

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS PROGRAM

ESH KODIESH

THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI KALONYMOS SHAPIRO IN THE WARSAW GHETTO,
1939-1943

by

NATHAN POLEN

B.S., THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, 1969

M.Ed., NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY, 1973

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Ph.D.

April 20, 1983

© Copyright by NATHAN POLEN, 1983

APPROVED BY

FIRST READER

Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel

University Professor and Andrew W. Mellon
Professor of Religious Studies and Humanities

SECOND READER

Nahum Glatzer

Nahum Glatzer

University Professor, Professor of Judaic
Studies and Professor of Religion

THIRD READER

Rodolfo Cardona

Rodolfo Cardona

University Professor and Professor of Modern
Foreign Languages; Director of the University
Professors Program

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to take this opportunity to thank those individuals who have contributed to the progress of this dissertation. It has been my privilege to have had Professor Elie Wiesel as my advisor. He has been more than a teacher to me. As a source of constant support, encouragement, and inspiration, he has gently guided this work to its conclusion. I hope that in some small measure it vindicates his trust in me.

Professor Nahum Glatzer has freely given of his time and wisdom. His meticulous reading and thoughtful comments have greatly enhanced the style and substance of this work.

The University Professors Program at Boston University has provided the rich intellectual environment, as well as the flexible but cohesive structure, that made this work possible. I wish to thank Professor Rodolfo Cardona, Director of the Program, for his gracious support and assistance.

The initial suggestion for the topic of this dissertation came from my friend and teacher Professor Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. His recognition of the significance of Esh Kodesh and its author has stimulated my own researches, and I am deeply grateful to him.

Martha Hauptman, Assistant to Professor Wiesel, has been an unfailing source of assistance, advice, and kindness.

Zara Chapin, Assistant Director of the University Professors Program, has enthusiastically followed my work and facilitated its progress.

Dr. Joseph Kermish of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and Marek Web of the YIVO Institute in New York, clarified points about the Ringelblum Archives and the Hersh Wasser Collection. David Fishman of Harvard University provided access to as yet unpublished materials. I am grateful for their help.

My enthusiasm for the study of Hasidism has been nourished by many friends. I think in particular of Daniel Matt, who introduced me to Keter Shem Tov; the members of the Tuesday night study group, with whom I have explored the writings of Rabbi Kalonymos; and Alan Rosen, who has shared my progress at Boston University.

My typist, Debbie Cacciola, has performed her task with great care and dedication.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife Lauri. Without her loving advice and guidance, this work would not have been possible.

ESH KODESH

THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI KALONYMOS SHAPIRO IN THE WARSAW GHETTO,
1939-1943

NATHAN POLEN

Boston University, The University Professors Program, 1983

Major Professor: Elie Wiesel, University Professor
and Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Religious
Studies and Humanities

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the life and work of Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapiro (1889-1943), known as the Piaseczner Rebbe. In particular, it focuses on his discourses delivered in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Holocaust. The record of these discourses, published as Esh Kodesh, is the last literary work of Hasidism in Poland. Major sections of the work are presented here in translation for the first time. The analysis focuses on the work's structure, style, sources, relationship to contemporaneous events, and underlying hermeneutical assumptions. The central theme of emunah--faith--is analyzed, and a significant shift in style, tone, and substance over the three years of the work's composition is noted. It is suggested that the catalyst for the change is the gradual unfolding of the unprecedented character of the historical circumstance which

surrounded the work's composition. Development of the author's treatment of suffering is traced, and a tendency for extremity of formulation is noted. In particular, we focus on the author's presentation of the notion of Divine suffering. The author's creative achievement is assessed against the background of Hasidic thought, as well as in terms of the circumstances of its composition. Finally, this study points to Esh Kodesh's role as an exemplar of spiritual resistance and transcendence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Notes to Introduction | 10 |
| Chapter | |
| I. RABBI KALONYMOS SHAPIRO: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH | |
| Section 1. Early Years | 13 |
| Section 2. Educational Theories | 19 |
| Section 3. War Years | 29 |
| Section 4. Writing in the Ghetto | 36 |
| Notes to Chapter I | 43 |
| II. THE WORK: <u>ESH KODESH</u> | |
| Section 1. General Characteristics | 61 |
| Section 2. Language and Style | 67 |
| Section 3. Earlier Sources Referred To | 73 |
| Section 4. The Work's Relationship to Contemporaneous Events in the Warsaw Ghetto | 80 |
| Section 5. <u>Esh Kodesh</u> in the Context of the Tradition of Jewish Spiritual Resistance | 83 |
| Section 6. Themes Notable for Their Absence | 89 |
| Section 7. Basic Interpretive Principles Employed | 92 |
| Notes to Chapter II | 96 |
| III. SUPPORTING THE PERSECUTED | 120 |
| Notes to Chapter III | 136 |
| IV. FAITH AND PROTEST | |
| Section 1. From Autonomous Rationality to Organic Faith | 143 |
| Section 2. Protest within Faith | 183 |
| Notes to Chapter IV | 198 |
| V. DIVINE SUFFERING | 217 |
| Concluding Remarks | 233 |
| Notes to Chapter V | 235 |

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----|
| APPENDIX 'A' | | 237 |
| APPENDIX 'B' | | 239 |
| Notes to Appendix 'B' | | 249 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | | 254 |