given in marriage to the king's daughter, that is, prayer. Consequently, a man must note whether or not prayer has been given to him (and he must not force the issue).

....If prayer is not given to man from Heaven and he wishes to take the hand of the king's daughter without permission, as above, it is sheer effrontery in the face of Heaven, and (even) where the honor of a mere mortal teacher is involved, there is a ban.

.... He explained that 'slaying the dragon' means that a man should see himself as really nothing at all, and then the king's daughter will be given to him. The indication of whether prayer has been given to him is when tears flow from his eyes.

.... He related, too, how a great man once stayed in his house and that man complained that his associates never seemed to pray along with him, one studying, the other sleeping. He said to him: 'You will observe that when I say my prayers they all pray together with me,' and so it was indeed. 'For you pray,' he said to the man, 'before your prayer has really been given to you, but when prayer has been given from Heaven and it is called 'the king's daughter, representing unification on high, there is unity here on earth' understand this.'"⁷¹

While R. Pinchas affirms that *devekut* is achieved through the stripping away of physicality, (*hitpashtut hagashmiut*) at the same time he does not ignore the role of each aspect of the body in that process. The role of the body is not negated in R. Pinchas' perspective, but rather serves a variety of functions throughout the process of

⁷⁰ Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 152ff.

⁷¹ Jacobs, Louis. *Hasidic Thought*, pp. 25-26. Sections of this passage can be found in *Sefer Imrei Pinchas*, 84:68.

prayer. Forceful physical activity is seen as less effective than the emotive state of crying. As we shall see in the following chapter, R. Pinchas, in comparison with some of his contemporaries, held an unusual view of how the body should or should not be used in order to achieve *devekut*.

Chapter Four: Pinchas' View of the Body

Humanity may be likened to the form of a man. Israel is the head, since his importance lies in the achievements of his mind. Other nations are the hands, since they are valuable for their manual works. Animals are the feet, since their worth derives from their feet.... A man's life may also be compared to the form of a man. In his youth his strength is in his feet; in middle age his hands; in old age, in his head.¹

As discussed earlier, while a great deal has been said about the theology of Hasidic prayer, few have begun to analyze the "how" of prayer as opposed to "what;" how were the prayers prayed and what was the role of the body in that experience? To what extent did perceptions of the body influence how various Hasidic leaders saw its role vis-a-vis prayer?² This chapter will focus on the textual evidence we have of how R. Pinchas perceived the human body in a variety of contexts. Chapter Five will address more narrowly how R. Pinchas perceived the role of the body specifically during prayer. A clear distinction between his general perspective of the body as opposed to the body at the time prayer is not possible. Given that it is likely that R. Pinchas himself may not have consciously made any such distinction, this categorization is for the purposes of this study in to clarify fully the various realms in which the physical body played a role.

To speak of the role of the body in Hasidic life is to speak of a kind of

¹ *Midrash Pinchas*, p. 9, quoted in Newman, *Hasidic Anthology*, p. 231.

² The panorama of possible external influences on how an eighteenth-century Hasid may have understood the human body necessitates further study. In this study only internal influences (i.e. Jewish: Biblical, rabbinic Kabbalistic, etc.) are assumed.

communication that is inherently non-verbal. Everything that the Hasid did with his body influenced his relationship with God: how he ate, drank, slept, cried, walked, stood, dressed, and of course, engaged in sexual intercourse. Each of these areas of behavior became nearly as significant as the behavior of prayer in terms of the individual's relationship with God. As the Hasidim sought to find God in every aspect of life, the reality of the body became increasingly problematic. While the main activities of the Hasidim were praying and studying Torah, their early leaders, including R. Pinchas of Korets, did not ignore the issue of the body in other activities. R. Pinchas taught his students not only about the possibility of serving God even while eating (and not through fasting!), as well as about the role of thought (conscious and unconscious); sleep and dreams; bodily cleanliness/bathing and dress; crying and tears (all bodily functions or issues of a body considered real and present). R. Pinchas did not ignore the body, nor did he depart from the goal of turning it to nothingness so that it would not interfere with a communion with the divine. While the body was a reality to be dealt with, however, he sought to make it a vehicle or a vessel through which one might, but not necessarily, achieve oneness with God.

Paradoxically, even while seeking to annihilate it, the corporeality of the body was viewed as a potential vehicle through which God could be worshipped. Another difficulty in creating these categories is the blurry distinction between non-prayer life and prayer is indicative of the extent to which every act was a prayer and there could be prayer in every act. Especially regarding prayer, however, Hasidic texts stress the goal of negation or "annihilation" of the body. They sought to transform the body into

a non-entity in order to destroy it as a barrier between the one praying and his unification with the divine.

Because of this textual emphasis on negating its existence, *hitpashtut hagashmiut*, it is clear why little attention has been paid to the *gashmiut* aspect, the corporeal presence of the body in prayer. Only in recent years have some scholars begun to focus on the role of the corporeal in Hasidism. Some of this recent scholarship on body and gender in Judaism is influenced by scholarship in other disciplines including as anthropology, psychology, and sociology. This allows for a deeper understanding of the ways in which cultures and societies influence the perception of the physical body as well as the impact of those influences in religious life.³

Anthropology and psychology often connect a culture's perception of the physical body with the range of bodily movements that are acceptable. The understanding that there is some correlation between the psyche and bodily expressions of emotion is reflected both in Hasidic texts in general and in the writings of R. Pinchas in particular. Both joy and sadness are reflected in the body's movements, and both effect prayer.

A pioneer in the subject of the anthropological meaning of the body vis-a-vis society, is Mary Douglas. In *Natural Symbols*, she describes the relationship between the physical body and the social body:

³ See for example: Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *People of the Body*; Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, David Biale, *Eros and the Jews*; and Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*.

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other. As a result of this interaction the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression. The forms it adopts in movement and repose express social pressures in manifold ways.⁴

Following the ground-breaking work of Marcel Mauss,⁵ Douglas argues, that the human body is always treated as an image of society and that there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time the social dimension.⁶ Omitting the social dimension in any discussion of the body would limit the possibility of understanding the body of the individual, and similarly, assuming only the social standard for a given behavior is to ignore the importance of individual practice. The significance of the development of new prayer-movement behaviors based on the individual customs of a number of *tzaddikim* indicates the elasticity of the boundaries of these behaviors, and at the same time, the practices rarely, if ever, stretched *halakha* to the point of breaking.

As we noted in Chapter Two, while some Hasidic masters developed their own practices regarding the direction of swaying his body during prayer, the obligatory nature of some kind of swaying was understood as a given.

Even as the individual Hasid sought to disintegrate physically, the social

⁴ Douglas, Mary, *Natural Symbols*, p. 65.

⁵ Mauss, Marcel, "Les techniques du corps", *Journal de la Psychologie*, 32. Mar-Apr. 1936, quoted in Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, p. 65.

⁶ Douglas, p. 70.

context in which he lived influenced every area of his physical life. When the physical behavior of an individual is mandated by the social body, any departure from that prescribed behavior will generate consequences in the social realm. At the same time, however, there were many ways in which early Hasidism also departed from those rabbinic perceptions.⁷ To be sure, the "social body" of the eighteenth-century Polish-Ukrainian Jewish community constrained, to a great degree, the way the physical body was perceived in early Hasidism. Whether or not the perception of the body within the early Hasidic circles was only defined by the "internal" influences of the perception of the body in Rabbinic Judaism and in the Kabbalah, or whether there additional "external" influences, has not been examined fully.

