

MEDITATIVE AND CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES
OF CERTAIN HASIDIC MASTERS

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
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Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by Richard Agler
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

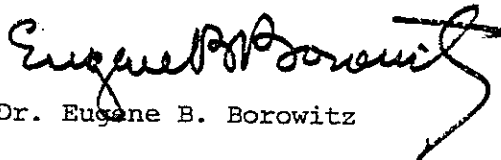
Meditative and Contemplative Practices of Certain Hasidic Masters

In the beginning, Mr. Agler's project seemed to set unsurmountable difficulties in his way. Out of his personal experience with meditative techniques, he sought to discover whether similar such practices were to be found in Hasidic traditions. Without secondary literature as an introduction to the topic, facing the reticence of mystics to set down the intimacies of their actions, utilizing texts which are notorious for their lack of organization, authenticity and proper publication, his project seemed doomed to yield few and tenuous results. Consultation with recognized experts in the field did little to solve these problems but did provide entry to the field, at least on related themes.

To my great delight, Mr. Agler's intense devotion to his investigation, manifest in his careful combing of large amounts of material for the occasional mention of his theme, began to yield substantial results. His thesis document, though substantial, reveals only a portion of what he did and learned since it is limited to his positive findings. With great sensitivity to the nuances of what he uncovered, with careful regard to key terms and their implications, with openness to the shift of vocabulary and ideas from teacher to teacher, he was able not only to bring Hasidic meditative practices to the surface but to trace their flow and development in a number of major masters. Mr. Agler makes only modest claims for what he has shown, acknowledging that some of his judgments are debatable and most of his findings require further investigation. This disciplined self-criticism adds to the scholarly maturity of his effort and the persuasiveness of his tentative conclusions.

This has been a most unusual thesis process, one which has seen a great deal created from what was initially near nothing. Mr. Agler deserves great praise for carrying it through with deep personal commitment and high academic achievement. I enthusiastically recommend the acceptance of this thesis.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz

April 25, 1978

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Whew! Although these are the first words seen by the reader, they are the last ones composed by the writer. It is with a great sigh of relief then, that I take a moment to thank G-d for sustaining me in life and permitting me to reach this most joyous of occasions.

I thank all of my teachers, and that includes everyone, for their dedication to life, to knowledge, to growth, and to students like myself. Whether we have met personally or through books, I have gained from all of them and I thank all of them. I especially thank Irv and Sue Sarnoff for everything they have given me. I thank my Mom and Dad for all of the above as well as for the unlimited quantities of love and understanding that they have given me during the past twenty-six years.

Specifically, for help with this thesis, I'd like to thank Rabbis Zalman Schachter, Arthur Green, John J. Tepfer, the library staff of the Hebrew Union College--Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, and of course Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz, who served as my advisor and whose aid was of inestimable value. Long after I've forgotten the many ways in which Dr. Borowitz has helped with this thesis, I will remember that he has helped to teach me that there's a little bit of the "mystic" in all of us.

Finally, to my wife Mindy, for all the love, understanding, assistance, encouragement, and last but not least the patience that she has shown since day one, this thesis is dedicated.

INTRODUCTION

Though I realized it in a limited way almost immediately after beginning, five years of practicing Transcendental Meditation have deepened my understanding of the fact that there is a clear and meaningful connection between meditative practice and any religion. I found that meditation provided what I call, for want of a better term, "a universal religious consciousness," that was too universal to be the sole domain of one particular faith or another. As a Jew, I was especially interested in the connection between meditation and Judaism. I knew that Judaism was too great a faith to have survived so long and to have overlooked such a taproot of religious experience as meditative consciousness.

But teachings of Jewish meditative practice have hardly been made known to the average Jewish layperson, in past eras or in the present era. When I reported to a Jewish friend of mine who was interested in Eastern religion that I wanted to be a Rabbi, he couldn't understand why on earth I wanted to do such a thing. Judaism, in his own words, was "a bunch of matzos". He had no idea whatsoever that much of what he had seen and found meaningful in Eastern religious teachings was available in Judaism as well. Yet I couldn't help but understand his sentiments. Six months earlier I might

not have questioned his understanding. It is because I felt that Jews can and should be able to find a spiritual home within their own religious tradition, that I began my study of the teachings of meditation that are found within the Jewish tradition.

A cursory glance at Jewish spiritual history provides us with the knowledge that meditation and contemplation were practiced in some form by the ancient "pious ones" of the tannaitic period. This is reported in the Mishna, Berachot 5:1. The Merkabah mystics of the tannaitic and amoraic periods strove for the contemplative vision of the merkabah, the heavenly chariot.¹ In a possible reference to Jewish meditation, the eleventh century philosopher Bachya Ibn Pakuda, referred to hitbodadut--being alone with G-d.² Abraham Abulafia wrote a detailed treatise on the doctrine of meditation in the thirteenth century. Abulafia's system was based on the mysteries of the Hebrew alphabet and the various Names of G-d.³ In addition, a complicated system of meditation based on the kabbalistic understanding of the universe was developed by the Lurianic kabbalists in sixteenth century Safed.

Unfortunately, the meditative teachings of the aforementioned spiritual leaders proved to be either too scanty or too complex on which to base a thesis. However, the Hasidim of eighteenth century Europe also practiced some form(s) of meditation and contemplation. I understood that the Hasidic teachings were both more available

and less complicated than were the teachings of the earlier luminaries. Hence the title of this thesis, "Meditative and Contemplative Practices of Certain Hasidic Masters".

The parameters in which this topic falls circumscribe the area of religious consciousness known as mysticism. Jewish mystics, as I had been told and was soon to find out first-hand, didn't like to talk much. They were especially reluctant to have their teachings appear in print for fear that all manner of uninitiated riff-raff would have access to that which was customarily transmitted privately, from master to trusted disciple. I reasoned that this problem would be minimized by studying the literature of the Hasidic movement, one of whose aims was to imbue a special religious consciousness in as great a number of Jews as possible.

The central problem now became where exactly to find written published evidence of Hasidic meditative and contemplative practices. Analysis of secondary literature provided very few leads. Probing the uncharted wilds of the card catalog also proved fruitless. I turned to two well known mavens in the field: Rabbis Arthur Green and Zalman Schachter. Both cautioned me that I was in difficult waters and suggested that I might be better off modifying my topic in one way or another. "Reb Zalman" suggested that I might be able to do a creditable thesis on hanhagot--the spiritual behaviors of various

Hasidic masters. This sounded close enough to what I wanted; he gave me a bibliography and I got to work.

I found that the Hasidic masters, although more willing to publish such material than others, were still pretty tight-lipped. The research was difficult but much to my delight I did find some teachings dealing with meditative/contemplative phenomena. A special problem was how to judge each passage that was potentially usable to determine whether it was simply offering ethical moralistic advice or describing something more profound. I have no doubt made some errors in judgement in this area. They are on display in the body of the thesis.

There are additional problems that present themselves in this field of study. Most Hasidic literature is structured as sermonic material based upon the weekly Torah readings. Little of it is thematically organized. Several themes are often expounded upon in a single sermon and they may have little more in common than the fact they are somehow related to a particular verse of Torah. Indices are unfortunately, scarce. When they do exist they are not necessarily accurate and/or complete. The methodology that is used in dealing with this material is therefore simple: line by line, paragraph by paragraph, page by page textual examination. It is a slow process but thankfully not an overly painful one. Much of the material, even though it is unrelated to the

topic under study can be delightfully refreshing. Still, the process of research is time-consuming and one must mine much "coal" before coming up with a single "diamond". It should be understood then, that this thesis is in no way intended to be a complete and exhaustive analysis of the topic under consideration. The findings presented here simply amount to what has been discovered in the time allotted for this project.

Yet even if the material were thematically organized and meticulously indexed, and even if the masters whose teachings have been consulted made it their business to reveal rather than conceal, there would be no guarantee that this search would have proved qualitatively more fruitful. Mystics, even Hasidic mystics, reach a point at which any words, to say nothing of printed and published words, fail to express the full depth and breadth of the mystic encounter. When this is the case, silence, meditative silence if you will, speaks more eloquently than words. It is imperative that the researcher in this field be sensitive to this. In the words of the great mystics Eckhart and Sankara:

G-d is silence rather than speech...The most beautiful thing which man can say of G-d is that, knowing His inner riches he becomes silent...⁴

I believe that all mystics, the Hasidic masters included, understand this well. The silence of the mystic can be

understood at times to reveal, rather than conceal. In the words of the Hasidic masters וְהַמְבִיֵן יִבְנֶה --And he who understands will understand. I believe that this phenomenon accounts in no small measure for the difficulty in finding texts describing the meditative/contemplative way in a movement in which that way played a not insignificant role. Still, a part of that way has been revealed, and I share with you here that which I have discovered.

I invite and welcome any and all comments, criticisms, and suggestions from any and all readers.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION
IN MYSTICAL TRADITIONS OF RELIGION

Inasmuch as meditation and contemplation fall within a sector of the religious spectrum that can be labeled "mysticism", we would do well to possess a working knowledge of that sector if our attempt to comprehend meditation and contemplation is to be a successful one. Therefore, before looking at meditative and contemplative practices, let us examine for a moment the religious context in which they are best understood.

The term "mysticism" has been defined by Rufus M. Jones as the "immediate experience of a divine-human intercourse and relationship."¹ According to Jones, this experience is marked by the emergence of a type of consciousness which is not sharply focalized or clearly differentiated into a "subject-object state", as is our everyday consciousness. In mystic consciousness the subject and object are perceived as being fused into an undivided one.² Evelyn Underhill explains that the primary aspect of the mystic experience is "the overwhelming consciousness of G-d and of the mystic's own soul: a consciousness which absorbs or eclipses all other centres of interest."³ To state it simply, we might say that the mystic experience is the all absorbing consciousness of union of man and G-d.

This experience has been well attested to and well documented in the annals of every major religion and the consciousness is considered to be one of the great sources of personal religious faith. According to Jones:

It (the consciousness) brings to the recipient undemonstrable yet irrefragable certainty of higher personal life in contact with the personal self and reveals new depth levels of truth... The experience...consists in leaps of insight through heightened life (and) in an intensifying of vision through the fusing of all the deep lying powers of intellect, emotion, and will.⁴

Sidney Spencer in Mysticism in World Religion holds that mystics of all schools believe in and attempt to fulfill the high destiny of man. He writes:

Mystics recognize that the human self is capable of an immeasurable transformation and enlargement, and this capacity is almost universally regarded as a thing intrinsic to its nature. It is commonly believed that man, because of the deeper life within him, may transcend the normal limits of his nature and may enter into oneness with G-d...⁵

In light of the above descriptions by Jones, Underhill, and Spencer, it could be said that mysticism is simply religion on an intensified and more personal scale and this indeed will serve as an adequate working definition for our purposes.

While each religion's mystic tradition expresses itself differently, there remains a certain essential unity of experience and perspective common to each

"brand" of mysticism. As we've seen, self-transcendence is a goal common to all mystics. The greatest obstacle to that goal is also agreed upon by all. Spencer writes:

...the mystics are thoroughly realistic in their view of human nature. They see that the obstacle which stands in our way also lies in ourselves.⁶

Spencer points out that "the necessity for self-naughting" is stressed in many forms of mystical religion. He notes also that it is common to find a distinction drawn between the lower or "separated" self, which finds expression in egoistic impulses of every kind, and the higher self, the "spark" or "ground of the soul", the "spirit". It is this higher self, reports Spencer, which is considered to be the source of all that is good in our life and which must become the activating principle of our being if we are to rise to union with G-d.⁷

Underhill concurs that the egoistic self is the principle obstacle to the mystical encounter. She writes:

...that if you acquiesce in the heroic demands which the spiritual life now makes upon you, if you let yourself go, eradicate the last traces of self-interest even of the most spiritual kind... thus dying to your own will...you will presently find that...those who said self-loss was the only way to realization taught no pious fiction but the truth.⁸

Rudolf Otto, in Mysticism: East and West, writes similarly:

Almost every type of mystical experience demands surrender of the will, but in most cases it asks simply the submissive resignation of self-will, a denial of man's will before the will of G-d...but at the same time there is also something greater: the unifying of the will with the will of the Highest...⁹

We should be aware, however, that not all mystical experience is distinguished by self-negation leading to self-transcendence. Otto is exceedingly helpful in pointing out that different species of mysticism do exist, for all the seeming generic similarity. In Mysticism: East and West, he differentiates between two distinct types of mysticism. The first type is characterized as:

...excited emotionalism, and mysticism as an intoxicated eroticism. This includes seeking and striving after "sensations" and "experiences", after the emotional excitement and consolation of ebbing and flowing rapturous states, half or wholly sensual; a striving after the bliss of the secret intercourse of the "bridal chamber", and a general overemphasis of personal feelings and moods...it seeks to attain unity with the Highest through coalescence by an emotional exaggeration and glow of feeling. And even the Highest is thought of as responding to amorous longings.¹⁰

The second type of mystic encounter is considered intellectual rather than emotional. Otto describes it as "a knowledge which is to be translated into a comprehensible doctrine with all the aids of proof, scholarly presentation, and keen dialectic." In this kind of mysticism man becomes beautifully silent, rather

than ecstatic, in his encounter with the Divine.¹¹

Otto concludes that:

...the real knowledge...is not a matter of "having visions". It is rather an awareness of identity...a dawning of insight, our own clear sighted realization of that which the Scriptures taught;...¹²

It is not within our purview to determine here which type of mysticism is "higher" or if the distinction is always and everywhere true. However it will be useful, as we progress, to keep in mind the distinction between mysticism as emotionalism-eroticism and mysticism as cool, clear-sighted serenity. This distinction can serve as a heuristic device to aid us in an area where clear-cut distinctions are hard to come by.

Just as mysticism implies a relationship of some sort between G-d and man, it also implies a "way" of attaining that relationship. Otto wrote:

...(mystic) awareness cannot be "produced", we cannot reason it out...The way may be prepared by the words of the (Scriptures) and by meditation on them, but in the end it must be our own vision.¹³

According to W. Major Scott:

Virtually all the classics of devotion announce the cultivation of the meditative mood as indispensable to the devout life... and in all alike there is the recognition that the most sublime object of thought demands the deliberate and definite concentration of man's whole soul in a "current of contemplative feeling."¹⁴

Meditation or active contemplation has been described as "a long process of internal quietude, of abstraction from sense, and of absorption in reason, by which the human soul is attuned to the Divine."¹⁵ W. R. Inge tells us that intense concentration of the will is one of the chief characteristics of the mystic.¹⁶ Inge quotes T. H. Hughes who, in The Philosophic Basis of Mysticism, wrote:

When the soul is said to be passive, the passivity is not a state of inactivity or lassitude...All the faculties are directed to one centre, so that there is a narrowing of the field of consciousness, through the intense concentration of the will to one focal point.¹⁷

We can now readily see the close relationship that exists between mysticism and the mystic encounter, and meditation and contemplation.

We should pause here to clarify the distinctions between the two terms "meditation" and "contemplation" for they are not always synonyms. Underhill explains meditation as a halfway house between thinking and contemplating and explains that as a discipline it derives its chief value from its transitional nature.¹⁸ She describes three stages of a spiritual hierarchy as follows: "the Beginner meditates upon reality, the Proficient contemplates reality, and the Perfect is united with reality."¹⁹ The etymology of the word meditation is a helpful tool here. The root "med" is

derived from the Greek "mete" meaning to measure, as in to measure or consider all aspects of a subject, or to reflect upon a certain matter.²⁰

Contemplation, on the other hand is more of a directed mental effort. Bradford Smith says that to contemplate is to wonder at clear truths and to keep one's attention steadily upon a single thought.²¹ Underhill says that contemplation is "unlike idle musing and more like the intense effort of vision and the passionate and self-forgetful act of communion presupposed in all creative art."²² It should be kept in mind here that within the mystic realm distinctions such as these are not necessarily hard and fast ones. There is much overlapping, and the foregoing is not meant to serve as anything more than a helpful guide.

This practice of meditation/contemplation requires no small amount of self-discipline. Underhill wrote:

All the scattered interests of the self have here to be collected; there must be a deliberate and unnatural act of attention, a deliberate expelling of all discordant images from the consciousness--a hard and ungrateful task.²³

But despite the difficulties, as we have seen above, "virtually all the classics of devotion announce the cultivation of the meditative mood as indispensable to the devout life." The classics of Beshtian Hasidism are no exception and it is to that movement we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO:
IMPORTANCE AND PURPOSE OF MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION
IN CENTRAL HASIDIC CONCEPTS

Beshtian Hasidism placed heavy emphasis on various theoretical concepts and doctrines which had a substantial effect on the practice of the Hasid. Some of these ideas were called by old names which were invested with new significance. Others were entirely new creations. Theories we were interested in were "mystical", that is, their underlying intent and purpose was to bring man and G-d together in a mystic consciousness. In this section, using secondary material, I will attempt to show that meditation and contemplation often played an important part in the fulfillment of the various doctrinal and conceptual ideals. I should like to clarify a number of these theoretical notions as this will make it far easier for us to understand the specific texts to be studied in the body of this thesis.

Devekut is probably the most important and most well known of these doctrines. In general Hebrew usage, devekut means attachment or devoutness, but since the thirteenth century the term was used by the mystics to describe the sense of close and intimate communion with G-d.¹

J. G. Weiss has suggested that the Hasidic ideal of devekut was influenced by as early a figure as Maimonides² who called for "complete devotion during prayer and during the fulfillment of religious duties", and urged people "to spend more time in communion with G-d, or in the attempt to approach Him. Louis Jacobs in his book Jewish Mystical Testimonies quotes from Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed as follows:

The exhortation [to seek G-d] always refers to intellectual apprehensions, not to imagination; for thought concerning imaginings is not called knowledge but "that which cometh into your mind." (Ezek. 20:32). Thus it is clear that after apprehension, total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at. Mostly this is achieved in solitude and isolation. Hence every excellent man stays frequently in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary.⁴

Jacobs then comments:

It appears that Maimonides was convinced that if his method of constantly reflecting on G-d, after adequate intellectual preparation for the purpose of refining one's ideas about G-d, is followed, the result will be that man becomes close to G-d and therefore immune from all bodily mishap, at least during the time he is actually in a state of meditation.⁵

It is generally accepted however that the doctrines of devekut in eighteenth century Hasidism are more closely based on the forms given the concept in Safed in the sixteenth century. These kabbalistic doctrines were highly esoteric and since for the most part, the

doctrines were preserved only orally, we do not know very much about them.⁶ However we do know the Safed kabbalists held that devekut gave a sense of beatitude and intimate vision⁷ and that it was the last rung in the mystical ladder of ascent. According to these kabbalists, devekut was realized only by rare and sublime spirits at the end of a long and difficult path.⁸ The Sefer Haredim, written in sixteenth century Safed by a student of Isaac Luria named Eliezer Azikri, describes the three highest values as aloneness, or retreat from society, asceticism, and devekut. He described the latter as "the fixing of the thought on G-d."⁹ We see from Azikri's description that in kabbalist circles, devekut was a contemplative practice.

