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JEWISH HASIDIM, RUSSIAN SECTARIANS NON-CONFORMISTS
IN THE UKRAINE, 1700-1760.

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**JEWISH HASIDIM, RUSSIAN SECTARIANS
NON-CONFORMISTS IN THE UKRAINE, 1700-1760.**

by

YAFFA ELIACH

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Note

This dissertation is primarily based on sources written in Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian and other languages. The transliteration of Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian words

presented major difficulties. To reconcile the many different ways of spelling, I followed the spelling of the Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 1967 edition. Thus the word Zaddik is spelled in that manner rather than tsaddik. Other spellings follow the rules of transliteration established by the Library of Congress. The spelling of geographical locations, follow the Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World, edited by Leon E. Seltser, 1966 edition. Thus the names of the towns Lezajsk and Medzhibozh are spelled that way despite the fact that it differs from the accepted Jewish pronunciation of these names, and this is true for other locales.

In secondary sources if the authors and editors had already transliterated words and titles in various forms not in accordance with the Library of Congress system, the transliterations were retained, both in quotations and bibliographical citations. When transliterating from Hebrew to English the Hebrew Sephardic phonology was retained, when transliterating from Yiddish to English the Yiddish Lithuanian phonology was followed. In most instances when the spelling does not conform with the above guidelines, the reason is stated in the dissertation proper. When terms assume a different

meaning than the accepted one, an explanation is given.

The word rabbi used in this dissertation does not imply, in all instances, that the bearer of the title was an ordained rabbi, it is used at times as a title of reverence.

CHAPTER I

YET ANOTHER STUDY ON HASIDISM?

Much has been written and even more has been told about Hasidism. Historians, theologians, philosophers, storytellers, sociologists, Rabbis, Hasidim and even Mitnaggedim (opponents of Hasidism) all have been expounding on its many phases. Some have approached Hasidism with the ardor of exuberant admirers, others as staunch opponents, many as exhilarated storytellers while still others, with an effort of restraint, as "non-biased scholars." Yet another study on Hasidism calls for an explanation and a measure of justification. Despite the many diversified books on Hasidism and the brilliance of some of the studies, research on Hasidism for the most part, shares a common denominator; Hasidism with its unique institutions, ideas and the events which led to its establishment in the mid-eighteenth century are exclusively examined and analyzed only against the background of Judaic ideas and Jewish society of Eastern Europe. The research is entirely inwardly directed. The focus is exclusively fixed on the Jewish community with its diverse complexity of institutions and the rich

phenomena of Jewish life. This approach, by its very nature, presents Hasidism as a unique Jewish experience and a phenomenon not shared or influenced by any other society in the immediate vicinity or elsewhere. The background of Jewish institutions, ideas and prevailing modes of life should indeed be among the prime concerns of the scholar who is out to investigate Hasidism, but this alone, cannot and must not remain his sole concern. For it is against the complexity of history at work which suggests an interaction of a multiplicity of factors. To confine Hasidism to a strait-jacket of exclusiveness hinders greatly the historian's task in his striving to achieve a better understanding of the subject. The experience of the many hundreds of years of Jewish communal life in its homeland and in the diaspora point to the contrary and suggest an interchange of ideas and ways of life. No community be it contained within a ghetto with walls of brick and gates of iron, or isolated by a splendid encirclement of a rich tradition and culture can blot out and remain immune to the prevailing moods of its own time. During the period of the Mishnah and Talmud, it was Hellenism and Roman Law that left its mark on Jewish literature and jurisprudence. "Greek Wisdom" was well known to the outstanding rabbis and this knowledge

was applied to the exegesis of the Biblical narrative.¹ The "Golden Age" of Spanish Jewry in philosophy² and literature³ culminated during the height of Arabic culture in Moorish Spain. Jewish life in Christian Spain likewise reflected an exchange and mutual influence between the Christian and Jewish societies.⁴ The year 1666 also suggests mutual influences. Sabbatai Zevi was to reveal himself as the long awaited Messiah of the Jews. The Russian Old Believers and European fundamentalists also expected the Antichrist during that very year.⁵

¹Saul Lieberman, Greek in Jewish Palestine. Phillip Feldheim, Inc., New York, 1965, pp. 37-43.

²For the non-Jewish schools of Philosophy which influenced Maimonides see Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Shlomo Pines with an Introductory Essay by Leo Straus, The University of Chicago Press, 1964, pp. XI-CXXXIV.

³Abraham S. Halkin, "Judeo-Arabic Literature" in Louis Finkelstein ed. The Jews Their Religion and Culture. Schocken. New York, 1971, pp. 121-124.

⁴Yitzhak Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain. Translated by I. Schoffman. J.P.S. Philadelphia, 1966, 2 vols.

⁵James H. Billington, The Icon and the Axe. Vintage Books, New York, 1970, pp. 153-154.

The Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment) followed on the heels of the European Enlightenment and Secular Zionism was the response to European nationalism and Russian Populism.⁶ The similarity between the above mentioned Jewish movements and their non-Jewish counterparts is too obvious to be ignored and indeed was not by many prominent Jewish scholars, Saul Lieberman, Salo Baron, Harry Wolfson, Yitzhak Baer, Shlomo Pines and others.⁷

It would indeed be a difficult task to place Hasidism outside the set patterns of the mainstream of Jewish history and claim its uniqueness exclusiveness and isolationism, not only as a religious sect but also as a freak of Jewish historiography. The insistence on the inwardness in the studies on Hasidism is indeed a surprising element in the research of Jewish history at the present since "the isolationist approach to Jewish History"⁸ is no longer the framework of the

⁶ Arthur Hertzberg, The Zionist Idea. Atheneum, New York, 1969, pp. 15-100.

⁷ It is not within the scope of this study to numerate the great contributions of Jewish culture to European and non-European societies. For a short concise exposition see Jacob L. Talmon, "Isolating the Jewish Component in World History" Midstream, March 1972, Volume XVIII, No. 3 pp. 8-26.

⁸ Salo W. Baron, "The World Dimensions of Jewish History" in History and Jewish Historians, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1964, pp. 24-25.

twentieth century scholar dealing with Jewish history.

One of the factors that may account for the strict adherence to the "isolationist approach" might stem from the accepted image of present day Hasidism. The movement is still a very active, viable force within the Jewish community. More so, in our own time it came to be regarded as the hallmark of genuine Jewishness. While scholars feel free to point out the foreign streaks of influence upon Jewish personalities, ideas and traditional institutions, or to point to the similarities between European ideologies and Jewish secular movements, like Haskala and Zionism, they are still inhibited from doing so with regard to Hasidism.

Hasidism with its aura of being the symbol of real Living Judaism deters, perhaps unconsciously, even the non-observing scholar, from investigating Hasidism against the events and the ideas of its own time and place of emergence, namely, the European Pietistic movements of the eighteenth century and primarily the Russian Sectarians of the Ukraine. For the person engaged in the research of Hasidism, who for the most part, knows Hasidism from daily encounters, family ties or even childhood memories, this is indeed a task fraught with strain. Yet only by placing Hasidism in its proper milieu, amid the society of

Podolia of the eighteenth century, may one hope to gain a better understanding of the movement.

The Ukraine of the eighteenth century, with its rich folklore, its wandering holy men, its numerous sectarians, is the place where Hasidism was born. A place which provided a haven for dissenters with their multitude of dynasties, their special garb, dances, songs, Christs and customs. It would have been extremely difficult to have lived in that vicinity and be unaware and immune to the surroundings, especially in a place where large segments of the Jewish population lived in villages and small semi-rural towns, in close proximity to the Gentile population and at times in the midst of them. The daily encounter between Jews and Gentiles is recorded in many Hasidic tales⁹ depicting the life and time of Israel Baal Shem Tov founder of Hasidism. While the socioeconomic structure of Podolia,* Volyhunia** was taken into account pertaining to the rise of Hasidism,¹⁰ an economic system based upon Jewish and non-Jewish

⁹ Shivhei ha-Besht, pp. 149-50; 183-4; 242.

¹⁰ Jacob Katz, Tradition & Crisis Schocken, New York, 1971, pp. 227-230.

* Podolia, region in SW Ukrainian SSR. Ruled by Kievan Russia from 10th century, by Tatars (1260-1362), Lithuania & Poland (1672-99) then Poland again, and finally by Russia. Had a large Jewish minority, which had settled there in the Middle Ages.

** Volhynia, historical region in NW Ukrainian SSR. One of the oldest Slavic regions in Europe.

factors, the daily encounter of the Jewish tradesmen with the gentiles was ignored in the studies on Hasidism. Only in times of trouble and strain were the confrontations mentioned. Yet between pogroms there seemed to have been a mundane way of life when the various inhabitants and their culture were exposed to each other.

While socially the contact might have been null or extremely limited and the mingling of the Jews and non-Jews restricted to the market place and other modes of business transactions the exposure to each other's ways of life was inevitable. The founder of Hasidism himself, the Besht,¹¹ spent most of his formative years away from the Jewish community in small villages populated by gentiles.¹² It was only after his ideas and innovations became more crystallized and solidified that he returned to a Jewish community, to the small town of Tluste, never severing his ties with the country-side from where he did attract many of his early followers. This further strengthens the need to investigate and examine the customs, ideas and institutions in the country-side peculiar to that vicinity where Hasidism

¹¹ Besht is an acronym for Ball Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name).

¹²See Chapter III, pp. 74, 77-8 below.

the small town of Tluste, never severing his ties with the country-side from where he did attract many of his early followers. This further strengthens the need to investigate and examine the customs, ideas and institutions in the country-side peculiar to that vicinity where Hasidism emerged and its founder lived at that most crucial stage of his development.

This study is confined to the early years of Hasidism which coincide with life and time of its founder, the Besht, 1700-1760, and deals mainly with Podolia, the place of its birth. For it is there, in Beshtian Hasidism, during its early formative years while still under the impact of the dynamic personality of the Baal Shem Tov and at its geographical source that one should try to examine the ideas, customs and institutions of Podolia and Yolhynia and the Zeitgeist of religious movements in general and of Russian Sectarianism in the Ukraine in particular. Cultural patterns, religious institutes and customs peculiar only to Russian Sectarials in the Ukraine and along the Polish borderlands, must be closely examined and only then can one draw valid conclusions as to whether there existed any significant interaction between the two religious movements - Jewish Hasidism and Russian Sectarianism.

Once Hasidism spread beyond the borders of

Podolia, its native soil, its character changed.¹³

The successor of the Besht, Rabbi Dov Baer, the Great Maggid, moved Hasidism away from its center in Medzhibozh Podolia, a semi-rural small town, to Mezhirich a larger town. He also modified many of the basic ideologies and customs, and attracted a new type of believer to the folds of Hasidism.

The sources both primary and secondary extensively consulted for this study were all previously known and utilized either in the research of Hasidism or in studies on Russian Sectarianism. The uniqueness of this study consists of its combination of the two divergent groups of sources for the study of one discipline, - namely Beshtian Hasidism. This, at times requires to re-examine, and reinterpret existing sources and their long established commentaries. The most crucial source for this study is Shivhei ha-Besht (In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov) the much disputed work on the life and time of the Baal Shem Tov. This book serves as one of the major sources on classical Hasidism.

¹³ Gershon G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, Schocken, New York, 1972. p. 348.

CHAPTER II

SHIVHEI HA-BESHT AS AN HISTORICAL SOURCE

Shivhei ha-Besht belongs to the genre of Hasidic literature which delights its friends and foes alike. For the first it is a source of constant inspiration, for the latter a vulnerable book open to criticism. This collection of seemingly naive and at times crude tales, belongs to a class of literature which became prominent with the emergence of Hasidism and has maintained this status till the present. Today there are many volumes of story anthologies. The majority of them were completed by members of the various Hasidic dynasties.¹ Other collections were compiled by

¹Gedaliah ben Yitzhak, Teshuot Hen, Hebrew, Berdichev 1816; Menahem Mendel Bodek, Mifalot ha-Zaddikim, Hebrew, Lvov 1856 bound with Jacob Kadaner's, Sippurim Noraim, Hebrew, Lemberg 1875; Michael Levi Rodkinson, Siftei Zaddikim, Hebrew, Lvov 1876; Yoetz Kayam Kaddish, Ramatayim Zofim, Hebrew, 1881 reprinted in Brooklyn 1954; Israel ben Shalom of Ruzhin, Irin Kaddishim, Hebrew, Warsaw, 1885; Maasiyot Peliot, Hebrew Krakau: Fisher, 1896; Kahal Hasidim he-Hadash, Hebrew, Lemberg, 1906; Niflaot Beit Levi, Hebrew, Warsaw: A.J. Klajman, 1911; Niflaot ha-Hozeh, Hebrew, Warsaw: A.J. Klajman, 1911; Niflaot ha-Baal Shem, Hebrew, Warsaw: Kahana, 1924; Reuben Haim Alexander, Niflaot ha-Sabba Kaddisha, Hebrew, Pietrokov, 1929; Shimeon Menahem Mendel Vadnik, Sefer Baal Shem Tov, Lodz 1937; Zevi Yehudah Mamelok (Born-Stein) Abbir ha-Roim, Hebrew, Pietrokov, 1935-38. Solomon Gabriel Rosenthal, Hitgalut ha-Zaddikim, Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1958 or 1959; these are just a few of the many hundred anthologies of Hasidic stories.

several 20th century men of letters² who present a more stylized version of known Hasidic tales. In the general terms Hasidic tales can be described as the hagiography of its Zaddikim (righteous men, leaders of Hasidic dynasties) legends and stories which reflect the ethos of Hasidism.

²Martin Buber, The Tales of Rabbi Nachman, trans. Maurice Friedman, New York, 1970.

_____, The Legend of the Baal Shem Tov, trans. Maurice Friedman, New York, 1955.

_____, Tales of the Hasidism, trans. Olga Marx, 2 vols. New York, 1947-48.

_____, For the Sake of Heaven, trans. Ludwig Lewisohn. New York, 1958.

Eliezer Steinman, Beer ha-Hasidut, Hebrew, 9 vols. Tel Aviv, 1951-62.

_____, Kankan ha-Kesef, Hebrew, 4 vols. Tel Aviv, 1969.

_____, The Garden of Hasidism, trans. Haim Shacter, Jerusalem, 1961.

Mordecai Ben Yehezkel, Sefer ha-Maasiyot, Hebrew, 6 vols. Tel Aviv, 1956/57-1958/59.

Isaac Loeb Perez, Kol Kitvei Y.L. Perez, Hebrew 10 vols. (edition not complete) 1948-60 especially "Hurban Beit Zaddik", Mishnat Hasidim Bein Shnei Harim, Mi-Pi ha-Am For bibliography of English trans. see Uriel Weinreich in: The Field of Yiddish New York, 1954, pp. 292-9.

_____, Chassidische erzählungen, trans. by Ludwig Strauss, Berlin, 1936.

_____, In His World & the Next; selected writings trans. from Yiddish by Moshe Spiegel, New York, 1958.

Micha Joseph Berdyczewski (later Bin-Gorion) Sefer Hasidim, Hebrew, Warsaw, 1900.

Shelomo Yosef Zevin, Sippurei Hasidim, Tel Aviv, 1955-57 2 vols.

Samuel Joseph Agnon, Twenty-One Stories; ed. by Nahum N. Glatzer, New York, 1970.

_____, Sifreihem Shel Zaddikim, Hebrew Jerusalem, 1961. [Nobel Laureate in Literature]
_____, The Bridal Canopy Trans. from Hebrew by I.M. Lask, London, 1968.

Elie Wiesel, Souls on Fire, New York, 1972.

Since the stories mostly related to the Zaddik and his remarkable sayings, in Hasidism storytelling assumed a dimension of holiness.³

When there was a berith [circumcision] at the house of the head of the court of the holy community of Horodyna, I heard from the rabbi of the holy community of Polonnoye and then from the rabbi of our community that the Besht said: "When one tells stories in praise of the tsaddikim, it is though he were engaged in Maaseh Merkavah [vision of the divine throne chariot]. 4

So the importance of storytelling became prominent in Hasidism from its earliest days. The aura of holiness was bestowed upon it by its founder himself - the Besht.

The other group of Hasidic literature is its theoretical writings.⁵ This great bulk of literature was compiled in the manner of homiletic discourses, expository pamphlets, epistolary literature Halakhic works, liturgy and other writings dealing with the religious aspect of life. The homiletic discourses (derashot) are on selected passages from the weekly Torah

³ Joseph Dan, The Hasidic Novella, Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1966. pp. 7-23.

_____, Isaiah Tishby, Encyclopaedia Hebraica, Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1965. Vol. XVII ff. 818-20.

⁴ Dov Baer the shohet of Luniets original editor of the Kopys edition, trans. and edited anew by Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome R. Mintz, In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov [Shivhei ha-Besht], Bloomington/London 1970. p. 199. Throughout this monograph it will be referred to as Shivhei ha-Besht, unless otherwise indicated since this translation was done from the Kopys edition of 1814.

⁵ Encyclopaedia Judaica, Jerusalem 1972, vol. VII, ff. 1413-1416.

readings as well as from other portions of Scripture. The homiletic framework, traditionally used for expository purposes throughout the literature of Judaism, served as a traditional vehicle for Hasidism to express its new ideas when it was fighting for its very survival. The most important⁶ of these works were written between 1780-1815 and set a model for homiletic discourses by Hasidic authors to the present day.

Expository pamphlets were a way of responding to contemporary problems over which opinion was divided. The most important work is the Tanya⁷ by Shneur Zalman of Lyady and a book by his son Dov Baer.⁸ Treatises of the explanatory type are shorter and more compact.

⁶Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, Toledot Yaakov Yosef, Hebrew, Korets, 1780; Maggid Devarav le-Yaakov also known as Likkutei Amarim, Hebrew, Korets 1784, (a work of the teachings of Dov Baer of Mezhirich); Elimelekh of Lezaisk, Noam Elimelekh, Hebrew, Lemberg, 1787; Moshe Hayyim Ephraim of Sudlikov, (the spelling of Sudlikov follows that of the Library of Congress Catalog), Degel Mahaneh Ephraim, Hebrew, Korets, 1811; Nahman ben Simhah of Bratslav, Likkutei Moharam, Hebrew Ostrog, 1806 (published during his lifetime without rabbinical approbation (Haskamah); Likkutei Moharan Tinyana, Hebrew, Mogilev, 1811 appeared posthumously. See footnote 33.

⁷Shneur Zalman of Lyady, Tanya, Hebrew, Slavuta, 1796.

⁸Dov Baer Schneershon, Kuntres ha-Hitpa'alut, Hebrew, Warsaw, 1866 (bound in one volume with Likkutei Beurim).

They appeared in several well-known letters⁹ as those of Hayyim Haikel of Amdur, Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk and Shneur Zalman of Lyady and others. They deal with current affairs and reflect upon the struggle between Hasidim and the Mitnaggedim (opponents to Hasidism). In view of the fact that the Epistles were written during the height of the polemics between the two camps, the letters of Shneur Zalman Lyady reflect a great measure of restraint and strike a conciliatory note. The best known of the epistolary literature are, The Iggerot ha-Kodesh¹⁰ by Shneur Zalman of Lyady and Elimelekh of Lezajsk.

The Halakhic¹¹ field is again dominated by Shneur Zalman of Lyady founder of the Habad dynasty. In liturgy, Siddur ha-Rav by Shneur Zalman¹² made a decisive imprint upon Hasidic liturgy. Another work of major importance for Lithuanian Hasidism was, the

⁹ Modrecai Wilensky, Hasidim and Mitnaggedim, Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1970, vol. I, pp. 84-100; 160-176; 196-203.

¹⁰ Shneur Zalman of Lyady [Schneeurshon] Iggeret ha-Koddesh, Hebrew, Shklow, 1814.

¹¹ _____, Shulhan Aruhk Hebrew, Kopys, 1814.

¹² _____, Seder Tefilot mi-Kol ha-Shanah, Kopys, 1816.

Beit Aaron by rabbi Aaron of Karlin.¹³

When studying Beshtian Hasidism one is faced with the dilemma of the utilization of its sources. Where should the emphasis be, on its legendary material or on its theoretical literature? The theoretical literature, all of it written by the outstanding leaders of the new movement, which made its first appearance one generation after the Besht, at a time when Hasidism was fighting for its very survival within traditional Judaism. This literature was written by men who were away from the place where Hasidism was born, Podolia, with the exception of one, Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye. The theoretical literature originated with the elite of the second generation of Hasidism, mainly with the students of the Maggid of Mezhrich. It reflects the theory of Hasidism rather than the way of life and mood of the Besht and the circle of his close friends. It lacks precisely the main attributes which would have made it an ideal source for the study of classical Hasidism. However, the earliest legendary

¹³Rabbi Aaron Stolinsky from Karlin, Beit Aaron, Hebrew. Brody, 1875. For a more extensive list of Hasidic literature see Simon Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut, Hebrew, Tel Aviv 1960, pp. 386-396.

source, Shivhei ha-Besht, is preoccupied exclusively with this group, the founder and the first generation of his followers in Podolia the place of origin. It is here that the dilemma is focused; theoretical writing vs. legendary material.

While the theoretical literature enjoys a respectable position in the research of Hasidism and related studies the status of the Hasidic legends is less comfortable. All of those dealing with Hasidism had, at one point or another in their course of research, to depend on Shivhei ha-Besht or other Hasidic tales. Yet even those who utilized this source did not give it the customary care accorded to a major source. Shmuel Abba Horodezky (1871-1957), scholar and historian of Jewish mysticism and Hasidism, in his foreword to the chapter on Beshtian Hasidism states "We do not have reliable material on the Besht, because it is non-existent. All the material which was available to me came from various legends that are in Shivhei ha-Besht and from other books written by his students and their disciples¹⁴ and indeed throughout the chapter on the life of the Baal Shem Tov his major source is Shivhei ha-Besht and he quotes it more than a hundred and fifty times!"¹⁵

¹⁴Shmuel Abba Horodezky, Ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Hasidim, Hebrew, Tel Aviv, 1951 vol. I. Title page of chapter on Besht not numbered.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 1-73.

Despite his great dependence on Shivhei ha-Besht, Horodezky did not hesitate to "rearrange" the stories in Shivhei ha-Besht. So as "to bring in some order as much as possible"¹⁶ a practice rarely common when dealing with a major source. The "rearrangement" of the stories and the division of the book into five major parts disrupted the authentic quality of the book and damaged the natural thematic grouping of the stories, their literary setting and historical quality.¹⁷

The martyred Jewish historian Simon Dubnow (1860-1941), faced a similar dilemma, is Shivhei ha-Besht fact or legend? And how much of it may a historian utilize in the absence of any other biographical material on the Besht?

The oral legend [of Hasidism] became in [Shivhei ha-Besht] the recorded scripture, the "genesis" of Hasidism, which describes the life of the "holy fathers" of the new belief, revealing a little and concealing twice as much.

It is within these obscure regions that we must do our research so that we may separate the kernel of truth from the waste of the legend, to uncover the true image of its hero, as much as we can. 18

With this caution in mind Dubnow proceeds to cite it extensively on the Beshtian period.¹⁹

¹⁶ Shmuel Abba Horodezky, ed. Shivhei ha-Besht, Hebrew, Berlin, 1922 p. 34 foreword.

¹⁷ Avraham Rubinstein "Shevah mi-Shivhei ha-Besht" Hebrew, Tarbitz vol. 35, 1965 pp. 189-191.

¹⁸ Simon Dubnow, op. cit., p. 42. Whenever the name of the translator is not indicated, the translation is my own.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 42-75.

Minkin is more evasive and less cautious than Dubnow. The precise historical data about the Besht is less important to him than the image of the founder of Hasidism as seen by his admirers.

So far as history is concerned it is quite as interesting and important as a reliable record [Shivhei ha-Besht], because it tells of the character of Israel's mission as well as of the state of mind of the people who were unceasingly enthusiastic about him. 20

But no one was more favorably disposed towards the Hasidic legend than Martin Buber (1878-1965). Buber saw in the Hasidic tale one of the main sources for the understanding of the movement. According to his interpretation of Hasidism that in its first instance it was not a category of teaching but a way of life, the legend, tale and anecdote, are indispensable. He saw in the Hasidic legend the main source of knowledge and its theoretical literature as a secondary one.

The latter is the Commentary, the former the text, even though a text that has been handed down in a state of extreme corruption one that is incapable of being restored in its purity. It is foolish to protest that the legend does not convey to us the reality of Hasidic life. Naturally, the legend is no chronicle, but it is truer than the chronicle for those who know how to read it. 21

²⁰Jacob S. Minkin, The Romance of Hassidism, California, 1971 edition p. 62.

²¹Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, ed. and trans. Maurice Friedman. New York, 1960. p. 27.

This led to the Buber²² - Scholem²³ controversy: theoretical literature vs. Hasidic legends and anecdotes as the major historical source for the study of Hasidism. Scholem vigorously denies the legend, the prominence given to it by Buber and sees the theoretical literature as the main source for the understanding of Hasidism.

Buber's metaphors about the text and commentary are misleading and conceal the historical fact that the so-called commentary was the first and most authoritative presentation of the meaning of this life, long before it was enveloped by legends. The identity of legends and life, which Buber claims, is fictitious. Strictly speaking, these legends are themselves nothing more than a commentary to what, with Buber, one might call life. Life is reflected both in the legend and in the teaching, but it must be emphasized that whereas the origins of this Hasidic life were deeply influenced and shaped by ideas laid down in the theoretical literature, its beginnings were certainly not influenced by legend.

...when Buber claimed that the legends of Hasidism were its truly creative achievement, he put himself into an unusually paradoxical position. He had to contend that the originality of the movement genuinely manifested itself only in a genre of literature which almost entirely came into being nearly fifty years after the period in which Hasidism was in fact creative and in which it produced those theoretical writings which Buber has so decisively shoved aside. Such a position is simply not tenable. 24

²²Mordehai Martin Buber, "Kama heArot la Teoria shel ha-Hasidut," Hebrew, Ammot Tel Aviv vol. II August 1963-January 1964, pp. 43-47.

²³Gershon Scholem, "Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism" in The Messianic Idea of Judaism, New York, 1971, pp. 228-250.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 234-5; for a similar position see Rivka Schatz, "Adam Nohah Elokim ve-Olam be-Mishnat Buber al ha-Hasidut," Hebrew, Molad, 1960 Vol. XVIII, pp. 596-609.

The two eminent scholars, Buber and Scholem were almost forced to adopt their respective positions with regard to the major sources of Hasidic literature, due to their all embracing view of Hasidism. The former was fascinated with its ethos, its creativity its folk elements its innovations and anarchistic tendencies. All this and much more Buber seemed to have found in the outburst of creativity of the Hasidic legend and anecdote and it suited well his own concept of man in society and his confrontation with God. The latter is captivated by the Hasidic theory, its philosophy, its elements of continuity rather than revolutionary tendencies, thus making it possible to link Hasidism with previous trends of Jewish mysticism and making it the latest heir to all of these traditions. Both eloquently exposed the two major trends of Hasidic literature and added a new, penetrating insight into the treasures of Hasidism but did not solve the historian's dilemma of theoretical sources vs. legends and anecdotes.

The controversy about the use of theoretical vs. legendary literature is not a question of primary and secondary material but that each of these categories is characteristic of a different stage in the development of Hasidism. Despite the fact that the legends, and here we refer only to Shivhei ha-Besht, were committed to writing in book form only in 1814, they preceeded in their origin and

influence the major theoretical writings were printed during 1780-1815. Storytelling seems to have been closely associated with the early phase of Hasidism 1736-1760. Both sources, theoretical and legendary are primary, but with a modification. For the Beshtian period the emphasis should be on the legend; for the later periods it is on the theoretical writings, yet in both cases never to the complete exclusion of the other.

The study of Hasidism is hampered at this point by the lack of categories and techniques²⁵ which should have been established to facilitate the proper study of its literature. When utilizing Hasidic literature as a source, one should be aware of the geographical locations, dynastic origins, cultural, social and political climate of that specific time and place where the story in question came into being. It is obvious that for the Besht's biological descendants the element of storytelling was an important component and reached its most artistic expression in the stories of his great grandson yRabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772-1811). For other dynasties it would be important to re-examine the status of theoretical writing and that of storytelling. Where did the element of storytelling remain an active force due to the Beshtian tradition and

²⁵ Joseph Dan, "Research Techniques for Hasidic Tales" Hebrew, in Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies. Jerusalem 1968 vol. II pp. 53-7. English Abstract p. 182.

where did the element of storytelling continue to function merely as a dormant tradition; and when did it cease to exist and vanish as a viable force?

For the research of the Beshtian period the emphasis must be on the Hasidic legend. For the holiness surrounding storytelling was an innovation of Hasidism²⁶ and the Besht is associated with storytelling rather than with theoretical writings.²⁷ Moses ben Jacob of Satanov in 1746, describes Hasidism and its leader as follows:

And now new ones, recent arrivals have their eyes set on money and the word of God is a disgrace to them. And there is a vulgar man telling stories in parables and jokes. He will preach to this nation. 28

While the Besht is not mentioned by name, Rabbi Moshe of Satanov most likely refers to him.²⁹ Among the accusations leveled against the new sect, storyteeling is one of them. Two other sources on the importance of storytelling come from the Besht's own family. His grandson Rabbi Ephraim of Sudlikov remembered that his grand-

²⁶ Joseph Dan, The Hasidic Novella op. cit., pp. 7-15.

²⁷ The sayings and the teachings attributed to the Besht found in the books of Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye were published in a separate book, Keter Shem Tov, Hebrew, Lvov 1863 and another book, Zavaat ha-Ribash, Hebrew, Zalkva 1805, sayings of the Besht found in the possession of the hasid Isaiah of Yanov.

²⁸ Moses ben Jacob of Satanov, Mishmeret ha-Koddesh, Hebrew, Zolkiew, 1746, p. 2/a, folio 5.

²⁹ Joseph Dan, Isaiah Tishby, op. cit., ff. 818. Gershon Scholem, "Demuto ha-Historit Shel Israel Baal Shem Tov" Hebrew, Molad, 1960 vol. XVIII, p. 342.

father, the Besht, "used to worship the almighty with the pure wisdom of storytelling and other foreign things (devarim hizonyim).³⁰ His great-grandson, Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, the master of the beautifully structured Hasidic tales, which most often evolve around his own essence and his messianic soul, makes a very interesting remark about the impact of the Besht's stories.

Before he [Rabbi Nahman] told the first story, which is to be found in this book, he turned and said" in the stories that the world³¹ is telling there are many concealed intentions and lofty matters. But the stories were corrupt because many were lost. They also became entangled and they are not being told in the proper order. Because what belongs to the beginning [of a story] is told at the end and vice-versa. But the truth of the matter is that the stories which the world is telling contain very lofty matters and the Baal Shem Tov, may the memory of a saint be blessed, could through a story or a tale achieve intense concentrations (yihudim)³² when he saw that the heavenly channels were damaged and they could not be mended with the aid of prayers, he used to mend them with his concentration while telling a story, a tale. ³³

³⁰ Rabbi Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sudlikov, Degel Mahneh Ephraim, Hebrew, Korets, 1811. Vayeshev, p. 26.

