

HESCHEL,
HASIDISM,
and HALAKHA

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Hasidism

HESCHEL'S ROOTS were in early twentieth-century Hasidism, of whose nobility he was one of the last, and perhaps the most eminent. Within the milieu of his family, it was still possible for him to feel the glow of the fire his forefathers had kindled centuries before, the fire Hitler's legions strove to stamp out or scatter asunder. Embarrassed by the twentieth-century's inability to produce a second Heschel, it is only natural for us to be curious as to Hasidism itself. That inquiry will lead us to several surprises.

Hasidism has been described as a revival movement, and revival movements do not as a rule endure. Not so Hasidism. Emerging in eighteenth-century Eastern Europe, it has continued down to our very day even in the most unexpected of places, despite repeated warnings as to its decay and imminent collapse. Fuel was somehow found to stoke the fires from time to time, so that the waves that broke upon the Hasidim could not extinguish the light. Neither the challenge of modern science and thought of the nineteenth century, nor the Communist suppression of the twentieth—not even the Nazi onslaught with its unparalleled destruction of their communities, their leaders, and their followers—sealed their doom. Hasidism not only has survived them all, but is undergoing a considerable revival in the lands of dispersion—America, Israel, and Europe. Even Americans are coming to recognize the difference between the black costumes of the Hasidim and those of the Amish, while politicians and reporters in New York have begun including them

An earlier version of this chapter appeared as the introduction to Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism*, ed. Samuel H. Dresner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985; rev. ed. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1998), pp. vii–xiv.

in the local ethnic power groups: there are the Asians, the Hispanics, and the “Hasidics.”

American Jews who succeed in resisting the new paganism or in escaping from its clutches owe a debt of gratitude to the discovery of the spiritual riches of Hasidism, a world only recently made available to us through the efforts of Buber, Heschel, and others. It is almost axiomatic that the road leading to faith and *mitzvot* today must pass through the music, legends, teachings, and lives of the Hasidic masters.

What is the secret they possess?

The last great flowering of the Jewish spirit, Hasidism transformed the life of an eighteenth-century Polish Jewry. The shtetls in which East European Jews lived were cut off from the burgeoning worlds of philosophy, art, and commerce that were flourishing in the emancipated West. Modern man had welcomed the dawning of the new Age of Reason with trembling anticipation after having endured for so long the dark night of Faith, for central to his creed was the unshakable belief that the systematic use of man's reason would penetrate all mysteries, just as the responsible employment of freedom would mark the end of every tyranny. What could Hasidic truth, the parochial teachings of some benighted, superstitious Jews of the medieval East, possibly mean to those newly acculturated Jews of the West? What could it mean to the gentile? And what meaning can it possibly have for us of the twentieth-first century?

While it is to be regretted that Heschel's detailed monographs dealing with the circle of the Baal Shem Tov (ca. 1690–1760), the founder of the Hasidic movement, failed to lead to a full-length evaluation of the Baal Shem and his teachings, especially since Heschel's textual and historical studies were generally done not for their own sake but in order to distill the meaning of the material he researched, there are a number of scattered remarks in his notes, in his more popular writings, and in *A Passion for Truth* that point to what he wished eventually to say. Obviously, they must not be taken as his measured and scholarly view either of the movement or of the man who was its founder.

"Hasidism," Heschel writes, "was neither a sect nor a doctrine. It was a dynamic approach to reality. That was its essence. It succeeded in liquefying a frozen system of values and ideas. Everything was neatly labeled—good and evil, clean and unclean, safe and dangerous, rich and poor, *rasha'* and *tzaddik*, *mitzvah* and '*averah*, beautiful and ugly, truth and falsehood. But such a division is artificial. Life cannot be enclosed in boxes. Values are often ambiguous. What, for example, is beauty? Something in itself, or an experience born when a person who loves the beautiful discovers it? In attaching oneself to the source of all unity, the Hasid learned to bend every action to the ultimate goal. Hasidism opposed the externalization of the Maggid's preaching and the idolatry of the Talmudist's learning. It attacked the inclemency of intellectuality, the rigidity of legalism, a system of life that had become chilly. The Hasid studied the Talmud also to experience its soul, to envision worlds. Hasidism brought warmth, light, enthusiasm; it set life aflame. It was one of the great conquests of Jewish history. The admonition not to fool others was given a new turn: don't fool yourself. Truthfulness, wholeheartedness, was central. The aphorism became a mode for Hasidic thinking. The parable took on new power. Doctrines affected life and were transformed into attitudes and facts. Hasidism learned how to fight with the enemies' weapons—the evil urge (*yetzer hara'*) and joy (*simḥah*). It taught that holiness was something concrete and positive. To redeem the sparks was earthly serving. There are two ways of instilling discipline: knowledge of the Law and understanding its meaning: Halakhah and Kabbalah. At a time when the spectacular phenomenon of *lamdanut* (Talmudic learning) was praised, Hasidism stressed '*anavah* (humility), the imponderable, the inaudible. It taught reverence, enthusiasm. It taught that scholarship for its own sake could be an idol, that God is greater than sin.'"¹

"It was a time," Heschel adds, "when the Jewish imagination was nearly exhausted. The mind had reached an impasse, thinking about impossible possibilities in Talmudic law. The heart was troubled by oppressive social and eco-

nomic conditions, as well as the teachings of ascetic preachers. Then a miracle occurred. It was as if Providence had proclaimed, 'Let there be light!' And there was light—in the form of an individual: Reb Israel, son of Eliezer, Baal Shem Tov, 'Master of the Good Name.' . . .

"He was born in a small town in the province of Podolia, Okop, to poor and elderly parents. Orphaned as a child, he later eked out a living as an assistant teacher of small children. Tradition has it that at the age of twenty he went into seclusion in the Carpathian Mountains for spiritual training and preparation for his calling. There he lived for several years as a digger of clay, which his wife sold in the local town where she kept house. When he was thirty-six he revealed himself as a spiritual master. Later he settled in Mezbizh . . . where he died in 1760. . . .

"The Baal Shem Tov was the founder of the Hasidic movement, and Mezbizh was the cradle in which a new understanding of Judaism was nurtured.

"When millions of our people were still alive in Eastern Europe and their memory and faith vibrated with thought, image, and emotion, the mere mention of Reb Israel Baal Shem Tov cast a spell upon them. The moment one uttered his name, one felt as if [one's] lips were blessed and [one's] soul grew wings. . . .

"During his lifetime, Reb Israel inspired a large number of disciples to follow him. After his death his influence became even more widespread. Within a generation, the insights he formulated at Mezbizh had captivated the Jewish masses with new spiritual ideas and values. And Mezbizh became the symbol of Hasidism.

"Rarely in Jewish history has one man succeeded in uplifting so many individuals to a level of greatness. . . . No one in the long chain of charismatic figures that followed him was equal to the Baal Shem.

"Hasidism represents an enigma. It is first of all the enigma of the impact of one great man, the Besht [acronym for *Baal Shem Tov*], . . . who in a very short time was able to capture the majority of the Jewish people and to keep them under

his spell for generations. What was there about him that was not to be found in other great Jewish personalities like Maimonides or even Isaac Luria or Akiba? . . . The answers given are partly sociological, partly historical; I believe there is also a Hasidic answer to this Hasidic riddle."

Heschel explains that in the royal succession in Poland in those days (the eighteenth century) two unusual conditions prevailed: one did not become king by birth but was elected by noblemen, and even non-Poles could be candidates. So, when the king died and there would be an election, princes from faraway lands competed by sending their representatives. Each representative claimed that his candidate was the wisest, the wealthiest, the ablest. This went on for days. No decision was reached, until one noble actually brought his candidate to the people, saying: "Here, see how grand he is!" That man was elected.

"Many Jews talked about God," Heschel continued, "but it was the Besht who brought God to the people. This is perhaps the best answer to the question of how to explain the unbelievable impact of this great man in such a short time.

Reb Israel Baal Shem Tov "revealed the Divine as present even in our shabby world, in every little thing, and especially in man. He made us realize that there was nothing in man—neither limb nor movement—that did not serve as vessel or vehicle for the Divine force. No place was devoid of the Divine. He taught that the Zaddikim who grasped the bond between Creator and creature were blessed with so great a power that they were able to perform marvelous acts of mystical unification in the sphere of the Divine. Furthermore, every man in this world could work deeds that might affect the worlds above. Most important, attachment to God was possible, even while we are carrying out mundane tasks or making small talk. Thus, unlike the sages of the past, who delivered discourses about God, the Baal Shem, like the wise man in the parable, brought God to every man. . . .

"The Baal Shem brought about a radical shift in the religious outlook of Jewry. In ancient times the sanctuary in Jeru-

salem had been the holy center from which expiation and blessing radiated out to the world. But the sanctuary was in ruins, the soul of Israel in mourning. Then the Baal Shem established a new center: the Tzaddik, the Rebbe—he was to be the sanctuary. For the Baal Shem believed that a man could be the true dwelling place of the Divine. He brought about the renewal of man in Judaism.

"The Jewish people is not the same since the days of the Besht. It is a new people. Other personalities contributed great works; they left behind impressive achievements; the Besht left behind a new people. To many Jews the mere fulfillment of regulations was the essence of Jewish living. . . . The Besht taught that Jewish life is an occasion for exaltation. Observance of the Law is the basis, but exaltation through observance is the goal. . . . Other great teachers bore the message of God, sang His praises, lectured about His attributes and wondrous deeds. The Baal Shem brought not only the message; he brought God Himself to the people. His contribution, therefore, consisted of more than illumination, insights, and ideas; he helped mold into being new types of personality: the Hasid and the Tzaddik. . . . [T]he greatness of the Besht was that he was the beginning of a long series of . . . moments of inspiration. And he holds us in his spell to this very day. He who really wants to be uplifted by communing with a great person whom he can love without reservation, who can enrich his thought and imagination without end, that person can meditate about the life . . . of the Besht. There has been no one like him during the last thousand years."²

From the unique as well as fascinating analysis in the above paragraphs, it is understandable why many claim that, although he was a master of many fields of study, in none is the loss of Abraham Joshua Heschel felt more keenly than that of Hasidism. A growing number of students have begun to take seriously Martin Buber's long-denied claim that Hasidism was the most significant phenomenon in the history of religion during the past two and a half centuries. The new academic and popular interest in Hasidism has sparked a

plethora of works on the subject in Hebrew and English, and a growing number of courses are being offered in institutions of higher learning. While the "decline" of the Hasidic movement has received generous attention from scholars, the evidence of its communal and intellectual vitality is only now beginning to receive a hearing. If it is not on the same exalted level as it was in its first three generations, the movement has nevertheless continued with unabated vigor, regularly producing a formidable series of leaders and a constantly growing, if uneven, literature. Despite early separatist tendencies, Hasidism returned to (and was admitted by) the official Jewish community, while in the second half of the twentieth century—even after the Holocaust—it has shown itself capable of taking root in the democratic societies of the West. Consider, for example, the fact that a disproportionate number of Jews who have made signal contributions to contemporary culture—Agnon in literature, Chagall in art, and Buber and Heschel in philosophy—emerged from a Hasidic milieu. All this, if touched on by publicists, has by and large been ignored by scholars.³ Heschel, whose studies on Maimonides and Abravanel demonstrated his understanding of the Spanish epoch, argued that the "golden period" of Jewish history was not in Spain but in Eastern Europe. For him the acme of Eastern European Jewry was Hasidism, the high point of post-Talmudic Jewish history.