The followers of the Besht, however, altered the Lurianic doctrine in a significant way. In Hasidism, devekut becomes the first rung in the ladder of ascent rather than the last. It is no longer the extreme ideal to be reached by the few--it is available to all Jews. Devekut is the starting point and according to Hasidic teaching, "one must only take one's monotheistic faith seriously" to realize it instantaneously.¹⁰ Unfortunately, this is by no means as simple as it sounds. According to Scholem:

Hasidic devekut is extremely difficult to attain as a sustained state of communion...it has the unmistakable ring of a mystical practice which has its esoteric side and is by no means as easy to carry out as it appears to be.¹¹

So despite the democratization of the practice, devekut, or communion, remained a difficult state to attain.

What exactly is the Hasidic notion of devekut? Scholem says it means "communion with G-d."¹² But he continues:

...However the term does not always have a mystical connotation, and it is not always easy to determine what is meant by it. Sometimes it only means concentration of mind by uniting all its powers on one focal point, sometimes it means even less, namely the acknowledgement of G-d's unity.¹³

It could be said that in its non-mystical sense, devekut requires meditation. After all, the acknowledgement of G-d's unity, or אחדות would seem to require some degree of reflection and consideration beyond simple intellectual agreement with the idea. Furthermore, since the mystical connotation of devekut requires "concentration of mind by uniting all its powers on one focal point", it can be said that this aspect of devekut is contemplative. Scholem appreciates this aspect fully. He has written that "Devekut is reached by a fixation of ones thought (מחשבה) or mind (שכל) on G-d"¹⁴; "Devekut was preached...as a contemplative realization of the immanence of G-d in the concrete"¹⁵, and "Devekut is a value of the contemplative not of active life."¹⁶ J. G. Weiss has also described the aspect of devekut that is meditative/contemplative in nature:

דכיקות זו מה משמעה?...? 1) קונלמפללאציה "מחוץ לעולם" של הכדידות וההסתגרות אשר כה העינים עצומות והידים בטלות ממלאכה זה medium- של קונטמפלציה כל עיקרו הוא איזה ציור נפש העולם כלב המתכונן¹⁷

While Scholem asserts that devekut is "communion with G-d", he points out that it differs from "union" in the sense of the mystical union between G-d and man of which so many mystics speak.¹⁸ According to Scholem, devekut:

...leads to a state, or rather, implies an action which in Hebrew is called yihud, which means unification, the realization of union.¹⁹

He continues:

...If a man binds his thought to the root of the Torah, this is called a yihud, both because he concentrates on it and because he breaks down the barriers and brings about unification by making into an organic whole what seemed separated and isolated. He does not become G-d, but he becomes "united" with Him by the process in which the core of his own being is bound up with the core of all being.²⁰

Yihud is therefore another important spiritual concept for the Hasidim. In fact, there is a statement by the Baal Shem claiming that on Sabbath there was almost no time to study because all of it ought to be devoted to Yihudim, i.e. acts of contemplation.²¹

It is clear then, that the Hasidic theories of devekut and yihud are mystical and meditative/contempla-

tive. Scholem goes so far as to say that Hasidism places devekut at the center of man's spiritual activity.²² If this is in fact the case, it would indicate that meditation and contemplation, given their importance in attaining and achieving devekut and yihud, are also in place at center stage.

There is one statement by the Baal Shem--apparently the only one--stating that yihud, which is accomplished through devekut, transforms the Ego or אני into the Naught or אין.²³ This concept of השגת האין --attainment of the Naught--apparently plays no central role in the Baalshem's teaching. However, his most important disciple, Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mesritch, made it one of the cornerstones of his thought. It is an idea preached often and with great enthusiasm by the Maggid and his pupils.²⁴ It has a direct and substantial effect on the Hasidic practice of contemplation.

J. G. Weiss describes השגת האין as:

The withdrawal of the human ego from his individual consciousness (which) conduces to the entry of the divine ego. In this process, the Shekhinah, or G-d, takes the place of the human ego that has been converted to ayin.²⁵

The doctrine of השגת האין or "attainment of the Naught", is therefore intimately related to the notion of ביטול היש --self-nullification or self-annihilation. According to Jacobs, bitul ha-yesh includes "annihilation of the selfhood, the soul soaring to G-d with the ego

left behind."²⁶ The terms hasagat ha-ayin and bitul ha-yesh are, for all intents and purposes synonymous. Yet there is a sense of development in them. Bitul Ha-yesh focuses on man and his self nullification. Hasagat ha-ayin focuses on what comes from this, union with the divine. The two names imply the positive and negative aspects of the doctrine--becoming united with G-d through the nullification of the self.²⁷

Just as the processes of devekut and yihud are meditative/contemplative, it follows that there must be an important role for meditation and contemplation in hasagat ha-ayin/bitul ha-yesh, which according to Scholem, are closely related to yihud. Weiss confirms this:

...One formulation of the ayin doctrine urges a mystical anawah, that is humility and self abasement before G-d. It is practiced in contemplative exercises leading to the mystical annihilation of self. As the contemplative Hasid annihilates himself viz., his individual consciousness, the vacuum thus created within his soul is invaded by G-d., viz., the Divine Shekhinah.²⁸

The idea of self-nullification/attainment of the Divine is an important one and it is common to many if not all mystic traditions. Weiss, writing in an article entitled "Via Passiva in Early Hasidism", posited:

...That the human soul must conduct itself in a mode of passive receptivity whilst G-d takes the active part is said to be one of the fundamental

principles of mysticism. Indeed it is claimed that this particular quality of consciousness is a permanent postulate of all mystical experience.²⁹

Evelyn Underhill also recognized the "passive way" to be a common thread linking divergent mystical traditions.

She wrote:

...This unmistakable experience has been achieved by the mystics of every religion; and when we read their statements, we know that all are speaking of the same thing. None who have had it have ever been able to doubt its validity. It has always become for them the central fact upon which all other realities must be tested and graduated...In every case, they are the passive objects upon which it works.³⁰

While the via passiva may be called by different names in different traditions it is nonetheless essentially the same in all of them. In each tradition the mystic, through the process of emptying the self, allows the Divine to enter without attempting to "grab" G-d. Sidney Spencer describes the via passiva--though he does not refer to it by name--in Buddhism:

...The essential feature of this discipline is meditation, leading to a complete concentration of mind, "one-pointedness", or absorption. Attention is progressively withdrawn from outer things, so that a man may become entirely unconscious of them...at its highest point the consciousness of self disappears along with that of the outer world.³¹

The correspondence between what Spencer refers to as "the consciousness of self disappearing" and what the

Hasidim refer to as bitul ha-yesh/hasagat ha-ayin is readily apparent. This is not to say that Buddhism and Hasidism are equivalent. As Spencer describes the via passiva in Hasidism, we see why:

...(In Hasidic prayer) it is essential...to forget oneself--such forgetfulness reaches its highest point in ecstasy, in which a man is wholly absorbed in G-d, losing the consciousness of himself and his surroundings, and attaining what is described as the extinction of separate existence. It is said that the man who is in ecstasy is above nature and above time and above thought...³²

Apparently, even in their use of the via passiva Hasidism and Buddhism differ with regard to what is concentrated on, the place of ecstasy, prayer, etc., etc. However, we also see that two elements crucial to the via passiva--a forgetfulness and a concentration which take us from the worldly to the Divine--are common to two systems of belief as widely separated as these.

J. G. Weiss testified to the workings and importance of the via passiva in the thought of the Maggid of Mesritch and his disciples:

...The human being begins fulfilling his merely passive role in the moment when he recognises his own nihilitudo: he is empty and immobile, activated only by the power of G-d within him. His sole task is to understand that he is no more than a passive instrument and mentally to prostrate himself in repudiation of all selfhood... By thinking of oneself in a repeated contemplative way--whether in the image of the shofar, the hammer, or the harp--one comes to accept the nature of G-d as the sole agent not only in the world, but even more emphatically, within oneself.³³

Sigmund Hurwitz concurs that self-detachment is the pre-requisite for religious vision, at least for the Maggid (whose homilies we shall consider in detail in chapter five) and his followers:

...It (self-detachment) leads to a turning away from self, a self-surrender, a self-submergence in G-d and finally to that which the Hasidic mystic is wont to term bondage to G-d or devekut.³⁴

We should note that Hurwitz sees self-surrender, i.e. bitul ha-yesh and self-submergence in G-d, i.e. union, as leading to devekut. Scholem, on the other hand, has stated that devekut leads to yihud. This is a contradiction that I do not believe to be a critical one for our purposes. In any event, I do not feel competent to solve it at this juncture.

Scholem and Hurwitz however, do agree on the answer to a different question often asked of those espousing a quietistic way: Does all this talk of self-submergence, self-annihilation, and self-nullification by the Hasidim add up to a flight from the world of reality? Both are clear and emphatic in answering in the negative. According to Hurwitz:

...Turning away from outer reality must by no means be interpreted here as a flight from the world. It means neither a negation of life nor a devaluation of the here and now...(rather) it signifies an introspective self-submergence. For as (the Maggid) says..., "a man should gradually detach his ego from his body until he has passed through all the worlds and has become one with G-d," Thus self-detachment is the pre-requisite for religious vision.³⁵

The religious vision, we understand, is to be used to help teach and preach to the yet to be enlightened. The understanding gained in introspection is to be put to use in the everyday world. Scholem also tells us that devekut and self-negation do not indicate a flight from reality, but rather help one to find it:

...According to the Maggid, in devekut, man finds himself by losing himself in G-d, and by giving up his identity he discovers it on a higher plane...Devekut is said to lead not only to communion but to אחדות, union. But this union is, in fact not at all the pantheistic obliteration of the self within the divine mind which he likes to call the naught, but pierces through this state on to the rediscovery of mans spiritual identity. He finds himself because he has found G-d. This, then, is the deepest meaning of devekut of which Hasidism knows...After having gone through devekut and union, man is still man--nay, he has, in truth, only started to be a man, and it is only logical that only then will he be called upon to fulfill his destiny in the society of men.³⁶

That the attainment of bitul ha-yesh/hasagat ha-ayin requires contemplation is beautifully attested to by Weiss:

...(The) admonition, "let him consider himself as nought"...becomes the practical programme of a specific kind of contemplation. What we are presented with here is not, for the most part, an abstract account of the nature of man, or even of the mystic, but rather practical advice on contemplative procedure. Rather than constituting a comment...on the essential nothingness of man, it is a practical guiding principle as to how to reach experimentally one's true nature, which is non-existence...The mystic's contemplation here means a specialisation in his mental activity, and its simplification by narrowing down the field of consciousness and thus intensifying the activity of thinking. In

other words, it means thinking more and more about less and less. The content of this thinking is very limited: it is the passivity or nullity of the human being.³⁷

It is clear that the via passiva is also the via contemplativa.

Another fundamental Hasidic doctrine that we need to consider comes from the doctrine of חב"ד (Habad) which was first espoused by Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Lubavitch Hasidism. Habad is an acronym comprised of the first letters of the words חכמה --wisdom, בינה -- understanding, and דעת --knowledge. חכמה is considered intellectual knowledge. בינה is a more deep understanding acquired through meditation, דעת is a deep involvement, attachment, and association-- התקשרות והתחברות -- acquired via contemplation upon אין סוף, or G-d.³⁸

Louis Jacobs wrote, that in Habad man strives to:

...awaken the powers of the divine soul by engaging in contemplation. Through profound reflection on the tremendous idea that there are no divisions in reality and that all is in G-d, man's divine soul is helped to exert its influence on the emotions, so that he is moved in self-annihilation.³⁹

The importance of meditation/contemplation are readily apparent in Habad thought. We will examine this more closely later on.

We have now seen several systems of religious belief each one placing at or near the summit of its hierarchy of religious values at least one value that is

reached through contemplation. Devekut, bitul ha-yesh, hasagat ha-ayin, yihud, achdut, and da'at are all values attained through some form or process of contemplation. There remains, however, a major school of Hasidic thought that does not fit in this pattern, the school founded and developed by Rabbi Nahman of Braslav. Although Nahman's credentials as a Hasid are indisputable, his thought did not emphasize some form of self-nullification. Instead, Nahman emphasized the acquisition of emunah-- faith.

Faith, according to the Braslaver, is something that rises above all doubts. It is the main purpose and perfection of man to worship G-d in complete faith.⁴⁰ Worship is considered as the relationship of one personality to another and "dialogue between man and his Creator" or שיחה בינו לביין קונו in Hebrew, and the ritual of daily isolation or התבודדות, are important parts of that worship.⁴¹

Yet an examination of hitbodadut shows it to involve deep personal introspection and examination. It thus seems to be a form of meditation. I believe this will emerge in the examination of the primary sources to be undertaken shortly.

To this point, my aim has been to show, principally through secondary sources, the fact and the importance of meditative and contemplative activity in the mystical life and doctrines of the Hasidim. It is time now to turn to the texts.

CHAPTER THREE:

NAHMAN OF KOSOV

It is perhaps too often thought that modern Hasidism begins ex nihilo, as it were, with the Baal Shem Tov's emergence into public life from his hermitage in the Carpathian mountains. The fact is however that the Besht was neither untouched nor uninfluenced by contemporary Jewish leaders. In an article entitled

"ראשית צמיחת של הדרך החסידות", J. G. Weiss notes that the Besht developed his concept of devekut, at least in part, from a pre-Hasidic חוג, or group, that regularly engaged in its' practice.¹ We learn from ספר שבחי הבעש"ט and תולדות יעקב יוסף, two of the most important Hasidic works, that foremost among the practitioners of devekut in this group was one R. Nahman of Kosov.² It is to him that we now turn our attention.

Sefer Shivhei Ha-Besht seems to give us an uncommonly clear testimony to both the actuality and mechanics of the meditative/contemplative practice of Nahman of Kosov. There is a story that tells us that R. Nahman and the Besht were rivals. Distressed at this situation, Nahman's disciples urge him to come to some kind of peaceful reconciliation with the Baalshem so that they might continue their learning without having to choose one master or the other. Nahman agreed to meet the Besht

and confronted him, asking if it was true he could discern people's thoughts. Upon hearing the affirmative answer, Nahman asked if the Baalshem could tell him what was on his mind at the moment. After telling him to fix his thought on one thing, the Besht said: שם הוי"ה במחשבתך.³ In English, "The Name Havayah (one of the names of G-d) is in your thoughts". Nahman's reply brings us to the heart of the matter:

זאת תוכל להכין מעצמך, כי הלא מחשבה זו צריך
אני לחשוב תמיד כמו שנאמר "שוייתי ה' לנגודי תמיד".
וממילא כאשר אני מניח כל המחשבות, ומצמצם מחשבותי
בהכרח אחד, מוכרח להיות שם הוי"ה לנגוד עיני.⁴

In English, the crucial phrase, for our purposes is:

As it is written, "I have set the L-rd always before me." Whenever I lay aside (or remove) all thoughts and concentrate (or focus) my thoughts on one thing, the name "Havayah" must be before my eyes.

After this, the Besht goes on to say that he discerned which of the many names of G-d Nahman concentrated on, Nahman became convinced of the Besht's powers, and the two went on to discuss the secrets of the Torah.⁵ Nahman's disciples, we can suppose, were satisfied.

But let us return and analyze this passage closely. Nahman reveals that he bases a meditative/contemplative practice upon the Biblical verse שביתי ה' לנגודי תמיד, (Psalms 16:8). According to Abraham J. Heschel, this

verse was the basis of a mystical practice known to be used in kabbalistic circles and Nahman made it an important part of his spiritual life.⁶ Heschel reports that according to the Toledot, R. Nahman placed the name ה"ה before himself always.⁷ The question now becomes, is this "placing the Name before the eyes" a particular mystical consciousness and frame of mind or is it simply a visual technique? In a footnote to his discussion of Nahman, Heschel tries to answer the question by tracing the interpretations given to the verse

ה"ה לנגודי תמידי by sages through Jewish history.

He notes that to the Rabbis of the Talmud, Rashi, and Maimonides, the verse could be understood as an urging toward a state of mind or consciousness. To post-Lurianic personalities however, it seems to be a visual mode of remembrance. What did Shiviti mean to Nahman? Was it a state of mind, a visual technique, both, or neither? I believe that the textual evidence we have is too scanty to rule out either possibility.

However, Nahman's description of the contemplative process as relayed through Shivhei Ha-Besht does seem to mesh quite nicely with our understanding of meditation/contemplation and the via passiva. The laying aside of all thoughts מניית כל המחשבות, and the concentration upon one focal point ומצמצם מחשבותי בדבר אחד, correspond to the emptying out of the self that we saw to be a principal ingredient of the passive way. Given our

understanding of the via passiva and the text under consideration, I believe it fair to conclude that R. Nahman of Kosov, in his practice of devekut, meditated/contemplated in the quietistic manner common to mystics of all ages and traditions.

CHAPTER FOUR:

ISRAEL BEN ELIEZER BAAL SHEM TOV

We have already seen through our analysis of secondary material that both devekut and yihudim played an important role in the spiritual life of the founder of modern Hasidism, Israel ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov. It is now our responsibility to substantiate the claims of the secondary material with textual documentation.

A problem often encountered when studying the lives and teachings of spiritual giants is that their disdain for written communications, ostensibly due to the limitations inherent in them, leaves us with a scarcity of first hand material and we are forced to rely on disciples' transmissions of the masters' teachings for information. This is true of such figures as Jesus, Buddha, and also the Baal Shem Tov. We are in possession of almost nothing that we know to be written by the Besht himself and our knowledge of him comes almost exclusively from the writings of his followers. We proceed then, aware of our limitations.

