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MIRIAM'S DANCE: RADICAL EGALITARIANISM IN HASIDIC THOUGHT[1]

In the year 1899, a hagiographical work was published about Rabbi Hayyim Meir Yehiel, the wonder-working grandson of the Maggid of Kozienice, known as the "Seraph" of Moglienice. The work, *Toledot ha-Nifla'ot*, discusses, *inter alia*, the Seraph's mother, the daughter of the Kozienicer Maggid, whose name was Perl ('Pereleh'). It is related that Perl had a dream in which she saw a child of hers who had died at a young age. The child assured her that Perl, who was pregnant, would give birth to a son who would have a long life and who would "enlighten all the worlds"; this son was the aforementioned Hayyim Meir Yehiel.

The hagiography's author, Israel Moshe Bromberg of Lodz, assures us that he heard this story from Perl herself—three times. Then he writes, "And don't think that she and her dreams were simple, in the manner of other women; it is well known that she was of very elevated spiritual stature. She enjoyed revelations, in the waking state, of the souls of *zaddikim*."

The author tells us that he heard from Rabbi Hayyim Meir Yehiel that his mother once traveled to Lizhensk to visit the grave of Rabbi Elimelekh, famed author of *No'am Elimelekh*. On her journey she spent the Sabbath in Neustadt, as a guest of Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Epstein, author of *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, and a disciple of Rabbi Elimelekh. Rabbi Epstein attempted to dissuade her from continuing her pilgrimage, telling her, "Why should a woman want to visit my master's grave? He is in a very lofty world and nothing will be achieved by being at his grave." The following day, however, Rabbi Epstein summoned her and said, "My master came to me [in a dream] and was quite perturbed, saying, 'Why did you attempt to dissuade this righteous woman from traveling to my grave? Be careful to vigorously encourage her to travel to my grave; there, with the help of God, she will achieve all that she desires and requests.' " Afterwards, the author tells us, Rabbi Epstein himself assisted her in her travel arrangements.[2]

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This revealing story, it seems to me, is a good place to begin a re-examination of the question of the status of women in the hasidic movement. It is well-known that Samuel Abba Horodecky portrayed the role of women in the most glowing terms. In his work *Ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Hasidim,* he asserted that women achieved complete equality of religious expression within the movement. In Horodecky's view, they participated fully as Hasidim, and even as Zaddikim; the most celebrated instance of the latter phenomenon was the Maid of Ludmir.[3]

Many writers followed Horodecky's lead on this issue. Jacob S. Minkin, in his *The Romance of Hasidism* (1935), wrote that "While Rabbinism subordinated the place and position of woman to that of man and made her an inactive member of the Jewish community, Hasidism assigned to her a place and importance almost equal to that of her male partner."[4]

This evaluation, however, has been called into question. Jacob Katz, in *Tradition and Crisis,* states that membership in the hasidic movement weakened family ties and lowered the status of women. He writes, "The Hasidic congregation was a man's world; in it, there was no place for women, as there was in the family. Not even a parallel women's community was organized, as in the kehilla associations. The community of Hasidim was built, if not on the ruins, at the expense of traditional institutions of society."[5] More recently, Ada Rapaport-Albert has subjected Horodecky's thesis to a thorough and trenchant critique.[6] With regard to Horodecky's 'female Zaddikim', Rapaport-Albert points out that they were almost invariably the close relations of a male Zaddik, and it is thus not surprising that some spiritual endowments might be transmitted to them by association. This is a far cry, however, from an autonomous leadership role in the hasidic community. As for Hannah Rachel, the 'Maid of Ludmir', Rapaport-Albert argues that she was "forced to renounce her identity as a woman, only to embrace a false identity as a man . . ."[7] Thus, rather than being perceived as a successful female role model in the world of Hasidism, she was understood to be an "aberration of nature and a social deviation."[8] Rapaport-Albert concludes that far from pioneering the equality of men and women in Judaism, Hasidism "embraced unquestioningly all the conceptions of women produced by classical rabbinic Judaism" as well as kabbalistic associations of a decidedly negative character.[9]

While Rapaport-Albert's refutation of Horodecky has merit, we will argue here that her bleak portrayal is not quite the entire picture either. To return to the hagiographical story with which we began, we do find it to be largely consistent with her position as opposed to that of Horodecky's. Perl—the daughter of Rabbi Israel Hapstein, the famed Maggid of Kozienice and one of the fathers of Hasidism

in Poland—was, we are told, endowed with spiritual gifts, but there is no indication in this account that she had any formal leadership role in hasidic circles. Indeed, Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Epstein, also a famous hasidic master, attempted to dissuade her from her pilgrimage to the grave of R. Elimelekh, and it took the latter's paranormal intercession to convince him otherwise. Most significantly, it is clear that in the author's view, Perl's spiritual endowments pertain to her alone, and not to the "other women."

Yet it is interesting that R. Epstein, in this account, did change his mind about the value and efficacy of Perl's pilgrimage, and that he was told by R. Elimelekh that she would "achieve all that she desires and requests." This suggests that the goal of Perl's pilgrimage was not simply the pious visitation of a Zaddik's grave, but some spiritual mission, most likely involving intercessory prayer.

We recall at this point Gershom Scholem's methodological principle that an accurate understanding of the hasidic movement must be based first and foremost not on the tales but on the theoretical literature, the *derashot*.[10] With this in mind, we now note that the story of Rabbi Epstein's re-evaluation of Perl's spiritual stature parallels a remarkable shift in a sequence of discourses found in his classic collection of hasidic homilies, *Ma'or va-Shemesh*.

In *Ma'or va-Shemesh* on Exodus 15 (the Song at the Sea), there are three discourses which examine the relationship between Moses's song ("I WILL SING UNTO THE LORD . . .") and that of Miriam ("MIRIAM THE PROPHETESS, THE SISTER OF AARON, TOOK A TIMBREL IN HER HAND; AND ALL THE WOMEN WENT OUT AFTER HER WITH TIMBRELS AND WITH DANCES. AND MIRIAM SANG UNTO THEM: SING YE UNTO THE LORD . . ."). In the first piece on this topic, Rabbi Epstein writes that

> . . . even though Miriam was a prophetess, nevertheless, she was in the state of *nukvah* [feminine], and did not attain the conception of awe for the divine. Had she waited for Moses, she would have been able to sing the entire song; but she did not wait . . . She immediately took the timbrel in her hand and uttered song. That is why she was only privileged to say the first verse . . . [because] she grasped the quality of love alone.[11]

His second discourse cites a rabbinic source which points out that in the Song of Moses we find the feminine form *shirah* [song], but in the Time to Come, we will sing *shir*—the masculine form. That is why, writes Rabbi Epstein, Moses says *ashirah*, I will sing, looking forward to the time of the future redemption when we will sing in masculine modality. "But," he writes, "Miriam the prophetess will be feminine even in the future, so what is the point of waiting; it is better to sing now: *shiru*, sing ye."[12]

Extracting Rabbi Epstein's message from its exegetical setting, we may summarize as follows: Miriam, although a prophetess, expresses an imbalanced, partial, impetuous spirituality. She, and by extension all women, are fixed in an inferior spiritual modality known as *nukva*, feminine, in contrast to the men of Israel, who will, in the eschatological future, achieve a robust and complete spirituality.