³¹ In Yiddish the word, "oilam," here translated as world, also means public.

³² see glossary.

³³ Rabbi Nahman ben Simhah of Bratslav, Sippurei Maasiyot, Hebrew-Yiddish Berdichev 1815, reprinted in New York, 1929 with a foreword and notes by Samuel H. Setzer, pp. 58-9. These 13 stories were published in bilingual editions, the original Yiddish with Nathan of Nemirov's translation. Rabbi Nathan ben Naphtali Hertz Sternhartz of Nemirov served as Rabbi Nahman's scribe and literary secretary and almost to all of the extant of Bratslav literature was committed to writing by him.

It is quite clear that storytelling is identified with early Hasidism and was one of its hallmarks. Its importance was so great that it could "mend heavenly channels" where prayer had failed. It would be inconceivable to study Beshtian Hasidism only from its theoretical sources for they came into existence one generation after the Besht. The theoretical literature for the most part is a synthesis between form and content, the homiletic traditional structure and the new Hasidic ideas. The traditional framework was of great importance since this literature came into being during the great conflict between Hasidism and Traditional Judaism. Hasidism was out to prove to its opponents that the new sect was a strict adherent to traditional values.³⁴ In this process the theoretical literature lost much of the original simplicity and mood of Beshtian Hasidism. Yet these qualities of the "genesis of Hasidism" are more easily noticeable in its legends and tales. The early Hasidic story still contains the initial innovations of the movement as practiced by its founder the Besht and his early followers.

The stories were committed to book form only in 1814, as pointed out by Scholem, and thus as in book form do indeed belong to a later period than the

³⁴This trend can be most clearly observed in the writings of the movement's first ideologist, Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye. See Gedalyah Nigal, Manhig Ve-Edah, Hebrew, Israel 1962 p. 19.

theoretical literature. But the fact that the stories were committed to book form at a later date does not negate the fact that they came into being were widely circulated, and were told and retold at a much earlier time. There is indeed ample evidence that the Hasidic tale and anecdote were widely circulated either by word of mouth, in the best oral tradition of storytelling, or in form of manuscripts, prior to 1814. Many Hasidic stories found their way into the theoretical literature³⁵ and only later gained their independent existence in a separate book.

The Besht himself when attracting new followers and among them the most famous ones, Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye and the movement's first theoretician and Rabbi Dov Baer, the Besht's successor, did it with the aid of a story. They did not come to the Besht because of his erudition and scholarship. Rabbi Jacob Joseph was attracted to the Besht by his stories and life style,³⁶ and Rabbi Dov Baer the great Maggid (pietistic preacher) came out of medical necessity rather than intellectual curiosity. The meeting between the sick scholar Rabbi Dov Baer and the Besht was indeed a strange one. The Besht in his unassuming manner told

³⁵Ibid., pp. 113-141, especially p. 130 note 55.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 14-19; Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 61-67.

the great scholar stories. Stories about his own horses and the shortage of fodder on one of his many journeys. Tales about the gentile lad who accompanied him on his travels, and other trivia typical of a simple man who spends much of his time on the road. Rabbi Dov Baer, the scholar, was annoyed, for he saw no cure in sight and his stay in Medzhibozh kept him away from his studies. So he decided to depart and return home.³⁷ When the Besht learned about the Maggid's intended departure, he said "I wanted to cure you with words alone since this is an enduring remedy, but now I have to cure you with medication."³⁸ Nothing could be accomplished once the trance of the story was broken. However, the Maggid, now only partially crippled, remained with the Besht and both studied the secrets of the Torah. The Maggid joined the newly formed sect³⁹ and he himself became an accomplished storyteller.

At the beginning of Hasidism there was a story. The fact that storytelling was one of the young movements major vehicles of propagation is difficult to refute. Therefore the early Hasidic story must be a decisive factor in the study of Beshtian Hasidism along with all other innovations introduced by the Baal Shem Tov. While this genre of literature was used extensively and by the creator of Hasidism, it is also the major

³⁷ Sefer Shivhei Baal Shem Tov, Yiddish, Koretz, 1816. pp. 11a-12a. Reproduced by Hebrew University Jerusalem 1965, 900-64.

³⁸ Shivhei ha-Besht, p. 82.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 81-84.

"chronicle" left on Beshitan Hasidism, especially Shivhei ha-Besht. When it came to this book even Scholem, the ardent admirer of the theoretical sources, had to admit that indeed it is possible to obtain actual facts from Shivhei ha-Besht.^{40a} A collection of legends, tales and stories is a questionable source for the study of history and is hardly the sort of data any competent historian would relish. Yet with a positive approach a careful analysis which takes into account the events that took place in the Jewish community as well as those which occurred in the gentile society and correlates them with material in Shivhei ha-Besht might extract a wealth of historical data.

Shivhei ha-Besht⁴⁰ was first printed in 1814, by Israel Yofeh a printer in the town of Kopust. It was fifty-four years after the death of the Baal Shem Tov, the protagonist of all the stories. The compiler of the tales was Rabbi Dov Baer ben Samuel, the son-in-law of Rabbi Alexander the Shohet, a man who had been the Baal Shem Tov's personal scribe for eight years.⁴¹ Rabbi Dov Baer included in Shivhei ha-Besht fifteen tales told to him by his father-in-law, an

^{40a} Scholem, "Demuto ha-Historit Shel Israel Baal Shem Tov." op. cit., pp. 336-7.

⁴⁰ It was modeled after an earlier work Shivhei ha-Ari. It describes the life and wonders of the Safed mystic Isaac Luria (1534-72) In Praise p. 2.

⁴¹ Shivhei ha-Besht, p. 32.

eye witness to the events described. Almost all the other tales in the collection came from sources that the author considered equally reliable.⁴² In the writer's preface

Dov Baer states:

Therefore, I was careful to write down all the awesome things that I heard from the truthful people. In each case I wrote down from whom I heard it. Thank God, who endowed me with memory, I neither added nor omitted anything. Every word is true, and I did not change a word.⁴³

He was very eager to establish the credibility and authenticity of his stories. At the beginning of each tale he states the name of the source and some other impressive credentials. The stories in Shivhei ha-Besht usually begin with an opening phrase of identification of his source like "In addition I heard from the Rabbi of the holy community of Polonnoye the author of the book Toldot Yaakov Yosef."⁴⁴ Or "I heard more from the above mentioned Rabbi Falk, who at the time of the flight went into exile in the Crimea with Rabbi Joseph Ashkenazi, the Besht's hazan."⁴⁵ In both cases cited, the people who told the story initially were

⁴²For the source of each tale see Ibid., pp. 280-289.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁵Shivhei ha-Besht, p. 53.

respected men in the community and close associates of the Besht. To more strongly re-enforce the authenticity, the flight is mentioned as an event which took place in 1768 and is historically true.⁴⁶

The method of establishing the origin of each tale is employed throughout the two hundred fifty-one tales in the volume.⁴⁷ However, at times the compiler is not sure with regard to certain details concerning his story, he states his doubts.

On the Sabbath the bandits came to the town and did not find the Jews. I do not know whether the incident took place in the holy community of Tlust or in the holy community of Kolomyya, because subsequently the Besht lived in the holy community of Kolomyya. 48

The historian benefits greatly from Dov Baer's "documentation," Dov Baer's motivations for doing so were not to provide the future historian with dates and facts but rather to record moral issue of the tales.

The reader should realize that I wrote all this not as history nor as stories. In each tale he should perceive His awesome deeds. He should infer the moral of each tale, so that he will be able to attach his heart to the fear of God, the beliefs of the sages and the power of our holy Torah. 49

⁴⁶ Ibid., Tale 40 footnote 1, p. 317.

⁴⁷ In the original Kopust edition there is no division into separate tales.

⁴⁸ It is more likely that the town is Tluste since it is closer to the Dniester, the river mentioned in the first half of the story. p. 211.

⁴⁹ Shivhei ha-Besht, p. 5.

Despite the pious intentions of the writer the historical significance of his material is very beneficial to the student of Beshtian Hasidism. Yet at times the piety of the writer does impose limitations for it served as his yardstick for the selection of material for Shivhei ha-Besht. A fact which again he readily admits.

The Besht heard that his [Shabbetai Tsevi's] fall came through pride and anger. I was reluctant to write it down, but nevertheless I did so to show to what extent pride can be dangerous. 50

A careful reading of Shivhei ha-Besht suggests that Rabbi Dov Baer, like the printer Israel Yofeh, had before him manuscripts. This is very clear from the remark he makes when describing the meeting between the Besht and the Maggid. Rabbi Dov Baer comments "There are several versions of how the Maggid came to the Besht⁵¹ or at the conclusion of this very tale." "This is as far as it goes"⁵² a phrase used for written material rather than a story told orally. Dov Baer also remains silent as to the reason for his preferences. Why did he choose this particular version rather than others regarding the historic meeting between the Besht and the Maggid? The existence of several versions is an additional indication that the material printed in Shivhei

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 82.

⁵² Ibid., p. 84.

ha-Besht existed prior to the date of publication and strengthens the claims that the legends and tales are as old as the theoretical sources and may be even older. It also indicates that both writer and printer acted as editors and decided what to include and what to omit from the manuscripts in front of them. A closer examination and correlation between the material included and that excluded from the Hebrew version strongly suggest that pious and moral considerations were not the only guidelines. Their selective approach was based primarily upon their attitude to the Baal Shem Tov himself. Material which enhanced the Besht's position or personality was included. Anything which they considered less complimentary was omitted from the Hebrew edition of Shivhei ha-Besht.

The printer Israel Yofeh did further editing on his own. He added more material on the birth and revelation of the Besht. His source was the Admor,⁵³ most probably Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady⁵⁴ (1747-1813).

⁵³ see glossary.

⁵⁴ It is of importance to note that Shivhei ha-Besht was published after the death of Shneur Zalman of Lyady. There is a need to clarify his attitude towards Beshtian Hasidism.

The printer said: Since in the manuscripts from which I have copied these tales the sequence of events and the revelation of the Besht-may his merit protect us, amen-are not in the right order, and because I heard everything as it came from Admor, whose soul rests in heaven, in proper order and with the correct interpretation, I will print them first as I heard them from his holy lips and after that point in the story I will include what had been written in the manuscripts. 55

The reason given by the printer for his intended changes is lack of chronological order in the events recording the Besht's revelation. However, when the actual editing was done, the printer did not follow his own plan. He interrupts the Admor's tale regarding the Besht's Origins and revelation and supplements with the older manuscript text.⁵⁶ The end result is a multi-version regarding the Besht's origin and early years. Yet the printer takes great pain to identify each of his sources as the story unfolds. In the manuscripts it is written in these words⁵⁷ or "that is the end of this [manuscript] version."⁵⁸ The distinction between the various sources is of great significance. It indicates the awareness and sensitivity of the printer to the problem of sources. It also reveals the

⁵⁵Shivhei ha-Besht p. 6.

⁵⁶Shivhei ha-Besht, pp. 7-31.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 10.

existence of at least two versions regarding the Besht's origin and revelation. The earlier version, the manuscript one, seems to have been the older one and retained many significant facts missing in the Admor's tale, such as the Rabbi Adam story. The Admor's version seem to be more stylized and projects the image of the Besht in a more traditional framework.⁵⁹ These differences regarding the Besht are not the only indications that at least two major views of the Besht were current. One version, the earlier one, is more crude and authentic and the second one is more refined and more in accordance with the image that later Hasidism had of itself as a respectable Jewish sect of mainstream Judaism. This is quite evident when a comparison is made among the major versions of Shivhei ha-Besht.

Between the years 1814-1818 the major editions of Shivhei ha-Besht appeared in print, four Hebrew editions and three Yiddish ones. The Berdichev Hebrew printing followed immediately the publication of the Kopsys one and even seemed to have utilized the same printing blocks. Despite the closeness in time, only a few months elapsed, there are a few, but very significant differences. The Berdichev edition omitted a few

⁵⁹For the analysis of the differences between the two versions see Chapter III, pp. 49-79, below.

details. The omission was a deliberate one. Rabbi Meir Halevi in his consent statement (Haskamah) justifies the self imposed censorship. Since some of the stories might be misunderstood and therefore he had decided that it would be safer "to conceal a few matters."⁶⁰ Despite the fact that only six months had elapsed between the two editions a readjustment was in line pertaining to the image of the founder of Hasidism. The story which might have suggested supernatural conception of the Besht's wife was one of the deleted stories.⁶¹ Yet for the student of Beshtian Hasidism the omitted stories are of great significance because it is precisely in the rejected material that one can locate the essential differences between classical Hasidism and later Hasidism once comfortably established as part of normative Judaism. But nowhere is the difference more strikingly evident than when comparing the Hebrew editions of Shivhei ha-Besht with the Yiddish version.

The Yiddish editions of Shivhei ha-Besht have been getting more scholarly attention in the last few years than ever before. A study on Rabbi Adam by

⁶⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht, Berdichev edition 1815, reprinted in Israel, Talpiot [1961] p. 17.

⁶¹ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 258.

Shmeruk⁶² and another by Yaari⁶³ greatly helped strengthen the contention that Shivhei ha-Besht is both an early document and a reliable historical source. Shmeruk proves that the tale about Rabbi Adam, the man who sent the secret manuscripts to the Besht, is more authentic in the Yiddish version than in the Hebrew one. It follows more closely the 17th century manuscript which he discovered of the same tale. His conclusion is that the Yiddish version was copied directly from manuscripts and is independent of the Hebrew edition of Shivhei ha-Besht.⁶⁴

This study promoted Abraham Yaari, a man who since 1935⁶⁵ is preoccupied with Shivhei ha-Besht and related books and events, to re-examine the Yiddish edition of Shivhei ha-Besht. He, systematically and methodically compared two versions of Shivhei ha-Besht, the Hebrew edition of Kopys 1814, and the Yiddish version of Ostrog 1815, Korets 1816.⁶⁶ The systematic comparison yielded surprising results. The two editions differ in many aspects.

⁶²Ch. Shmeruk, "Tales about R'Adam Baal Shem in the Versions of Shivkhei Ha'Besht," Hebrew, Zion, XXVIII 1963, 86-105.

⁶³Abraham Yaari, "Two Basic Recensions of Shivhei Ha-Besht, Hebrew, Kirjat Sepher, XXXIX 1964, 249-72; 394-407, 552-62.

⁶⁴Shmeruk, op. cit., pp. 90-92.

⁶⁵Abraham Yaari, "Miscellaneous Bibliographical Notes, 10. Three Yiddish translations of Shivhei ha-Besht;" Hebrew, Kirjat Sepher, XII, 1935, 129-31.

- a) in the order of the stories
- b) in their form
- c) the Koretz edition contains only eighty-five tales, the Kopust edition two hundred twenty-seven⁶⁶
- d) in inclusion of stories omitted from the Hebrew edition
- e) and in style; while telling the same story many particulars differ.⁶⁷

Yaari concludes that the anonymous translator of the Yiddish Koretz edition did not depend on the Hebrew version but worked directly from manuscripts in front of him.

The existence of two primary sources⁶⁸ one in Hebrew the other in Yiddish, greatly enhances the possibilities of a better understanding of the origins and beliefs of Beshtian Hasidism. The difference between the two versions might be attributed to two different attitudes towards the founder of Hasidism, the Yiddish version being the less complimentary one. The Hebrew edition might be regarded as the one which is more in conformity with the image Hasidism had of itself and its founder at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The more restrained tone of the Hebrew editions

⁶⁶ According to the Ben-Amos Mintz division into tales, it contains two hundred fifty-one stories. see note 47.

⁶⁷ Yaari, "Two Basic Recensions of Shivhe ha-Besht" op. cit. pp. 252-258.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 259.

might also be due to the fact that Shneur Zalman of Lyady, the Admor, was the source for some of the stories in the Hebrew version. And indeed the sections told by the Admor contain the essential customs of Hasidism.⁶⁹ In the Hebrew version the Baal Shem Tov's mortal shortcomings are overlooked or modified. The Yiddish version is less charitable and it describes his triumphs as well as his failures.

One of the major failures of the Besht, if indeed it was regarded as such by later Hasidism, is the fact that the Baal Shem Tov failed to reach the Holy Land. He did set out on his long journey but never reached his destination. The Hebrew version almost dismisses the failure. The description of the event, his attempt to reach Israel, is recorded in very vague language and the reader is left to draw his own conclusions: did he or didn't he reach Israel?

Later, when the Besht traveled to the land of Israel, I [Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonoye] was left desolate until he returned.⁷⁰

A statement which might leave the reader with an impression that the Besht did indeed reach his destination and then returned to Podolia.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 27-31.

⁷⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 62.

⁷¹ Ibid., tales 11, 211 and 231 all dealing with the Besht's journey to Israel.

We already wrote above that the Baal Shem stayed in [I]stanbul for a long time, close to a year because he wanted to travel to the land of Israel but from on High he was prevented from doing so. It ended as follows, since he was very stubborn and made attempts with the aids of mighty prayers and other things, so from heaven his wisdom and torah were taken away from him, so he will have to return home and not travel to the land of Israel. 72

The Yiddish source is very explicit about the Besht's failure to reach the Holy Land. In another instance it is also quite clear that the Yiddish version is less obsessed with the Besht's unblemished image. Once the Besht and his friend and follower Rabbi Jehiel Mikhel lost their way on the eve of the Sabbath. In distress the Besht lay on the floor, cried bitterly and was tearing the hair out of his head in anguish. The Hebrew version concludes the above story with the following words:

Rabbi Jehiel Mikhel said: If I had seen nothing other than his bitter weeping because of profaning the Sabbath, it would have been sufficient. 73

The Yiddish version tells that the same Rabbi Jehiel Mikhel was upset that the Besht despaired instead of

⁷²Sefer Shivhei Baal Shem Tov, Korets, 1816, p. 25b.

⁷³Shivhei ha-Besht, p. 188.

searching with the rest of the travelers for a way out of the darkness.⁷⁴ While the event recorded in both versions is very similar the "editorial" is quite different. According to the Yiddish version the behavior of the Besht on that particular Sabbath eve was in no way remarkable.

A careful comparison of the tales cited and others⁷⁵ indicates according to Yaari that the Yiddish version and the Hebrew one are two basic yet different versions of Shivhei ha-Besht; and confront the student of Hasidism with a new dilemma, which of the two versions is more authoritative when we come to draw historical conclusions? Yaari like others who depend on Shivhe ha-Besht as an historical valid source,⁷⁶ is aware of its lack of respectability as such.

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Sefer Shivhei Baal Shem Tov, Korets, p. 22a.

75 Abraham Yaari, "Two Basic Recensions of Shivhe Ha-Besht, op. cit., pp. 552-561.

76 Abraham Yaari, Taalumat Sefer, Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1954 pp. 119-141.

_____, "Srefat ha-Talmud beKamenets Podolsk," Hebrew, Sinai, 42, 1958 pp. 294-306

Israel Halpern, "Gezerot Woszczylo" in Eastern European Jewry, Hebrew, Jerusalem 1968, pp. 277-288.

True we are dealing here with tales legends, and in such a case one may perhaps accept the dictum both are the pronouncements of God....But the more we study early Hasidim the more we profoundly investigate Shivhei ha-Besht the more we realize how much it contains kernels of historical data and the vast importance of the book not only to the particular study of Hasidism but to the study of Polish and Russian Jewry in general The scholar who will come to study Polish Jewry and especially the history of Hasidism will have to decide which of the two versions he prefers. 77

Preference is hardly the case, for both versions complement each other. By comparing the two one might hope to achieve a better insight into the dynamics of early Hasidism and the development of the Besht from obscurity to leadership. While the Hebrew version appears to be more stylized and more carefully edited, it has some important features. Its mere size calls for more attention, 251 tales compared with 81 in Yiddish. It contains more material on the Besht and his close associates. The Hebrew, in contrast to the Yiddish version, identifies at the beginning of each tale the source from which it obtained its material of the story told below. This practice might have been adopted as a mere literary device to create an air of authenticity and reliability for the Hasidic fold.⁷⁸ But for the

⁷⁷Abraham Yaari, "Two Basic Recensions of Shivhei Ha-Besht," op. cit., p. 259.

⁷⁸Chaim Liberman "On the Attitude of Chassidism to Yiddish," Yiddish, Yivo Bleter 1943 vol. XXII pp. 208-9, with abstracts in English p. 255; Simha Katz, "Joseph Perl's Hakdomeh Zum Megaleh Temirin," Yivo Bleter, 1938 vol.13, pp. 566-568.

historically minded person it has important consequences. This ability to establish the credentials of the individual in question as to his social position, education, relation to the Besht, age group place of birth and other details offer a much better insight to the story which is attributed to that particular individual when dealing with the formation of a new sect this is indispensable information.

The information that the two basic versions of Shivhei ha-Besht yield is enormous. The image of the Besht emerges from these sources with quite distinct features. Studies in various Eastern European disciplines make it possible to see in Shivhei ha-Besht less and less that "wonderful Oriental garden of legends"⁷⁹ but rather a source of historical validity from which valuable material can be extracted. Data with which one may clearly reconstruct the basic features of classical Hasidism and that of its founder, Israel Baal Shem Tov.

⁷⁹Mejer Balaban, Le-Toldot ha-Tenuah ha-Frankit Hebrew, Tel Aviv 1934, vol. I, p. 69.

CHAPTER III

ISRAEL BAAL SHEM TOV - IMAGE OF A FOUNDER

Israel Baal Shtem Tov founder of Hasidism was born in Okopy in 1700. His parents Eliezer and Sara were both close to one hundred years old and died shortly after his birth. Each of the above facts was to be questioned by scores of historians and the uncertainty still holds in its grip of fascination the present day scholar.

Aescoly-Weintraub doubted the very existence of the Baal Shem Tov.¹ Isaac Schiper, while allowing for the Besht's existence, denied him the privilege of being the founder of Hasidism. He stated that the movement was founded by another Baal Shem, named Joel² of Nemirov.

¹Aaron Z. Aescoly-Weintraub, Le Hassidisme: Essai Critique avec un Expose de la Kabbale, French, Paris, 1928 pp. 23-32.

²Isaac Schiper, "R' Israel Baal Shem Tov," Hebrew, Hadoar Vol. XL, 1960 p. 52; Shivhei ha-Besht p. 63; Solomon Maimon, An Autobiography, Hebrew, Introduction by P. Lachover; trans. by Y.L. Baruch. Tel-Aviv, 1953 pp. 137-138.

Scholem dismisses the theory and commands the angel entrusted with forgetfulness to take the above hypothesis under his wings.³ The exact location of Okopy is also uncertain. Dubnow⁴ and Kahana⁵ placed it near Kamenets Podolsk. Schechter moved Okopy to Bukovina.⁶ Markus preferred Kutty to Okopy.⁷ Even the date of his birth was uncertain, 1698 according to Graetz,⁸ 1700 according to Dubnow.⁹ Did indeed both of his parents die shortly after his birth? It is very doubtful!

And so it is not surprising that the Baal Shem should have fared so poorly with lay historians, who were, after all, "outsiders." He eludes them. Historically speaking, the character barely emerges, his outlines blurred by contradictions. Nothing about him can be said with certainty. Those who claim to have known him, to have come close to him or loved him, seem incapable.

³G. Scholem, "Demuto ha-Historit Shel R'Israel Baal Shem Tov," op. cit., p. 445. footnote 1.

⁴Simon Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut op. cit., p. 43.

⁵Abraham Kahana, Sefer ha-Hasidut, Hebrew, Warsaw, 1922, p. 19.

⁶Solomon Schechter, "The Chassidim," in Studies in Judaism London Vol. I p. 5 1896.

⁷Aaron Marcus, Ha-Hasidut, Hebrew, trans. from German by M. Schenfeld, Tel Aviv, 1953 p. 13.

⁸Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews, Philadelphia, 1956, Vol. V, p. 375; Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "Israel Baal Shem Tov" in EJ, op. cit., Vol. IX, ff. 1051-1052.

⁹Dubnow, op. cit., p. 43.

of referring to him in terms other than poetic. He made them dream so much that they describe him as in a dream. That is at least part of the reason why so many rationalists study him with thinly veiled hostility. By becoming a legend, his life has slipped from their grasp.

There were scholars who made him the target of unrestrained animosity, an animosity which went beyond any ideological stance. He disturbed them in their roles as historians. They dismiss him as a charlatan, a vulgar drunkard, an ignorant and greedy quack, because they resent him.

Unable to draw a line - any line - between mythical and real being, between fictions and testimony they are embarrassed. Particularly since their subject is a man who, in a comparatively recent past, shook the very foundations of Judaism, by revolutionizing its thoughts, its perceptions, its way of life. ¹⁰

Yet the line between the mythical and the real is much more distinct, the image of the Baal Shem Tov is less elusive in Shivhei ha-Besht than in the pages of many books that follow it. It is rather the magnitude of the Besht's personality which sets ablaze the imagination of generations of men of letters and caused them to add legend upon legend and tale upon tale. Yet within the pages of Shivhei ha-Besht, the

¹⁰ Elie Wiesel, Souls on Fire op. cit., pp. 7-8.

the image of the Besht is real. The emotions are human, the surroundings are earthly and recognizable. While at the same time they are subjected to the special trance and cadence of the pious Hasidic storyteller.

Based upon Shivhei ha-Besht the life of Israel Baal Shem Tov can be divided into four distinct periods:

- I. Origins, education and early youth.
- II. The period of the secret manuscripts and revelation.
- III. The Tluste period.
- IV. The Medzhibozh period, the most significant one for Hasidism.

I. Origins, Education and Early Youth

Shivhei ha-Besht opens with the description of the Besht's parents:

Rabbi Eliezer, our teacher, the father of the Besht, lived in the state of Walachia near the border. He and his wife were old. Once bandits came to the city and captured him, but his wife managed to escape to another town. She was so poor that she became a midwife and in this way earned her living. Rabbi Eliezer's captors took him to a remote country where there were no Jews and sold him. Rabbi Eliezer served his master faithfully. His master liked him and he appointed him overseer over his house. He asked his master to allow him to observe the Sabbath and to rest on that day, and his master granted his request. And it came to pass that he remained there a long time. He wanted to escape and save himself, but a dream came to him: "Do not be too hasty, since you must still remain in this country.

It came to pass that his master had dealings with the king's viceroy and as a gift he gave him the rabbi, our teacher, our rabbi, Eliezer. He lavished praise on him and extolled him. As soon as he came to the home of the king's viceroy, he found favor in his eyes and was given a special chamber in which to stay. He had no duties to perform at all, except that when the king's viceroy came home Rabbi Eliezer would welcome him with a bowl of water to wash his feet, since this was the custom accorded great men of state. During all that time he studied the Torah and prayed in his special chamber.

Once the king became embroiled in a great war and he sent for his viceroy to counsel him on tactics of attack and defense. Because it was difficult for the viceroy to grasp the actual situation, he did not know what to say. The king stormed with rage because the viceroy could not help him in this time of trouble. The king's viceroy went home dejected. When he arrived, Rabbi Eliezer, the rabbi, our rabbi and teacher, welcomed him as usual with a bowl of water, but the king's viceroy rejected it and lay down on his couch in a troubled mood. Rabbi Eliezer said to him: "My master, why are you so troubled? Please tell me."

The king's viceroy scolded him, but Rabbi Eliezer was a faithful servant to his master and wanted him to be treated justly. He endangered his life and repeatedly urged him until the king's viceroy was forced to tell him what had happened. And he said to his master: "Do not interpretations belong to God? The Lord is a man of war. I will keep fasts and I will ask the Lord, blessed be He, for this secret since He is a revealer of secrets." And he asked a dream-question and it was answered. All the tactics of war were revealed and clearly explained to him.

The next day he came to his master and told him the advice that had been revealed to him from heaven the king's viceroy was very pleased with the information and he joyfully hastened to the king. And he said, "Oh, my master, this is the advice I have to give." And he answered every question.

When the king heard all the viceroy's words, he said: "This is marvelous advice. It is not

from a human mind-unless it comes from a holy man who had inspiration from gods whose dwelling is not with flesh or from one who had contact with the Evil Spirit. Since I know that you are by no means a godly man, you must be a sorcerer." The king's viceroy was forced to confess the truth and tell him what had happened. ¹¹

This version, about the Besht's father, was told by the Admor. However, the manuscripts offer a different version:

(In the manuscripts it is written in these words: Once the king sailed with his army to attack a fortress. When they came to the fortress, the king scoffed at it and said, "Look, the day is almost gone. The fortress is small. We'll sleep here overnight, a short distance away, and early tomorrow instead of bothering all our men, we'll send a small force to conquer it."

Rabbi Eliezer was also a sailor on one of the boats. It was revealed to him in a dream that he should go and tell the king not to make light of this battle, for if the king did so, he and all his army would be lost. Iron pillars were planted in the sea all around the city to overturn invading boats, and it was impossible to land there except by way of the channel leading to the entrance of the city. Signs marking the channel were revealed to him so that they would not take the wrong course.

The king and all his troops arose eagerly early in the morning and began to wake up the sailors so that they would man the boats. Rabbi Eliezer did not want to sail, and he said, "I have to tell the king a secret." They immediately shaved him and changed his clothes and then he was taken to the king in a small boat. He told the king what had been revealed to him from heaven. He said to the king: "If you don't believe me, send a small boat manned by convicts and see what their fate will be."

¹¹Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 7-9.

And the king did so. When the boat reached the point where the pillars were placed, it overturned and everyone on board was lost.

The king said, "What do you advise me to do now?" The rabbi told him: "There is a straight channel which is the entrance to the city and through which the people sail back and forth." He showed him the signs of this channel. They did as he suggested, and the king succeeded in conquering the fortress. This is the end of this version.)¹²

The difference between the two versions is immense. While both stories have some basic features in common, the manuscript version lacks important facts as to the description of Eliezer. It does not tell us that "Rabbi Eliezer our teacher" was a pious Jew observing the Sabbath, studying the Torah and praying in his special chamber while in captivity. All this is to be found in the Admor's tale. The Besht's father emerges from the Admor's tale as a learned Torah-observing Jew. Yet while the tale is more elaborate on Eliezer's righteous personality, the facts pertaining to the "great war" are very scant.

Once the king became embroiled in a great war and he sent for his viceroy to counsel him on tactics of attack and defense. ¹³

The manuscript version is less preoccupied with Eliezer's spiritual welfare and offers a more detailed account of the war and of Eliezer's part in it. We are told that it was a naval battle and the

¹²Ibid., pp. 9-10.

