

GRANDEUR AND HUMILITY IN THE WRITINGS OF R. SIMHAH BUNIM OF PRZYSUCHA

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The path of R. Simhah Bunim of Przysucha (1765–1827), a pharmacist turned Hasidic rebbe, 'was' considered a sufficient break with traditional Hasidic ways to arouse opposition from other Hasidic leaders. Indeed, his opponents went as far as to attempt to ostracize his followers. This antagonism was eventually quelled by the senior rebbe of the time, R. Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt, at a great wedding attended by the many Hasidic leaders at Uschillig (Ustilla).¹ Most studies of Hasidism consider the thought of Polish Hasidism of the schools of

¹ On R. Simhah Bunim of Przysucha, see Z. M. Rabinowicz, *Rabbi Simhah Bunim Mi-Przysucha* (Tel Aviv, 1945); Yekutiel Kamelhar, *Dor Deah* (Bilgorai, 1933) 276–280. R. Simhah Bunim died without leaving behind much written work; we have only the accounts left by his students. The basic text cited by later generations is *Kol Simhah* (hereafter cited as KS) written by a student of R. Simhah Bunim, R. Zusha of Plozker (1st edition, Breslau, 1859), reprinted with interpolated additions by R. Ahron Walden (1903) and recently reprinted in a Hasidic-critical edition by Yehudah Menahem Boim, (Raananah, 1992) (hereafter cited as KSN).

Though we do not have R. Simhah Bunim's own written account of his ideas, it is possible to verify the authenticity of R. Zusha's reports by comparing parallel traditions by other disciples. Their references to *Kol Simhah* often contain critiques. They write that the passage cited was not complete, or out of context, or that there is an alternative tradition; sometimes these yield vastly different interpretations. I contend that whenever there are two or more parallel traditions of nineteenth-century citations, they can be accepted as reflective of the image of R. Simhah Bunim. Even if these traditions do not provide proof that R. Bunim made the statements, and the traditions are presented through the prisms of Kotzk, Izbiča, Gur, and Kuzmir, they have a clear convergence in their presentation. In all the accounts, R. Simhah Bunim delayed prayer, studied medieval theology, wrote of the need for humility, required love and fear of God, discussed sin, and rejected the life of the Hasidic court for an approach of

Przysucha, Kock, Izbicha, Gur, and their students as a continuation of early Hasidism. Yet its social world and ideas are strikingly different from those of early Hasidism.

This paper will investigate R. Simhah Bunim's inner-directed, rational approach to spirituality, emphasizing his differences from earlier Hasidism, and his own original Hasidic path. Many of his ideas are the result of his reading of earlier Jewish philosophic texts as experiential directives. R. Simhah Bunim's spiritual path emphasizes the need to arouse oneself from the slumbers of ordinary life and dedicate oneself to God. This is done by developing a sense of awe before the divine grandeur, external to oneself and overwhelming one's senses. One submits to the will of the divine with humility and self-sacrifice. Torah study, prayer, repentance, and entrance into the modern city are all unique expressions of this humility and submission to the divine will done in order to experience the divine grandeur.

God's Presence and Awe of the Divine

The Hasidic notion of finding God in all creation is given a subtle reformulation in R. Simhah Bunim's thought. It becomes a doctrine in which the unity of the hidden divine will stands behind all the varied

self-perfection. The best volume of early collected traditions is R. Shemuel of Sieniawa (Shinaver), *Ramataim Zofim*, (Warsaw, 1882) (hereafter cited as RZ). It is trustworthy in that R. Shemuel did not seek to collect traditions about a single person, forcing himself to stretch the material. Rather, the book is a collection of statements from various members of the school treated as a whole, in which the differences between the approaches become apparent. It also is based on the traditions of the lectures R. Bunim gave on *Tanhuma* and *Tanna Debei Eliyahu*.

A second period of oral transmission is reflected by citations from students of his disciples; these reflect the changing reality of urban Poland. The best collection is that of R. Israel Berger, *Simhat Israel* (Piotrkow, 1911) which indicates its sources, and sometimes furnishes a full chain of tradition. It is divided into stories, teachings (*Maamarei Simhah*, hereafter cited as MS), and Torah (*Torat Simhah*, hereafter cited as TS). Later works such as Y. K. K. Rokotz, *Siah Sarfei HaKodesh* (Lodz/Piotrkow, 1923-32) are reflective of the ongoing strength of Przysucha ideas in early twentieth-century urban Poland. The tone has become more conservative and has been integrated with an urban Gur approach toward Hasidism. There are many statements which are clearly not authentic.

manifestations of nature. God's will is to be discovered both in nature, which was directly created by God, and in man's actions, which are governed by God's providence. God's presence in nature demonstrates His providential dominion over the world. The world is not an illusion, or filled with divine sparks, but is a manifestation of the divine will that manifests the divine glory.