Perhaps the best testimony to the Besht's use of the contemplative yihudim during the times of prayer and study is found in the famous letter to R. Gershon of Kitov, brother-in-law of the Besht. This is virtually the only written communication generally accepted

to be from the Baalshem's hand that we possess today. The portion of the letter we are concerned with reads as follows:

ואל יעליוזו וכפרט בארץ הקדושה בעת תפילתך
 ולמודך וכל דיבור ודיבור ומוצא שפתיך הכוין
 ליחה-שם כי בכל אות ואות יש עולמות ונשמות ואלקות
 ועולים ומתקשרים ומתייחדים זה עם זה ואחר כך
 מתקשרים ומתייחדים האותיות ונעשים תיבה ומתייחדים
 יחודה אמיתי כאלהית ותכלול נשמתך עמהם בכל כחלי וכו' מהנ"ל
 ומתייחדים כל העולמות כאחד ועולים ונעשים
 שמחה ותענוג גדול לאין שיעור בהכינך כשמחת חתן וכלה
 בקטנות וגשמיות כלשכך במעלה העליונה כזאת¹

...Let no one mock your way of prayer and study, especially in the Holy Land. In every word that comes forth from your lips have in mind some unification of the name of G-d. For in every single letter there are worlds, souls, and aspects of divinity. As they rise up, they are joined with one another. The letters then come together to form a word, and their ascent is truly unto G-d. Join your soul to them in every one of these aspects; all the worlds will then unite as one, and there will be immeasurable joy. When you understand the joy of the bride and groom in the corporeal sense, you will see how much greater it is on this high level.²

This description of the process of yihud tells us of the method of contemplation in addition to testifying to the fact of it. We see that the concentration upon the letters leads to a mystical state that seems to fall more within Otto's description of mysticism as "emotionalism--eroticism" than as "cool clear-sighted serenity". This meditative activity of the Besht is also clearly not the via passiva. It is however, an

active, cognitive form of contemplation, perhaps a descendant of Abulafia's meditations on the alphabet and/or the Lurianic yihudim of sixteenth century Safed.

We also have testimonies to this practice, or close relatives of it, in our other sources. Sefer Shivhei Ha-Besht was first published in 1815, some fifty five years after the death of the Baalshem. Despite this, it is generally held to essentially reflect the way of life of the Hasidic movement during the lifetime of its founder.³ In Shivhei Ha-Besht we read:

The Besht wrote to R. Joseph the Kohen:...every single morning while you are studying contemplate the letters with utmost devotion in worship of your Creator and G-d will be with you...⁴

צוואת הריב"ש --The Ethical Wills of the Baal Shem, is a collection of instructions and counsels attributed to both the Besht and the Maggid of Mesritch, compiled by R. Isaiah of Janova. It is said that R. Isaiah received the teachings from the two rebbees verbally. (We will deal here, of course, only with the communications of the Besht.) Zva'at Ha-Ribash teaches that practicing yihudim involves a meditative/contemplative concentration:

הדכיקות הוא כשאומר תיבה הוא מאריך באותה
תיבה הרבה, שמחמת דכיקות אינו רוצה לפרוד עצמו
מהתיבה ולכך מאריך באותה התיבה⁵

In both of these texts, we again have descriptions, scanty though they might be, of the processes and methods

of some of the Baal Shem Tov's meditative/contemplative techniques. However, unlike the description given in the letter to R. Gershon, the texts do not describe the emotional sensations attendant to the practices. Is this because these practices are quietistic and "serene" rather than "emotional--erotic"? Or was their description omitted in response to the dilemma of mystic silence? Whatever the answer, it is clear that the Baal Shem Tov was engaged in some mystical meditative/contemplative activity and we can be content in this knowledge. Zva'at Ha-Ribash also asks, "How does one merit devekut?":

מפני מה יזכה לדביקות מחמת התבודדות מכני אדם
 ומחמת שכוח רזי תורה ומחמת יחודים כיודעים מהאר"י
 ז"ל. וכשיעשה יחודים יחשוב באותה שעה כגדלוהו
 יתברך כפי כחו.⁶

The answer given is threefold: 1) through solitude or withdrawal from one's fellow men; 2) By writing the secrets of the Torah; 3) By practicing the yihudim, the contemplations of the Ari, and by thinking upon the greatness of G-d during this exercise. "Writing the secrets of the Torah" seems to fall outside the scope of this paper, apparently being neither meditative nor contemplative. However, "solitude" and "yihudim" are very much within our present domain and we have now seen textual evidence to support our claim that these practices are indeed meditative/contemplative in nature

and are intimately connected with the mystical state of devekut.

We saw in chapter two that solitude, for Maimonides, was a prerequisite for "total devotion to Him."⁷ Similarly, התבודדות serves to bring the Baal Shem Tov into closer contact with G-d. We have a tale of the Besht sitting alone at night in an attic, when one R. David happens upon him and sees a great light above the Baalshem. R. David inquires as to the source of the light and receives the answer, "I do not know. I became connected with G-d, blessed be He and that is what it was."⁸ We clearly see the connection between hitbodadut--aloneness--and devekut--communion with G-d--effected via "concentration" in this text. It is this "concentration" that demonstrates the meditative/contemplative nature of hitbodadut. We realize that hitbodadut is not simple hermitage, rather an active meditative/contemplative process conducted in solitude.

We have other texts testifying to the meditative activity of the Besht. Unfortunately, as in the text above, we do not learn the method or process of the Baalshem's meditative activity from these texts, only testimony to the fact of it. Sefer Shivhei Ha-Besht testifies to the Baal Shem Tov's activity as follows:

פעם אחת ישב הרב הבעש"ט בסעודה שלישיה והיה
 טרוד מאד בעמקת המחשבה ולא אמר תורה בסעודה
 שלישיה כלל.⁹

Similarly:

והנה הכעש"ט מהלך ככהכ"נ אנה ואנה וטרוד
מאר בעמקות המחשבה¹⁰

Both of these descriptions seem to portray the Besht deep in concentration, i.e. contemplative activity, but we could say little more, were we compelled to rely on these texts alone.

Did the Baal Shem practice a quietistic discipline as well as the "emotional--erotic" one we have already seen? I have encountered one text that seems to describe hitbodadut as something of a quietistic process:

השתיקה יפה יותר (מן הדיבור אפילו חכמת התורה)
שיכול בשתיקה לחשוב בגודלתו יתברך ולקשר עצמו בו
יותר משיקשר את עצמו בדיבור. לפעמים שוככ במטה ונראה
לכן אדם שהוא ישן, והוא באותה שעה מתבודד עצמו עם
הבורא ית'.¹¹

However, on this evidence alone, it would be difficult to call the Besht a quietist.

The final evidence of the Baal Shem Tov's meditative practice are tales of a supernatural nature found in Shivhei Ha-Besht:

The mountains were immense. Between them was a deep ravine, and the sides of the cliffs were steep. Once the Besht was walking deep in meditation...When they saw him walk to the edge of the mountain engrossed in his meditations, they said, "He will probably fall to the bottom and break his bones, G-d forbid. When he came near the edge, the other mountain moved towards him and the ground became level...¹²

Also:

There are people who say that once the Rabbi entered into deep meditation. He was absorbed in his thoughts for three days and three nights and he was not aware that he was walking...¹³

So the picture of the Baal Shem Tov that emerges is a composite one. The fact of his meditative/contemplative activity appears definite. There is certainly an "emotional--erotic" aspect to it and very possibly a quietistic one as well. But Scholem's report of a statement by the Beskt to the effect that yihud, accomplished through devekut, transforms the Ego or אני into the Naught, or אין,¹⁴ is the only evidence of quietism that I can present at this time.

Although the notion of quietism seemingly played a minor role for the founder of Hasidism, the idea was taken up with great fervor by his chief disciple, Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mesritch. The Maggid made it central to his thought and practice and it is to him that we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DOV BAER, THE MAGGID OF MESRITCH

Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mesritch, is considered to be the individual most responsible for spreading the message of Hasidism after the death of the Baal Shem Tov.¹ The Maggid was a disciple of the Besht and the teacher's influence is readily apparent in the collections of homilies attributed to Dov Baer. (Like the Besht, most all the material we have that is attributed to the Maggid has been collected by disciples. The Maggid himself is the author of little.) In addition to receiving a doctrine from his master and teacher, Scholem says that the Maggid was responsible for a major innovation: moving the doctrine of bitul ha-yesh to the forefront of Hasidic teaching.² We have already seen the closeness of the relationship between bitul ha-yesh and hasagat ha-ayin. The following texts will show the important roles that each of these concepts played in the teachings of the Maggid.

It should be noted here that in the time allotted, only a sample of the Maggid's teachings were examined. In the opinion of this writer it was a fairly representative sample, yet the limitations inherent in this study should be made known a priori.

That the Maggid was strongly influenced by the Besht is clearly shown in a teaching that Scholem attributes to Dov Baer:

Three factors induce the state of devekut: retreat from association with other people; the writing down of kabbalistic mysteries on the Torah; and the practice of yihudim, in the sense of special meditations.³

This teaching is identical with a statement that we noted was attributed to the Besht. We have seen that solitude and yihudim were meditative/contemplative practices for the Baal Shem. It is highly unlikely that they were anything different for the Maggid.

The following homily from Torat ha-Maggid, a collection of Dov Baer's sermons, shows what the Maggid might have understood the meaning of "retreat from association with other people" to be. It deals with the practice of hitbodadut, solitude:

He should see to it that he is alone in thought with his Creator daily and he should draw down into his being the fear of the Creator, who is so great. He should practice this until it becomes second nature for him never to forget his Creator.⁴

We would not be surprised if we were to discover that this text was attributed to the Besht and not the Maggid. There does not appear to be anything of substance that separates the masters on this issue.

In the section of Zva'at Ha-Ribash that purports to relay the teachings of the Maggid, we have a description of the various states of intensity, belief, and vision that a good hasid can attain. I believe it can be said that this text is generically compatible with the section of the Besht's letter to R. Gershon that tells of the vision of heaven attained by making use of the yihudim. The text reads:

יחשוב שהבורא מלא כל הארץ כבודו, ושכינתו תמיד
 אצלו; והוא דק מן הדק והוא אהדן על כל מעשים שנעולם
 והוא יכול לעשות כל מה שאני אחפוץ, ולכן אינו יפה
 לו לבטוח רק בו יתברך, ויחשוב כמו שמסתכל על דברים
 גשמיים כן מסתכל בשכינה שהיא אצלו, וזהו עבודה
 בקטנות.

ופעמים יכול להבחין שיש עוד כמה רקיעים עגולים
 והוא עומד בנקודת הארץ הקטנה וכל העולם כאין נגד
 הבורא ית', שהוא אין סוף, והוא עשה צמצום ופנה
 בעצמו מקום לברוא כאותו מקום העולמות, ואע"פ שהוא
 מכין כך בשכלו מ"מ אינו יכול לעלות לעולמות העליונים.
 וזה מרחוק ה' נראה לי שרואה את השי"ת מרחוק.
 אבל כשהוא עובד בגדלותו, הוא מחדיק עצמו בכח
 גדול, ועולה כמחשבתו וכוּקע כל הרקיעים כפעם אחר,
 ועולה למעלה מהמלאכים והאופנים והשרפים והכסאות,
 וזהו עבודה שלימה.

ויהיה תמיד בשמחה, ויחשוב ויאמין באמונה שלימה
 שהשכינה אצלו ושומרת אותו והוא מסתכל על הבורא ית'
 והבורא ית' מסתכל בו, והבורא ית' יכול לעשות כל
 מה שהוא רוצה, אם הוא רוצה מחריב כל העולמות ברגע
 אחד ובורא אותם ברגע אחד, וכו' יתברך מושרשים כל
 הטובות והדינים שיש בעולם, שככל דבר יש שפעו וחיותו
 ואין אני כוּטח ומתירא רק ממנו ית'.⁵

This is clearly a description of a mystical encounter that Otto would categorize "emotional--erotic" rather than "serene". Again, we have seen the Besht use similar terms in describing his mystical visions.

Similarly in מגיד דבריו ליעקב, a collection of homilies attributed to the Maggid and compiled by either Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev or Solomon of Lusk, we learn that Dov Baer discusses devekut in prayer as follows:

כשמסיח דעתו מכל וכל ונותן לבו לפני מי הוא
 עומד ומקים הדיבורים והצירופים והשמות והאורות
 שבתוכם, ומתדבק עמהם דביקות נפלא עה מאד, אז נעשה
 עם הדיבורים, פנים בפנים, ונתרחבו לו הדיבורים, עד
 מאוד ונתמתקנו הדיבין היינו מה שהיה מצומצמים לפניו
 כתחלה נעשה לו הרחבה גדולה כסוד נפשט מהגשמיות.⁶

We see, that according to the Maggid, intense religious experience, whether in thought or in prayer, leads to openings and expansions. The text of Zva'at ha-Ribash speaks of the opening of the heavens, the text from Maggid Devarav l'Yaakov refers to the letters and words of prayer being expanded into something more. The influence of writer of the letter to R. Gershon of Kitov can readily be seen upon these texts attributed to the Maggid. (See appendix)

However, the final two words of the preceding text indicate an innovation, based upon the Baal Shem's teachings yet not readily attributable to the Besht.

The words nifshat mehagashmiut--stripped of corporeality-- introduce us to the major contribution of the Maggid to Hasidic thought: the idea that bodiliness, or corporeality, is something that must be left behind if man is going to reach the Divine. This doctrine was only touched upon by the Baal Shem. The Maggid took it and developed it more fully.

We have numerous testimonies to the importance of התפשטות הגשמיות in the homilies of the Maggid. According to Rabbi Baer, prayer is an extremely opportune time, yet as we have seen in the above text from Zva'at ha-Ribash, not the only time, to leave behind bodiliness and achieve unity with the Divine Naught. Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer in החסידות כמיסטיקה notes that proper prayer is, according to Dov Baer, a meditative/contemplative activity used to break through the material world of nature to the world of the spirit:

התפילה משמשת מורת-דרך לפריצה אל מעבר לטבע,
אל הרוח. מבחינה זו הרי היא תפילה ספיריטואלית,
שאמצעיה הם התבוננות והריכוז המחשכתי ביסוד
הרוחני הנתון בחור עולם הטבע.⁷

Moreover, a prayer in which man does not try to do this is of little if any value:

אם לא עמד אדם חסיד להתפלל על מנת להגיע
"להתפשטות הגשמיות", לאכדן האחיזה בעוה"ז, להתעלות
מעל לטבע והזמן, כדי להגיע אל איחוד השלם, אל האין
האלוהי, הרי שלא עשה שום דבר בעל מקשל וערך החני
כלשהי.⁸

We see here that hitpashtut hagashmiut refers to a certain sense of timelessness and transcendental consciousness leading to the Divine Naught.

However, Schatz-Uffenheimer writes that both the transcendental אין or "Naught" of G-d and the immanent אין or "naught" of man are acceptable as potential destinations for man in his attempt to attain the in his meditative prayer.⁹ How can this be? We can understand by examining another important mystical doctrine of the Maggid's: man's purpose in life is to return the world to its "root", i.e., the Naught, אין סוף:

- חכליה בראת האדם הוא בכדי שיעלה העולמות
לשורשן. והיינו שמחזירין לאין כמקדם ע"י
תורה ותפלה ומע"ט ומדבקן להש"י.¹⁰

According to this doctrine, G-d creates the multiplicity of the world and man works to return all to the unity of אין סוף יתברך .

This belief is grounded in the Hasidic doctrine of צמצום, a philosophy inherited from the kabbalists, which holds that all of the corporeal world is an emanation of אין סוף, the Divine Naught, which is G-d. Schatz-Uffenheimer explains that zimzum--G-d contracting into Himself--is followed by שבירת הכלים--the "breaking of the vessels" which causes Creation. In Creation there is the imperfection of "forgetfulness" of the שרש -- the Root (G-d), among the creatures. Since people are

forgetful of the Root, of אֵין, they can perform deeds, for if they were fully conscious of the Divine they would be in a state of devekut and would not actively "do" anything. It is humanity's task then, to raise the "sparks" within Creation and return them to the Root, the Ayin, through Torah, prayer, and deed, uplifting all the world and "causing joy to the Name who is blessed".¹¹
 In the Maggid's words:

צריך כל אדם לכוין בעת עשיות המצוה כדיבור,
 וכמעשה וכמחשבה, כי כזה מעלה את המצוה ומפשיט
 אותה מגשמיותה ומקרב אותה אל שורשה ויחודה
 בעולמות עליונים.¹²

It would seem that this is an activist practice aimed at the attainment of the "Naught" more than it is a quietistic one aimed at the "naught" of the nullified self. Schatz-Uffenheimer goes so far as to say that in this homily the "words" are directed to the sefira of מלכות, the deeds to the sefira of תפארת, and the thoughts to the sefira of חכמה.¹³ But in reality it is more than this. For as man acts to uplift and "redeem the sparks" in Torah, prayer, and good deeds, he finds himself in higher and higher levels of devekut. And as he approaches En Sof more and more, he "does" less and less. For as we have seen above, people fully conscious of the Divine actively "do" little. Ultimately man becomes fully united with the "Naught" (השגת האין)

and by doing nothing he becomes "naught" (ביטול היש)! We see then how an activist practice rooted in Luria's kabbalistic yihudim, when taken to its limit, leads to quietist behavior and contemplation. We see also that the "Naught" is ultimately equivalent to the "naught". As activity becomes more and more refined, as Torah, prayer, and good deeds approach the Root, the En Sof, the contemplative sphere looms larger and larger. At the highest level, man is totally absorbed in the Divine, and he has achieved האיתווד השלם through yihudim and devekut. We have moved from activist Beshtian yihudim to the quietist bitul ha-yesh of the Maggid.

It should be understood that the foregoing is an attempt by the present writer to present a working hypothesis explaining the relationship between the concepts of bitul ha-yesh and hasagat ha-ayin. It could just as easily be hypothesized that bitul precedes hasaga rather than follows it. I have been unable to find testimony in the secondary literature in support of one hypothesis or another. The precise nature of the relationship between the two concepts, if indeed there is one, must remain undetermined for the present time.

If man succeeds in nullifying his ego-self and becomes filled with the Divine, that Divine will then

guide him along the "proper course". The following text demonstrates this with regard to speech:

כשמדבר אל יחשוב שהוא המדבר, אלא החיות שבו,
 הוא הבורא ית', המדבר בו, והוא המעלה הדיבור
 אל שורשו... וכן ככל שאר דברים הכל יהיה
 מחשבתו לעשות כהי לקשר את עצמו למעלה.¹⁴

This text testifies to the Maggid's belief in the via passiva.