While it is impossible at this stage to determine the whole panorama of influences on the eighteenth-century Hasid's attitude toward the body, one can discern what was considered "normal" and "abnormal" behaviors via the community's reaction to them. Two important examples of a reaction that indicates the rarity of a given bodily behavior in prayer are related to the Besht and to R. Pinchas:

During the voiced eighteen benedictions, the Besht trembled greatly as he always did while praying. Everyone who looked at the Besht while he was praying noticed this trembling... R. Wolf Cozies looked at his face. He saw that it was burning like a torch. The Besht's eyes were bulging and fixed straight ahead like those of

⁷ See Chapter Two.

someone dying....⁸

In contrast, we read a similar passage about R. Pinchas in prayer yet in this case the on-lookers were shocked because of his lack of movement:

A Hasid asked Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz why he prayed without motions of the body, and without a single sound, whereas other *Zaddikim* ("righteous ones") oftentimes prayed with many gestures of enthusiasm and in a loud tone of voice.⁹

While there was a wide range of movement during prayer that was expected and considered acceptable in Hasidism, these two passages exemplify the extent to which certain movements or lack of movements were uncharacteristic of the community.

1. Eating and Drinking

Attitudes toward eating reveal a great deal about a culture's perspective of a central function of the human body.¹⁰ We must note that these attitudes toward gluttony and sexual excess remain paired in early Hasidic texts as well as in earlier rabbinic literature. Proper practice with regard to food was paired with proper

⁸ Dan Den-Amos and Jerome Mintz, eds., *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov, [Shivchei Habesht]: The Earliest Collection of Legends about the Founder of Hasidism*, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993, 1970), p. 50ff (a number of different versions are cited). Quoted also in Ted Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), p. 147.

⁹ *Menorah Hatorah*, by J. A. Frankel; Prezemysl, 1911, p. 3, quoted in Newman, *The Hasidic Anthology*, p. 327.

¹⁰ See for example Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1866; 1991), pp. 41-57; *Natural Symbols*. Judaism is a culture which stresses the purity or cleanliness and impurity or uncleanness of both the human body and the food that is taken into it.

practice in regard to sexual behavior. Moderation for the sake of continuing the life of the human body and the collective body was advised regarding eating and sexuality.¹¹ The role of food in Hasidism has not been addressed at length, and yet it is clear that eating represents more than either an indulgence of bodily pleasures or partaking in the fullness of God's earth. Regarding the role of eating in early Hasidism, R. Pinchas followed the Besht who taught that one could serve the Lord through eating, and not necessarily through fasting. The Besht frowned on self-mortification as did R. Pinchas.

In contrast to the Maggid who instructed another sage that one must "eat only sparingly," R. Pinchas declared: "Here below they know more than on high, for one should eat and, through eating, serve the Lord."¹² R. Pinchas asserted that he learned how to "eat before the Lord"¹³ from the Besht. Following the teachings of the Besht, R. Pinchas opposed the fasting encouraged by the Maggid and his followers, yet also cautioned against eating too much.¹⁴ Fasting at least once a week --but not more often-- leads to "greatness," and "breaks the evil side of a person."¹⁵ Fasting was one of the many ways in which R. Pinchas thought that his contemporaries tried to force closeness with God. While he saw its positive effects

¹¹ Boyarin, pp. 74-75.

¹² Manuscript, *Kitvei Kodesh*, chap. 5, fol. 6b quoted in Heschel, *Circle*, p. 12.

¹³ Manuscript, *Kitvei Kodesh*, chap. 10, fol. 3a, quoted in Heschel, *Circle*, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Imrei Pinchas*, 98:160ff.

¹⁵ *Imrei Pinchas*, 99:163.

for the body and for the mind, he taught that you cannot force even the lower levels of unification with the Divine. Consequently, he taught that one should fast only "sometimes," in spite of the fact that fasting is necessary in order to achieve a certain sense of the sacred, but once again cautioned that it cannot be forced.¹⁶

Eating moderately, he advised, helps one to live long,¹⁷ while eating a great deal can distance you from God.¹⁸ "If one eats a great deal it is a sign [it demonstrates] he has no soul; it is a sign that the one who eats too much has a small mind, or not a good mind."¹⁹ The ways in which food contributes to the holiness of man's life is demonstrated by the fact that the Jews eat meat and fish on Shabbat and even more luxurious items on holidays. But on the holiest of days, there is no food that can contribute to its holiness, there is no food which is spiritual enough for it to be eaten on that day and therefore we do not eat at all.²⁰ Similarly with regard to wine, R. Pinchas did not teach abstinence nor did he teach indulgence, but rather the importance of moderation. "The Talmud,"²¹ he taught, "declares that wine taken in moderation unfolds the brain of man. He who is a total

¹⁶ *Imrei Pinchas*, 98:162. "*ki tsarikh l'hiot k'tanot kodem l'godlut. V'hizhir meod sh'lo l'dchot mochin d'katnut.*"

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 101:185.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 101:189.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 102:189.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 102:190.

²¹ *Eruvin* 58; *Yoma* 76; *Baba Batra* 12, as quoted in Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

abstainer is rarely possessed of wisdom."²²

2. *Mikvah*-Immersion in a Ritual Bath

Bodily cleanliness and the ritual purity of the body are topics that the early Hasidic rabbis addressed directly but differently than their predecessors. While the use of the *mikvah* (ritual bath) was prescribed for men both before holidays and following a nocturnal emission, the early Hasidim saw it as a spiritual practice that need not be limited to those two contexts. According to one tradition, R. Pinchas sought to establish the practice of immersing in a *mikvah* every Sunday.²³ In another place, R. Pinchas taught that one should immerse in the *mikvah* every day.²⁴ Rather than viewing the submersion in the *mikvah* as a quick ritual act in order to change one's status, R. Pinchas taught, along with other early Hasidim, that it was appropriate to remain in the bath for a few moments. This time is necessary in order to properly direct one's heart with the proper intent.²⁵ The body of the human being, according to this section of *Imrei Pinchas*, is like a *kli cheres*,²⁶ common earthenware bound to be destroyed.²⁷ There is no way to direct one's

²² *Nofet Tsufim*, p. 13 as quoted in Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 85. It is likely that he got this idea from Maimonides.

²³ *Imrei Pinchas*, 100:172.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 100:173.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 100:174.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 100:174. "*Tsarich lishbor halev v'hu d'ikkar hataharah, ki ha'adam hu kli cheres.*"

²⁷ A clay vessel that must be destroyed, see Jastrow Dictionary, p. 504.

thoughts toward God if one simply dunks into the *mikvah* and emerges immediately. Purification of the body is not the central purpose of the *mikvah*, but rather the purification of one's thoughts, one's voice, and one's speech.²⁸

That R. Pinchas focused on the goal of *devekut* especially at the *mikvah* should not surprise us given the extent to which immersion was a common practice among Hasidim. Yet his connection between the immersion of the body and *devekut* stresses his desire to allow for the possibility of *devekut* in a wide variety of contexts available to every member of the community. Among his *kavvanot* at the *mikvah*, R. Pinchas differentiated between those directed toward this world and those directed toward the world to come. In some *kavvanot* he prayed that he would be able to pray with *devekut*.²⁹ Chief among all the *kavvanot* at the *mikvah*, however, were those that stressed that one is doing the act for the sake of the thing itself. Similarly, R. Pinchas' students affirm the authority of his stress of the spiritual purpose of the *mikvah* over its ritual importance by stating that the Besht himself did not always recite the written prayer at the *mikvah*.³⁰

It is curious that it is in this context that R. Pinchas' students state his general principle regarding serving God: One should not pray so that afterward one will attain *devekut*, but rather one should immediately find himself in that state because he is doing a *mitzvah* for God, for the only way to achieve *devekut* is

²⁸ *Imrei Pinchas*, 100:174. Regarding a quick immersion, he says: "I am not sure if it is useful at all."

