Hasidism – Historical Continuity and Spiritual Change

by

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In the concluding chapter of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Gershom Scholem constructed the frame of reference for all further research on Hasidism. He exerted decisive influence in determining its intellectual context and historical directions.[1] Some of his determinations have been accepted without challenge, while lively controversy has surrounded others. However, it would seem to be no exaggeration to state that every aspect of subsequent research into Hasidism has been undertaken with a deep affiliation to the assumptions and arguments advanced in that chapter.

Scholem made five basic assumptions:

1. Lurianic Kabbalism, Sabbatianism, and Hasidism are three different stages in the same process.

2. Hasidism represents an attempt to make the world of Kabbalism, through a certain transformation or re-interpretation, accessible to the masses of people.

3. Hasidism was a typical revivalist movement which drew its force from the people and aimed from the beginning at the widest possible sphere of influence.

4. Hasidism represents an attempt to preserve those aspects of the Kabbalah which were capable of evoking a popular response, and at the same time stripped them of their messianic flavor. The movement was aware of the destructive force inherent in mystical messianism; hence it tried to eliminate the messianic element from the focus of religious life and thought and removed messianic significance from religious worship in its Kabbalistic form.

5. Hasidism adopted from Sabbatianism the ideal of pneumatic leadership which drew upon divine inspiration, while raising the ideal of charismatic leadership in place of the traditional rabbinical leaders. The Hasidism demanded from the man to whom community leadership was entrusted inner religious renewal sufficient to nourish simultaneously both mystical elevation and social bonding.[2]

Scholem offered a general description of the components of the new religious consciousness, of its sources in Kabbalistic literature, of its ec-

[1] G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1941, pp. 325–350. References are to the third edition, published in New York in 1961. Hereafter, MTJM.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 327, 329–335, 343–344.

static elements, of its mystical power, and of the basic ideas to which it clung. In his opinion, "no less surprising, however, is the fact that this burst of mystical energy was unproductive of new religious ideas, to say nothing of new theories of mystical knowledge." He also argued that he found no new doctrine, no original Kabbalistic thinking, nor any new ideas and principles in the circles of Hasidic mystics – nothing, in any case, suitable for an organized system of ideas, because in general, Hasidism was more or less identical with earlier mysticism, though it gave it new form. In this observation he saw the difficulty of interpreting Hasidism.[3]

In the light of the foregoing, Scholem believed that the new factor within Hasidism was not to be sought on the theoretical level but rather one should address the experience of inner renewal and the encounter between the subjects of the mystical tradition and its living embodiments. Hasidism, according to Scholem, is the product of an immediate and spontaneous religious experience, mystical in character. He added that the Kabbalah in its theosophical guise no longer served as a focal point of religious consciousness in Hasidism, but rather that emphasis was placed on a new direction: the mysticism of the individual life. The original contribution of Hasidism to religious thought was bound up in the way that it interpreted the particular values of individual life. In Hasidism, general theosophical ideas became individual moral values.

The mystical movement was consolidated as a social phenomenon around the figure of the Zaddik, who, in his being, united the mystical ideal, the communal responsibility, and the deep bond with the congregation. In Scholem's opinion, herein lies the true originality of Hasidic thought. The Hasidim, as moral mystics, founded a new form of social organization by placing the Zaddik, who is imbued with spiritual elevation, in the center of earthly society. Hasidism forged a deep link between the pneumatic, who feels that all of his actions are guided by a transcendental power, and the religious community in all the various aspects of its life. The entire development revolved around the personality of the Zaddik, to whom was attributed supreme religious authority, and who was viewed as the canonical source of inspiration and as the medium of divine revelation. His personality took the place of doctrine in the world of Hasidism. Or, put another way, idea is overshadowed by charisma in the Hasidic paradoxical doctrine. The mystic, who rejects corporeal experience, was placed among the people, as a leader of the congregation, within mundane reality. All of these traits caused Hasidism to spread among broad circles, leading to a clash between Hasidism and the religious authority of rabbinical Judaism.[4]

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[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 338, 340.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 342–345.

Scholem's remarks in this chapter are largely of polemical character, although their author does not explicitly state this opening position. Perhaps he intended to expand on the subject elsewhere; perhaps some of the controversy was oral – perhaps the remarks were originally made in a lecture given before an audience which did not speak the language in which the work of the other scholars was written, so that he could not allude to them.[5] In any event, unlike the historians who concentrated their attention on the question of the causes for the flourishing of Hasidism and attempted to show it in its historical and social context, Scholem placed the issue of the spiritual and religious character of the new movement in the center. Scholem seems to have sought to remove the study of Hasidism from the area of the causal connection between the crisis which affected the Jews of Poland in the first half of the eighteenth century and the growth of the movement itself. He tried to bring about a change in the understanding of the factors causing the spread of Hasidism and to clarify the secret of its spiritual and social vitality. He wished further to examine the uniqueness of Hasidism against the background of the trends that had preceded it in the Kabbalistic tradition, while detaching it from the dominant characteristics and historical manifestations of the messianic idea.

Scholem seems to be arguing against remarks made orally by Dinur,[6] which were later put into writing in 1943 in a series of articles appearing in the Hebrew journal *Zion*. These remarks concerned the question of the connection with the messianic idea in the formation of the movement and in consolidating its doctrine. He also argued against the claim that at first Hasidism was a "social opposition" in a situation threatened by social disintegration and the crisis of communal organization. Moreover, Scholem found Dubnow's view, that "history responds to the needs of the generation,"[7] simplistic. He disagreed with Dubnow's evaluation of the view that the Hasidic movement was a historical response to severe social and spiritual distress, bound up with the crisis of the rabbinical religious system. Further, he disputed Dubnow's understanding of the teachings of Hasidism as a reaction to this crisis and to his interpretation of it as a

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[5] Scholem's remarks were first presented in New York in 1938 as the Hilda Stroock Lectures at the Jewish Institute of Religion, and they were first printed, as noted, in 1941.

[6] B. Z. Dinur states in the preface to his *Be-Mifneh Ha-Dorot*, Jerusalem 1955, that all of the articles in this volume were first delivered orally as lectures, delivered principally to the students at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Dinur's work was first published as a series of articles on the origins of Hasidism and its social and messianic elements in *Zion*, 8–10 (1943–1945).