God created the world in order that the world allow His creation and providence to be recognized. Therefore, everything was created with the great intention that through this creation one could recognize His blessed Glory (*Kevodo*). After He [God] saw [through] reflection that this world and its creations are sufficient to recognize His glory, He said, "it is sufficient (*shedai*)."²

The glory of God, revealed through creation and providence, was designed to allow the divine will to manifest itself in the world.

According to R. Simhah Bunim, the experience of the divine in ordinary life, as portrayed by the Baal Shem Tov, finds its medieval philosophic base in the celestial hierarchy of Maimonides and Ibn Ezra. Maimonides' requirement to fear God attains a vivid Hasidic sense of trepidation, while his stress on the philosophical knowledge of God obtained by studying creation is transformed into the soul's sensing of God's presence in creation.³ An experience of the divine as *tremendum* is attained by the individual developing his sense of awe and fear of God's grandeur. It is interesting to note that the Neoplatonism of Ibn Ezra was considered as fulfilling this requirement.⁴

² T.S. 90; KSN 1; R. Zadok develops this statement of R. Simhah into the metaphor of the book of nature which can be read to find God. Creation is the lower book of God's wisdom, and Torah is the higher book of God's wisdom. R. Zadok's *Zidkat HaZaddik*, sec. 216; *Likkute Maamarim*, '79; R. Mordekhai Yosef Leiner, *Mei haShiloah likkutei haShas* 21a.

³ This idea is also to be found in the circle of Rabbi Moses Cordovero, *Ohr Ne'arav*, part 2 chapter 1; Eliyahu de Vidas (16th cent.), *Reshit Hokhmah*, Gate of Awe, chap. 1; and in Habad. See Roman Foxbrunner, *Habad* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992) chap. 1.

⁴ On Ibn Ezra, see Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris, *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). There is no academic essay on the traditionalist uses and reactions to Ibn Ezra

In the name of R. Simhah Bunim it is said: From R. Abraham Ibn Ezra's great fear of heaven and awe, he [R. Simhah Bunim] cannot understand how Ibn Ezra's vitality abided in his body. However, in truth Israel is given this power to hold all this in its midst, to perceive these sensations and, in its midst, to contain them.⁵

Maimonides is also presented as the source for this fear of God. R. Simhah Bunim said:

in the name of his holy teacher R. Moses Leib Sasov [1745-1807] . . . Each person is required at each second to consider the grandeur of God as it is written "lift up your eyes on high" (Isaiah 40:26). . . . One needs to know the grandeur of the world of action, the middle world, and the higher world . . . and also the world of angels is included because the intellect reaches there. Through this one can come to a little fear of heaven [because] one can exert effort and know the grandeur of the creator. If one does not know the grandeur of the world, it will be slight in his eyes. . . . Therefore, Maimonides opened his work to let us know a drop in the ocean of these matters. This was in order to reach fear of God, and he [Maimonides] writes there how to proceed with love and fear of God.⁶

This continuous experience of the fear of God constitutes the chief goal in religious life. "A person should cleave to his Creator and not cease literally for an instant. One who ceases an instant . . . all of Gehinnom is not sufficient for him."⁷

Awe of God as experienced in creation exists at the point at which Maimonides' and the Baal Shem Tov's discoveries of God in the world converge.

It is known that one needs continuously to combine the two [divine] names, the Tetragrammaton and A-D-N-Y. To know with strong faith (*emunat omen*) that he sustains all existence. As Maimonides writes in the

in Eastern Europe; it does seem that his work was accepted in a manner similar to Maimonides' writings.

⁵ T.S. 191.

⁶ T.S. 310, RZ 73; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Yesodei HaTorah* chapters 2-3.

⁷ T.S. 103, RZ 5.

introduction to his work "the basic principle of all basic principles,"⁸ alluding [in the initial letters] to the Tetragrammaton. Furthermore he writes that this existence "is the lord of the world, master of the earth."⁹ This is the actual combination in the mind of all Israel.¹⁰

The Tetragrammaton refers to God as first principle of creation, as alluded to in the first statement of Maimonides, and A-D-N-Y refers to God as providential master of the world, as discussed in the second statement of Maimonides.

Both divine creation and divine providence are required in order for man to have the experience of divinity because

with [the creator aspect of God alone], one could not sustain the fear and love that are needed to experience the grandeur of the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, that sustains all the worlds and is not separated from this world even an instant. He is connected (*mithabber*) with people in order to give reward and punishment according to the Torah. This is the combination that brings fear and love, and this is complete faith.¹¹

Creation and providence are the two aspects of divinity needed to attain awe.¹² God's ongoing connection to the world by means of reward and punishment allows man to develop the fear, love, and complete faith needed to contemplate His grandeur in creation. As noted above, R. Simhah Bunim describes the experience of God as sensed in the mind and not in the world itself. One cultivates the mind to sense the awe and wonder of God's will behind nature and the external world.