¹³Ibid., p. 8.

objective of the campaign was a fortress on a sea shore. And the King sailed with his army to attack that fortress. Rabbi Eliezer was a sailor on one of the boats. When they came to the fortress, the King scoffed at it and wanted to engage only a small force in his attempts to conquer the fortress. Eliezer knew about the danger awaiting the King. He expressed his wish to see the King whereupon he was shaved, his clothes changed and he was taken to the King in a small boat.¹⁴ Quite a wealth of material on the maritime battle.

To the person familiar with Russian history the events described are incredibly familiar and call to mind Peter the Great's Azov Campaigns of 1695 and 1696.

The target was indeed a fortress, the Turkish town of Azov. At first the King, Peter, took the matter lightly. When he left Moscow he cheerfully announced "we are going to play over Azov."¹⁵ The matter was less playful than Peter anticipated. The first attempt ended in failure. At the time Russia lacked efficient engineers and there were no warships to prevent Turkish reinforcement by sea. A second Azov campaign was planned with the same objective in

¹⁴Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵Bolshaia Sovietskaia Encyclopaedia, Russian, U.S.S.R., 1957 second edition, Vol. I, pp. 530-531.

mind.¹⁶ At Voronezh, in the timber-rich region, the building of the fleet began. Peter started hectic recruiting of foreign shipbuilders, seamen and doctors. Once the fleet was ready Peter set out for the campaign sailing in "eighty-six ships of way - two-decker ships, galliots, brigantines - and five hundred barges, had sailed down the Don."¹⁷ Peter himself assumed command of one of the ships. Once near Azov the port was besieged and Turkish relief was cut off from the sea. It was then that Peter called for a council of war to discuss the tactics of the planned conquest of the fortress. A participant in the Azov campaign, Alexander Gordon, son-in-law of the famed Patrick Gordon describes the war council:

The Czar, says this writer, considering the great loss of time he had sustained the preceding year, called a council of war to know the opinion of the generals about the safest and most expeditious method of becoming masters of the place. Most of them delivered their sentiments in the common way, by carrying on attacks, making of great breaches, with mines and batteries, which (they said) would infallibly oblige the governor to capitulate in the terms of war, or expect the worst. Then General [Patrick]

¹⁶ B.H. Sumner, Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia, New York, 1969 pp. 35-49; Vasili Klyuchevsky, Peter the Great trans. by Liliana Archibald, New York 1958, p. 23.

¹⁷ Mairin Mitchell, The Maritime History of Russia, 1898-1948, London, 1949, p. 65.

Gordon, as the oldest general, gave his opinion that the safest and most expeditious way to become masters of the town, would be to carry on before them a whole rampart of earth along the front of the town, which as they advanced, would increase hourly.¹⁸

The advice of Patrick Gordon was accepted. Azov was captured by the Russian army. On October 19, 1697 the entry in Patrick Gordon's Diary states:

The Muscovite army returned in triumph to Moscow on the ninth of October. Rewards were bestowed on the victorious generals, and Gordon received a medal worth six ducats, a gold cup, a costly robe of sables, and an estate with ninety serfs.¹⁹

The sea-battle in Shivhei ha-Besht, the particulars mentioned bear an overwhelming similarity to the Azov campaigns:²⁰ a maritime campaign in which the King himself participated; a fortress on a seashore, the King's scoffing and taking the matter lightly; the King's seeking advice from his war council, the one general offering the advice which led to the conquest of the

¹⁸Patrick Gordon, The Diary of General Patrick Gordon in the Years 1635-1699, London 1968 p. 185.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 186.

²⁰For a detailed description of the Azov campaigns see M.M. Bogoslovsky, Peter I: materialy dlya biografii; Russian, Moscow, 1940 Vol. 1; Captain John Perry, The State of Russia Under the Present Tzar, London, 1716.

fortress and being highly rewarded, and the engagement of foreigners in that campaign. All of this suggests very strongly that Eliezer, the Besht's father was one of the foreigners who participated in the Azov campaign and lived in Russia about the time of the Besht's birth. This fits also an earlier statement in Shivhei ha-Besht that "Rabbi Eliezer's captors took him to a remote country where there were no Jews and sold him"²¹ or "It so happened that no Jew was allowed to live in that country. When they found a Jew, there was only one verdict - that he be put to death."²² Russia was such a place. Its territory was forbidden to professing Jews, including Jews on business trips, under the penalty of death.²³

In Shivhei ha-Besht there is yet another indication that at some point of his childhood the Besht was in Russia or in a Russian speaking vicinity.

Once the Besht became so ill that he lost the power of speech. His followers stood around him, and he motioned to them to put his tefillin [Phylacteries] on him, and they did so. He lay wearing the tefillin a long while. Then he began to talk. They asked him: "What happened?"

²¹Shivhei ha-Besht p. 7.

²²Ibid., p. 10.

²³Salo W. Baron, The Russian Jew, New York 1964, pp. 7-14; Shmuel Ettlinger, "The Muscovite State and its Attitude Towards the Jews" Hebrew, Zion Vol. XVIII 1953, 136-153. Title and summary in English p.III.

He told them that there was a sin that he had committed in his boyhood and that an accusation had been made against him. His rabbi came and informed him about it and said: "Hurry. Put on the tefillin."

Then the accuser came in the image of a gentile with an iron shovel in his hand to cut off my head. But because of the tefillin he could not get near me. He shouted at me in Russian: "Throw away that leather!" But I did not pay any attention to him, and he continued shouting until the accusation was nullified. 24

What further strengthens this contention, that Eliezer was in Russia during the Azov Campaign, is the Admor's version. The Admor omits from his tale any shred of information pertaining to the battle that might have led to its identification. He describes the great war in the most general statement possible:

Once the King became embroiled in a great war and he sent for his viceroy to counsel him on tactics of attack and defense. 25

Not even the fact that it was a naval campaign. The Admor most probably knew about the Azov venture of Peter the Great. Shneur Zalman of Lyady, the Admor, lived for many years in Russia. His long and turbulent career had exposed him to Russian culture and politics. The feud between the Hasidim and the Mitnaggedim led to

²⁴Shivhei ha-Besht, pp. 187-8. The source is a reliable one. The story is told by Rabbi Zeev, brother of Rabbi Leib of Ilnitsy and Rabbi Gedaliah.

²⁵Ibid., p. 8.

his imprisonment in the famed fortress of Peter and Paul.²⁶ His philosophy forced him to be a supporter of the Russians against the Poles in 1793-1795, and of Tsar Alexander I in his great war against Napoleon.²⁷ It would be difficult to believe that he had no knowledge of the Azov Campaign Russia's first sea venture. The changes he introduced into his version indicate that indeed he knew for he altered all the recognizable features. The Admor omitted, along with the other details, the information that Eliezer was a sailor on one of the boats. A fact which would have hardly conformed with the image of the pious Eliezer.

Eliezer, like Patrick Gordon, was rewarded for his valuable advice to the King during the maritime campaign. He was given a wife, the viceroy's daughter. However, Eliezer did not consummate the marriage. When the puzzled wife asked for the reason of her husband's strange behavior. Eliezer revealed his secret.

He said to her, "Swear to me that you'll not reveal this to anyone, and I'll tell you the truth." She swore to him, and he told her: "I am a Jew."

²⁶Mordecai Teitelbaum, Ha-Rav mi-Lyady, Hebrew, Warsaw 1910. Reprinted in Israel 1970 Vol. 1, pp. 72-81.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 149-161 as to the attitude of Tsar Alexander regarding Napoleon see Allen McConnell, Tsar Alexander I, New York 1970, pp. 80-116.

She immediately sent him home with a rich treasure of silver and gold. But on the way thieves robbed him and he lost everything that he possessed. 28

While still on his way Elijah the Prophet met him and informed him "Because of the merit of your behavior a son will be born to you who will bring light to Israel..."²⁹ Rabbi Eliezer came back home to his native town, found his former wife and when both were close to a hundred years old a son was born to them whom they named Israel. However, Hasidism in a later period offered a few variations to this story. Eliezer was a very hospitable Jew. He posted sentries at the village edge to be on a constant lookout for the needy. The Prophet Elijah was one of the destitutes who was brought to Eliezer's house. Eliezer fed him, gave him alms and was very patient with him. For his hospitality and charity Elijah revealed his true identity and promised Eliezer a son "who will enlighten all of Israel - this is the Besht."³⁰

No mention of the fact that Eliezer had lived in a foreign country, had been confronted with another culture or that he had had another wife.

²⁸ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 10.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

³⁰ Rahamei ha-Av, Hebrew, Jerusalem 1958 pp. 41-48. First published in Chernovitz, 1865.

It is accepted that both³¹ parents died when the Besht was a small child and he was left alone and desolate. However, Shivhei ha-Besht does not say it. It records only the father's death. The time came for his father to die, and he took his son in his arms and he said, "I see that you will light my candle, and I will not enjoy the pleasure of raising you."³² The death of the mother is not mentioned and indeed later on when the Besh't was in his late twenties or early thirties, the Besht's mother is alive, alert and very active. Prior to his revelation the Besht had combat with a witch. The Besht's prayer set aside the witch's sorcery.

The witch went to the Besht's mother and said to her: "Tell your son to leave me alone; otherwise, I will put a spell on him."

His mother thought that the quarrel between them concerned some debts for brandy, and she said to him: My child, don't bother with that gentile woman because she is a witch.

He said to his mother: "I am not afraid of her." And he continued on his way and prayed for rain.

The witch went to his mother a second time, and after that she sent her demon against him. 33

³¹Dubnow, op. cit., p. 44; Horodezky, op. cit., p. 2; Kahana, op. cit., p. 19 Ben-Sasson EJ op. cit., Vol. 9 ff 1051-1052.

³²Shivhei ha-Besht p. 11.

³³Ibid., p. 123.

The source is doubly reenforced. It is related by Rabbi Gedaliah and Rabbi Alexander Shohet both of whom knew the Besht very well. In a tale following the one cited Rabbi Joseph Ashkenazi is identified as the Besht's stepfather's son-in-law³⁴ raising the possibility that the Besht's mother had even remarried. The source for this story is Rabbi Falk, a man who spent some years in exile in the Crimea together with Joseph Ashkenazi.³⁵ It might suggest that the Besht's mother was much younger at the time of the Besht's birth, than recorded in the Admor's version, or that despite her old age at the Besht's birth she lived after the event for a considerable length of time.³⁶

During his early youth his mother was still alive. However, the people of the town cared for the Besht's education.

After the death of his father the child grew up. Because the people of the town revered the memory of his father, they favored the child and sent him to study with a melamed [a teacher]. And he succeeded in his studies. 37

But the Besht was not the studious type. He would run away from school and spent his time sitting alone in the forest. At the beginning the people of the town

³⁴ Ibid., p. 124.

³⁵ See Chapter II pp. 29-30.

³⁶ In Medzhibozh long after the Besht's death, people still referred to him as "Israel der bobes," Israel the Grandmother's, which may suggest, that his mother lived to a very old age. See: M. Osherowitch, Cities and Towns in the History of the Jews in Russia and the Ukraine, New York, 1948. Vol. I, p. 60.

would bring him back to the melamed, however, in the course of time they gave up in despair and no longer would return him to school.

The Besht, while still very young, hired himself out as a melamed's assistant. He would bring the little children to and from school. He seemed to have liked it very much. While he walked with the children he would sing with them enthusiastically in his very pleasant voice. It was during these walks that his supernatural power became evident. He and the children were being attacked by a werewolf. "He would fight with the beast and kill it in the name of God."³⁸

After that episode the Besht, still in his early teens, became a watchman in the beth-hamidrash (house of study). It was during this period according to the Admor, that the Besht's behavior already indicated his greatness in the future.

This was his way: while all the people of the house of study were awake, he slept; and while they slept, he was awake, doing his pure works of study and prayer until the time came when people would awaken. 39

The Besht, according to the Admor, starts his career as a Nistar (a hidden saint). The secret manuscripts which the Besht received during that period are not mentioned in his tale.

³⁸Ibid., p. 12. The beast was a gentile sorcerer in disguise.

³⁹Ibid., p. 13.

II. The Period of the Secret Manuscripts and the Revelation

The event that was to change the Baal Shem Tov's life took place during the period when he was still a watchman at the beth-hamidrash and a lad of fourteen years of age, the receiving of the secret manuscripts. The manuscripts originally belonged to a man by the name of Rabbi Adam.

I heard the following from Rabbi Samson, the rabbi of the holy community of Raszkow, the son of the rabbi of the holy community of Polonnoye. Once there was a man who was called Rabbi Adam. He was the one from whom the Besht received the manuscripts. Rabbi Adam had found these manuscripts containing the hidden secrets of the torah in a cave.

Once this Rabbi Adam invited the kaiser to come to a banquet and the kaiser promised that he would come. Rabbi Adam lived in a very small house. The feast he intended to serve was one that he had perceived that one king was preparing for another. The preparation had taken two years so that the host could build great palaces. He had constructed a staircase of expensive decorative glass called crystal, beside which ran a small canal in which fish swam back and forth in the water. He prepared table settings of silver and gold, and arranged for food, drink, and servants to honor the visiting king. A date was set for the king to come to the banquet. On that day Rabbi Adam invited the kaiser to dinner. And the kaiser and all the ministers of the court went to the banquet of this Rabbi Adam.

Among these ministers was one who violently hated the Jews. He wanted to persuade the kaiser that if he attended the dinner it would disgrace him, since, as the minister knew, Rabbi Adam had neither palace nor banquet. The kaiser paid no attention and went. While they were on their way, the minister again tried to convince the kaiser to return to the court but was ignored. Nevertheless, the kaiser sent one minister to see

if the banquet preparations had been made and if there was room in Rabbi Adam's house. The messenger returned and said that Rabbi Adam had a small house just as before. The kaiser continued on his way in spite of that, and when he drew near to Rabbi Adam's city, he sent another messenger, who returned with the same information. But when the kaiser came to the street on which Rabbi Adam lived, he saw great palaces and a large courtyard, and he entered the courtyard with all his ministers and servants. Immediately all his servants took the horses to the stables, while palace waiters did the tasks to which they were appointed. All of the palace waiters were mutes. The kaiser's court partook of all the delicacies, and Rabbi Adam said to them: "Eat and drink as much as you like, only let none of you take any of the table settings."

Afterwards, Rabbi Adam said: "Every one who has a wish should say to me - 'I want this or that' - and then put his hand in the pocket of his coat, and he will find what he wished for." The kaiser was first. He wished for something and found it in the pocket of his coat. All the ministers did the same. When it was the turn of the minister who was a Jew hater, he wished for something as well. Rabbi Adam told him: "Put your hand into your pocket." When he put his hand in his pocket, he dirtied his hand and he took it out filthy with human dung. There was a terrible stink and the kaiser ordered him to be removed. He washed his hand with water, but it did not do any good, and he appealed for mercy to Rabbi Adam. Rabbi Adam said to him: "If you swear never to be a Jew hater it will be all right. If not, your hands will be filthy all your life." He swore, and Rabbi Adam told him: "There is only one remedy for you - a Jew must urinate on your hands. You will wash in it and this will help you." And so it happened.

The kaiser took two glasses from one table setting and concealed them in his breast-pocket. After the kaiser went away all the palaces disappeared, and nothing was missing

except those two glasses and what they had eaten and drunk. When the world's newspapers announced the extraordinary event - the disappearance of the palace and the table settings and their return intact except for the missing two glasses and all the food and drink - the kaiser sent a letter to the king in which it was written: "I have a Jew who brought us to your palace and we ate the dinner that you prepared. As a sign I return to you your two glasses."

Once the wife of Rabbi Adam said to him, "How long will we suffer this poverty?"

And he told her, "What is your wish? You can go to the closet and take any coat that you wish from the rod." She went to the closet and took the coat that she liked from the rod and brought it into the house. But he urged her to return the coat. He said to her: "It is better for us to endure poverty in this world." And she returned the coat.

Rabbi Adam prepared a dream-question: To whom should he hand down his manuscripts? He was told to hand them down to Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer of the city of Okopy. Before his death he commanded his only son: "I have manuscripts here which hold the secrets of the Torah. But you do not merit them. Search for the city called Okopy and there you will find a man whose name is Israel ben Eliezer. He is about fourteen years old. You will hand him the manuscripts for they belong to the root of his soul. If you will be fortunate enough to study with him, then so much the better." 41

The name Adam puzzled many. Dubnow pointed out that Adam was "a strange name, it was never used by Jews."⁴² Scholem suggests that it was a fictitious name:

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 13-16.

⁴²Dubnow, op. cit., p. 45.

The name Rabbi Adam which was exceedingly unusual among Jews of that period, seemed to prove that the so called Rabbi was in reality a legendary figure and I am personally inclined to the view that the whole story of his literary heritage was a figment of the imagination. 43

Scholem associates the manuscripts with Rabbi Heshel Zoref a Sabbatian prophet who lived in Vilna and died in Cracow about 1700. Scholem identifies the manuscripts as being Sefer ha-Zoref by Heshel Zoref.⁴⁴ The Besht ordered it copied by his disciple Shabbetai of Raszkow. Copies of the book were found in the courts of several Zaddikim.⁴⁵ But nowhere in Shivhei ha-Besht is the name Heshel Zoref mentioned nor his literary heritage.

Shmeruk partially solved the mystery of Rabbi Adam. He discovered at the Bodleian library of Oxford a small Yiddish pamphlet published in the 17th century. It relates the miracles performed by Rabbi Adam before a Kaiser. According to these tales Adam Baal Shem was born in Bingen near Worms; however, his permanent place of residence was Prague.⁴⁶ According to Shmeruk the stories about Rabbi Adam

⁴³Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, op. cit., p. 331.

⁴⁴G. Scholem, "Adam Baal Shem Tov" in EJ op. cit., Vol. 11, ff 247-8; G. Scholem "Ha-Tenuah ha-Shabbatait be-Polin" Hebrew, in Beit Israel be-Polin ed. by Israel Halpern, Jerusalem 1953 Vol. 11 pp. 48-51.

⁴⁵Wolf (Zeev) Rabinowitch, Lithuanian Hasidism Hebrew, Jerusalem 1961, pp. 172-176.

⁴⁶Shmeruk "Tales About R' Adam Baal Shem in the Versions of Shivhei Ha'Besht" op. cit., pp. 86-106.

reached Podolia and found their way into the pages of Shivhei ha-Besht. "The author of Shivhei ha-Besht or the creator of the legends about the Baal Shem Tov modified the character of these writings and attributed them to Adam Baal Shem."⁴⁷ It is Shmeruk's opinion that when dealing with legends one should not always seek to establish the existence of the legendary character as an actual personality. In this case to verify the historical existence of Rabbi Adam. Shmeruk's claim is indeed a very valid one, but not within the framework of Shivhei ha-Besht so far each event mentioned in Shivhei ha-Besht which was researched, was verified historically. And each person mentioned in the books could be accounted for from different sources. More so the very tale of Rabbi Adam which was accepted till quite recently as a figment of the Hasidic imagination was based upon an older manuscript discovered by Shmeruk himself!

Since the pattern of accountability was established in the research of Shivhei ha-Besht the Adam tale should be given more care. A careful reading of the tale reveals that the Adam tale consists of two major layers. One layer incorporates the main body of the story, the tale about Rabbi Adam and the

⁴⁷Scholem, "Adam Baal Shem in EJ. op. cit., Vol. 11 ff 248.

miracles he performed before the Kaiser and Adam's wife. This is the main part of the tale and corresponds to the pamphlet discovered by Shmeruk. However, the opening section of the Rabbi Adam tale and the conclusion belong to a different period. These two sections deal with the secret manuscripts, Rabbi Adam's son and the Besht. They form the second layer of the story and were attached to the now older tale about Rabbi Adam Baal Shem but belong to the period of Beshtian Hasidism. In the older version there is no mention of the secret manuscripts.⁴⁸ Why then was Hasidism compelled to combine the two tales?

Adam was not a common Jewish name during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and could not be accounted for as a real living person, in Jewish sources. Adam is the name of a prominent man of letters who lived in the Ukraine during the last decades of the seventeenth century. A man who among his many accomplishments also wrote a few books on religion:

Judging from his faith and knowledge, no one within the Provoslavik faith was more worthy of praise and honor than Adam Zernikov, who was almost un-noticed in his time. He was born abroad and educated within the Lutheran Church, also studying

⁴⁸ Joseph Dan, Ha-Novella ha-Hasidit op. cit., pp. 16-17.

in various western universities. Adam became dissatisfied with the Lutheran Church, which was divided into many sects. 49

He therefore turned to the Greek Orthodox church, left for Russia and settled in Chernigov.⁵⁰ Adam was born in Koenigsberg in 1652 and attended the city's famed university. He was a student of Christian Dreier and Melchoir Zeidler (1630-1686). His student years coincided with the height of the Syncretic controversy⁵¹ and its ideas of a Universal Church.⁵² Both of his teachers were among the chief spokesmen for the movement. Disappointed with the theological conflict and feeling a growing interest in the Eastern churches, Adam, at the age of nineteen left Koenigsberg for Jena. In addition to philosophy and theology he pursued the studies of Roman Law, medicine, physics and astronomy.

⁴⁹ Filaret, Istoria russkoi tserkvi, Russian Charkow, 1853, Vol. IV p. 144.

⁵⁰ Chernigov is in the Ukraine to the northeast of Podolia. Adam assumed the name of the city and is sometimes called Adam Chernigovski. See: Brockhouse Encyclopaedia, Russia. St. Petersburg, 1890, Vol. I p. 163.

⁵¹ Von Selle Gotz, Geschichte der Albertus Universitat zu Koenigsberg in Preussen, German, Wurzburg, 1956, pp. 93-110.

⁵² G.J. Jordan, The Reunion of the Churches - a study of G.W. Leibnitz and His great Attempt, London, 1927.

started to search for Russians in Europe. In his search he traveled to Paris, Lyon, Turin, Bologna, Venice and Padua.⁵³ His travels were in vain for he did not meet any Russians, a rare commodity on the European scene, prior to the days of Peter the Great. After extensive travels in Eastern Europe he arrived in Russia.

Adam was warmly welcomed by the leading church authorities after a short period of time and a splendid ceremony Adam was accepted into the Orthodox church. For a while he lived in the serenity of the Baturinsky monastery. However, it seems that the restless Adam did not find the solace he longed for. He left the Baturinsky monastery to become chief adviser on military affairs to the Hetman of Baturin.⁵⁴

The geographical location, Adam's preoccupation with religion, his acting in the capacity of the chief military adviser at about the same place and time that Eliezer lived, might suggest that Adam met and knew Eliezer and befriended him during his captivity in Russia and military venture.⁵⁵ Parts from the Adam

⁵³Adam Zernikov, De Processine Spiritus Sancti A Suo Patre. Biography and Russian trans. by Mislavski, Kiev, 1774, p. 13.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁵Yaffa Eliach, "Russian Dissenting Sects and Their Influence on Israel Baal Shem Tov, Founder of Hasidism" in Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research New York 1968 Vol. XXXVI, pp. 67-70. Scholem questions this theory. See Scholem, "Adam Baal Them" in EJ op. cit., Vol. 11 ff. 248.

tale in Shivhei ha-Besht seem to support this claim. When Adam instructs his son to deliver the manuscripts to the Besht, his information about the Besht is very accurate.

Search for the city called Okopy and there you will find a man whose name is Israel ben Eliezer. He is about fourteen years old. 56

This is the most precise information we have on the Besht's early youth and the only place where Okopy is mentioned with regard to the Besht's boyhood. The town came to be regarded, based on this information, as the Besht's place of birth. It is not stated explicitly in Shivhei ha-Besht. From his accurate instructions to his son, it seems that Adam knew about Eliezer and his son Israel. This personal data as to name, age, father's name and place of residence, one may attribute to the possibility that Adam knew Eliezer well and had maintained contact with him and his family. Shivhei ha-Besht is also aware of Adam's accurate knowledge but attributes it to a divine revelation.⁵⁷

Rabbi Adam's son after much traveling reaches Okopy and delivers the manuscripts to the Besht as instructed by his later father. While in Okopy Adam's son gets married. Both of them, the Besht and Rabbi Adam's son study together the secret manuscripts, not

⁵⁶Shivhei ha-Besht p. 15.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 15.

in the beth-hamidrash, but rather in complete seclusion. Rabbi Adam's son asked his father-in-law to obtain for him a separate house outside of the city.⁵⁸ His father-in-law complied with his wish. The association between Adam's son and the Besht pleased the people of Okopy:

When the people of the community saw that our teacher Israel was studying with Rabbi Adam's son, they said that it was probably on account of Israel's father that Rabbi Adam's son came here to care for Israel. It seemed to them that Israel was behaving in the right way. And so they gave him a wife... 59

However they did not study for a long period in the house of seclusion. Due to a mishap Adam's son dies. The two young wives also die. After the events the Besht becomes the sole possessor of the manuscripts.

The source for the Rabbi Adam tale is Rabbi Samson of Raszkov, son of Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye. Both father and son knew the Besht very well. The Besht's warm relations with Rabbi Samson can be seen from a concluding remark in a letter that the Besht sent to Samson's father:

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 17. The above story may suggest that the people in the community knew about Eliezer's association with the important R'Adam. It is only after Adam's son takes care of him that they find the Besht worthy of having a wife.

Best wishes to your only son, the famous
rabbi, my friend, his honor, our teacher,
Samson, and his heir who is a friend of
our rabbi and teacher... 60

Yet the Admor ignores the Rabbi Adam tale just as he ignored the maritime venture of Eliezer. He does not include it in his sequence of events regarding the life of the Besht from his father's exile till after the revelation. It was the printer who could not resist the temptation of telling a good story and included the Rabbi Adam tale. One may only speculate as to the calculations of the Admor. It seems that the same motivations that prompted the Admor to modify the story of Eliezer's years in exile guided him in ignoring the Rabbi Adam tale. Both tales might suggest close ties between the Besht's family and non-Jewish elements.

From the time he became the sole possessor of the manuscripts "the Besht took another path"⁶¹ and left Okopy.

After his departure from Okopy he remained in the vicinity of Brodý; where he became a successful melamed and was sometimes instrumental in settling

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

⁶¹ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 18.

disputes and arguments.⁶² While it is not mentioned in Shivhei ha-Besht at this period of his life.

Another source indicates that the Besht was also a Shohet⁶³ (a ritual slaughterer of animals and poultry). He then met and befriended your Meir Margolioth, later a famous Talmudic scholar. Rabbi Meir always considered the Besht a colleague and a teacher.⁶⁴

It was during this period that a marriage was arranged between the Besht and the divorced daughter of Rabbi Ephraim⁶⁵ of Kutty. However, after the marriage contract was signed, the bride's father fell sick and died. His son Rabbi Gershon of Kutty⁶⁶ received all of his father's papers and among them he found the engagement contract. Rabbi Gershon was amazed that his father, who was a famous man, had made a match with a person of low rank and moreover, with someone whose background and family line were unknown.

⁶²Ibid., p. 19.

⁶³At a later period in the Besht's life. It is mentioned in Shivhei ha-Besht that he was a Shohet. Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 42, 45.

⁶⁴Jacob Margolioth, Kevutzat Yaacov, Hebrew, Peremyshlyany, 1897, p. 61; Meir Margolioth, Sod Yakhim u-Voaz, Hebrew Ostrog, 1794 p. 71. Reprinted in London, 1955, p. 6.

⁶⁵Should be Ephraim and not Abraham as stated in Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 19-21. See Horodezky, Ha-Hasidut ve-Hahasidim. Op. cit., pp. 5-6.

⁶⁶Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 19-21; for a biographical study of Rabbi Gershon of Kutty see, Abraham J. Heschel, "Rabbi Gershon of Kutty, His Life and Immigration to the Land of Israel," Hebrew, Hebrew Union College Annual XXIII, pt. 2 1950-1951, 17-71.

After the Besht had finished his term of teaching, he disguised himself by putting on clothes like those worn by loafers.

He put on a short coat and a broad belt, he changed his demeanour and manner of speech, and went to the holy community of Brody to the house of the rabbi, our master and rabbi, Rabbi Gershon. . . . The Besht told him, I have a secret to tell you. They went to a room and the Besht showed him the engagement contract and said: Give me my wife. 66

Rabbi Gershon, the Admor tells us, did not realize that the Besht was a hidden saint. Only to his bride, prior to the wedding ceremony, did he reveal his true nature. He made her swear that she would not reveal his true identity. Real or a put-on, Rabbi Gershon seemed very disturbed by his brother-in-law's ignorance and was more than happy to send him away.

Really, I am disgraced by your husband, and if you want to divorce him, it is acceptable to me. If not, I will buy you a horse, and you may go and lodge with him wherever he will lodge. I cannot bear his shame. 67

With his secret manuscripts, the Besht, his wife and perhaps his mother left Brody and its vicinity.

From then till the time he discarded his secret manuscripts, according to the earlier version, and till his revelation according to the Admor's tale

⁶⁶ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 21.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

The Besht lived intermittently apart from the Jewish community. For seven years he lived in solitude in the mountains.⁶⁸ And for some time he led the life of an ascetic fasting for long periods. He would cross the river Prut⁶⁹ and retire into seclusion in a houselike crevice that was cut into the mountains. To support his family the Besht would quarry clay and his wife would cart it to town,⁷⁰ or he made his living by keeping a tavern and after bringing brandy to his wife he would again return to his seclusion.⁷¹ When not working he would walk the mountains in deep meditation unaware of a deep chasm between them. But as he moved towards them, "the ground became level."⁷² Many times he encountered robbers who wished to kill him but his supernatural powers saved him.

⁶⁸The Name of Mountains is not mentioned in Shivhei ha-Besht See Dov Noy, "The Baal-Shem Tov Legend in The Carpathian Mountains." Hebrew, Machanayim, No. 46 June 1960.

⁶⁹Shivhei ha-Besht p. 34. The Admor in his tale does not identify any place which was not directly connected with the Jewish community. The source for this particular information is Alexander Shohet.

⁷⁰Shivhei ha-Besht p. 22.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 34.

⁷²Ibid., p. 22.