While Heschel's specifically Hasidic studies are confined to the essays in *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, and to the monumental work on Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, his other writings often reflect Hasidic sources and insights. Indeed, the more familiar one becomes with Hasidic literature, the more one understands how Heschel drew upon these sources. The influence of Hasidism is reflected in Heschel's contributions to the understanding of the phenomenology of prophecy and of *ruah hakodesh* (the holy spirit). There are, for example, clear echoes of Hasidic concepts and concerns in Heschel's excursions upon the Sabbath as a bride, upon "divine pathos," the "ineffable," "radical amazement," the illusion of God's absence, the "holy di-

mension" of all reality, the "primacy of inwardness," the criticism of "panhalachism," the centrality of prayer, the "dignity of words," and the "endless yearning." Some of the section headings in *Man Is Not Alone* might, in fact, be transposed to a book on Hasidic philosophy. In the final chapter of his work on Maimonides, where he described the great philosopher's last years when he abandoned his scholarly undertakings for a life of *imitatio Dei*, one catches a reflection of the zaddik for whom "living" Torah is more important than "writing" Torah.⁴

THE STATE OF HASIDIC RESEARCH

To understand Heschel as a scholar of Hasidism, it would be helpful to review the general state of Hasidic research. One might describe it as both problematic and promising.

Hasidic research is problematic, because so little was done in the past that was of lasting value and upon which one could build. Anti-Hasidic prejudice in the West kept many students from contributing to the field and rendered the work of others ineffective. With the absence, until recently, of university-level courses in Hasidism and professorships, fellowships, or research grants, few were encouraged to enter a field with so bleak a future. Earlier studies can be characterized either by over-enthusiasm or by lack of sensitivity. Hasidism was either romanticized or maligned. The absence of a balanced approach to the subject has been a major obstacle. New movements are bound to engender advocates and critics. Hasidism, because of its nature and its claims, aroused a storm of controversy. Fervor characterized both its proponents and its enemies. Attack was followed by counterattack, forgery by counter-forgery. The burning of books, excommunications, and courting the interference of government authorities were the order of the day. In time, though matters quieted down—partly because the Hasidic movement had grown so powerful that it had to be received back into the community—much of the literature remained impas-

sioned, extreme, and bitter. As a result, the contemporary scholar has at his disposal a minimum of evenhanded and well-informed studies congruent with Hasidism's depth and breadth. In 1952 Heschel observed that

in the field of Jewish scholarship there are few subjects about which so much has been written in so dilettantish a manner as the history of Hasidism. Few researchers have followed the fine example set by Eliezer Tzvi Hakohen Zweifel with his work *Shalom 'al Yisra'el* (Zhitomir, 1868–69). . . . Samuel Abba Horodezky's important monographs did not concern themselves sufficiently with details. Dubnow, in his noteworthy *History of Hasidism*, paid more attention to the opponents of Hasidism, the Mitnagdim, than to Hasidism itself. . . .⁵

The lack of surviving documents is a second obstacle to a proper understanding of the movement. Referring to the post-Holocaust situation, Heschel noted in the same article that "we remain unsure of thousands of simple facts: biographical dates, bibliographic details, identification of names, etc. This sorry state of affairs is due in part to the fact that research on Hasidism suffers from a dearth of documents."⁶ Although Heschel was writing about the post-Holocaust condition, such a vacuum had, in fact, long prevailed in the great Jewish libraries of Western Europe and America, upon which most historical research on Judaism was dependent. The author of the major work on Shabbetai Tzvi observed to me that it was easier to write a study on that subject than on some noted Hasidic figure, for while Sabbatean manuscripts were being avidly collected by the Jewish librarians of the West, who considered them bizarre testimony of a movement long dead, Hasidic documents, even the most valuable, though readily accessible—Hasidism, after all, was a living, challenging phenomenon—were virtually ignored as worthless.⁷ The librarians followed the example of their doyen, Moritz Steinschneider, the master bibliographer who insatiably ransacked every nook and cranny in search of Hebrew manuscripts, but freely admitted that he knew next to nothing about Hasidic literature. Sabbateanism, though

heretical, was after all a curiosity, while Hasidism was a contemporary calamity, a "malady of Judaism."⁸

A case in point is Elkan Adler, the noted English barrister, book collector, and son of the former chief rabbi. While his anti-Hasidism seems a somewhat gentler British version, it no doubt played a role in what he felt was of value to collect. The description he gives in his travel book of "Hasidic" joy on Simhat Torah around the turn of the century in Jerusalem includes seeing himself as

Gulliver among the Brobdingnagians, when the monkeys patronized him. . . . If the tune of the Chassidim is funny . . . a Chassidish howl, . . . [and] the harmonization rather like a Chassid's nightmare after a heavy supper of Beethoven! . . . the manner in which they make the Hakafoth, or circuits of the Synagogue, during the Rejoicing of the law, is funnier still. It was comical and shocking to see venerable gray beards pirouetting on their toes like some European fairy of the pantomime, but it was highly appreciated, and I had to simulate satisfaction for fear of being rebuked, as Michal was when she objected to King David's "dancing with all his might."⁹

An unusual combination of Jewish knowledge and aristocratic wealth, Adler literally scoured the earth in search of rare Hebrew books. He managed to collect manuscripts at the rate of about one hundred a year and to visit each of the continents, except Australia, half a dozen times or so in search of them.¹⁰ Yet the important catalogue of his manuscripts, which represents a significant part of the collection of its present owner, the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, reveals hardly a single Hasidic work.

Another problem in Hasidic research is the separation, by predilection or circumstance, between some Hasidic scholarship and familiarity with Hasidic life. In other disciplines, such disjuncture may not have serious consequences. The essence of Hasidism, however, was the living reality of which the written word, impressive and vast as it is, is often not an adequate reflection. Hasidism was more than the philosophy that could be distilled from its classics. It was a cer-

tain style of life. With the demise of Eastern European Jewry, the living tradition was severely attenuated. Heschel writes:

Whoever attempts to describe Hasidism on the basis of literary sources alone without drawing upon the oral tradition ignores the authentic living source and is dependent upon material artificial in character. In the absence of the oral tradition and a proximity to Hasidic personages, one can scarcely describe Hasidism. Its essence was rarely expressed in writing, and what was written down was translated into Hebrew in a style that seldom captured the living tongue of the masters.

Hasidic literature is a literature of translation, and not always successful translation. In order to understand Hasidism one must learn how to listen and how to stand close to those who lived it.¹¹

And again:

[It] is a tragedy that this great movement is essentially an oral movement, one that cannot be preserved in written form. It is ultimately a living movement. It is not contained fully in any of its books. . . . [In] other words, Hasidism has a very personal dimension. . . . To be a Hasid is to be in love with God and with what God has created. Once you are in love you are a different human being. . . . That is the history of Hasidism. Indeed, he who has never been in love will not understand and may consider it a madness. That is why there is so much opposition to Hasidism, more than we are willing to admit.¹²

Some modern scholars, not familiar or sympathetic with Hasidic life, may be limited almost exclusively to its literature and by necessity approach their subject like astronomers, biologists, . . . or tourists.

Hasidic literature itself, finally, is intrinsically difficult to penetrate. It is enigmatic, terse, usually the work of a disciple transcribing the words of his master, often written in a poor Hebrew that is nothing more than a translation of the original spoken Yiddish,¹³ characterized by allusions to kabbalistic formulae, and presupposing a knowledge of the rabbinical texts. The writings of Hasidism, though filled with brilliant

insights and profound exposition, present a formidable obstacle to the student. One need only observe that although Hasidic literature numbers about three thousand items, we lack a bibliography, an adequate study of its nature and extent, a comprehensive, quality anthology, and a critical edition of and commentary to even a handful of its classic texts.¹⁴

In a little-known article,¹⁵ Heschel once suggested that the attitude toward Hasidism of the *Wissenschaft* scholars of the West was yet another example of their wholesale rejection of the Ashkenazic tradition in favor of the supposedly more liberal, "cultured," and decorous Sephardic mode. To demonstrate his point, he included one of his rare references to contemporary writers:

In the modern period, its [the Sephardic] influence permeated other Jewish groups, especially in Germany. It was the admiration of the 19th-century German Jewish scholars for the Sephardic Middle Ages that determined the mood of the modern "Science of Judaism" (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*).

The scholars of emancipated German Jewry saw in the Spanish period the "Golden Age" of Jewish history, and celebrated it as a happy blend of progress and traditionalism upon which they desired to model their own course. In their research they went to the point of applying the cultural standards of the "Golden Age" to the literature of later centuries. For some Jewish scholars, any Jewish literature dating after 1492, the year in which Jewish life in Spain ceased, was not considered worthy of scholarly investigation. Their example was followed in forming the curricula of the higher schools of Jewish learning, which gave no place to works written after 1492 and before the beginning of modern Hebrew literature.

This desire for inner identification with the Spanish Jewish period reflected itself in the synagogue architecture of the 19th century. Liberal Jewish synagogues in Central Europe were built in the Moorish style as if the stucco arabesque, horseshoe arches, and dados of glazed and painted tiles were the aptest possible expressions of the liberal Jew's religious mood.

Hand in hand with the romantic admiration of the Sephar-

dim that became one of the motifs of Reform Judaism in Germany went social aspirations, too. The social standing of the few Sephardim in Germany was superior to that of the Ashkenazim, and the leaders of the new Reform movement, anxious to develop a new and more advanced way of Jewish life that would abandon the traditional forms still adhered to by the Jewish masses, often blatantly imitated the manners of the Sephardim. In the Portuguese synagogues they found that solemnity and decorum which they missed in the old *shul*. It was hardly for scientific reasons that the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew was introduced in the early "temples." . . .

[T]he modern Ashkenazic Jew, particularly in Central Europe, often came to lose his appreciation of the value of his own original way of life. He developed an embarrassed aversion for the dramatic, for the moving and vivid style, whether in the synagogue or in human relations. For him dignity grew to mean something to be achieved by strict adherence to an established, well-balanced, mannerly form undisturbed by any eruption of the sudden and spontaneous. Thus Hermann Cohen wrote in 1916 that the elimination of the dramatic manner from the worship of East European Jews would turn the synagogues into "seats of true culture."