We now turn to the final *derashah* on this theme, a complex and carefully developed homily which draws upon the Lurianic concepts of *iggulim ve-yosher*, 'circularity and linearity'. Rabbi Epstein presents these concepts as follows:

> All the worlds and all creatures may be categorized as masculine and feminine, which are the principles of bestowal and receptivity. This means that a higher world bestows [the flow of radiance] to the world below it. In a similar fashion, a less knowledgeable individual requires someone of greater knowledge from whom to learn. This is because anything bounded has both upper and lower extremities. . . .
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> In the [eschatological] future, however, . . . the line and the circle will be equal, and there will no longer be the categories of masculine and feminine. All will come to realize His divine light equally. This is just like a round object which has no beginning and no end. Then no one will need to learn from his neighbor.
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> This is just like a circle dance, where every part of the circle's circumference is equidistant from the center. So will all absorb the clear light of His divinity equally, as it is written, "No longer will they need to teach one another [and say to one another, 'Know the Lord'], for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall know Me, declares the Lord (Jer. 31:34)."
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> . . . This was the intention of the prophetess Miriam. She had all the women follow her and performed circle dances [*hakkafot*] with them, with the intent implicit in the verse "A woman shall encircle a man" (Jer. 31:22), in order to draw upon the supernal light from the place where the categories of masculine and feminine do not exist.
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> Now Moses said, "I WILL SING UNTO THE LORD." This was because Moses spoke while still under the categories of masculine/feminine, for the light of supernal clarity had not yet appeared . . . But Miriam, through her circle dance, drew down the supernal light. Then they came to such realization than which no greater realization is possible. So she said, "SING YE"—now. For their realization was such that no greater realization is possible. . . . By making a circle-dance, she drew down the supernal light from the place where the categories of masculine/feminine do not exist.[13]

The substance of this *derashah* is strikingly different from the first two. In this third explanation of the passage, Miriam and the other

women attain the highest state of spiritual realization, a place of radical egalitarianism wherein all hierarchies and rank orderings disappear. Miriam not only reaches a higher state than the men in general, she attains a higher level than Moses himself, a level which Moses could only foresee for the eschatological future.

At this point we must say a few words about the origins of the concepts employed by Rabbi Epstein. The roots of the circle symbolism can be traced back to the early centuries of the Kabbalah's literary history. We find, for example, in R. Ezra's *Commentary on Shir ha-Shirim*: "In that which rotates there is no distinction between above and below, for the descent is the same as ascent, and ascent is descent."[14] Next we turn to the thirteenth century kabbalist and Bible expositor Rabbi Bahya ben Asher. In his commentary on Exodus 25:31, R. Bahya explains the symbolism of the Tabernacle's menorah, and in particular the round knops. He writes that the *kaftor*, knop, was shaped like a round apple, and was spherical because a circle has no beginning and no end. That is why, he writes, the Talmud [*Ta'anit* 31a] speaks of God at the center of a circle [*mahol*] of the righteous: because a circle has no end, just as the bliss of the righteous in paradise is endless.[15]

Iggulim ve-yosher—'circles and linearity'—emerge as fully-developed concepts in the Lurianic Kabbalah.[16] According to R. Hayyim Vital, the circles and the straight line are formed by the primary processes of *zimzum* (contraction) and *hitpashtut* (expansion). For some exponents of Lurianic Kabbalah such as Immanuel Hai Ricci and R. Shlomo Eliashiv, these notions are not mere metaphors or figures of speech, but actual structural features of the universe. Other Lurianic expositors, such as R. Joseph Ergas and R. Moses Hayyim Luzzato, understand these concepts allegorically. None of these interpreters develops the notion of *iggulim* into the full-blown metaphysical and epistemological egalitarianism found here in *Ma'or va-Shemesh.*

There are other sources which adumbrate some of *Ma'or va-Shemesh*'s ideas. In the *Keli Yakar* commentary by R. Ephraim Solomon ben Hayyim (1550–1609), *ad locum*, we find that Miriam took the timbrel and led the women in dancing, in order that the holy spirit might rest upon them. Miriam's level of prophecy was like that of Aaron, but not that of Moses. At the Sea, the women reached the level of the men with respect to prophetic realization; and so, *Keli Yakar* writes, will it be in the time to come, as scripture says, "A woman shall encircle a man" (Jer. 31:22).

The similarities between the *Keli Yakar* passage and the *Ma'or va-*

Shemesh are quite evident, down to the choice of Jeremiah 31:22 as a prooftext; yet the differences are equally striking. *Keli Yakar* does not stress the theurgic role of the circle-dance, and the Lurianic conceptual framework is absent. According to *Keli Yakar*, the women reached the level of the men; in *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, the very categories of masculine/feminine are transcended. *Keli Yakar* pointedly states that Miriam reached the prophetic level of Aaron but not that of Moses; in *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, Miriam's level of realization was such that no greater realization was possible. Specifically, it surpassed that of Moses, whose consciousness was still framed by the categories of masculine/feminine. This is quite extraordinary in the context of traditional Jewish thought, which always emphasizes the uniqueness of the Mosaic prophecy.

A more proximate source for the themes of our *Ma'or va-Shemesh* homily may be the writings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. In a passage in *Likkutei Torah Shir Hashirim*,[17] he draws upon the midrashic theme that Sarah was greater in prophecy than Abraham; invoking the by now familiar verse in Jer. 31:22 that "a woman shall encircle a man", he states that in the eschatological future, "the receptive [=feminine] mode will be elevated, so that it will be above the masculine, bestowing mode. . . ." R. Schneur Zalman does employ kabbalistic motifs to explain this reversal, but instead of *iggulim ve-yosher*, he speaks of *or yashar/or hozer* ('direct light/reflected light'). The implications of this terminology are different from that of *iggulim ve-yosher*. For R. Schneur Zalman, the patriarchs anticipated the eschatological state, and so were privileged to experience the mode of receptivity as well as bestowal. This mode of receptivity is, from one perspective, higher than the mode of bestowal. But it is clear from this entire dialectical line of reasoning that categories are not transcended; instead they are reversed. Indeed, according to Rabbi Schneur Zalman, it was precisely in order that the patriarchs might experience the state of receptivity in its mode of eschatological primacy that they were made inferior to the matriarchs in some respects. Thus it is still the patriarchs whose spiritual gifts are being emphasized: they did not even miss out on receptivity! This is different from *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, where Miriam's dance produces the very highest state in which the categories of bestowal/receptivity dissolve before the radiance of the Divine presence.