²⁹ *Ibid*, 101:177.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 100:175.

through the observance of Torah.³¹ The act of going to *mikvah* stresses one's humility, or *middat ha'anavah*.³² R. Pinchas' directions at the *mikvah* do not only concern the *kavvanot* of the individual but also the cleanliness of the body itself. At the *mikvah* one must be careful not to step with bare feet on dirt.³³ The spiritual goal of immersion in the *mikvah* then, is not to change the ritual status of the body, nor to negate nor annihilate the existence of the body, but rather to confirm that the body exists and if treated carefully will not be a barrier before God.

3. Sleep and Dreams

*"Sleep covers consciousness like a cloud."*³⁴

R. Pinchas' description of the function of sleep in terms of one's relationship to God also reveals something of his perspective on the human body. What occurs during sleep affects the events of reality. Like prayer which can soften or cut off the judgments against God's people, sleep can have a similar effect.³⁵ Dreams can cancel the judgments, he teaches, so that one who is sick or in danger should quickly lie down and sleep because it will be effective in helping him.³⁶ Early in

³¹ *Ibid*, 101:177.

³² *Ibid*, 100:176.

³³ *Ibid*, 101:178.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 105:210.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 104:205, based on manuscripts.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 106:219.

the statements regarding nighttime and sleep collected in *Sefer Imrei Pinchas Hashalem* is a statement about the infinite nature of dreams. Given the early rabbinic association between sleep and death, R. Pinchas, using an abbreviation, connects sleep with an endless pit, in which it is impossible to distinguish right from left, where everything is cut off, but where new creation is possible.³⁷

In contrast to the joy and gladness with which one must serve God stressed by the early Hasidism, the statements of R. Pinchas and his students focus on the sadness and tearfulness associated with sleeping: "In joy it is impossible to sleep for it lies in the mystery of the mind (*b'sod hamochin*)."³⁸ On the other hand, we also have the statement that one who goes to sleep in happiness (*b'simcha*) will have good dreams.³⁹

Among a few statements which connect sleeping with crying is the following statement: "Before going to sleep one should cry and by virtue of this there is an ascension of the soul..."⁴⁰ The idea that the soul ascends in sleep is linked to the idea that the soul experiences a quasi-death during sleep; or as the rabbis said, "sleep is one-sixteenth of death."⁴¹ Connecting the state of sleep with that of death originates in much earlier Jewish texts but is emphasized in Hasidism.

³⁷ *Imrei Pinchas*, 104:205, based on manuscripts.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 105:211.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 106:226.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 103:204.

⁴¹ *Masechet Berakhot*. Attributed to the Maggid in Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, p. 48.

Because the idea of death is most often referred to as "spiritual death" in the context of prayer, we will return to this issue in Chapter Five where the state of the body in prayer will be our focus.

Reflecting the rabbinic perception of the representation of one's thoughts in dreams, we have the following statement of R. Pinchas: "Refuse of the eyes [as opposed to refuse of the nose and ear] is spiritual (*ruchani*), but the refuse of the mind (*moach*), is dreams."⁴²

4. Attire: Clothing and Concealing the Body⁴³

Among the non-verbal behaviors that reveal R. Pinchas' perspective on the body is dress or attire. One's clothing is not a barrier before God but rather a further container, not much different than the body, for what actually brings a person closer to God. "Secrets of Torah are hidden within one's clothes, for they surround a person. Therefore one who presents himself before a king must present himself in his best clothes, for if not [the king] will rightly be angry with him."⁴⁴

In his commentary on the Book of Esther, R. Pinchas stresses the meaning of the majestic or royal attire that Esther wore. The impact of her royal attire facilitated the submission of Haman. Clothing has the power, he seems to argue, to

⁴² *Imrei Pinchas*, 106:122.

⁴³ In Chapter Five we will discuss the role of attire again, but in the context of prayer alone.

⁴⁴ *Tosefta l'midrash Pinchas*, 2:1. The reverse is true of the king who presents himself before the common person.

affect good and evil. Esther's royal attire was that of the royalty of the Sabbath and by virtue of which the evil that Haman intended to do to the Jews of Persia was annulled.⁴⁵

R. Pinchas sees the clothing of the average person as an extension of that person's body. He taught: "It is possible to recognize an insane man by observing whether his clothes fit him as if they truly belonged to him. The normal man's garments accommodate themselves to the normal movements of his muscles and limbs."⁴⁶ That one's clothes should be part of one's person, moving together with him, reflects, as we might expect, a general tendency of seeking a union of the body with its surroundings.

R. Pinchas used clothing as a metaphor for other activities as well. The words of speech represent a kind of clothing for the body: "Every word that is spoken in truth either of Torah or of prayer creates "protective surroundings (*makifin*) and clothes the naked body."⁴⁷ While many aspects of the body and its activities, including dress and speech, are potential vehicles through which one may worship God in mundane behaviors, these same aspects take on even greater significance in the context of prayer. Everything about the body, its clothing, its speech, its movements --both voluntary and involuntary-- as we shall see in the next chapter, becomes magnified during prayer. In R. Pinchas' writings, the body,

⁴⁵ *Devarim Nechmadim*, quoted in *Imrei Pinchas*, 40:255.

⁴⁶ *Nofet Tsufim*, p. 11, quoted in Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁴⁷ *Tosefta l'midrash Pinchas*, 2:3. See also section on dress in *Tosefta L'midrash Pinchas*, 2:4; and Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, pp. 48ff.

even while Hasidic doctrine sought its annihilation or at least its withdrawal, was still so powerfully present that he addressed it in nearly every aspect of its corporeality.

Chapter Five: R. Pinchas' View of the Body During Prayer

*For with one single movement, one can overturn a number of worlds....*¹

Perhaps R. Pinchas' most revealing teaching regarding his perspective on the role of the body during prayer is his comparison of the body during prayer to an acrobat balancing on a tightrope:

There are certain things you cannot teach another person. For example, a tightrope walker must balance his body very carefully. He gyrates and twists to maintain a perfect equilibrium. Now if someone were to learn to imitate his movements, thinking, "at this point the acrobat moved to the right, there he moved to the left-- I'll do the same thing," he surely would plunge to the ground after the first step. The same applies to serving God. **Prayer cannot be imitated. Everyone must find his own individual approach to the service of God.**²

The sense that the pray-er is fundamentally disoriented and must find his way alone characterizes many of R. Pinchas' statements on prayer. In a community which focused on the Hasid's imitation of his *rebbe*, the idea that an individual cannot model his movements during prayer on the movements of another is unusual. But the necessity for each individual to find his own way on the "tightrope" (implying a dangerous context) is a core aspect of R. Pinchas' position on the role of movement during prayer. "Prayer cannot be imitated," he argues, in opposition to those who taught that one must make certain movements with the

¹ *Imrei Pinchas*, 84-85: 71; see also 86:85.

² *Imrei Pinchas, Darkei Avodat Hashem*, 169:11. Translation: Finkel, Avraham Yaakov, *The Great Chasidic Masters*, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc. 1992), p. 36. Emphasis added.

body and use the voice emphatically in order to reach the highest levels of connection to God. As we saw earlier, he was an iconoclast not only in his attitude but also in behavior.³

On a number of occasions R. Pinchas refers to his careful study of the cosmic effect of movement during prayer:

He stood before the ark to prepare to pray [one particular Yom Kippur] and R. Pinchas said: 'I began to pray with *misirat nefesh* (surrender or devotion of the soul)[...] Sometimes I meditate on a single prayer (*tefillah*) eight days and I watch myself carefully throughout these days guarding every movement I make; even how to turn my face this way and that way....' Once his son was reproving him because of this method. Among R. Pinchas' responses he said: 'When I pray before the ark and lower myself one way, certain worlds⁴ tremble (*nertaim olamot*) and when I lower myself in another way, different worlds tremble.'⁵

The theory that spiritual worlds are affected by the movement of the body during prayer implies that one must remain conscious of the body and its movement rather than to detach oneself from one's corporeality entirely. Once again we hear echoes of the paradoxical desires to abrogate the physical presence of the body and at the same time to emphasize its corporeal role.