This lack of understanding for and alienation from the values of the Ashkenazic traditions became complete. Describing the way in which the Hasidim prayed, a prominent Jewish historian, in a work first published in 1913 and reprinted in 1931, could write:

"The [Hasidic] movement did not signify a gain for religious life; the asset that lay in its striving for inwardness was more than cancelled out by the preposterousness of its superstitious notions and of its unruly behavior. . . . According to its principles, Hasidism meant a total revolt against the divine service [sic!]; nothing could have made the untenability of the latter more striking than the fact that great numbers of people should turn away from it, not out of scepticism or doubt, but out of a most intense yearning for piety. . . . Hasidism contributed to the deterioration rather than to the improvement of the divine service. . . . its noise and wild, restless movements brought new factors of disturbance. . . . It is no wonder that at such a time complaints were made about the lack of devoutness and attention, about the disorder and inter-

ruptions. The divine service stood in need of a thorough renovation and restoration if it was to survive. The modern age [read: the Reform movement —A.J.H.] supplied both."

The book Heschel referred to is *Der jüdische Gottesdienst*, the standard work on Jewish liturgy, by Ismar Elbogen, his former teacher at the Liberal rabbinical school in Berlin and one of the leading figures in *die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the movement for the scientific study of Judaism).¹⁶ Other expressions of this point of view have not been uncommon. For example, according to the system of organization of one of the standard library catalogues for Judaica, "Hasidism" is listed under the rubric "sects," along with the Essenes, the Karaites, and the Samaritans.¹⁷ As early as 1887, perhaps the most distinguished figure associated with the development of American Jewish scholarship, Solomon Schechter, published a sympathetic article on Hasidism in English ("The Chassidim," first read before the Jews College Literary Society, November 13, 1887, later printed in the *Jewish Chronicle*, and reprinted in his *Studies in Judaism*).¹⁸ Virtually none on this continent were to emulate him. Among the more than seventy volumes of the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, the more than forty volumes of the *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, and the more than fifty volumes of the *Hebrew Union College Annual*, only a handful of articles relating to Hasidism have appeared—and these, more often, to anti-Hasidism!¹⁹ It would be fair to conclude that the approach to Hasidism of *die Wissenschaft des Judentums* was perpetuated, until most recently, by its American advocates.

But if the state of Hasidic scholarship is problematic, it is also promising. Much has occurred since Heschel made his critical observations. In both Israel and the Diaspora, an entire battery of scholars, too many to name, have emerged, producing a veritable barrage of books and studies, some of great value, including the tracing of kabbalistic origins, philosophical analyses, and historical studies such as the unearthing of Polish documents of the time. The flood of new scholarship stems primarily from the school of Gershom

Scholem and reflects both the insights and the limitations of its mentor.

Several reasons might be suggested for this elevated interest in Hasidism. One reason is spiritual. It has to do with what Daniel Bell has called the "exhaustion of modernity," that is, the failure first of technology and then of "culture" (literature—art—music) as substitutes for religion. After several centuries in which "natural" man has explored the secular kingdom in a failed search for redemption, there has been unlocked a receptivity to the sacred dimension of reality, accounting, in some measure, for the new attentiveness to the Hasidic movement. A second reason is historical. The catastrophic end of a thousand years of Eastern European Jewish communal life has stimulated considerable effort to document and understand what was previously taken for granted and, consequently, in good measure, overlooked. Studies on Hasidism, formerly so scant, are today considered of sufficient interest to warrant their publication in major scholarly journals.

Formerly, no courses in Hasidism had been offered at American institutions of higher learning, even Jewish institutions; today, the number rises each year, as does the number of doctoral dissertations on or related to Hasidism. One noteworthy early product of the new research was the publication of the first critical edition of a classic Hasidic work with full commentary.²⁰ Out-of-print volumes have been photocopied, or newly set, some with helpful indices. Whole batteries of books have appeared, both scientific and pietistic, while research into Hasidism has become so formidable an undertaking that staid academies dare not ignore it. Scholarship of every stripe endeavors to plumb its depths and sift the ashes. Hasidic study has become a veritable industry. Still we do not have a reliable history of the movement or an introduction to its ideas.

Heschel's warnings remain. Most documents have vanished forever. The oral tradition is no longer verifiable. And the authentic living reality of Hasidism is questionable. Though Hasidism itself is remarkably vital, the Holocaust

experience has driven Hasidism to an extremism which early became a feature of the movement, serving to further obscure its former greatness. One strains to find in post-Holocaust Hasidism either the Besht's heart or the Kotzker's head; it exhibits less of the spirit of Levi Yitzhak (known for his love for all Israel) and more of Satmar (Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, d. 1979, known for his narrow zealotry). Finally, the stress upon magic, mysticism, and gender, while legitimate subjects for inquiry, minimizes what Heschel considered the essence of the movement: its social and communal reality, its style of life. Heschel's belief that Hasidism was the most vital aspect of modern Judaism—part of what he called "the golden period of Jewish history"²¹—as well as his conviction that Hasidism must play a central role for any renewal of Judaism today, have proved substantially correct.

BUBER AND SCHOLEM

Among the few scholars of the West who repudiated the outlook of *jüdische Wissenschaft* and contributed to a reawakening of interest in Hasidism were Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem. Their motives were only partly the same.

Buber opposed *jüdische Wissenschaft's* stress on rationalism, philology, and positivism and its pursuit of a historiography "which sees the past as a meaningless 'promiscuous agglomeration of happenings,'" thus fragmenting "Jewish history into many tiny problems."²² Scholem understood *jüdische Wissenschaft* as the "academic mortician" of Judaism. Referring to the polemical purposes of the Western scholars who, in the throes of emancipation, were embarrassed by and sought to dismiss the unpleasant evidence of mysticism in Judaism, he wrote:

Factors that have been emphasized and were considered positive from the world-view of assimilation and self-justification now require an entirely new analysis in order to determine what their actual role was in the development of the nation. Factors that were denigrated will appear in a different, more

positive light from this point of view. . . . It is possible that what was termed degeneracy will be thought of as a revelation and light and what seemed to [nineteenth-century historians] will be revealed as a great living myth . . . not the washing and mummification of the dead, but the discovery of hidden life by removal of the obfuscating masks.²³

Although both Buber and Scholem were agreed in their rejection of the apologetic-rationalist-philological approach of *die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the two were to follow different directions in their work. A reading of their controversy on the proper post-*Wissenschaft* approach to Hasidism is of considerable interest; for my purposes, moreover, the two approaches help to provide a context within which to view the contributions of Abraham Joshua Heschel.²⁴

Toward the beginning of the century, Buber, through his lyric German rendition of the Hasidic tale, brought the startling message of Hasidism to the Western Jew and to the gentile. He was only the best-known figure of the neo-Hasidic revival which included such writers as Berdichevsky, Peretz, Horodetzky, and Y. Steinberg, most of whom were nationalists or members of the intelligentsia, rebelling against the traditional pattern of Jewish study.

Gershom Scholem and his school repudiated not only *jüdische Wissenschaft* but neo-Hasidism as well, particularly Martin Buber's understanding of Hasidism. They pointed to his preference for Hasidic legend over the discursive writings as well as his penchant for exposition which emphasized mysticism or existential "decision" at the expense of the real meaning of the text and the centrality of tradition. Though Scholem would not have gone as far as Hurwitz, who attacked neo-Hasidism for "searching for pearls in piles of garbage," he did adopt almost all of Hurwitz's "critique of Hasidism as a quietistic movement" and of Sabbateanism as a model of historical vitality.²⁵ He acknowledged Buber's contribution as a groundbreaking effort, but argued that it glossed over the less attractive aspects of Hasidism and was self-serving and overly selective in its emphasis. As Buber's general thinking moved from mysticism to existentialism, so

did his understanding of Hasidism. Thus, during the first phase, before World War I, he dealt with the "ecstatic quality" of Hasidism. Later, he emphasized Hasidism's "hallowing of the everyday" and its concern for the "concrete here and now."

The approach of the dominant Scholem school is no less problematic. Scholem credited the period of Shabbetai Tzvi as the watershed of modern Jewish history. He viewed the false messiah as a liberator who broke the millennial rabbinic hegemony and thereby facilitated, in greater or lesser measure, the emergence of such movements as Haskalah, Zionism, Reform, and Hasidism. For Scholem, "pluralism" replaced "normative" as the key word in the new Jewish historiography, providing, alongside Halakhah and philosophy, a place for mysticism, and even such undercurrents as antinomianism.²⁶

While contributing significantly to the understanding of the Hasidic text, both as to its historical authenticity and as to its relation to the older Kabbalah, the Scholem school betrays at times its own selective weakness for the gnostic, the quietistic, and the supposedly Sabbatean elements in the literature of Hasidism. Critics have made their points. R. J. Z. Werblowsky sees Scholem's attempt to raise Sabbateanism to the level of rabbinic Judaism as a dangerous misreading of Jewish history; Kurzweil questions Scholem's historical objectivity in view of the latter's anarchical emphasis on the irrational in contrast to the halakhic and rational elements in Judaism; Jacob Katz is doubtful whether historical sources support a causal relationship between Sabbateanism and modern Jewish movements;²⁷ while M. Piekarczyk argues that numerous Hasidic statements, which Scholem traces to Sabbatean texts, merely share a common source in earlier classic Musar works such as *Sheney Luhot Habrit* and *Re'shit Hokhmah*.²⁸

Die Wissenschaft des Judentums, because of its stress on polemics and rationalism, either ignored or demeaned Hasidism. Buber, the foremost representative of the neo-Hasidic revival, while cultivating the tale and showing the contem-

porary relevance of several of the central Hasidic themes, can be faulted for often interpreting Hasidism in terms of his personal philosophy, whether mystical or existential. Scholem, who opened modern Jewish historiography to the dimension of the mystical and the mythical, tended to overlook the moral and the enduring religious message of Hasidism, by virtue of his concentration on the kabbalistic and the Sabbatean, as well as his distance from Hasidic life itself.

Both Buber and Scholem rejected Jewish tradition as a pattern for their personal lives, and both pursued theories that support their own positions. Buber's central emphasis on Hasidism was upon the existential decision. (A favorite tale of his is about the master who asked his disciples, "What is the most important thing in the world?" One answers, "the Sabbath"; another "prayer"; a third, "Yom Kippur." "No," the master explains, "the most important thing is whatever you are doing at the moment!") Neither was familiar with authentic Hasidic life.

Buber as a religious anarchist rejected the notion of an authoritative revelation and historical tradition. Out of hostility toward both orthodox halakhic Judaism and rational Jewish philosophy, Buber rejected the burden of tradition and created his counterhistory by a subjective, mythopoeic "act of decision."²⁹ Scholem also labels himself a religious anarchist, but . . . he means something quite different from Buber. Scholem . . . argued that Judaism actually consists of an anarchistic plurality of sources. . . . When Scholem calls himself a religious anarchist, he means that the historical tradition, which is the only source of knowledge we have of revelation, contains no one authoritative voice. All that can be learned from the study of history is the *struggle* for absolute values among conflicting voices of authority. Scholem is an anarchist because he believes "the binding character of the Revelation for a collective has disappeared. The word of God no longer serves as a source for the definition of possible contents of a religious tradition and thus of a possible theology."³⁰

Both Buber's emphasis on mysticism and/or existential decision in Hasidism and Scholem's search for Sabbatean influences reflect antinomian sympathies.