The continuous divine creation and providence is parallel to man's need for continuous experience of the divine manifest through God's creative and providential power.

This is the thought of which a person needs to be mindful continuously without a moment's pause. It is called "feet" . . . and by means of

⁸ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah* 1:1.

⁹ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah* 2:3

¹⁰ T.S. 150.

¹¹ TS 150, TS 103.

¹² On the two levels of finding God in creation and through providence, see KSN 32 #4; KSN 81 #9. This is in contrast to R. Zadok's distinction between the higher aspect of revelation and the lower aspect of creation and providence, see footnote 2.

this [combination], all hindrances will fall. [The word] "glowing coals" (*gehalim*) has the gematria of ninety one... (equal to the two [divine] names which have the gematria of ninety-one).¹³ This mindfulness is similar to a glowing coal.¹⁴

The experience of God in the mind constitutes a tremendous experience that would be consuming like fire. R. Simhah Bunim questions the ability to survive this experience through allusion to the verse "Can one walk upon hot coals and his feet not get scorched?" (Proverbs 6:28). Fear and love of God protect one's feet from burning due to the hot coals of God's presence in the mind. This state of having the two divine aspects present and unified in the mind can be called a realized state of "glowing mind."¹⁵

To achieve the state of glowing mind one must sanctify the self by study, seclusion (because "holiness requires solitude [*hitbodedut*])," and ritual purity.¹⁶ The objective experience of God's presence reflects a conscious experience, and not an egoless *devekut*. The holy spirit (*ruah hakodesh*) dwells in the midst of Jacob, and all his descendants. Therefore, one can sense God naturally, after one's initial preparations, by means of an intellectual study which affects the heart. The purified heart is the indwelling of God. "There is nothing behind the soul except the blessed creator."¹⁷ If the mirror of the soul is polished from the tarnish of sin and ethical imperfection, then intellectual knowledge allows God to shine from that soul.

The shining of God in the perfected soul displays itself in that one may sense God even in the hiddenness and distance of creation; the philosophic study of creation reveals itself to be the path to God.

¹³ The sentence in parentheses has been moved from a different part of this homily.

¹⁴ TS 150, RZ 69b.

¹⁵ Compare the description of R. Kook's illumination in Binyamin Ish Shalom, *Rav Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993) 217. The "glowing" metaphor of warm light is common in mystical writings; on examples in Jewish texts, see Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 77-83.

¹⁶ TS 31, 242.

¹⁷ TS 108, RZ 12a, KSN 3.

"But from there you will seek the Lord thy God."¹⁸ [The phrase] "from there" refers to the other place of philosophical and intellectual investigations to grasp God and His unity. But the truth is that [philosophy] is the actual place, the heart. When a person properly purifies his ethical traits as presented by Maimonides in his *Hilkhot Deot*, then he will find in his heart the blessed divinity. The finding [of God] requires one to know that one has to seek, search, and investigate with all your heart and with all your soul.¹⁹

When the soul has been morally cleared, and an intellectual awe (from philosophy or from the study of Torah) affects the emotions of the heart, the heart shows its divinity. The verse "But from there you will seek the Lord thy God" (Deut. 4:29) shows that one can only seek God by means of the human mind, even though it seems far from God.²⁰ God can be found through the infusion of Torah study into the emotional experience of the heart. This experience of God has its source beyond the five senses of vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell by means of an emotional philosophic investigation.

Intellectual investigation involves a contemplative meditation on the divine hierarchy and providence as found in Maimonides, and in other medieval and early modern works. Achieving intellectual awe of the divine is also possible through Talmud study.

"The Torah of his God is in his heart."²¹ This refers to the apprehension of God, may He be blessed. None of the senses has the ability to experience (*lehargish*) the Torah of God, except the heart, the source of the sensation and experience of the Torah of God. But before the giving of the Torah the only way to God by human intellect was by philosophy (*hokhmot*). But Moses did not need this even before the giving of the Torah, as it is written, "It was good, etc." (*ki tov*).²²

Originally, Adam was connected to the divine Torah without the need for human intellect, and Moses could reach this hidden light even before the revelation at Sinai. After the fall, the human intellect served

¹⁸ Deut. 4:29.

¹⁹ TS 133, RZ 46b.

²⁰ TS 108, RZ 12a.

²¹ Ps. 37:31; old JPS translates as "The Law."