Mary Douglas, whose work we referred to in the previous chapter, cites a number of scholars who, since the early part of this century, "have noticed

³ "A Hasid asked Rabbi Pinchas of Korets why he prayed without motions of the body, and without a single sound, whereas other *Zaddikim* ("righteous ones") oftentimes prayed with many gestures of enthusiasm and in a loud tone of voice. *Menorah Hatorah*, p. 3, quoted in Newman, *The Hasidic Anthology*, p. 327.

⁴ See definition in the Introduction.

⁵ *Midrash Pinchas* 4a. Also quoted in Matityahu Y. Guttmann, *Rabi Pinchas M'korets: Chayav, P'ulotav V'torato*, p. 12. See also *Imrei Pinchas*, 84-85:71; 86:85.

unconscious correspondences between bodily and emotional states."⁶ Sigmund Freud, for example, called the acting out of a psychological state the "conversion" of the emotional into the physical condition."⁷ The complexity of the relationship between the emotional and the physical far exceeds the limits of this study and yet any unraveling of that complexity will influence one's interpretation of our material.

Jewish scholars have addressed the complexity of the relationship between the activity and the meaning of prayer in many different ways.⁸ One of the most interesting models proposed recently is that of the modes of prayer to the plane of interpersonal relationships taking into account a variety of influences on their development and significance. In his recent study on the role of the body during the *Amidah* in early rabbinic literature, Uri Ehrlich cites six "sources of influence" rather than emotional states. He suggests a "phenomenological background" of the "complex" of gestures associated with the *Amidah*. Noting six sources of influence during the time of the *Tannaim* and the *Amoraim* are 1) the natural element;⁹ 2) the plane of interpersonal relationships, especially the movements associated with

⁶ Douglas, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (New York/Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society/Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993, translated by Raymond P. Scheindlin); Larry Hoffman, *Canonization of the Synagogue Service* and Jakob Petuchowski, *Understanding Jewish Prayer* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1972) for some discussions on the history of movement during prayer.

⁹ He defines the "natural element" as "a general context characteristic of natural human expression." Uri Ehrlich, "Modes of Prayer," p. 13, abstract.

entering and exiting from prayer which model the entrance and exit of a subject in the chambers of his king;¹⁰ 3) the Temple service, meaning the attempt to "perpetuate what had been done in the Temple, and, on the other, an attempt to make a clear distinction between the two realms."¹¹ 4) the angelic orders, as described in the book of Isaiah; 5) prayer in the Bible;¹² and finally 6) neighboring religions.¹³ While it is not the purpose of this study to critique Ehrlich's delineation of "sources of influence," it is clear that some, although not all, of these sources continued to be influential in the development of gestures in Hasidic prayer. At this juncture it can be argued that the sources of influence on the writings of R. Pinchas that emerged from what Idel calls the "panorama" of Jewish mystical landscapes¹⁴ available to him,¹⁵ were likely to have been so varied that they cannot be similarly

¹⁰ Ehrlich notes "almost all the gestures contain a clear analogy on that plane. The connection is indubitable and offers an explanation of the origins of gestures, their halakhic status, and their meaning." *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Some of the gestures Ehrlich describes constitute an "innovation in Jewish prayer," while others exhibit a clear influence of ancient practices from the biblical period. *Ibid.*

¹³ "The prayer practices of the peoples in whose midst Jews lived in that period exerted some influence on the formulation of the gestures." But Ehrlich stresses that interpersonal relationships is a more dominant influence and may be identified as the "primary model according to which the gestures were formulated." Ehrlich, "Modes of Prayer," p. 14, abstract. Eric Zimmer, in "Poses and Postures during Prayer," also refers to the impact of neighboring religions on the development of poses and postures in Jewish prayer. In particular, he cites Naftali Wieder's *Hashpa'ot Islamiot al Pulchan Hayehudi* (Oxford, 1947).

¹⁴ See Introduction.

¹⁵ See Idel, *Hasidism*, Introduction and Chapter One.

categorized. Although we cannot determine with certainty all of the sources of influence on R. Pinchas' perception of the body during prayer, we can nevertheless separate his views into categories corresponding to different aspects of human life and the human body.

As noted in Chapter Two, the differentiation between the body, the soul, and the mind was not altogether firm for the early Hasidim. While they were working with the influence of the rabbinic perceptions of the separation between the body and the soul,¹⁶ they were similarly influenced, and possibly reacting to, the development of that idea in Lurianic and Cordoverian Kabbalah. While we cannot dismiss these influences, we must also note the relevance of Idel's argument against the Buberian and Scholemian approaches. As noted earlier, Idel contests seeing the variety of influences on an individual Hasidic master as emerging only from the mystical movements and historical events that preceded him. Because of this vast "panorama" an individual master was not able

to take in each and every detail of this vast landscape; no doubt there were numerous blind spots, areas that escaped their attention altogether. Moreover, [...] some of the masters had clearly misunderstood or distorted the 'real' spiritual concerns of the original sources.¹⁷

R. Pinchas' panorama was especially wide, one might argue, because of his Lithuanian background and his grounding in Medieval Jewish philosophy and the

¹⁶ See for example how Ephraim E. Urbach in *The Sages: The World and Wisdom of the Rabbis of the Talmud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), Chapter Ten, deals with this complex issue.

¹⁷ Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 15.

Zohar, in addition to the traditional cache of textual influences. Given the complexity of influences on an individual such as R. Pinchas, his writings on the body cannot be broken down into clear theoretical or phenomenological categories, but only into categories of types of behavior and, literally, parts of the body.

Having stated these concerns, four main areas can still be specified through which R. Pinchas defined the role of the body during prayer: 1) the role of the mind and the psyche 2) the role of the posture of the body and its movements; 3) the role of specific body parts (i.e. hands, eyes) 4) the role of dress (i.e. hats, belts) and special attire (i.e. the *tallit* and *tefillin*).¹⁸

The list of aspects of the body that will be discussed below is by no means exhaustive. While many aspects of the body during prayer -- the mind, movement in general, the role of different body parts, special attire -- are addressed by the rabbis, the Kabbalists and the early Hasidim, this last chapter will focus only on those aspects that R. Pinchas addressed directly. It is my contention that R. Pinchas, unlike his contemporaries, confronted the paradox of the body's real presence during prayer and yet its supposed disappearance. Rather than ignoring the paradoxes and the inescapable reality that most people were unable to rid themselves of a sense of their physical existence, even for the sake of prayer, R. Pinchas accepted and affirmed its presence during prayer. While seeking *bittul*

¹⁸ This list represents aspects directly related to the physical body of the human being, as opposed to Ehrlich's suggestion that the body's modes during prayer model the same behavior in the context of interpersonal relationships, and have a similar, if not identical, meaning. Ehrlich, "Modes of Prayer," abstract.

hayesh, he accepted the fact that most often the body nevertheless remained present. Pulled by forces of gravity beyond his control, the acrobat, dancing on the rope, can only be required to find their own way of balancing, and of walking across it.

1. The Mind and the Psyche During Prayer

Regarding the role of the mind during prayer, R. Pinchas opposed any practice which might lead to elitism. He was against "relying on one's intellect alone, which he believed separates man from God. When worldly 'wisdom' became widespread, he observed, the holy spirit withdrew."¹⁹ As Elie Wiesel observes:

To be Jewish is to link one's fate to the Messiah-- to that of all those who are waiting for the Messiah. How is one to accelerate events? Never mind the Kabbalistic methods. They are too complicated, involved, and inaccessible....No, better try simpler ways. Better appeal to simpler people. Every person may change the course of history; it is the power of every individual to shorten exile.