HESCHEL AS A SCHOLAR OF HASIDISM

For Heschel, Hasidism was not romanticism, not rebellion, not an affirmation of Orthodoxy. He could not be labeled a neo-Hasid, though he forsook the Hasidic enclave for the broader Western society; nor did he find Hasidism shot through with Sabbatean elements, though he was well aware of the origins and history of the movement. Indeed, in his understanding of Hasidism, Heschel had no peer. His grasp of the entire range of Jewish literature—biblical, rabbinic, philosophic, and mystical—enabled him to discern in what sense Hasidic writings were a continuation of or a departure from the past, where they were original, what elements of earlier Jewish thought they accepted or rejected, and what problems they attempted to address. Philosophically, he was able to place Hasidism within a wider spiritual context; historically, he sought to gather those bits of evidence that, properly evaluated and pieced together, might reveal a hitherto unknown aspect of a personality or an event. Heschel's mastery of Hasidic texts themselves was such that, when works were cited during discussions, he usually had no need to see the printed volume to quote from it extensively. Heschel's control of the material was joined by highly disciplined study habits.

An example of his phenomenal memory is apropos. A most rare Hasidic book once came into my possession. Delighted, I was off the next morning to show it to the leading dealer in Hasidic books, who promptly offered me a goodly sum for it; from there I went to the principal Hasidic bibliographer, who wanted to photocopy it; late in the afternoon I arrived with my treasure at Heschel's study. He told me to sit down, read the small volume in about twenty minutes, and returned it to me. None of the three had ever seen the book before: one wanted to buy it, another wanted to copy it; Heschel simply memorized it!

Despite the fact that Hasidic literature is characterized by considerable shortcomings, which I have already alluded to, the effect of the publication and dissemination of the early

Hasidic writings was like a series of thunderbolts that shattered as well as enlightened. Of those who read these treatises, few remained unmoved, some becoming angry critics of the new movement, others fervent followers. So avidly did the devotees pore over these books in the years that followed that they virtually devoured them, and soon a first edition in good condition could hardly be found. Hasidic literature was, and was meant to be, evocative as well as cognitive, addressing the soul and the mind at once. The "word," so central to the entire Hasidic enterprise, was, in its written form, says Heschel, "a voice, not a mere idea." To him, whose approach to Hasidism was never that of pure research, the task of the present student of this literature becomes, therefore, "how to hear the voice through the words." Heschel's trenchant observations are contained in his preface to my study of Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, author of the first and, in some ways, still the most significant Hasidic book:

The Holy of Holies in the Temple at Jerusalem was a place which only the High Priest was allowed to enter once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Now, even the Holy of Holies was occasionally in need of repair. To provide for such an occasion, there were openings in the Upper Chamber leading [down] through the ceiling of the Holy of Holies and close to its walls. Through these openings they used to lower the workmen in boxes (*Teivot*), which were open only to the walls, "so that they should not feast their eyes on the Holy of Holies.

It is said that the Upper Chamber of the Holy of Holies was even less accessible than the Holy of Holies, for the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year, whereas the Upper Chamber was entered only once in fifty years to see whether any repairs were required.

The great Hasidim were the repair men of the Holy of Holies. In Hebrew *teivot* means both boxes and *words*. It was through the word that they entered the Holy of Holies. In the Hasidic movement the spirit was alive in the word. It was a voice, not a mere idea. It emanated in words that had the power to repair, to revive, to create.

Judaism today is in need of repair. The spirit is stifled, the word is emaciated; we do not know how to find access to the "Upper Chamber."

Hasidism withers when placed on exhibition. Its substance is not perceptible to the eye. It is not enough to read its written word; one must hear it, one must learn to be perceptive to the voice. Fortunately there are words in many of its records which still ring with the passion and enthusiasm of those who spoke them. The problem is how to hear the voice through the words.

Neither the Baal Shem nor most of his disciples have written down their utterances. One of the very few who did write was Rabbi Yaakov Yosef. The surprise, the joy, the refreshment which the publication of his books brought to the Jewish world are quite understandable to those who are acquainted with the spiritual atmosphere of the eighteenth century. It was like questioning the Ptolemaic theory in the time of Copernicus. These books offered a transvaluation of accepted values, a fresh vision of what is at stake in Jewish faith and existence, and a singular sensitivity for the divine. These are words that originated in Paradise, said one of his contemporaries. In other books one must read many pages until the presence of God is sensed; in the writings of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef, God's presence is felt on each page.³¹

Heschel's Hasidic understanding went beyond books. He was intimately familiar with Hasidism as a living phenomenon, was privy to the legacy of tradition handed down from several of the most eminent Hasidic dynasties because of his early upbringing and continued association, and had remarkable sensitivity to the core of Hasidic authenticity as it was transmitted from generation to generation. Without acquaintance with the oral tradition of the movement, and with Hasidism as a living phenomenon, Hasidic scholarship, in Heschel's opinion, faces a major obstacle, which the demise of East European Jewry only serves to emphasize. His published views on this central issue revolve around the preparation of his last major work, the powerful two-volume Yiddish study on Rabbi Menahem Mendl of Kotzk.

Why, in his waning years, Heschel determined to write his

one major Hasidic work on the later master of Kotzk rather than the movement's founder, the Baal Shem Tov, whose life and thought had occupied him for decades, Heschel never told us. Perhaps the formidable problems which the paucity of historical sources presented for a comprehensive work on the Baal Shem—the need to collect, collate, and interpret scattered hints and pieces of information to establish dates, names, and places, comparing different versions of manuscripts and/or early prints, as well as contending with numerous other conflicting theories which would have to be presented and refuted—constituted too wearying a project for the final years of his life. A book on the Kotzker rebbe, on the other hand, whose teachings he had grappled with since youth, partly internalized, partly rejected, but was always enthralled by, might almost write itself.

Whether or not this explanation as to the subject of his final major study satisfies our curiosity, there is a second problem about the language of the study that Heschel himself answers: namely, why he wrote his book on Kotzk in Yiddish. Surely, he knew that to do so was to limit severely the work's future readership and that either English or Hebrew would have been preferable from the point of view of the future use of the book. In his explanation that he resolved to use Yiddish as the language of the work in order to preserve the authentic legacy of Kotzk, a literary monument of the highest order, Heschel's understanding of the relationship between the oral tradition and Hasidic scholarship comes to the fore:

The words of the Kotzker Rebbe have simmered within me all my life. Even when [I was] not in agreement, I felt their powerful thrust. Though my way has not been without hardship, when I thought of the Kotzker Rebbe everything difficult became easier. Rabbi Mendl occupied himself with problems that, though we may not always be aware of them, disturb us to this very day. The answers he proposed may be hard for modern man to accept, but his perception was revolutionary, his impact shattering. Whoever is for but an hour in the presence of the Kotzker will never again give way to smugness.

One of the qualities of the Kotzker Rebbe was a marvelous gift in formulating his thoughts in a tense, sharp, and brilliant manner. Reading those of his aphorisms that have been preserved in the distinctive manner in which they were uttered, that is, in Yiddish, reveals an extraordinary style and power. Unfortunately, those who published Rabbi Mendl's words translated them into Hebrew, for seldom in Jewish history has the talent for conversion into felicitous Hebrew been so lacking as among those learned Jewish circles in Poland of the last century. Consequently, a number of his sayings . . . are garbled. That I understand them despite their ambiguous Hebrew formulation is due to the fact that in my youth I heard many of these aphorisms in their original Yiddish. It was my good fortune to have known Rabbi Ben Tzion and Rabbi Moses Judah, who had visited Rabbi Mendl, as well as a large number of Hasidim who were thoroughly imbued with the way of the Kotzk. From them I learned many of the aphorisms which I cite in this book. . . .

Some oral statements have survived which are more correct than their literary form. While the oral tradition preserved what was spoken by the rabbis, the literary text conveys them only as they were translated into Hebrew. One who has been close to Hasidic life knows with what reverence the words of the Masters were transmitted after they were "heard." One literally lived with them, was nourished by them: every effort was taken to transmit such words accurately.

When he was surrounded by so many great scholars, why did none of them write down Rabbi Mendel's words, as students of other tzaddikim had? The Kotzker himself asked his disciple, Rabbi Yehiel Meir, to record his teachings, but he did not. In my opinion it was because of an unwillingness to do so in Yiddish. The words Rabbi Mendl spoke in Yiddish were not easily rendered into Hebrew. To translate them exactly was not possible, while to record them in Yiddish was not acceptable. Thus Kotzk remained an oral tradition. . . . What I have written in this book about the Kotzker, whether his personality or his way, reflects the tradition of Kotzker Hasidim. . . .³²

It has been suggested that the low estimate in which Hasidism was formerly held in the scholarly circles within which

Heschel was attempting to establish himself may have encouraged him in his early years to omit all but the most necessary references to Hasidic material in support of his theories. The tragic end of Eastern European Jewry, however, brought new affirmation for what it had produced. This, together with the growing acceptance of Heschel's own works, encouraged him to make more open use of Hasidic literature. It is of interest that Heschel's first book in 1933, *Der Shem Hameforash: Mentsh* (Man: The Ineffable Name of God), a youthful volume of Yiddish poetry, was not listed in the initial bibliography of his works, which appeared in 1959, but is present in the updated 1965 version.³³

Heschel observed privately more than once that "after the Holocaust, Jewish scholarship should be devoted to that which advances Yiddishkeit." He was warning that in the terribly weakened position in which Jews found themselves then, with the demise of the great centers of Jewish authority and guidance and with their very survival at stake, they dared not expend their limited resources on hairsplitting studies or concentrating on the exposure of the unseemly side of Jewish life. Heschel was speaking to a situation in which some Jewish scholars were content to edit texts, collect footnotes, and frown upon ideas, questioning, for instance, whether there was such a thing as Jewish theology, while others explored the Jewish "underworld," dwelling upon forgeries and heresies.³⁴ Heschel preferred to devote himself, in a series of seminal works, to delineating wide areas of Jewish creativity—biblical, rabbinic, medieval, and Hasidic. Even his popular survey of Eastern European Jewry, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, which reflects the enduring values of a thousand years of Ashkenazic Jewry, stands in marked contrast to others' explorations of the occasionally insipid, bizarre, and ribald. If Heschel may be faulted, it is in his tendency toward Hasidic apologetics and his preference to stay clear of the ignoble and dark features that are inevitable in a world that included millions. To limit Jewish research in any way, however praiseworthy the motive, may result in an incomplete view of the subject. The reader and the student must submit

the final verdict as to the relative reliability of those who sought, for whatever reasons, to portray a different and often more negative picture than Heschel did.