A homily from Maggid Devarav l'Yaakov makes a similar point. That is, there is nothing in man but חיות, the life force, which is one with the "first thought", which is Unity. To attain unity, man must understand he is nothing but חיות. Says the Maggid:

ועיקר החיות הוא מפני שיש לו התחברות עם
 תחילת המחשבה, ועיקר ההתחברות היא מפני שהוא
 כאפס בלתי החיות ואין בו אלא החיות. והחיות הוא
 אחד עם תחלת המחשבה אחדות פשוט, ואם האדם ירצה
 לעשות הכנה שישרה עליו אלהות אזי עיקר הכל שיביין
 וישיג מאד שאין בו אלא האלוהות המחיה אותו ובלתי
 זה הוא כאפס ממש, ואז יש הכנה שיוכל לשרות עליו.¹⁵

And to understand this, man must meditate:

כי כל החיות מכל הדברים הגשמיים הם חלק
 אלוה ממעל. ולפיכך חייב אתה להחבוני תמיד
 אל כח הפנימי הצפון בגשמי.¹⁶

The truly righteous person, teaches the Maggid, is one who makes himself into nothing more than a "vessel" carrying nothing but G-dliness within him:

אין הקב"ה שורה אלא כמי שמקטין א"ע... על כן
 נקרא הצדיק... כלי... לשון סבלות שהוא סובל אלוהותו
 בתוכו... ומזה הקב"ה מקבל שעשועים, ... שימשיך א"ע
 לאין. וכל אדם צריך להכין את זה, ואם כן היה תמיד
 בחי' אי"ן.¹⁷

We see here clear testimony to the via passiva. Another text shows a different aspect of the doctrine:

ונרפל עליו כ"כ וראה עה"ה שהוא בטל מציאות נגד
 המלך ונכנס לשער האי"ן.¹⁸

Schatz-Uffenheimer comments that self nullification is a psychological condition for mystic consciousness:

היראה מפני גדולתו של האל הופכת לתחושה
 אינטנסיבית כמידה הזאת, שאדם חש עצמו כאין
 ואפס שהוא תנאי פסיכולוגי לכניסה מיסטית
 לשער האי"ן.¹⁹

From these texts we see that this was certainly true of the Maggid.

Another homily from Maggid Devarav l'Yaakov draws the same connection between יראה and the אין. Using midrash, the Maggid demonstrates that the Ayin is found through the sefira of חכמה;

מכח מדה ירא בא למדת אי"ן, כי מחמת זה מחשיב
את עצמו לאיין, ואיין נקרא חכמה, כמ"ש והחכמה מאיין
תמצא (איוב-כח: יב).²⁰

Abraham Kalisker, a disciple of the Maggid, quotes
his master to the effect that the purpose of Torah and
wisdom is the attainment of the N/naught:

כי תכלית התורה והחכמה כמחשבה דבור ומעשה
להשיג האיין והאפס וישים עצמו כאיין "והחכמה
מאיין תמצא" והאיין היא שורשה...²¹

Kalisker also uses the text of Job 28:12 to show the
relationship between איין and חכמה .

In simple terms, the Maggid teaches the quietist's
way:

ואם האדם ירצה לעשות חכמה שישרה עליו אלוהות
אזי עיקר הכל שיבין וישיג מאד שאיין כו' אלא
האלהות המחיה אותו וכלתי זה הוא אפס ממש.²²

and:

צריך האדם לחשוב א"ע כאיין, וישכח א"ע מכל
וכל... ואזי יכול לבא למעלה מהזמן דהיינו
לעולם המחשבה ששם הכל שוה חיים ומות ים ויבשה²³

Commenting upon this final text in particular, but upon all of mysticism in general, Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer notes four characteristics of a true mystic:

- (1) לראות עצמו כאין-זהו האטום שלו
- (2) לשכוח כל אינטרס אנוכי
- (3) להתפלל על גידולה הפנאומאטי של השכינה
- (4) לערוג אל "מעבר הזמן" אל עולם המחשבה²⁴

From the texts we have seen, the Maggid of Mesritch fits all four very well.

In modern times it is sometimes assumed that anyone who would spend as much time and placed as much emphasis upon self-nullification as has the Maggid would be morbid and unhealthy. On the contrary, claims Dov Baer, it is only after man has denied his existence and achieved unity with G-d that he is truly a man:

ואדם צריך לפרוש א"ע מכל גשמיות כ"כ עד
שיעלה דרך כל העולמות ויהא אחדות עם הקב"ה.
עד שיבוטל מציאותו ואז יקרא אדם.²⁵

He becomes, in effect, "born again", possessing the knowledge of the ultimate truth of the relationship between G-d and man. He can live out his life secure in the knowledge that his sole worthwhile task is to redeem sparks and return them to the Root--En Sof.

Devekut was by no means an easy, sure-fire technique, lest anyone think that mystical consciousness can be

attained instantly. The Maggid warned that failure was entirely possible:

וזאת נקרא קליפה סביב מצוה זו, כדי שלא
 תוכל להתאחד עם קדושתו ית', ודי למבין.²⁶

Even if efforts did not end in failure, success could be, at times, modest and one could not expect to "stay up" all the time:

מתחלה ידבק עצמו בכורא ית' למטה כראוי, ואחר
 כך יכול לעלות למעלה. וצריך לירד למטה כמה פעמים
 כיום לנוח עצמו ממחשבת מעט, ויש כמה פעמים שאינו
 יכול לעבוד רק בקטנות ואינו יכול לעלות לעולם
 העליון.²⁷

We also have evidence from the testimonies of his disciples that the Maggid was a teacher of the via passiva. Hurwitz has collected some of these in his essay "Psychological Aspects in Early Hasidic Literature". In that essay, he notes that Solomon Maimon, who had traveled a great distance to see the Maggid, reported this teaching:

As long as man acts from himself, he is incapable of receiving the effect of the Holy Spirit. For this purpose he must comport himself like an instrument, only passively.²⁸

J. G. Weiss too, reports Maimon's encounter with the via passiva as taught by the Maggid:

I observed that their ingenious exegesis (sc. that of the Hasidim)...was limited strictly to their own extravagant principles, such as the doctrine of self-annihilation.²⁹

Hurwitz writes that according to R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi:

While our blessed Maggid spoke of the Torah, the shekina spoke through his mouth and the spirit of G-d was in him, but he was completely detached from the world.³⁰

Finally, from the introduction to Maggid Devarav l'Yaakov, written (according to Hurwitz) by Solomon of Lusk:

The Maggid said to us: I will teach in what disposition one can best speak about the Torah. It is a state in which one no longer has any sense at all of one's own self, is all ear, so that it is not the speaker himself who speaks, but the world of speech in him.³¹

We have seen that the via passiva and the doctrines of self-annihilation and attainment of the N/naught, were in fact an important part of the teachings of the Maggid of Mesritch. We have previously commented on the connection between meditation and contemplation and the passive way. J. G. Weiss, in the passage cited in note 37 of chapter two, argues that in the case of the Maggid the connection is a particularly strong one. Weiss additionally argues:

The human being begins fulfilling his merely passive role in the moment when he recognizes his own nihilitudo: he is empty and immobile,

activated only by the power of G-d within him... passiveness is...a preparatory phase of precise contemplative technique aimed at the attainment of ecstasy. Contemplative exercises centred on the nature of human instrumentality are the best possible means whereby the instrumentality appreciated by the mystic in contemplation may become actualized within the ecstatic experience.

Contemplation of this kind is not focussed on the "greatness of G-d" or the "greatness of His creation"...But the technique for achieving ecstasy in self-annihilation is the searching penetration of the contemplative mystic turned inwards into the very depths of his own soul, in scrutiny of his own essential nature...The way is that of self-knowledge, achieved by a mystical introspection which amounts to recognition of the instrumental character of man in a very specific respect, namely, of oneself. By thinking of oneself in a repeated contemplative way...one comes to accept the nature of G-d as the sole agent not only in the world, but even more emphatically, within oneself. One has then reached the stage at which the objective consideration of the exclusive activity of G-d and the radical passivity of man becomes a subjective reality, in the form of ecstatic experience.³²

Schatz-Uffenheimer, in a more limited fashion, also notes that the way in which man is to encounter the shekina is through meditation:

האלוהית המצומצמת ב"שכינה" יכול אדם
לפגוש בדרך ההתכוונות המדיטטיבית.³³

Though we have eloquent secondary testimony and well-reasoned arguments supporting the fact that the Maggid engaged in meditative/contemplative activity, we lack testimony from the Maggid, or even from his disciples describing the actual method and practice of Hasidic meditation/contemplation. Perhaps such

information was only communicated orally, from master to disciple, never publicly, and much less in print. Nevertheless I feel safe in concluding that meditative and contemplative practices formed a key part of the Maggid's spiritual life. They are too crucial an ingredient of the passive way to allow any other conclusion.

CHAPTER SIX:

ELIMELEKH OF LYZHANSK

Elimelekh of Lyzhansk was one of the many disciples of the Maggid of Mesritch and was a third-generation hasidic master. He is probably best known as the author of ספר נועם אלימלך , a collection of sermons and drashot upon the weekly Torah portions. It is a work that has enjoyed great popularity in several Hasidic communities from the time of its publication until the present day. It is clear that meditation and contemplation play nowhere near as central a role in Elimelekh's teachings as they do for someone such as Dov Baer. However, upon examining a substantial sample of Noam Elimelekh, I was able to find within it evidence of lower-level meditative practices as well as higher level contemplative ones.

The teachings I've collected seem to be best understood when divided into two categories: practices for the average hasidim and practices for the צדיקים, the leaders of the Hasidic communities. It was the contention of zaddikim such as Elimelekh that the unlearned masses of Jews who had little time for study or meditation could achieve devekut only through the power of the zaddik, they being the only ones able to practice devekut directly.¹

In our attempt to show that meditation and contemplation were important to Elimelekh, we are faced with

a double problem. First, although Noam Elimelekh was intended for mass distribution, it was not Elimelekh's intention to teach the readers to achieve devekut on their own. Rather, he urged them to go to the zaddik, who would help them in this endeavor. He therefore says little that will instruct the unlearned reader directly in the ways of mystical meditations or contemplations. Second, not surprisingly, we learn little about the practices of the zaddikim themselves. After all, knowledge such as this was not intended to be put in print.

To solve the problem, we must work inductively. We have already seen the importance of mysticism, meditation, and contemplation to the Hasidic movement's founders. Elimelekh, being an inheritor of that tradition, must have accepted these teachings to some degree. Although the texts we will see here are not as explicit as some of the ones we have seen previously, I believe that they can be understood to show that meditation and contemplation played a not unimportant role for zaddikim such as Elimelekh and their hasidim.

Noam Elimelekh continually stresses the importance of the מחשבה --the thought--in spiritual exercise and growth. This is of particular interest to us because, after all, meditative activities of all schools make use of the thought as a vehicle for attaining mystical consciousness. The following text shows how this holds true for Elimelekh:

דעיקר רוממות אל הוא כמחשבה שהוא אחד מג'
 מדריגות שצריך האדם לעבוד להשי"ת כדבור וכמעשה
 וכמחשבה הדיבור היינו התורה הקדושה והמעשה הם
 מצות ומחשבה הוא רוממות אל ית' ויתעלה זכרו לעד
 ולנצח נצחין אמן²

Elimelekh teaches here that the essence of the grandeur of G-d is in the thought of man. Man serves G-d in speech through the Torah, in deed by doing mitzvot, and in thought by grasping the supreme highness i.e. transcendence, exaltedness and greatness of He who is Blessed. This would then seem to imply a mental activity that goes beyond mere cognition. The grasping of the rommemut El seems to require a trans-cognitive, meditative mode of thought.

Similarly, the following text encourages the seeker to search for G-d's majesty:

שצריך האדם לחקור ולדרוש ולחפש תמיד לראות
 רוממות אל מכל דבר אשר יראו עיניו ועי"ז ידכה
 שיתן לו השי"ת שכל וכינה להבין ולהשכיל
 בעולמות העליונים³

The words לחקור ולדרוש ולחפש indicate a type of thought that leads to a mystical understanding of higher realms. What is this if not meditative thought?

The following texts also teach the importance of gazing at the heavens:

והנה עיקר העבודה שע"י יתיחד שמו יתברך
 הוא ע"י הסתכלות ברוממות אל יתברך וגדלותו
 במורא ופחד הבא לאדם ממילא בהסתכלו נוראותיו
 ונפלאותיו⁴

ואמר לו הבט נא השמימה והיינו להסתכל
 ברוממות אל וביותר יוכל האדם לראות רוממות
 אל בהכינו השמים ורואה הכוכבים במסילות על
 משמרותם מזהירים כזוהר אורם ומזה יבא לסודם
 יראה להבין רוממות ית'⁵

It seems clear that Elimelekh wanted his hasidim to be inspired when they looked heavenward and reflected upon G-d's majesty. It should also seem clear that meditation would have been a very appropriate behavior on these occasions.

The reader will note that the meditative activity of Elimelekh is not similar to the meditative activity of the Baal Shem Tov or Dov Baer. Elimelekh's meditation seems closer to the etymological meaning that we noted in the first chapter of this thesis: "to measure or consider all aspects of a subject, or to reflect upon a certain matter." We recall that Underhill wrote, "the Beginner meditates upon reality, the Proficient contemplates reality and the Perfect is united with reality". So far, Elimelekh's counsels have been directed to the "Beginners".

Elimelekh offers other teachings with "grasping the majesty of G-d" as a theme:

וצריך האדם לצייר בלבו את גוף ממשלתו
 ונוראותיו ונפלאותיו ית' ועי"ז יבא ליאהבה
 רבה בלבו להכורא ית'. ומה גם שבמחשבה יכול
 האדם להשיג השיגות גדולות לאין קץ כי המחשבה
 היא ג"כ א"ס. וא"כ צריך האדם לקשר עצמו בעבותות
 אהבה ומתוך אהבה יהיה לו היראה לחטוא חלילה פן
 יפרוד אהבה חלילה.⁶

Of special interest to us in this text is the statement that the thought, like the heart and like G-d, is En Sof, without end. Both heart and thought must be taken further than they normally go, the heart through great love and the thought through meditation, to begin to understand the infinity of G-d.

The reward for directing thoughts heavenward is spelled out in this teaching:

אם תכניס הכל במחשבת רוממות אל י"ת עי"ז
 תזכה שתוכל לבא אל הארץ אשר אראך דהיינו
 לארץ עליונה?⁷

It is doubtful that a mystical reward such as this would be promised for an exercise that was anything but a mystical one. The mystical exercise of thought is, of course, meditation/contemplation.

The following text teaches that in order for man to arrive at the mystical level of אמת -- Truth, he must meditate upon the idea that he is standing in heaven on the one hand and is exceedingly humble on the other:

בלתי אפשרי לכא למדריגת אמת שהוא מדריגת
 נורא כ"א האופן זה... שצריך לאחוז ב' מדריגות;
 א' שירמה בעיניו כאלו עומד למעלה בעולמות
 העליונים בבית אלקים ממש לפני השי"ת ומדריגה
 הב' שיאחוז במדת הכנעה מאוד מאוד... יחשוב תמיד
 כאלו הוא מתחיל בעבודת הכורא עתה...⁸

Admittedly the line between high level musar and low level mysticism can be a thin one and it could be said that this text walks that line. However, I believe that the nature of the Hasidic movement entitles us to classify texts like this one as something higher than ethical counsels. The movement was one, as we have already seen, with a rich mystic heritage. Considering the imagery in this text, I believe it is best understood as a low-level mystical teaching, implying that some form of meditative activity was called for.

Elimelekh also noted that devekut and yihudim, practices we have already seen to be meditative/contemplative, were important to Jacob in the Bible, and they remain important to anyone who wishes to acquire the world to come:

עיקר עבודתו של יעקב אבינו ע"ה היה תמיד
 ביחודים והדביקות... דהיינו לקנות עוה"ב
 היה רק יחודים והדביקות והכך⁹

The Biblical verse "I have set the L-rd always before me" (Psalms 16:8), which played an important role to Nahman of Kosov, was used as a spiritual aid by Elimelekh as well:

וזהו שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד כו' דזה חיוכ
 על כל איש מישראל לצייר השם הו"י כ"ה נגד
 עיניו.¹⁰

Elimelekh quite clearly intends the verse be used as a
 mantra-like device, to be kept in mind at all times.

The meditative practice of התבודדות --solitude, was
 an important one for Elimelekh, as it was for the Besht
 and the Maggid. Elimelekh recommends "being alone with
 one's thoughts" i.e. meditating as in Mishna Berachot
 5:1, before prayer:

דקודם התפלה צריך התבודדות כמ"ש חז"ל
 חסידים הראשונים היו שוהין שעה אחת קודם
 התפילה ושעה אחת אחר התפלה ונמצא עד אחר
 התפילה צריך התבודדות במחשבתו¹¹

We learn elsewhere that the purpose of this solitude
 is to concentrate the mind upon serving G-d:

התבודדות קודם לתפילה... שיחדו מחשבתם
 לדבר אחר והוא עבודתו יתברך שמו¹²

The baal tshuva is advised that hitbodadut will serve as
 the opening of the heavens for him:

כפתח קטן צריך הכעל תשובה לדחוק עצמו עד
 שמן השמים ירחיב לו וזהו ופתח התיבה היינו
 הפתח של התבודדות.¹³

Hitbodadut is also recommended to help man achieve humility:

האדם כתחלה עבודתו ית"ש צריך התבודדות
 לעצמו יחידי דהיינו שצריך לצמצם א"ע ככל
 מעשיו להיות בהם הצנע לכת עם ה'.¹⁴

Elimelekh was concerned, lest the neophyte become intoxicated with mystic fervor and not know how to handle it. The following teaching offers advice in such a situation:

האדם הבא לו אהבה והתלהבות כלכבו כתפילתו
 או בלימודו הן ככל מעשיו אשר יעשה לשמו ית"ש
 ראוי לו שיחשוב מי יודע אם אין זו התלהבות אש
 דרה חלילה וחלילה...ואם לבו מתלהב עוד... רק שיהיה
 שפל מאד ויחשוב איך אפשר שאיש שפל כמוני יזכה
 לזאת ואם יוסף עוד ולא יפסוק יחשוב אמת כודאי זה
 הוא דבר אלקים שנתן לי השי"ת מתנה והלוואי שיהיה
 לכבי זה כל הימים ויתפלל תמיד להשי"ת שיעזור לו
 וישמור אותו שלא יכשל ח"ו בשום נדנוד חטא שלא
 יזרום החטא ח"ו לככות אש התלהבותו בעבודת הבורא ית"ש¹⁵

Finally, in the group of counsels intended for the average hasid, we have this text, which hints at the doctrine of self-annihilation:

רק שצריך האדם לדמות בנפשו באמת כאלו עתה
 נמסר נפשו על יחוד שמו הגדול וכן הוא דרך
 צדיקים¹⁶

The last four words are instructive. "This is the way of the zaddikim" no doubt means just that. This practice and related quietist activities are not intended for the

everyday hasid, but for the zaddik alone. A text such as this seems to say that it was a belief of Elimelekh's that higher level mystical practices are reserved for the spiritual upper class. We have seen a sample of the meditative practices intended for the simple hasid. Admittedly, some of them do not offer resounding testimony in support of our thesis that meditation and contemplation played an important role in Beshtian Hasidism as taught by Elimelekh of Lyzhansk. However as we turn our attention to the practices intended for the zaddikim, the picture will change quite noticeably.