When not in the mountains the Besht also rented a house from a gentile and he spent much of his time in the house of seclusion.⁷³ At his own home he behaved very much like a local peasant and would not change that behavior even when visited by Jews. "The Besht lay with his wife in the same bed like a peasant."⁷⁴ His table manners were those of a local peasant "They sat down at the table to eat, and in the way of peasants his wife sat next to him."⁷⁵ It seems that already during this period the Besht was a practicing Baal Shem.⁷⁶ He would expel demons⁷⁷ and evil spirits (lezim) pray for rain,⁷⁸ cure the sick foretell the future and even challenge a witch.⁷⁹

While not tending the sick or busying himself with other chores, the Besht would spend a great deal of his time in seclusion studying his secret manuscripts, in his house of seclusion or at his own home at midnight. From the time of Rabbi Adam's son's death

⁷³Shivhei ha-Besht p. 43.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 30, 45.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 30.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 123.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 35, 37.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 35-36, 123.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 123, 129; Joseph Perl, Hasidic Tales and Letters, Hebrew-Yiddish, Introduction and annotation by Chone Shmeruk and Samuel Werses, Jerusalem 1969 pp. 168-172.

nobody was allowed even to catch a glimpse of these manuscripts, despite the fact that such attempts were made. Once Rabbi David, the Maggid of Kolomyya, wandered off his path and came to the Besht's house. The Besht was in his house of seclusion. When Rabbi David asked for the Besht his wife told him that he had gone to help the arrendator (a Polish term, a farmer who leased out land, mills, inns, etc., at fixed rents) water the stock. Never revealing that the Besht was only a few steps away in his house of seclusion. However, later on, Rabbi David met the Besht.

In the middle of the night the Besht arose. I heard that generally he slept but two hours. He sat at the base of the oven, and he did whatever he did in secret.

The Maggid, Rabbi David, woke up and saw a great light beneath the oven, and he thought that the logs on the oven had been kindled and were burning. . . . When he came to the oven he saw the Besht sitting and there was light shining above him. The rabbi told me personally that the light shone above the Besht like a rainbow. When the Maggid saw he fainted. Hannah had to rouse the Besht to revive the Maggid from his faint. 80

Rabbi David realized the greatness of the Besht and became his follower. But the Besht had forbidden him to reveal anything.

⁸⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 45-46.

On another occasion another Jew was forced to spend the Sabbath in the Besht's house, since his wagon broke and he could not repair it before the Sabbath. The pattern of that story is very similar to the Rabbi David incident. When the visitor, Rabbi Gershon's student, asked as to the Besht's whereabouts the Besht's wife replied that "He is in the field with the sheep and the cows."⁸¹ The Besht was at the time at his house of seclusion. Like Rabbi David, he too saw a strange sight.

At midnight the guest awoke and saw a large fire burning on the oven. He ran to the oven because he thought that the wood on the oven was burning. He saw a great light-then he was hurled backward and he fainted. They revived him and the Besht said: "You should not have looked at what is not permitted you. 82

This student like Rabbi David became a follower of the Besht. Despite the identical pattern of the two stories there is subtle difference. In the Alexander Shohet tale we know details about the visitor - Rabbi David. In the other tale, told by the Admor, the visitor is identified merely as a student of Rabbi Gershon, no name is given. This student is also instrumental to the Besht's revelation before the sect of the Great Hasidim of Brody.⁸³ In the Shohet

⁸¹Ibid., p. 29.

⁸²Ibid., p. 30.

⁸³Ibid., p. 31.

tale only Rabbi David himself becomes a follower of that "certain poor, ragged man."⁸⁴ The Admor's intention to establish the Besht's contacts with a respected Jewish community, in this case Brody, is indeed remarkable.

Yet the older sources point toward different contacts. While occasionally the Besht met Jews, he also mingled with the local gentile population. During one winter he even rented his house of seclusion from a gentile.

That winter the Besht rented his house of seclusion in the village from a gentile, and the Besht's wife went to her husband to ask him whether or not she could buy the furs. 85

His manners closely resembled those of the local population. He spoke, ate dressed and slept like them. On the Sabbath he would wear white garments. He administered his medical know-how to the local population. While at no point is there a clear statement as to the identification of the gentile population, there are strong indications that they were Russians. Podolia even when under Ottoman (1672-1699) and Polish (1699-1772) occupation was inhabited by Cossacks.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 46.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁶Menahem Nahum, Litinski, Korot Podolia ve-Kadmoniyot ha-Yehudim Sham, Hebrew, Odessa 1895 pp. 16, 22-27.

At least on one occasion a gentile is identified as a Cossack and a gentile-woman, the miller's wife, spoke Russian.⁸⁷ As to the religion of the local population

Shivhei ha-Besht records the following story:

One gentile asked: Why did you remain at prayer so long today? And why was there a great cry among you?" The arrendator told him the truth - that they prayed for rain - and the gentile mocked him sharply, saying, "we went around with our idols and it did not help. What help will you bring with your prayers?" 88

It was a common practice among Russian Provoslavs in time of drought to march around with icons and pray for rain.⁸⁹ When the time came for the Besht to reveal himself, he left the gentile communities never, till his very last day was he to sever his ties with the Christian society. It was then, when the Besht left the countryside, that he was ready to part with his secret manuscripts forever and to reveal himself.

At the revelation, as at the other major events during the Besht's first thirty-six years, there are the two concurrent versions in Shivhei ha-Besht, the Admor's version and the other one. According to the Admor the Besht revealed himself and

⁸⁷ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 37.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

⁸⁹ A practice common until the Revolution.

was accepted by the Sect of the Great Hasidim of
[Brody]

Afterwards, he [The Behst] commanded his guest to go to our master and rabbi, Rabbi Gershon, but he was not to reveal anything. He was to go instead to the Sect of the Great Hasidim in the town, and also to the rabbi of the community, and say these words: "There is a great light living near your community, and it will be worthwhile for you to seek him out and bring him to the town."

When all the Hasidim and the rabbi heard these things, they decided that it must refer to the Besht. They recalled their questions about him, which now seemed clear. All of them went to his village to invite him to come to town. The Besht had foreseen what would happen and he went toward the town as they were going out to see him. When they encountered each other they all went to a place in the forest where they made a chair out of the branches of trees. They placed him on the chair and accepted him as their Rabbi. And the Besht said torah to them. 90

The Admor's tale rests after relating that the Besht had revealed himself before and had been accepted by one of the most respected group of scholars and mystics of the Jewish community of Brody.

The acceptance of the Besht by the Brody scholars as told by the Admor, troubled many. Dinur⁹¹ is very much aware of the fact that the episode in Shivhei ha-Besht was told in such a way as to form

⁹⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 30-31.

⁹¹ Benzion Dinur [Dinaburg] Historical Writings [Be-Mipneh ha-Dorot] Hebrew, Jerusalem 1955 pp. 160-170.

impression, that the Besht at his very early stages was accepted by the Brody "Sect of the Great Hasidim" a group known for its erudition in traditional Jewish sources and its unblemished behavior. Dinur accounts for the story by the fact that Brody indeed had groups who were inclined towards Hasidism, and he conceived these members to be the historical nucleus for this legend.⁹² Gelber doubts very much the story in Shivhei ha-Besht. It is on record that two among the most prominent scholars of the Brody, Klaus, Rabbi Hayyim Tsenzer and the noted Rabbi Ezekiel Landau (1713-1793) both vigorously opposed the Besht. Therefore he concludes that with the exception of Rabbi Gershon of Kutzy the Besht's brother-in-law who turned from a staunch opponent to an ardent admirer.

The rest of the scholars of the Klaus had a negative attitude towards the Besht, despite his great efforts to win them over. Therefore it is difficult to accept the story that we are told in Shivhei ha-Besht that the Sect of the Great Hasidim of the city (Brody) recognized Israel Besht and accepted him as their rabbi, as a valid historical fact. 93

⁹²For Scholem's response to this theory see Gershon Scholem [Shalom] "The Two First Testimonies, On the Relations Between Chassidic Groups and Baal Shem Tov," Hebrew, Tarbiz, XX, 1949 p. 228.

⁹³Nathan M. Gelber, Toldot Yehudei Brody, Hebrew, in Arim Ve-Yimahot be-Israel Judah Loeb Fishman, ed., Vol. IV Jerusalem 1955 p. 110.

Scholem is more cautious. He points out that during different periods of his career the Besht had labored to establish good relations between himself and the prominent scholars of Brody, a fact which can be very well supported from Shivhei ha-Besht.⁹⁴ His efforts however were not always appreciated. The Besht's prize student, Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Pollonoye complained about the negative attitude of the people of Brody. He tells a parable about a "big city of scholars and authors (Sofrim) that refused to listen to the wisdom and moral teachings"⁹⁵ of his teacher when he was in their vicinity. While neither city nor the teacher are mentioned by name it is quite clear to whom the reference was made.⁹⁶ But it seems that not all of his effort was in vain; at least one of the scholars from the Brody Klaus revered the Besht. When offering his own exegesis on a certain phrase Rabbi Abraham Noah Heller says:

⁹⁴Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 80, 112, 191, 250.

⁹⁵Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, Zafnat Paaneah, Hebrew, Korets, 1782 p. 20a.

⁹⁶Scholem, "The Two First Testimonies on the Relations Between Chassidic Groups and Baal-Shem-Tov. op. cit., p. 228.

After I wrote this, I heard the same explanation offered in the name of the Hasid Rabbi Israel Besht and I rejoiced over it. 97

Still other Brody notables were related, through marriage, to the Besht and his close circle. Rabbi Gershon of Kutny and Brody was the Besht's brother-in-law. The Rabbi Hayyim of Tsenzer of the Brody Klantz was related to Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye and the second prominent scholar of the famed Klaus. Rabbi Moshe Ouster was related to Rabbi Gershon of Kutny.⁹⁸

The Admor most probably was aware of the Besht's efforts in courting the scholars of Brody and some measure of his success at different stages. He tells the revelation story before the "Sect of the Great Hasidim" in such a way that the chronological order of the events and their scope, as to the time and number of people who favored the Besht, is of no significance. The opposition to the Besht is completely ignored. At this stage of research of Beshtian Hasidism there is a need of periodization as to all the events of the "touch and go" relations between the Besht and the community of Brody. As to

⁹⁷ Rabbi Avraham Noah Heller, Zerizuta de-Avraham Hebrew, Lvov 1900 p. 5a written in 1759 according to the authors own statement. See Scholem. "Demuto ha-Historit Shel R'Israel Baal Shem Tov." op. cit., p. 344.

⁹⁸ Scholem Ibid., p. 344.

the reliability of Shivhei ha-Besht with regards to this particular story, one should keep in mind that the source of the tale of revelation in Brody was the Admor, the man who labored so hard to bestow upon the founder of Hasidism the halo of a worthy scholar being accepted at the very early stages of his career, at the very time of the revelation itself, by the prominent scholars of Brody. The same reasons that prompted the Admor to ignore the sea-going venture of Rabbi Eliezer, the Rabbi Adam tale and the secret manuscripts, impelled him to tell the revelation tale in the fashion that he did. Scholem with his special insight into Hasidic literature also sensed the peculiarities of the Admor's stories:

The tale is fabricated from head to tail, and is found in the most fantastic section of Shivhei ha-Besht, that has no historical basis. In these stories that the printer added from manuscripts and which he heard "in the name" of R'. Shneur Zalman of Lyady. And as the irony of the Muse of Literature would have it, it was he who contributed the most unrealistic part of Shivhei ha-Besht. 99

The other version in Shivhei ha-Besht, the older one, since it was told by Alexander Shohet the Besht's personal scribe, has quite a different tale to tell.

⁹⁹ Scholem [Shalom], "The Two First Testimonies on the Relations Between the Chassidic Groups and the Baal-Shem-Tov" op. cit., p. 228.

Afterwards the Besht moved to the holy community of Tlust, and he was a melamed there as well. At first he could not assemble a minyan [a quorum of ten adult men] in his home, and so he gathered around him a group of people and prayed with them. He was so poor that he wore only a short, woolen winter coat, and his toes stuck out through the holes in his shoes. He used to go to the mikveh [ritual bathhouse] before praying, even in the month of Tevet. While he was praying, perspiration drops the size of large beans would fall from him. Later on, several sick people came to him, but he refused to see them. Then once a madman or a madwoman was brought to him and he refused to see him. That night they told him that he was already thirty-six years old, and in the morning he calculated his age and found that they were correct. He saw that madman and cured him. He left teaching and accepted my father-in-law, God bless his memory, as his scribe. And people came to him from everywhere. 100

The difference is immense. In the Alexander Shohet tale there are no renowned Jewish scholars, no welcoming committee, no chair made out of branches and no fanfare at all. Just a simple crude tale about a young poor melamed whose revelation is almost accidental and brought about by the request of a madwoman or a madman to be cured. It is then at night "they told him that he was thirty-six." And after his own calculations in the morning he found it to be so and revealed himself.

¹⁰⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 36.

Before this simple revelation took place, the Besht parted forever from his secret manuscripts, the other crucial event ignored by the Admor.

The Besht had sealed Rabbi Adam's manuscripts in a stone in a mountain. When he said some secret words the stone opened and he placed the manuscripts inside. Then it closed. He placed a watchman there. The rabbi of our community said that when the preacher of Polonnoye was old he said: "I have the power to take the manuscripts from there since I know their hiding place, but because it was the Besht who sealed them up I do not want to take them." He said, "It was only the fifth time that those manuscripts had been revealed." He said "They were in the hands of Abraham the Patriach, may he rest in peace, and in the hands of Joshua, the son of Nun, but I do not know the others." 101

The manuscripts came to be regarded by Scholem and others as of Sabbatean origin, and were identified especially with the Heshel Zoref Book. Indeed Poddia was a hot house for kabbalistic teachings¹⁰² and a region where subsequently Sabbatianism was successful in its influences. Podolia for a significant number of years was dominated by Turkey (1672-1699). When

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 31-32.

¹⁰²Gershon Scholem, Shabbetai Zevi Hebrew, Tel Aviv 1957 2 vol. pp. 62-74, 493-502, 642-643; Gershon Scholem [Shalom] "Ha-Tenuah ha-Shabbait be-Polin," in Hebrew Beit Israel be-Polin ed., Israel Halpern, Jerusalem 1953 Vol. II pp. 36-76.

not under Ottoman rule commercial relations between the Podolian Jews and their co-religionists in the Balkans and Turkey were maintained. As late as 1722, there was still a need to combat Sabbatean influence in Podolia and a Herem (a ban) was proclaimed against the sect in its major towns.¹⁰³

Scholem and his school maintain that much of this Sabbatean fermentation served as the ideological basis for Israel Baal Shem Tov and for some of his followers among them the Great Maggid himself. The Sabbatean literature widely in circulation was crucial, according to the same school, to the establishment of Hasidism. Tishby¹⁰⁴ maintains that the Besht's dependence on Sabbatean sources might have been such that he himself was ignorant as to the true nature of the sources. The dependence however is a fact. The Baal Shem Tov, Tishby points out, read and knew the works of at least one Sabbatean, Rabbi Koppel, the brother of Rabbi Hayyim Lipschutz. The Besht revered Rabbi Koppel's book Shaar gan Eden, as well as

¹⁰³Menahem N. Litinski, Korot Podolia ve-Kadmoniyot ha-Yehudim Sham op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁰⁴Isiah Tishby Netivei Emunah u-Minnut, Hebrew Ramat Gan, 1964 especially pp. 205-226.

his prayer book.¹⁰⁵ Tishby has proved that Rabbi Koppel was a Sabbatean. It is in this contact between the Besht and the writings of Rabbi Koppel that Tishby locates the "living bridge" between Sabbateanism and Hasidism, the reflection of the entire contact between the dying Sabbatean movement and the emerging group of the New Hasidim.¹⁰⁶ This friendly attitude of early Hasidism towards Sabbateanism¹⁰⁷ will account for the fact that the Heshel Zoref Book was found in Hasidic possession.

One must indeed allow for Sabbatean influences and other kabbalistic writings on early Hasidism, ignoring them would amount to ignoring the important segments of the reality of Podolian life during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The Besht himself disliked intensely anything that he suspected of being connected with Sabbateanism, either Sabbatean practices,¹⁰⁸ literature¹⁰⁹ or Sabbetai

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 215-226.

¹⁰⁷ Tishby points out the fact that Rabbi Aaron of Karlin's Beit Aaron contains a Sabbatean prayer. See Beit Aaron op. cit., pp. 12-15.

¹⁰⁸ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 192.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 85-86; For the controversy regarding the book Hemdath ha-Yamin condemned by the Besht as a book written by a member of Sabbatean sect. See Abraham Yaari, Taalumat Sefer, Hebrew, Jerusalem 1959; Isaiah Tishby, "Sources of Hemdath Hayyamin," Hebrew, Tarbiz XXV 1955 pp. 66-92; Shivhei ha-Besht p. 323 Tale 64.

Zevi himself. Yet one story in Shivhei ha-Besht may suggest otherwise:

Rabbi Joel told me, in addition, that Shabbetai Tsevi came to the Besht to ask for redemption. Rabbi Joel said these words: "The tikkun [the restoration of the scattered sparks of God] is done through the connection of soul with soul, spirit with spirit, and breath with breath." The Besht began to establish the connection moderately. He was afraid as Shabbetai Tsevi was a terribly wicked man. Once the Besht was asleep, and Shabbetai Tsevi, may his name be blotted out came and attempted to tempt him again, God forbid. With a mighty thrust the Besht hurled him to the bottom of hell. The Besht peered down and saw that he landed on the same pallet with Jesus.

Rabbi Joel said that the Besht said that Shabbetai Tsevi had a spark of holiness in him, but that Satan caught him in his snare God forbid. 110

This episode may suggest that indeed there was a time in the Besht's career that he was "tempted" by Sabbetai Zevi and it took quite a struggle on the Besht's part to rid himself of that temptation, for he, the Besht could see that Sabbetai Zevi had a spark of holiness in him.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 86-87.

¹¹¹ For its ideological implications see Joseph Weiss, "Beginnings of Hassidism" Hebrew, Zion Vol. XVI, 1951 pp. 78-79.

The Sabbatean mood of the time looms largely in the research of Beshtian Hasidism and tends to overshadow, exclude and ignore other realities of Podolian society. Dinur did indeed elaborate on one segment of that reality, the social and messianic elements in early Hasidism¹¹² but it too is inwardly directed. The Besht's firm and long contacts with the Podolian gentile population call for the examination of additional factors of that reality. The nature of the manuscripts in the Besht's possession and the utmost secrecy imposed upon them by the Besht himself seem to suggest that they were other than Sabbatean or were Kabbalistic manuscripts. Whenever the Besht dealt with Sabbatean writings even Tishby will agree to the fact that the Besht was ignorant of their Sabbatean nature. As in the case of Shaar Gan Eden, when he was aware of the Sabbatean origins of a book, his reaction was negative and violent like the incident with the Hemdat ha-Yamin, the book was wrapped in a filthy rag and put under the table.¹¹³ With regard to the secret manuscripts it is quite clear that he was aware of their nature and their origin.

¹¹² Benzion Dinur, Be-Mifneh ha-Dorot, op. cit., pp. 83-227.

¹¹³ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 85-86.

He never studied them in the company of a person known to be a Sabbatean in his own time or later discovered or unmasked as such by present day scholars. The identification of the Sabbatean prophet Heshel Zoref with Rabbi Adam, as shown above¹¹⁴ does not stand the test of time and the research of Shivhei ha-Besht. Yet the attitude of the Besht towards the secret manuscripts and his behavior strike a remarkable note of similarity to the attitude of another group towards their literature, the writings of the Russian schismatics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

With the Great schism of 1667, Russian schismatics (Raskolniks) became a prominent force in Russian history. The event had proven to be a point of no return in Russia's religious history. The split between the official church and the Dissenters was permanent. In a way, it was a Russian Reformation taking place about a century later after the European event. Patriarch Nikon compared the situation in Russia to that produced by the "Latin heresies" in the West, lamenting that "we have come to those times when we [priests] are fighting one another like people."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ pp. 62-65.

¹¹⁵ quoted in Billington, The Icon and the Axe. op. cit., p. 155.

It was he himself, Nikon, who set the struggle in motion. Early in 1653, a few months after his elevation to the Patriarchal throne Nikon issued a new psalter and a set of supplementary instructions introducing changes in the ritual. A group of clergymen led by Archpriest Avvakum raised their voices in opposition. Nikon¹¹⁶ ignored them and plunged forward with his reforms. Initially the opposition to Nikon was based on opposition to liturgical reforms like re-editing the missal, changing the ritual and the correction of ecclesiastical texts to bring them into closer conformity with those of the contemporary Greeks. Nikon himself declared at the Council of 1656: "Although I am a Russian, and the son of a Russian, my faith and convictions are Greek."¹¹⁷ Avvakum and other opponents of the Nikonian reforms advocated retention of the Russian form of the ancient

¹¹⁶For Nikon's career and the Nikonian Reforms see N.F. Kapterev, Patriarkh Nikon i Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, Russian 2 vols. Sergiev Posad, 1909, 1912; W. Palmer, The Patriarch and the Tsar 6 vols. London, 1871-1876.

¹¹⁷Quoted in Paul Miliukov, Religion and Church in Russia P.I. N.Y. 1960 p. 35.

texts and rites. While these originally had been introduced into Russia from Greece, they had acquired a specific national character after seven centuries of Russification.¹¹⁸ The dispute over seemingly trivial matters, carried the Old Believers, as Avvakum's followers came to be known into opposition to the Russian State and church. The movement became a rallying point for the discontent and the dispossessed of the Muscovite society.

The populist historians of the nineteenth century viewed the Raskol primarily as a movement of political, social and cultural opposition.

A.P. Shchapov the dean of the populist historians and himself from a sectarian background,

¹¹⁸The particular tenets on which the Old Belief differed from those of the Orthodox church were 1) services must be conducted according to the pre-Nikonian books. 2) The eight articles of the creed must read "And in the Holy Ghost the true Lord and Giver of Life. 3) "Alleluia" must be said twice and not thrice. 4) Church processions must go with the sun, not against it. 5) The sign of the cross must be made with two fingers, not three fingers. 6) The only cross to be honored is the eight-pointed. 7) The name of Jesus Christ must be written and pronounced Isus not Iisus. 8) The liturgy must be celebrated with seven prosphorae instead of five. To mention the initial essential differences at the beginning of the Schism.

saw the religious dispute not as the cause of the split but rather the catalyst which set in motion the focus of discontent in the Muscovite society.¹¹⁹ The government of Tsar Alexis (1645-1675) introduced far reaching changes in the Russian society. The National Assembly (Zemskii Sobor) approved the new code of laws of 1649 - The Ulozhenie.¹²⁰ It completed the enserfment of the Russian peasantry¹²¹ and bound the urban taxpayers to the town in which they were legally registered. The code also established a new category of crimes, that of political crimes.¹²²

¹¹⁹A.P. Shchapov, "Zemstvo i raskol" in Sochineniia A.P. Shchapova, I. Russian St. Petersburg, 1906 pp. 451-579; V.V. Andreev, Raskol i ego znachenie, Russian St. Petersburg 1870.

¹²⁰For the Russian text of the Ulozhenie see Sobornoe Ulozhenie Tsaria Alekseia Mikhailovicha 1649 Ggda Pamiatniki russkogo prava, Russian, VI Moscow, 1957 especially Chapter II; English translation in Richard Hellie ed., Readings for Introduction to Russian Civilization: Muscovite Society Chicago 1967, pp. 55-56, 215-216.

¹²¹Jerome Blum, Lord and Peasant in Russia, New York 1964 pp. 262-266.

¹²²Michael Cherniavsky, "Old Believers and the New Religion" Slavic Review Vol. XXV No. 1, 1966, p. 12.

The Raskol, according to the populist historians, represented "general popular opinion and its desire to preserve, if nothing more, popular customs and institutions against the encroachment of the centralizing and bureaucratizing state."¹²³ The religious issues merely provided the oppressed with the opportunity to express their discontent and protest against the social, political changes and the ever increasing importations from the West; clothes, customs and institutions.¹²⁴

This fellowship of discontent, united in its opposition to the state, grew in scope and dimension. At first the government hoped to curb the spread of the movement by exiling its leader Avvakum to Siberia. In 1662 he was permitted to return to Moscow after nine years of exile.¹²⁵ In 1682 the government in fear of the popularity of the movement ordered the Avvakum and three other leaders be burned at the stake. In order to escape the Russian authorities the Old Believers

¹²³Ibid., p. 3.

¹²⁴S.F. Platonov, Moscow and the West, translated and edited by Joseph P. Wieczynski, Introduction by Serge A. Zenkovsky United States, 1972, pp. 97-141.

¹²⁵The Life of Archpriest Avvakum by Himself. Translated by Jane Harrison and Hope Mirrlees in Medieval Russia's Epics Chronicles and Tales ed. by Serge A. Zenkovsky, New York 1963 pp. 321-370.

and other Raskol groups¹²⁶ settled close to the borderlands or in the neighboring states: near the White Sea, Urals, Crimea, Ukraine and across the border in Poland. In Vetka on the Polish side of the border and in Starodub on the Russian side two large communities of Old Believers were established. The Vetka community consisted of 14 hamlets and already existed in 1682. There were 40,000 schismatics living there in 1733.¹²⁷ In 1735 after months of careful planning, under the command of Colonel Ia. G. Sytin Vetka was attacked and over 13,000 refugees were driven back to Russia. Subsequently, many Old Believers returned to Vetka and rebuilt it. Vetka¹²⁸ continued to be a thriving stronghold of Schismatics till its destruction in

¹²⁶Raskolniki was the official term used by the government till Catherine the Great. Raskol generally includes all subjects of the empire who broke away from official Orthodoxy, including the adherents of the rationalistic and mystical sects, hereafter referred to as Schismatics, Dissenters or Raskolniki when the particular branch or sect is not mentioned.

¹²⁷Sergei Bolshakoff, Russian Nonconformity, Philadelphia, 1951, p. 59.

¹²⁸M.I. Lileev, Iz istorii raskola na Vetka i v Starodube XVII-XVIIIvv., 1, Kiev, 1895 pp. 288-302.

1762-4. Starodub, northeast of Vetka was another large center of Schismatics. The Sectarrians of these centers traveled on their commercial trips¹²⁹ as far as Vilna Warsaw, Danzig and the Ukraine. In these two border settlements schools were organized where children were taught writing and ecclesiastical chants.¹³⁰ The Vetka colonists, also collected books and manuscripts and made their own copies of many works of religious and historical interest. The Old Believers did everything in their power to spread their particular branch of belief and practice. Missionaries were sent out from Vetka to carry their teachings back across the border to large and small towns of Russia.

The literature of the various Schismatic sects, since it was outlawed by the Russian state and church, was kept in strict secrecy. Danila of Kostroma (1600-1700) a Christ (leader of various sects) and prophet of the Khlysty sect formulated his views in twelve commandments. The Tenth of the Twelve Commandments deals with the secrecy of the Sectarrians rules and beliefs:

¹²⁹A.M. Lazarevskii, Opisanie Staroi Malorossii, Russian, Kiev, 1889, Vol. I pp. 447-461.

¹³⁰Lileev, Is istorii op. cit., pp. 217-9; N Sokolov, Raskol v Saratovskom krae, Russian, Saratov, 1888 p. 270.

Keep these rules in secret, reveal them not even to father or mother, and even if men scourge thee with whip or burn thee with fire, bear it. So doing the true shall after the pattern of the old martyrs win heaven, and on earth spiritual satisfaction. 131

Danila, whose memory and relics are sacred to various Russian dissenting sects, could write and read and had in his possession Old Believer books. Revelation took place according to sectarian tradition on the hill of Gorodina in the Volost of Starodub, God Zebaoth descended on clouds on fire in a fiery chariot with his cortege of angels, seraphim and cherubim. Danila since then became a living God. After his revelation he claimed that the Dove Book in his possession superseded all Church books, he took all of the latter books that he could find and threw them into the Volga.¹³² The Doukhobors relate the story according to their tradition. Their sect was founded in the seventeenth century by an army deserter named Danilo Filippov. He lived like a hermit in a cave on the shores of the Volga. In the beginning he based his teachings on the Bible and Orthodox liturgy. But he had decided that they were useless. He put them into a sack and threw them into the Volga. The truth was to be found instead

¹³¹Cited in F.C. Conybeare, Russian Dissenters, Cambridge, Mass., 1921 p. 358.

¹³²Ibid., pp. 357-8.

in the golden book the Living book.¹³³ To this day the Doukhobors sing in the memory of Danilo an ancient hymn entitled "In his youth he walked much." It describes the prophet weeping by the riverside after he threw in the books.¹³⁴ It seems that the early Doukhobor teachers were his followers. The center of the Doukhobor activity till the middle of the eighteenth century was the Ukraine.¹³⁵

The Sectarian attitudes towards their literature, their secrecy about it, the pattern of the founder of some major sects staying away from the community, and leading the life of a hermit while formulating his views; the discarding of books once the ideas are formulated, closely resemble the Besht and his secret writings. The closeness in time, the geographical proximity must be taken into account. The fact that the Old Believers of Vetka and Starodub mingled with the local population as did the Doukhobors

¹³³The Russian Marxist historian Vladimir Bonch-Bruerich visited the Canadian Doukhobors. He published the Living book based upon Doukhobor oral tradition which he collected and wrote down Vladimir Bonch-Bruerich, Zhivotnaia Kniga Doukhoborstev in Materially K istorii izucheniiu russkago sektanta, Russian, Vol. 211 St. Petersburg, 1909.

¹³⁴Eli Popoff, Historical Exposition on Doukhobor Beliefs, Grand Forks B.C., 1966 p. 30.

¹³⁵George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, The Doukhobors Toronto/New York 1968 pp. 26-27.

and the other sects cannot be ignored. The Rabbi Adam tale, the Besht's isolation from the Jewish community, during the most crucial years of his intellectual development, the house of seclusion he rented from a gentile and the fact that the Admor ignored the manuscripts, all call for a need to reevaluate the source and nature of the manuscripts. And indeed when the Sectarian presence there and then is taken into account the possibility that the manuscripts were of Russian-Sectarian origin cannot be ruled out. This may account for the Besht's super effort to conceal their identity while studying them and when parting with them. He placed them "in a stone in a mountain"¹³⁶ and nobody was to take them from their hiding place.¹³⁷

While Scholem ungraciously¹³⁸ dismisses the above approach—suggesting a contact between the Besht

¹³⁶ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 31.

¹³⁷ The Besht's great-grandson, Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, who in many ways reverted to Beshtian Hasidism, said that he knew where the manuscripts were hidden but he had no need for them. This was in reply to his Hasidim who thought that their Rebbe had traveled to the town of Kamenets in order to take the manuscripts. Kamien in Russian means stone, hence the connection. See Joseph Perl, Hasidic Tales and Letters, op. cit., p. 100. The episode is of major importance in life and thought of Rabbi Nahman.

¹³⁸ Gershom Scholem, The Messianic Idea in Judaism, op. cit., p. 362. note 37.

and Russian Sectarianism - he himself courts the idea that the Besht's behavior during his most formative years resembles that of Russian starets!