EXPECTATIONS, MENTORS, AND THE WEST

From Heschel's childhood on, there were Hasidic leaders who looked to him as one with unique promise for renewing Hasidic life. That was not to be, at least not in the way that they had hoped. Descended from Hasidic royalty on both his father's and his mother's side, young Heschel had talents that were recognized early, and though he was only a child of nine at the time of his father's death, the Hasidim began to bring him *kevitlekh* (petitions) and treat him as their rebbe. "We thought," said the rebbe of Kopyczynce (Kopitchinitz), a cousin and brother-in-law, "that he would be the Levi Yitzhak of our generation and rekindle Hasidism." A byword after his departure was that "had Heschel become a rebbe, all the other rebbes would have lost their Hasidim."³⁵ While his education had always been directed with special care in the selection of his teachers, even more attention was now paid in view of his promise, and it was during this period of his life that the influence of the remarkable Kotzker Hasid, Reb Bezalel, his teacher from the age of nine to twelve and a half (described by Heschel's childhood friend, Yehiel Hofer, the writer), was most keenly felt.

But awareness of the worlds "outside" was stirring, and the young Heschel did not accede to the wishes of the Hasidim. His curiosity was too consuming to ignore what lay beyond the narrow borders of the Jewish society of piety and learning of his ancestors in which he had been raised. Hofer relates how, at the age of seven or eight, Heschel once surprised him by compiling a detailed catalogue of the bolts of cloth that were piled in high columns in Hofer's father's millinery store, giving such information as color, material, quantity, price, etc., as an example of how Heschel insisted on mastering whatever new phenomenon drew his atten-

tion. Heschel's interest in secular studies must have begun in his teens. His decision to leave Warsaw for Berlin, by way of Vilna, to gain a secular education was received with trepidation. His mother, an unusual woman, clever and strong, who maintained their *shetibl* (the Hasidic house of prayer) after her husband's death and appreciated her son's gifts, noticed, when he was about fifteen, that she no longer heard him chanting the Talmud from his room, for he was now engaged in learning Polish, and she inquired why. He told her of his plan, and she communicated her concerns to the family in Vienna and Warsaw. A meeting of the family in Vienna was called by the Tchortkover Rebbe,³⁶ which Heschel may have attended. His mother's brother, the Novominsker Rebbe of Warsaw, at whose table Heschel grew up and one of the most powerful influences upon his life, tried to dissuade him, and agreed only when he saw that it was to no avail. "You can go," he finally told Heschel, "but *only* you." It was on a Saturday night after the close of the Sabbath that, having changed his Shabbos hat for an ordinary weekday cap, and accompanied by his cousin, a son of the Novominsker Rabbi, Heschel left Warsaw.

Just before the young Heschel was to depart his ancestral home in Poland for the secular society of the West, an old Hasid came to bid him farewell. Following the admonition that one should take leave with a word of Torah, the Hasid quoted the Mishnah (Avot 5:8) that cites, as "one of the ten miracles of the Temple in Jerusalem," that, no matter what the provocation, "the holy flesh [of the sacrifice] never became polluted." Then he told how Rabbi Barukh of Miedzybórz (Mezbizh) explained the passage: "One of the most wondrous miracles was, indeed, *lo' hisriaḥ besar kodesh mey'-olam*, which is to say, 'the holy flesh'—that is, the people Israel—did not become polluted—*mey'-olam—from the world.*"

"Avraham," the old Hasid concluded, taking him by the shoulders, "remember the word of Rabbi Barukh. *Lo' hisriaḥ besar kodesh mey'-olam*. You, Avraham, you holy flesh, do not become polluted from the world!"

The Novominsker Rebbe, mentioned above, is important

for another reason. One of Heschel's major contributions as a religious thinker was his analysis of piety. He was a phenomenologist. He held that discursive reason, while essential, was, alone, inadequate to penetrate the inner recesses of religion. This could better be achieved through a description of the religious phenomena themselves, which, much as the artist's canvas, would have the power to evoke another level of comprehension. In composing his definitive picture of Jewish piety, Heschel drew from the lives and writings of holy men of the past, as well as from his own personal experience, but equally important were those he had known in his youth. One whom he identified to me as his principal model was the rabbi of Minsk Mazowiesk (Novominsk).

Rabbi Alter (a name added for long life) Israel Simon (after his grandfather) Perlow (1874–1933) was Heschel's mother's twin. The Novominsker's grandfather was a son-in-law of Rabbi Shlomo Hayim of Kedainai (Kaidenov), in the line of Mordecai of Nezkhezhtsh and Shlomo of Karlin, in White Russia, situated between Minsk and Vilna. It was there that the family lived. The Lithuanian stress on the study of Talmud lent a special tone to their Hasidism and had its effect on the young Heschel, whose Talmudic prowess was remembered. The father of the Novominsker, Jacob (1847–1902), was advised to "bring his type of Hasidism to Poland," and settled in Minsk Mazowiesk (Novominsk), just outside of Warsaw, where he established the first Hasidic yeshivah and a large synagogue with an impressive *Hof* or court. The privations of World War I drove the Novominsker, Alter Shimon, who succeeded his father in 1902 (though he had been at the head of the yeshivah since its founding in 1896), to remove to Warsaw itself, where he remained. His principal published work was *Tif'eret 'Ish*. The Novominsker was an unusual tzaddik. Famed for his Talmudic learning and as a kabbalist, he was also well known for his piety, Torah, and love of Israel. He presided at the third Sabbath meal, the *Shalosh Seudos*, in a mood of ecstasy. Those who were present reported that his songs and words of Torah were wonderful to hear, while his gestures and his face were marvelous

to behold. He helped to bring Heschel's father to Warsaw, found a suitable place for him, and after the latter's early death, acted as mentor to the family. Heschel's uncle liked to have the young Abraham sit at his right hand when he spoke before the Hasidim at the Sabbath table.³⁷ The Novominsker's life, Heschel observed

was consistent with his thought. . . . He was a complete person. Not one minute of the day was allowed to pass without attempting to serve God with all his strength. He gave himself over to a tremendous task: the service of the Almighty at every moment with every act. An ordinary *Minhah* [the afternoon service] was like Yom Kippur elsewhere, and on the Sabbath, as he put each morsel of food into his mouth, he would say, *Lekoved Shabbos Kodesh*, "[I eat this] in honor of the holy Sabbath." This latter custom was not practiced even by my father, while the Gerer Hasidim who were the majority in Poland and followed the austere teachings of Kotzk, opposed it as excessive expression of one's feelings.³⁸

Heschel left Warsaw for Vilna to study and graduate from the secular Yiddish Real-Gymnasium there, joining, during his stay, a circle of Yiddish poets, later known as the famed Yung Vilno, which included writers such as Abraham Sutzkever and Hayim Grade, who recalled in what high regard the youthful Heschel had been held. Shlomo Beillis, a fellow-poet, a Communist who resided in the East after the war, described his impressions of Heschel: "with the deep eyes of a *talmid hakham*, he came from a world far different from mine." When they took walks through the forest, Heschel "would surprise me by bringing along his dark hat and, upon entering the woods, would put it on. When I inquired for the reason, he replied in his soft voice: 'I don't know if you will understand. To me a forest is a holy place, and a Jew does not enter a holy place without covering his head. . . . The swaying trees are praying *shimen esre*.'" ³⁹

From Vilna Heschel moved west, to the University of Berlin and the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, to the Frankfurt Lehrhaus, and, after an eight-month return to Warsaw, on to England, and, finally, to America.

Contact with Western culture, particularly with German Jewry, its synagogues and academies of higher Jewish learning, made Heschel all the more certain that Hasidic thinking and living contained a treasure that should be made available to the emancipated Jew. His early studies on prophecy and Maimonides had stressed themes such as the divine pathos, the striving for prophecy, and *imitatio Dei*, concepts to which he had been sensitized by Hasidism. But what of Hasidism itself? What of that immense repository of surprising beauty and startling wisdom of which the West was not only ignorant but contemptuously ignorant? Where should one begin? Hasidism constituted a panorama of hundreds of remarkable spiritual figures, each with his own special way, and a literature whose books were precious, because, according to Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec, unlike other works, one did not have to turn countless pages in them to find God. Before understanding the contributions of its notable leaders and the meaning of its most important books, it was necessary to address the phenomenon of the Hasidic movement's creator, the Baal Shem Tov. This was the task to which Heschel began to direct himself.

The Baal Shem Tov

Perhaps the single most important project that Heschel left unfinished at his untimely death, a project for which he was uniquely suited and the completion of which students and scholars of Judaism had long awaited, was his work on the life and thought of the Baal Shem Tov, the renowned eighteenth-century founder of the Hasidic movement.⁴⁰ We do not know when Heschel first made plans to write this comprehensive work, but while he was in Cincinnati (1940–1945) he was already methodically gathering material. Perhaps the destruction of Hasidic life in Eastern Europe made him turn from those areas of Jewish thought in which he had been engaged, primarily the Bible and medieval philosophy, to a study of the movement he considered to be, in some ways, the final flowering of post-biblical Jewish his-

tory. Heschel's silent agony over the Holocaust during his years in Cincinnati (he rarely shared his pain with me, though I saw him several times a week from 1942 to 1944), as he failed in desperate attempts to influence public policy directly, led to his now classic portrait of Ashkenazic Jewry, in which he sketched its lasting qualities.⁴¹

Whatever the reasons, Heschel's book on the Besht was never written. Other works and projects, coming in quick succession, always postponed the book that must have been dearest to his heart. The closest he came were his remarks on the Besht in his investigation of Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, which was finished at the very end of his life, as if at least one major statement on Hasidism had to be made before death snatched him away. In that book, a part of which he adapted into English as *A Passion for Truth* he dealt, as well, with the Besht. True, his purpose was to contrast the way of the Besht with that of Kotzk, the main subject of the work, but in his remarks on the Besht he condensed a number of valuable insights into the founder of Hasidism, allowing himself a personal statement (part of which was cited in the previous chapter on his life; here the focus is upon the Besht):

I was born in Warsaw, Poland, but my cradle stood in Mezbizh (a small town in the province of Podolia, Ukraine), where the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Hasidic movement, lived during the last twenty years of his life. That is where my father came from, and he continued to regard it as his home. . . . The earliest fascination I can recall is associated with the Baal Shem, whose parables disclosed some of the first insights I gained as a child. He remained a model too sublime to follow yet too overwhelming to ignore. . . .

Years later I realized that, in being guided by both the Baal Shem Tov and the Kotzker, I had allowed two forces to carry on a struggle within me. One was occasionally mightier than the other. But who was to prevail, which was to be my guide? Both spoke convincingly, and each proved right on one level yet questionable on another.

In a very strange way, I found my soul at home with the

Baal Shem but driven by the Kotzker. Was it good to live with one's heart torn between the joy of Mezbizh and the anxiety of Kotzk? . . . I had no choice: my heart was in Mezbizh, my mind in Kotzk.