Therein lies Rebbe Pinchas' originality. In his teachings, he barely mentions the central role of the Tzaddik, the Just Man, as mediator between heaven and earth, as the instrument chosen by God to make His will known and implemented. Instead he stresses the importance of each individual, no matter how saintly or how ignorant. It is enough to fulfill certain basic and practical commandments to enable the Redeemer to appear in our midst for one hour-- to one other human being, and then to more and more.²⁰

¹⁹ *Midrash Pinchas*, p. 82, quoted also in Heschel, *Circle*, p. 20.

²⁰ Elie Wiesel, *Four Chasidic Masters and Their Struggle against Melancholy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. 19. Emphasis added.

For R. Pinchas, intellectual skills and spiritual abilities are not necessarily connected. He consistently de-emphasizes practices that imply that the prayer of the less skilled or ordinary person, as opposed to the spiritual aristocrat has less spiritual and Messianic potential.

Teaching that different parts of the body were most active during different prayers, he associated the mind with reading the *Sh'ma*, for instance, because it declares God's oneness: "Reading the *Sh'ma* one reads from one's head, for this is *hitpashtut hagashmiut*."²¹ Here again, moving the prayer from the body, the mouth, to the head, the mind, is a higher mystical state of prayer.

Remembering and Forgetting in Prayer

One particular aspect of what occurs in the mind was stressed by R.

Pinchas: the remembering and forgetting that happens during prayer:

During prayer I find myself suddenly understanding a new meaning or interpretation of a prayer or a verse, but after praying I forget about it entirely. The reason for this is that the hour of prayer is (*sod b'fanim el panim*) the secret of face to face, this is the remembering and after the prayer they fall (*b'achorim*) which is the forgetting.²²

Here we note that R. Pinchas connects aspects of thought and of the process of remembering and forgetting with aspects of thought are related to the way that the Kabbalists mapped out the Godhead. Memory during prayer, a topic which deserves greater study, for R. Pinchas is directly connected to the extent to which

²¹ *Imrei Pinchas*, 89: 108, 109.

²² *Ibid*, 82:60.

one is near to God's "face."²³

Among the teachings of the Besht that R. Pinchas repeated related to remembering was "Man is not alone....God makes us remember the past so as to break our solitude."²⁴ The sense of one's loneliness in the struggle to meet God was exemplified in the above statement; how else could God "break our solitude" if not through the process of prayer in which, as the Besht taught, all those who have gone before us come to us.

2. Body Movement and Body Parts During Prayer

Each of the gestures that will be discussed below, like many of the concepts addressed earlier, have their roots in the practices of early rabbinic Judaism and some even in biblical practices. Each of these aspects of the body during prayer -- its gestures, its posture, its movement, and its dress -- is an integral part of prayer, no less than the prayer book and the words themselves. While Rabbinic Judaism serves as the backdrop, we will focus mainly on their development of these practices in early Hasidism, and while the early mystical influences were multifaceted, how R. Pinchas understood them. While an in-depth study of the pre-Hasidic development of these gestures exceeds the scope of this study, minimally we must note here that the reaction to these practices by the early

²³ The idea of closeness to God's face originates in a number of Biblical verses i.e.: Genesis 32:30; Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 34:10; 5:4. *Panim b'fanim* was later developed in Jewish mystical sources.

²⁴ Wiesel, *Four Hasidic Masters*, p. 7.

Hasidim. The scope of reactions to these gestures were not necessarily the result of the theories of those early Jewish schools of mysticism, but neither could it have escaped their influence altogether. It is not surprising, then, that some of them, including R. Pinchas, developed idiosyncratic views on these practices which elude easy categorization.

A. Posture, Entering and Exiting from Prayer²⁵

Rabbinic literature on the extent or the nature of bowing includes a variety of opinions. According to Ehrlich,

the prevailing opinion favored moderate bowing of the upper part of the body. This would express some measure of confidence on the part of the worshipper before God. A second, contrasting opinion, whose foremost proponent was Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, favored full and emphasized bowing. Such an awareness was particularly characteristic of R. Joshua ben Levi, who was known as a religious personality with the nature of a *hasid*, humble and modest.²⁶

Bowing and the posture of the one praying expressed his attitude toward God and reflected as well on his own personality. Posture is even linked to whether or not the prayers are received and whether or not they represent truth: "It is a sign that the prayers of one who walks bent over are not received for they are not words of truth. (*divrei emet*) Every word that is spoken in truth either of Torah or of prayer create 'protective surroundings' (*makifin*) and become clothing for the body."²⁷

²⁵ See *Imrei Pinchas* 88:99 and Ehrlich, *op. cit.*, p. 5ff.

²⁶ Ehrlich, *op. cit.*, p. 5, abstract.

²⁷ *Tosefta L'midrash Pinchas*, 2:3.

B. Movement

*One must be precise about every movement so that it will serve God, Blessed be He.*²⁸

R. Pinchas differed from the Besht and many of his followers "who prefer prayer to be recited in a loud voice and with violent gestures." R. Pinchas did not believe in trying to "storm" Heaven.²⁹

A Hasid asked Rabbi Pinchas of Korets why he prayed without motions of the body, and without a single sound, whereas other *Zaddikim* (righteous ones) oftentimes prayed with many gestures of enthusiasm and in a loud tone of voice.

The Koretser answered: "When a *Zaddik* prays, he cleaves in truth to God, and loses all sense of corporeality, as if his very soul had departed from his body. The Talmud³⁰ tells us that in some people the soul leaves the body only after great agonies and convulsions, whereas in others it departs as quietly as one draws a hair out of milk or offers a kiss."³¹

The connection between movement, prayer and death appears in similar mystical sources. The reality of the body and the desire to live were accompanied by the desire to "die," in order to free oneself of the spiritual limitations of the physical.

²⁸ *Nofet Tsufim*, 119; p. 38.

²⁹ Jacobs, *Hasidic Thought*, p. 26.

³⁰ *Berakhot* 8, quoted in Newman, *The Hasidic Anthology*, p. 327.

³¹ *Menorah Hatorah*, by J. A. Frankel; Prezemysl, 1911, p. 3, quoted in Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

C. Death: The Ultimate Annihilation of the Body

*Know that the main goal of prayer is devekut which is the stripping away of physicality. This is exactly like the soul leaving the body.*³²

The association of spiritual or mystical death as the highest form of serving God in Judaism has a long history. The 'paradoxes of life and death' were relevant in every aspect of Judaism.³³ Death, for the Hasid, represented the consummate annihilation of the body, which was part of the ultimate goal of *devekut*, cleaving to God in prayer. Whether or not every Hasidic master supported the idea that *devekut* causes the soul to depart from the body, because it is spoken of as "killing oneself," has not been demonstrated.

Many passages in Hasidic texts, however, reflect upon this prayer attributed to the Baal Shem Tov which illustrates a relationship between spiritual union and death:

Behold, I desire to kill [mortify] myself in order to serve the Name, be He blessed, in truth and with a whole heart, in love and fear, that I acknowledge His Unity fully. Therefore, I desire to kill myself-- even to sacrifice myself as an oblation before Him.³⁴

This passage reflects not only a desire for constant self-sacrifice and abdication of the body for God's sake, but a clear association of death with the highest state of union. In the mind of the Hasid, Michael Fishbane argues, "all the while one's

³² *Imrei Pinchas*, 84:69, based on *Menorah HaTorah*.

³³ See Fishbane, Michael, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

³⁴ *Tzva'at Haribash*, no. 43a quoted in Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, p. 46.

lower self is palpable, it creates a duality, so to speak, in the divine unity."³⁵

Fishbane identifies the Hasidic understanding of spiritual death as "a bold reinterpretation of the Talmudic teaching of the scholars of the south, who, almost two millennia earlier, answered the question: "What should one do to live?" with the reply, *yamit et atzmo*, "Let him kill himself."³⁶ That death represented the ultimate *bittul hayesh* (self-annihilation) did not originate in Hasidism should be noted, yet its association with the early Hasidim's greatest goal meant that it was developed and played upon literally in new ways.