The Encyclopedia Judaica states, that according to Elimelekh, the zaddik, "by means of reflection and contemplation, wages a war whose ultimate purpose is devekut and the ascent to the absolute."¹⁷ Additionally, the zaddik receives the spiritual outpouring (עשׂו), which endlessly and lovingly flows from heaven and transmits it to his people. When he acts in this sense, the zaddik is spoken of as a "channel".¹⁸ Only by achieving a high level of devekut, which we know to be attainable through meditation and contemplation, could a zaddik fill this role properly. The attainment of devekut, then, is crucial to the zaddik:

הצדיק כל עבודתו הוא להיותו דבוק בו
 יתברך ויתעלה ולדבק בשמתו תחת כסא הכבוד מקום
 שרשו והצדיק המזכך את גופו ומטהר עצמו מכל
 התאויות החיצוניים אזי גם גופו הטהור דבוק
 בו יתברך¹⁹

Not surprisingly, one of the methods the zaddikim used to attain the state of devekut necessary to fulfill his task was hitbodadut:

מהכר רמז להתבודדות גדול שהצדיק מתבודד
בעצמו ומדבק א"ע בו ית',²⁰

Unlike the texts that refer to hitbodadut for the common hasid, this text clearly shows that when the zaddik was in solitude, it was a time of devekut, and hence, meditation and contemplation.

The following texts tells that the zaddik contemplates heaven and ascends to mystical heights while in solitude:

הצדיק השלם העוכה ה' כאמת הוא מסתכל תמיד
ברוממות אל וגדולתו יתברך ומתבודד עצמו
כמחשכתו לעלות במחשכתו ממדריגה למדריגה
עד רום המעלות.²¹

Since histaklut barommemut El is shown here to be a contemplative practice of the zaddikim, we find support from an unexpected source for our earlier contention that it is a lower level meditative process for the ordinary hasidim. As we would expect though, the zaddik is called upon to reach higher levels of devekut through this practice than is the ordinary hasid:

שהצדיק צריך לקדש עצמו כ"כ להכיר נפלאות
וגדולות הכורא כ"ה עד שיבא למדריגה כזו שגם
אם יראה איזה פלא לא יפליא בעיניו לחידוש גדול
נגד נפלאות הכורא ותעלה שבידו לעשות פלאי פלאים
יותר ויותר אין קץ.²²

The zaddik who desires proper kavanah and wishes to serve as a proper channel for his people, is told to meditate, i.e. to stand amazed at the wonders of Heaven and the majesty of the Almighty:

הצדיק בעת תפילתו כשרוצה להתפלל או לעשות
 מצות הבורא ית' צריך להכין עצמו בשלש מדרגות.
 א' כדאיתו בגמרא: חסידים הראשונים היו שוהין שעה
 אחת ומתפללים והיינו שחשבו רוממות אל טרם התפללם,
 ושוהין מלשון והאיש משתאה דהיינו כחושכם רוממותו
 וגדלותו הם מתמיהים על גודל תפארתו, וכ"א צריך
 שיחשוב רוממות אל עה מקום שידו מגעת בעולמות
 העליונים לפי מדרגתו ועי"ז הוא ממשיך את נשמתו
 למעלה בעולמות העליונים ומקבלת משם השפעת
 קדושה ויורדת למטה...²³

The following text shows the relationship between devekut, mahshavah, hitbodadut, and the channelling of heavenly influence earthward:

כי הצדיק מתדבק בשרשו ברום המעלות
 בהתבודדות ובמחשבתו ומקשר נפשו בעולמות
 העליונים וממשיך השפע למטה²⁴

We see in this text that devekut, mahshavah, and hitbodadut are elements that precede the channelling process. We know that each of these components are meditative/contemplative when used by the zaddik and it appears safe to say that the zaddik's role of channelling requires meditation/contemplation as well.

Further testimony to the central role played by the thought in devekut, and the connection between devekut and channelling is seen in these texts from Noam Elimelekh:

ויש צדיק הדבוק בכורא יתכרך במחשבות
קדושות תמיד ודבקות בלי הפסק הצדיק הזה
גורם השפעות גדולות לעולם²⁵

מאד עמקו מחשבותיך רמז לצדיק הנ"ל
העובר במחשבות זה עמוק עמוק.²⁶

Here too, the thought is shown to be a vehicle upon which the zaddik ascends to higher worlds:

והוא יושב פתח אוהל פי' שם דרך הצדיק
הגם שהוא למטה אבל עיקר ישיבתו הוא למעלה
בעולמות העליונים דהם נקראים אוהל מועד
מחמת שהם תמיד בחדוה ושמחה כמו י"ט.
והצדיק המשתוקק תמיד עם מחשבתו ומתגבר
לעלות עם מחשבתו לעולם העליון נקרא יושב
פתח האוהל.²⁷

It is clear that the word mahshavah in many cases, has strong mystical overtones to Elimelekh. It is not simple thinking he refers to but a type of thought that leads to a consciousness of higher realms, of the mystical. By the definitions we laid down in the first chapter, this type of thought is considered meditative in nature. Texts such as these that urge the zaddik to use the thought to achieve devekut lend support to our contention

that the texts that urge the ordinary hasid to use the thought to ascend to heavenly heights are also meditative in nature. They are not as explicitly mystical as are the texts that refer to the zaddikim, but we accept and even anticipate this. We see that Elimelekh's counsels to the ordinary hasidim and his counsels to the zaddikim may differ in a qualitative sense, but they are generically all but indistinguishable.

We have seen the importance of devekut to Elimelekh and to the zaddikim of his day. Knowing the relationship between devekut and meditation/contemplation, we can deduce that Elimelekh was not unfamiliar with these modes of spiritual exercise. Like the Besht and the Maggid, Elimelekh chooses to conceal the "how-to" of meditation, at least in the texts I've examined. Were we to ask Elimelekh, "how does one meditate?", we would receive only the most general of instructions, e.g. הסתכל ברומומות אל. The rest remains a mystery, at least for now.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

MOSHE LEIB OF SASOV

Moshe Leib of Sasov lived from 1745-1807 and was a disciple of the Maggid of Mesritch, Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, and Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsburg.¹ He is the author of a guide to spiritual progress titled "הנהגות" that appears in the booklet ספר חמדה גנוזה, which was published by Moshe Leib's great grandson R. Gershon Hager through Joseph Biegeleisen.²

"Hanhagot" is a brief collection of counsels on such topics as "Awe and the Way of Acquiring It", "Prayer", "Faith", "Good Qualities and Their Acquisition", etc. A few of the counsels in Moshe Leib's "Guide" can be considered meditative/contemplative in nature and we will examine those teachings here.

The first teaching in our collection that could be considered meditative reads as follows:

תצויר לפניך השמים ושמי השמים הארץ וכל
 אשר עלי' הימים וכל אשר בהם וגודל קומתם
 ורוחב שטחם.³

This text is taken from the section on "Awe" and the seeker is here being counselled to picture Creation and its wonderous dimensions, ostensibly so that he may acquire a measure of awe of Heaven. I believe such a text falls comfortably into the category of meditations

that are considered to be "reflections on a matter". We recognize that Awe of Heaven would not be readily acquired simply by thinking about the dimensions of Creation. Meditation upon them is much more likely to bring about the desired result. It seems that in this text, Moshe Leib was counselling his students to meditate upon the Heavens, much as his teacher Elimelekh encouraged his students to do.

The following text falls into a similar category:

תמליך את השם על כל הנכראים ותבטל
מציאותם נגדו וכולם יכרעו ויפולו ויאחזם
רעו וחלחלה לעבדו שכם אחר⁴

Here the aspirant is urged to meditate, i.e. reflect upon and consider carefully, the greatness of G-d with respect to the relative tininess of His creatures. Like the previous text, this counsel is intended to help develop a sense of Awe of Heaven within the heart and mind of the seeker. Such a sense is developable through meditative activity.

The following teaching encourages meditation while in solitude. Unlike the previous texts, this teaching refers to meditation explicitly:

התבודדות לפחות על כ' שעה והתבודדות
בהם איזה דרך ישרה שיבור לו אדם הוא קוטב
דרכי העבודה וזולת זה לעולם תהי' רחוק
ממנה.⁵

Moshe Leib urges that two hours per day be spent in solitude and that the time should be used for meditation upon the "straight path that one should choose in G-d's service."⁶ Unfortunately, as we've seen elsewhere, we are left in the dark as to the process and method of the meditative activity. Nevertheless, the fact of such activity is undeniable here.

Of all the teachings we have seen from Moshe Leib, this next one comes the closest to outright mysticism:

חזכור מעשה אברהם יצחק ויעקב משה וכו'
ומעשה הצדיקים.
אם כה תעשה יבא בלכך אהבה ויראה וחשיקה
עד שתבא להתפשטות הגוף מעל הדעת⁷

The text says that the calling to mind of the deeds of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc., and the deeds of the zaddikim will eventually lead to a mystical state of spiritual awareness where mind and body are perceived as being distinct entities rather than parts of the whole. For a phenomenon such as this to transpire,

חזכור מעשה צדיקים must mean something more than simple recollection. Likewise a result such as התפשטות הגוף מעל הדעת would seem to require an effort of concentrated reflection and meditation. I believe that this is what is being taught here.

Finally, we see that Moshe Leib advocates self-nullification during prayer:

אם תכטל מציוואתך להשם לגמרי בעת
התפילה, וראי שלא תשכח כל היום אותו⁸

Self-nullification is, as we have already seen, a contemplative practice and one of the pillars upon which the Maggid's brand of Hasidism rests. Moshe Leib here carries on the teachings of his rebbe, the Maggid: Prayer is a good time for the contemplative exercise of self-nullification.

In Sefer Hemda G'nuza, Moshe Leib's counsels that can be considered meditative/contemplative constitute a very small minority of the teachings attributed to him. We must not conclude, however, that simply because the meditative/contemplative texts form a small sample of this collection of teachings that meditation and contemplation were unimportant to Moshe Leib. It is inconceivable that the few testimonies to the practices that we have seen were all that Moshe Leib knew or had to say about them. Their very wording indicates that they form but the tip of the iceberg. Their presence, even in small numbers, demonstrates to us that meditation and contemplation played a significant role in the life of this Hasidic teacher.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

HABAD HASIDISM

We saw in chapter two that the Habad school of Hasidism considered meditation and contemplation to be important spiritual disciplines. In this chapter, we will take a deeper look at the meditative/contemplative practices of Habad by examining some of the writings of the early leaders of the movement. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I was only able to scratch the surface of the literature of the movement in my research. What follows then, should be understood as a limited study of our subject.

Discussion will center around two men: Shneur Zalman of Liadi, also known as the Alter Rebbe, the founder of Habad, and his son and successor, R. Dov Baer of Lubavitch. (R. Dov Baer of Lubavitch should not be confused with R. Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mesritch, whom we discussed earlier.) Shneur Zalman is the author of the תניא , a work first published in 1797 that has been recognized as a masterly and systematic exposition of Hasidism, has been accepted as the principle source of Habad Hasidism, and is considered to be "the written law of Habad."¹ The Tanya is alternately known as

--ספר התינוני -- לקוטי אמרים

The Book of the Average Man. According to Shneur Zalman, the category of the benoni includes all those who are not צדיקים --wholly righteous, nor רשעים --wholly wicked.

The benoniyim constitute the great majority of mankind.

Even though the Tanya is written principally for the benoni, and is not considered to be an esoteric text, the book gives more detailed information about meditation and contemplation than any of the works we have examined to this point. This in itself makes for impressive testimony in support of the contention that meditation and contemplation were widespread practices in Habad.

Shneur Zalman's son, Dov Baer of Lubavitch is the author of קונטרס ההתבוננות --"The Tract on Contemplation", first published in 1821. The "Tract" is considered to be a reliable account of what is involved in the Habad method of contemplation.² Given the time limitations placed upon this thesis, I was unable to study the "Tract on Contemplation" in the Hebrew original. However, Louis Jacobs, in his book Hasidic Prayer, offers a detailed summary and analysis of key portions of the "Tract" and Jacobs' interpretations have been relied upon in the writing of this chapter. It should also be stated here that English translations of the Tanya, rather than the Hebrew texts, have been used for assistance in understanding the text.

It is not a difficult task to find textual evidence testifying to the actuality of meditative/contemplative

practice among Habad Hasidim. The Tanya states:

רק שצריך לקבוע עתים להתכונן בגדולת ה'
להשיג דחילו ורחימו שכליים...³

The teaching urges the benoni to set aside specific times for reflecting upon the greatness of G-d so that one might attain an intelligent sense of love and fear of G-d. According to Jacobs, Dov Baer in the Kunteros Ha-Hitbonanut, defines contemplation as:

the powerful reflection on the profundity of a subject, pondering over it until it is understood perfectly in all the details of its various parts. It is the opposite of a mere superficial glance at a subject.⁴

We need look no further than these texts to substantiate the statement that Shneur Zalman and Dov Baer urged their Hasidim to meditate.

This shown, we now can ask questions such as "what was the mood of Habad-style meditation?" and "What was it like?" Had we tried to find the answers to these questions from the writings of the spiritual leaders we discussed in preceding chapters, we would have received the sketchiest of answers. The Habad-niks however, have answers galore.

First, we see that meditation was described as a time when man could commune with his soul, so that he might learn to cultivate the abhorrence of evil and rejoice in the greatness of G-d:

צריך לקבוע לו עתים גם כן לשיח עצות
 כנפשו להיות מואס ברע... להתענג ולשמוח
 בה' ע"י התכוננות בגדולתו א"ס כ"ה...⁵

Moreover, continued reflection on G-d's greatness during meditation was said to lead to heavenly inspiration:

וכשירגיל לשמח נפשו בה' ע"י התכוננות
 בגדולת ה' הרי כאתערותא דלתתא אתערותא
 דלעילא וכולי האי ואעלי יערה עליו רוח
 מרום...⁶

The Tanya also teaches that the movement from חכמה to בינה i.e. from potential knowledge to actual knowledge, is effected through meditation:

וכשמוציא כחו אל הפועל שמתכוונן כשכלו
 להכין דבר לאשורו ולעמקו מתוך איזה דבר
 חכמה המושכל כשכלו נקרא בינה.⁷

In turn, binah and hokhmah combine to create love and fear of G-d in the heart of the meditator:

והן הם אב ואם המולידות אהבת ה' ויראתו
 ופחדו כי השכל שננפש המשכלת כשמתכוונן ומעמיק
 מאד בגדולת ה' איך הוא ממלא כל עלמין וסוכב כל
 עלמין וכולא קמיה כלא חשיב נולדה ונתעוררה
 מדת יראת הרוממות במוחו ומחשבתו לירא
 ולהתכושש מגדלתו ית' שאין לה סוף ותכלית
 ופחד ה' כלכו...⁸

As meditation continues, the benoni reaches the highest level of knowledge attainable in the Habad system, דעת :

והדעת היא מלשון והאדם ידע את חוה והיא
 לשון התקשרות והתחכרות שמקשר דעתו בקשר אמיץ
 וחזק מאד ויתקע מחשבתו בחוזק בגדלות אין סוף
 כ"ה ואינו מסיים דעתו כי אף מי שהוא חכם ונכון
 בגדולת א"ס כ"ה הנה אם לא יקשר דעתו ויתקע מחשבתו
 בחוזק ובהתמדה לא יוליד בנפשו יראה ואהבה
 אמיתית כי אם דמיונית שוא...⁹

The English translation of this significant passage reads as follows:

Da'at, the etymology of which is to be found in the verse: "And Adam knew Eve," implies attachment and union; it is that faculty which binds one's mind with a very firm and strong bond to, and firmly fixes one's thought on, the greatness of the blessed En Sof, without diverting one's mind /from Him/. For even one who is wise and understanding of the greatness of the blessed En Sof, will not--unless he binds his knowledge and fixes his thought with firmness and perseverance--create in his soul true love and fear, but only vain fancies...¹⁰

The attainment of genuine love and fear of G-d, achieved by contemplating the greatness of G-d is a theme oft repeated in the Tanya. The following text calls for the benoni to rule his heart by meditating upon the greatness of En Sof. The knowledge and fear of G-d acquired through this activity will help one to turn from evil:

וזה כלל גדול-בעבודת ה' לכינונים העיקר
 הוא... לשלוט על הלב כשמתכוונן כמוחו בגדולת
 א"ס ב"ה להוליד מבינתו רוח דעת ויראת ה'
 כמוחו להיות סור מרע ואורייתא ודרכנן...
 ולהוליד אהבת ה' בהתגלות לבו.¹¹

This does not seem like the via passiva. Rather it is
 a direct, positive concentration on G-d. Contemplation
 upon the greatness of G-d also leads to the development
 of the latent love of G-d that exists within the soul
 of every Jew:

וע"י התכוונות זו... מדת האהבה שכנפש...
 לא לחפור כלל שום הכר בעולם כלתי ה' לבדו
 מקור החיים של כל התענוגים שכולם בטילים
 כמציאות וכלא ממש קמיה חשיבי ואין ערוך
 ודמיון כלל כיניהם ח"ו... לגבי חיים נצחיים¹²

This love will also be aroused in those who contemplate
 G-d's love of Israel:

היא אהבה שכל אדם יוכל להגיע אליה
 כשיתכוונן היטב בעומקא דלכא בדברים
 המעוררים את האהבה לה' בלב כל ישראל...
 כן יאהב את ה' כאשר יתכוונן וישים אל
 לבו כי ה' הוא נפשו אמיתית וח"ו ממש...