²² TS 133, RZ 46b.

as an invaluable aid in reaching God; following revelation, however, Torah becomes the preferred path to God. The idea of the heart as an organ of divine experience resembles its function in the thought of the Maharal, and R. Simhah Bunim combines this with Maimonides' idea of man's natural connection to God through the contemplation of the world and philosophy.²³

The divine presence found in the world and in the soul remains hidden, yet "a person needs to accept (*lehaamin*) that God is in the midst [of the individual souls] of Israel even though it appears hidden." This takes much effort, because even the hiddenness is hidden in order that "a person not be able to understand that it is hidden." The hidden hiddenness of God does not reveal itself and allow one to find God externally. The only way to find this hiddenness is to reach into the depths of the soul and find God in the internality of the heart.²⁴ Przysucha Hasidim advised hiding one's piety and personal worship; one worked on internal states of the heart and hid one's external practices.²⁵

R. Simhah Bunim develops the experience of learning Torah as an emotional experience that cannot be confused with any sensory experiences.

The Torah of his God is in his heart (Psalms 37:31). There is no sense with which to perceive the Holy Torah except through the heart. Man's senses are for perceiving [the world], but for [perceiving] the holy Torah and His blessed divinity there is no sense except the heart. Specifically the secrets of the Torah which are called the divine Torah (*torat Elokim*) are perceived by the heart. Therefore one should not make a mistake. God forbid.²⁶

²³ Yoram Jacobson, "The Image of God as the Source of Man's Evil According to the Maharal" [Hebrew], *Daat* 19 (1987) 103-136.

²⁴ TS 180; quoted in *Sefat Emet* on Deut., Nitzavim 60b.

²⁵ TS 194, 228; RZ 8a; *Milin Hadevin* Korach; Shabbat teshuva 80a. Bahye ibn Pakudah, *Hovot Hale'avot*, Shaar Yihud Hamaaseh, chap. 5 mentions this approach of hiding piety to avoid hubris and corruption from social pressures, but Bahye fears it will lead to laxness. The Sufi writer Sharafuddin Maneri, *The Hundred Letters* trans., intro., and notes, Paul Jackson (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) letter 95 and passim, expresses both views of hiding and not one's piety, and leaves the reader to decide which is better for his own situation.

²⁶ TS 198 in the name of RS 68.

R. Simhah Bunim warns against confusing this sensation of the divine with emotional, self-generated sensations of God.²⁷

An experience of God that remains hidden in the heart while one partakes of the secrets of the Torah raises the modern problem of a personal subjective experience that cannot give knowledge and is prone to be misread by the unprepared. R. Simhah Bunim sees a need for scrutinizing the validity of the experience; once it has been examined, however, one may be sure that it is true. He cites Maimonides as a support for his position.

"And testify to the truth and speak truth in the heart." The explanation of "to the truth" is that due to truth alone does one testify to the truth. To "speak (*dober*) [truth]" implies a complete act. One should lead the truth to his heart from his intellect, to produce a unity (*yihud*) of intellect and heart.²⁸

The truth obtained by a union of the heart and mind embodies the divine itself and therefore is not subject to skepticism. The experience is not conceptualized as a personal illumination from God to the self, rather it is presented as an experience of the otherness and grandeur of the divine presence based on prior preparation. Similarly, he describes the awareness of an external revelation as "the revealing of His awe, unity, and glorious kingship, overwhelming the senses . . . and what greater joy is there than this?"²⁹

R. Simhah Bunim requires one to prepare oneself for prayer through the development of awe, love, and holiness. When one begins to pray, one senses fear and shame before the grandeur, as a paltry creature who stands with little, insignificant knowledge. This awe leaves one unable to pray except for the petition at the start of the silent

²⁷ See the more gradual approach of Dov Baer Schneersohn, *On Ecstasy*, trans. Louis Jacobs (Chappaqua, N.Y.: Rossel Books, 1963), who develops a continuum from the self-generated experiences of the emotions to the ontic divine experiences of the mind. Another useful contrast to R. Simhah Bunim is the intellectual apprehension in John of the Cross, in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel in St. John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), who contrasts the early stages of illumination and self-generated experiences with the internal growth gained through the purification during the long night of the soul.

²⁸ TS 197; RZ 86. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Seder Hafeilot*.

²⁹ TS 206, RZ 81.

Amidah, "God open our mouths" (*adonai sefatai tiftach*), because God is overwhelmingly beyond human praise.

It would certainly be impossible, because of the magnitude of awe and fear to approach in thanks, and praise the Exalted and Holy One. But "the righteous shall praise," through the power of Torah we have license and permission and are able to say before Him songs and praises.³⁰

However, this experiential recognition of God's greatness and man's lowliness represents the very state of prayer in "truth" in which God reveals his grandeur.