I was taught about inexhaustible mines of meaning by the Baal Shem; from the Kotzker I learned to detect immense mountains of absurdity standing in the way. The one taught me song, the other—silence. The one reminded me that there could be a Heaven on earth, the other shocked me into discovering Hell in the alleged Heavenly places in our world.

The Baal Shem made dark hours luminous; the Kotzker eased wretchedness and desolation by forewarnings, by premonitions. The Kotzker restricted me, debunked cherished attitudes. From the Baal Shem I received the gifts of elasticity in adapting to contradictory conditions.

The Baal Shem dwelled in my life like a lamp, while the Kotzker struck like lightning. To be sure, lightning is more authentic. Yet one can trust a lamp, put confidence in it; one can live in peace with a lamp.

The Baal Shem gave me wings; the Kotzker encircled me with chains. I never had the courage to break the chains and entered into joys with my shortcomings in mind. I owe intoxication to the Baal Shem, to the Kotzker the blessings of humiliation.

The Kotzker's presence recalls the nightmare of mendacity. The presence of the Baal Shem is an assurance that falsehood dissolves into compassion through the power of love. The Baal Shem suspends sadness, the Kotzker enhances it. The Baal Shem helped me to refine my sense of immediate mystery; the Kotzker warned me of the constant peril of forfeiting authenticity. . . .⁴²

My origin was in Mezbizh [the town of the Besht]. It gave me nourishment. Following the advice of the old Chortkover Rebbe, Rabbi David Moses, the uncle and second husband of my father's mother, my father settled in Warsaw. There I spent my younger years among Kotzker Hasidim. I am the last of the generation, perhaps the last Jew from Warsaw, whose soul lived in Mezbizh but whose mind was in Kotzk.⁴³

Some idea of how Heschel intended to proceed in his work on the Baal Shem comes from an early outline of the book (or part of the book) that he showed me:

1. The Love of God
2. Love for Israel—Love for Evil-Doers
3. Descending into Hell [to Redeem the Sinner]; Self-Sacrifice
4. [Faith?] in the Tzaddik
5. Humility
6. Evil
7. The Value of the Common Deed
8. The Relation to [?]
9. Messiah
10. Sadness
11. Strictness in Observing the Law
12. Truth
13. The Hasid
14. To Study Musar
15. The Besht on Himself
16. The Talmudic Sages
17. Bodily Movement [in Prayer]
18. "Serve Him in All Your Ways"
19. Limits of the Way of the Besht
20. Yearning
21. The Study of Torah
22. The Tzaddik

This outline is, of course, neither complete nor final. The topics, for example, seem not to be arranged in any particular order. No provision is made, moreover, for the historical studies contained in *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov* that, in revised form, were presumably to form the first part of the work. But what is significant about the outline is that it enables one to contrast Heschel's view of what should constitute the main subjects of Hasidism with that of other scholars.

Heschel did not, as I have noted, complete the work on the Besht that he had planned. One would have wished to possess a comprehensive statement from him, even a single substantial essay, on the meaning of Hasidism. Unfortunately, almost all of his published Hasidic research is of a technical nature. He rarely even lectured on the subject and only once, at the end of his life, did he offer a formal course

on Hasidism at the Jewish Theological Seminary. His scanty lecture notes, however, do provide brilliant, if all too brief, insights. At one point he even hints at the reasons for his reticence. "Young boys are shy," his notes read, "too shy to lecture on Hasidism. It is too personal. Too intimate. I remained a boy even after becoming a man!"

Besieged by controversy, Hasidism had emerged in the eighteenth century as a revival movement that engendered bitter opposition. Its early writings, such as the *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* (Korzec [Koretz], 1780), were largely polemical, attacking not only the decline of Judaism into legalism and asceticism, but also the corruption of Jewish life itself. To correct the malaise, Hasidism boldly proposed a new type of leader, the tzaddik, a new stress on one's service to God which was not limited to Torah study and worship but embraced "all one's ways," and a new mood of joy and exaltation. Along with this program came the daring establishment of separate synagogues. A furious clash of forces followed, producing a polemical literature from the Mitnagdim, as the opponents of the Hasidim were called.

Though the Hasidim, at first separatists themselves and later excluded by the ruling group, finally rejoined the general community, the remnants of the early opposition never disappeared. The bitterness that provoked the excommunications of the first generations in the eighteenth century was still felt in the twentieth. Its tone could be heard in the anti-Hasidic satire in the East and the aggressively critical reports by historians in the West. If Hasidim were drunkards, and tzaddikim little deities dabbling in witchcraft,⁴⁴ then it should come as no surprise that the Besht himself was the object of stinging jibes. "Ignoramus" and "sorcerer" were the two terms most commonly applied to him. In an atmosphere in which Western scholars, such as Heinrich Graetz, were so critical of Hasidism, it was natural that disturbing questions would continue to be raised: Did the Baal Shem, in fact, ever live? Do we possess any evidence about him from contemporary sources, apart from the hagiography that accumulated after his death? What do we know of his early

followers? What was their relationship to the Frankists and the Sabbatean heresy?⁴⁵

Adored by some and reviled by others, the subject of miracle legends and scurrilous gossip, the inspiration for subsequent communities of the faithful as well as decrees of excommunication, the Baal Shem himself seemed shrouded in mystery. How to get behind the legend to the man? If an historian of Polish Jewry of the distinction of Mayer Balaban despaired in the 1920s and 1930s of finding any verifiable historical evidence about the founder of Hasidism,⁴⁶ consider the difficulties that confronted scholars after the Holocaust had destroyed most of the primary sources as well as the movement's living tradition.

Heschel felt it vital that the historical basis for the rise of Hasidism be established to whatever extent it was still possible. To do so meant examining the entire eighteenth-century rabbinic literature for occasional references to and hints of the early Hasidic figures. The libraries of Hebrew Union College and, especially, of the Jewish Theological Seminary provided him with a unique opportunity for a systematic and thorough review. His work was severely hampered by the disastrous fire at the latter institution in 1966 which destroyed or made unavailable many of the rare volumes he needed. With the help of the book dealer Jaker Biegeleisen, Heschel also began to rebuild his own Hasidic library, though he could not replace the valuable material, including rare manuscripts, he had lost in Europe. In 1949, aware of the presence in America of some of the central figures of the Hasidic remnant who had survived, he founded the YIVO Hasidic Archives, which functioned under his guidance and was directed by Moses Shulvass, his friend from Warsaw and Berlin, to search out what could still be salvaged. Heschel believed that there was a reliable oral tradition going back to the earliest Hasidic period, if only one knew where to look and how to listen. The YIVO Archives were, therefore, used as well for fieldwork and oral histories.⁴⁷

In Heschel's relentless search, no document that might illuminate the origins of Hasidism was overlooked. Even rare

and early Polish periodicals were scrutinized. Scholars who brought him their discoveries in this field almost always found that Heschel had been there before them. By exhaustively exploring the literature of the early eighteenth century for new information and by re-examining known material and allusive oral traditions, Heschel sought to move toward the establishment of an historical understanding of the Besht and the foundations of the Hasidic movement. The major results of his early work are the four essays collected in *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, which I edited and partially translated.⁴⁸ These studies, originally published in Hebrew and Yiddish, represent the first serious attempt to chart the lives and describe the teachings of the exceptional personalities who made up the intimate circle the Besht had gathered about him as disciples, colleagues, or both. These monographs constitute an indispensable corpus of research preliminary to a proper understanding of the Besht, the founder of Hasidism. If the intended work was planned in two volumes—the first to deal with the history and the second the teachings of the Besht—these four essays would have supplied much of the material for the first volume.

They are:

"Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec [Koretz]" (Hebrew) (*Alei 'Ayin: The Salman Schocken Jubilee Volume* [Jerusalem: Schocken, 1948–1952], pp. 213–44);

"Reb Pinkhes Koritzer" (Yiddish) (*YIVO Bleter*, 33 [1949], 9–48);

"Rabbi Gershon Kutover: His Life and Immigration to the Land of Israel" (Hebrew) (*Hebrew Union College Annual*, 23, No. 2 [1950–51], 17–71);

"Rabbi Nahman of Kosów, Companion of the Baal Shem" (Hebrew) (*The Harry A. Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, ed. Saul Lieberman et al. [New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965], pp. 113–41); and

"Rabbi Isaac of Drobitch" (Hebrew) (*Hado'ar Jubilee Volume* [New York: Hado'ar, 1957], pp. 86–94).

Four (or five, if we include Rabbi Moses of Kutu) of the leading figures in the group associated early with the Besht

are discussed in these essays. A number of almost equal importance are not. Heschel did not give us portraits of others from the Besht's circle, such as Rabbi Nahman of Horodenka (grandfather of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav), whose early ascent to Palestine helped set a pattern among Hasidism for the love of the Land;⁴⁹ or Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, the chief literary disciple of the Besht, whose books are the main record of the Baal Shem's teachings;⁵⁰ or of Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Miedzyzrecz (Mezeritch) who succeeded to the leadership of the movement after the death of the Besht; or of Rabbi Judah Leib Pistener.⁵¹ No doubt, Heschel intended eventually to deal with these and other figures. I have located some significant unpublished material in his files dealing with these and other personalities which have yet to be examined.

Strictly speaking, none of the figures Heschel has described in these essays can simply be called a "disciple" of the Besht's. Rabbi Nahman and Rabbi Pinhas, critics at first, became disciples who were also colleagues, while Rabbi Isaac of Drohobycz seems to have remained somewhat distant until the end. (His son Rabbi Yehiel Mikhel of Zloczew, on the other hand, became one of the most fervent fighters for the way of the Besht. It was before his house in Brod that the first Hasidic book, *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, by Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, was publicly burned.) In any case, those who composed the circle of the Besht did not submerge their individuality to the Besht: at times they were partners, at times opponents, at times followers. What each of them shared in common was the possession of immense personal talents and their role as the conscious object of the Besht's missionary efforts.

Prior to Heschel's studies, these figures had been vague and unclear. Some, like Rabbi Gershon of Kutu, Rabbi Nahman of Kosów, and Rabbi Isaac of Drohobycz (Drobitch), were occasionally quoted or told about; only Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec [Koretz] had left a small body of teachings. In Heschel's adept hands, these men are revealed as formidable scholars and striking personalities who, no doubt, would

have played a role in any period of Jewish history. In reading these essays, one beholds the image of historical figures and not simply legendary ghosts.