תתעורר האהבה בלב כל משכיל ומתכוון
 בענין זה בעומקא דלבא לאהוב את ה' אהבה
 עזה ולדבקה בו בלב ונפש.¹³

In prayer as well, contemplation leads to the
 arousal of love in the heart of the worshipper:

היא חובה של תורה ממש למכיני מדע
 תועלת ההתכוונות ועומק ההעת קצת כל חד
 לפום שיעורא די ליה בסודור שבחו של מקום ב"ה...
 לעורר... האהבה המסותרת בלב כל ישראל...¹⁴

Fear of G-d and grief over past sins will also be felt
 by the one who contemplates the greatness of G-d:

ובפרט כאשר יתכוון המשכיל בגדולת א"ס
 ב"ה ממלא כל עולמות יסובב כל עולמות כל
 א' וא' לפי שיעור שכל והכנתו יתמרמר ע"ז
 מאד מאד.¹⁵

According to the Tanya, contemplation of G-d's
 greatness leads to two different kinds of אהבה and
 יראת: a lower category where the love and fear are
 the result of contemplation, and a higher category
 where they are considered to be a gift from G-d:

והנה מודעת זאת די ש ב' מיני דו"ר
 הראשונות הן הנולדות מהתכוונה והדעת
 בגדולת ה' וכדברים המביאין לידי אהבת
 ה' ויראתו והאחרונות הן הכאות אחר כך
 מלמעלה בבח' מתנה... והנה ודאי אין

ערוך כלל בין הראשונות שהן תולדות
 השכל הנכבד לגבי האחרונות שהן מהבורא ית"ש...¹⁶

Judging from the texts we have seen, a recurring theme seems to be that contemplation upon G-d's greatness leads to intelligent love and fear of G-d. Since the examples of Habad meditation that we have seen speak of arousing the emotions of love and fear, they would probably be classified by Otto as "emotional" rather than "serene". Yet this is not the only category of Habad contemplation. A set of teachings proscribing the passive way are found in the Tanya as well.

We saw earlier that the Maggid of Mesritch taught that one who was righteous acted as a כלי, a vessel who carried G-dliness within him. The same motif is used by Shneur Zalman:

אברהם אבינו ע"ה... שהיה אורח את הקב"ה
 אהבה גדולה ועליונה כ"כ עד שנעשה מרכבה
 לקב"ה¹⁷

This expression signifies absolute self-abnegation and submission to G-d and the Divine will. Abraham thereby became a vehicle for Divinity on earth.¹⁸ The Alter Rebbe also speaks of elevating the divine spark that is within man by surrendering his soul:

והנה כל כוונתו במסירת נפשו לה' ע"י
 התורה והתפילה להעלות ניצוץ אלהות
 שכתובה למקורו...¹⁹

Similarly, the nullification of the self is viewed by Shneur Zalman as a prerequisite for one to possess the Holy Spirit:

כמו נשמות האבות והנביאים וכיוצא בהן
 (שהיו מרכבה לה' ממש ובטלים ממש במציאות
 אליו כמ"ש ארז"ל שכינה מדברת מתוך גרונו
 של משה וכן כל הנביאים ובעלי רוה"ק היה
 קול ודבור העליון מתלבש בקולם והכורם ממש
 כמ"ש הארי ז"ל)²⁰

In a note to this passage, Immanuel Schochet wrote: "Moses was but a passive tool for the speech of the Shechinah, as if he himself did not exist as a separate entity."²¹ This is certainly an example of the via passiva.

Shneur Zalman encourages the realization that all things in Creation are as naught when compared to G-d. The Tanya teaches that such a realization will lead to compassion in the heart of the meditator:

והתעוררות רחמנות זו היא בא מהתכונה
 והדעת בגדולה ה' איך שאפילו העולמות
 העליונים למעלה מעלה עד שאיזן קץ כלא
 ממש חשיבי קמיה...²²

The realization that all is as naught before Him also leads to great joy:

זאת תהיה שמחת הנפש האמיתי וכפרט
 כשרואה בנפשו בעתים מזומנים שצריך לזכרה
 ולהאירה בשמחת לבב אזי יעמיק מחשבתו
 ויצויר בשכלו ובינתו ענין יחודו ית' האמיתי...
 וכולא קמיה כלא חשיב ממש והוא לכרו... והנה
 כשיעמיק בזה הרכה ישמח לכו והגל נפשו אף
 גילת ורנן בכל לב ונפש ומאד באמונה זו כי
 רכה היא כי היא קרבת אלקים ממש וזה כל
 האדם ותכלית בריאתו...²³

The benoni's realization that all is as naught before Him will lead to his understanding that He is En Sof:

והנה כאשר יתכוונן המשכיל כגדולת א"ס כ"ה
 כי כשמו כן הוא א"ס ואין קץ ותכלית כלל
 לאור וחיות המתפשט ממנו ית' ברצונו הפשוט
 ומיוחד במהותו ועצמותו ית' בתכלית היחוד²⁴

It is instructive to note that in these texts, even when Shneur Zalman urges the quietist understanding of the naughtness of Creation, it is often followed by an emotional reaction e.g., compassion, joy, etc. In a letter to one Alexander of Shklov, the Alter Rebbe described the same phenomenon: serene understanding of G-d followed by an emotional feeling of love and the desire to serve Him. Jacobs translates:

...the concept of prayer and its essential idea belong to the very foundation of the Torah, namely to know the L-rd, to recognize His greatness and His glory with a serene mind and through contemplation to have these fixed firmly in mind. A man must reflect on this theme until the contemplative soul is awakened to love the L-rd's name--to cleave to Him and His Torah and to greatly desire His commandments...²⁵

The Habad Hasidim understood that the "serene" understanding of the greatness of G-d and the naughtiness of man was difficult if not impossible to separate from emotionalist reactions following the attainment of that understanding. Jacobs describes the problem as follows:

The stages in the act of contemplation are, first a powerful sensation experienced in the animal soul as a result of contemplation (i.e. a purely natural response to the "thrill" of reflection on the divine), and then the refinement of this sensation so that the self enjoys the experience, and yet without self-awareness. It is the self which experiences G-d. Without sensation in the heart there is no experience of G-d, only abstract thought about Him. This latter can hardly be referred to as 'Wisdom' (Hokhmah) or 'Understanding' (Binah). But the very nature of a true experience of G-d involves self-annihilation. The whole process is bound to be exceedingly subtle. It is vital for the self to be deeply affected; yet once the self has attained to a realization that G-d is all, the self must pale into insignificance. There cannot be an authentic self-annihilation unless there is a self to be annihilated...This whole question loomed very large in Habad thought and practice.²⁶

It seems that we have encountered a variety of mystical experience which does not fit cleanly into one or the

other of Otto's categories. Habad contemplation has both "serene" and "emotional" aspects. According to Jacobs, the role of ecstasy in contemplation was a point of contention among Habad Hasidim after the death of Shneur Zalman:

Some declared that Habad forbids every kind of sensed ecstasy as a sensation of 'that which is' (yesh), forbidden to those who wished to gaze beyond the 'somethingness' of things to see only G-d. Others, again taught that the whole aim of contemplation is to induce ecstasy.²⁷

It seems that we will not be able to draw a line between the "emotional" and "serene" aspects of mysticism in Habad contemplation, at least at present.

As was briefly mentioned earlier, Dov Baer's Kunteros Ha-Hitbonanut explains the Habad view of what constitutes contemplation. Louis Jacobs summarizes the Kunteros in his book Hasidic Prayer and I will point out some of Jacobs' key statements here.

In the beginning of the Kunteros, Dov Baer notes that התבוננות is an intensive form of the verb בינה, and this is to indicate that only prolonged and rigorous reflection in depth qualifies as contemplation.²⁸

According to Dov Baer, there are two types of hitbonanut and each has an important role to play in prayer. Writes Jacobs:

There are thus two stages of contemplation in prayer. The first is that of binah. This means reflection with deep concentration on the

theme that G-d 'fills all worlds', that all there is has been created by G-d out of nothing and that it is by His power alone that all things are sustained. It is not sufficient to reflect on the bare idea but to grasp it in all its implications by means of various illustrations and analogies, such as the soul giving life to the body or that of the spark emerging from the flame. But it is possible for a man to obtain a theoretical understanding of this idea without being able to 'use' it in prayer. Many Hasidim, remarks Dov Baer, have a good knowledge of these tremendous themes in an academic way but fail to see of what relevance they are to the life of prayer. This is because they have never tried adequately to apply the themes of their studies to the life of prayer. They are more abstract religious thinkers than true contemplatives. The stage of tevunah is reached when the idea has become so much of a part of man that he can 'use' it in his prayers in order to induce the love and fear of G-d.²⁹

Dov Baer also wrote that there are two methods of contemplation. The first is a general method, whereby one dwells on the idea of G-d's immanence, and the fact that all is in G-d. A second, more detailed method, begins with the general method and then asks the contemplator to understand the details of how G-d's immanence is demonstrated through the Kabbalistic Sefirotic realm. The detailed method was the preferred method, said R. Baer, but beginners are advised to adopt the general method at first.³⁰

Finally, Dov Baer realized that it was not a simple task to reconcile the sense of wonder and joy one feels when contemplating G-d's majesty and His creation with the sense of sadness that accompanies the realization that man is but naught in relation to G-d, who is

אין אמת .³¹ R. Baer held that both joy and pain are present in true contemplation. He wrote:

The true test of authenticity in contemplation is whether or not the soul laments her remoteness from G-d. Where there is only joy, where man enjoys G-d without any sense of remoteness from Him, the act of contemplation is superficial.³²

This study of meditation and contemplation in Habad Hasidism, limited though it has been, has nevertheless been a worthwhile undertaking. We have seen that meditative/contemplative practice in Habad, seems to play a role that is far less peripheral and far more central than it does in other brands of Hasidism. The number of Habad texts suggesting that the benoni actively engage in contemplative activity would have surprised, say, someone such as Elimelekh of Lyzhansk. We receive no specific instructions about the "how to" of Habad meditation, except for counsels such as "contemplate the greatness of G-d". At this stage of our research though, we know not to expect detailed step by step instructions. In conclusion we can say that Habad meditation/contemplation is clearly an area that warrants further study.

CHAPTER NINE:

NAHMAN OF BRASLAV

R. Nahman of Braslav was a great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov and the founder of the Braslaver school of Hasidism. We saw in our preliminary discussion in chapter two that R. Nahman considered the acquisition of אמונה--faith, to be one of the main purposes of man. Nahman refers to several practices that aid man in the attainment of emunah, among them praying with fervor, observing the commandments, trusting and listening to the zaddik, giving tzedakah, melody, dance, etc. In addition to these, Nahman suggests practices that are meditative/contemplative in nature. ספר ליקוטי ערות, A Collection of Counsels, is a collection of teachings attributed to R. Nahman that were compiled by his disciple R. Nathan. There is a wealth of evidence in this work which supports the contention that meditation and contemplation were practices that were important to Nahman of Braslav. This chapter will examine that evidence.

Inasmuch as the attainment of emunah is the principal focus of Braslaver Hasidism, it is only reasonable to expect that a path, guide, or a method for that attainment will be found within the teachings of that sect's founder and spiritual leader. R. Nahman suggests that faith cannot be acquired through the intellect alone and

that "contemplation of the Truth" will serve as an aid in attaining emunah:

עיקר האמונה אינה אלא כמה שאין השכל מביין,
 כי במקום שהשכל מביין אין שייך אמונה... עיקר
 האמונה תלויה באמת, שאם ירצה האדם להסתכל על
 האמת לאמתו יבין מאליו. להאמין באמונה הקדושה
 בהש"י ובצדיקים האמיתיים וכתורתו הקדושה שאע"פ
 שא"א להבין כשכלינו המוגשם כי ע"י הסתכלות
 על האמת בעין האמת יבין מרחוק שהאמת היא כך...
 והבן היטב.¹

The text clearly shows that to the Braslaver, faith was something that lay beyond, or at least alongside, the realm of reason. Upon this foundation Nahman builds a school of meditative/contemplative practice that covers a wide span of the mystical spectrum, ranging from lower level musar advice to full blown doctrines of self-annihilation. We will consider Nahman's mystical teachings in their respective stages.

There are several teachings in Likkutei Etzot that refer to the practice of החכוננות, a word usually translated as meditation. Nahman taught that hitbonanut is an activity that helps the mental facilities to grow and expand:

בשעת הולדה השכל מצומצם אצל כל אחד
 וכשמתחילין להשתמש בו בהתכוננות בעבורך
 הש"י אזי שכלו הולך וגדל²

The Braslaver asks the hasid to meditate upon the futility of excessive fasting and self-mortification, practices that were not uncommon in his time:

כי צריך להתכונן כעצמו ולראות שאחר כל
 התעניתים והסיגופים עדיין נשאר כל תאוותיו
 קשורים בגופו³

This text describes a relatively rational musar-istic sort of hitbonanut. In the same sector of the mystical spectrum Nahman counsels man to meditate upon the active presence of G-d in everyday life:

צריך האדם להסתכל מאד על דרכיו ולהסתכל
 ולהתכונן היטב על כל הסיכות והענינים שהשי"ת
 מזמין לו ומתגלגל עמו בכל יום ויום.⁴

On the basis of the texts we have seen, it would be difficult for us to say exactly what hitbonanut meant to R. Nahman. However, among the texts I have studied, it seems to be the case that when Nahman refers to meditative/contemplative practice, it is usually some kind of self-introspection and examination. The following texts are examples of this:

ע"כ צריכין אלו כשרי הדור להתכונן מאד
 בגדולה והדיבור והחשיכות שמגיע להם לכל אחד
 לפי ערכו, מעט או הרבה, להתכונן ולהסתכל על
 עצמו שלא יכשל בגיאות שהיא גלות השכינה ח"ו⁵

and:

צריך לזה זכיה גדולה שיזכה ליישב עצמו
 שעה אחת ביום, ושיהיה לו חרטה על מה שצריך
 להתחרט כי לאו כל אדם זוכה ליישוב הדעת.
 ע"כ צריך להתגבר מאד לראות ליישב עצמו
 היטב על כל מעשיו והנהגותיו.⁶

The practices described here are still relatively low-level, that is to say they do not really enter the realm of the transcendent. But in the latter text, although no specific word is used to indicate meditation, the process described is clearly a meditative one in the sense that it calls for man to set aside a certain amount of time each day to reflect upon a subject. In this case the subject matter is deeds that call for regret or repentance.

We have now seen that the term hitbonanut can be used to indicate self-introspection and examination. Such behavior was of great importance to Nahman and there are a multitude of texts in Likkutei Etzot that call for the seeker to undertake this activity. Nahman referred to this meditative introspection as התבודדות--solitude, because it took place while man was in solitude, alone, as it were, with G-d:

מי-שרוצה לטעום טעם אור הגנוז היינו
 סודות התורה שיתגלו לעתיד ירכה בהתבודדות
 בינו לבין קונו, וידין וישפוט א"ע בכל עת
 על כל עסקיו ומעשיו אם כך ראוי והגון לו
 לעשות ולהתנהג כך נגד הש"י...⁷

This text clearly links the musar style of introspection with mystic-meditative activity. As can be seen, the reward for this activity was considered very great.

Nahman gives us specific instructions as to the optimum time and place for hitbodadut (not to be confused with hitbonanut):

עיקר התבודדות הוא בלילה שאז הכל ישינים
 וגם שיהיה המקום חוץ מהעיר, שילך בדרך יחידי,
 דהיינו במקום שאין בני אדם הולכים שם אפילו
 ביום. ועי"ז שמתבודד בלילה בדרך יחידי כנ"ל⁸

In accord with the literal meaning of hitbodadut, Nahman calls for this practice to be undertaken in full isolation.

But even more importantly for our purposes, Nahman suggests a method and explains in simple language, how one is to carry on the process of meditative self-introspection:

כבר מכואר שהתבודדות היא מעלה גדולה
 ודרך נכון וישר מאד להתקרב עי"ז להשי"ת.

וצריך כל אחד לקבוע לו על זה איזה שעות
 כיום שיפרש שיחתו לפני השי"ת בלשון שמדברים
 בו, כגון במדינות אלו בלשון אשכנז שאנו
 מדברים בו כי בלשון שמדברים בו בנקל יותר
 לפרש כל שיחתו היטב ואת כל אשר עם לבבו ישיח
 לפני השי"ת בטענות ואמתלאות והכרי ריצוי
 ותחנונים שיזכה להתקרב אליו ית'. כל א' כפי
 מה שיודע נגעי לבבו ואיך הוא מרחק מהשי"ת⁹

This text teaches that 1) hitbodadut is a highly regarded practice not without mystical overtones, inasmuch as it describes a proper way for man to come closer to G-d; 2) man should fix a certain specific time for this activity; 3) hitbodadut should be conducted in the language most familiar to the seeker; 4) one must speak his heart openly, fully, and completely, and that all words spoken in this manner help bring one closer to G-d. Hitbodadut then, is a process whereby man, by articulating and pouring out his heart's desires before G-d, comes closer to Him. Hitbodadut is unlike the meditation upon the greatness of G-d of the Habad-niks, and the contemplation of the Divine Naught taught by the Maggid of Mesritch. It is a meditative/contemplative practice nonetheless, as it requires intense reflection and concentration upon the deeds, activities, and feelings of the self.