In this case the veracity of the experience is self-validating in that it does not come from one's own mind, but actually from the divine.

The mystic needs to know that this experience is not from [his] intellect alone. If not for the grace of the Creator, the person [would not] remain alive because God . . . used the person's faculties, his spirit, soul, and limbs. . . . One who is worthy of this knows, and it is impossible to explain further.³¹

The experience described consists of a sense of identification with the divine, occurring within the limitations of human faculties. R. Simhah Bunim cannot explain how, but he knows that there is a mechanism that keeps man alive during the experience.

Humility and God's Will

The feeling of awe before the divine leads both to an awareness of humility based on human limitations and a simultaneous realization of one's greatness in the ability to identify with the divine. "If for one instant in his life fear of God leaves the bones of a person, all of Gehinnom is not sufficient to repay him."³² Fear of God is

³⁰ TS 140, RZ 55b. "The righteous" is a paraphrase of "I will declare thy righteousness" (Isaiah 57:12).

³¹ TS 204, RS 80b. *Kol Simhah Hashalem*, ed. R. Ahron Walden, Beha'alotekha.

³² TS 220, TS 103 citing RZ 115; fear is replaced by *devekut*. The equating of fear and *devekut* is also found in R. Mordekhai Yosef Leiner of Izbicha, *Mei Hashiloah* 58, where *devekut* is defined as acting in accordance with the divine will. TS 306 has a story of R. Bunim dropping a cup of wine due to fear.

cultivated as an experience of man's sensing his own smallness before the grandeur of God. R. Simhah Bunim is often recorded as citing the rabbinic statement that one is to consider oneself simultaneously "I am dust and ashes" and "for me the world was created."³³ According to him, one does not oscillate between these opposite attitudes, but they constitute a two-step process. First one accepts humility as a conversion to sensing the divine presence, and then one evaluates decisions in reference to one's sensing the divine in order to realize one's true potential. If one can realize one's insignificance and passivity before the divine, then one may actively achieve an influx from the divine. One becomes both humble and elite, like "the Patriarchs who were vessels to receive the blessed divinity."³⁴ Jewish society consists of three groups: the simple believers, the humble elite scrupulously following the legal requirements, and the few who can experience the divine.³⁵

Due to Adam's fall from his original oneness with the divine when he was without a sense of self, man needs to overcome his ordinary consciousness of the separation of this world from God.

Before the sin, Adam was so great in his continuous cleaving to the apprehension of the divine that he did not know and sense that he knew and sensed. All of his vitality and senses were clothed in [divinity] continuously without any interruption.

Despite [the fall], the entire worship of *zaddikim* is to reach this level intermittently. This level is, in truth, the attribute of Nothing (*Eyn*). After the sin, [Adam] fell from this [level] and sensed that he sensed.

In the world to come, a person will not be able to take out his vessels and eat, meaning [there is no] physicality, [because] the eternal life is spiritual. Yet there is a mixture of good and evil. The Messiah will function on this level as before the fall. . . . *zaddikim* cannot be on the two levels at once, but the Messiah will act on both levels without a

³³ TS 193; MS 12, 66; RZ 25.

³⁴ KSN 42 #5.

³⁵ E. R. Goodenough, *The Psychology of Religious Experiences* (New York: Basic Books, 1965) 117, 133, distinguishes between "sub" and "super" orthodox religious actions. The suborthodox simple believer does not live up to the elite's orthodox standard, while the superorthodox are able to transcend the standard and achieve a higher religious ideal.

moment's interruption. This is the attribute of Nothing (*Eyn*), in which one joins the lower world to the higher world without interruption.³⁶

Zaddikim alternate between the pre-fall state of union with the divine and the state of living in this world of good and evil. Sin and exile are due to Adam's sin of having a will of his own which thereby created good and evil. They will not be undone until the coming of the Messiah, who will be able to live in this world and identify with the divine at the same time.³⁷ Solomon wanted to restore (*tikkun*) the world, unredeemed from Adam's fall, and to gather the fallen sparks in the physical world by marrying foreign wives. However, before the messianic age, this was not yet possible. One serves God in the varied ways of this world, not by freely gathering sparks, but by submitting ordinary actions to God's will.³⁸ Here R. Simhah Bunim differs in his understanding of the concept of finding God in creation from that in early Hasidism. He interprets finding God in all creation as the need to relate to evil as the necessary polarity of goodness. King Solomon had to marry foreign wives in order to show that everything is governed by the divine will and thereby to restore the original state of Adam.

If everything manifests God's presence, then evil (even if unwanted) also contains elements of the divine presence. Again, if everything is governed by God's will, evil may be considered an unwilled privation of the divine. Combining his sources, R. Simhah Bunim assumes that everything expresses both God's will and the goodness of God, and therefore evil ultimately issues from God's goodness and is willed by God.³⁹ This combination of will and vitality creates a tension between

³⁶ TS 118; RZ 2, based on TB Taanit 31a.