[7] See Dubnow, *Toldot Ha-Hasidut*, Tel Aviv (1931) 1975, p. 34. Scholem expressed an opinion highly critical of Dubnow's work. He defined Dubnow's treatment of Hasidic thought as "a rather barren discussion" and termed him a "simplistic and gullible popularizer," see *Devarim Be-Go*, Tel Aviv 1975, pp. 290, 363.

response to social injustice.[8] He also disputed Dubnow's evaluation of the figure of the founder of the movement, disagreeing with him as to the true place of the doctrine of the Zaddik in Hasidism.[9] Scholem sought the answer to the question of the growth and expansion of Hasidism in a plane beyond the historical framework, or the economic, social, and political conditions of existence of the Jewish community in Eastern Europe. He wished to emphasize the uniqueness of Hasidism as a *religious phenomenon* and to interpret its theoretical struggle with the Kabbalistic tradition, with the messianic idea, and with charismatic inspiration. In opposition to the messianic thesis advanced by Dinur, Scholem advanced the neutralization of the messianic idea. In opposition to the view that attributes decisive weight to the crisis in economic and social reality, as the decisive factor in the expansion of Hasidism, he raised the question of the meaning of the theological factor. He insisted upon understanding Hasidism as a movement of spiritual awakening and religious renewal, acting under the inspiration of charismatic leadership and drawing upon the Kabbalistic tradition.[10]

Scholem was influenced by Buber in his view of Hasidism as a living religious force which placed great weight on the combination of the ethical and mystical elements. He also followed Buber in his estimation of the importance of the charismatic element and in recognizing that it was vital to examine the religious meaning of the movement in its mystical context and in its social expressions.[11] However, just as Scholem did not name those with whom he disagreed, he also refrained from mentioning the name of the scholar who exerted decisive influence on him, although he later came to disagree with some of Buber's interpretations and conclusions.[12]

In the course of the years since the publication of these remarks, Scholem expanded upon various points which he had merely touched briefly in this preliminary survey. His historical clarifications of the origins of Hasidism, his concentration on the figure of R. Yisrael Baal-Shem-Tov, the controversy regarding the neutralization of the messianic idea, and his theoretical research into the place of *devekut* (cleaving to God) in Hasi-

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[8] Dubnow, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–38.

[9] See *ibid.*, p. 37 and see also pp. 42–75.

[10] See MTJM, 334–344.

[11] See M. Buber, *Be-Fardes Ha-Hasidut* (1945), Jerusalem and Tel Aviv 1963.

[12] See Scholem's remarks to the effect that it was Buber who first revealed that the Hasidic movement contained the mystical kernel of living Judaism, for he viewed Hasidism as the masterpiece of Jewish mysticism and defined it as Kabbalah become an ethos, *Devarim Be-Go*, p. 364. Although Scholem disagreed with Buber about basic methodological assumptions regarding various issues connected with the study of Hasidism, he did agree with several of his principled statements about its essence. On the shifts in his attitude toward Buber see Scholem, *Devarim Be-Go*, pp. 361–382, 450–462; idem, *Od Davar*, Tel Aviv 1989, pp. 363–415; and cf. his remarks on Buber's influence on his conception of Hasidism in his autobiographical work, *Mi-Berlin Li-Yerushalayim*, Tel Aviv 1982, pp. 47, 126.

dism, the controversial meaning of *avodah be-gashmiut* (worship in corporeality), and into the evolution of the figure of the Zaddik[13] all determined the character of research in Hasidism, aroused sharp controversies, and exerted decisive influence on the outlines of the scientific discussion.

One may well dispute more than a few of Scholem's contentions, either in his comprehensive conception or in specific details, especially when one isolates a single thread from the general fabric and concentrates only upon it. Many scholars are known to have argued with him both on the level of ideas and also on that of history. Some have disagreed as to the validity of Scholem's historical and social view of the origins of Hasidism and about subsequent consequences with respect to the affiliation between Sabbatianism and Hasidism. Others have taken issue with his spiritual interpretation and with the religious significance of his remarks.

C. Shmeruk rejected Scholem's interpretation of the stories of R. Adam Baal-Shem. Scholem claimed that these writings were derived from a disguised Sabbatian source. Shmeruk noted that they originated in a collection of Yiddish stories dating from the late seventeenth century, thereby refuting their interpretation as a Hasidic adaptation intended to hide the Sabbatian identity of Reb Heshel Zoref, whose writings were in the possession of the Besht.[14]

A. Rubinstein took issue with Scholem's thesis regarding the possibility that Hasidism rose or existed within the framework of Sabbatian ideas. He indirectly challenged the direct influence of Sabbatianism upon the leaders of the Hasidic movement and on the quality of the doctrine of the Zaddik which crystallized within it.[15]

M. Silver has recently disagreed with the argument that the geographical and historical areas in which Hasidism arose were identical with those in which secret Sabbatians were active. He maintains that the

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[13] See G. Scholem, "Shtey Ha-Eduyot Ha-Rishonot al Havurot Ha-Hasidim ve-Ha-Besht," *Tarbiz* 20 (1949), pp. 228–240; idem, "Demuto Ha-Historit shel R. Yisrael Baal-Shem-Tov," *Molad* 18 (1960–1961), pp. 335–356, and see the expanded version in the collection, *Devarim Be-Go*; idem, "The Neutralization of the Messianic Element in Early Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 20 (1969), pp. 25–55; idem, "Devekut o Hitkashrut Intimit im Elohim Be-Reshit Ha-Hasidut," in *Devarim Be-Go*, pp. 325–350; idem, "Perusho shel Martin Buber La-Hasidut," *Amot*, IX, (1963), and in *Devarim Be-Go*, pp. 361–382; idem, "Ha-Zaddik," in *Pirkey Yesod Be-Havanat Ha-Kabbalah u-Semaleyha*, Jerusalem 1976, pp. 213–258.

[14] C. Shmeruk, "Ha-Sippurim al R. Adam Baal Shem ve-Gilguleyhem be-Nushaot Sefer Shivhey Ha-Besht," *Zion* 28 (1963), pp. 86–105, and see the revised version in Shmeruk's *Sifrut Yiddish be-Polin*, Jerusalem 1981, pp. 146–199. See accounts of the various opinions on this matter in G. Scholem, *Mehkarey Shabtaut*, ed. Y. Libes, Tel Aviv 1991, pp. 597–599.

[15] A. Rubinstein, "Beyn Hasidut le-Shabtaut," *Sefer Ha-Shanah shel Universitat Bar-Ilan*, 1967, pp. 324–339.

founders of Hasidism took care to act in those areas where there were no concentrations of Sabbatians.[16] M. Idel has recently disagreed with Scholem's assertion of a historical and phenomenological connection between the Lurianic Kabbalah, its Sabbatian branches, and Hasidism.[17] Y. Tishby has disagreed over the analysis of the place of the messianic idea in Hasidism, arguing against the need of its neutralization and even doubting the very fact that there ever was such a phenomenon in Hasidism, in the light of the messianic affinities of the Besht.[18]

R. Schatz has differed regarding the continuity of the connection which Scholem asserted between the Kabbalistic tradition and its Hasidic form, arguing against his claim that its doctrine lacked any essential innovation. She maintained that there is a true confrontation within Hasidic doctrine, for it contains interpretation and dialogue with questions which are decidedly theosophical and Kabbalistic in nature.[19] M. Peikarz has disputed the contention that Hasidism contained innovative ideas in comparison to its predecessors, and he emphasized its essential and formal connection with other contemporary trends. He also argued against the view of the Hasidic religious renewal as a continuation or reaction against Sabbatianism. He rejected the understanding of the manifestations of Hasidic religious radicalism within the context of Sabbatianism. Likewise, he maintained that Hasidic innovation did not exceed norms which were accepted in the non-Sabbatian homiletic sources from which it drew.[20]

Y. Tishby disagreed with Scholem's view that the idea of cleaving to God as the first step in spiritual worship was a Hasidic innovation, and he claimed that it must be seen in close association with the doctrine of cleaving to God found in the teaching of Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto, which was spreading through Eastern Europe at the time of the growth of the movement.[21] A. Rapoport-Albert took issue with the conception that cleaving to God was a spiritual ideal intended for every Jew. She discusses the social meaning which would be inherent in this ideal, were it to be placed at the start of the mystic path open to everyone, without restric-

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16 M. Silver, "Ha-Geographia shel Reshit Ha-Hasidut ve-Ha-Shabtaut," lecture given at the symposium in honor of Yosef Weiss, *The Social Function of Mystical Ideals in Judaism: Hasidism Reappraised*, London 1988.