It is only proper to comment that during the same years that the young Besht was wandering in the Carpathian Mountains in search of his God, we found similar occurrences in the Pravoslavnic vicinity of Rumania. Also there the ascetics and the hermits went to the mountains and forests till their revelation. Like the startsy who made a great impression in their own time (an institution which has a few things in common with early Zaddikism) and not this alone, the development of the new startsycism in Russia during the eighteenth century started from this center in the Carpathian mountains, in Moldavia and Bukovina, which is to say, in the vicinity neighboring the places of the activities of the Besht who was active at precisely the same time as the revival of the old Russian startsycism. The parallel is worthy of notice. 139

Scholem cites Paisius Velichkovsky (1722-94) as one of the startsy. Velichkovsky was born in 1722 just about the time that the Besht, with his manuscripts, went into seclusion. Indeed the name of Paisius Velichkovsky¹⁴⁰ is connected with the whole history of the Russian startsy, especially with the famous

¹³⁹ Gershom Scholem, "Demato ha-Historit Shel R' Israel Baal Shem Tov" op. cit., p. 339.

¹⁴⁰ V.V. Zenkovsky, A History of Russian Philosophy, Translated by George L. Kline, New York 1953 Vol. 1, pp. 52-53.

Optina Cloister, and the entire Optina movement of the nineteenth century Orthodoxy. Indeed Russian Startsy have much in common with the Besht and Zaddikism, but even more do the Christs, leaders of dissenting Russian sects. Both the Starets and Christs have much in common for they both owe their origin to the particular Russian spiritual climate which has a long history of holy men.¹⁴¹ However, the similarity between the Sectarian Christ and the Besht and subsequently between Christ and Zaddik is indeed even more striking.¹⁴² Nevertheless, the fact that Scholem calls attention to the parallel between a Russian Pravoslavivic spiritual leader and the Besht is of major importance.

The similarity between the Sectarian Christ and the Besht transcends the limited parallel between Besht and starets or between the Startsy and early Zaddim like Zusya of Annopol¹⁴³ (d. 1800) and is extended as well to their respective movements; Russian dissenting sects and Beshtian Hasidism. The social patterns of

¹⁴¹G.P. Fedotov ed., A Treasury of Russian Spirituality New York 1965.

¹⁴²See Chapter IV pp. 172-182.

¹⁴³Scholem, Demuto ha-Historit Shel R'Israel Baal Shem Tov op. cit., p. 339.

Beshtian Hasidism; its unique institutions and innovations suggest a close similarity to the social organization, practice and customs of various Russian dissenting sects in the Ukraine. When the Besht parted both from his manuscripts and his places of seclusion he retained the customs and practices he had acquired during his seven years of isolation from the Jewish community (about 1723-1730). During his Tluste and Medzhibozh periods his personal behavior and the customs and practices of early Hasidism bear the imprint of the Besht's alleged contact with Russian culture, especially that of its dissenting sects. It is mostly apparent in dress, prayer, dance and above all in the institution of the Zaddik and its many implications.

The Tluste Period 1730-1738

Israel Baal Shem Tov settled in Tluste* in 1730¹⁴⁴ at the age of thirty. He, his wife Hannah and their small daughter, Adel born about 1720,¹⁴⁵ lived there in stark poverty. The Besht was so poor that he did not even have proper clothing.

¹⁴⁴Abraham Rubinstein, the MS "Uiber das Wesen der Secte Chassidim aus ihren eigenen werken gezogen im Jahre 1816" Hebrew, Kirjath Sepher Vol. XXXV, December 1962-September 1963, p. 267.

¹⁴⁵Abraham Kahana, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, Zhitomir 1900, pp. 5-45.

*A city in South Ternopol oblast Ukrainian SSR. In 1944 name changed to Tolstoye.

He wore only a short woolen winter coat,
and his toes stuck out through the holes
in his shoes. 146

At the age of 36 he revealed himself, stopped being a Melamed¹⁴⁷ and in fact became a practicing Baal Shem¹⁴⁸ in Tluste, a Master of the Divine Name. The Besht exorcised demons, wrote amulets, performed various miracles, healed the sick with segullot (remedies) concocted from animal,¹⁴⁹ vegetable and mineral matter. Baalei Shem were quite a common phenomenon in the eighteenth century Europe in general and in Podolia in particular like Benjamin Krotoschin, the Baal Shem of London Samuel Jacob Hayyim Falk,¹⁵⁰ (1710-1782) known by Christians as Doctor Falk and Joel Baal Shem of Podolia¹⁵¹ who actually signed his name as Besht.

¹⁴⁶ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 36.

¹⁴⁷ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 36.

¹⁴⁸ On the origin and function of Baalei Shem, see G. Scholem "Baal Shem" in EJ op. cit., Vol. IV ff 6-7; J. Günzig, Die "Wundermänner" im juedischen Volks, Ihr Leben Und Treiben, German, Antwerpen, 1921.

¹⁴⁹ Once the Besht prescribed a remedy for a sick girl which consisted of chicken soup cooked from a black chick which was torn apart over the sickbed. See S.Z. Setzer, Reb Israel Baal Shem Tov, Yiddish, [New York] 1919 Vol. 1, p. 182.

¹⁵⁰ Cecil Roth, Essays and Portraits in Anglo-Jewish History 1962 pp. 139-164. The picture of the Baal Shem of London is now frequently reproduced erroneously as the portrait of the Besht, founder of Hasidism.

¹⁵¹ On Baalei Shem in Podolia see Abraham Kahana, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov op. cit., pp. 59-76; Gershom Scholem, "The Polemic Against Hassidim and its Leaders in the Book Nezed Ha-Dema" Hebrew, Zion Vol. XX, 1955 pp. 80-81.

The Besht's activities as a Baal Shem Tov forced him to spend much of his time away from Tluste for long periods the Besht's travels, his gentile driver Alexis and his horses became part of the Hasidic tradition and ranks among its highlights. On his countless journeys he cured the afflicted. At times this resulted in sharp clashes with the local doctors. On one such occasion the doctor no longer could contain his contempt for the Besht and exclaimed "When I see the Besht I will kill him with my gun."¹⁵² The patient being treated at the time by the Besht and the doctor was Abraham Podlisker. Both doctor and Baal Shem failed to cure the sick Rabbi Abraham but at least the Besht offered a spiritual alleviation which the doctor could not.¹⁵³

Dubnow feels that these powers of the Besht as a miracle healer were a major factor in attracting followers to the newly formed Hasidic sect.¹⁵⁴ Shivhei ha-Besht seems however only partially to support this claim. It seems that among the Besht's greatest assets, when attracting new followers, was his personal charm, his warmth, his patience, his optimism and his

¹⁵²Shivhei ha-Besht p. 40.

¹⁵³Shivhei ha-Besht p. 41.

¹⁵⁴S. Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

great art of storytelling. Yet his ability to cure, to bless, to foretell the future and solve mysteries of the past were instrumental in attracting such prominent people as the Great Maggid Rabbi Dov Baer and the wealthy brothers of Slutsk known as the Dersawzes.¹⁵⁵ The crippled Maggid came in search of a cure. Toveleh, the wealthy wife of Samuel from Slutsk, sent for the Besht to bless the new stone house they had built but were afraid to occupy since it was possessed by evil spirits. Even a man like Rabbi Yaacov Halperin (d. 1738) came to the Besht to ask him a "dream question," (one of the many abilities of a Baal Shem). The incident most probably took place sometime between 1735-1738. This was recorded by Yaacov Halperin's son Shlomo Halperin (born 1727) in the forward to his father's book Beit Yaacov¹⁵⁶ Rabbi

¹⁵⁵The entire episode of the Dersawzes or the farmer-generals who had a lease of all the estates of Prince Radzivill is of primary importance to the history of the economic condition of the Jewish community in the vicinity of the Besht's activities. See Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 211-17, Solomon Maimon, Autobiography op. cit., p. 54; Israel Halpern, "The "Woszczylo Revolt," in Eastern European Jewry op. cit., pp. 277-88. The importance of the sources is that they all support and verify the events described in Shivhei ha-Besht including the newspapers of the time, cited in the Halpern article. M.L. Rodkinson, Adat Zaddikim, Hebrew reprinted in Jerusalem 1958/9 pp. 26-7.

¹⁵⁶Responsa Beit Yaacov MS quoted in Dubnow, Toldot bar Hasidut op. cit., p. 484; Scholem, "Demuto ha-Historit Shel R' Israel Baal Shem" op. cit., p. 339.

Shlomo Halperin was an opponent of Hasidism.¹⁵⁷ This mention of the Besht's activities during the Tluste period is the earliest account concerning the Besht from non-Hasidic sources.

The Besht enjoyed his activities as a Baal Shem and took pride in them as is clearly indicated by his signature, "Israel Baal Shem of Tluste."¹⁵⁸ On another occasion he signed "So spoke Israel Besht, the servant of God."¹⁵⁹ At times it is indeed difficult to separate and distinguish between his activities as a Baal Shem and his other practices and customs which established him as a founder of a new movement. Throughout his lifetime his behavior is a strange conglomeration of the magic of a Baal Shem and the innovations of a founder. His charismatic personality and a Baal Shem's power were at times crucial in augmenting and implementing his innovations and in asserting his authority. Yet a separate set of practices, which was not spellbound, was already in evidence in his very initial steps in Tluste; a system of behavior and practice which he formulated during his seven years of isolation.

¹⁵⁷ Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut op. cit., pp. 485-6.

¹⁵⁸ Responsa Mayim Hayyim part one, 1858. The Besht affixed this signature while already in Medzhibozh to a response to a question sent to him by Rabbi Meir Emden son of the famed Rabbi Jacob Emden (1697-1776). Michael Levi Rodkinson [Frumkin] Toldot Baalei Shem Tov, Hebrew, Konigsberg 1876 Vol. 1 pp. 48-49.

¹⁵⁹ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 213. It should be noted that here indeed the matter involved was that of a Baal Shem, i.e., forecasting the future. In the previous incident it was of a scholarly nature.

During his years of seclusion his new practices were in evidence. He wore white garments on the Sabbath.¹⁶⁰ He had a mikveh¹⁶¹ (a bathing place for ritual purification). His wife baked twelve loaves of hallah for the Sabbath.¹⁶² He took great care that the knife used for shehita should be sharpened and not merely tempered,¹⁶³ and prayed with great concentration and devotion.¹⁶⁴ When he moved to Tluste he brought all these practices along. His first act of deviation at Tluste might have been when he tried to assemble a minyan in his own home rather than to pray in the established place of worship. At first he failed but then he gathered around him a group of people and prayed with them.¹⁶⁵ This minyan was his initial success in Tluste as a founder of a new sect. Then "people came to him from everywhere."¹⁶⁶ The latter group seemed to have been more interested in his services as Baal Shem rather than in his religious innovations. But once exposed to the magnitude of

¹⁶⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 27.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 27, 29.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

his personality they became ardent followers of the new movement.

And then in the midst of this initial success, with a circle of followers, a growing crowd of admirers and a scribe, the Besht decides to leave Tluste after living there for some eight years¹⁶⁷ and to travel to Israel. Shivhei ha-Besht does not mention any reason for this change of heart. However, the plan to emigrate was not an impulsive decision and as one story indicates was thought about for some time. When he was summoned to Slutsk by Toveleh the wife of one of the two chief arrendators of prince Radzivil's estate, he told him about his intended journey.

The following day he prepared a great dinner for the Besht, and he talked with him about the routes to the Holy Land because the Besht wanted Rabbi Samuel [Toveleh's husband] to send him by land. He asked the Besht: "How much does one need for that?"

The Besht answered that one thousand was necessary for expenses.

He said to him: "It is a trivial matter for me." He promised to send him money for his livelihood every year. The Besht answered that he was not worried about his making a living because the main object was to be in the Holy Land.¹⁶⁸

The Besht never reached Israel. His failure to reach the Holy Land greatly preoccupied Hasidic

¹⁶⁷ Michael Levi Rodkinson, Toldot Baalei Shem op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁶⁸ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 212.

tradition and at times the account of his journey concealed more than it revealed. Till the present, the journey of the Besht to Eretz-Israel has not been fully reconstructed.^{168a} Jacob Joseph refers to it as the Besht's "known journey" and relates that the Besht had to return after he had already embarked since the boat broke down. It saddened the Besht very much.¹⁶⁹ The Hebrew edition of Shivhei ha-Besht shunned the Besht's failure to reach Israel and discussed the entire episode in very ambivalent terms. Other sources and the Yiddish edition of Shivhei ha-Besht¹⁷⁰ recorded some aspects of the abortive trip. Physical misfortunes, such as pirates, bandits, stormy seas and a wrecked ship were all instrumental in blocking the Besht's passage to Eretz-Israel.¹⁷¹ Hasidic tradition itself was aware of the irony regarding these obstacles. After all the passenger in question was none other than the Besht himself. The man

^{168a}Dinur, Historical Writings Vol. 1 op. cit., pp. 192-206.

¹⁶⁹Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, Toledot Yaakov Yosef, Hebrew Korets, 1780, p. 201/a.

¹⁷⁰See Chapter 11, pp. 38-9; Shivhei ha-Besht, pp. 22-4; 231-38.

¹⁷¹Michael Levi Rodkinson Adat Zaddikim op. cit., p. 4.

who could turn his handkerchief into a boat and sail the stormy seas to the Promised Land. But it was heaven itself that interfered, "from on High he was prevented from doing so."¹⁷² Even then the Besht was stubborn and did not yield, "so from heaven his wisdom and torah were taken away" and he was forced to return home. The decision not to continue his travels to Israel must have been a very difficult one for the Besht for he remained in Istanbul close to a year. (1739-1740) But the lure of his native Podolia triumphed. The Besht and members of his household returned to Podolia, not to Tluste their previous home but to the larger and more central town of Medzhibozh. With the Besht's settlement in Medzhibozh starts the most vital period in the development of Beshtian Hasidism.

V. The Medzhibozh Period 1740-1760.

The Medzhibozh* period is the most crucial for the development of Hasidism. It was there that the Besht became the central rallying point for the elements of social and religious discontent in the Podolian Jewish society. It was there that he

¹⁷² Sefer Shivhei Baal Shem Tov, op. cit., p. 25/b.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 25/b.

*A town in East Kamenets Podolski oblast, on the Southern Bug, Ukranian SSR.

attracted the most significant people to his branch of Hasidism. It was the Besht's charismatic personality, his way of life, his ability as a Baal Shem and his innovation which formed the unifying element for his followers. During the Medzhibozh period the Besht's personality was enhanced by two additional factors previously not mentioned in Shivhei ha-Besht; his "Teacher" the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh teacher of Eliajah the prophet, and the fact that the Besht became an ardent pipe smoker. Both Teacher and pipe are not mentioned prior to his stay in Istanbul during his abortive voyage to the land of Israel. It was sometime in 1738 most probably that the Besht stood at the crossroads of his career. His quest for a new direction resulted in his attempted emigration to the land of Israel. However, the venture ended in failure. He returned to Podolia and settled in Medzhibozh. It might be that prior to his coming to Medzhibozh he considered other places. One may even suggest that he considered the famed city of Brody with its community of scholars, kabbalists and members of the Klaus which was just then coming into existence (1740).¹⁷⁴

It seems that the Besht also considered Nemirov, as a place of residence as the statement in Zikhron Tov suggests:

¹⁷⁴

Gelber, op. cit., pp. 109-110..

From heaven he was given a choice as to where to settle; in Nemirov, Medzhibozh or in a third town. He chose Medzhibozh due to the abundance of fish there. It would be easy to obtain fish ¹⁷⁵ for the Holy Sabbath. ¹⁷⁶

In this case the choice depended on the physical attributes of the city rather than on its intellectual atmosphere. Medzhibozh was indeed situated in the midst of beautiful woods and lush vegetation. It was also commercially quite well off and had the full range of merchants typic of a small town of its time.¹⁷⁷ At least one of its wealthy merchants traveled as far as Breslau.¹⁷⁸ In 1765, just fifteen years after the Besht's death, the Jewish population of Medzhibozh and its vicinity numbered 2,039 souls.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵He chose it erroneously, for the Besht, always in a difficult economic condition, since he gave his money away had to ask a man from the community of Polonnoye to do him a favor and give him flour and fish on credit. Shivhei ha-Besht p. 150.

¹⁷⁶Cited in A. Kahana, Israel Baal Shem Tov. op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁷⁷The Yiddish writer Israel Axenfeld (1787-1866) was well acquainted with the Besht's grandchildren and the town of Medzhibozh. His book Dos Shterntichel or Shabbes Hannukeh in Medzhibozh, Yiddish, Leipzig, 1862 pp. 130-2 is an excellent source on the commerce of Medzhibozh. It is also a source on the Besht's family; see Max Erik [Zalman Merkin] "Vegen Socialen Mahus fun Axenfeld's Shafer" in Zeitschrift Vol. V Akademiya Navuk Minks, 1931 pp. 128-168.

¹⁷⁸Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 48-9, 164-5.

¹⁷⁹M. Osherowitch, Cities and Towns in the History of the Jews in Russia and the Ukraine, Yiddish, New York, 1948, Vol. I.

It is also possible that the official government of Medzhibozh was a determining factor in the choice of the city. The town was under Polish rule till 1793. Its population like the rest of Podolia at the time, seems to have been Russian and Russian-oriented, and spoke Russian. A Jewish woman from Medzhibozh told Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye a parable in Russian.¹⁸⁰ The Besht seemed to have enjoyed very friendly relations with the town officials and with the local population. In one instance a priest associated with the governor of Medzhibozh caused great trouble to the Jewish population of the city. After the Jews complained, the Besht promised to deal with the priest slowly and carefully. He began with prayers. Later after a confrontation between the Besht and the priest the priest lost his post.

Officials came from the governor of the city and confiscated all of the priest's property and fortune. He was dismissed from his post, and he had to pay the claims of every Jew in the town until he was ruined. 181

¹⁸⁰ Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, Toledot Yaacov Yossef op. cit., 49/a; Gedalia Nigal, Manhig ve-Edah op. cit., p. 117 note 20.

¹⁸¹ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 149. See second version pp. 149-150. In the Hebrew original the governor is called the Commissar.

On another occasion the dispute involved a dismissed Arrendator from Medzhibozh who had lost his position to another Arrendator since he did not pay his debt to his master in the village. The dismissed Arrendator sought the Besht's aid. The Master from the manor house was frightened of the Besht's magical powers. He released the Arrendator's son and permitted the dismissed Arrendator to leave the village. The Master however, did not rest and he sent a letter to the governor of Medzhibozh containing a serious complaint about the Besht stating: "There is a sorcerer in your town." The governor answered him:

See to it that you make the utmost effort to appease the Besht because he is not a sorcerer. If you do not appease him, heaven will punish you. 182

This friendly relation between the town's officials and the Besht lasted till the latter's very last moment. When the Besht lay on his deathbed on the first day of Shabouth (a holiday seven weeks after Passover, commemorating the "Giving of the Law" on Mt. Sinai). The governor came to the death chamber.

In the morning he [the Besht] sent for all his followers to gather and he told Rabbi Leib Kessler and someone else, I have forgotten his name to handle his burial. 183

182 Shivhei ha-Besht p. 129.

183 Shivhei ha-Besht p. 256.

Among the people who came were his prominent friends Rabbi Pinhas of Korets, Rabbi Nahman of Horodenka, his daughter Edel and Rabbi David Forkes.¹⁸⁴ However, the Yiddish version of Shivhei ha-Besht includes among the people who came to say farewell to the dying Besht, the governor of Medzhibozh and others.¹⁸⁵

The governor came to him. The Besht asked that his face should be covered,¹⁸⁶ and in this manner he spoke with him.

The incidents cited suggest a friendly relationship between the Besht and the governor and other officials of Medzhibozh. It calls for further investigation.

Another consideration for the choice of Medzhibozh might have been the fact that a group of people who were inclined towards some form of Hasidism lived there prior to the Besht's settlement. Such groups, according to Dinur, existed in Brody, Kutny and Medzhibozh.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 255- , 136-137.

¹⁸⁵Abraham Yaari, "Two Basic Recensions of Shivhei ha-Besht" op. cit., p. 559.

¹⁸⁶Sefer Shivhei Baal Shem Tov op. cit., p. 36b
In the Yiddish original the governor is called Commissar.

¹⁸⁷Dinur, Historical Writings Vol. 1 op. cit., pp. 159-161.

When the Besht came to the holy community of Medzhibozh, he was not regarded as an important man by the Hasidim—that is to say, by Rabbi Zeev Kotses and Rabbi David Forkes—because he was called the Besht, the master of a good name. This was not considered proper for a pious man. 188

Some indeed suggest that the Medzhibozh period marks a new era in the Besht's status. It marks the shift in his position from a Baal Shem to that of a Zaddik. Evidence does not support this claim. He continues his erratic travels to the countryside and to many small towns.¹⁹⁰ At times people in need of his services found it hard to locate him.

The arrendator did not find the Besht at home because he was in the holy community of Kamenka. He followed him to that town, but he did not find him there because the Besht had gone home. He followed after him and caught up with him on the road. 191

On these journeys the Besht behaves very much as a Baal Shem, his particular branch of Baal Shem performing the same services he performed during the Tluste period. When not on the road people flocked to Medzhibozh.

¹⁸⁸ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 173-174. In the original Hebrew the word for pious man is Zaddik.

¹⁸⁹ A. Kahana, Israel Baal Shem Tov p. 77.

¹⁹⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 38, 78, 90, 126, 129, 219.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 128.

When the son of a wealthy Medzhibozh merchant failed to return home from a business trip, the worried mother asked her husband to go to the Besht.

Why do you harden your heart against the Besht? Everyone from four corners of the earth goes to him, and he helps them. 192

Another man who was childless revealed his troubles to his friend. The friend was amazed that he had not yet sought the Besht's help. "The whole world goes to the Besht, why do you avoid going to him?"¹⁹³ At times when people in need of his special services were neither within walking distance nor traveling they still found a way to benefit from his help. His brother-in-law, Rabbi Gershon of Kutty, after his immigration to Israel, wrote to the Besht and requested that he send him an amulet.¹⁹⁴

However, there were also voices of criticism. Rabbi Hayyim Rapoport (c. 1700-1771), rabbi in Slutsk and Lvov, a man who took part in the disputation with the Frankists in Lvov in 1759, thought that the Besht was not even worthy of the title Baal Shem. When two

192

Ibid., p. 48.

193

Ibid., p. 225.

194

Joshua Trachtenberg, Jewish Magic and Superstition; A Study in Folk Religion, New York, 1939. pp. 143-5; Hirsch Jakob Zimmels, Magicians, Theologians and Doctors; Studies in Folk Medicine and Folk-Lore, as Reflected in the Rabbinical Responsa, London, 1952, pp. 136-7.

members of his family in Buczacz wished to seek the Besht's medical aid, he warned them against going to a witchdoctor who called himself a Baal Shem. Those who seek his advice, he claimed are wasting their money since his activities are deceitful.¹⁹⁵

While the Medzhibozh period does not mark the transition from a Baal Shem to that of a Zaddik, it does mark the development of the Besht from a person dealing with the problems of the afflicted individual to that of a leader dealing with the problems of a community. The Besht became a leader and spokesman for groups suffering social injustices and religious oppression. The pages of Shivhei ha-Besht are filled with stories about arrendators who could not pay their debts and meet the other obligations¹⁹⁶ of that institution. They were imprisoned,¹⁹⁷ beaten,¹⁹⁸ humiliated¹⁹⁹ and converted to Christianity.²⁰⁰ The Besht became their self appointed spokesman and source of help. The period also coincided with the attacks of

¹⁹⁵ Mordecai Wilensky, Hasidim and Mithaggedim op. cit., Vol. II, p. 258 note 14, Scholem, "Demuto ha-Historit Shel R' Israel Baal Shem Tov" op. cit., p. 344. See: Isaac Bacon, "The Nature of the Letter Against the Baal Shem Tov," Hebrew, Zion, Vol. XXXII, 1967, pp. 116-122.

¹⁹⁶ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 183-4.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 128-9, 146.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 115.

the Haidamaks²⁰¹ (1734-1788) Ukrainian bands who lashed out in a campaign of destruction against the Jewish and Polish communities. During this same period the Jewish community also saw the increase of blood accusations.²⁰² Many accused communities were in the immediate vicinity of the Besht. In Zaslaval, 1747 when a dead gentile was found in the fields, a blood libel was leveled against the Jews. They came to the Besht to ask for help.

When the Jews of the city learned about it, they trembled with fear, and they sent Rabbi Aizik to the inn where the Besht was staying to inform him about it.²⁰³

The sufferings of the Jewish communities as a result of the blood accusations had a profound affect on the Besht. At Pavlysh in 1753, twenty-four Jews were charged with the murder of a four year old Christian boy. Twelve of the Jews were tortured and executed. The Besht cried bitterly,²⁰⁴

²⁰¹For a Ukrainian view on the Haidamaks see Michael Hrushevsky, A History of Ukraine ed. by O.J. Frederiksen, New Haven, 1941, pp. 433-445; on the Haidamaks destruction and massacres in the Jewish Communities See S. Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, Phila., 1916-20 Vol. I, pp. 180-7; the stories about the Haidamaks in Shivhei ha-Besht are told in a restrained manner. Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 124, 172, 186.

²⁰²Raphael Mahler, History of [The] Jews in Poland, Hebrew, Palestine, 1946 pp. 333-357.

²⁰³Shivhei ha-Besht p. 79.

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 161.

He prayed Minhah with great bitterness until his followers could not lift up their heads. 205

The Besht became a leader as a result of his concern, love and understanding of the oppressed and his aim was to improve their lot. He believed in his unique powers and his capacity to effect the necessary changes. It was not his scholarship (the hallmark of all religious Jewish leaders, prior to Hasidism) which paved the way for his leadership, as was the case with his contemporary Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon, the "Vilna Gaon" (1720-1797). The Gaon became a leader of modern Jewry because of his intellectual, rabbinical and scholarly ability and knowledge. The Besht was far removed from the rabbinical tradition which strove for excellence. The books that the Besht read or had recited in his presence were not halakhic works nor books of major rabbinical significance. One of his favorite books was Ein Yaakov,²⁰⁶ which is a collection of haggadic passages from both Talmuds.

Once, at the conclusion of the Sabbath, the Besht ordered his stepfather's son-in-law, Rabbi Joseph Ashkenazi, to read him from Ein Yaakov while he lay on the bed and listened. At one place the Besht said torah concerning a saying in Ein Yaakov. The Rabbi Joseph continued to recite Ein Yaakov. 207

²⁰⁵Ibid., p. 161.

²⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 124-5, 198.

²⁰⁷Ibid., pp. 124-5.

He also studied the Mishnah²⁰⁸ (the six volumes of the Oral Law) and the Zohar.²⁰⁹ He fared poorly with Halakhic matters but in a few instances when confronted with questions in that realm he elegantly avoided giving a direct answer. Once the Council of the Four Lands, the chief governing body of Polish and Lithuanian Jewry till about 1764, summoned the Besht to appear before its rabbis.

When he came before them that rabbi [Rabbi Abraham] was the main speaker. He said to the Besht: "According to your behavior, it would seem that the Holy Spirit inspires you, but there are those who say that you sir, are an unlearned man. Well let us hear whether or not you, sir, know something of the law." This incident took place on the first of the month. He asked him: "What is the law if a person forgets 'Rise and Come.'" The Besht answered: "Neither you, sir, nor I heed this law. Even you, sir, repeat the prayer, you will not forget it again (indeed, it was the truth that he had forgotten. 'Rise and Come' the second time), and I certainly shall not forget it." When the Besht told him the truth he was very frightened of the Besht's knowledge of secret things. 210

The Besht's reply had a supernatural quality rather than a simple halakhic response. On another occasion he cited the opinion of the Rambam (Maimonides 1135-1204). The passage cited cannot be found in the

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 173. The Besht's approach to the study of the Mishna in contrast to that of Rabbi Gershon of Kutzy is significant, Rabbi Gershon was interested in the apparent meaning of the Mishna, while the Besht was preoccupied with the supernatural implications.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 58, 165. He also is known as having quoted from Ethics of our Fathers.

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 222-3; Israel Halperin, Acta Congressus Judaeorum Regni Poloniae, (1580-1764) Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1945 pp. 531-2.

Rambam. The Besht's knowledge about it came from the time that the Besht had ascended to the Rambam's palace. There, great scholars from the Jewish past were arguing about it. "Since then there is not any hint of the matter in the Rambam's book."²¹¹ The Besht cited the same statement from the Rambam on two other occasions.²¹²

At times the Besht attributed his special knowledge to his teacher, Ahijah of Shiloh. In Shivhei ha-Besht Ahijah is not mentioned by name. The Besht refers to him as "my rabbi"²¹³ or he is called "his well-known rabbi."²¹⁴ He is identified by Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye in Toledot Yaacov Yosef.²¹⁵ The Besht's association with the prophet Ahiah of Shiloh is mentioned in Shivhei ha-Besht, either with matters regarding the Messiah²¹⁶ and redemption or with

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 233.

²¹² Ibid., pp. 72, 118.

²¹³ Ibid., pp. 56, 112, 137.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 129.

²¹⁵ Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, Toledot Yaacov Yosef, op. cit., p. 126/a.

²¹⁶ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 56-7, 112, 137; it is of interest to note that the Besht in his famous letter to Rabbi Gershon, mentions his Teacher. The letter also deals with the coming of the Messiah, first published in the back of Jacob Joseph's book Ben-Porat Yosef, Hebrew, Korets, 1781; p. 128/a; Eliezer Zvi Hacoen Zweifel, Shalom Al Yisrael, Hebrew, edited, with Introduction and Notes by Abraham Rubinstein, Jerusalem, 1972 Part I, pp. 182-208.

devekut, devotion.²¹⁷

Another practice, smoking a pipe, greatly enhanced the Besht's personality. He smoked various pipes, lulkes as they are called in Shivhei ha-Besht. The Besht with pipe in hand or mouth is a common sight within the pages of Shivhei ha-Besht during the Medzhibozh period. He smoked various pipes and at least two are described, a regular pipe and one with a long shank (zibbuk).²¹⁸ One lulke, the smaller one, he smoked while walking around and also the substance that he smoked is identified as titun-²¹⁹tobacco. The other lulke with the long shank he smoked when he was at rest. The smoking of the pipe, or the times when he was forced to refrain from smoking had a profound effect on the Besht,²²⁰ and others. Rabbi Jacob Joseph

²¹⁷Shivhei ha-Besht p. 129. For a short study on the Besht's Teacher see: G. Nigal, "Moro ve-Rabbo Shel Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov," Hebrew, Sinai 1972, Vol. 71 pp. 150-9.

²¹⁸Shivhei ha-Besht p. 220.

²¹⁹Omitted from English translation of Shivhei ha-Besht p. 245, see the original Hebrew Kopust ed. p. 34/b.

²²⁰Yaffa Eliach, "The Russian Dissenting Sects and Their Influence on Israel Baal Shem Tov, Founder of Hassidism." op. cit., pp. 81-82. Abraham Rubinstein, "[Smoking] in Hasidism" Encyclopaedia Hebraica, Jerusalem/Tel-Aviv, 1966 Vol. XVIII, f 322.