³⁷ TS 155, RZ 77a, KSN 5.

³⁸ TS 30.

³⁹ R. Simhah Bunim's determinism was directly influenced by his reading of the Maharal and his association with the Maggid of Kozienice (Israel ben Shabbatai Hapstein, ca. 1733–1814), whose writings integrated Kabbalah with Hasidut and Maharal. On God's will in M. H. Luzzatto's thought, see Rivka Shatz, "Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto's Thought Against the Background of Theodicy Literature," in *Justice and Righteousness*, ed. Yair Hoffman and H. G. Reventlow, JSOT supplement series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); on the theological issues, see Norman Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1979), chapter 4. Bell presents the philosophic issues of holding simultaneously that everything is God's will, and therefore inscrutable, and the position that everything is God's desire for His glory or our benefit, in which

the divine will, found only in Torah, and the divine goodness, found in all actions. In a messianic perspective, one realizes that everything is a divine manifestation of God's will.⁴⁰

The relationship of humility and the sensation of the divine will seems to contain much which is similar to the discussion of piety (*hasidut*) found in the writings of R. Mōses Hayyim Luzzatto (1707–1747).⁴¹ Both view humility as the acceptance that all events of this world including evil are God's plan for the best of all possible worlds. A comprehensive theology of determinism, similar to those found in later Polish Hāsīdism, is difficult to piece together from his statements. Among his students, however, R. Simhah Bunim's goal for a connection to the divine gave the worthy few an omnisignificant view of themselves in which their lives were regarded as due to the manifestation of the divine will.

For an explicit discussion of determinism, R. Simhah Bunim uses the actions of Balaam, whose sin was the nonrecognition of this determinism.

In *parashat Balak*, [the statement of Balaam] "I sinned because I did not know" (Numbers 22:34) is difficult, because according to his words on the contrary, there was no sin at all. This itself is the sin, that he did not know and did not understand the cause of what occurred thrice, that God's will (*ratzon Hashem*) was that he should not go with them.

case everything is filled with God. If one holds both at the same time, then everything is both willed and divine good, and therefore even evil is willed by God's good.

⁴⁰ RZ 40b–41a R. Ahron Walden notes the contrasting views of R. Simhah Bunim and R. Menahem Mendel of Kock on the sin of Yehudah. R. Simhah Bunim allows a messianic perspective, while Menahem Mendel thinks that one can never trust oneself in its attainment. This messianic role for Yehudah is further developed in the schools of Izbica and Gur.

⁴¹ See *Mesillat Yesharim*, chapter 19 (fear and humility, the glory of *mitzvot*, love, joy, and communion), and chapters 23, 24, 25, 26 (humility before the grandeur of God). On Luzzatto's view of the divine will, see his *Daat Tevunot* (Bene Berak, 1974). Yoram Jacobson, "Torat HaHanhagah shel Ramhal veZikatah leTorat HaKabbalah Shelo" *Italia Judaica* 3 (1989) 27–46; Yosef Avivi, "Historiah Zorekh Gevohah," *Sefer Hayyovel LeRav Mordekhai Breuer* Vol. 2, ed. Moshe Bar Asher (Jerusalem, 1992) 709–771. Some of these ideas are also to be found in R. Yonatan Eybeschutz (d. 1764), *Tiferet Yehonatan* (Jerusalem, 1986).

After an afternoon nap I was told to read before him *Sefer Hasidim*. I took the *Sefer Hasidim*, asking him where [I should] start. He told me to open the book and to read before him in the place that it was opened to. Thus I did, and thus I read before him and found there these words [on Balaam] that I said that morning. He said not to read further, that the author of the *Sefer Hasidim* had come to him in a dream during his afternoon nap, telling me to read his book. I did not know why. Now I understand. It is sufficient to be understood.⁴²

R. Simhah Bunim taught his followers that in order not to repeat Balaam's sin, one needs to adapt a determined perspective in which all one's actions are meaningful as part of God's manifestation. Based on the Maharal's thought, one submits to the divine in order to identify with God's will.⁴³ One's volition and sense of self are limited to choosing the ontically true divine path which contains God's will for the world.