17 M. Idel, lecture at an evening in memory of Shmuel Ettinger, October 1989, and lecture in honor of Weiss (see n. 16 above), "Hashkafoteyhem shel Buber ve-Scholem al Kabbalah ve-Hasidut – Haarakha Bikortit."

18 Y. Tishby, "Ha-Raayon Ha-Meshihi ve-Ha-Megamot Ha-Meshihiot be-Zemihat Ha-Hasidut," *Zion*, 32 (1967), pp. 1–45.

19 R. Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Ha-Hasidut ke-Mistika*, Jerusalem 1968, pp. 11–14. See further on this issue, note 50, below.

20 M. Peikarz, *Bi-Yemey Zemihat Ha-Hasidut*, Jerusalem 1978.

21 Y. Tishby, "Ikvot Ramhal be-Mishnat Ha-Hasidut," *Zion* 43 (1978), pp. 201–234.

tions or distinctions. She argues that the concept of cleaving to God was actually limited from the start to the worship of the Zaddik and was only the province of an elite, inaccessible to the community at large.[22]

Although some scholars have rejected Scholem's arguments completely, and others proposed a different reading of the facts and their assessments, it does seem, despite the various differences of opinion, that the questions which Scholem posed regarding the spiritual meaning of the phenomenon of Hasidism, its connection with Jewish mysticism in general, and the social consequences of the mystical arousal which was bound up with it, still remain the key issues in any discussion of the phenomenon of Hasidism. Moreover, his principal points regarding the spiritual and religious essence of Hasidism and its place in the Kabbalistic continuum, his view of the movement as a religious renewal, the centrality of the doctrine of the Zaddik, and the attitude regarding the messianic question remain firmly in place, providing the foundation for contemporary study of Hasidism.

With the perspective of half a century that has passed, there appears to be no obligation to resolve the various positions which have been presented and expounded in varied arguments, gaining adherents and adversaries and generating extensive scholarly creativity. Rather, perhaps it is appropriate to go back and examine one of Scholem's *arguments*, which does not appear to have been understood correctly, and to take up one *question* arising from his words which has remained unanswered.

More than any other argument in the last chapter of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Scholem's claim that one must examine the essence of Hasidism against the background of the trends that preceded it in the history of Jewish mysticism in general, and versus Sabbatianism in particular, has been understood simplistically by his readers. The argument that Hasidism is the "last stage" in the history of Jewish mysticism, a stage connected dialectically to the two prior stages – or, according to Scholem's well-known statement: "Lurianic Kabbalism, Sabbatianism and Hasidism are after all three stages of the same process"[23] – seems to have been interpreted by his critics in a manner unintended by him. Undoubtedly these words do not refer to direct theological continuity, nor do they mean to establish a causal connection between the phenomena, nor yet a historical continuity of significant contacts between men who belonged to Sabbatian circles and the leaders of the Hasidic community. But rather, these remarks concern the need to evaluate the meaning of the Hasidic phenomenon,

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[22] A. Rapoport-Albert, "God and the Zaddik," *History of Religion* 18 (1979), pp. 296–325.

[23] MTJM, p. 327.

which grew up contiguously in time and place with controversial manifestations of Sabbatianism, in the light of the continuity of Kabbalistic thought with its historical manifestations, on the one hand, and in the light of the essential change which took place in spiritual and social reality in the wake of the Sabbatian crisis, on the other.

Against all of the arguments and counter-arguments concerning the character of the historical connection between Sabbatianism and Hasidism, which have been raised by Scholem's critics, it seems worthwhile to state once again that it is indeed very doubtful whether in the Jewish world of Eastern Europe in general, and, in particular, within the southwestern Ukraine and Podolia, where the first Hasidim were active, there was anyone who was not aware of the destructive power inherent in extreme mystical messianism or who lived beyond the circle of direct connection or indirect influence of Sabbatianism in its various forms. The impression generated by the decree of excommunication issued in 1714 by the Rabbis of Istanbul against the Doenmeh was still strongly felt during the 1720s and 1730s, the years of the development and spiritual formation of some of the founders of Hasidism.[24] The anti-Sabbatian polemics against Nehemia Hayun and Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto caused great unrest and confusion.[25] At the same time depositions were already being taken against Sabbatians in southeastern Poland. At that time fierce polemics were also being waged over the books of Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz, who was accused of Sabbatianism,[26] and surrounding an anonymous work entitled *Hemdat Yamim* which was published in the 1730s and was suspected of being Sabbatian.[27] The teachings of Barochia of Salonika, who continued in the path of Sabbatai Zevi,[28] were circulated in Podolia in the years following 1722, as we see from various testimonies concerning Sabbatian circles in Nadborna, Satanov, Gorodenka, and Buczacz.[29] As

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[24] See Scholem, *Mehkarey Shabtaut*, pp. 346, 402. The fact that Podolia was under Ottoman dominion between 1672 and 1699 had no little influence upon its connections with the Sabbatian movement in Turkey.

[25] See G. Scholem, "Hayun Nehemia," *Ha-Enziklopedia Ha-Ivrit*, vol. 17, pp. 349–351. See S. Ginzburg, *Ramhal u-Bney Doro*, a collection of letters and documents, Tel Aviv 1937, Introduction; Y. Tishby, *Netivey Emuna u-Minut*, 1964, pp. 169–203. The controversy surrounding Rabbi Hayim Moses Luzzatto (1707–1747) aroused agitation among the Jews of Europe in 1730 and 1735–1736.

[26] See B. D. Cahana, *Toldot Ha-Mekubalim Ha-Shabtaiyim ve-Ha-Hasidim*, II, pp. 22, 137; M. Perlmutter, *RY Eibeschuetz ve-Yahaso el Ha-Shabtaut*, Jerusalem 1947, and cf. Scholem, *Mehkarey Shabtaut*, pp. 653–734. See also n. 38 below.