Thus we see that R. Epstein, while drawing upon earlier kabbalistic and hasidic sources, has in fact transformed these sources into a new and creative vision of radical egalitarianism, positing a state in which the very categories of inferior/superior disappear. And, in his homily, this state is evoked by a woman—Miriam, Moses's sister, and not by Moses himself.

The biblical figure of Miriam also served a later hasidic master, a descendant and namesake of R. Epstein, as the vehicle for expressing some radical and creative notions about the role of women's spirituality in Judaism. Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapiro (1889–1943), known as the Piaseczner Rebbe, was a fifth-generation descendent of R. Kalonymos Kalman Epstein of Cracow. Prominent as a hasidic master and pedagogue in interbellum Poland, he was caught in the Nazi occupation during World War II. In the dark days of the Warsaw Ghetto, he preached regularly to his hasidim on Sabbath and festivals, attempting to encourage and console them, as well as to buttress their faith. The manuscript of his discourses was discovered after the war, and was eventually published under the title *Esh Kodesh* (Fire of Holiness).[18] In a sermon given on June 27, 1942 (*Parashat Hukkat* 5702), Rabbi Shapiro takes as his text Numbers 20:1–2 (". . . AND MIRIAM DIED THERE . . . AND THERE WAS NO WATER FOR THE CONGREGATION . . ."). Building upon the midrashic theme that the well which provided water for the Children of Israel in the desert was by virtue of the merit of Miriam, he notes that men's religious practice in Judaism is always commanded by God, and therefore not truly innovative. The religious acts of men are always in response to a prior call from above, and therefore can never be considered the result of their own initiative. Women, however, are not obligated to fulfil temporally-linked commandments, so that when they take the initiative to do so, they are making an autonomous, self-generated religious affirmation. As he puts it,

> When a woman become a *zaddeket* [feminine form of 'zaddik'], studies Torah and fulfills the commandments—that is her own accomplishment, since she is not under any obligation to do so: heaven has not really aroused her to do what she did. . . . The fact that she reached such a high spiritual level is not attributable to divine elicitation but rather to her own self-generated effort. . . . The source of her service is within her; it flows from her. That is why the well—the source flowing with living water, holy water—existed by virtue of her merit.[19]

This is the connection between the well and Miriam: the well was artesian, overflowing of its own, not needing to be primed or pumped. Similarly, Miriam's spirituality was self-generated. Drawing upon her own inner resources and flowing from the depth of her being, it depended upon no other, not even, as it were, the divine Other.

This exegesis is daring in the context of traditional Jewish thought, which typically sees heteronomous submission to commandment as superior to autonomous, voluntary, unprescribed performance of a good deed. In the classic formulation of the Talmud, "One who is commanded and fulfils the command is greater than one who

fulfils it without being commanded."[20] Indeed, a major determinant of women's lack of standing in certain areas of Jewish law is their status as persons "not commanded."[21] R. Shapiro actually uses the talmudic language here: *'eynah mezuvah ve-'osah* ('one who performs a commandment without being commanded'), but instead of being taken as a disability, it is seen affirmatively, as a positive, desirable value.

This teaching of Rabbi Shapiro is not merely a theoretical formulation: in this passage he is alluding to his own wife, whose name was Rahel Hayyah Miriam, and whose death, in 1937, occurred on the Sabbath during which Numbers 20 is read and studied in the synagogue.[22] His remarks here are actually eulogistic. It is also notable that of the spiritually gifted hasidic women who enjoyed a limited but valued and acknowledged leadership role in hasidic circles (about which more later), a significant number were from Rabbi Shapiro's own family, including his mother,[23] maternal grandmother,[24] and Perele (the central figure of the story with which we began), who was R. Shapiro's great-grandmother. It should also be pointed out that R. Shapiro's tribute to women's spirituality was written during the Holocaust, and is thus consistent with a venerable tradition that extols the faith and courage of Jewish women in times of crisis and martyrdom.[25] Nevertheless, it seems clear that the basic influence on R. Shapiro here is the personal experience and knowledge he had of the activities and stature of the women in his own family.

The above texts call into question Rapaport-Albert's blanket assertion that the hasidic movement introduced no changes in the classical rabbinic understanding of women. Furthermore, they show that hasidic masters were capable of drawing upon kabbalistic motifs to articulate conceptions of women other than "the Kabbalistic association of women with the demonic."[26] In fact, the dialectical suppleness and paradoxical maneuvers which kabbalistic thought allows for, were employed to articulate far more appreciative notions of women and their spiritual potential. These theoretical formulations—as always in Hasidism—have a complex reciprocal relationship with the realities of hasidic life.[27]

We consider it a moot point whether the change of perspective between the three pieces of *Ma'or va-Shemesh* on Miriam reflects a genuine change of attitude on the part of R. Epstein to (certain) women, as corroborated by the story with which we began, or whether the parallel to the story of Perl is fortuitous.[28] The real question is what conclusions we may draw from all this regarding the place of

women in Hasidism. At the very least, it seems reasonable to reexamine the available evidence more carefully.

If we go back to the earliest collection of hasidic tales, the *Shivhei ha-Besht*, we find at least two stories which display attitudes suggesting an elevated spiritual role for women. One story has as its central character the wife of Rabbi Abraham, son of the Great Maggid, known as "the Angel." After the death of the Maggid, he would come to his daughter-in-law—not his son!—in a dream, to tell her what to do. Once, we are told, when R. Abraham's wife received a message in a dream from the Maggid alerting her to danger, and she attempted to warn her husband, he dismissed her warning, saying, "Why did he tell it to you and not to me?" Subsequently, as a result of his disregard of her warning, all his books were destroyed in a fire. On another occasion, the Maggid appeared to her in a dream and told her not to travel to a certain community where her husband, Rabbi Abraham, had been appointed Rabbi. Despite the request of her husband to join him, transmitted through two zaddikim, she refused to go. Shortly thereafter, her husband R. Abraham died, and the zaddikim "were ashamed to face Rabbi Abraham's wife because she had perceived the future better than they had."[29]