Joseph who stood near the Besht while the Besht was smoking wept afterwards during prayer. "I wept as never before in my life and I realized that it was not my weeping."²²¹ Two soldiers and a governor on horseback who snatched away the Besht's lulke with the long shank as he was riding in his carriage, succumbed to the effect of the pipe. After smoking it they fell asleep while mounted on their horses. The Besht's servant then recovered the lulke.²²²

Smoking became a fetish with some Hasidim. Rabbi Gershom of Kutu when asked by Rabbi Jehiel of Kovel if he was the Besht, replied:

Ay! Ay! Ay I am the rabbi I wish I would have the portion of the next world that the Besht gains from smoking one lulke. 223

For the Opponents of Hasidism the lulke and its prominence²²⁴ in Hasidism became a source of constant criticism and ridicule. The Polemic literature

²²¹Shivhei ha-Besht p. 62.

²²²Ibid., pp. 220-221.

²²³Ibid., p. 105.

²²⁴Abraham Rubinstein, EH op. cit., Vol. XVIII f 322.

against Hasidism is full of it.²²⁵ Among the Besht's friends and followers Shivhei ha-Besht mentions sniffing shuff.²²⁶ Two people are mentioned by name as having smoked a lulke, Rabbi Mikhel and Rabbi Mendele,²²⁷ members of the Besht's circle.

In Medzhibozh, the Besht attracted the most prominent members of his movement. The main source for the identification of these followers is Shivhei ha-Besht, and most sources depend on it for their information.²²⁸ The same force that drove the rank and file to join Hasidism brought also to its ranks the prominent members - discontent with their religious and social lot. They came at times from diverse backgrounds and with different problems. Their unity was in their quest for change.

²²⁵ Mordecai Wilensky. Hasidim and Mitnaggedim op. cit.,, This is a collection of the polemic literature between Hasidim and the Mitnaggedim. The derogative description of the Hasidic habit of smoking a lulke is within the various documents. Shever Poshyim 13/a-13/b, Wilensky Vol. I, p. 75; Shever Poshyim 76/b-77/b, Wilensky Vol. I, p. 178; Zemir Aritsim 14/b-15/a, Wilensky Vol. I, p. 213; Sefer Vikkuah 2/a, Wilensky Vol. I, p. 271.

²²⁶ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 74, S. Maimon, An Autobiography op. cit., p. 144.

²²⁷ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 189; p. 154.

²²⁸ Michael Levi Rodkinson. Toldot Baalei Shem op. cit., pp. 30-45. He names sixty-nine disciples; B. Dinur, Historical Writings Vol. I op. cit., pp. 141-2.

Those however, who came with a will to change the social fiber of the Jewish community tend to share a more similar background. Many of them were wandering preachers, teachers and shoetim. Those who came to the Besht out of medical necessity or religious quest crossed all lines of social stratification and scholarly achievement. When the Vilna Gaon heard that Rabbi Dov Baer the Great Maggid, noted for his scholarship was attracted to the Besht, the bewildered Gaon attributed it to the Besht's sorcery.²²⁹ Despite the diversity in their social background, scholarship and knowledge they share a common denominator typical of the composition of revolutionary groups—their age. They seem all to have belonged to the same age group and presented a typical cleavage between the traditionally-oriented fathers and their radical sons.²³⁰

Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye²³¹ (d.c. 1782) the theoretician of Hasidism was one of the early followers of the Besht. He had his difficulties and grievances with the existing order. He was expelled from Shargorod²³² in 1748 on Sabbath eve. He nourished

²²⁹Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut op. cit., p. 80 note 2.

²³⁰Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 146-8.

²³¹For Studies on Jacob Joseph see: Gedalia Nigal, Manhig ve-Edah op. cit.; Samuel Dresner, The Zaddik; The Doctrine of the Zaddik According to the Writing of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoy, London/New York/Toronto 1960.

²³²Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 62-63.

his contempt for the ordinary type of rabbi and referred to them as Jewish demons.²³³ After joining the Besht his life changed. For some while it seems he persisted in his ascetic behavior. When his fasting became known to the Besht he, the latter hurried to the fasting Rabbi Jacob in order to force him to eat. Hasidic tradition relates that in his haste the Besht lost his very fine horse. The Besht also wrote Rabbi Jacob Joseph a letter admonishing him for his ascetic ways:

This [fasting] is the way of melancholy, and sadness, and the Shekina does not inspire through sadness but only through the happiness of doing mitzvoth. 234

Jacob Joseph also distributed all his wealth, about sixty thousand golden coins.

He returned all the fines that he had received and all the fees from the transactions about which there was the slightest doubt. 235

²³³Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Pollonoye, Toledot Yaacov Josef pp. 29/a, 120/a, 178/b, 195/b See Dubnow Toldot ha-Hasidit op. cit., p. 98, G. Nigal, Manhig ve-Edah op. cit., pp. 40-1.

²³⁴Shivhei ha-Besht p. 231. See A. Shochat, "On Joy in Hassidism" Hebrew, Zion Vol. XVI, 1951 pp. 30-42.

²³⁵Ibid., p. 63.

This distribution of wealth was very much in accordance with the Besht's concept of money and property.

The Besht never kept money overnight. When he returned from his travels, he used to pay his debts, and he would give the rest of it to charity the same day. 236

Once the Besht and his son Tsevi were in the house of a local rabbi. There were many pieces of silverware and the boy seemed to have been envious. The Besht turned to his young son and told him:

If your father had money for silverware, it would be better used to provide for poor people and the rest to give for charity. 237

The Besht believed that money corrupts. When his wife had once hidden some money so she would not have to buy on credit the Besht felt a hindrance during his prayer.²³⁸ A lady follower of the Besht, Rivaleh the Pious, echoes the Besht's attitude.

When she visited her husband's grave, she would rap with her stick on the grave and say these words: "Hershel, Hershel, go before the throne of God and pray that your sons will be poor so that they will not go astray from God's Way." 239

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 174.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 180.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 121.

Rabbi Nahman of Horodenka (d. 1780) came to the Besht out of religious quest. Like Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye he was an ascetic. He experienced a complete reversal of his world outlook after his encounter with the Besht. It seems that Nahman of Horodenka occupied himself essentially with practical questions concerning the methods of divine worship. Yet, despite all of his efforts, he was unable to achieve communion with God. He came to the Besht from a great distance.

Once I heard Rabbi Nahman of Horodenka say: "When I was a great Hasid I went every day to a cold mikveh. When I went home I did not feel warm for about an hour even though it was so hot the walls were like fire. Despite this I could not rid myself of wayward thoughts until I turned to the wisdom of the Besht."²⁴⁰

Rabbi Nahman of Kosov²⁴¹ (d. 1746) is among the most interesting personalities from among the Besht's group. A man who maintained his spiritual independence even after joining the Besht. He was a Kabbalist and a wealthy land contractor and grain dealer. He maintained an arrendeh in a village.²⁴²

²⁴⁰For a short study on Rabbi Nahman of Kosov See Abraham J. Heschel "Rabbi Nahman of Kosov The Besht's Friend" in Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Vol., ed., Saul Lieberman, New York-Jerusalem 1965, 111.

²⁴¹Ibid., p. 156.

²⁴²Shivhei ha-Besht p. 208.

He was among the first to introduce into the public prayer the Nusah ha-Ari (prayer rite of Isaac Luria). He was one of the foremost teachers of devekut²⁴³ (devotion) emphasizing constant contemplation of God.²⁴⁴ Yet it seems that his achievements in attaining this state of mind were unsatisfactory. His disciples urged him to travel to the Besht, to learn the latter's methods of contemplation. He reluctantly agreed.²⁴⁵ He came to Medzhibozh where the Besht "received him with great honor." They both entered a room from which everyone else was excluded. There they discussed contemplation.

The Rabbi, our teacher and rabbi, Nahman, said: Israel, is it true you say that you know people's thoughts?" He said to him: "Yes." He said to him: Do you know what I am thinking now?" The Rabbi answered: "It is known that thought is not fixed. It wanders from one point to another and is continually transformed. If you concentrate your thought on one thing, then I will be able to know.

The rabbi, our teacher and rabbi, Nahman, did so. The Besht said: "The name of Y-A-H-W-E-H is in your thoughts."

²⁴³Jacob Yoseph of Polonnoye, Toledot Yaacov Joseph, op. cit., 17/b.

²⁴⁴On devekut see Gershom Scholem, "Devekut, or Communion with God" in The Messianic Idea in Judaism op. cit., pp. 203-227. On Rabbi Nahman's Devekut, Joseph Weiss, "Beginning of Hasidism" op. cit., pp. 60-65.

²⁴⁵Shivhei ha-Besht p. 234.

The rabbi, our teacher and rabbi, Nahman, said: You would know this anyhow, for I must always keep this thought. As it is written: "I have set the Lord always before me. Whenever I remove all thought and concentrate on one thing, the name of the Presence is before my eyes."

The Besht said: But there are several holy names, and you could have concentrated on any that you like." Then the rabbi, our rabbi and teacher, admitted that it was as the Besht had said. 246

While Rabbi Nahman of Kosov became a follower of the Besht he continued to maintain his spiritual independence and occasionally clashed with the Besht.²⁴⁷

Once the Besht said: "The rabbi, our teacher and rabbi, Nahman, pursues to kill me... But with the help of God he will not get me." 248

The Yiddish version of Shivhei ha-Besht identifies the core of the dispute. It was about the ways one should serve God (Avodat ha-Boreh). Rabbi Nahman told his students not to get involved in his dispute with the Besht since the two of them, he and the Besht, were quarreling for the sake of heaven, for God's honor.²⁴⁹

The most illustrious of all of the Besht's followers who had come to Medzhibozh in search of a

²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 234-235.

²⁴⁷ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 209, 234, 236-237.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 234.

²⁴⁹ Sefer Shivhei Baal Shem Tov op. cit., pp. 31/b-32/a; Abraham Yaari, "Two Basic Recensions of Shivhe ha-Besht" op. cit., pp. 224-5; On the Besht's own method of Devekut see Shivhei ha-Besht p. Sefer Shivhei ha-Besht op. cit., p. 23/a.

change, was Rabbi Dov Baer (about 1710-d.1772), the Great Maggid. He came to Medzhibozh out of physical desperation and in search of a medical cure. He had received traditional religious education in the Yeshivah of Rabbi Jacob Joshua Falk (1680-1756). He was an erudite Talmudic scholar and no stranger to Kabbalah. He had adopted the system of Lurianic Kabbalah. Dov Baer also led the life of an ascetic. The mortification to which he subjected himself eventually made him ill and crippled.²⁵⁰ Among others he seemed to have suffered from Podagra and for long periods of time was unable to walk.

The Maggid resisted for several years the temptation and constant urging of his family and students to go to the Besht and be cured. The Besht was very eager to have this prominent scholar come to him and be among his followers. Once the Besht exclaimed, "I have known of him [the Maggid] for several years and I long for him to come to me."²⁵¹ The very sick Maggid eventually gave in to pressure and physical discomfort and came to the Besht. The meeting between the cheerful easy-going Besht and the ascetic Rabbi Dov Baer with

²⁵⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 81.

²⁵¹ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 82.

his bushy hair and ill looking face²⁵² was indeed remarkable.²⁵³ The Maggid was partially cured by the Besht. The joining of Rabbi Dov Baer with the Besht's Hasidim may be considered a most significant event in the development of Hasidism, second only to the founding of the sect by the Besht himself. He was chosen by the Besht to succeed him thus giving a new direction to Hasidism, one within traditional Judaism.

Dissatisfaction with the social conditions within the Jewish community, his physical inability to cope with the physical demands of an ascetic's life brought Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye to the Besht. Rabbi Nahman of Horodenka returned from Israel in order to pursue his quest of achieving communion with God. He found the answer with the Besht. He joined his circle of close associates and family. He was the grandfather of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav. Rabbi Nahman of Kosov, the wealthy land contractor and Kabbalist came to the Besht in search of a new method of devekut. The Great Maggid could no longer endure his physical discomfort. The cure was to be found in Medzhibozh with the Besht. For all of them the Besht provided the promised change which was the solution to their

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Sefer Shivhei ha-Besht p. 11/b.

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More on the meeting see Chapter II pp. 26-27.

respective searching. And if the total solution was not to be found at Medzhibozh at least a new direction was charted there, as in the case of Rabbi Nahman of Kosov. With slight variations the motivations which brought these prominent people to the Besht were similar for the rest of his close associates like Pinhas of Korets, Mikhel of Zolochov, Zeev Kotses and others.

Like those in the Besht's close circle were the rank-and-file individuals and groups united in their discontent and quest for change. Among them emerge recognizable groups of similar social and economic background, Shohetim melamdim, preachers arrendators and also coachmen seem to have a special place in Beshtian Hasidism. Dinur in his study on the social elements in Hasidism, suggests that Hasidism fashioned its founder in its own image.²⁵⁴ The Besht prior to the Medzhibozh period was a shohet,²⁵⁵ a melamed,²⁵⁶ a man who leased an inn and other facilities from an arrendator.²⁵⁷

One may add to Dinur's list the fact that the Besht was also a coachman, Rabbi Gershon's coachman.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴Dinur, Historical Writings Vol. 1 op. cit.
p. 141.

²⁵⁵Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 43, 45.

²⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 35, 36.

²⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 43-44.

²⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 26, 29.

Shmeruk in a study on the Hasidic Shehita,²⁵⁹ discusses the social implications of the Hasidic Shehita and the intervention of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov and his colleagues on behalf of the oppressed. Hasidism differed in its Shehita from the accepted custom. The deviation however was not of an halakhic nature. Hasidism used a different knife (halaf) - a polished knife. The shehitah became an ideological and social mark of the movement. A polished knife for the mystic meant that a soul which transmigrated to the body of an animal would find its Tikkun redemption through a proper shehitah. In the social aspect it meant the interference with the authority of the kahal (the local representation of the autonomous Jewish community). The kahal acquired monopolistic control over all shehitah and sale of kasher (kosher) meat. It was also the state's main revenue from the Jews. The independent shehitah of the Hasidim their abstinence from meat at times,²⁶⁰ compelled the

²⁵⁹ Ch. Shmeruk. "The Social Significance of the Hassidic Shekhita," Hebrew Zion Vol. XX, 1955 pp. 47-72. Title and summary in English 11-111.

²⁶⁰ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 38 Rabbi Jacob, brother of Rabbi Gershon of Kutty ate dairy; Shivhei ha-Besht p. 135; fish was substituted for meat, Ibid., p. 178.

Kahal and the state authorities eventually to recognize Hassidic slaughter. At the same time that the new methods of Shehitah was a protest against the authority-the Kahal. The Besht was very much concerned with the personality of the individual Shoet and saw to it that he would not be a follower of the Sabbatean movement or an unreliable individual.²⁶¹

As in the case of the Shehitah, Hasidism undertook another task which the Kahal, for various reasons, could no longer perform - the defending of the Arrendator when he was unable to fulfill his obligations towards the manor house. The Besht, his student Mikhel of Zolochov²⁶² and later Hasidic leaders like Rabbi Aaron of Karlin displayed the utmost concern for the protection of the Arrendator. Apparently this concern and direct intervention of Hasidic leaders from the very inception of the movement attracted many common people to Hasidism, even though its theological innovations and new ways of worship were not understood sufficiently well by this social class. It was a major reason for the rapid

²⁶¹ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 90-91, 192.

²⁶² Sefer Hitgalut ha-Zaddikim, Warsaw, 1901 pp. 42-3; M. Ben Yehezkel, Sefer ha-Maasiyot op. cit., Vol. 1 pp. 188-194.

spread of the movement into the regions where the kahal was incapable of protecting the arrendators.²⁶³

Coachmen were another social group which figured largely in Hasidism. Rabbi Joshua Trunk of Kutno (1820-1893), who was close to Hasidism, used to say "nine Joshuas do not form a minyan but ten coachmen do." The pages of Shivhei ha-Besht are filled with stories about horses and coachmen. The subject held a special fascination for the Besht. The Besht was both a coachman and a frequent traveler and both driver and animal played a very significant role in his life. He was quite an expert when it came to horses²⁶⁴ and liked to tell stories and parables about them.²⁶⁵ He was also very well acquainted with the countryside and its many roads.

A merchant wanted to travel to the community of white field (Belaya Tserkov) but was afraid to travel there because of the robbers. His wife said to him I heard that the Besht travels on the same road. Give his servant a present

²⁶³Ch. Shmeruk, "The Hasidic Movement and the 'Arendars," Hebrew, Zion, Vol. XXXV, 1970 pp. 182-192 English title and summary.

²⁶⁴Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 44, 64, 105-106.

²⁶⁵F.A. Doppelt, "The Besht in Chassidism" in The Reflex Vol. IV, 1929 pp. 61-62.

and he will inform you on what day the Besht goes. He did so and he traveled in the same company with the Besht. When they arrived at the forest where the robbers were, the Besht ordered his servant to stop and permit the horses to graze. The man became very frightened. The Besht ordered that the wagons be placed opposite each other and the Besht sat in the center. He opened the Book of the Zohar and read it. The robbers came out of the forest, but when they approached them they were seized with a trembling and they fled. 266

The Besht's fascination with the topic appears at times to reach extremes. When the erudite Talmudic scholar Dov Baer came, reluctantly, to the Besht to be cured, the Besht spoke about his gentile lad, horses and fodder. The distressed Maggid was ready to return home without the cure ²⁶⁷ he came for. Yet to this Dov Baer, once he became a member of the Besht's group, the coachmen became part of his religious outlook. Rabbi Mikhel of Zolochov once came to the Great Maggid Dov Baer with his coachman. When it was time to say the Grace after the meal, the Maggid bypassed Rabbi Mikhel and asked the coachman to recite the Grace. Rabbi Mikhel was amazed at the procedure and asked Rabbi Dov Baer for an explanation. The Maggid told

²⁶⁶ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 165.

²⁶⁷ Sefer Shivhei ha-Besht p. 35/a.

Rabbi Mikhel that his coachman was a hidden saint and the Prophet Elijah had revealed himself to the coachman.

Rabbi Mikhel was indeed surprised. He went to the coachman and asked him if he was willing to study with him. The coachman promised Rabbi Mikhel an answer after three days since he had to consult heaven about the matter. However, on the third day when Rabbi Mikhel came to the coachman he was gone. The coachman with horse, wagon, wife and children ran away.²⁶⁸

But no other coachman has a more prominent place in Hasidism than the Besht's coachman. He was a gentile, for it was the Besht's custom to travel with a gentile coachman.²⁶⁹ His name was Alexis. Yet it is never mentioned in Shivhei ha-Besht despite the many references made to him. Joseph Perl when discussing the Besht's ability as a Baal Shem mentions Alexis. According to Perl the Besht forms a unique Baal Shem set apart from all other Baalei Shem, since his methods include additional practices.

²⁶⁸ Sefer Shivhei ha-Besht p. 35/a.

²⁶⁹ M. Ben-Yehzekel, Sefer ha-Ma asiyot op. cit., Vol. III p. 67; Jacob Kadaner, Sippurim Noraim Munkatch, 1894.

He affects change with the aid of daily prayer, small talk, questions that he puts before his coachman Alexis, by the sniffing of tobacco. And according to the stories in Shivhei ha-Besht by telling his students about his ascensions to heaven. 270

Perl was a Maskil, (adherent of the Haskalah movement - Enlightenment) liked to ridicule Hasidism and should be read with caution. Yet as a man who was a Hasid in his own youth and a man with a penetrating insight, he cannot be ignored. Perl, sensed the unique position of Alexis and numbered it among the Besht's specific attributes which set him apart from the other traditional Baalei Shem.

The fact the Besht always had a gentile coachman, his dependence on his advice on matters other than driving are indeed interesting. Especially since coachman was a profession of Russian Dissenting sects the predominance of Old Believers in the coach transport business on Russian and Polish roads and highways was essential for Russian Dissenting groups. The Sect which occupied itself with the coach transport business was the Theodosians. The Sect was named after its founder, a Novgorod clerk Theodosii Vasilev, who

²⁷⁰ Abraham Rubinstein "The MS Uiber das Vesen der Secte Chassidim"-- op. cit., p. 266.

died in prison in 1711.²⁷¹ The services of the Sectarians as coachmen was of utmost importance. For if the police were hot on someone's trail, he could be smuggled out to some distant Theodosian community or to a refuge as far away as Poland. Blackwell²⁷² refers to this elaborate network of coach transport system as an "underground railroad."

This might suggest that Alexis the Besht's coachman was a member of a Russian Dissenting Sect, and that through him the Besht continued to maintain contact with Russian Sectarianism. It may account for the Besht's super sense of safety on remote roads. It might offer an explanation of the disappearance of Rabbi Mikhel of Zolochov's coachman. He fled in order to avoid revealing his identity. It might also shed some light on the Besht's peculiar conversations with the Maggid when they first met, about a gentile lad and horses.

But most of all it may suggest an additional indication, namely that one of the main, constant sources of influences on the Besht was Russian

²⁷¹N.M. Nikolskii, Istoria russkoi tserkvi, op. cit., pp. 236-7; V.V. Andreev, Raskol i ego Znachenie, op. cit., p. 157.

²⁷²W. Blackwell, The Beginning of Russian Industrialization 1800-60. Princeton, 1968 p. 220. As late as the nineteenth century a Judaizing fringe group, and also some of the Russian non-conformists were still prominent as coachmen. See Kosodoi, Ha-Mityahadim, Hebrew, Haifa 1924, pp. 57, 60-1.

Sectarianism. The constant contact with Russian Dissenting groups may account for the Besht's innovations in Hasidism, among them the most crucial institution for Hasidism was the establishment of the leader, the Zaddik. The Besht, the man who became a leader and an institution during the Medzhibozh period is a unique phenomenon and has no precedent in the Jewish past. For such an institution was non-existent.

As for the outstanding personalities, their membership in Hasidic society endowed them with a position of leadership based on qualities which were diametrically opposed to the accepted basis for leadership in traditional Jewish society. 273

Yet despite the novelty in Judaism of the institution of the Zaddik, the Besht behaved with an air of certainty, authority and clarity as if he were following a well chartered plan. This was also very much in evidence when he handled the problem of his succession as leader. Part of the great self-assurance can be attributed to his charismatic personality, his enthusiasm and his optimism. Yet the possibility that he was influenced by an existing model in Russian Sectarianism cannot be overlooked. It is only after

²⁷³Jacob Katz, Tradition and Crisis. op. cit., p. 239.

isolating the innovations of Hasidism and comparing them with Russian Sectarian practices, customs communal patterns and leadership, can some valid conclusions be made.

CHAPTER IV

INNOVATIONS OF BESHTIAN HASIDISM

The distinct features of Hasidism which set it apart from the rest of the traditional Jewish community emerged during the Beshtian period. The innovations of Hasidism in ritualism, mass enthusiasm, ecstasy, social organization of communal life, its close knit group cohesion and especially its unique institution of leadership, were all clearly recognizable by the mid-eighteenth century.

Beshtian Hasidism became the most dynamic and vital element in the Podolian Volhynian Jewish community. The Besht and his growing following were characterized by their enthusiasm and activism. The communications between Medzhibozh and the numerous towns, villages and hamlets assumed an erratic nature. Both leader and his ever growing circle of followers were eager to confront the issues at stake and take the necessary steps. When the Besht learned that Jacob Joseph, then still an ascetic, needed help the Besht sped to him exhausting his horse to death, but arriving on time to be with Jacob Joseph.¹ The distressed arrendator who tried

¹Shivhei ha-Besht p. 64.

to locate the traveling Besht did not despair when he failed to contact him in two towns. He continued relentlessly in his pursuit till he caught up with the Besht somewhere on the road.² In matters regarding the Shehitah issue,³ a cause of discontent which attracted a substantial number of followers, activism was again its hallmark. Jacob, brother-in-law of the Besht, pointedly ate dairy products when everybody else ate meat.

The arrendator ordered a fine dinner. Rabbi Jacob did not want to eat meat, and they gave him dairy food at the end of the table. The arrendator mocked him. 4

The Besht like Rabbi Jacob demonstrated his new practicws both in Shehitah and prayer even when in Slutsk, a Lithuanian community.

He wanted to prepare dinner and he [The Besht] said that he had to examine the knife. The Shohet had to come and show him the knife, the people of the town were very angry. How dare he examine the knife of the local Shohet, especially in a big community. But they could

²Ibid., p. 218.

³See Chapter III, pp. 135-7.

⁴Shivhei ha-Besht p. 38.

not stop him because this wealthy woman ordered it. At minhah they heard him praying in the Sephardic style, and they became still angrier.⁵

Activism one of the most essential temperamental characteristics of the new movement. And a factor in the rallying of the discontented around the Besht, was not its cohesive force. The diversified dynamic members of this religious group, of Beshtian Hasidim, were united in their novel ritualism and social organization.⁶ The innovations of Beshtian Hasidism found their greatest expression in action and in communal life rather than in thought.⁷ And indeed when the thought of Hasidism was compared with previous major trends in Jewish theology it fared poorly, and its novelty was non-existent. Even the claim that Hasidism popularized Kabbalistic ideas⁸ was eventually to be denied to it. The popularization

⁵Ibid., pp. 211-212.

⁶On the broader aspect of the issue see Joachim Wach, The Comparative Study of Religions, Edited with introduction by Joseph M. Kitaagawa, New York 1958, pp. xxx-xxxiii.

⁷For a broader discussion of the subject see Ibid., pp. 97-143.

⁸G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism op. cit., pp. 338-9; Abraham Rubinstein, "Kabbalah ve-Hasidut" Hebrew Kirjath Sepher Vol. XXXVI, 1961.

of Kabbalistic thought had already originated with Yehuda Loewe ben Bezalel⁹ of Prague (1520-1609). The change introduced by Hasidism merely constituted a shift in emphasis.¹⁰ Indeed when Hasidic teachings are placed alongside the rich diversified trends of Jewish thought, it is almost expected to score poorly on originality of thought.

Although there can be no real doubt of the Ball Shem's claim to originality, it should be borne in mind that his teachings is not only distinctively Jewish, but that for every part of it parallels and analogies could be found in the older Hebrew literature. Indeed it is not wonderful that in a literature, extending over 2000 years, of a people whose chief thoughts have been religion, and who have come in contact with so many external religious and philosophic influences, the germs can be discovered of almost every conceivable system, and the outline of almost every imaginable doctrine. 11

While it is difficult to find any originality in its thought, innovation is evident in its practice. The new and the novel in Hasidism are most pronounced in its garb, song, dance, mass enthusiasm and most strikingly of all in the institution of the Zaddik. It is there that its innovations are to be found. The theological justification came later after the practice was established.

⁹G. Scholem, Major Trends op. cit., p. 339.

¹⁰Jacob Katz, Tradition and Crisis op. cit., p. 237.

¹¹Solomon Schechter, Studies in Judaism, London, 1896 Vol. I, pp. 19-20.

The wearing of white clothes was one of the first most noticeable characteristics of Beshtian Hasidism. The Besht himself wore white clothes while in seclusion prior even to the Tluste period.

He built a house of seclusion in the forest. He prayed and studied there all day and night every day of the week, and he returned home only on the Sabbath. He also kept these white garments for the Sabbath. ¹²

Yet as in the case of Hasidic thought so it seems is the fate of its practice, regarding the wearing of white clothes. Members of both, traditional and fringe groups in Judaism wore white garments. In Traditional Judaism the High Priest during some services on Yom ha-Kippurim wore white garments.¹³ White attire assumed a mystical significance with Isaac Luria. He wore four white garments like the High Priests. On cold days he wore a fifth red garment.¹⁴ Despite the Ari's (rabbi Isaac Luria) custom and such practice by later Kabbalists the wearing of white was criticized by rabbinical Judaism,¹⁵ and did not become common practice. It was only with

¹² Shivhei ha-Besht p. 27.

¹³ Yomah, p. 70/a.

¹⁴ Dr. Arie Strikovsky, Ha-Ari, Hebrew, Ministry of Education and Culture Israel, [1972?]

¹⁵ The wearing of white garments by the Ari on the Sabbath was criticized by Rabbi Meir Eisenstadt (c.1670-1744) See: Meir Eisenstadt, Panim Meiros, Hebrew, second part, responsa no. 152. Sulzbach, 1733.

Beshtian Hasidism that it became common. Rabbi Dov Baer, the Great Maggid, carried the wearing of white to a new extreme; not only white garments but also white accessories. The white clad Maggid was indeed an impressive sight, and Solomon Maimon was duly impressed:

Accordingly, on the Sabbath I went to this solemn meal, and there found a large number of respectable men who had gathered together from various quarters. At length the great man appeared, his awe-inspiring figure clothed in white satin. Even his shoes and snuff-box were white, this being among the Kabbalists the color of grace. 16

The Jewish community was less impressed with the wearing of white clothes among the Hasidim, and lashed out with biting comments and a series of excommunications (haramot). The campaign against white clothes and other innovations started during the lifetime of the Besht, and was to continue till the end of the eighteenth century.

¹⁶ Solomon Maimon, An Autobiography edited with an introduction by Moses Hadas. New York, 1967, p. 54. Previous citations in this monograph were from the Hebrew edition since significant facts regarding the origins of Hasidism were omitted from this edition.

The first such attack was launched by
Rabbi Shelomah of Helma:

And there is one among them void of knowledge either in mysticism or in Gemarah, Posekim and Tosaphot... He jumps and sings. His deeds are strange and he is clad in white... He shakes like a tree of the forest and more of that nature. Things unknown to our forefathers. We witnessed it with our own eyes... and despite the fact that he did not study he is known as a wise man and rabbi. 17

In the accusations leveled by Rabbi Shelomoh of Helmah the Besht is not mentioned by name. However, it is accepted as one of the earliest testimonies, on the Beshtian¹⁸ Hasidism.

The harshest accusations to be pronounced against the Besht was the Ostrog excommunication. It is the only ban pronounced against the Besht in his lifetime. There is a dispute as to the authenticity¹⁹ of the Ostrog excommunication. Scholem accepts the authenticity of the Ostrog excommunication.²⁰

¹⁷Rabbi Shelomoh of ben Moshe of Helmah, Mirkevet ha-Mishneh, Hebrew, Frankfort on the Oder, 1751 reprinted in New York, [1948] p. 6.

¹⁸G. Scholem, "The Two First Testimonies on the Relations Between Chassidic Groups and Baal Shem Tov" op. cit., pp. 232-236.

¹⁹Dubnow doubted its authenticity. See: Toldot ha-Hasidut, op. cit., pp. 65, 66. The chronicler of the city of Ostrog Menahem Mendel Biber, does not mention the ban in his book, Mazkeret li-Ggedolei Ostraha.

²⁰G. Scholem, "Demuto ha-Historit Shel R' Israel Baal Shem Tov." op. cit., pp. 350-351.