[27] See Jacob Emden, *Torat Ha-Kanaut*, Amsterdam 1752; idem, *Edut Be-Yaakov*, Altona 1757, II, p. 28. Scholem, *Mehkarey Shabtaut*, pp. 250–288, and cf. the wording of *Shivhey Ha-Besht*, Kapost 1815, 11c–d, cf. the manuscript version of *Shivhey Ha-Besht*, ed. J. Mondschein, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 171–172.

[28] See G. Scholem, "Barochya Rosh Ha-Shabtain be-Saloniki," in *Mehkarei Shabtaut*, (n. 14 above), p. 321.

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 343, 375–376.

early as 1725 suspicion was first voiced against Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz, and investigations were initiated regarding the activities of Sabbatians and their emissaries in Poland and Ashkenaz.[30] In 1735 Rabbi Elazar Rokeah, the Rabbi of Brody, supported the banning of Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto's books, because of the suspicion of Sabbatianism. He wrote a letter to all the rabbis of Poland, warning them against "the pollution of Sabbatai Zevi" and demanding that they be "of assistance to us in burning out the thorns from the vineyard of Israel."[31] In the 1740s and 1750s, the years of intense activity on the part of the founder of Hasidism, various Sabbatian circles were active in southeast Poland and in Podolia. In the mid-eighteenth century the community of Brody, with which the Besht was linked in many ways, began a determined struggle against manifestations of Sabbatianism and Frankism which had spread into the surrounding area.[32] The rabbis of Podolia were familiar with the books of Nathan of Gaza and also with those of Barochia, which were circulated throughout the area by emissaries from Salonika, as we find from compilations of testimony and from bills of excommunication. During the 1750s, the following events occurred:[33] Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz and his book, *Va-Avo Ha-Yom el Ha-Ayin* were banned in Brody in 1752[34]; the well-known prophet of Sabbatianism, Leibl Prosnitz was excommunicated in Brody in 1753; and Jakob Frank, who had been vigorously active in the area and had acquired supporters throughout Podolia, was excommunicated in Brody in 1756.[35] This step led indirectly to the Kaminitz-Podolsk dispute in 1757, and to the great Frankist conversion of 1759.[36] From the sources which have come down to us, the Besht is the only one who expressed sadness and pain about that tragic episode.[37] All of these events occurred at the same time and in the same places where the founders of Hasidism, led by the Besht, lived and were active. We are speaking here of intense public activity and fierce legal measures taken by the community leaders, the rabbis of the community and the pietists of the *kloiz*, the Council of the district, and the Council of the Four Lands. These

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30 *Ibid.*, pp. 331–332, 343, 375, 376.

31 See M. N. Gelber, *Toldot Yehudey Brodi*, Arim ve-Imahot be-Yisrael, VI, Jerusalem 1955, pp. 50–51.

32 On the Besht's connection with Brody see *Shivhey Ha-Besht*, ed. B. Mintz, Jerusalem 1969, pp. 47–48, 50, 90, 129. On the struggle of that community against Sabbatianism and Frankism, see Gelber, *Toldot Yehudey Brodi*, pp. 55–58, 106–115. See also n. 38 below.

33 See M. Balaban, *Le-Toldot Ha-Tenua Ha-Frankit*, Tel Aviv 1934–5, I, pp. 44–48, and see Heilprin, n. 38 below.

34 See n. 26 above and see Balaban, pp. 6–8, 72–81.

35 See Gelber, pp. 105–109 cf. Balaban pp. 118–126.

36 See Balaban, pp. 137–150, 181–281.

37 See *Shivhey Ha-Besht*, ed. Mintz, p. 65, and cf. ed. Mondschein, p. 157. See the various traditions regarding this matter in A. Yaari, "Le-Toldot Milhamtam shel Hakhmey Polin be-Tenuat Frank," *Mehkarey Sefer*, Jerusalem 1958, pp. 450–465.

measures included gathering of testimony, exchanges of letters, convening of special tribunals, examination of forbidden books and writings, and promulgation of writs of excommunication,[38] and it left its mark on the entire Jewish community during the first half of the eighteenth century and in following years. However, since these events took place largely in areas where Hasidism grew up, most likely they left an especial imprint upon the circles where Hasidism took shape.[39] This is said in reference not only to the persecution of Sabbatianism and to the excommunication of certain individuals or their books, but also to the prohibition of the common factor that stands in the background of their activity, that is, the study of Kabbalah, as well as to the rejection of visionary authority in its various manifestations.[40] It will be remembered that the Sabbatians were known to have linked their doctrine to the Lurianic Kabbalah and to revelations from the upper worlds transmitted by their prophets. Similarly the Frankists, who called themselves the Masters of the Zohar, acted under the inspiration of Kabbalistic literature and its Sabbatian interpretation, and under the inspiration of visionary revelations which took place within Jakob Frank's circle.[41] Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto was also excommunicated at that time because he wrote innovative interpretations of the Kabbalah according to the revelations of a divine mentor and because he was suspected of Sabbatianism.[42] Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz was thought of as a great Kabbalist by his contemporaries, and a conflict was waged surrounding his Kabbalistic writings and amulets, similar to the controversy surrounding Leib Prosnitz and other Sabbatian teachers. All of these masters studied the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah, interpreting these writings according to visionary revelations of their own or of their associates, and in the light of the new truths they espoused, which, according to them, were found explicitly in the Kabbalistic texts themselves or related through heavenly revelations concerning them. Therefore, if Hasidism is grasped as a link in the chain of the Kabbalistic tradition, in its own consciousness or in that of the surrounding society, and if it anchors its authority to the Kabbalistic tradition, to immediate contact with the upper

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[38] Regarding the communal significance of the controversies, their extent, and the circle of their influence, see I. Heilprin, *Pinkas Vaad Arba Arzot* (Jerusalem 1945), second edition revised and expanded by I. Bartal, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 339–359, 361–372, 375–378, 390–398, 406–408, 415–418.

[39] See *Shivhey Ha-Besht*; ed. Mondschein, pp. 11, 155–157, 171–172 and see also various Hasidic traditions regarding Sabbatianism and Frankism, pp. 265–266.

[40] On the prohibition against the study of Kabbalah before the age of forty, which was promulgated in Brodi, see Balaban, I, p. 126, Gelber, p. 107, and see Yaari n. 37 above. For the historical source of this prohibition and its subsequent developments see M. Idel, "Le-Toldot Ha-Issur Lilmod Kabbalah Lifney Gil Arbaim," *AJS Review*, V, (1980).

[41] See A. Kroizhar, *Frank ve-Adato*, I, Warsaw 1897, trans. N. Sokolov.