Another story relates to Rivaleh the Pious, the mother of the brothers Rabbi Joseph and Rabbi Isaac of Satanov. When he visited Satanov, we are told, the Besht saw a light hovering over her head, and pointedly berated the men of the community, none of whom were graced with this spiritual gift, for being outshined by a woman. Later she prevailed in two confrontations with the Baal Shem Tov, one of which had to do with a doctor who was sick and in need of prayer, but whom the Besht dismissed as an adulterer. Rivaleh interceded on the doctor's behalf, and "the appeal that she made was accepted above and the doctor recovered from his illness." It is notable that Rivaleh is depicted in this story not only with the spiritual grace of light above her head, but as effectively taking over the Besht's office of curing the sick by heavenly intercession.[30]

Taken together, these stories suggest that the spiritual powers of certain women may exceed those of men (in specific and limited ways, to be sure), even such men as Rabbi Abraham the Angel and the Baal Shem Tov himself. In these stories one can detect a thinly veiled delight in the victories of the women over their supposed betters, a turning of the tables which is reminiscent of the spirit of many stories told in *Shivhei ha-Besht* about the Besht himself in his confrontations with authority figures.[31] Indeed, the reversal of expectations and roles almost seems to be the main point here, and is entirely consistent with the reordering of values which early Hasidism attempted to

foster, and which it did not completely abandon even in its later years.

Regarding the more recent period, Rapaport-Albert questions the authenticity of the reports of 'female Zaddikim,' asserting that they "all are inspired by Horodecky," may be apologetic in purpose, and are not corroborated by internal hasidic evidence.[32] She continues,

> Nevertheless, as is generally the case with literary adaptations of oral traditions, allowing for a certain measure of exaggeration and romantic idealization, one must assume that they contain an element of truth. The important question, however, is not so much whether these prominent women existed, which is probable, but whether or not the phenomenon of independent female leaders was integrated into the ideology and organization of Hasidism and considered to be fully legitimate.

First of all, it must be stated that, at least in some cases, the existence of these women is more than merely 'probable.' For example, Sarah Horowitz Sternfeld of Checiny (the "Chentshiner Rebbetsin"), mentioned briefly by Rapaport-Albert,[33] was a well-known figure in the hasidic world of interbellum Poland, as the obituaries which appeared in the Yiddish press of both Poland and America at the time of her death in 1937, at the age of 99, make clear. Warsaw's *Der Moment* wrote that "after the death of her husband, hasidim traveled to her with *kvittlakh*. She was the only woman in Poland who conducted herself as a Rebbe."[34] A subsequent article in *Der Moment* reported that about 10,000 people attended her funeral, and that she was survived by 250 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.[35] *Dos Yiddishe Togblatt*, published by Agudat Yisrael, carried a lengthy article on her passing in its edition of March 4, 1937, focusing on her piety, wisdom, and devotion to the poor and needy, for whom she would even pawn her household belongings. According to the *Togblatt*, on Simhat Torah she would summon all her strength and dance in honor of the Torah; she prayed with a *minyan* three times daily. The last few days of her life are described as a period of conscious preparation for death: "Tuesday she recited the Song of Songs, and each day she recited the Song for the Sabbath Day (Psalm 92)."

The Yiddish essayist Moshe Feinkind wrote about her in his *Froyen-Rebeyyim un Berihmte Perzenlikhkeiten in Poylen* ["Women-Rebbes and Famous Personalities in Poland".][36] Feinkind portrays her as giving wise and compassionate advice to those who came to her with their troubles. Famed for her miraculous powers, women especially would make pilgrimages to see her, although even rebbes would ask

her blessing, leaving a *kvittel* and an offering. Feinkind is careful to underscore her modest, unassuming manner: "She does not conduct *tish*, says no *toyres*, tells no [hasidic] tales, leads no superfluous ceremonies, has no assistants. [She has] no 'court,' doesn't storm about money . . ." Her pious behavior included fasting and abstention from meat, except on Sabbath and Holy Days. He ends his sketch with the remark that "She is now the last rebbetsin of the old generation that conducts herself in the manner of a Rebbe in Poland." Feinkind evidently had firsthand knowledge of his subject, and his portrayal appears to be a sober and unembellished, if warm and appreciative, account.

In evaluating the life and impact of the Chentshiner Rebbetsin, we are clearly worlds apart from the Maid of Ludmir, whose life, Rapaport-Albert argues, is ultimately a story of deviance and failure. If we are to accept Horodecky's account as essentially accurate, the Maid adopted a lifestyle of social isolation and celibacy, and her career was effectively terminated by R. Mordecai of Chernobyl, who encouraged her to marry. This suggests that he perceived her as a woman illegitimately attempting to act as a man, a circumstance which today might be called gender identity confusion. Given that her behavior was perceived as bizarre and anomalous by the established zaddikim of the day, it would not be correct to present her life as evidence for the legitimacy of the "woman-zaddik" in hasidism. But precisely because the Maid was evidently perceived as a deviant by influential figures in her social setting, her story does not prove the opposite: that Hasidism made no changes whatsoever in the range of possibilities open to women. From within the hasidic perspective, it seems likely that the moral of the story of the Maid of Ludmir has little to do with the spiritual potential of women per se, but rather suggests that any attempt to defy both nature and the wishes of the recognized zaddikim of the day is doomed to failure. One simply does not know what might have been the resolution of the story had the Maid not taken the self-defeating path, from a Jewish perspective, of celibacy within marriage, but had maintained her ascetic piety while at the same time embracing other elements of the lifestyle expected of a traditional Jewish woman.[37]

For that, in effect, is what Sarah Horowitz Sternfeld of Checiny did. A daughter of R. Joshua Heschel Te'umim-Frankel, who was a disciple of the Seer of Lublin, her husband R. Hayyim Shumu'el Horowitz Sternfeld was a great-grandson of both the Seer and R. Kalonymos Kalman Epstein of Cracow, the author of *Ma'or va-Shemesh* (the work discussed above, with reference to the teaching on the egalitarian implications of Miriam's circle-dance); among her grandchildren was the Piaseczner Rebbe, whose teachings on Miriam

have also been cited above. Her hasidic lineage was thus impeccable; in addition, she obviously fulfilled her womanly roles of wife and mother. The fact that she survived her husband by over twenty years enabled her to establish an identity and following at least partly independent of her husband, although she did not, and would not have wished to, emerge entirely from his penumbra. Thus her ascetic piety and charismatic leadership were no doubt perceived as firmly rooted in her hasidic heritage, and did not come at the expense of social and religious expectations. They were evidently accepted as legitimate expressions within her hasidic social setting. They were also consistent with its worldview, if, as seems plausible, the more learned of those who came to her were aware of the teachings emanating from male masters in her lineage which suggest the possibility of a valued and respected spiritual leadership role for women.