Nahman explains that hitbodadut is a practice that cannot be clarified or imagined because it is above all yet includes all Divine Service. It also includes petitionary prayer. In any case, hitbodadut is clearly considered to be a practice whose benefits are tremendous:

ועוצם מעלות הנהגה זאת אין לבאר ולשער
 כי זאת ההנהגה עולה על הכל והיא כוללת כל
 עבודת ה' כי ע"ז יכולין לבוא לכל טוב בזה
 ובבא... וכל גדולי הצדיקים לא באו למדריגתם
 כי אם ע"י הנהגה זאת ומשכיל על דבר יבין
 מעצמו גדול מעלות זאת הנהגה. אשרי זוכה לקבוע
 עצמו על זה שער מיוחדת בכל יום ויום ושאר
 היום יהיה בשמחה...¹⁰

The essential elements of hitbodadut are described in several places in Likkutei Etzot. The following text shows hitbodadut to be a practice that entails self-judgement, and in the course of conducting a dialogue with the Creator, the pouring out the heart before G-d:

מי שרוצה לטעום טעם אור הגנוז, היינו
 סודות התורה שיתגלו לעתיד, צריך להעלות
 מדות היראה לשורשה וזה זוכין ע"י משפט שהוא
 בחי' התבודדות ושיחה בינו לבין קונו,
 שמפרש כל לבו לפני הש"ת ושופט ודן את
 עצמו על כל עסקיו...¹¹

Here too, the overtones are clearly mystical. In slightly different language but nonetheless conveying the essential details we see that hitbodadut involves both conversation with the Creator and self-judgement:

...ע"י התבודדות שמתבודד ומשיח בינו
 לבין קונו, ושופט ודן את עצמו על כל
 מה שעשה.¹²

The fact that this text omits the heart as the source of the dialogue between the hasid and G-d does not disturb us. It is mentioned in numerous other teachings as an important element of hitbodadut. This text calls for one to "pour out the heart like water":

להתבודד בינו לבין קונו לפרש שיחתו
 לפני השי"ת לשום עם לכבו לחפש הרוח הטובה
 ההיינו הנקודות טובות שיש בו עדיין לבררם
 מתוך הרוח הרעה עד שישפוך לבו כמים נוכח
 פני ה'.¹³

We see clearly in this next counsel that the heart is a key element of hitbodadut:

צריכין לשוח ולדבר בינו לבין קונו
 ולעורר לבו באמת כל כך עד שכמעט תצא נפשו
 ח"ו וזה עיקר שלימות ההתבודדות.¹⁴

Hitbodadut contains at least some element of the via passiva. The following passage shows that when man converses properly with G-d, G-d Himself takes over and puts the words in man's mouth:

הדיבורים שאדם משיח ומדבר בינו לבין
 קונו הם כח' רוח הקודש. כי ע"י שנכנס לזה
 ומכריח עצמו ומכין עצמו להכיר לפני השי"ת,
 שולח לו השי"ת דיבורים בפיו שהם כח' ¹⁵
 רוח הקודש.

Nahman likens hitbodadut to praying in the state of devekut. Both require one's heart to be humbled:

כשאדם מתפלל בהכניקות או מתבודד כראוי
 ובאמצע הוא נופל ממדריגתו זה נמשך מפגם
 האמונה ואז צריך שישכר לכו בקרבו, ויתכייש
 בעצמו על שנפל משמים לארץ. וירחם על עצמו עד
 שיתאנח וע"י האנחה יחזור למדריגתו ¹⁶

We learn here that hitbodadut is not a silent practice. Sighing and even moaning and groaning are not out of place.

Along with Torah and prayer, hitbodadut is recommended by Nahman to help man remember his true end and purpose:

... לעסוק בתורה ותפילה והתבודדות,
 ע"ז זוכין לכרר הטוב מן הרע ולהמשיך
 על עצמו הזכרון האמיתי, לזכור תמיד
 תכליתו וסופו... ¹⁷

Under ideal circumstances hitbodadut is not a difficult exercise. According to Nahman, G-d helps man speak to Him in the manner that he would speak to a friend or a teacher:

כשהשי"ת עוזר כהתבודדות יוכל לפרש
שיחתו לפני השי"ת כאשר ידבר איש אל רעהו.
וצריכין להרגיל עצמו כזה. שידבר עם השי"ת
כמו שמדבר עם רבו או חבירו...¹⁸

However, the Braslaver realized that this could not always be the case. At times when hitbodadut is difficult, Nahman's advice is to persevere and do one's best:

אע"פ שאין האדם יכול לדבר כלל ונדמה לו
שאינו יכול לפתוח פיו כתפילה והתבודדות
מגודל הגשמיות שלו ומכובד צרות הנפש והגוף
שעוברים עליו, אעפ"כ צריך להתחזק אז דייקא
להכריח א"ע לקרוא לה'...¹⁹

In the way of further advice, Nahman reminds the seeker that hitbodadut, like all spiritual disciplines, must be started anew on each occasion:

וטוב שיאמר האדם בשעת התבודדות היום אני
מתחיל להתדבק כך ויעשה בכל פעם תחילה, כי
כל הממשכות הולכין אחר התחילות²⁰

Had we any doubt, Nahman explicitly states that hitbodadut is nothing less than a key ingredient of spiritual advancement:

כי מקטן ועד גדול א"א להיות איש
 כשר כי אם ע"י התבודדות ושיחה כינו
 לבין קונו²¹

It is a practice that carries great rewards:

עיקר הדעת היא כלב... ושם כלב מקום
 היראה, היינו שעיקר הדעת שידע את השי"ת
 כלבו ולא במוחו לבד... עד שיזכה ליראת
 הרוממות שידע מימי יתירא. וזה זוכין
 ע"י התבודדות. ועי"ז זוכין לאור הגבוה.²²

To this point, both hitbonanut and hitbodadut seem unlike any of the meditative/contemplative practices that we have studied. The textual materials place the teachings of the Braslaver in a class by themselves. J. G. Weiss writing in the Journal of Jewish Studies distinguished between the meditative/contemplative exercises of the Maggid of Mesritch and his followers and those of Nahman of Braslav and his followers:

In the spiritual exercises of the Great Maggid and his school the personal relationship with G-d is lacking. The Divine is conceived as something impersonal. The divine essence, the חיות, which dwells in all things

is a-personal. Indeed the contemplative mystic renounces even his own personality, since he aims through the complicated technique of contemplation at attaining a state of ecstasy in which the extinction of existence, the bitul ha-yesh, the extinction of personality in the self-annihilation of consciousness, is achieved.

"Faith" in the Braslav school is opposed to this impersonal way. "Faith" is here considered as the relation of one personality to another... Such faith is, by definition, essentially, personal...²³

Weiss may be correct in his overall analysis but there is evidence that testifies to the fact that Nahman too, saw bitul ha-yesh--self-negation, as an important aspect of spirituality. In addition to understanding hitbodadut as a meditative/contemplative process of self-introspection, examination, and dialogue, we will now see that it can also lead to a state of prayer wherein the self becomes nullified:

ע"י התבודדות דהיינו שיתכונד וידין
 וישפוט א"ע על כל הדברים שעושה, עי"ז
 זוכין ליראה ועי"ז זוכין לתורה שבנגלה
 ולענוה באמת. ועי"ז יזכה לתפילה במסירת
 נפש. שיבטל כל ישותו וגשמיותו כשעת התפילה
 ועי"ז יזכה להשגת סתרי תורה...²⁴

The following text also calls for contemplative prayer whose aim is bitul ha-yesh:

כשעת התפילה האדם עומד כהיכל המלך
 ואז צריך לבטל את עצמו מכל וכל ושלא
 לראות שום דבר אלא את המלך לכבוד ית',

עד- שיתכטל ישותו לגמרי ולא ירגיש
את עצמו כלל בשעת התפילה, רק את
המלך- לבדו יתברך.²⁵

Nahman goes further in describing a method and process of bitul ha-yesh than any of the masters we have studied:

ומפנה לבו ודעתו מכל עסקי העוה"ז
ומבטל הכל עד- שמבטל את עצמו לגמרי שלא
יהיה בו שום גיאות ושום ממשות, עד- שיהיה
בעיניו כאיך ואפס ממש. עד שזוכה לבא
לכחי' ביטול באמת. ועי"ז נכלל נפשו בשורשו.
ועי"ז נכלל כל העולם עמו בשורשו. והיינו
נכלל עמו הכל כאחדותו יתברך.²⁶

This is a classic variety of mysticism. The "self" is nullified, one step at a time, one characteristic at a time, until the seeker is as "naught".²⁷

But formal prayer is not required to nullify the self. Hitbodadut alone can accomplish both bitul and devekut:

צריך כל אחד לראות שיהיה נכלל בשורשו.
ולהכלל בשורשו צריך שיהיה לו ביטול.
ואי אפשר לבא לידי ביטול כי אם ע"י

התבודדות כי ע"י שמתבודד כינו לבין
 קונו עי"ז הוא יכול לבטל הכל ולהתדבק
 בהשי"ת ולהכלל בשורשו.²⁸

We could hardly ask for clearer testimony to the reality of mystical contemplative practice in Hasidism.

Finally, we see that for Nahman, bitul ha-yesh was not just some minor way station but an important element of man's spiritual being:

צריך להרגיל א"ע ככל פעם בכחי'
 כיטול להסתכל רק על התכלית הטוב
 האמיתי הנצחי.²⁹

The state of self-nullification gives an important perspective and understanding to man of the relationship between himself and G-d. But lest one think that it is best to try to remain in a high state of devekut, Nahman reminds us that such a course would allow little of G-d's work to be completed. Hence, we are urged to "contract the fervor of the heart" rather than endlessly pursue the ecstatic state:

כל אחד מישראל הוא חלק אלוקי ממעל.
 ועיקר אלקות הוא בלב. והאלוקות שבלב איש
 הישראלי היא בחי' אין סוף. כי אור להכיותו
 היא עד אין סוף, היינו אין סוף ואין
 תכלית לתשוקתו ולפי גודל ההתלהבות הלב

של איש הישראלי שהיא עד אין סוף לא היה
 אפשר לעשות שום עבודה, ולא היה אפשר
 לגלות שום מדה טובה כי מגודל התלהבותו
 עד אין סוף אינו יכול לעשות שום חכר.
 ע"כ בהכרח צריך לצמצם התלהבות לכו כדי
 שיוכל לעבוד את השי"ת בהדרגה ובמדה, כי
 השי"ת רוצה בעבודתו...³⁰

Our study of Nahman of Braslav is now concluded. It has been fruitful to say the least. We have seen textual evidence that shows that meditation and contemplation played an important role in Nahman's spiritual life. Dayenu! But on top of this, we have seen step by step instructions and counsel on how to meditate, in solitude and in prayer. Perhaps the instructions are not as specific and detailed as we would like, they are certainly no substitute for a living and breathing teacher. But they unquestionably serve as an aid in helping us to understand one of the Hasidic methods of meditation and contemplation.

CONCLUSION

The research process for this thesis began with little assurance that any clear-cut textual documentation in support of the contention that the Hasidim of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries meditated would be found. After these many months of textual examination, it can be said without qualification that not only does such material exist, but in certain places it exists in abundance. This finding alone would have made the thesis a worthwhile undertaking. But we have also learned that different forms of meditative/contemplative practice existed among the various Hasidic masters. Moreover, we can distinguish between these different forms in some detail.

Nahman of Kosov used a biblical verse as a mantra of sorts, concentrating his thoughts upon it and thereby keeping G-d in mind. The Baal Shem Tov practiced yihudim, unifications of the names of G-d that were attributed to Isaac Luria, but may very well have been influenced by the technique of Abraham Abulafia as well. In addition, the Besht practiced both devekut and solitude, which were perhaps first advocated together by Maimonides. These practices continued to play an important role for many of the Baal Shem's successors.

Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mesritch, was an original contributor to Hasidic meditative/contemplative practice

in that he gave the doctrines of radical quietism--
bitul ha-yesh and hasagat ha-ayin, a place at the fore-
 front of Hasidic teachings. Quietist doctrines had
 played only minor roles in the teachings of the Maggid's
 predecessors. It is interesting to note that the Maggid's
 focus on the via passiva and the nullification of the
 self come closer to the teachings of present day
 Transcendental Meditation than have the teachings of any
 of the other masters. In TM, a mantra is used to take
 one's concentration away from the self. Consequently
 in a deeper meditation there will be less thought of self
 than there is in a more shallow one. The Maggid also
 attempted to get the meditator away from the idea of
 self but he revealed to us little of his method, except
 to say that man must consider himself "as naught". It
 would be interesting to see if further research would
 yield evidence of a mantras being used to aid in the
 process of self-nullification in any of Dov Baer's
 recorded teachings.

From the texts that have been examined, it seems
 that Elimelekh of Lyzhansk felt that meditative/contem-
 plative practice were best left to the zaddikim, the
 elite of the Hasidic community. Although he did recommend
 various meditative practices for the average hasid, the
 higher level mystical practices that were discussed in
Noam Elimelekh were reserved for the zaddikim. Elimelekh
 was nonetheless well versed in the various doctrines put

forward by his predecessors e.g. devekut, bitul ha-yesh, hitbodadut, etc. Moshe Leib of Sasov too was clearly familiar with the various doctrines connected to meditative/contemplative practice but he revealed little that was new in Sefer Hemda G'nuza.

The Habad Hasidim made an original contribution to Hasidic meditative/contemplative practice by teaching that contemplation upon the greatness of G-d would help one develop a proper sense of love and fear of G-d. In addition, such activity would arouse a sense of joy within the heart of the contemplative hasid. No such teaching had been promulgated prior to the time of Shneur Zalman. Unlike some of the other Hasidic masters, Shneur Zalman and his son Dov Baer prescribed meditative/contemplative activity for the benoni, the common person, and did not reserve it for the elite. Early Habad gave meditative practice a central role in Jewish spiritual development.

Nahman of Braslav also made an original contribution to Hasidic meditative/contemplative teaching. Nahman's aim was to foster both dialogue and a personal relationship between man and his Creator through the ritual of daily isolation and solitude. Unlike the Maggid of Mesritch and Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who emphasized a direct union between man and G-d through devekut and self-nullification, the Braslaver taught that the seeker must strive to attain emunah--simple faith.¹ The attainment of emunah was aided by certain meditative practices as has been demonstrated above.

Without a doubt there is a call for further work to be done in this field. There is currently much interest being expressed in meditation as a spiritual activity by Jews and non-Jews alike. It is gratifying to know that the Jewish tradition has considerable resources to offer the Jew who realizes that meditation can be a spiritual or religious activity and is not entirely comfortable practicing it in a setting that is clearly non-Jewish.

But before presenting a program of meditation to the general Jewish public, the teachings of these and other masters, both Hasidic and non-Hasidic, must be examined to better understand the various Jewish meditative "ways". Since few of these teachings have been translated, they remain at present available only to those with the competency to understand original Hebrew texts. Again, this is a field that is rife with opportunities. But more importantly, it is a field that is rich in spiritual treasures that need to be made known not only by writers and researchers, but by living and breathing teachers intent on carrying forth a message from deep within the Jewish soul.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

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³Scholem, op. cit., col. 1218

⁴Rudolf Otto, Mysticism East and West (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 31

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³Evelyn Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1920), p. 2

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⁵Sidney Spencer, Mysticism in World Religion (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 329

⁶Ibid., loc. cit.

⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

⁸Evelyn Underhill, Practical Mysticism (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1915), p. 136

⁹Rudolf Otto, Mysticism East and West (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 208

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¹¹Ibid., p. 31

¹²Ibid., p. 33

¹³Ibid., loc. cit.

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¹⁵Ibid., p. 695

¹⁶W. R. Inge, Mysticism in Religion (London: Hutchinson's University Library, n.d.), p. 28

¹⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁸Underhill, Practical Mysticism, op. cit., p. 48

¹⁹Underhill, Essentials of Mysticism, op. cit., p. 7

²⁰Bradford Smith, Meditation (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1963), p. 13

²¹Ibid., loc. cit.

²²Underhill, Practical Mysticism, op. cit., pp. 77-78

²³Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London: Methuen and Co., 1914), p. 374

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¹Gershom Scholem, The Messianic Idea in Judaism (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 203

²J. G. Weiss, "A Circle of Pneumatics in Pre-Hasidism" Journal of Jewish Studies Vol. 8:4, 1957; p. 199

³Moses Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, translated by M. Friedlander, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1956) pp. 387 & 391

⁴Louis Jacobs, Jewish Mystical Testimonies (New York: Schocken, 1977) p. 39

⁵Ibid., p. 47

⁶Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah (New York: The New York Times Book Co./Quadrangle, 1974) p. 372

⁷Ibid., p. 176

⁸Gershom Scholem, "Devekut, or Communion with G-d", Review of Religion, Vol. 14:2, January, 1950, p. 120

⁹Scholem, Messianic Idea, op. cit., p. 207

¹⁰Scholem, "Devekut...", op. cit., p. 120

¹¹Ibid., p. 124

¹²Scholem, Messianic Idea, op. cit., p. 213

¹³Ibid., p. 214

¹⁴Ibid., p. 217

¹⁵Ibid., p. 216

¹⁶Ibid., p. 205

¹⁷J. G. Weiss, "Reshit Zmihat Shel Derekh Hasidim," Zion, Vol. 16, 1951, p. 61

¹⁸Scholem, "Devekut...", op. cit., p. 126

¹⁹Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁰Ibid., loc. cit.

²¹Ibid., p. 127

²²Ibid., p. 128

²³Ibid., p. 126

²⁴Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁵J. G. Weiss, "Communion with G-d and Men", Journal of Jewish Studies, Vol. 6:2, p. 88

²⁶Louis Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer (New York: Schocken, 1973) p. 21

²⁷I found it difficult to further clarify hasagat ha-ayin the attainment of the N/naught. Is the תפילה the תפילה of תפילה תפילה or is it the personal naught of the emptied self that makes room for G-d? Are both these possibilities ultimately the same? A proposed hypothesis is presented in chapter five but satisfactory answers to the above questions warrant considerable further study.

- ²⁸J. G. Weiss, "Communion...", op. cit., p. 88
- ²⁹J. G. Weiss, "Via Passiva in Early Hasidism", Journal of Jewish Studies, Vol. 11:3, 1960, p. 137
- ³⁰Evelyn Underhill, Practical Mysticism, op. cit., p. 138
- ³¹Sidney Spencer, Mysticism in World Religion (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963) p. 75
- ³²Ibid., p. 207
- ³³J. G. Weiss, "Via Passiva", op. cit., p. 154
- ³⁴Sigmund Hurwitz, "Psychological Aspects in Early Hasidic Literature", Timeless Documents of the Soul (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) p. 233
- ³⁵Ibid., loc. cit.
- ³⁶Scholem, "Devekut...", op. cit., p. 139
- ³⁷Weiss, "Via Passiva", op. cit., p. 155
- ³⁸Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Tanya (New York: Kehot Publishing Society, 1966) p. 7a
- ³⁹Louis Jacobs, Seeker of Unity (London: Valentine and Mitchell, 1966) p. 114
- ⁴⁰Moshe Hallamish, "Nahman of Braslav", Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd. 1971) Vol. 12, col. 786
- ⁴¹Ibid., loc. cit.

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- ¹J. G. Weiss, "Reshit Zmihat shel ha-Derekh ha-Hasidut", Zion, Vol. XVI, 1951, p. 60
- ²Ibid., loc. cit.
- ³Sefer Shivhei Ha-Besht, Horodetzky, S. A., editor (Berlin: Ajanoth, 1922), p. 56a
- ⁴Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

⁶Abraham J. Heschel, "Rav Nahman mi-Kosov, Haveroshel ha-Besht" Sefer ha-Yovel Lihvod Tzvi Wolfson (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), Vol. 3; pp. 117-118, note 4. Heschel's "note" is in reality a small discussion.

⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

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²Iggeret me-ha-Besht, Arthur Green, translator, mimeograph received from translator

³Weiss, J. G., "Kavanot of Prayer in Early Hasidism", Journal of Jewish Studies Volume 9:4 p. 121

⁴In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov (Shivhei Ha-Besht), Ben-Amos, Dan and Mintz, Jerome R., translators and editors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972) p. 65

⁵Zva'at Ha-Ribash (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 1975) p. 21

⁶Ibid., p. 26

⁷Jacobs, Louis, Jewish Mystical Testimonies (New York: Schocken Books, 1977) p. 39

⁸In Praise..., op. cit., p. 65

⁹Sefer Shivhei Ha-Besht, Horodetzky, S. A., editor (Berlin: Ajanoth, 1922) p. 111

¹⁰Ibid., p. 108

¹¹Zva'at Ha-Ribash, op. cit., p. 49

¹²In Praise..., op. cit., p. 22

¹³Ibid., p. 24

¹⁴Gershom Scholem, "Devekut, or Communion with G-d", Review of Religion, Vol. 14:2, January 1950, p. 126

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¹E. Z. Liebes, "Dov Baer of Mezreich" Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1971) Vol. 6, col. 181

²Gershom Scholem, "Devekut, or Communion with G-d", Review of Religion, Vol. 14:2, January 1950, p. 126

³Ibid., p. 129

⁴Louis Jacobs, Hasidic Thought (New York: Behrman House, 1976) p. 80

⁵Zva'at Ha-Ribash, (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 1975), p. 50

⁶Maggid Devarav l'Yaakov, Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, editor (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976), p. 330

⁷Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, Hehasidut ka-Mistika, (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1968), p. 96

⁸Ibid., p. 95

⁹Ibid., p. 96

¹⁰Schatz-Uffenheimer, Maggid Devarav..., op. cit., p. 109

¹¹Ibid., p. 124

¹²Ibid., p. 235

¹³Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁴Zva'at Ha-Ribash, op. cit., p. 45

¹⁵Schatz-Uffenheimer, Maggid Devarav..., op. cit., p. 197

¹⁶S. A. Horodetzky, Hehasidut veba-Hasidim, (Jerusalem, Berlin: Dvir, 1923), Vol. 1, p. 90

¹⁷Schatz-Uffenheimer, Maggid Devarav..., op. cit., p. 233

¹⁸Ibid., p. 94

¹⁹Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁰Another text of Kalisker's points to the connection between meditation and devekut:

בכל דרכיך דעהו והמאמר, הדרך כמדותיו שיתן
האדם אל לבו כל פועל ותנועה ראיה ושמיעה מחשבה
וריבור דאתי לידי מאיזה שיהיה יתכונן על כל פנים
הלא ה'... כשיבא לו איזה אהבה... ידבק עצמו
באהבתו אל חיות הפנימי שבתוכו שהוא אליו ית'
המחיה את הכל אם אמנם הוא יתברך אין סוף...
והנה כשירגיל האדם א"ע בכל דרכיו... להתכונן בו
ולדבק בו ית' באופן זה, הנה יש בכחו זה להיות למעלה
מן הטבע והבריאה...

(Sefer Pri Ha-aretz, Kopyst, 1857, p. 29d)
Kalisker refers to meditation upon G-d and in this text at least, is not interested in attaining to N/naught. Nonetheless, it is a reference to meditation and worth noting.

²¹Schatz-Uffenheimer, Maggid..., op. cit., p. 68

²²Weiss, "Communion with G-d and Men", op. cit., p. 89

²³Schatz-Uffenheimer, Maggid Devarav..., op. cit., p. 197

²⁴Ibid., p. 186

²⁵Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁶Ibid., p. 39

²⁷Schatz-Uffenheimer, Maggid Devarav..., op. cit., p. 25

²⁸Zva'at Ha-Ribash, op. cit., p. 49

²⁹Sigmund Hurwitz, "Psychological Aspects in Early Hasidic Literature", in Timeless Documents of the Soul (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 233

³⁰J. G. Weiss, "Via Passiva", op. cit., p. 139

³¹Hurwitz, op. cit., p. 233

³²Ibid., loc. cit.

³³J. G. Weiss, "Via Passiva", op. cit., pp. 154-155

³⁴Schatz-Uffenheimer, Hehasidut ka-Mistika, op. cit.,
p. 98

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²Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, Sefer Noam Elimelekh, (Brooklyn: Moriah Offset Company, 1974), p. 13

³Ibid., p. 8

⁴Ibid., p. 36

⁵Ibid., p. 13

⁶Ibid., p. 48

⁷Ibid., p. 9

⁸Ibid., p. 66

⁹Ibid., p. 36

¹⁰Ibid., p. 95

¹¹Ibid., p. 77

¹²Ibid., p. 79

¹³Ibid., p. 7

¹⁴Ibid., p. 97

¹⁵Ibid., p. 63

¹⁶Ibid., p. 55

¹⁷Esther Z. Liebes, "Elimelech of Lyzhansk", Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), Vol. 6, col. 662

¹⁸Dresner, op. cit., p. 126

¹⁹Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, op. cit., p. 30

- ²⁰Ibid., p. 83
²¹Ibid., p. 35
²²Ibid., p. 17
²³Ibid., p. 75
²⁴Ibid., p. 30
²⁵Ibid., p. 93
²⁶Ibid., p. 94
²⁷Ibid., p. 15

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¹Yitzchak Raphael, "Moses Leib of Sasov" Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), Vol. 12, col. 432

²Zalman M. Schachter, "Some Hasidic Masters on Spiritual Direction", unpublished manuscript, p. 17

³Moshe Leib of Sasov, "Hanhagot", Sefer Hemda G'nuza (New York: Biegeleisen, 1927), p. 1:2

⁴Ibid., p. 1:4

⁵Ibid., p. 4:49

⁶Schachter, op. cit., p. 21

⁷Moshe Leib, op. cit., p. 1:5-6

⁸Ibid., p. 1:2b

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¹Avrum Stroll, "Shneour Zalman" Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), Vol. 14, col. 1433

²Louis Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer, (New York: Schocken, 1973), p. 84

- ³Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Likkutei Amarim (Tanya), (New York: Kehot, 1966), p. 59a
- ⁴Jacobs, op. cit., p. 85
- ⁵Shneur Zalman, op. cit., p. 20a
- ⁶Ibid., p. 20b
- ⁷Ibid., p. 7b
- ⁸Ibid., loc. cit.
- ⁹Ibid., loc. cit.
- ¹⁰Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Tanya, Part I, translated by Nissan Mindel (New York: Kehot, 1962), p. 33
- ¹¹Shneur Zalman, Likkutei Amarim, op. cit., p. 216
- ¹²Ibid., p. 62a
- ¹³Ibid., p. 75b
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 162a
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 97a
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 110b
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 121a-b
- ¹⁸Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Tanya, Part IV--Iggeret Ha-Kodesh, translated by Jacob Immanuel Schochet (New York: Kehot, 1968), p. 137, note 21
- ¹⁹Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Likkutei Amarim, op. cit., p. 58b
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 139a-139b
- ²¹Schochet, translator, op. cit., p. 251, note 29
- ²²Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Likkutei Amarim, op. cit., p. 109b
- ²³Ibid., p. 41b-42a
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 67a
- ²⁵Jacobs, op. cit., p. 18

²⁶Louis Jacobs, Seeker of Unity (London: Valentine and Mitchell, 1966), p. 115

²⁷Ibid., loc. cit.

²⁸Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer, op. cit., p. 86

²⁹Ibid., pp. 86-87

³⁰Ibid., p. 87

³¹Ibid., p. 88

³²Ibid., p. 89

NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

¹Sefer Likkutei Etzot, A Collection of Counsels by R. Nahman of Braslav compiled by his disciple R. Nathan (Jerusalem: Hasidei Braslav, 1956), p. 3a: siman 4

²Ibid., p. 23b; 26

³Ibid., p. 19b; 5

⁴Ibid., p. 25a; 36

⁵Ibid., p. 20a; 16

⁶Ibid., p. 26b; 54

⁷Ibid., p. 28b; 1

⁸Ibid., p. 29b; 7

⁹Ibid., p. 30a; 13a

¹⁰Ibid., p. 30a; 13b

¹¹Ibid., p. 47a; 4

¹²Ibid., p. 63a; 10

¹³Ibid., p. 29b; 8

¹⁴Ibid., p. 31a; 19

¹⁵Ibid., p. 29a; 2

¹⁶Ibid., p. 29b; 9

¹⁷Ibid., p. 42a; 1

¹⁸Ibid., p. 31a; 20

¹⁹Ibid., p. 107b; 75

²⁰Ibid., p. 31a; 18

²¹Ibid., p. 30b; 16

²²Ibid., p. 21a; 1

²³J. G. Weiss, "Contemplative Mysticism and Faith in Hasidic Piety", Journal of Jewish Studies, Vol. IV, 1953, p. 25

²⁴Sefer Likkutei Etzot, op. cit., p. 95a; 18

²⁵Ibid., p. 105a; 54

²⁶Ibid., p. 29b; 7b

²⁷I found this text strongly reminiscent of a description of an experience with the drug psilocybin reported by Ram Dass (a.k.a. Richard Alpert) in the book Be Here Now, pp. xvi-xvii. Be Here Now was first published by the Lama Foundation in 1971 and has been reprinted numerous times. This is not to suggest that the Braslaver used psilocybin or any other psychedelic drug. Rather, it points to the fact that self-nullification can be seen as a common denominator of mystical experience in widely separated times and cultures.

²⁸Sefer Likkutei Etzot, op. cit., p. 29b; 6

²⁹Ibid., p. 38a; 11

³⁰Ibid., p. 37b; 9

NOTE TO THE CONCLUSION

¹J. G. Weiss, "Contemplative Mysticism and Faith in Hasidic Piety", Journal of Jewish Studies, 1953, Vol. IV, p. 19

APPENDIX

The following is the full text of the Baal Shem Tov's famous epistle to his brother-in-law, R. Gershon of Kitov. The translation by Louis Jacobs is as it appears on pages 149-153 of Jewish Mystical Testimonies.

Text

To my dear friend and brother-in-law, whom I love as my own self, wondrous Rabbi and Hasid, renowned in knowledge of the Torah and fear of God, his honor our teacher, Rabbi Abraham Gershon, may his light shine. Greetings to all and to his modest wife, mistress Bluma, and all their offspring. May they all be blessed with life. Amen. Selah.

I received the letter written by your holy hand at the Lyck fair in the year 5510 (= 1750) which you sent by the hand of the envoy from Jerusalem. The letter was very brief but you state therein that you have written to everyone in letters sent by the hand of a man who was traveling from Egypt. Unfortunately, these lengthy letters never arrived and I am greatly distressed not to have had the lengthier epistles written in your holy handwriting. For our sins, the reason for it is, undoubtedly, the confused state of communication among the countries. The epidemic has spread to all lands, reaching near to the place where we reside; to the holy communities of Mogilev and in the lands of Volhynia and the Tartar lands. You also remark that the new ideas and mysteries I recorded for you by the hand of the scribe, the Rabbi and Preacher of the holy community of Polonnoye, did not arrive. Over this, too, I am greatly distressed for you would undoubtedly have derived much satisfaction from them. Now, however, I have forgotten many of these matters yet I shall write to you very briefly those details I do recall.¹

For on the day of the New Year of the year 5507 (= September,

1746) I engaged in an ascent of the soul, as you know I do, and I saw wondrous things in that vision that I had never before seen since the day I had attained to maturity. That which I saw and learned in my ascent it is impossible to describe or to relate even from mouth to mouth. But as I returned to the lower Garden of Eden I saw many souls, both of the living and the dead, those known to me and those unknown. They were more than could be counted and they ran to and fro from world to world through the path provided by that column known to the adepts in the hidden science. They were all in such a state of great rapture that the mouth would be worn out if it attempted to describe it and the physical ear too indelicate to hear it. Many of the wicked repented of their sins and were pardoned, for it was a time of much grace. In my eyes, too, it was a great marvel that the repentance was accepted of so many whom you know. They also enjoyed great rapture and ascended, as mentioned above. All of them entreated me to my embarrassment, saying: "The Lord has given your honor great understanding to grasp these matters. Ascend together with us, therefore, so as to help us and assist us." Their rapture was so great that I resolved to ascend together with them.²

Then I saw in the vision that Samael went up to act the part of accuser because of the unprecedented rapture. He achieved what he had set out to do, namely, a decree of apostasy for many people who would be tortured to death. Then dread seized me and I took my life in my hands. I requested my teacher to come with me since there is great danger in the ascent to the higher worlds and since from the day I attained to maturity I had never undertaken such high ascents.³ I went higher step by step until I entered the palace of the Messiah wherein the Messiah studies the Torah together with all the *laminaim* and the saints and also with the Seven Shepherds. There I witnessed great rejoicing and could not fathom the reason for it so I thought that, God forbid, the rejoicing was over my own departure from this world. But I was afterwards informed that I was not yet to die since they took great delight on high when, through their Torah, I perform unifications here below. To this day I am unaware of the reason for that rejoicing. I asked the Messiah: "When will the Master come?" and he replied: "You will know of it in this way; it will be when your teaching becomes famous

and revealed to the world, and when that which I have taught you and you have comprehended will spread abroad so that others, too, will be capable of performing unifications and having soul ascents as you do. Then will all the *kellipot* be consumed and it will be a time of grace and salvation."⁴ I was astonished to hear this and greatly distressed that it would take such a long time, for when will such a thing be possible? Yet my mind was set at rest in that I learned there three special charms and three holy names and these are easy to grasp and to expound so that I thought to myself, it is possible by this means for all my colleagues to attain to the stages and categories to which I have attained, that is to say, they, too, will be able to engage in ascents of the soul and learn to comprehend as I have done. But no permission was given to me to reveal this secret for the rest of my life. I did request that I be allowed to teach it to you but no permission at all was given to me and I am duty bound on oath to keep the secret.⁴

However, this I can tell you and may God be your help. Let your ways be set before the Lord and never be moved, especially in the holy land. Whenever you offer your prayers and whenever you study, have the intention of unifying a divine name in every word and with every utterance of your lips. For there are worlds, souls and divinity in every letter. These ascend to become united one with the other and then the letters are combined in order to form a word so that there is complete unification with the divine. Allow your soul to be embraced by them at each of the above stages. Thus all worlds become united and they ascend so that immeasurable rapture and the greatest delight is experienced. You can understand this on the analogy of the raptures of bride and bridegroom in miniature in the physical world. How much more so at this most elevated stage! God will undoubtedly be your help and wherever you turn you will be successful and prosper. Give to the wise and he will become even wiser. Also pray for me, with this intention in mind, that I should be worthy of being gathered into the inheritance of the Lord (= the Holy Land) while still alive and pray, too, on behalf of all the remnant still in the diaspora.⁵

I also prayed there, asking why the Lord had done this and why this great wrath, to hand over so many Jewish souls to be slain by Samael, among them many souls who had apostatized and

had still been killed. Permission was granted to me to ask this of Samael himself. I asked Samael why he did this and what could have been his intention in having Jews become apostates and yet still be killed afterwards. He replied that his intention was for the sake of heaven. And afterwards, for our sins, so it happened, that in the holy community of Izyaslav there was a blood libel against many people, two of whom became apostates and yet they still killed them. But the others sanctified the name of heaven in great sanctity, dying by terrible torture. Afterwards there were further blood libels in the holy communities of Shebitovka and Dunayevtsy. But there none of them became apostates having seen what happened in the aforementioned holy community of Izyaslav. They all resisted temptation, suffering martyrdom and sanctifying the name of Heaven. By their merit the Messiah will come to avenge us and to gain atonement for God's land and His people. ⁶

On the New Year of the year 5510 (= September 1749) I made an ascent of the soul, as you know I do, and I saw a great accusation so that permission was almost given to destroy whole lands and communities. I took my life in my hands and prayed: "Let us fall into the hands of the Lord but let us not fall into the hands of man." This they granted to me, that there should be great sickness and an epidemic of unparalleled proportions in all the lands of Poland and in other lands adjacent to ours. And so it came to pass. Sickness spread over all so that it could not be counted and also epidemics in other lands. I discussed with my company whether to recite the portion regarding the making of the incense in order to nullify the above-mentioned judgments but they revealed to me in a vision of the night: "Behold, you yourself chose the alternative of falling into the hands of the Lord [as above] and now you wish to nullify it. An accuser cannot become a defender." So I then desisted from reciting the incense portion and from praying for this. But on Hoshana Rabba I went to the synagogue together with all the company, uttering the while many conjurations in great dread, and I recited the incense portion just once so that the epidemic should not spread to our districts, and thank God I was successful. ⁷

It was my intention to write at greater length and discuss matters in detail but I am unable to continue because of the tears which flow when I reflect on our parting. But I do beg you to

repeat the words of reproof I have said to you again and again. Have them always in your thoughts, meditate on them and take note of them. You will undoubtedly find numerous sweet things in every word for that which I have told you is no empty matter. For God knows that I have not abandoned the hope of journeying to the land of Israel, God willing, to be there together with you. It is only that the time is not yet opportune. And please do not take it amiss that I have not sent you any money but there is no money left and we have been left penniless because of the treacherous way time has dealt with me. There have been epidemics and famine and I have been obliged to support and sustain many children belonging to our family as well as other poor Jews. Please God, when the Lord will enlarge our borders then I shall certainly. . . .

My grandson, the worthy bridegroom Ephraim, is a great genius in his complete devotion to study. It would undoubtedly be very fitting, if it can be arranged, for you to come here that we can see one another face to face and rejoice, as you have promised, at our celebrations.

With regard to the famous Rabbi, the Hasid, our teacher Joseph Katz, the servant of the Lord, I beg you, please welcome him with both hands and help him in every way possible for his deeds are acceptable to God, blessed be He, and all that he does is for the sake of Heaven. Please write on his behalf to the wealthy that they provide him with a generous allowance and support him adequately for you will certainly find great satisfaction if it can be arranged for him to be with you. ⁸

These are the words of your brother-in-law who longs to see you face to face and who offers his prayers for your long life and for your wife and offspring and who desires your well-being every day, including the night. Long may you live. Amen. Selah.

Israel Ba'al Shem Tov of Medzibezh

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