When a *tzaddik* prays, he cleaves in truth to God, and loses all sense of corporeality, **as if his very soul had departed from his body**. The Talmud³⁷ tells us that in some people the soul leaves the body only after great agonies and convulsions, whereas in others it departs as quietly as one draws a hair out of milk or offers a kiss."³⁸

As we saw earlier, R. Pinchas, like Hasidism in general, describes *devekut* as an ideal state in which the soul has left the body. Through the words and the activity of prayer, he taught, "one must be able to *limsor et nafsho al kol t'nuah v'dibur* (**give over or offer one's soul or life** in every movement and every word)."³⁹ At the same time, R. Pinchas remained concerned with the physical reality of the body

³⁵ Fishbane, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 47.

³⁷ *Berakhot* 8, quoted in Newman, *The Hasidic Anthology*, p. 327.

³⁸ *Menorah Hatorah*, J.A. Frankel, *Prezemysl*, 1911, p. 3, quoted in Newman, *The Hasidic Anthology*, p. 327.

³⁹ *Nofet Tsufim*, 16:54.

affirming that escaping it would be as momentous as death itself. He wants to facilitate the absence of the body through *devekut*, but he cannot escape its corporeal presence.

I am unaware of any scholar who has done a detailed study comparing the various movements prescribed by the various leaders of early Hasidism. Among the scholars who have focused on the issue of the importance of bodily gestures during prayer, some have addressed the references made to the importance of "entering" and "exiting" prayer:

Particularly evident in [the gesture of exiting from prayer, bowing right and left] is the concept of God's presence with the worshipper. The latter's striding backwards demonstrates the experience of tangible presence which the worshipper then leaves. The talmudic decision, as well, that one bows to the right and the left of the *Shekhinah* reveals the idea of an intimate relationship with a personal God.⁴⁰

The bodily movements of entering and exiting from prayer demanded the attention of the Sages. According to the literature of the period of the Mishnah and the Talmud, "prayer is concluded with a complex gesture of withdrawal that includes three steps backward with face turned forward, followed by a bowing to the right and to the left." ⁴¹ Ehrlich attributes the meaning of this gesture, along with that of other gestures, to interpersonal behavior: "Walking backward with the face turned to the other person, as well as bowing at the conclusion of a meeting are common gestures of parting made by a man of inferior stature to one of superior stature."

⁴⁰ Ehrlich, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10, abstract.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 9, abstract.

While Ehrlich also mentions the parallel behavior of the Temple priests, he emphasizes that the gesture

is an expression of submission and devotion, emphasized as a preface to ending an encounter with God. Particularly evident in this gesture is the concept of God's intimate presence with the worshipper. The latter's striding backwards demonstrates the experience of tangible presence which the worshipper then leaves.⁴²

The association of closeness with God with actual intimacy gave rise, as we noted earlier, to a number of different interpretations of the nature of that intimacy, whether that of a sexual intimacy,⁴³ or that of a king with a summoned subject. In a variety of Hasidic texts, the action of bowing as one exits from prayer was emphasized as having connotations of an encounter with a majestic ruler.

Another type of movement which attracted the attention in Hasidic texts was swaying. Swaying and even gyrating in prayer was common in some Hasidic. Outsiders often criticized it, we find also those who defended the practice.

Do not laugh at one who moves his body, even violently, during prayer. If a man is drowning in a river, he makes all kinds of motions to try to save himself. This is not a time for others to laugh.⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 9, abstract.

⁴³ An example of the sexual intimacy assumed in prayer is found in this passage: "Prayer is union with the Divine Presence. Just as two people will move their bodies back and forth as they begin the act of love, so must a person accompany the beginning of his prayer with the rhythmic swaying of his body. But as he reaches the heights of union with the Presence, the movement of his body ceases." Quoted in David Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism*, vol. II (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1982), p. 141.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Blumenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

As R. Pinchas taught in a statement we saw earlier, even the smallest movement had the potential to be very significant in the spiritual realms. This passage also reveals an ambivalent relationship to violent movement of the body during prayer. It protects those who may have been mocked for this dramatic activity.

R. Pinchas often repeated the phrase, "a single simple movement before God is precious....."⁴⁵ Again we note the tone of the particular movement without any specificity as to what exactly he meant, other than to assert its inherent value. Similarly, his statements include references to the redemptive nature of one's movements:

Sometimes a man whose deeds are corrupt will live to be 70 years old because of one word he uttered or one gesture he made in complete sincerity, entirely for the sake of God. It was essential that he be born for this single solitary word or gesture. It could not have been done by anyone else, for no two people were created exactly alike, since the beginning of the world until the end of days.⁴⁶

We see here the assertion of the importance of the action of the individual and another indication of his tendency to reject notions which may prescribe conformity_especially in the area of gesture and movement.

3. Role of Body Parts

*Only according to the heart should one pray....*⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Imrei Pinchas*, 168: 7. Translation, Finkel, Avraham Yaakov, *The Great Chasidic Masters* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc. 1992), p. 36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Imrei Pinchas*, 82:41.

A. Voice

On the verse [from Nitzavim] the thing, (God) is so near to you that it is in your mouth. Literally, this means that God contracts His presence, (Shikhinato), with each and every word. I know this is so, and there is no greater wonder.⁴⁸

R. Pinchas believed that there was cosmic significance to the sound of prayers sung to God. In the following passage he asserts the desire to use a physical ability, singing, in order to bring down the Heavenly to the earthly.

Ribbono Shel Olam (Master of the Universe), if only I could sing I would not let you remain in Heaven Above. I would sing and sing until you would have no choice but to come and dwell with us.⁴⁹

Many Hasidic masters emphasized the "oral aspect of prayer as a major creative component, one that minimalizes the mental quality of prayer and restores the glory of the prayer as production of sounds. Similarly, seeking to bring down the holy to the earthly was a major theme in Hasidic literature.⁵⁰

Although R. Pinchas affirmed the use of the force to draw down God's presence, he is also the one who affirmed and defended the need and the value of an individual's silence during prayer. He himself modeled this individualist quiet way: "He would pray wearing a large hat and his eyes would be focused on the *siddur*, and most of what he said he said silently (in a whisper, *b'lachash*).⁵¹ R. Pinchas' silence during

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 169:8.

⁴⁹ *Imrei Pinchas, "Tnyanim Shonim,"* translation, Finkel, *The Great Hasidic Masters*, p. 37.

⁵⁰ Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 149.

⁵¹ *Imrei Pinchas*, 88:99.

prayer, his personal predilection for not using his voice is yet another example of how he modeled what he fought for: the right of the individual to use his body in a way that would be most conducive to his own search for God.

B. Eyes

The issue of the orientation of the eyes during prayer was connected to the issue of the orientation of one's face as well. Yet, while the face could be oriented eastward, or toward Jerusalem,⁵² one's eyes could be oriented either upward, towards the Heavens, or downwards toward the earth, or closed so as to avoid seeing anything that may be a distraction. Eyes play an important role in prayer not only in the minds of the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud but also in the minds of later rabbinic authorities and in the minds of some of the early Hasidic masters.

Beginning with the *Tannaim*, there was a debate regarding the direction of the eyes in prayer; whether toward heaven or toward the Temple. This debate became even more heated between the sages who grappled with the new status of prayer following the destruction of the Temple. According to Uri Ehrlich, the two opinions "reflect a long-standing dispute regarding the place of the Shekhinah: the Temple or heaven."⁵³ Eric Zimmer's article on poses and postures

⁵² According to most Mishnaic and Talmudic sources, prayer was said while the face was turned toward the Temple and toward the Holy of Holies. "The practice was already extant in the biblical and Second Temple periods and was instituted as halakha at the beginning of the Mishnaic period." Ehrlich, *Modes*, p. 6, abstract. See also Daniel 6:11.