Heschel's thorough examination of eighteenth-century rabbinic literature enabled him to add important facts to what was already known. The close relationship between the earliest members of the "circle" of the Besht and such significant personalities of the time as Rabbi Hayim Hakohen Rapoport of Lwów, Rabbi Meir Margoliot of Lwów and Ostro, Rabbi Eleazer Rokeah of Amsterdam, and Rabbi Ezekiel Landau of Prague is confirmed and explored in Heschel's studies. That the brother-in-law of the Baal Shem, Rabbi Gershon of Kutu, emerges as one of the central figures of his time, suggests a re-evaluation of our understanding of his role in eighteenth-century Jewish history as well as of the role of certain other Hasidic figures. Similarly, that Rabbi Gershon was a halakhic authority respected by the important Rabbi Ezekiel Landau of Prague and by Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz points to his role as a communal figure who was later accepted as a leading representative of Palestinian Jewry. Heschel presents a fascinating picture of Rabbi Gershon in the then notable Constantinople Jewish community where Ashkenazim and Sephardim esteemed and worked with one another. The position of Rabbi Gershon can be better appreciated through our new knowledge that a person of such eminence as the wealthy printer and regular visitor to the sultan's court, Moses Soncino, who "administered the funds raised by R. Ezekiel Landau in Poland for the Ashkenazim in Jerusalem," was a close friend of Rabbi Gershon's and, in fact, acted as intermediary in the correspondence between the Besht and Rabbi Gershon. Rabbi Gershon traveled to the Land of Israel from Constantinople accompanied by Rabbis Abraham and Isaac Rosanes, among the most noted leaders of the community. Soon after his arrival, Rabbi Gershon was offered the post of rabbi of the Ashkenazic community of Jerusalem. Heschel's long article, marked by new insights and suggestions, has encouraged considerable further research into Rabbi Gershon Kutover's role in eighteenth-

century Palestine. Persuasive evidence is now available that the early Hasidic leaders occupied a more important position than was formerly believed among the pilgrims of the period.

It is in the essay on Rabbi Gershon that Heschel published an important discovery: a reference to the Besht made during his lifetime by Rabbi Meir Teomim, the head of the Yeshivah in Lubartów (Levertof) and father of the noted Talmudist and author of *Peri Megadim*, who writes: "I have seen a letter from the Holy Land, written by the Hasid, our master, R. Gershon, may his light continue to shine, wrote to his renowned [*mefursam*] brother-in-law, Baal Shem Tov, may his light continue to shine. . . ." The source of this statement, a Talmudist and father of a halakhic authority, the term used, *hamefursam*, and the fact that it is one of the very few contemporary references to the Besht, "refutes the claims by certain scholars that the founder of Hasidism lived in some remote corner of the Jewish world and was unknown during his lifetime to all but a very small circle."⁵²

Apart from Heschel's contribution to the history of Hasidism in these essays is his analysis of Hasidic thought. His essay on Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec (Koretz), for example, delineates the ideological conflict that occurred early in the history of the movement, in which each side claimed that it possessed the true meaning of the Besht's legacy. The Maggid of Miedzyrzecz (Mezeritch) had stressed the centrality of Kabbalah and established *devekut* (cleaving to God) as the highest goal. For him, the awareness that all is God would lead man to understand that this world is but so many veils that must be cast aside to enter into the divine embrace. His language is strongly Lurianic, with spiritual ascent beyond time and place the all-consuming goal. For Rabbi Pinhas, on the other hand, the stress is elsewhere. This world is no illusion. It is the place, and now is the time, that man must labor diligently and unremittingly to perfect himself. To escape the world is to violate the Psalmist's admonition that one must first "turn from evil" and only then "do good." Rabbi Pinhas, who had favored Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye and

not the Maggid as successor to the Besht, emphasized moral virtue and simple faith.

These essays are not all of a single type. The articles on Rabbi Gershon of Kutty, Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec, and Rabbi Nahman of Kosów are finished works. The essay on Rabbi Isaac of Drohobycz, which did not appear in a scholarly journal, is less structured. Published in Hebrew and Yiddish and in various stages of completeness, the essays that constitute *The Circle* should be understood as preliminary studies that would undoubtedly have been edited or recast to make up part of the work on the Besht that Heschel had planned.

Descendant of a Hasidic dynasty and heir of the living tradition at its most vital source, master of the philosophical and historical-critical method of the West, and possessing unusual creative gifts, Heschel was perhaps the one scholar who might have given us the definitive work on Hasidism.

NOTES

1. This paragraph is drawn from Heschel's lectures.
2. A composite from "Hasidism," 14-16; and *A Passion for Truth*, pp. 3-7.
3. One of the few who have commented on Hasidism's creativity came from an unexpected source, a leading *maskil*, the rationalist, Zionist, and Hebraist Ahad Haam (Asher Ginzberg), d. 1927. "We must admit," he wrote, "that if we want to find original Hebrew literature today, we must turn to the literature of Hasidism; there rather than in the literature of *Haskalah* one occasionally encounters (in addition to much that is purely fanciful) true profundity of thought which bears the mark of original Jewish genius" (*Al Parashat Derakhim* [Berlin: Dvir, 1913], vol. 2, p. 29).
4. More explicit cases of the way Hasidic sources are used in Heschel's writings are abundant. For example, the standing title Heschel chose for his youthful volume of Yiddish poems, *Der Shem Hameforash: Mentsh* (Man: The Ineffable Name of God), can be traced to Hasidic-kabbalistic origins. According to a form of gematria (which uses the numerical equivalents of letters to provide

meanings) introduced by the kabbalists that permitted "filling," *milui 'alafim*, where each letter of a Hebrew word receives the numerical value not of the letter itself but of the name of the letter "filled with alefs," the value of the ineffable Name, YHVH (*Yod He Va'v He*) becomes 45 (= 20 + 6 + 13 + 6), which is equivalent to the simple gematria of the Hebrew *adam* or "man" (= 1 + 4 + 40 = 45)! Thus, through the process of gematria, "man is the ineffable Name of God" (*Keter Shem Tov* [Brooklyn: Kehot, 1972], p. 74, §292).

A further study in Hasidism is Heschel's "Unknown Documents in the History of Hasidism" (Yiddish), *YIVO Bleter*, 36 (1952), 113–35.

5. See Heschel, "Unknown Documents."

6. *Ibid.*

7. Gershom Scholem; see his *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973).

8. See Salo Baron, "Steinschneider's Contribution to Historiography," *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950), English section, p. 95.

9. Elkan Adler, *Jews in Many Lands* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1905), pp. 50–55.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

11. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Kotzk: In Gerangel far Emesdikeit* (Kotzk: The Struggle for Integrity), 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Hamenora, 1973), pp. 7–10.

12. "Hasidism," 14–16.

13. A reference to this problem is found in the introduction to *Teshu'ot Hen* by Gedalia of Linitz, one of the earliest followers of the Besht. The editor of the book, a disciple of Rabbi Gedalia's and a son of the author of *Shivhey Habesht* (In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov, 1815, the first hagiography of the Besht), explains that difficulties in comprehending the text may be due to the profundity of the ideas, the errors of the printer, and the limits of his own understanding in transcribing the text. "Or perhaps the meaning of the author was altered in [my] translating from one language [Yiddish] to another [Hebrew], and it was as a 'tongue of stammerers' to me. For it is known that the task of translating from one tongue to another is considerable, in that care must be taken neither to add nor to detract from the intent of the author" (*Teshu'ot Hen* [Berdichev, 1816; repr. Jerusalem: S. Reifen, 1964], p. 15).

14. A century ago Solomon Schechter believed that Hasidic literature consisted of some "200 volumes." See his *The Chassidim* (London: Jewish Chronicle, 1887), p. 22. The Mosad Harav Kook of Jerusalem, under the general editorship of Dr. Yitzhak Raphael and the authorship of Shalom H. Parush, began to publish a bibliography of Hasidic literature, only the first volume of which, unfortunately, appeared in 1980). See also the fine translation and commentary of Rabbi Nahum of Chernobyl's *Light of the Eyes* by Arthur Green, published by Paulist Press in 1982.

15. Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Two Great Traditions: The Sephardim and the Ashkenazim," *Commentary*, 5 (1948), 420–21.

16. Ismar Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Leipzig: Fock, 1913), p. 392; *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), p. 295.

17. A. Freimann, *Katalog der Judaica* (Frankfurt: Lehrberger, 1922), p. ix. Also listed under this rubric are the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

18. Contrary to the standard division of nineteenth-century Judaism into two movements, "Reform and Rabbinism," Schechter, in an early unpublished review, divided it into three: The "Mystic Movement" of Hasidism; the "Wissenschaft Movement," represented by the Gaon of Vilna, Krochmal, Rappoport, and Zunz; and "the Rational Movement," associated with Reform (R. Fine, "Solomon Schechter and the Ambivalence of Jewish Wissenschaft" [*Judaism* (Winter 1997), 18–19]).

19. E.g., M. Wilensky, "Some Notes on Rabbi Israel Loebel's Polemic Against Hasidism," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* (PAAJR), 30 (1962), 141–51; Y. Eliach, "The Russian Dissenting Sects and Their Influence on Israel Baal Shem Tov, Founder of Hasidism," *ibid.*, 36 (1968), 57–81; E. Etkes, "The System of R. Hayim of Volozhin as a Response of the Community of the Mitnagdim to Hasidism" (Hebrew), *ibid.*, 39 (1972), 1–46 (Hebrew Section); J. Weiss, "The Great Maggid's Theory of Contemplative Magic," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 31 (1960), 137–48.

20. Dov Ber, Maggid of Miedzyrzecz (Mezeritch), *Maggid De-varav Leya'akov*, ed. and commentary by Rivkah Schatz-Uffenheimer (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1976).

21. *The Earth Is the Lord's*, p. 10.

22. David Biale, *Gershom Scholem* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

University Press, 1979), p. 46. See Martin Buber, "Jüdische Wissenschaft," *Die Welt*, 11-12 (October 1901); *Jüdische Bewegung* (Berlin: Jüdische Verlag, 1920), vol. 1, pp. 48-58.

23. Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, p. 11; translation has been emended.

24. See both Gershom Scholem's "M. Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 227-51; and his "Martin Buber's Conception of Judaism," in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 126-72; Rivkah Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Man's Relation to God and the World in Buber's Rendering of the Hasidic Teaching," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. Paul Schilpp and Maurice Friedman (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967), pp. 403-35; Martin Buber, "Replies to My Critics: On Hasidism," in *Philosophy of Martin Buber*, pp. 731-41; Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, pp. 165-69; Martin Buber, "Interpreting Hasidism," *Commentary*, 36, No. 3 (1963), 218-25; Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work*, 3 vols. (New York: E. P. Dutton: 1981-1983), index.

25. Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, p. 48. Cf. Stanley Nash, "The Psychology of Dynamic Self-Negation in a Modern Writer, Shai Hurwitz (1861-1922)," *PAAJR*, 44 (1977), 81-93. See also Stanley Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Hurwitz and His Polemics in the Hebrew Press* (Leiden: Brill, 1980).

26. For an example of the attractiveness of Sabbateanism to a contemporary novelist, see Isaac Bashevis Singer, *A Young Man in Search of Love* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), p. 7. Cf. Samuel H. Dresner, "Is Bashevis Singer a Jewish Writer?" *Midstream*, 27, No. 3 (1980), 42-47.