Thus while Rapaport-Albert is quite correct in noting that the story of the Maid of Ludmir as it has come down to us is one of failure,[38] it is equally important to see that the story of the Chentshiner Rebbetsin is one of success. Revered during her lifetime as a holy person, a source of charismatic blessing and wise counsel, she was surrounded in death by her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren (among them well-known rebbes), as well as tearful throngs of hasidim, and was laid to rest next to her late husband the Chentshiner Rebbe. We must then demur from Rapaport-Albert's "unequivocally negative" answer to the question she put as to whether "the phenomenon of independent female leaders was integrated into the ideology and organization of Hasidism and considered to be fully legitimate." As long as we do not attempt to find women acting precisely as male masters, we are indeed justified in saying that figures such as the Chentshiner Rebbetsin were considered to be fully legitimate within their restricted domain. For what does legitimacy mean in the context of popular hasidism other than that hasidim flock to an individual for blessing, counsel, and assistance, and that the individual who stands at the focal point of such attention achieves a measure of prominence and recognition?[39] Judging by the reports, the Chentshiner Rebbetsin certainly fulfilled those criteria. Undoubtedly, she did not travel to rabbinic conferences or participate in the kinds of organized communal activities typical for some hasidic masters in interbellum Poland, but that does not detract from the significance of the position that she did attain. Her activities, while unusual, were legitimate in her milieu because hasidism, despite its accommodation to and readoption of many mitnaggedic ideals, had still retained into the twentieth century much of its early emphasis on charismatic leadership and the stamp of extraordinary personality.[40]

It is worthwhile pausing to compare the language employed in

the popular press of the day to describe the Chentsiner Rebbetsin. While New York's *Morgen Zshurnal*—describing her activities as conforming precisely to the pattern of male rebbes, labeled her a "*froi-rebbe*,"[41] and *Der Moment*, somewhat more circumspectly, wrote that she "conducted herself as a rebbe" ("*hot zikh gefirhrt, vi a rebbe*"),[42] Agudah's *Togblatt* applied the traditional midrashic category of "*na-shim zidkonios*" ('righteous women') to her.[43] Clearly, there was nothing to be gained, from the *Togblatt*'s point of view and that of its Orthodox readership, by applying the provocative term "*froi-rebbe*," or anything resembling it, to her. Her life and activities are described, but the terms employed are muted and nonsensationalist. So while, as Rapaport-Albert argues, Horodecky may have been influenced by modern feminism to exaggerate the influence of the charismatic woman leader in Hasidism, it is equally plausible that sources connected to the hasidic movement might have had reasons to minimize it, or at least to shield the phenomenon from what, in its view, would be distortion and misappropriation by outsiders.

It is interesting to note in this context that an authorized history of the Chentshin-Ozherov dynasty, published recently in Israel, has a lengthy discussion of the Chentshiner Rebbetsin, mentions that she accepted *kvittlach*, but avoids the term *froi-rebbe*. This work reproduces a letter of blessing sent by her to a hasid upon which is affixed her seal, which reads, "*Ha-Rabbanit Sarah Shternfeld—Eshet ha-Rav ha-Zaddik ha-Kadosh . . . mi-Chentshin.*"[44] In twentieth century Poland there was of course no official register of hasidic leaders, but the evidence of correspondence stamped with a personal seal certainly suggests that the Chentshiner Rebbetsin possessed a robust, self-confident awareness of her role and status and no doubt considered her activities (and was likely considered by others) "to be fully legitimate."

The hasidic movement was, we are coming increasingly to realize, a part of traditional society from the very beginning,[45] wanted to be perceived as such, and was certainly not interested in making changes in such a fundamental matter as sex-roles. Nevertheless there are to be found, in the theoretical *derasha* literature of Hasidism, themes which present a vision of radical egalitarianism and the sweeping away of traditional sex-role distinctions. To be sure, these themes are never developed systematically or applied in a programmatic manner. Most importantly, they are largely reserved for the eschatological future. Yet it is not implausible to suggest that these themes might have both reflected and encouraged certain limited deviations from the patterns which held sway in the rest of Jewish traditional society of the day.

The relationship between Hasidism and the halakhic tradition is complex and fraught with an aspect of tension. It is well known that the early Mitnaggedim charged the Hasidim with halakhic laxities and even antinomianism. This charge, to the extent that there was an element of truth in it, seems to have been closely associated with the focus on divine immanence, which was at the core of the teachings of early Hasidism. This emphasis tended to erode commitment to a life of mizvot, which are anchored firmly in the real world of the flesh, within the coordinates of one's own place and time, and not in the atemporal realm of mystical unification with the divine. As Rabbi Hayyim Volozhyner, the foremost student of the Gaon of Vilna, pointed out in his *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*,[46] the halakhic system is anchored in an epistemology of differentiation and distinction, of boundaries, gradations and hierarchies. A sustained focusing on divine immanence is likely, argued R. Hayyim, to lead to a collapse of those boundaries.[47] Since Hasidism did wish to remain within the world of tradition and commitment to the Law, it anticipated or responded to R. Hayyim's critique and was compelled to develop strategies for avoiding the more radical consequences of its teachings.[48] One way of doing this was by limiting their domain of applicability to the circle of the Rebbe. It was understood that in many cases, the rebbe's actions are for inspiration and edification, but not for imitation.[49] If the zaddik was late in praying, this was because he was above time and space.[50] This is radical in the context of the Jewish legal tradition, but the radicalism is muted and neutralized, in hasidic self-perception, by the protective aura of the zaddik. Thus the centrality of the zaddik at once permitted the hasidic movement to express some limited aspects of its radical theology, while retaining and even enhancing a basically conservative posture.[51]

This perspective may help us to place hasidic attitudes towards women in better focus. While, as we have seen, there are to be found in hasidic theoretical literature passages which point to the breaking down of gender boundaries and hierarchies, in practice the boundaries held. There is no evidence that within the hasidic movement the role of women in general was significantly different from elsewhere in traditional Jewish society. We do encounter exceptional cases of women charismatics and religious leaders, but they are almost invariably the close relatives of established zaddikim, and where therefore perceived by all as extraordinary and special, not precedent-setting.