One's actions are judged as manifestations of this divine will; they are evaluated not on the quantity and quality of Torah studied or mitzvot performed, but rather on the amount of self-sacrifice and devotion that went into the act. This self-sacrifice (*mesirat nefesh*) R. Simhah Bunim considered a mystical secret (*divrei pi hakham hen*) because self-sacrifice allows one to identify with the divine. While this is comparable to the ideas of Habad, as presented by Naftali Lowenthal, in which activism and self-sacrifice are a means of nullifying the self,⁴⁴ R. Simhah Bunim's self-sacrifice is a need for humility in order to experience the awe of God. The mystical secret is that the more self-sacrifice one exerts, the more one consciously identifies with the divine will. "A person who gazes on the exalted divine grandeur needs to use all parts of his soul, divesting himself completely from everything . . . not even knowing his vision."⁴⁵

⁴² TS 117, RZ 27b, KSN 2; *Sefer Hasidim* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1970) 668. The idea of the divine will in Hasidei Ashkenaz does not seem to be either the cause or a major influence on the notion of divine will in R. Simhah Bunim.

⁴³ Bezalel Safran, "Maharal and Early Hasidism," in *Hasidism: Continuity or Innovation?*, ed. Bezalel Safran (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 47-91.

⁴⁴ TS 41, 43, 44; Naftali Lowenthal, *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁴⁵ KSN 76 #9.

Intentionality is required in daily life, as shown in his statement that "the principal intention of eating is to chew well."⁴⁶ One needs to still oneself psychologically, and perform one's actions without a separate consciousness from the act itself. Yet the identification with the act itself allows one to partake of the divinity inherent in the act. Everyday activities done with a 'inner-worldly ascetic dedication and total focus become the religious goal. Eating as a devotional act does not facilitate the raising of sparks by means of worship through corporeality, or of 'doing *yihudim*. One eats in order to eat, walks in order to walk, and acts in order to act. This world is infused with the divine presence so that by doing actions without the distractions of the mind one can identify with the divine.⁴⁷

The varied needs and experiences of life are to be accepted with equanimity. "When one wants tranquility, toward everything he should show acceptance (*savlan*), spontaneously acceptance brings tranquility, and words from the mouth of the wise are graceful (*divrei pi hakham hen*)."⁴⁸ The goal is not the overcoming of the illusionary nature of the world, as it is in early Hasidism. The equanimity achieved is intended to bring the emotional tranquility that shows that one's actions are in the hands of heaven. The phrase "words from the mouth of the wise are graceful" (*divrei pi hakham hen*) is indicative of the realization that everything is from the divine, and that centering on the self through personal striving is nonproductive. Ultimately, such striving takes one away from experiencing the divine within everything.⁴⁹

The rabbinic statement that at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai God held the mountain over the Israelites and threatened to crush them if they did not accept the Torah, is taken by R. Simhah

⁴⁶ TS 4 from the *Torat Emet*, Shavuot; cf. R. Mordechai Leiner, *Mei HaShiloah* 74. A similar approach is found in the writings of R. Pinhas of Koretz, who states that the "intention (*kavanah*) of immersion in a ritual bath is to be doing that activity." Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec," in *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 1-43.

⁴⁷ The religious purpose of eating is to sustain the body. If one is well fed, one has the freedom to serve God by means of Torah. Physical comfort is seen as a prerequisite to the spiritual life. TS 39, 245.

⁴⁸ TS 6. In the name of the *Torat Emet* of Leibele Eigar.

⁴⁹ FS 35. While this passage alone might be seen as a detached equanimity, in the metaphysical and spiritual context it is a living in the moment.

Bunim as paradigmatic of the need for humility, awe, and self-sacrifice. "If they do not accept [the Torah] with a complete (*shalem*) heart, they would not be exempt from death by means of Torah." It teaches that the great and awesome obligations of the Torah dwarf human capabilities, making one worthy of death if one does not fulfill them.⁵⁰ This condemnation to death is associated with forgetting God, loss of continuous awe, and not accepting Torah properly. These extreme requirements of a continuous consciousness hidden in the heart help account for the relentlessly extreme behavior associated with Polish Hasidut.⁵¹

The stating of "we will do" before "we will listen" at Mount Sinai implies that the Jews will need to perform the divine laws before they can listen through personally responding. Man can act only because his self-sacrifice to divine law cultivates the soul. Stringencies in law are good if they are indicative of devotion, and not mere traditionalism. Judaism requires fulfilling the maxim of "The Merciful One requires the heart" (*Rakhmana liba ba'i*), but the heart required is not Buber's Hasidism or the ordinary Hasidic concept of the *pintele yid*. According to R. Simhah Bunim, the heart required by God is an awareness that one stands before the awe-inspiring law.⁵² Torah functions as the source of the awe, humility, and self-sacrifice to the law, and simultaneously Torah is the revelation in the heart of identity with the divine will.⁵³

The Hasidic approach of identifying with the divine will inherent within the world is also found in the Polish approach to incorporating religious experience within intellectual Torah study. Torah contains the divine will; therefore "even though one does not intend to reach through study the mystical (*sod*), study [of halakhah] nevertheless reaches the mystical aspect of halakhah. [This is] due to wearying

⁵⁰ KSN 98 # 1; TS 49; TB Shabbat 88b; Maharal, *Tiferet Israel* 94.