To the nobles of Israel ... to the princes of the community leaders ... We have heard the disturbing voices of the joyful city ... There were once here many Torah authorities ... the late leader of the exile, the Maharsha As we have seen with our own eyes, as did all of Israel, this evil, vile, instigating, dishonest man, a stranger, arrogant and light-headed ... He persuaded many with his slick language, so that those foolish people who believe everything run after him, cherishing his every word, which is nothing but wind. And this man - may his memory be blotted out - who defiles Israel once said that he is from Shklov, and then said that he is from Shvatsh; he came to our community twice preaching here. He damaged himself within his own words of inanities, until we were afraid for his since, lest he have been exposed to a heretic. We searched him out and found ... that he is evil, and boasts in his stupidity that he is a drunken prophet, acting crazy ... And he here revealed his shame that he ate and drank and got drunk on the Yartzeit - all his words are worthless ... He is dressed in white ... He shall be called impure until God takes his revenge. Thus, we learned in the Torah, in all strictness excommunicate this evil, vile above-mentioned man, Israel - may his name be blotted out. And to all places where these words are received, all God-fearing men should heed these words ... encircle, pursue and excommunicate him; separate him from the community of the Exile; search his hidden [thoughts] and [you will] find in them deceit and heretical ideas. 21

The fact that the Besht was dressed in white is included among the other deviations from Judaism.

²¹Mordecai Wilensky, Hasidim and Mitnaggedim Vol. II, pp. 125-6; for other histographical facts with regard to this ban see: Ibid., pp. 122-4.

As late as the beginning of the nineteenth century sometime between 1811 - September 23, 1814, the day Rabbi David of Makow died, the Hasidim were still being accused of wearing white clothes. Rabbi David of Makow one of the most bitter opponents of Hasidism wrote a testament to his children in which he asks them to continue to observe Traditional Judaism "the way of truth, the Torah and fear of God",²² and to stay away from the people who are "draped in white and have wings like the stork"²³ all of the deviations of Hasidism and its straying away from Normative Judaism are associated with "Israel of Medzhibozh."²⁴ To his very last moment, David of Makow accused the Besht. This is in contrast with the many bans pronounced against Hasidism. There the novel in Hasidism is not always linked directly to the Besht.

²²Mordecai Wilensky, Hasidim and Mitnaggedim op. cit., Vol. II, p. 241.

²³Ibid., p. 241.

²⁴Ibid., p. 241. Rabbi David of Makow states that the Besht died in 1759 rather than in 1760. He remembers the date since it coincided with his own wedding.

Among the other innovations in Hasidic attire was the gartel, a sash-type belt worn during prayer. This is also mentioned in the polemic literature. "And they make themselves belts out of torn rags....setting themselves apart from the crowd of Israel"²⁵ or "they all are wearing belts on their loins."²⁶ The wearing of a belt during prayer time has its origin in ancient Jewish law.²⁷ Yet traditional Judaism saw in it an innovation during the eighteenth century. The Jewish community saw in the white clothes and gartel a practice foreign to Judaism, and indeed rightly so. Both the wearing of the white garments and the special sashes was, and still is, a practice common among Russian Sectarian sects. The Khlysty sect²⁸ the Doukhobors and the Molokans all wear white long garments on holidays and other important occasions. This custom is still common among Russian Dissenting sects residing on the American continent, like the Doukhobors in British Columbia.²⁹ Or the Molokans in Los Angeles, where the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 66

²⁷ Shulhan Arukh, Oraakh Hayyim Chapter 91, cf. b2. See also A. Wertheim, Law & Custom in Chassidism, op. cit., p. 73.

²⁸ Sergei Bolshakoff, Russian NonConformists op. cit., p. 90.

²⁹ George Woodcock & Ivan Avakumovic, The Doukhobors see picture #12 of a typical Doukhobor meeting in British Columbia during the 1950's.

women and the Elders still wear white during Sunday morning services and other important occasions. They look like a solid mass of white with only their weathered hands and faces showing from edgings of whitest lace."³⁰ This describes the Los Angeles group.

The gartel, the other innovation of Hasidism, is still very much in evidence and is part of the Hasidic attire. The gartel was also a Sectarian custom. The members, the Christs, and Mother gods, male and female leaders of the sects wore white garments and gartels during services and on all festive occasions. They wore gartels of various colors, gold, red and black, it depended on the particular ship (community).³¹ The dominant color of the Hasidic gartel is black, however other colors like, red, white and gold can also occasionally be seen.

In all instances mentioned above the Besht, the Maggid and other Hasidim wore white clothes only on the Sabbath and holidays. There is a story in

³⁰Pauline V. Young, Ph.D., The Pilgrims of Russian-Town, with an introduction by Robert E. Park, Ph.D., New York, 1967, p. 32.

³¹K.K. Grass, Die Russischen Sekten, German, Leipzig 1905. p. 384 Grass refers to the Sash as "Gürtel."

Shivhei ha-Besht regarding the wearing of white garments which is an exception to this Hasidic practice.

Before the rabbi, our teacher and rabbi, Aaron, [of Karlin] returned to the holy community a second time, the Great Rabbi [Dov Baer] told him: The rabbi, our teacher, Menahem Mendel will accompany you, since he speaks Polish. Take white Sabbath clothes with you. And so they did. On the way the rabbi, our teacher and rabbi, Menahem Mendel said: The purpose of our trip is only to arrange divorces, so what need have we to speak Polish? And why do we need the white clothes? Undoubtedly our rabbi must have perceived in his mind that the wicked people have regretted their confessions and have slandered us to the governor of the town.

Indeed, so it was. Upon their arrival at the town the governor ordered policemen to bring them immediately to him. He wanted to cause trouble for them. The wicked men hid themselves in another room of the governor's house. When they came to the governor dressed in their white clothes, they found favor in his eyes. He received them with great honor, and he told them to sit down with him. 32

It is quite clear from the story that it was not a Sabbath, a holiday or any other religious festivity. It was a meeting between a gentile governor and two Hasidic personalities, Rabbi Aaron of Karlin (1736-1772) and Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk (1730-1788). The governor had a negative prejudicial attitude toward the two Jewish visitors.

³²Shivhei ha-Besht p. 100.

However, he changed his mind in their favor before even a single word was spoken. The two Hasidim clad in white impressed him greatly. He received them with great honor and asked them to sit down. The governor most probably mistook them for Russian Sectarians. There were quite a few members of the Polish nobility who had Russian Sectarians living on their estates. One was Pan Khatkyevich of Chernobyl.³³ The Polish gentry looked with favor upon the industrious Russian Sectarians. Dov Baer, probably knew about the governor's sympathetic attitude toward the white clad Russian Sectarians with their flowing beards, and thus asked his two disciples to take white clothes along and wear them when they confronted the governor. Rabbi Aaron of Karlin and Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, it seems, were not aware of the significance of the white clothes in Russian Sectarianism only knew about its importance in the Hasidic community. While the color white was mostly associated with garments it was also extended to other items. The Molokan Elders during morning services gave out the bread from a white platter.³⁴ The Maggid when meeting with the Hasidim

³³F.C. Conybeare, Russian Dissenters, op. cit., p. 103.

³⁴Ibid., p. 110.

used a white snuff box.³⁵ Like the white garments, communal dancing and singing were an additional innovation of Hasidism.

Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz regretted not having a pleasant voice. He said: "If I could sing I would force God to live among men." Rabbi Aaron of Karlin was asked, "why do Hasidim dance?" Rabbi Aaron replied. "While dancing a person is uplifted a notch above the ground."³⁶ The Besht could do both. He had a pleasant voice³⁷ and could not resist dancing. In Beshtian Hasidism dance and song became a vehicle of social cohesion and spiritual exaltation. The Besht institutionalized these forms of spontaneous religious expressions of joy and ecstasy into established communal patterns, and made it part of Hasidic lore and ritual. Till today the dance and Niggun³⁸ (hasidic term for a musical unit, e.g., a "tune" be it sung or played) are among the most distinct features of Hasidism. According to the Besht, dance

³⁵For the importance of the snuff box in Hasidism, see Rabbi Dr. A. Wertheim, Law & Custom in Chassidism, Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1960 p. 225.

³⁶Quoted from Mi-Dor Dor in Isaac Werfel [Raphael] Sefer ha-Hasiditut, Hebrew, Tel Aviv, 1947 p. 82/b.

³⁷Shivhei ha-Besht p. 12.

³⁸For a short comprehensive article see Andre Hajdu & Yaacov Mazor, "The Musical Tradition of Hasidism" in EJ op. cit. Vol. VII, ff 1421-6; for an extensive study see: A.Z. Idelsohn, Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies, 1932, M.S. Geshuri, Ha-Niggun ve-ha-Rikkud be-Hasidut, Tel Aviv 1956-9, 3 vols.

and song were unavoidable for the man who comprehends the manifestation of God in the universe, and a necessity for the one who seeks God's closeness.

Rabbi Moshe Ephraim of Sudlikov (1740-1800) told a parable related to him by his grandfather, the Besht. Once someone was playing a beautiful instrument. When people heard the sweet music they could not restrain themselves and began to dance. They danced with such fervor they almost reached the ceiling. The closer one was to the music the more he accelerated the speed of his dance. A deaf man passed by. He saw a group of people behaving in a strange manner, one stretching out a leg the other lifting up his hands the third bending backwards. Not hearing the music, the deaf man was sure that they were insane.³⁹ The Besht's followers were well attuned to the music.

When Rabbi Yudel got out of the Mikveh, he heard Rabbi Nahman singing "ha-Aderet ve-ha-Emunah,"⁴⁰ and became very excited.

³⁹Rabbi Moshe Ephraim of Sudlikov, Degel Mahane Ephraim op. cit., Exodus 20, 18.

⁴⁰An acrostic prayer praising the greatness of God.

He ran to the beth-hamidrash dressed only in a shirt, and he danced in the beth-hamidrash for about two hours. 41

To such spontaneous individual expressions of joy as Rabbi Yudel's, which in moment of ecstasy even neglected proper attire, the Besht provided an outlet within a framework of communal dances which he instituted. Dancing in a circle by the Besht's followers is mentioned twice in Shivhei ha-Besht.

Once on Simhat Torah the followers of the Besht were happy, dancing and drinking alot of wine from the Besht's cellar. The Besht's pious wife said: "They will not leave any wine for the blessing of Kiddush and Havdalah," and she entered the Besht's room and said to him: "Tell them to stop drinking and dancing since you will not have any wine left over for the Kiddush and Havdalah."

The Besht said to her jokingly: "Well said. Go and tell them to stop and go home."

When she opened the door and saw that they were dancing in a circle and that flames of fire were burning around them like a canopy, she herself took the pots, went to the cellar, and brought them as much wine as they wanted. 42

The second instance of dancing in a circle is mentioned in Shivhei ha-Besht. It was also on Simhath Torah.

⁴¹Shivhei ha-Besht p. 134.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 80-1. Simhat Torah, literally, "The rejoicing of the Torah," a holiday in the Fall celebrating the conclusion of the annual public reading of the Torah.

Once on Simhath Torah the members of the holy group, the disciples of the Besht, were dancing joyfully in a circle and the Shekinah was in flames about them. During the dance the shoe of one of the lesser members of the group was torn. He was a poor man and it angered him that he was prevented from dancing with his friends and from rejoicing in the festivity of the mitzvah. 43

The Besht's daughter, Edel gave him a new pair of shoes. The dancing described here most probably took place on Simhath Torah, four years prior to the Besht's death. Since the rest of the quoted tale mentions that Edel gave birth on that year to her son Baruch. He was born in 1757.

There is quite a difference between the spontaneous dancing of the half-dressed Rabbi Yudel and that of the Hassid from the Besht's circle who was prevented from dancing by a torn shoe. It seems that proper attire was one of the features of Beshtian dances in the last years of the Besht's life. Even after becoming a communal institution Beshtian dances and Niggunim retained their sparks of enthusiasm and ecstasy (hitlahavut). The Beshtian trend of the Hasidic Niggun in contrast to other later Hasidic Niggunim, still retains some of its distinct features, conveying joy, pleasure and the appreciation of nature and life.⁴⁴

⁴³Ibid., p. 223.

⁴⁴M.S. Geshuri, "Le-Torat ha-Niggun ba-Hasidut," Hebrew in Sefer ha-Besht ed. Rabbi Y.L. Maimon, Jerusalem, 1960 p. 73.

Like its dance and niggun so was the Hasidic prayer, marked by ecstasy and enthusiasm in the hope of achieving devekuth. The Hasidic innovations in prayer were of a twofold nature: one, changing the liturgical convention (Nusah) from Askenazi to Sephardi and in its outward manifestations of ecstasy during prayer. The outward manifestations closely resemble the mannerisms of most of the Revival and Pietist groups of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The new Hasidic liturgical convention was based primarily on three main sources: The Ashkenazic Nusah of the Polish Jewry, the doctrine of Kavvanot according to the Ari and on the Sephardic Nusah of Eretz-Israel.⁴⁵ The attitude of the Besht toward hazanim (cantors) was negative and for some time remained a feature of Hasidism. Prayer was rather to be led by a member of the fellowship. The hazanim according to the Besht at times only created "demons." Two such demons, male and female were mocking the Besht and singing the Besht's melody of "Come my Beloved." These particular demons were born in a synagogue:

⁴⁵Meir Madan, "Tefilat ha-Hasidim" Hebrew, Machanayim, Tel Aviv 1960; Abraham Rubinstein, "Kabbalah ve-Hasidut," op. cit., p. 283; Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 60, 61, 135, 196, 212. Aaron Wertheim, Law and Custom in Chassidism, op. cit., pp. 83-143.

Because the cantor who used to sing in the synagogue, the one with the bass voice, was an adulterer. He purposely attracted the women with his singing.

The Besht banished these two demons.⁴⁶

The other change, that of making gestures, uttering of peculiar sounds, shaking, jumping, trembling, clapping of hands and "speaking in tongues," became more pronounced in Hasidism. And was at times carried to extreme by radical factions. These expressions of ecstasy are typical of Revivalist, Pietist and other religious sects, independent of their respective religion. The Besht used to shake violently during prayer.

I heard also from the Hasid Rabbi David Forkes from Medzhibozh, that once while the Besht was traveling he prayed near the eastern wall in a house. There were barrels full of grain that were placed at the Western Wall, and you could see that grain was shaking. 47

On another occasion, also while traveling, he prayed Minhah in a village granary "while he was praying his trembling made the barrels dance"⁴⁸ still another tale compares the trembling to an earthquake:

Shekinah hovered over him and as a result the earth trembled....But the earthquake was not noticeable except as it was seen in the water. 49

⁴⁶ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 108.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, describes a similar experience which took place in 1648.

After this I went to Mansfield where there was a great meeting of professors and people. Here I was moved to pray, and the Lord's power was so great that the house seemed to be shaken. 50

The Besht also made peculiar gestures during prayer.

He rested his head on the stand. Then raised his head and laid it down again... several times. 51

On another occasion, also on Yom Kippur, the Besht underwent visible physical changes. He bent backwards until his head came close to his knees.⁵² This was also a typical gesture of other enthusiasts of the eighteenth century.⁵³ Welsley who was a contemporary of the Besht, also experienced a change in his religious orientation at the age of 36. He describes in his Journal the American Jumpers:

⁵⁰George Fox, Journal, London/New York, 1924, p. 13.

⁵¹Shivhei ha-Besht p. 52.

⁵²Shivhei ha-Besht p. 55.

⁵³R.A. Knox, Enthusiasm, A Chapter in the History of Religion New York/Oxford, 1950 pp. 372-388.

Some of them leaped many times, men and women, several feet from the ground; they clapped their hands with the utmost violence; they shook their heads, they distorted all their features, they drew their arms and legs to and from, in all variety of posture; they sung, roared, ⁵⁴ shouted, screamed with all their might.

The quest to attain the state of enthusiasm during prayer indeed led at times to radical statements as well as strange physical manifestations.

I went before him [The Besht] and found that someone was standing before the Ark reciting the Psalms as if asleep. I knew that the rabbi would be irritated by this, as he [the Besht] used to compare the genital union to the spoken covenant just as it is impossible to procreate with an inert organ in the genital union, so it is impossible to create with a mute organ in the spoken covenant. ⁵⁵

Peculiar actions, radical statements and actions, change in liturgical form, provoked a violent response from the Jewish community. The opponents of Hasidism as in the case of the white garments pronounced excommunications and abusive statements. Vilna took the lead. In 1772 a herem was pronounced against Hasidism with the "Vilner Gaon" in the lead of the opposition.

⁵⁴From John Welsley's Journal 11/8, 1774, cited in Ibid., p. 533.

⁵⁵Shivhei ha-Besht p. 68; See also Zavaat ha-Ribash, op. cit., p. 12 Keter Shem Tov; op. cit., p. 4.

Our brethren Israel ... do you not know that newcomers, unknown to our ancestors, have arrived, organizing a suspicious [HaShudim, a pun on Hasidim] sect...forming private cliques. Their ways are different from Jewry with respect to the liturgy... they yell improper foreign sounds during the Amidah,* behaving in a mad fashion, saying that their thoughts are wandering in many worlds.... They do away with the study of Torah; they always maintain that one may limit his studies and not be too upset regarding his sins...All their days are holidays...As they say their forged prayers they display different voices, and the entire city is in an uproar. They behaved like wheels, topsy turvy...This is only one of thousands of their ugly ways... The above-mentioned suspect confessed before us...and thank God that their sins were revealed to us in our camp, they confessed after a very thorough investigation...⁵⁶

The other bans were to repeat these accusations. The Brody herem among others, also included criticism the Shehitah with polished knives.⁵⁷ While many abusive statements were in more general terms⁵⁸ some identified

⁵⁶ Zmir Aritsim ve-Harvot Zurim in Wilensky op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 59-61.

⁵⁷ The Gaon of Vilna never accused the Hasidim on account of their Shehitah.

⁵⁸ Shever Poshyim 30/a-30/b, in Wilensky, op. cit., pp. 102-3.

* See Glossary.

a particular strange behavior. Among the peculiarities during prayer were mentioned; banging on the wall,⁵⁹ clapping of hands, sexual activity,⁶⁰ turning topsy turvy,⁶¹ throwing away of the shoes⁶² and singing in foreign languages⁶³ during prayer.

The Opponents of Hasidism realized that this ecstatic behavior was also common among non-Jewish Sects as well as among Jewish fringe groups like the Sabbateans. They compared Hasidism to the Free Masons,⁶⁴ the Mennonites⁶⁵ - a branch of Anabaptism,⁶⁶ Illuminati and Quakers. All this suggests that the

⁵⁹ Shever Poshyim, 30/a-30/b, in Wilensky, op. cit., pp. 1020103.

⁶⁰ Shever Poshyim, 66/b-67/a in Ibid., p. 163.

⁶¹ Shever Poshyim, 72/b-73/a in Ibid., 172; Vol. I, pp. 82-83.

⁶² Shever Poshyim, 43/a-43/b in Wilensky Vol. II, p. 129.

⁶³ Sefer Vikuah, 15a in Ibid., p. 305.

⁶⁴ Shever Poshyim, 70/a-71/a Ibid., p. 169.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 68/b-69a in Ibid., p. 166.

⁶⁶ The Mennonites were named after their founder Menno Simons (1491-1561) see Hans J. Hillerbrand, Christendom Divided New York/Philadelphia/London, 1971, pp. 82-83.

Hasidic practices were seen by its opponents as of non-Jewish origins. Yet this accusation must be accepted with some qualifications since different Pietistic and mystic groups share a very similar range of spiritual experiences and outward manifestations of ecstasy and fervor in that respect Hasidism was very much a child of the eighteenth century religious movements⁶⁷ in particular and of Pietistic movements in general. As such, Hasidism experienced many similar trends with all other religious groups allowing however variations due to its own particular culture. This is also true for the Sabbatians and Frankists. Their dances⁶⁸ or hand clapping⁶⁹ can also be seen as part of the general mainstream and not

⁶⁷Rivkah Schatz Uffenheimer, Quietistic Elements in 18th century Hasidic Thought, Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1968. The study analyzes the quietistic elements, in Hasidism, especially the trend that emerged in the thought of Dov Baer the Great Maggid.

⁶⁸M. Balaban, Le-Toldot ha-Tenuah ha-Frankit op. cit., p. 117.

⁶⁹G. Scholem, "The Two First Testimonies on the Relations Between Chassidic Groups and Baal Shem Tov" op. cit., 238.

especially as a source of influence on Hasidism. Some of the modes of behavior described above, spontaneous or as a result of a contact with Christian Pietistic Jewish fringe groups, became part of the Hasidic tradition. The more radical manifestations like those of the Amdor faction vanished.

While Hasidic behavior during prayer follows a more general trend of Pietistic movements, its dance and Niggun belong to a different category. The Beshtian Hasidic dance and music have particular Slavic qualities blended with Oriental tones and strike a remarkable note of similarity to Russian Ukranian melodies and dances,⁷⁰ and more so resemble the dances and music of Russian Sectarianism. The Khlysty Sect, independent of its ecstatic behavior where the individual is dominant has a range of dances and songs which are communal and are governed by set regulations. In its ecstasy the Khlysty resemble the general trend of religious enthusiasm of the eighteenth century.

[During the Khlysty service some, would] begin to stamp, kick, hop, leap shriek;... all are ejaculating such phrases as: Oi Duhy, Oi Dukh, Savatio Duch, Okh, Okh Okh," but some under the intoxication of the

⁷⁰M.S. Geshuri "Le-Torat ha-Niggun ba-Hasidut" op. cit., pp. 71, 73; EJ Vol. VII, op. cit., ff 1422, 1425.

Spirit begin to speak with tongues, which is the task of others to interpret. 71

Unlike the spontaneous ecstatic behavior during prayer the dances of the Khlysty were governed by rules traditions and were part of a communal activity. The most important of these dances was the Radenie, a dance of joy and happiness. The dance was already an established practice in 1734.⁷² During the dance the members of the Sect were dressed in white clothes, including the gartel. Both men and women carried a white handkerchief to wave; simulating the fluttering of angels or dove wings. The Radenie had many forms.⁷³ In one of its various forms the Sectarians form a line facing the Christ. They ran after one another, keeping time with an accelerating

⁷¹Conybeare, op. cit., p. 303; See also Shivhei ha-Besht p. 208 about Rabbi Nahman of Kosov. He used to send messages to the members of the holy group in the city telling each of them what sins they had to correct in this world. Everything that he said was true, but they were very annoyed with his prophecies because they had an agreement among them not to prophesy."

⁷²Grass. op. cit., p. 388.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 384-389.

rhythm, and then suddenly turning in the opposite direction.⁷⁴ The other form is that of the circle. Not all members participate in the dance and at the same time some stand on the side and sing while others sing and dance. They also drank Kvas.

Despite its very orderly regulated form at the onset, the Radenie ended many times with the ecstasy of individuals. During some dances the dancers also balanced on their heads bottles filled with water.⁷⁵

The similarities between the Hasidic dance and Sectarian dances are remarkable. The same form, rhythm, the handkerchief in hand and even the balancing of bottles. It is possible that David of Makow when describing the Hasidim as "draped in white and have wings like a stork" was referring to their handkerchiefs during the dances.^{75a} For the Besht, as for the Sectarians dancing became an organized communal function of a social cohesive nature which takes place on prescribed dates and at special events. It was no longer that spontaneous sporadic outburst of Rabbi Yudel, dancing while half dressed. The Hassid

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 385.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 414.

^{75a}Yet the phrase in Tractate Sanhedrin p. 24/a should not be overlooked. "Wings like the wings of a stork." Rashi commented this means flattery: presenting themselves as being pious (hasidim).

in the Besht's group had to get a pair of new shoes before he could resume his place among the dancing Hasidim.

The Besht's knowledge of the various dances and songs was based upon personal experiences in the countryside. Once the Besht was host to a seven year old boy named Shaul, a member of the famous Margoliouth family, the devoted and loved disciples of the Besht. The lad was handsome and had a magnificent voice. The Besht could not resist showing off the talented young boy. He ordered the coachman to prepare his horses. The Besht with the child and some of his students left for the countryside. The road passed near a Gentile house of prayer and a tavern. It was a Christian holiday. The Besht's student's became frightened for they feared being stoned. The Besht paid no attention to their fears.

Near the tavern an old Gentile was playing the violin and Gentile men and women folk were dancing as was their custom. The Besht stepped out of his coach and ordered drinks for everybody. Then he began boasting about young Shaul's talent. The child sang for them. They enjoyed his singing and they drank and danced all night. The Besht also treated the Gentile children to drinks and inquired about their names. They all enjoyed themselves very much and

forgot the fact that the guests were Jewish.⁷⁶ One can draw from this story different conclusions. However, the fact that the Besht maintained a direct contact with the Gentile countryside is the most obvious one. The Besht introduced the Ukrainian Russian dances and melodies, of Sectarian and non-Sectarian into Hasidism. The Besht it seems was innocent of the many elaborate Jewish theological explanations that later Zaddikim gave to the dance and song in Hasidism.

"I came to the world to show a new direction" said the Besht according to his grandson Rabbi Baruch.⁷⁷ Nowhere in Hasidism is the innovation more apparent than in the institution of the Zaddik. Dance, song a new liturgical form gave Hasidism the essential framework of communal organizational features as a sect. The institution of leadership - the Zaddik

⁷⁶A. Kahana, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, op. cit., p. 88. The story was sent to Kahana by Rabbi Joseph Levinstein (1840-1924). Rabbi Levinstein is a reliable source and his many letters to prominent historians, among them Dubnow were quoted. See Wilensky, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 350.

⁷⁷Buzinah Dinurah, quoted in Shimeon Menahem Mendel, Sefer Baal Shem Tov, Hebrew, Warsaw, 1938, reprinted in New York 1948. Vol. I p. 29. The two volumes are a collection of statements and teachings attributed to the Besht. It is the most comprehensive in its field.

became the focus of the movement and its essential feature. The innate nature inherited from the Sectarrians subsequently gave birth to the most unique innovations in Hasidic thought. The basic features which were to mark this institution from its inception and are very much in evidence today, can be found in the Besht. The Zaddik was the most essential element for the movement, without which its foundations were unthinkable.⁷⁸ Buber saw in the first Zaddikm of Hasidism a unprecedented vitality.

The "Zaddikim" of these five generations form together a group of religious personalities fo a vitality, a spiritual powerfulness, and a manifold originality such as, to my knowledge, have nowhere in the history of religions been concentrated in so short a span of time. ⁷⁹

Scholem is also overwhelmed with the new phenomenon.

There are two things about the movement which are particularly remarkable. One is the fact that within a geographically small area and also within a surprisingly short period the ghetto gave birth to a whole galaxy of saint-mystics, each of them a startling individuality. The incredible intensity of creative religious feeling, which manifested itself in Hasidism between 1750 and 1800, produced a

⁷⁸ Martin Buber, The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, edited and translated by Maurice Friedman. New York, 1960. p. 40.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

wealth of truly original religious types which, as far as one can judge, surpassed even the harvest of the classical period of Safed. Something like a rebellion of religious energy against petrified religious values must have taken place.

No less surprising however, is the fact that this burst of mystical energy was unproductive of new religious ideas, to say nothing of new theories of mystical knowledge.⁸⁰

For Minkin the Zaddik assumed larger dimensions than merely a saint-mystic, he became a Man-God.

It is man's highest ideal, taught Israel Baal Shem Tov, to become the clear manifestation of God on earth. It is thus that the ideal of the Man-God, or Zaddik, was evolved. While Israel was alive, he was himself the living symbol and embodiment of this ideal, but he well knew that, at least in its material form this symbol would soon be broken. He, therefore, created what is perhaps the most daring innovation of the sect he had founded - the Zaddik. ⁸¹

The magnitude of the originality of this institution is so overpowering that even those who question the innovations of Hasidism agree that the physical existence of the Saint-mystics constituted new religious types. The impact of the originality was so great that in the frame of reference of the Jewish past one could not find anything like it.

⁸⁰ Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, op. cit., pp. 337-8.

⁸¹ Jacob S. Minkin, The Romance of Hasidism, op. cit., pp. 97-8.

Besht's startling individuality, the first Zaddik, was compared to none other than to the personality of Jesus himself!

When we account for all the miracles and wonders performed by the Besht, as told by various legends we can not find anything similar except in the New Testament...⁸²

Dubnow who believed that the Besht's ability as a Baal Shem was crucial in the assertion of his leadership states:

Did not we have precedents of that behavior in the history of religions? Maybe Jesus of Nazareth would not have reached the state of a religious innovator had he not employed "sorcery" and miracles; curing the sick and restoring the dead to life. ⁸³

When speaking about Hasidic stories Dubnow again recalls the similarity:

During tens of years stories circulated among the people, wonder stories about the Podolian son as in his time stories circulated about the son of the Galilee.⁸⁴

The comparison between Jesus and the Besht was so much on the Jewish mind that when writing about Jesus the parallel was drawn to the Besht! The Gospel was compared to Shivhei ha-Besht; the Pharisees to

⁸² Sh. A. Horodetsky, Ha-Hasidut ve-Hasidim op. cit., Vol. I p. 16.

⁸³ S. Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut op. cit., p. 48.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

the Rabbis who were opposed to the Besht and Jesus himself to Israel Baal Shem Tov.⁸⁵

Indeed the similarity is unavoidable and almost natural. The Besht is the embodiment of the Zaddik and as such the parent model of later Zaddikism. He can be seen as directly influenced by and modeled after the Sectarian Christ. Torsten Ysander⁸⁶ and others called attention to the fact years ago. The Zaddik resembles most closely the Christs of the Khlysty and Doukhobors as well as Christs of other sects. According to the Khlysty Jesus of Nazareth was an ordinary man till the age of thirty. His birth from a virgin was interpreted to mean that he was brought up in the true faith by his mother.⁸⁷ After a forty day fast Christ came to baptism and then the spirit of God descended upon him, whereby he was anointed the Christ. Among the Doukhobors as among

⁸⁵Solomon Zeitlin, Who Crucified Jesus, New York/London, 1942 p. 136.

⁸⁶Torsten Ysander, Studien Zum B'estschen Hasidismus, German, Uppsala, 1933 p. 372. When initially I found similarities between Russian Sectarianism and Hasidism it was independent of Ysander's study. See Yaffa Eliach, "Ysander Torsten" in EJ op. cit., Vol. XVI, ff 866-7; G. Scholem, "The Two First Testimonies" op. cit., p.

⁸⁷K.K. Grass, op. cit., p. 256.

the Khlysty the cardinal doctrine is that of the reincarnation of Christ in the individual. The doctrine often assumes the belief that at the death of one of their Christs, the Christhood passes into the body of another. Thus there are living Christs in each generation. But this does not limit the number of Christs. On the contrary, almost every congregation, fellowship has its own Christ.⁸⁸ The Christhood is also transferable or inherited in a direct line of succession.