[42] See n. 25 above and cf. Ginzburg, *Igrot Ramhal*; pp. 284–285.

worlds, and to celestial visions, it could not but have had some connection to the provocative manifestations of this tradition occurring at the same time and place, and to the storm which raged around it, nor could it avoid taking a position on the questions which arose on this matter.[43]

Even if we accept some of the arguments advanced by those who disagree with Scholem about the *historical* role played by Sabbatianism with respect to the origin of Hasidism, accepting some of the objections and refutations which have been raised regarding the question of direct contact between Sabbatianism and Hasidism and regarding the question of personal connections between members of the two movements, and indeed we agree that the assertion of historical or chronological continuity does not prove that the later stage grew out of the earlier one, this cannot eliminate the *spiritual influence* of Sabbatianism, which was not conditional upon direct contact. These spiritual influences need not refer to direct and immediate continuity in ideas, but rather to the effect of the Sabbatian breaking down boundaries and challenging the entire traditional world of thought and the validity of Kabbalistic norms, at a time when new horizons were opened for struggling with the conception of the divinity, with the changing divine will, and with the significance of divine worship.

The Sabbatian antinomianism was unlike anything which preceded it, and the opening of new antinomian horizons of thought left their mark upon the spiritual transformations which took place in their wake. Hasidic spiritualization, which undermined the existing order, in thought if not in fact, and which explicitly preferred intention to the deed,[44] was directly and indirectly influenced by concepts which were of critical significance in Sabbatianism. A decided *phenomenological affinity* with the Sabbatian conceptual world is found in the profound discussion in Hasidic literature of the religious meaning of sin, in its relation to the degree of autonomy of a person's spiritual determination, and in the theurgic influence of the divine world. This discussion was bound up with the question of when the religious value of sin was greater than the prohibition against committing it and in determining the obligation to respond to transformations in the divine will by means of a religious act performed through sin. Repeated discussions of concepts such as "a religious act performed through sin," "descent for the purpose of rising up," "the time to act for the Lord, violate your Torah," "sin for the sake of heaven," "sin for its own sake," "the descent to the kelipot," "the descent of the Zaddik," "an act against the Halakhah," "in all Your ways know Him, and even in sin," "the need of the hour," "doubts," "inversion," and "reversal" – all of which interpret a

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[43] Most likely the tradition indicating that the Besht forbade the study of Kabbalah is also connected to this matter.

[44] See Schatz, *Ha-Hasidut ke-Mistika*, pp. 17–20, 54–77.

sin as a religious action – are common in various Hasidic sources.[45] These concepts and similar ones testify to the indirect influence of Sabbatianism and to the meaning of the spiritual liberty which took shape in the Hasidic world. They also express the desire to define and interpet anew the changing meaning of the divine commandment and the alterations in personal worship necessitated by these changes. These concepts, which show a renewed examination of the religious meaning of transgression, and the daring to establish a spiritual world other than the prevailing one, indicate the liberties taken by various Hasidic circles to choose autonomously between the normative framework and the spiritual interest, as well as a reevaluation of the accepted hierarchy of values.[46]

The choice of a conceptual framework so close to that of the world of Sabbatianism could not have been insignificant in the eighteenth century, when the Jews of Eastern Europe were agitated and threatened by the various forms of the Sabbatian and Frankist movements and by various manifestations of antinomian praxis.

At the same time, the rise of Hasidism cannot be explained solely through its connection with Sabbatianism, as a continuation or a reaction. Likewise, one must not exaggerate the significance of Sabbatian ideas within the fabric of Hasidic life, for Hasidism, as Scholem correctly pointed out, freed itself from the burden of the messianic idea, which had profoundly dominated Sabbatian thought, and also from the tragic gap

[45] See for example the words of the Seer of Lublin: "that it should seem to him for the honor of heaven to be permitted to transgress some commandment, and this is a transgression for its sake," *Zot Zikaron*, Mukachevo 1942, p. 178; "Even a transgression for its sake is great," *ibid.*, 47; "Even a transgression for its sake is important to the Place," *ibid.*, 60; "And this is 'let all your actions be for the sake of heaven.'" Compare Rabbi Aharon Ha-Levi, "and His blessed intention is that it be revealed particularly in reversal, which is the *sitra ahra*, so as to His honor will be revealed in the aspect of His uniqueness, in particular through reversal," *Shaarey Ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*, Shklon 1820 V, ch. 15; "For any revelation is manifest in reversal ... that is by overturning the *sitra ahra*, and by forcing the *sitra ahra* into holiness in this He will be more revealed in His wholeness," *Shaarey Ha-Avodah*, Shklow 1821 Shaar Anpin, ch. 36, and cf. "And this was the essence of the intention of the creation, that in this aspect would be the principal revelation of the Torah, in [ritual] prohibitions and permissions, kosher and non-kosher ... for this is precisely through the revelation of evil, and therein will be revealed His blessed will ... that in all things which are extended in greater hiddenness is greater revelation from the power of His blessed substance, and therein will be clarified and elucidated all of the details ... and thus every descent is for the sake of ascent," *ibid.*, IV, ch. 19. See also the words of the author of *Mey Ha-Shiloah*, "And even all the sins of the Jews are in the providence of the Blessed Name, for thereby His great Name is magnified and sanctified," *ibid.*, Parshat Va-Yera; "And in all your ways know Him, and even in transgression," *ibid.*, Be-Shalah; "And this is the root of the life of Judah to look at the Lord in all things and not to observe the commandments out of habit. ... and this matter sometimes requires one to do an act against the Halakhah, for the time has come to act for the Lord, etc.," *ibid.*, Va-Yeshev.

[46] I hope to discuss this subject extensively elsewhere. See, to date, R. Elior, *Torat Ha-Elohut Ba-Dor Ha-Sheni shel Hasidut Habad*, Jerusalem 1982, the discussion of the doctrine of reversal, pp. 244–288.

between the disenchanted hopes for a messianic age and the reality of an apostate messiah.[47] Hasidism concentrated its attention on the dual facets of existence and on the reciprocal mystical relations between human consciousness and the presence of the divinity, without attributing to these relations absolute theurgical significance or an unconditional meta-historical goal. Hasidism determined its place in an unequivocal manner *within* traditional Judaism and not beyond it, though it assumed the spiritual freedom constantly to examine and reassess the structure of its values anew.[48]

The growth of Hasidism is marked by mystical arousal, spiritual change, and charismatic leadership, as well as by a new relationship between spiritual rebirth and social reality. The contribution of Sabbatianism to the consolidation of Hasidism lay in the following areas: (1) the expansion of the horizons of spiritual discourse; (2) the establishment of charismatic patterns of leadership; (4) breaking the accepted boundaries; (5) deepening the feeling of spiritual freedom regarding the interpretation of religious values; (6) and the degree of daring to place new ecstatic and mystical concepts alongside the accepted normative categories. While presenting the Sabbatian movement as a historical and chronological axis might perhaps arouse controversy, it is worth recalling that it presented for the first time not only the model of pneumatic leadership drawing upon Kabbalistic concepts, but also the model of a movement, which gave importance to the social significance of mystical ideas.