The limitation and localization of boundary violations to the nimbus of the zaddik, their ascription to his authority and influence, and their categorization as unique expressions of his personality and spiritual signature, enabled Hasidism to test some of the boundaries of rabbinic Judaism, to penetrate and tunnel through them, but in ways

that did not lead to their collapse.[52] An example of this was the female charismatic leader, a phenomenon which interested observers such as S. A. Horodecky interpreted as a programmatic manifestation of egalitarian values unavailable elsewhere in the traditional Jewish world. But the hasidic movement, in its own self-perception, saw matters differently. For the eschaton has not yet arrived, the boundaries must hold, and the female charismatic does not now set a precedent for other women to follow. In this as yet unredeemed world she remains, like the biblical Miriam, a singular phenomenon, safely enshrined within the mystique of the zaddik, and very much not "in the manner of other women."[53]

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NOTES

1. The author wishes to thank the editor of this journal, Professor Steven T. Katz, for his most helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper. Ruth Clements, Deanna Douglas and Alan Rosen read and commented on the entire paper; Elliot K. Ginsburg, Zeev Gries, Daniel C. Matt and Elliot Wolfson were helpful in clarifying specific points. All errors of fact and interpretation remain, of course, my own responsibility.

2. Israel Moshe Bromberg, *Toledot ha-Nifla'ot* (Warsaw, 1899), pp. 4–6.

3. S. A. Horodecky, *Ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Hasidim* (Tel Aviv, 1951), Vol. 4, pp. 68–71.

4. Jacob S. Minkin, *The Romance of Hasidism* (New York, 1935), p. 345.

5. Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1977), p. 243.

6. Ada Rapaport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism, S. A. Horodecky and the Maid of Ludmir Tradition," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, edited by Ada Rapaport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London, 1988), pp. 495-525.

7. Ibid., p. 508.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Gershom Scholem, "Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism," *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1978), pp. 233–236.

11. *Ma'or va-Shemesh* (reprint ed., Tel Aviv, 1964), pp. 77a–c.

12. Ibid., p. 77c.

13. Ibid., pp. 77c–78a.

14. *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. C. B. Chavel, 2:504 (on Song of Songs 6:2); cited by Eliot Wolfson, "Mystical-Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, Vol. 3, ed. David Blumenthal (Atlanta, 1988), p. 72, n. 87.

15. R. Bahya ben Asher, *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. C. B. Chavel (Je-

rusalem, 1981), pp. 282–3. Compare *Etz Yosef* on *Ein Yaakov* to *Ta'anit* 31a who cites a longer version of R. Bahya. As cited by *Etz Yosef*, R. Bahya interprets the Talmud's statement that each righteous person will point to God with a finger to mean "that each one will realize everything that is possible to realize. This means intellectual and not sensual apprehension." The Hebrew *she-yasigu kol mah she-efshar le-hasig* is extremely close to the language of *Ma'or va-Shemesh*. Cf. also R. Bahya's *Kad ha-Kemah*, Purim, on the royal ring which was removed from Haman's hand and given to Mordecai, symbolizing the rotating wheel of fortune and the change of destinies by which "those who are in a higher place will be lowered, and those who are now in a low place will be elevated." R. Bahya ben Asher, *Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts*, trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York, 1980), p. 527.

16. We are here relying upon the very extensive discussion by Mordechai Pachter, "Circles and Straightness—A History of an Idea," *Daat*, Vol. 18 (1987), pp. 59–90.

17. Zhitomir, 1848, p. 15c. Compare Rabbi Schneur Zalman's use of Jeremiah 31:34 in the introduction to *Tanya* or *Likkutei Amarim* (Brooklyn, 1952), p. 4a. Cf. also R. Dov Baer of Mezhirech, *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'akov*, ed. Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 214.

18. Cf. Nehemia Polen, "Divine Weeping: Rabbi Kalonymos Shapiro's Theology of Catastrophe in the Warsaw Ghetto", *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1987), pp. 253–269.

19. R. Kalonymos Kalmish Shapiro, *Esh Kodesh* (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 183. Cf. R. Israel Yafah, *Or Yisra'el*, p. 39b (cited by Gershom Scholem, *Pirkey Yesod ba-Havanat ha-Kabbalah u-Semaleyhah* [Jerusalem, 1976], p. 300).

20. *Kiddushin* 31a; *Baba Kamma* 38a; *ibid*, 87a.

21. See *Rosh Hashanah* 29a.

22. In the epitaph for his wife which he appended to the manuscript of his discourses (this page is not numbered in the printed edition but appears just before the main body of the text), he states that she passed away on the Sabbath day upon which the verse "AND MIRIAM DIED THERE" is read, in the year 5697 (1937). He writes of her:

> In honor of my mate, the rebbetsin, the righteous, modest and pious [hasidah] . . . Her character traits were noble; in addition, she studied Torah every day. She was as a merciful mother to embittered souls in general, and to hasidim specifically. . . .

In his *Mavo' ha-She'arim* (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 21b, R. Shapiro clarifies a point raised, he tells us, by his wife, who read the work in question, as she did "a number of my other writings."

23. Hannah-Brakhah, the second wife of R. Elimelekh of Grodzisk (d. Oct. 20, 1939). Compare Rapaport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 518, n. 39.

24. Sarah, daughter of R. Joshua Heschel Te'umim Frankel ('Sarah of Checiny,' 'the Chentshiner Rebbetsin'). See below.

25. See Shlomo Noble, "The Jewish Woman in Medieval Martyrology," in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in Honor of I. Edw. Kiev*,

ed. Charles Berlin, (New York, 1971), pp. 347–355. Noble states that in the martyrological chronicles, women are credited with "taking the initiative in sanctifying the Name of God," and also with being "the first to perceive the nature and true significance of the onslaught and to alarm their menfolk accordingly (p. 350)." For an even stronger statement of the transformation of women's roles during this period of crisis, see Ivan G. Marcus, "From Politics to Martyrdom: Shifting Paradigms in the Hebrew Narratives of the 1096 Crusade Riots", in *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*, Vol. 2 (1982), pp. 40–52. Marcus writes that "In the imagery in which the martyrdom is cast, women along with men play the role of the male Temple priests in perfoming the sacrificial cult. Thus, in the martyrdom narratives, women and men are equalized as priests . . ." (p. 45).

26. Rapaport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 508, citing I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 221–31; Gershom Scholem, *Pirkey Yesod ba-Havanat ha-Kabbalah u-Semaleyhah* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 300–3; idem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1961), pp. 37–38.

