Liberles also sheds new light on the process of religious change by taking into account the frequently underestimated impact of political forces. While the ascendancy of Reform in Frankfurt during the 1840s was in large measure due to government backing, so too was the Orthodox rebound of the 1850s. Prior to the Revolution of 1848, many German states had actively supported the most radical reformers. After the revolution, however, local administrations grew increasingly fearful of all radical impulses, whether religious or political. As a result, they now tended to support Orthodoxy, which they felt offered the most secure bastion of political conservatism. Liberles thus forcefully reminds us of the tight interconnection between religious and political change in Germany.

Finally, Liberles offers us a radically new portrait of Hirsch himself. Whereas Hirsch has traditionally been depicted as authoritarian and uncompromising, Liberles adopts a far more sympathetic perspective, arguing that it was not Hirsch who was intransigent but, rather, his Reform opponents. On this point, Liberles's discussion is far from convincing. The evidence he himself adduces seems to confirm rather than deny Hirsch's uncompromising, sectarian, and dictatorial character. This is most apparent with regard to the 1877 Separation Controversy. Here Hirsch took the momentous decision to secede entirely from the Reform-dominated Frankfurt Jewish community without consulting his own membership. Ultimately he succeeded in persuading only seventy to eighty of the IRG's 360 members to join him in this radical break. If Hirsch had in fact been pushed into advocating secession by the unflexible policies of the established community, as Liberles suggests, why then did the vast majority of his own constituents reject his position, preferring to remain within the communal framework? Furthermore, why did they then turn on their erstwhile leader and accuse him of acting in an irresponsible and high-handed manner? Liberles's frequently contradictory discussion of Hirsch's behavior in this controversy thus falls far short of its intended goal of overturning the traditional assessment.

One final note: Liberles talks about Orthodox *resurgence,* but in fact he shows that Hirsch significantly *transformed* Orthodoxy and even adopted many aesthetic changes typically associated with Reform. Hirsch thus created an entirely new brand of Orthodoxy, one suitable for a middle-class Jewry eager to take advantage of Emancipation. Liberles's terminology has the unfortunate consequence of minimizing the radical newness of Hirsch's contribution. Despite these shortcomings, this is a fine book that undoubtedly will inspire further research into the social and political history of Jewish religious change in the nineteenth century.

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HESCHEL, ABRAHAM J. *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism.* Edited and translated by SAMUEL H. DRESNER. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. xlv + 213 pp. $24.95 (cloth).

The founder of the hasidic movement, Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name), remains an enigma more than two centuries after his passing. From the writings of his students, we have a good idea of the essentials of his teachings: communion with God, devotion to service, sanctification of the everyday, ecstatic prayer. Yet basic facts about

his life remain obscure. The main source of biographical information is a book published some fifty-five years after his death, a collection of hagiographical stories. Some scholars even doubted his existence, while others portrayed him as a bizarre, ignorant character, to the outrage of the hasidic faithful. While Gershom Scholem, among others, has provided us with sober and carefully crafted studies of the Baal Shem Tov, a reliable full-length biography has yet to be written. The present work by Abraham Joshua Heschel is a significant step toward that goal. One of the most prominent Judaic scholars of this century, Heschel was born in Poland to a family that stood at the center of hasidic life and was himself groomed in his youth to assume the mantle of a hasidic master. With an insider's knowledge of hasidic culture, and trained in the methodology of Western scholarship, Heschel was uniquely qualified to do the painstaking historical research necessary to compose an accurate yet warmly sympathetic portrait of the founder of Hasidism.

The studies in the present work focus on the "circle" of the Baal Shem Tov—his friends, family members, and students. We acquire a sense of the man who stood at the center of the circle in the same manner that one sights a distant star: by averted vision, directing one's eyes slightly off center. Those who are familiar with Heschel's more popular writings may be surprised with what they find here: the lyrical, aphoristic style is absent; instead, there is a wealth of detail and specialized information. The style evidently follows the contours of the original Hebrew and Yiddish. The translator, Samuel H. Dresner, had a most difficult task rendering into comprehensible English the abundance of technical terms, obscure place names, historical allusions, Hebrew wordplays, and other arcana of a lost civilization. He has succeeded admirably. His lengthy and informative introduction, as well as his many explanatory footnotes, go a long way toward opening up the real world of early Polish Hasidism to the English-language reader.

There is a programmatic undercurrent to this work. It is known that Heschel was unhappy with a certain tendency in contemporary Judaic scholarship to focus on peripheral, antinomian tendencies and personalities within Jewish life. In these studies, Heschel aims to show that the Baal Shem Tov—the founder of the great, creative movement of charismatic renewal of East European Judaism—was not an individual at the very periphery of Jewish life, almost unknown in his own lifetime, but was in fact embedded in a social network very much affiliated with the major religious personalities and institutions of the day. The reform movement that is Hasidism, then, was inspired not by an outsider but by someone who was very much a part of the Jewish community. If taken seriously, this fact would require a rethinking of the significance of the emergence of Hasidism, an abandonment of many cliches on the nature of the opposition it engendered, and a new understanding of the movement's remarkable resurgence, after devastating losses, in our own day. This is an important work.

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