As noted, Scholem placed Hasidism in the Lurianic-Sabbatian sequence, and recently controversy has also arisen regarding the validity of the first member of this sequence. Idel has raised the argument that it is overly simplistic to view the Lurianic Kabbalah as a principal factor which exerted dominant influence upon following developments. He argued that one should expand the variety of sources which must be taken into account in understanding the growth of Hasidism and the formation of its spiritual world.[49]

No one should disagree that the library at the disposal of the masters of Hasidism contained many diverse sources, and doubtless they did not limit their interest to only one chapter of the Kabbalistic tradition, as is clearly attested by the Hasidic homiletic literature. However, the principal

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[47] See MTJM, p. 329, and cf. the detailed discussion of the argument in Scholem, "Neutralization" (above, n. 13).

[48] Opinons are divided concerning the character of the connection of Hasidism to the framework of the tradition. See J. Katz, *Masoret u-Mashber*, Jerusalem (1958), pp. 262–283, and cf. Sh. Ettinger, "Ha-Hanhaga Ha-Hasidit be-Izuvah," *Dat ve-Hevrah be-Toldot Yisrael ve-Ha-Amim*, 1965, pp. 121–134.

[49] See n. 17 above.

issues are: What was the conceptual system from which they chose their point of departure? What were the dominant perceptions around which they raised their arguments? And which ideological conception did they chose to confront when they formulated their worldview? If we make a distinction between the Hasidic *doctrine of divinity* and the form of *divine worship* which took shape within it, an examination of the literature of the movement clearly shows the centrality of the *Lurianic system* in the conception of the divinity – there is hardly a single Hasidic work which does not discuss "Withdrawal" and "Breaking," "Divine Emanation" and "Raising the Sparks," "Expansion" and "Contraction," "*Igulim*" (Rounds) and "*Yosher*" (Straightness), or "Abundance" and "Enrobement," all as formulated within the Lurianic Kabbalah. Even after profound alteration takes place in the spiritual concern entailed by these concepts,[50] the Lurianic framework still provides the general and dominant conceptual and terminological system in all dimensions regarding the doctrine of divinity.[51] Alongside it there exist other systems such as the Cordoverian Kabbalah and its extensions, or the Kabbalistic moral literature, but these systems are decidedly secondary in the importance accorded to them by the masters of Hasidism and in the degree of authoritativeness and sanctity attributed to them. Hasidic thought is nourished by tension between the transcendental Lurianic theosophy which deciphers the laws of divine being, and the immanent doctrine of Hasidism which explains the hidden essence of the relations between God and the world. Even in the extreme manifestations of Hasidic thought, the acosmistic, the anarchical, and the pantheistic doctrines, which often contradict the literal meaning of Lurianic thought, the authors never divest themselves of the concepts of the Lurianic Kabbalah and its terminological framework.

With respect to *divine worship* and the comprehensive spiritualization which took place in the understanding of its meaning, the masters of Hasidism indeed used the entire mystical lexicon which preceded them, but they did not view themselves as committed to a specific system or overall conception, for they depended upon the force of spiritual arousal and mystical exaltation which they experienced themselves, or which they witnessed. They took the term "*Hishtavut*" (indifference) from *Hovot Ha-Levavot* and "*devekut*" (cleaving to God) from the Kabbalistic moral literature, "*hitpashtut ha-gashmiut*" (stripping away corporeality) from the *Tur, Orah Hayim*, and "*avodah be-gashmiut*" (worship in corporeality)

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[50] See R. Elior, "Ha-Zika she-beyn Kabbalah le-Hasidut – Rezifut u-Temurah," *Divrey Ha-Kongress Ha-Olami le-Madaey Ha-Yahadut*," Section III, Jerusalem 1986, pp. 107–114.

[51] Examination of Hasidic books with indices of sources such as *Maggid Devarav le-Yaakov, Ketonet pasim, Noam Elimelekh, Tanya, Shaarey Ha-Yihud ve-Ha-Emunah, Likutey Torah* and others easily shows the dominance of Lurianic Kabbalism. See also Y. Tishby and J. Dan, "Hasidut," in *Ha-Enziklopedia Ha-Ivrit*, vol. 27, p. 770.

from Maggid-Meysharim, and of course "*tikkun*" (restoration) and "*haalat ha-nizozot*" (the raising of the sparks) from the Lurianic literature. However they also frequently coined new concepts to explain the innovative Hasidic experience, concepts such as: "*Bittul ha-Yesh*" (annihilation of being) "*Bittul mi-meziut*" (annihilation from reality), or "*maaleh azmo le-maalah me-ha-olam*" (he raises himself above the world), "*yeziah me-arziut*" (departure from earthliness), "*reiat ha-ruhaniut*" (viewing spirituality), "*hashraat elohut be-evarav*" (the inspiration of the divinity in his limbs), or "*le-haber shemeimiyut im arziut laasot ha-kol be-hitkashrut u-ve-hitlahavut*" (to link celestiality with mundanity, to do everything with attachment and enthusiasm), along with "*hitpaalut*" (ecstatic inspiration), "*hazaza*" (displacement), "*hafikhat ha-ani le-Ayin*" (turning the self into Nothingness), "*le-haktin azmo le-Ayin ha-muhlat*" (to reduce oneself to absolute Nothingness), "*hitkashrut*" (zealous devotion), "*hitbonenut*" (contemplation), "*hamshakhah el ha-Ayin*" (being drawn to Nothingness), and the like.[52] The purpose was to assist and guide man in achieving a transition in his consciousness from being to nothingness, to decipher the spiritual innerness of physical reality and recognize the divine presence beyond its earthly guise. These concepts, which draw upon the force of mystical experience and upon the spiritual arousal which took place in Hasidism, were also certainly influenced by the Kabbalistic tradition preceding them: the mystical tradition which had taken shape in Safed; the assumptions derived from the Hasidic doctrine of immanence; and also assumptions connected with the Lurianic dialectic. But these elements were *not* arrayed in systematic fashion, nor were they committed to a specific system of thought beyond the general contemplative orientation which seeks to create an ethos based on denial of reality for the purpose of concentrating on the divine meaning of existence.

Scholem's choice of the Lurianic system as the point of reference for evaluating the Hasidic movement is a well founded one with which one might differ on the historical or methodological level, but it is almost impossible to refute it on the spiritual level because of the pronounced dominance of that system in Hasidic thought with respect to concepts and terminology.

Scholem determined the spiritual place of the Hasidic movement when he established a historical continuum and placed it among the basic trends of Jewish mysticism. However, he condemned it in stating that the outburst of mystical energy which was embodied by the succession of Zaddikim and mystics who formed the movement did not create new religious ideas, nor

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[52] See *Or Ha-Meir*, Koretz 1798, Jerusalem 1968, fols. 15b, 34b, 84b, 115b, 137b, 161a. Cf. Maggid Devarav le-Yaakov, index, for these concepts.

did it generate new doctrines of mystic consciousness.[53] On this point one may disagree with him and raise the question which he had left unanswered. He claimed that "Hasidism, as a whole is as much a reformation of earlier mysticism as it is more or less the same thing."[54] If so, what was the secret of its charm and attraction, and why was it significant to extensive circles, on the one hand, and why did it arouse such great opposition, on the other?