Scholem's assertion at the end of the first chapter of *Major Trends* that there is a kabbalistic "tendency to lay stress on the demonic nature of woman and the feminine element of the cosmos" is, it must be said, misleading, hardly balanced by his brief comment on the Shekhinah as a feminine element in God. When one consults Scholem's extended essay on the Shekhinah in *Pirkey Yesod*, pp. 259–307, one is apprised of a far more nuanced and complex situation. In particular, the 'association' of the feminine with the demonic turns out in large measure to refer to the ongoing danger of Shekhinah's capture by demonic forces. Similar remarks hold for the Tishby essay in *Mishnat ha-Zohar* cited by Rapaport-Albert. Compare the far more benign formulation of Elliot K. Ginsburg in *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany, 1989), who speaks of "*Shekhinah*/Shabbat's . . . entanglement in the demonic forces of *Sitra' 'Ahra'* " (p. 102) from which she is liberated on the Sabbath day. Compare also the approach of Charles Mopsik to these matters in his Sorbonne doctoral thesis, "Recherches Autour de la Lettre Sur la Saintete. Sources, Texte, Influences. Tome I: La Dualite Masculin/Feminin dans la Cabale. Tome II: Le Secret de la Relation entre l'Homme et la Femme." Note for example the remark on p. 21 that " . . . les cabalistes n'identifieront masculin et feminin a bien et a mal que lorsque le mal est concu comme dimension ou attribut divin." See also idem, "The Body of Engenderment in the Hebrew Bible, the Rabbinic Tradition and the Kabbalah," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, Vol. 1, ed. by Michel Feher with Ramona Nadaff and Nadia Tazi (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 49–72. Elliot Wolfson's "Female Imaging of the Torah: From Literary Metaphor to Religious Symbol," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, eds. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs and Nahum M. Sarna, Vol. 2 (Atlanta, 1989), pp. 271–307, conveys the scope and pervasiveness of positive associations between the feminine and Torah in the Jewish mystical tradition. Finally, note the discussion in Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), pp. 83–88, and pp. 230–231; and idem, "Sexual Metaphors and Praxis in the Kabbalah," in *The Jewish*

Family: Metaphor and Memory, ed. David Kraemer (New York, 1989), pp. 197–224.

All of this calls into question Scholem's assertion about women and the demonic. His remark certainly cannot be used to explain the historical relationship of women to the Kabbalah. Rapaport-Albert herself raises other questions concerning this putative linkage: "On Women in Hasidism", p. 523, n. 80.

27. See the remarks of Arthur Green in "Typologies of Leadership and the Hasidic Zaddiq," in *Jewish Spirituality From the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present*, ed. Arthur Green (New York, 1987), p. 138.

28. It is notable in this connection that, in the midst of a homily on the sancitity of the Sabbath, R. Epstein makes a point of saying that "in each generation it is incumbent upon the zaddikim of the generation to extend the sanctity of the Sabbath even to the women of lower rank, who are engaged in the affairs of this world and are busy with their work all week long. They too must feel the sanctity of the Sabbath . . . " (*Ma'or va-Shemesh, Parashat Ki Tissa*, s.v. *Va-yedaber*, p. 102c) No other group is singled out in this homily as being worthy of the particular attention of the zaddik.

29. S. A. Horodecky (ed.), *Sefer Shivhei ha-Besht* (Tel Aviv, 1965), pp. 78–80; English version trans. and ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome R. Mintz, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* (Bloomington, 1972), pp. 97–99.

30. *Sefer Shivhei ha-Besht*, pp. 180–181; *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, pp. 120–121.

Rapaport-Albert, in her discussion of this story ("On Women in Hasidism", p. 517, n. 36), sees only "Rivaleh's traditional female virtues, . . . , and the total absence of any pneumatic or charismatic powers among her qualities." In her view, the story is "totally innocent of any desire to . . . acknowledge [women's] capacity for charismatic leadership." It seems to me that it is precisely Rivaleh's capacity for charismatic leadership—of the Besht himself!—which is asserted in this story.

31. Compare the enigmatic mode of *Shivhei ha-Besht* discussed by Arnold Band in "The Enigmatic in Two Hasidic Tales", *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, eds. J. Dan and F. Talmage, (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 185–209. Band shows the significance of the stories about the "wayward yet tolerated child" who turns out to be the spiritual giant known as the Baal Shem Tov as calling into question our concepts of appearance and reality: people are not always who they seem to be. This seems to be a central message of many hasidic tales, and is consistent with the thrust of the Pious Rivaleh tale discussed here.

32. Rapaport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 501.

33. Rapaport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," p. 518, nn. 39 and 42.

34. *Der Moment*, February 28, 1937. (The date printed on top of the page upon which the obituary appears—February 25—is undoubtedly a misprint, as the page appears within the sequence for February 28 [microfilm reel #49]; in addition, the article states correctly that she died around midnight on Friday evening—the day after Thursday, February 25, 1937.)

35. *Der Moment*, March 1, 1937, p. 6.

36. Warsaw, 1937, pp. 56–61.

37. It must also be pointed out that for some time she evidently did have

a following and functioned as a zaddik, a career which, no matter how tragically it may have ended in her case, would have been inconceivable in traditional circles but for hasidism's appreciative evaluation—at least in theory—of charismatic popular leadership. Furthermore, the concern on the part of the recognized zaddikim of the day may have been prompted in part by the fact that her charismatic powers evidently did not derive from her connection to an already established lineage: she was neither the relative nor the student of a zaddik. After the first few generations of the movement, almost all *male* masters were themselves the sons of masters. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, independent charismatic personalities starting new dynasties were quite rare. (See Rachel Elior, "Between *Yesh* and *Ayin*: the doctrine of the Zaddik in the Works of Jacob Issac, the Seer of Lublin," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, eds. Ada Rapaport-Albert and S. J. Zipperstein, [London, 1988], p. 449, n. 50.)

38. I confess uneasiness about the extent to which Rapaport-Albert relies, both for the facts on the Maid's life, as well for the evaluation of her career ('failure'), upon the same source—Horodecky. I was not able to examine E. Taubenhaus, *Bi-Netiv ha-Yakhid* (Haifa, 1959), referred to by Rapaport-Albert (her notes 2 and 52), which reports that in Jerusalem the Maid "conducted herself 'as a Polish *Rebbe*' and had a considerable following." This report, based on personal recollections, conveys a very different impression about the Maid's later life than does Horodecky.

39. There is an old popular witticism about hasidic rebbes, which asserts that a rabbi is made into a Grand Rabbi by the sign painter. The truth in this rather cynical jest, of course, is that there is no formal board of certification for hasidic zaddikim. Whatever license they have—in addition to that conferred by their lineage—they receive by virtue of their ability to attract and retain a following.

40. Cf. Joseph Dan, "Hasidism: The Third Century," *World Union of Jewish Studies Newsletter*, No. 29 (1989), pp. 29–42 (in Hebrew). The importance of personality in Hasidism, and the legitimation of "idiosyncratic relationship to God" is pointed out by Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (University, Alabama, 1979), pp. 3–4, and p. 20, n. 1.