Danila of Kostroma, the Christ who delivered the Twelve Commandments and was also the founder of the Khlysty, transferred his Godship to his spiritual son. His name was Timofeyerich Suslov, the son of Timofe and Irina. The legend is that Irina was a hundred years old when Suslov was born. He was her first born.⁸⁹ Silvan Kolesnikov was a Doukhor Christ and lived in the Ukraine in 1750 among the peasants of Nikolskoye. People flocked to him and brought him gifts. He had the reputation of distributing generously whatever he received. He transmitted his Christhood to his natural sons Kiril and

⁸⁸ Conybeare, op. cit., p. 341.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 359.

Peter whose descendants are still prominent among Canadian Doukhobors. Ilarion Pobirokhin was another Christ who claimed Kolesnikov's mantle of Christhood. He was a man with considerable charm and a persuasive personality and tongue who could be quite arrogant at times. He proclaimed himself the living Christ and claimed that he derived his title by spiritual inheritance and a deathbed testament from Kolesnikov.⁹⁰ Another prominent family of Christs is the Verigin family among the Canadian Doukhobors. The Christ, while being the center of each sect, was also at times the cause for dissension. A man would proclaim himself a Christ and attract a number of followers thus establishing a sect with slightly different customs. At times a Christ would together with his new dynasty join another sect. Like Semen Uklein who rejected some teachings of Pobirokhin his father-in-law, and joined the Molokans.⁹¹

The Christ was the leader and highest authority of his particular sect. He was prophet, priest, political leader and healer. He was usually endowed with

⁹⁰George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, op. cit., pp. 26-30.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 30.

great deal of the native ability of a Russian peasant philosopher, so much a part of Russian tradition.

They are neither scholars nor theologians, but man of action, skillful organizers, who give the brotherhood strength and stability. 92

The Christs had a number of specific powers. They could see the future, predicting what the weather would be, whether the crops would fail or whether there would be a bumper harvest, what the take of fish in the rivers would be, and when there would be persecutions by the government. Members of the sect confessed their sins to them and they could detect sinners - for example, they would swing a lamp: if it remained lit, all present were blameless; if it went out, someone had sinned.⁹³ The Christ could also ascend bodily to heaven.

Even after his death his place of burial had unique powers.

The family institution also experienced a change with the Schism. The sects that belonged to the bespopovtsy (priestless) had no priests to celebrate the marriage sacrament since the Apostolic succession was broken due to the failure of the bishops to join

⁹²A description of a Molokan Elder. See: Pauline Young, op. cit., p. 80.

⁹³Conybeare, op. cit., p. 342.

the Schism. Many sects provided their own solutions.⁹⁴
 In some sects male and female members lived together as spiritual husband and wife. Semen Uklein a Doukhobor who turned to the Molokans lived with his wife in spiritual union for five years. She was the daughter of the Doukhobor Christ Ilarion Pobirokhin.

Children born of these spiritual unions were cared for and provided for by the Sects.⁹⁵

The parallels between the Sectarian Christ and the Besht are indeed startling. Almost each instance of the Besht's behavior has its counterpart in the Sectarian Christ. Like Suslov the Besht was born to parents who were a hundred years old.⁹⁶ In both cases the child was the first born. The Besht like the Christs could see the "whole world"⁹⁷ at one glance.

⁹⁴For the response of the Vyg Community see Robert O. Crummey, The Old Believers and The World of Antichrist, Madison, Wilwaukee and London, 1970 pp. 117-122; for a detailed discussion of family life among the Raskol. See, I.F. Nilskii, Semeinaia zhizn v russkom raskole, Russian St. Petersburg, 1868.

⁹⁵Nilskii, op. cit., pp. 103, 133. There were, among other provisions asylums in Moscow and Riga. Later some of them shared the fate with many Jewish Cantonists.

⁹⁶An allowance here can be made for the Biblical story of Abraham and Sarah.

⁹⁷Shivhei ha-Besht p. 49.

He could predict the destruction of cities.⁹⁸ He could pick out sinners by observing their faces. Once he decided that a sinner was nearby the position of a lamp.⁹⁹ He was a rainmaker¹⁰⁰ and singled out localities favorable for fishing. He, like the Christs, ascended to heaven and described this ascension of the soul in a letter¹⁰¹ to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Gershon of Kutty. He distributed all his money like some among the Christs. The Besht said that he was a reincarnation of Moses,¹⁰² King David,¹⁰³ Saadia Gaon¹⁰⁴ and was to be the Messiah.¹⁰⁵ Each Christ was a reincarnation of Jesus. Like the Christs, the Besht's qualification for religious leadership was his native ability rather than scholarship.^{105a} Like Sectarianism, Hasidism split into many Sects. Each Sect with each own Christ or with its own

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 59.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 35-6.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 169-70, Ben-Porat Yosef op. cit., p. 28/a.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 58, 169-70.

^{105a}Russian Sectarianism, like the official Russian Church, did not particularly seek knowledge and scholarship. Even parts from the Bible were translated into Russian for the first time as late as the 15th century almost six hundred years after Russia embraced Christianity.

Zaddik. The Dynastic concept of succession became dominant in Hasidism. In Lubavitch the present Zaddik - Rebbe - is the seventh in straight dynastic succession. The Admor, founder of Lubavitch was born in 1747.

Even on the issue of a spiritual wife a concept so foreign to Judaism, the Besht resembles some aspects of Sectarianism.

I heard that when the Besht's wife died, his followers and those of his generation suggested that he remarry, but he replied to them in wonder: "Why do I need a wife? For the last fourteen years I refrained from sleeping with my wife, and my son Hersheleh was born by the word." 106

While this type of conception was strange to Judaism it was accepted by Sectarians whose spiritual unions were blessed with children. The innate qualities of the institution of the Christ remained an active force even after they were transplanted and transformed into those Zaddikism. One may suggest that Hasidic attitude toward the Messianic idea is one of them. The controversy as to the attitude of Hasidism to the Messianic idea is one of the leading problems in the contemporary study of Hasidism. The

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 258. The Berdichev edition published only six months later omitted that statement.

principal protagonists in this controversy are Scholem¹⁰⁷ on the one hand, Dinur on the other.¹⁰⁸ According to Scholem the Messianic element in Hasidism was neutralized following the collapse of the Sabbatian Messianic movement in its Frankist form. Hasidism as a result reconciled itself with life in the Diaspora. Dinur sees Hasidism as an active Messianic movement. The tense Messianic anticipation once set in motion could not stop even after the collapse of Sabbatianism. The people were awakened to imminent redemption and Hasidism was striving to attain it.¹⁰⁹ Isiah Tishby deals critically with these views. In a well documented study¹¹⁰ he examines the works of four Kabbalistic preachers all contemporaries of the Besht and Frank. He examines the famous letter of the Besht as well. What attitude.

¹⁰⁷Gershom Scholem, "The Neutralization of the Messianic Element in Early Hasidism" in The Messianic Idea in Judaism op. cit., pp. 176-202.

¹⁰⁸Dinur, Historical Writing op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 83-227.

¹⁰⁹On the active Messianic idea in Hasidism also see: Zalman Shazar, "kisufei ha-Aliyah ba-Hasidut" in Light of Bygone Generations, Hebrew, Jerusalem 1971, pp. 167-186.

¹¹⁰Isiah Tishby, "The Messianic Idea and Messianic Trends in the Growth of Hasidism," Hebrew, Zion Vol. XXXII, 1967, pp. 1-45.

towards the Messianic idea does the work of these men reveal? Tishby concludes that Hasidism, contrary to the Scholem claim, did not arrive at the "neutralization" of the Messianic ideas. And at least some of the Hasidim even placed the Messianic idea and the yearning to hasten the Messiah's coming in the center of this spiritual world.

The outstanding studies mentioned above are based on an overwhelming number of pre-Hasidic and Hasidic sources from various trends. Yet theoretical writings alone are not a sufficient barometer to check Messianic fervor. A multiplicity of factors must be taken into account. Hasidic thought is only one of the leads. The institution of the Zaddik seems to be one among the primary factors related to the Messianic idea. The Messianic element, while remaining very much part of Hasidism, became subordinate to the institution of the Zaddik. The Messianic idea by its very nature required the spiritual or physical commitment of its adherents, the yearning for Zion in all its manifestations or settlement in Zion. This was among the central themes of Jewish thought for centuries. The institution of the Zaddik, the Christ turned Zaddik, which innately combines both leader and Messiah, demanded the same loyalty of its followers as was previously reserved exclusively for the Messianic

idea. The intensity of the emotions reserved for Jerusalem was diverted to the Zaddik.

The Zaddik's gravesite was proclaimed to be as holy as the Land of Israel¹¹¹ and prayer there could achieve the same mystical results. On a cold snowy day Rabbi Nahum of Chernobyl was standing only in his socks on the Besht's grave. When asked for an explanation he replied that he was standing on a strip of the Land of Israel and therefore did not feel the cold.¹¹² Vilna became the Jerusalem of Lithuania because of its scholarship. Medzhibozh became Little Eretz Israel due to its holiness. When the tuberculous stricken Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav was in Israel, his days were already numbered. He was asked to remain in Israel so he might be buried there. Nahman preferred to return to Uman in the Ukraine so that he would rest next to the victims of the 1768 massacre.¹¹³

In both instances, though for different reasons, the foreign soil, in this case places in the

¹¹¹Likkutei Eizot Moharan mi-Bratslav and of Section on Eretz Israel cited in Wertheim op. cit., p. 226.

¹¹²Quoted in Wertheim, op. cit., p. 227.

¹¹³During the spring of and summer of 1768 in Uman the Haidamaks murdered thousands of Jews.

Ukraine, assumed a dimension of holiness previously reserved only for the Land of Israel. The polemic literature, of the Mitnaggedim, hostile by its very nature, was aware of these changes. On two separate occasions it attacked both the peculiar position of the Zaddik and that of his place of residence. Avigdor, in his letter to Tsar Paul, mentions among other accusations the divinity of the Zaddik. "They call their elected Elder-God."¹¹⁴ Another hostile source compares the flocking of the Hasidim to the Zaddik's residence to the pilgrimage of Catholics to the holy shrines of Czestchova, Koblianki and Gora Kalwarja.¹¹⁵ If one is to accept that the institution of the Zaddik was modeled after that of the Sectarian Christ, the consequences are natural. For the Zaddik, like the Christ, arrested in his being both heaven and earth and as such demanded all of the energy previously reserved, among others, for national redemption. Redemption, while remaining very much part of Hasidism, became subordinated to the Zaddik rather than independent of him.

In the famous letter to his brother-in-law, a letter which never reached its destination, the

¹¹⁴"The Plea of R'Avigdor to Tsar Paul," in Wilensky op. cit., p. Vol. I, p. 244, 248, note 43.

¹¹⁵"Zot Torat ha-Kanaot" 139/a-139/b in Wilensky, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 107.

Besht describes his soul's ascension to heaven on Rosh ha-Shanna of 1747. The letter gives a realistic description of his mystical exaltation; *alliyat neshamah* (soul ascension). It was during this exaltation that the Besht met the Messiah and inquired the time of his coming. "Till when sir?" The Messiah replied to the Besht's question. "Till your springs [of teaching] will burst to the outside."¹¹⁶ When the Besht's teachings will become widespread. The coming of the Messiah became dependent on the Besht's teaching. On another holiday, on Yom ha-Kippurim, David Forkes, the Besht's friend, was about to bring the Messiah with his intense concentrations during prayer. The Besht, who could read David's mind, confused Rabbi David's thoughts and thus prevented the Messiah from coming that year. The Besht explained:

The days are not yet the days of the Messiah. To save the Community of Israel one must think in different terms. They [the Jews] should settle among the nations. For still some time and some years will pass till [redemption]... I did it for the best of the Community of Israel. For Rabbi David is a great man and a Zaddik and Satan feared him and, God forbid, he might have uprooted everything and cause, God forbid, a great catastrophe that can not even be written down. 117

¹¹⁶Jacob Joseph, Ben Porat Yosef, op. cit., p. 28/a.

¹¹⁷Sefer Shivhei Baal Shem Tov. p. 8/a.

The Hebrew version of Shivhei ha-Besht describes the confrontation between Rabbi David and the Besht in very general terms. And even more so, there is quite a change in the role of the two protagonists in the story. It was the Besht who wanted to make a path for prayers so they might reach heaven. And he feared that Rabbi David might obstruct it. Quite a reversal of roles.

But I was afraid that Satan would enter your heart, God forbid, and would spoil my efforts. So I broke your heart to protect you from having wayward thoughts, ¹¹⁸ and then afterwards I ordered you to pray.

The entire Messianic element was deleted. For it was not in accordance with the image of the Besht that later Hasidism wanted to project. From the Yiddish version it was very clear that the Besht stopped the Messiah from coming that year. Yaari¹¹⁹ who supplied the historical background for the Besht's behavior, identified that particular Yom Kippur as Yom Kippurim of 1759, the year of Jacob Frank's Apostasy. One can very well understand the Besht's fears of any new Messianic awakening.

While the Messianic idea remained eminent in Hasidism it lost its urgency at least for the Besht.

¹¹⁸ Shivhei ha-Besht p. 53.

¹¹⁹ Abraham Yaari, "Two Basic Recensions of Shivhei ha-Besht" op. cit., pp. 400-402.

When his student Jacob Joseph wanted to travel to Israel, the Besht prevented him from doing so.

I heard from the rabbi of our community, our teacher, Gedaliah, God bless his memory, that the rabbi, Jacob Joseph wanted to go to the Holy Land on several occasions, but the rabbi, the Besht, told him not to go. He said to him: "This will be an omen for you. Every time you have the desire to go to the Holy Land you will know for certain that there are accusations against the city, God forbid, and that Satan is distracting you so that you will not pray for the city. Therefore, when it occurs to you to go to the Holy Land, pray instead for the city." 120

It is one of the most revealing stories about the Besht's attitude towards Zion. It also shows the Besht's penetrating ability to comprehend the essence of a matter. It seems that he belonged among those who scorned immigration to Israel out of negative motivations. The Besht told Rabbi Jacob Joseph not to leave the city in danger but, rather to remain and pray for her safety, positive action in the Diaspora instead of immigration to the Land of Israel. The concepts used in the story are not accidental and closely resemble the other two stories previously cited regarding matters of a Messianic nature. Based upon these stories, the Besht becomes the classical example of Scholem's theory regarding the neutralization of Messianism in early Hasidism: "redemption

¹²⁰Shivhei ha-Besht p. 66.

not from exile but in exile."¹²¹

The Besht was forced to assume that position regarding Israel and the Diaspora out of pragmatic reasoning and the nature of the institution of the Zaddik. Once he took upon himself the responsibility of a self-proclaimed leader, he had to act the way he did. He realized, and even said so, that any Messianic activity, like that of Rabbi David Forkes, will set in motion waves of Messianic fervor in the Jewish Community, an act which might lead to its destruction. His observation was based upon a keen analysis as well as a sense of a pragmatism in evaluating the historical events, with regard to Sabbatai, Zevi, and Jacob Frank.

Yet even after the threat of Sabbatianism was no longer imminent, and the fear of Jacob Frank no longer a reality, there still remained another factor, the innate qualities inherited in the institution of the Zaddik. The institution modeled after that of the Christ. It dictated not only the subordination of the Messianic idea to that of the Zaddik but, by its very nature, was instrumental in demanding a type of local patriotism. The Zaddikim and the Hasidim may be, even unconsciously, a part, more than any other Jewish group, of the surroundings from which they sprang.

¹²¹Gershon Scholem, "The Neutralization of the Messianic Element in Early Hasidism" op. cit., p. 195.

Hasidism, was dependent on the Gentile countryside for its song, dance, parable and story. The local Gentile Slavic environment was a source of its inspiration as much as that of the Jewish community. And it was precisely that element, one may suggest, which gave birth to Neo-Hasidism. Scholem noted that Hasidism was successful only in Slavic countries.

Large sections of Russian and Polish Jewry were drawn into the orbit of the movement, particularly up to the middle of the nineteenth century, but outside of Slavic countries and Russia this form of mysticism was never able to gain a foothold. 122

It was too much a part of the Slavic Eastern European temperament to attract Western European Jews. It was only after the Russian Revolution and the destruction of Hasidism along with the rest of Eastern European Jewry that the remnants of Hasidism settled in non-Slavic countries, primarily Israel¹²³ and the United States.

While this peculiar type of local loyalty and dependency on the Diaspora should be taken into account, the problem of leadership and community during the Beshtian period should not be overlooked. Maybe the Besht's attitude towards the Messianic idea as expressed

¹²²Gershon Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism op. cit., p. 325.

¹²³There was always a trickle of Hasidic immigration to Israel and later on to the United States, but it did not include the most prominent Zaddikim.

in its yearning for Zion, depended very much on his concern for his new movement. He feared that mass immigration would erode the base of his following and rob Hasidism of its potential leadership. When he felt that it would be advantageous for Hasidism, he encouraged immigration to Israel, as in the case of Rabbi Gershon of Kutty. When he feared that Hasidism might lose its theoretician, Rabbi Jacob Joseph, he prevented him from leaving.

The Besht was greatly preoccupied with the future of his young movement. The problem of succession was of major importance. It seems that he considered carefully the candidacy of the prospective successors and when he finally made his choice it was Rabbi Dov Baer. The Besht enjoyed a better fortune than other religious innovators for he did not experience any clashes with a powerful government. Luther had to hide in a castle at Wartburg. Avvakum, first frost bitten by the snows of Siberia, was then consumed by the flames of the church. Danila of Kostroma was crucified several times by the orders of Tsar Alexis. The Besht, undisturbed by persecution, devoted all his energies to the building of his movement. The grooming of the future successor was of prime concern.

The natural choice would have been his son since from the very beginning he placed his children

almost in a divine category. His daughter's soul, he said, he took from the Torah. "Esh Dat Iamo" ("A fiery law unto them"), abbreviated Edel.¹²⁴ His son Hershele was born "by the word."¹²⁵ Yet Hershele did not possess the needed qualities and seemed to have suffered from all the disadvantages of being the son of a famous father. He was shy and did not say much in public.¹²⁶ He did not like to study and even might have had difficulties with writing. Rabbi Gershon had moved to Medzhibozh to teach him but was not too successful. In a letter from Hebron, Israel, written in 1748, Rabbi Gershon pleading with his former young student to abandon his playful ways and apply himself to learning.¹²⁷

When the Besht was dying, his followers said to him: "Why do you not give your son instructions?" He said: "What can I do? He is asleep."¹²⁸

When he was finally awakened and his father spoke to him, Hershele said "I do not understand what you are saying."¹²⁹ Rabbi Dov Baer became the leader.

¹²⁴ Shivhei ha-Besht, p. 137.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 258.

¹²⁶ Shimoeon Menahem Mendel, Sefer Baal Shem Tov op. cit., p. 30.

¹²⁷ Abraham Yaari, collected Letters From the Land of Israel, Hebrew, Ramat Gam 1971, pp. 285-6.

¹²⁸ Shivhei ha-Besht, p. 258.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 258.

Yet by endowing his children with divine qualities the Besht made them natural successors and established a twofold system of succession. The concept of a biological dynasty and the concept of a spiritual one.

Both types of succession, as indicated previously, were common among the Sectarial Christians. Despite the shortcoming of Hershele, the Besht never disclaimed his natural right to leadership¹³⁰ but at the same time entrusted Rabbi Dov Baer with the main responsibility of the movement. The dynastic concept which was to become one of the hallmarks of Hasidism, belonged like all other innovations to the Besht. Rabbi Baruch, Edel's son and the Besht's grandson, once confronted Rabbi Sheur Zalman of Lyady, the Admor, and demanded more respect, claiming "I am the Besht's grandson." "So am I," replied the Admor. "I am his spiritual grandson since the Great Maggid was the Besht's student and I am the Maggid's student."¹³¹

With the Maggid's assumption of leadership, not without a struggle,¹³² the fate of Hasidism was

¹³⁰ Shimeon Menahem Mendl; Sefer Baal Shem Tov op. cit., p. 29.

¹³¹ Rabbi Baruch of Medzhibozh, Buzinah Dinurah, Hebrew, Lvov, 1930 p. 12.

¹³² Shivhei ha-Besht p. 155; Abraham Rubinstein "A Possible New Fragment of Shivhey Habbesht." op. cit., pp. 179-191; S. Ettinger, "Ha-Hanhagah ha-Hasidit be-Yizuvah" in Religion and Society, Hebrew, Jerusalem 1964. pp. 130-133.

sealed. His erudition, independence of the Besht's family, administrative capacity of organization made him the perfect leader for the new movement. He retained all the innovations of the Besht, but he and his school of Mezhirich gave the Beshtian innovations a theoretical foundation in Judaism. Much of this ground work was also done by Rabbi Jacob Joseph who was not of the Mezhirichean School.

The Maggid moved from Medzhiborh to Mezhirich and surrounded himself with young, bright students. Very few of the Besht's close associates and of the same age group followed Dov Baer to Mezhirich. Among the young people who flocked to Mezhirich were Sheur Zalman of Lyady, Aaron of Karlin, Jacob Isaac of Lublin, Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, Nahum of Chernobyl, Elimelech of Lyzhansk, Solomon of Lutsk, and Levi Isaac of Berdichev, to mention only the most prominent ones. Their theoretical writings gave a Jewish foundation to many of the Beshtian innovations. The most noted are the works of Shneur Zalman of Lyady, which covered every aspect of Hasidic life whereas Elimelech of Lyzhansk mainly occupied himself with the idea of the Zaddik.

With the death of the Besht, the Maggid's move to Mezhirich and the establishment of the Mezhirichean School, Beshtian Hasidism came to an end. Yet Hasidism

was to retain all the innovations introduced by the Besht, in its communal structure, practice, and leadership. The dance, song, gartel, the institution of the Zaddik, and its many implications, still distinguish Hasidism from the rest of the Jewish community. For all these innovations, the Besht depended on the Russian Sectarian countryside.

While Hasidism lost its revolutionary nature since the social grievances it championed no longer existed, and its initial enthusiasm was tempered by time, the Beshtian innovations are still very much in evidence. The theoretical writings which gave Hasidism its Jewish foundation remained to a large extent the preoccupation of the Hasidic elite which came into existence with Zaddikism. It is precisely this institution, the Zaddik, which still retains elements revealing its early dependence on the Sectarian Christ which was adopted by the Besht.

The Beshtian period marks the movement's most imaginative epoch that it was ever to experience. All that was to be new in Hasidism was introduced by the Besht. He gave Hasidism, and through it Judaism, a new breath of life. He revitalized Judaism at one of its most crucial periods of its existence. It was one of those brilliant instances of cross fertilization between Jews and their environment, the environment of

the Ukraine and Podolia, rich in mystics and mysticism of all shades and variation. This environment, calls for a detailed study not only because of its Khmelnitskys, Voshchilos, and Gonthas, but because of its peculiar temperament, its constant flux between the saintly and the demonic. A place that nourished wondering, Startsy, Russian Sectarrians, Sabbatians,¹³³ Frankist, and Hasidism, surely deserves a thorough investigations.

In 1760 on the first day of Shabuoth at Medzhibozh Podolia, two clocks stopped,¹³⁴ and so did the Besht. He died at the age of sixty, amidst his close friends. The movement that he founded numbered about 10,000 at his death. Hasidism inherited the Besht's vitality, his creativity, and revolutionary temper. The Baal Shem Tov still remains a source of constant inspiration for both the secular and traditional-minded Jew.

¹³³ Scholem pointed to the possibility of a contact in Podolia between Sabbatianism and Russian Sectarianism. However, he did not pursue his research in that direction. See. G. Scholem, "Ha-Tenuah ha-Shabtait be-Polin." op. cit., p. 59.

¹³⁴ Shivhei ha-Besht pp. 255-256.

Chronology of Principal Events in the Besht's Life.

- 1700 Birth of Israel Baal Shem Tov
- c. 1703 Death of Rabbi Eliezer, the Besht's father
- c. 1714 The Besht receives the secret manuscripts from Rabbi Adam's son.
- c. 1720 The Besht's second marriage to Hannah the daughter of Rabbi Ephraim of Kutty. Second marriage for both.
- c. 1720 Birth of Edel, the Besht's only daughter.
- 1723-1730 The Besht lives in seclusion.
- 1730 The Besht moves to Tluste.
- c. 1734 Birth of Hershele Zevi the Besht's only son.
- 1736 The Besht reveals himself in Tluste.
- 1730-1738 The Besht lives in Tluste.
- 1735-1738 Sometime during these years Rabbi Yaacov Halperin came to the Besht for a "dream question."
- 1739-1740 The Besht's attempt to immigrate to Israel. Attempt ends in failure.
- 1740 Birth of grandson Moshe Ephraim son of Edel. Author of Degel Mahneh Ephraim.
- 1740 The Besht moves to Medzhibozh.
- c. 1741 Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polennoye joins the Besht.
- 1747 The Besht's famous mystical exaltation Alliyat Neshamah (soul ascension)
- 1751 The Besht describes his mystical exaltation in a letter to Rabbi Gershon of Kutty.
- 1757 The burning of the Talmud in Kamenets-Podolsk.

- 1757 Birth of grandson Baruch, son of Edel author of Buzinah Dinurah.
- 1759 Apostasy of Jacob Frank.
- 1760 Death of Israel Baal Shem Tov

Significant Russian Dates for the Besht

- c. 1600-1700 Danila of Kostroma, founder of various Russian Sects.
- 1649 The "Ulozhenie" new codification of Russian law.
- 1652 Nikon elevated to Patriarchy by Tsar Alexis.
- 1652 Birth of Adam Zernikov.
- 1667 The Church Council of 1667 and final Schism.
- c. 1682 Foundation of Vetka in Poland, and of Starodub in the Ukraine, large Schismatic centers. Starodub also had a Jewish community.
- 1682 Avvakum burned at the stake.
- 1685 Ukaz of 1685, commanding severe punishment for Sectarians; their flight to the borderlands.
- 1695/6 First and second Azov campaign of Peter the Great.
- 1708 Vetka community aiding Peter the Great against Mazepa and the Swedes.
- 1711 Death of Theodosian Vasilev, founder of Theodosian Sect dealing in coach and transport business.
- 1715 Death of Christ Suslov, Danila's spiritual son.
- 1733-4 First destruction of Vetka by Russian troops.
- 1763 Second destruction of Vetka.

GLOSSARY

- Admor, Abbreviation of the Hebrew words adonenu morenu verabbenu, our master, teacher and rabbi. The Hasidism addressed their Zaddikim and rabbinical authorities by this title; however, in this monograph it refers to Rabbi Shenuer Zalman of Lyady, from (1747-1813) founder of Habad Hasidism.
- Amida, main prayer recited at all services; also known as Shemoneh Esreh, prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions.
- Arrendator, A Polish term, a farmer who leased out land, mills, inns, etc., at fixed rents.
- Ball Shem, Master of the Divine name (lit. Possessor of the Name) a person who heals the sick, exorcises demons, writes amulets and performs miracles by using the magical power of divine names. The designation ba'al shem did not originate with the Kabbalists, for it was already known to the last Babylonian genom, Hai Gaon.
- Christ, A leader of a Russian Dissenting Sect, believed in the reincarnation of Christ in the individual.
- Devarim Hizonyim, Hebrew, for unusual or external things. Term used to describe dissention or deviation from traditional, accepted norms.
- Devekut, Cleaving to God. A term which denotes a meditative and an ecstatic communion with God, constant contemplation of God.
- Hasid (pl. Hasidim) An extremely pious person. During the Hellenistic period referred to a sect which strongly opposed the Hellenization of Jewish culture. In Germany during the Middle Ages referred to the members of a revivalist movement of popular mysticism. In current usage it applies to the religious movement founded by Israel Baal Shem Tov.
- Herem, Excommunication, imposed by rabbinical authorities for purposes of religious and/or communal discipline.
- Hitlahavut, Enthusiasm, ecstasy. A central Hasidic concept of worshipping God.

- Kavvana (pl. Kavvanot) Inner devotion, intense concentration in prayer directed toward God.
- Klaus, Name given in Central and Eastern Europe to an institution usually attached to a Synagogue, where Talmud was studied perpetually by adults. The Brody Klaus was a center for mystics. (also pronounced Kloyz)
- Lulke, (Persian) pipe.
- Maskil (pl. Maskilim), adherent of Haskalah ("Enlightenment") movement.
- Merkabah, Merkava, "chariot;" mystical discipline associated with Ezekiel's vision of the Divine Throne-Chariot (Ezek. 1).
- Mikveh, ritual bath.
- Minhah, Afternoon prayer; originally meal offering in the Temple.
- Minyan, Group of ten male adult Jews, the minimum required for communal prayer.
- Mishnah, Earliest codification of Jewish Oral Law.
- Mitnagged, (pl. Mitnaggedim), originally, opponents of Hasidism in Eastern Europe.
- Mitzvah, Biblical or rabbinic injunction; applied also to good or charitable deeds.
- Musaf, Additional service on Sabbath and festivals; originally the additional sacrifice offered in the Temple.
- Niggun, is the hasidic term for a musical unit, i.e., a "tune" be it sung or played.
- Nizozot, "sparks;" mystical term for sparks of the holy light imprisoned in all matter.
- Nusah, "version" term applied to distinguish the various prayer rites, e.g., Nusah Ashkenaz, Nusah Sepharad, Nusah ha-Ari.

Raskol, Schism, the term Raskol was the official term, till Catherine the Great, for all subjects of the Russian empire who broke away from the Official church.

Rebbe, a term applied to the Zaddikim and Hasidic leaders.

Responsum (pl. responsah), written opinion (teshuvah given to question (sheelah) on aspects of Jewish law by qualified authorities.

Rosh Ha Shanah, Two day holiday at the beginning of the month of Tishrei (September-October), Jewish New Year.

Shabuoth, a holiday seven weeks after Passover, commemorating the "Giving of the Law" on Mt. Sinai.

Shekinah, Divine Presence the manifestation of the presence of God in the life of man and the community.

Shohet, a ritual slaughterer of animals and poultry.

Torah, Pentateuch or the Pentateuchal scroll for reading in Synagogue; entire body of traditional Jewish teaching and literature.

Wayward thoughts, Thoughts about immoral or profane matters which disturb a man during prayer and prevent him from obtaining the desired devekut.

Yihud (pl. Yihudim) Special mystical formula constituting divine names which are used in mystical contemplations to bring about the ultimate union of God and Shekinah - the unity of God.

Yom Kippur, Yom ha-Kippurim, Day of Atonement, solemn fast day observed on the 10th of Tishrei.

Zohar, Mystical commentary on the Pentateuch; main text book of Kabbalah.

Zaddik, Person outstanding for his faith and piety; especially a Hasidic rebbe or leader.

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