It seems that Scholem passed his judgment regarding the lack of new doctrine in Hasidic literature when he came to compare the complex theosophical systems erected by the Lurianic Kabbalah and the Sabbatian ideas which arose in its wake to the doctrine of Hasidism. He did not find the new stage in Kabbalistic theosophy which he sought. However, perhaps the comparison to the Lurianic Kabbalah and Sabbatian thought does not truly enlighten the essence of Hasidism, since Hasidic doctrine did not intend to create a new layer of theosophy in order to decipher the subtleties of the divine cosmogony. Rather, it sought to present a *comprehensive dialectical worldview* which would bridge between the divine processes described in the Lurianic Kabbalah and man's consciousness and his thinking processes, while it offered an essential continuity between the upper and lower worlds, transformed the connection with them, and determined a common structure between them.

Hasidic doctrine created a multi-levelled conceptual system which simultaneously referred to both the divine being and human consciousness, while interpreting the divine processes of creation and the human processes of thought according to a single metaphorical structure of concepts.[55] Both the day-to-day ethos of the congregation and also the mystical leadership of the Zaddik took shape around the same structure of concepts which viewed spiritual change as valid only when it was accompanied by social significance.[56] Any perusal of Hasidic homiletical literature will reveal that the basic concepts of Hasidic reality always possess double and redoubled meanings. These concepts refer both to divine being and its transformations, and also to human thought and its mundane manifestations. Likewise, they pertain to the leadership of the Zaddik, with its spiritual and corporeal meaning, and also to the Kabbalistic symbolism which relates to the relationship among the various aspects of the divinity.

Concepts deriving from the mystical tradition – such as: "abundance," "vitality," "greatness," "smallness," "nothingness," "being," "ascent," and

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[53] MTJM, p. 338.

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] See R. Elior, "Yesh ve-Ayin – Defusey Yesod ba-Mahshava Ha-Hasidit," *Sefer Ha-Zikaron le-Efraim Gottlieb*, ed. E. Goldreich and M. Oron, in press.

[56] See R. Elior, "Between Yesh and Ayin, the Doctrine of the Zaddik in the Works of Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin," in *Jewish History*, Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky, ed. A. Rapoport-Albert and S. Zipperstein, London 1988, pp. 393–455.

"descent;" or: "contraction," "expansion," "sparks," and "shells" – are prevalent in Hasidic literature, where they refer both to upper worlds and also to the world of man. Hasidic doctrine adopted the basic concepts of the Lurianic dialectic, which reflects the existence of contradictions within the divine being, and discuss at length "coming into being" and "annihilation," "expansion" and "withdrawal," "ascent" and "descent," "effulgence" and "contraction."[57] However, Hasidism detached these concepts of their unique reference to higher realms by applying them to broad areas of human existence, in general, and to the area of the mystical leadership of the Zaddik, in particular. Hasidism adopted the concepts of the Kabbalistic theogony, which discuss processes which are constantly repeated in upper worlds, and it transformed them into the cornerstone for understanding the true significance of reality on all its levels. It did so by applying the principles of the divine dialectic to the innerness of all the worlds, while relating to all of the components of existence as infinite metamorphic processes, on the one hand, and as details which can be taken apart and reassembled, on the other.

In Hasidic thought, the divinity is perceived as a unity of opposites, both emanating and contracting, extending and vanishing, coming into being and annihilating, and constantly undergoing a dynamic change called "Ascent and Descent," or "Alteration."[58] Similarly, "human thought constantly cogitates ... *in extension*" and *contracts* in speech. As opposed to the divinity which "*contracts* itself and permeates this world", man "*contracts* his intellect in words and letters ... contracts his intellect and speaks small things" (Dov Ber of Mezritch, *Maggid Devarav le-Yaakov*, Pars. 131, 134, 28a). In contrast to the divinity, which expands and contracts, turning itself *from nothingness into being* and from being into nothingness over and over again, Hasidism demands of man that he transform himself *from being into nothingness* and declares "that this is the purpose of the creation of the worlds from nothingness to being, so as to transform it from the aspect of being to the aspect of nothingness" (Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, Va-Yeze, p. 44). Hasidic doctrine frequently defines the reciprocal and inverse bond between creation and annihilation in various formulations; "but behold we see the aspect of the annihilation of being into nothingness in all created things, that this is the opposite of the creation from nothingness into absolute being" (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Torat-Hayim*, 1b).

In the light of this transformative view, which leaves no static element in earthly or celestial reality, Hasidic doctrine posed an exceptional de-

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[57] On the place of these concepts in Lurianic thought, see Scholem, MTJM, pp. 260–264.

[58] See R. Elior, *Torat Ahdut Ha-Hafakhim – Ha-Theosophia Ha-Mistit shel Habad*, Jerusalem 1993; idem, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God, The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad*, New York 1992.

mand, stating that "*a person must remove himself from all corporeality* so much so that as he ascends through all the worlds he becomes *unity* with the Holy One, blessed be He." It supports this demand with the argument that "*the Holy One, blessed be He*, underwent several contractions through several worlds so as to become *unity* with man, who would not have been able to bear His splendor" (*Maggid Devarav le-Yaakov*, par. 24). This teaching, which asserts that there are reciprocal mystical relations between God and man, defines the paradoxical religious ideal which arises from it in the following words: "*That he be voided of existence and then he will be called man*" (*ibid.*). It instructs man "to regard himself as though he *did not exist* and think as though he were not in this world" (*Zavaat Ha-Ribash*, p. 9).[59] Hasidic doctrine continues with the following details: "a person must consider himself as nothing and forget himself entirely" (*Maggid Devarav le-Yaakov*, 110). It states that everyone is obligated to see the conversion of being into nothingness as a guiding ideal, but the Zaddik is the one who fully carries out its application. The Zaddik completes the divine cycle of reversals and also *transforms nothingness into being*: "whoever *considers himself as nothing* can draw down blessings from the divine flow (*mazal*); children, life, and sustenance" (Yaakov Yizhak of Lublin, *Zikharon Zot*, Lekh-Lekha, p. 9). The Hasidic worldview insists upon the dialectical connection between the actions of God and those of the Zaddik: "It is known that the Blessed Name emanated worlds and created *being from nothingness*, and the main point was so that the Zaddik could make *from being nothingness*" (Abraham ben ha-Maggid, *Hesed le-Avraham*, Parshat Bereshit). At the focal point of its doctrine Hasidism places the infinite divine transformations from nothingness to being and from being to nothingness, and it established them as the archetype for the conception of the divinity and also for the conception of reality, both in the doctrine of the Zaddik and also in man's worship. The Hasidic worldview inferred, from the presence of opposing elements within the divine being, a dynamic duality in the processes of coming into being and annihilation which lie at the foundation of all reality. Therefore it grasps existence as being composed of alternating opposites.[60] This doctrine discerns the dual significance of being and the dialectical relation of its two components to one another, and it infers this critical duality of significance from the dual aspect of divine being, which is viewed as a dialectical process simultaneously including within it things and their opposites. It declares categorically that just as the divine being is constantly found in a process of ascent and descent, expansion and resignation, abundance and contraction, concretization and annihilation, so, too, human consciousness is

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59 See R. Schatz, *Ha-Hasidut ke-Mistika*, pp. 21–31.