41. *Der Morgen Zshurnal: The Jewish Morning Journal*, March 22, 1937, p. 9.

42. See note 33, above.

43. *Dos Yiddishe Togblatt*, March 4, 1937.

44. Aharon Suraski, *Be-Labat Esh: Toledot Bet Ozherov-Chentshin* (Tel Aviv, 1985), pp. 282–289.

45. See Yaacov Hasdai, "The Origins of the Conflict between Hasidim and Mitnagdim," in *Hasidism: Continuity or Innovation?* ed. Bezalel Safran, (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 27–45. See also Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism*, ed. Samuel H. Dresner (Chicago, 1985). Relevant in this context are the researches and archival discoveries of Moshe (Murray) Rosman. See his "Miedzyboz and Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov," *Zion*, Vol. 52 No. 2 (1987), pp. 177–189 [in Hebrew].

46. The most closely reasoned intellectual response to the rise of the hasidic movement was R. Hayyim Volozhyner's *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*. This work,

first published in 1824, engages hasidic theology on its own terms, and expounds a frank acosmism no less radical than anything to be found in the works of hasidic masters such as R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi. But for R. Hayyim, the Hasidim erred in allowing a doctrine which is true from the divine perspective to become the subject of popular, sustained reflection, rather than limiting it to isolated moments of contemplation within the spiritual life of an intellectual elite. See Norman Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake In the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries* (New York, 1989); and idem, "The Phase of Dialogue and Reconciliation," in *Tolerance and Movements of Religious Dissent in Eastern Europe* (New York, 1975), pp. 115–129.

47. Compare Arthur Green, "Hasidism: Discovery and Retreat," in *The Other Side of God: A Polarity in World Religions*, edited by Peter L. Berger (Garden City, 1981), pp. 104–130.

48. Habad Hasidism, for example, precisely because of its radical acosmism, placed heavy emphasis on the fulfillment of *mizvot* in a most punctilious manner. This seems to be one of the main thrusts of Rabbi Schneur Zalman's *Likkutei Amarim* or *Tanya*. See Tali Loewenthal, "The Apotheosis of Action in Early Habad," *Daat*, Vol. 18 (1987), pp. 5–19 (English section).

49. This theme appears already in early collections of the teachings of the Besht, based on the writings of Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polnoyye. See Aaron ben Zvi Hirsh ha-Kohen of Apt, *Keter Shem Tov*, Kehot edition (Brooklyn, 1981), p. 54c (#366); p. 31c-d (#244). Cf. the discussion in Ada Rapaport-Albert, "God and the Zaddik As the Two Focal Points of Hasidic Worship," *History of Religions*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1979), pp. 296–325, especially pp. 303–8. I am in agreement with Rapaport-Albert on that article's main point, that Hasidism was from its inception an elitist movement which restricted the fulfillment of the ideal of *devekut*, communion with God, to the spiritually endowed, and that the method of fulfilling the promise of spirituality for the masses was "not by emulating the spiritual elite by [by] 'cleaving' to it." (p. 305). She does not, however, explore the relationship between Hasidism's spiritual elitism, and its capacity to maintain halakhic boundaries despite a theology of panentheism and acosmism. Cf. also Tali Loewenthal, "Early Hasidic Teachings—Esoteric Mysticism, or a Medium of Communal Leadership?" *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 37 (1986), pp. 58–75.

The tension between radical teachings bordering on antinomianism on the one hand, and conservative praxis on the other hand, was especially acute in the school of Izbica, and seems to have been controlled in the manner suggested here; see Morris M. Faierstein, *All Is in the Hands of Heaven: The Teachings of Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica* (New York, 1989), esp. pp. 29–39; 61–67.

50. See the discussion in A. Wertheim, *Halakhot ve-Halikhot ba-Hasidut* (Jerusalem, 1960), pp. 88–93; Lamm, *Torah Lishmah*, pp. 14–18.

51. An examination of the material assembled by Wertheim (previous note) demonstrates that, other than with respect to the matter of tardiness in the fixed times of prayer, it is hard to find any area where hasidism deviated significantly from the mandates of Jewish law; to the contrary, in many instances the hasidim adopted stringencies or supererogatory practices not fol-

lowed by other halakhic Jews. The impression one obtains is that hasidic masters resurrected practices that had fallen into disuse, adopted strict minority opinions, or took optional customs and made them central features of their ritual, in order to be able to make a personal statement and still keep within the broad framework of the halakhic system. That is, they marshalled various neglected elements in the vocabulary of Jewish law to fashion a personal language which would bear the mark of their individual signatures, while at the same time conforming to the essential grammar of the law.

In some hasidic circles the tardiness in prayer carried over to the hasidim, but this does not undermine our point that, coming as it did from the overarching authority of the zaddik, the deviation did not, in the minds of the hasidim, compromise the integrity of the halakhic system as a whole.

52. See Wertheim, *Halakhot ve-Halikhot ba-Hasidut*, p. 57, n.96; and p. 93, n. 56, on the limitation of halakhic anomalies and the preservation and enhancement of the system as a whole.

53. Undoubtedly there was great variation between dynasties with respect to attitudes towards women's spirituality, as there was on most other matters. It seems evident that the Kozienice dynasty and related families—which have figured prominently in the above presentation—had a particularly appreciative view of women's spirituality. Thus our conclusions should not be taken as necessarily applicable to hasidism in general. Mrs. Malkah Hapstein Sternberg, daughter of R. Yisrael Eleazar Hapstein of Kozienice, confirmed to me that Pereleh [daughter of the Kozienicer Maggid] was "held up as a model to the rest of the women in the family . . ." and that women's learning was encouraged and highly esteemed (interview, New York City, June 19, 1989). Elsewhere I hope to discuss another accomplished woman from the Kozienice family, the writer Malkah Hapstein Shapiro.

In focusing on women within the immediate family of the zaddik, we do not mean to exclude the possibility that in some cases the example found there may have influenced a broader circle of hasidim.

Finally, we make reference to the work of Chava Weissler, which significantly increases our understanding of the range of spiritual possibilities and positive models available to Eastern-European (not necessarily hasidic) Jewish women. See her "The Religion of Traditional Ashkenazic Women: Some Methodological Issues," *AJS Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1987), pp. 73–94; idem, "Women in Paradise," *Tikkun* Vol. 2, No. 2 (1987), pp. 43–46, 117–120; idem, "The Traditional Piety of Ashkenazic Women," in *Jewish Spirituality From the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present*, ed. Arthur Green (New York, 1987), pp. 245–275.