27. Cf. Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, pp. 155, 172-74, 192-93, and the bibliography cited there. For Buber's response to Scholem's strictures, see Buber, "Replies to My Critics," pp. 731-41, and above, note 23.

28. M. Piekarz, *Bimey Tzemihat Hahasidut* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1978). A more polemical approach is adopted by H. Lieberman, "How Jewish 'Researchers' Explore Hasidism" (Hebrew), *Ohel Rahel* (Brooklyn: Empire Press, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 1-49. Cf. Gershom Scholem, *Devarim Bago* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), p. 300, n. 20.

See also Eliezer Schweid, "Mysticism and Judaism According to Gershom Scholem" (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, Supplement 2 (1983); R. Shatz, "Gershom Scholem's Interpretation of Hasidism as an Expression of His Philosophy of Idealism"

(Hebrew), in *Gershom Scholem: The Man and His Work* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Israel National Academy for Science/Magnes Press-Mosad Bialik), pp. 48-63.

29. "Buber is dissatisfied with Hasidism because it does not expand the realm of revelation," argues Rivkah Schatz-Uffenheimer, "and in this he sees its failure. . . . [But], if Hasidism had been more universal and had dared to broaden the 'horizon of revelation,' instead of confining itself from the start to the revelation in the Torah, it would have achieved this greatness at the price of antinomianism . . . and is it not thus that we must understand Buber's position?" ("Man's Relation to God and the World," p. 419). In a letter to Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber wrote that he discontinued religious observances after he became bar mitzvah, at the age of thirteen, and Gershom Scholem testified that "the early Buber developed a deep aversion to the Law, to *halakha* in all its forms." Buber was a "man who with complete radicalism stood aloof from the institutions of Judaism as a cult, and whom nobody ever saw in a synagogue during the almost thirty years he lived in Israel" (Martin Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, ed. Grete Schaefer [Heidelberg: L. Schneider, 1972], vol. 3, p. 141; Gershom Scholem, "Martin Buber's Conception of Judaism," in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* [New York: Schocken Books, 1976], p. 129; see also pp. 133-34. Cf. Franz Rosenzweig, "The Builders: Concerning the Law," in *On Jewish Learning*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer [New York: Schocken Books, 1955], pp. 72-92; Ernst A. Simon, "Martin Buber and the Faith of Israel" [Hebrew], *Divre 'iyun mukdashim le-Mordekhai Martin Buber* [Contemplations dedicated to Mordechai Martin Buber on the occasion of his eightieth birthday] [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1958], pp. 13-56; Arthur Cohen, "Martin Buber and Judaism," in *Leo Baeck Yearbook 25* [London: Secker & Warburg, 1980], pp. 287-300; Nahum N. Glatzer, "Reflection on Buber's Impact on German Jewry," in *Leo Baeck Yearbook 25*, pp. 301-309).

30. Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, pp. 80, 98. Other distinguished scholars of Hasidism are Moshe Idel, Rachel Elijor, Zev Gris, Gedalia Nigal, Louis Jacobs, Isaiah Tishbi, and Meir Orion.

31. Preface to Dresner, *The Zaddik*, pp. 7-8.

32. *Kotzk*, pp. 7-10.

33. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Between God and Man: From the Writings of Abraham J. Heschel*, ed. Fritz A. Rothschild (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959; rev. repr. New York: Free Press, 1965).

34. An examination of the topics selected for doctoral dissertations in Jewish studies during the past thirty years unfortunately confirms Heschel's concern.

35. Quotations for which no sources are given come from my conversations with Heschel or from family members.

36. That is, Rabbi Israel. He was the son of Rabbi David Moses, the first Tchortkover rebbe and grandson of the famed Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, after whom he was named. David Moses of Tchortkov was married later in life to his niece, Leah-Rachel, the daughter of his brother, Shalom Joseph, and Heschel's father's mother, both she and David Moses having been widowed from their first spouses. Thus, Heschel's grandmother, Leah-Rachel, was both the daughter-in-law of the Ryzhiner and his granddaughter. Indeed, David Moses died in her arms in 1903. After the death of her first husband, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Miedzibosh, Heschel's grandfather, Leah-Rachel brought her son, Heschel's father, to the court of the Tchortkov, where he was raised. Since Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin was the great-grandson of the Maggid of Mezritch and knew intimately those who knew the Maggid, and since Heschel's father grew up in the house of the Tchortkover, and since the oral record was handed down from generation to generation with extraordinary care, this is an instance, which Heschel once cited in conversation with me, of how reliable traditions going back to the earliest generations of Hasidism, to the Besht himself, were available to him. It is likewise why, in gathering material for the YIVO Hasidic Archives, he believed he could find similar authentic material. In fact, it was over this issue—whether searching for such material should be a priority—that the chief researcher for the Archive, Dr. M. Shulvass, resigned. Cf. A. Twerski, *The Genealogy of Tchernobl and Ruzhin* (Hebrew) (Lublin, 1938), p. 120.

In addition to being descended on his father's side from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt, Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, and Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritch, Heschel counted on his mother's side, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin, and Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz. See the detailed genealogy in Edward K. Kaplan and Samuel H. Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).

37. Cf. H. Rabinowicz, *The World of Hasidism* (London: Valentine, 1970), pp. 164–66; A. Bromberg, *Hasidic Leaders* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Hamakhon Lehasidut, 1963), vol. 20, pp. 124–68.

38. Heschel's appreciation of his uncle is confirmed by other

sources. So admiring was he of him that the Gerer Rebbe, the ranking Hasidic leader in Poland, used to send his Hasidim to visit the Novominsker and would himself call upon him whenever the Gerer was in Warsaw. Evidence of the friendship between the two is found in a letter, which I have seen, from the Gerer Rebbe to the Novominsker after the death of the Gerer's wife, thanking him for his encouragement to proceed with a second marriage. When the Gerer Rebbe sought someone to head the powerful Agudas Yisroel organization, he remarked that there was only one person in all of Poland whom he could recommend without qualification: the Novominsker Rebbe; and when his followers asked whom they should consult upon his departure for a visit to the Holy Land, the Gerer again responded: the Novominsker. Hillel Zeitlin observed, "Whenever I felt depressed and needed to repent, I visited the rabbi of Novominsk." The chief rabbi of Tel Aviv, Rabbi Yehidiah Frankel, said, "The picture I have in my mind of a perfect tzaddik is the rabbi of Nomominsk. His profound wisdom, his constant learning, the depth of his kabbalistic mastery, his majestic face, the smile which never left his face, his love of all Israel, his refusal to utter a critical word about another, were unforgettable" (Bromberg, *Hasidic Leaders*).

39. Hebrew: *shmone esre*; the long-standing prayer or *amida* is said with a swaying motion of the body. Beillis, "The Beginnings of Yung Vilno," in *Die goldene Keit*, pp. 18–19; cf. E. Schulman, *Yung Vilne, 1929–1939* (Yiddish) (New York: Getseltn, 1946).

40. Heschel's plan is indicated in the introductory note to his first published essay on the history of Hasidism, the Yiddish study "Reb Pinkhes Koretz" (*YIVO Bleter*, 33 [1949], 9), which he described as "a chapter from the author's work on *the Besht and his circle*" (emphasis added). By July 1947 Heschel had completed his essays on Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz and Rabbi Gerson of Kutov (*ibid.*, 48).

41. For the 1963 interview with him in which the Yiddish journalist Gershon Jacobson, recorded Heschel's recollections as a newcomer to America, see above, pp. 23–24.

42. *A Passion for Truth*, pp. xiii–xv.

43. *Kotzk*, p. 10.

44. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1898), vol. 5, pp. 375–81.

45. On these movements, see Scholem's *Sabbetai Sevi*.

46. "According to Balaban, all that is left to us concerning the

life of the founder of the Hasidic movement is pure legend. To him, therefore, no responsible historian should attempt to write an historical treatise on this topic. 'A legend is a piece of folk poetry and it should not be dissected. We must take the legend as it is, or not use it at all.' There are no historical facts whatsoever against which to test these legends about the Baal Shem Tov. . . . Balaban is dubious as to whether any genuine evidence relating to the founder of the Hasidic movement will ever be found. 'Israel Baal Shem Tov was a simple man. He did not participate in the public life of the Jewish community, and did not come into contact with the leading personalities of his age. He did not compose books himself and did not write introductions to the books of others.' Neither did he engage in business activities nor have any communication with the Polish noblemen. There is therefore nowhere to look for traces of his activities. All we have is a multitude of legends, which often contradict each other" (I. Biderman, *Mayer Balaban: Historian of Polish Judaism* [New York: Biderman Book Committee, 1976], pp. 204–205; cf. M. Balaban, "Hasidut," *Hetekufa*, 18 [1923], 488. Balaban's strict delimitation of the role of legend was made, in part, in reviewing the exaggerated claims of S. Setzer's biography of the Besht in the periodical *Bicher Velt*, 1, Nos. 4–5 [1922], 406–407).

Balaban's general view of Hasidism was one of disapproval. He claimed that Hasidism had a negative influence upon family life and was one of the major causes of the decline of Polish Jewish culture. Summarizing Balaban's view, Biderman writes that "Polish Jewish culture . . . came to fruition during the seventeenth century, later to deteriorate under the twofold impact of the misfortunes which beset Polish Jewry from outside and the decay brought about by the mystical and Hasidic movements from within the community" (p. 174). At least three factors must be considered in assessing Balaban's disapprobation: (a) the highly critical views of Heinrich Graetz; (b) the testimony of the historian Moses Shulvass, Balaban's student, that Balaban's knowledge of Hebrew did not allow him to master the sources sufficiently to gain a proper understanding of Hasidism; and (c) Balaban's descent from a family of *Mitnagdim*. One ancestor was a co-signer, with the rabbi of Lwów, of the 1792 excommunication of the Hasidim, while Balaban's grandfather "was known for his opposition to the Hasidism and was a principal supporter of Rabbi Ornstein of Lemberg [i.e., Lwów] from 1804 to 1839," a leading opponent of the Hasidic

movement. "Opposition to Hasidism was characteristic of the Balaban family tradition."

One of the major objectives of Heschel's studies was to refute the point of view represented by Balaban, arguing, that, indeed, "there are . . . historical facts . . . against which to test these legends about the Baal Shem Tov," to the point of affirming that the Besht did, in fact, "come into contact with leading personalities of his age." Meanwhile, Moshe Rosman has discovered documents from the Polish archives of Medzibosh establishing the Besht's residence there and the importance of this residence (Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966]).

47. See Heschel's introductory remarks of to his "Unknown Documents in the History of Hasidism."

48. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Circle of Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism*, ed. Samuel H. Dresner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985; rev. ed. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1998).

49. See "Unknown Documents in the History of Hasidism," 115–19.

50. See Dresner, *The Zaddik*.

51. He was held in such esteem by Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye that he published his eulogy of him (*Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* [Koretz: Katz, 1780], p. 92d).

52. See *Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, pp. 71–76, 98–99.