60 See n. 58 above.

called upon constantly to distinguish the dual meaning of existence by means of these processes. Hasidic doctrine seeks to apply the divine unity of opposites to human consciousness and to remove all the dimensions of human experience from unequivocal categories. It also demands of man that he recognize that all things embody simultaneously themselves and their opposite, for there are no immutable beings, since everything is subject to process, constantly assuming forms and abandoning them. That is to say, beyond every manifest *Yesh* (being) there is a hidden *Ayin* (nothingness) which gives it life and which conditions its existence, just as every hidden *Ayin* (nothingness) needs a manifest *Yesh* (being) for the purpose of its discernable manifestation. Everything is simultaneously both being and nothingness, all things embody the unity of opposites and the divine duality which lies at the foundation of existence.

The Hasidic principle demands of man that he constantly recognize this duality: "Let him not permit his heart to see the *corporeality* of things, but rather the *divinity* which is garbed and hidden there" (Zeev Wolf of Zhytomir, *Or Ha-Meir*, p. 182). This principle stands at the base of the paradoxical system of thought which demands of man that he adopt a point of view contradictory to his sensory perception and his routine experience, confronting him with the need to re-examine the entire structure of his conceptions and the existing order of reality.

Hasidic doctrine requires one to effect a reversal. That is to say, in one's consciousness he must transform being into nothingness, see reality as nothing and naught, and restore it to the divine nothingness, which is grasped as the unity of opposites. Man is also called upon to reject the tangible aspect of existence for its innerness, to annihilate being, to strip away corporeality, and to see in the divine nothingness the only true being.

The Hasidic conception places a nihilistic doctrine before man, nullifying the whole accepted meaning of reality, suspending normal criteria, and refuting the literal meaning of things. It is a doctrine which calls upon man to doubt his experience and the evidence of his eyes, to suspend the authority of tangible concreteness, and to raise questions and doubts regarding the accepted and established tradition of unequivocal dichotomies. It is no coincidence that Hasidism chose the nihilistic term, "the annihilation of being," as a central value in human worship, nor is it coincidental that it chose to call God "*Ayin*" (nothingness) and spoke frequently of self-annihilation and the stripping away of corporeality, of transforming the self ("*ani*") to nothingness ("*Ayin*"), of the indifference to all manifestations of being, of resignation, and of self-nullification and self-abnegation. For it penetratingly challenges the appearance of the existing order of things, which is called "being" or "illusion." It also demands the negation of illusory reality, which is truly nothing at all as long as it is grasped as separate from the divine abundance which gives it life, as a condition for uni-

fication with the true reality which is present in the contemplative consciousness of man. It calls upon man to perceive himself as belonging to the upper realm and urges him to detach himself from his earthly being and relate with absolute indifference to the common order of rational values. It repeatedly challenges man to remove himself from the regions and boundaries of the material world; "The true bond is through ... the obliteration and burning of the Yesh completely ... as when one truly does not wish to be living in the existence of being, only unto thee Oh Lord do I lift up my soul (Psalms 25; 1), as in the obliteration and absence of the Yesh" (Aharon ha-Levi, *Avodat Ha-Levi*, Tezaveh, 47b). Hasidic doctrine demands of man that he attain "the measure of nothingness," that he nullify all of his corporeal powers, that he deliver up his soul, that he see himself as devoid of substance and divested from corporeality. It states these demands more acutely in speaking of the Zaddik, asserting that there is a connection between the alternations of being and nothingness on the divine level and the oscillation between the annihilation of being and the drawing down of abundance of the Zaddik. "For the Zaddik must cleave to nothingness and be nullified in reality, and afterward he draws down all blessings from the divine flow to the world" (Levi Yizhak of Berditchev, *Kedushat Levi*, 14a).

The character of Hasidic thought is delineated by the transformative character of existence from its divine origin, which unites nothingness and being and alternates between them, through its reflection in the vacillations of the Zaddik's soul, as he constantly shifts back and forth from being to nothingness, to the experience of a person subject to corporeality, who seeks to strip being away from his consciousness and annihilate it into nothingness.

That Hasidic thought which attributed transformative power to the divinity, to existence, and to consciousness, and stated that everything has dual meaning, raised up a world of transformation and change, dismantling and reconstruction, a world which is not content with the literal nature of things, with fixed earthly values, with the manifest countenance of reality, or with the unequivocal meaning of existence. Reality which is grasped solely in its external manifestations is merely naught and nothingness, "For the entire world is like a grain of mustard in comparison to the upper world. ... And let him think that he belongs to the upper world, and let all the people dwelling in this world be of no importance to him" (*Zavaat Ha-Ribash*, 1b). "For in truth everything is as naught and nothing" (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Iggrot Kodesh*, Kuntres Miluim, 10b). However, the most penetrating meaning of this perception does not lie only in their spiritual significance on the mystical level, but rather in the deep essence of the inner liberty which was granted to those who took the path of Hasidism and freed themselves from the impediment of conformed con-

ception. The liberty that was taken by those who defined existing reality as nothing and naught, who removed themselves from subjection to the existing order of things and asserted the right to determine within the world of tradition a new hierarchy of values different from that which was prevalent in the structures of daily ethos, in those of divine worship, and in the conception of reality. When Rabbi Shneur Zalman cries out: "and even if the worlds seem to us like being, *this is an utter falsehood*" (*Torah-Or*, Tisa, 86b), he takes a principled position regarding reality and its structures, and not only regarding the divinity and its mystical metamorphoses. The tension between commitment to the tradition and the desire, arising from a mystical view of the world, to diminish the value of external reality – or the tension coming from the collision between autonomous spiritual values sustained by the *Ayin* (Nothingness) and the traditional values derived from the *Yesh* (Being) – nourished Hasidic thought, as it sought to remain within the traditional world while seeking the liberty to shape it anew in its own spirit and image.

Perhaps this dialectical attitude, which simultaneously maintained commitment to the tradition but sought freedom from the rule of traditional frameworks; which sought to observe the Torah and the commandments but called for "stripping existence of its corporeality"; which chose to remain within the accepted social system but demanded an attitude of "indifference" and "annihilation of being" toward it; which sought to remain within the confines of the norm but yearned to annihilate the existing order and to change its meaning entirely – this is what typified the world of Hasidism and determined its dual countenance and ambivalence. It seems that this unification of opposites, which interpreted all of the worlds in the light of divine metamorphoses, and which subjected all of existence to processes of change and alteration – this is what elucidates the secret of the attraction of Hasidism in its origins and explains its significance.