⁵³ Ehrlich, *op. cit.*, p. 8, abstract.

during prayer, delineates the inconsistencies in rabbinic literature regarding where one should direct one's gaze during prayer.⁵⁴ Some authorities argue that the eyes should be directed toward the heavens in order to "arouse/inspire intention (*kavvanah*)" or to cause the heart to "surrender,"⁵⁵ while others argue that one should direct one's gaze towards the earth and "consider in one's heart as though he were standing in the Heavens...."⁵⁶ Still others argue that one should close them entirely so as not to "offend" the *Shekhinah* who is standing before him.⁵⁷ Another argument states that closing one's eyes during prayer prevents one from seeing things that may destroy one's *kavvanah*, and gives the Ari as the exemplar of such behavior.⁵⁸ Indeed the clearest indication that *kavvanah* is likely dependent on praying with eyes closed is found in the Zohar,⁵⁹ and a similar perspective is given in the name of the Ari.⁶⁰ It is likely that the perspective of the Zohar on the eyes

⁵⁴ Zimmer, Eric, "Poses and Postures during Prayer," *Sidra*, Vol. 5, 1989. On the use and movement of the eyes during prayer, see especially pp. 889-95.

⁵⁵ Zimmer, p. 92. Zimmer cites a number of *halakhic* sources including the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim*; *Beit Yosef*; *Hilkhos Tefillah*; and *Hilkhos G'dolat*, among others.

⁵⁶ R. Yonah on *Berakhot* 22b.

⁵⁷ Zimmer, "Poses," p. 93, based R. Bachya's *Interpretation of the Torah*. Zimmer adds that the tendency to pray with eyes closed is also mentioned in *Sefer Hachasidim* also in reference to the ability to pray with *kavvanah*.

⁵⁸ R. Ya'akov Emden, *Sulam Beit El* (the introductory essay to his prayer book, *Siddur Yavetz*) quoted in Zimmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

⁵⁹ Zimmer, *op. cit.*, p. 93, citing Zohar (Vilna, 1922), *Parashat Etchanan*, 260b. See also *Parashat Chayei Sarah*, 132.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 93; citing *Siddur Ha'ari: Kol Ya'akov:Kavvanat Amen* (Lemberg, 1859).

influenced R. Pinchas, given that there is evidence that it influenced halakhic authorities in a variety of historical periods.⁶¹

The excretions of the eyes, both tears and the discharge that gathers during sleep, were taken to have significance as well. As we saw in his perspective on sleep, R. Pinchas taught that the issue of the eyes had spiritual value: "Refuse of the eyes [as opposed to refuse of the nose and ear] is spiritual (*ruchani*)...."⁶²

C. Tears during prayer

Given his attention to the discharge from the eyes during sleep, it is no wonder that R. Pinchas paid significant attention to tears. Both their presence and their absence within and without the prayer context had meaning. Tears during prayer indicated that one's prayer was received, while an inability to cry is indicative of depression: "One of the three signs which distinguishes a "man of melancholy" is an "inability to shed tears."⁶³

It could be argued that the act of crying during prayer should be understood in the category of movement. R. Pinchas understood the flow of tears, however, as an involuntary response of the eyes (a part of the body) as well as as a product of the emotional or spiritual state. The product of that state, tears, represented a state of extreme joy, which itself allows for greater closeness to God; including the possibility that one's prayers were heard: "The sign that prayer has been given is

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 93.

⁶² This passage continues: "....but the refuse of the mind (*moach*), is dreams." *Imrei Pinchas*, 106:222.

⁶³ *Nofet Tsufim*, p. 12, quoted in Newman, *Hasidic Anthology*, p. 243.

when tears stream from his eyes...."⁶⁴

Similarly, he taught: "If one weeps during prayer as a man who has *nachat ruach* (pleasure or contentment)" and "One should cry before going to sleep because this allows the soul to ascend."⁶⁵ R. Pinchas links the flowing of tears to the flowing of the soul toward a higher level. Tears, then, are a way that the body operates which facilitates a greater possibility of closeness to God.

D. Hands

The practice of hand-clasping during prayer acquired halakhic stature only in the Middle Ages. Ehrlich describes the symbolic significance of hand-clasping as "an expression of passivity and helplessness before God. This is supported by the fact that the gesture appears along with other gestures of submission, such as removal of garments and bowed stature."⁶⁶ Movement of the hands during prayer also appears in the writings of R. Pinchas:

And Aaron lifted his hands...."⁶⁷ The verse explicitly describes the movement of raising one's hands as the moment when the prayer is heard. [...] At the time that one prays and one's hands are lifted upward by themselves it is a sign that his prayers have been accepted. Hence it is written about Moses, "and his hands in faith....." [*v'yhi yadav emunah*] is translated as "in prayer" [*btzlo*]. If Israel directs their hearts to their father in heaven they will be strengthened and their hands will be lifted upward, and their will be

⁶⁴ *Imrei Pinchas*, 84:67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 103:204.

⁶⁶ Ehrlich, "Modes," pp. 8-9, abstract.

⁶⁷ Exodus 29:9.

unity in the ten *s'firot*.⁶⁸

Among his commentaries on the Torah in *Midrash Pinchas*, R. Pinchas chose to cite movement of a body part in connection to prayer and faith.

"The Besht extended special honor to R. Pinchas. Once the Besht said to him: 'In the years of my youth I used to feel that when I lifted my hands worlds would tremble. But now I feel nothing.' R. Pinchas replied: 'And I feel that when I raise my hands worlds do tremble.'"⁶⁹ Because he believed that one could not control these kinds of bodily movements during prayer, while he emphasized their significance when they did occur, he did not insist that they must occur in order to achieve oneness with God.

4. Covering the Body, Hats, Belts, Shoes and Special Garments

Ehrlich defines dress itself as a "gesture," an action on the part of the person praying that is indicative of how he perceives its role in his relationship with the sacred. Dress represents a cultural indicator.⁷⁰ One of the many ways in which R. Pinchas focused on the presence of the body during prayer is evident in the attention he gave to the way in which one dresses during prayer, and what kinds of special garments are worn during prayer.

A. Covering the Body

⁶⁸ *Tosefta l'Midrash Pinchas*, 3:14; 3:16. See also *Imrei Pinchas*, 84:68.

⁶⁹ Heschel, *Circle*, p. 14, note #72 based on Manuscript, *Kitvei Kodesh*, chap. 10, fol. 3a.

⁷⁰ Ehrlich, *op. cit.*, p. 142ff.

According to the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud, the worshipper is required to cover his entire body with a garment while he prays the *Amidah*. The Hasidim were especially concerned with the obligation to put on a belt in preparation for prayer. Originally, in Babylonia, this requirement was "connected to the fact that [...] a belt was a component of dignified attire, and prayer an activity requiring dignified appearance."⁷¹ Some sages modeled a luxurious dress as an expression of honor toward God and toward the act of prayer, yet this concern does not voice itself often in the writings of early Hasidim, certainly not in the writings of R. Pinchas of Korets. For example, he was known to have rejected the practice of decorating the *tallit* with an ornamental *atarah*, or special strip of material around the neck with precious metals or jewels: "His *tallit* did not have any *atarah*. He could not even stand to have the corners of his *tallit* made out of silk. [...] The entirety of his *tallit* was only wool."⁷² Although R. Pinchas preferred to have a simple *tallit*, as we shall see in the next section, the garment nevertheless played a central role in his understanding of the body during prayer.

B. Hats and Belts

While the issue of shoes and general attire are discussed at some length in similar studies of the issue of attire during prayer in other contexts, wearing hats is often omitted.⁷³

⁷¹ Ehrlich, *op. cit.*, p. 10, abstract; pp. 146-149.

⁷² *Imrei Pinchas*, 95:145:14.

⁷³ See, for example, Ehrlich, "Modes" who discusses dress and shoes but not hats.

R. Pinchas was strict about wearing two hats during prayer, or one large hat, or two yarmulkes. One of his students was strict about this practice also while learning as well as at other times.⁷⁴ Again we note how his students describe R. Pinchas during prayer: "He would pray wearing a large hat and his eyes would be focused on the *siddur*, and most of what he said he said silently (in a whisper, *b'lachash*)."⁷⁵

C. Special Garments: *Tallit* and *Tefillin*

1. *Tallit*:⁷⁶

Initially, the practice of wrapping oneself in a *tallit* was a widespread practice only of the "spiritual elite," although at that time the *tallit* resembled a sort of Roman toga which was wrapped around the entire body, including hands and legs and sometimes even the head,⁷⁷ than the prayer-shawl with which we associate it today. This practice, according to some scholars, "reflects a sense of awe as the worshipper seeks to create some separation between himself and God, who is near to him as he prays. Other scholars also suggest that wearing a *tallit* represents an attempt to imitate the practice of the angels who cover themselves with their wings before God."⁷⁸ The attempt to imitate angels with bodily gestures during prayer is also evident in the rabbis as well as the Hasidic masters' discussion of the posture

⁷⁴ *Imrei Pinchas*, 81:46.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 88:99.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 94:145:9-16. On the roots of the use and meaning of the *tallit* in Mishnaic and Talmudic literature, see Ehrlich, "Modes," pp. 152-160.

⁷⁷ Ehrlich, "Modes," p. 10, abstract.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

and position of the legs and feet during prayer.

The concern with wrapping the body, whether to bring a sense of God's presence nearer and to facilitate *devekut*, or to define the distance between God and the worshipper, attests to the fact that the Hasidim, like the rabbis, accepted the corporeal presence of the body during prayer. R. Pinchas describes the practice of wearing a *tallit* as part of the way in which a Jew demonstrates his sense of the human body in the context of the spiritual: "In the synagogue, the Jew wears a special covering, the *tallit*, in order to separate the nakedness of the body from the spiritual. Non-Jews remove their coats and hats when praying. They do not realize that the body and soul are distinct from each other."⁷⁹ Similarly he sees the way in which one wears the *tallit* as demonstrative of how he primarily relates to Torah:

Poskim (halakhic authorities) wear their *tzitzit* on top of their clothing; the *mekubalim* (Kabbalistic or Hasidic) wear their *tzitzit* underneath their clothing. One is because of the outwardness (*chitzoniut*) of the Torah and the other because of the aspect of the inwardness (*p'nimiut*) of the Torah.⁸⁰

2. Tefillin⁸¹ According to the sources available, R. Pinchas wore *tefillin* according to the tradition of Rashi. He was reticent about checking them, fearing that the process of checking could damage the parchment. Instead he preferred the practice of obtaining new boxes, or containers for the parchment which seemed better or

⁷⁹ *Nofet Tsufim*; Translation: Finkel, Avraham Yaakov, *The Great Chasidic Masters*, p. 37-38.

⁸⁰ *Likutei M'Rabi Pinchas M'korets*, 8a:64.

⁸¹ See *Imrei Pinchas*, 77ff.

more perfectly square.⁸² In contrast to his refusal to have a decorative *atarah* on his *tallit*, he nevertheless was careful to blacken the "houses" (boxes) of his *tefillin*, although this is not required according to halakha, because of *hiddur mitzvah* (the beautification of the object involved in performing a commandment).⁸³

R. Pinchas addressed each of these aspects of dress during prayer repeatedly yet he does not seem to prescribe a required dress, but rather preferred to focus on the spiritual significance of those aspects and to model his own behavior on his understanding of them. There was little -- no movement, no article of clothing, no bodily function -- related to the role of the body which escaped his attention. Because of the extent to which he commented on these aspects of the body during prayer, he could hardly have believed that one succeeded in causing it to become 'naught' as the doctrine of *avodah b'gashmiut* prescribed. Rather his understanding of the doctrine of *devekut* implies that in spite of the gravity of one's corporeality, one can achieve union with God. He, himself, modeled some unusual personal practices of how one might use one's body during prayer. His was a unique teaching of the doctrine of *devekut* which protected the tendencies of the individual in the process. He fought for the right of every individual to seek his own way of carefully moving his body across the tightrope -- without falling into an abyss by virtue of being forced to imitate the movements of another -- in order to encounter the Holy One.

⁸² *Imrei Pinchas*, 77:14.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 78:15.

Conclusion

*God is everywhere, said the Besht. In pain too? Yes, in pain too--
especially in pain. God is, and that means that God dwells in every
human being. In the unlearned too? Yes, in the unlearned too....
God can be perceived by everyone.*

*Sitting on His throne, said Rabbi Pinchas, God can be approached
both through the tears of the penitent and the fervor of the
worshipper. God is, God is one; and that means He is the same to
people who turn to Him in different ways.¹*

Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz was a unique figure among the leaders of early Hasidism. Our study demonstrates the many ways in which he contributed an independent and influential spirituality.² His unique perspective on prayer incorporated three distinctive elements: 1) one may not force the state of *devekut*, one cannot "storm Heaven;" 2) corporeality cannot be escaped, even in prayer; and 3) the individual should not necessarily imitate others in how he uses his body during prayer, nor should he be forced to do so. Rather he must find his own way of moving across the "tightrope" by which he may reach God. Each of these three ideas differentiate him from with the other major Hasidic masters of his time, in particular, from the Maggid of Mezeritch. R. Pinchas' position on *devekut* attracted the critical attention of his contemporaries. He did not believe that one must necessarily engage in violent external movements in order to achieve union with God. Others observed that he himself did not display an outward "divine thunder" while he prayed. This "inward

¹ Wiesel, *Four Hasidic Masters*, pp. 14-15.

² Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, p. 3.

yearning for God" as that which ultimately motivates man to strive for *devekut* characterizes much of R. Pinchas' writings on prayer. In contrast to other Hasidic rabbis of his time, however, he was not convinced that the deepest yearnings for God must be visible in the body's movement. He did not believe that one could "storm Heaven"³ nor is one permitted to enter God's palace before the gates are opened.

His second contribution to early Hasidism was a view of the role of the body during prayer with allowed for the common person as well as the elite to meet God. Rather than insisting on the complex spiritual practices of the Maggidic school, Pinchas, fought to maintain a standard of spiritual achievement that all could reach. He did not believe in limiting access to God's kingdom.

While he taught the concepts of self-annihilation and stripping away one's physicality in order to achieve union with God he accepted that, generally, the body remains present in prayer and should be utilized according to the needs of the individual. Rather than insisting that one must escape the reality of corporeality only through particular means, he spoke for the general admittance into the highest spheres by the means available to each individual. R. Pinchas directly confronted the paradox of the body's real presence during prayer and yet its supposed disappearance. While seeking *bittul hayesh*, he accepted the fact that most often the body nevertheless remained present. Therefore, he spoke about the body as being part of the process of prayer and never insisted on prescribed movement, believing that only the one who dwells in the body knows how it must move in order to reach the One.

³ Jacobs, *Hasidic Thought*, p. 26.

Thirdly, because each individual must ultimately reach across the abyss towards God for himself, R. Pinchas taught that one cannot learn to do this by imitating another's movements. He viewed the act of prayer as individual as precarious as an acrobat walking on a tightrope. A person at prayer is rather one who is balancing the reality of the gravity of his body with the intense desire to escape it and unite with God. R. Pinchas dwelled within this tension between the forces pulling the body in every direction, or causing it to stand still, to shout or to remain silent, and the spiritual forces, pulling one upward toward God. Given the power of this tension, he believed that it was dangerous for one to imitate another, but rather he insisted that each person find his own balance; his own way of traversing the abyss that separates him from God.

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