⁵¹ Raphael Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985) 291, 299.

⁵² TS 98; on stringencies, see TS 48, MS 21.

⁵³ It is not the creative aspect of Torah study as much as the mastery of a fixed text. R. Simhah Bunim's ideal was the Hungarian model of Talmud study, not the Lithuanian one. Sochachew and Gur have a Lithuanian formulation of the need for effort and innovation in Talmud study. R. Bunim studied at the yeshiva of Mattersdorf under R. Jeremiah b. Isaac (d. 1805) and at the yeshiva of Nikolsberg under R. Mordechai Banet (1753–1829).

oneself to reach the truth."⁵⁴ The mystical aspect of study involves an experiential level attained through selflessness and identifying with the divine will. Some parts of the Torah do not have a literal meaning (*peshat*), but can only be understood as an allusion (*remez*) to the higher realms, comprehensible through experience.⁵⁵ To interpret the text by means of allusion (*remez*), one needs to be a *zaddik*, close to God, because allusion can only be used among those who have experiences of the divine and are therefore close to Him. R. Simhah Bunim writes that this restriction needs to be publicized in Galicia, in order to limit the free use of kabbalistic associations in the homilies of the contemporary Hasidic preachers.⁵⁶ R. Simhah Bunim said about himself that "I am not able to learn Kabbalah, since the study of the Kabbalah requires an apprehension of the holy lights."⁵⁷

In avoiding explicit discussion of the Kabbalah and Hasidut and limiting himself to Talmud, late mystical midrashim, medieval thought, and Maharal, R. Simhah Bunim developed an intellectual Talmudic form of Hasidism. In a statement attributed to R. Simhah Bunim's student, R. Menahem Mendel Morgenstern of Kock (Kotzk) (1787-1859), this experiential learning is formulated.

It is written in the Zohar "to be busy in the Torah," meaning a desire for Torah in the depth of the heart, to be cleaving (*davak*) to Torah and God, to be one flesh. This level of cleaving while learning Torah is accomplished by learning Torah for its own sake (*lishmah*), because the souls of Israel are a part of God, and by means of the Torah this inner point⁵⁸ is awakened and cleaves to God.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ TS 274.

⁵⁵ TS 207, RZ 82.

⁵⁶ TS 164, RZ 62b.

⁵⁷ "As it is written in the Zohar, 'Come and see'; III:152a; RZ 227.

⁵⁸ On the inner point, the *pinetele yid*, see Mendel Piekarsz, "The 'Inner Point' of the Admorim of Gur and Alexander as a Reflection of Their Ability to Adjust to Changing Times" [Hebrew], in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism Presented to Isaiah Tishby* (Jerusalem, 1986).

⁵⁹ R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib, *Sefat Emet, Devarim*, p. 156. This theme is also developed by the son-in-law of the Kotzker in his Introduction to the *Eglei Tal* (Piotrkow, 1905; reprinted with corrections, 1931). On Kotzk and Torah study, see J. Levinger, "Imrot Autentiot shel HaRebbi miKotzk," *Tarbiz* 55 (1986), pp. 109-135; idem, "The Teachings of the Kotzker Rebbe According to His Grandson R. Samuel Borenstein of Sochotchev," [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 55 (1986) pp. 413-432. On R. Zadok, see A. Brill, "The Intellectual

This method influenced the entire school of Polish Hasidism, including the son-in-law of R. Menahem Mendel of Kóck, R. Abraham Borenstein of Sochaczew (1839–1906), R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib of Gur (1847–1905), and R. Zadok HaKohen of Lublin (1823–1900). Suffering is felt only when one is far from God; if one is humble and close to God, suffering is all part of God's design. The greater the knowledge one has of God, the less one has free will, because one realizes that all is determined by God.⁶⁰ Suffering, therefore, comes from not studying the Torah, because if one studies, one realizes one's distance from God, that one has not fulfilled one's obligations toward God, and that everything is part of God's design.⁶¹

Prayer as Identification with the Divine

Since God may be directly experienced in prayer by prior seclusion, humility, and the perception of God's grandeur, one is required to work on attaining the experience. Those seeking an experience of God will delay their prayers in order to attain a revelatory *kavanah*. This delay of prayer is one of the distinguishing social features of the followers of R. Simhah Bunim of Przysucha. In the beginning of *Siah Sarfai Kodesh*, the editor places an excerpt from a responsum by RaDBaZ (David ben Solomon ibn Abi Zimra, 1513–1573) on not attending synagogue if the other congregants' talking is found distracting.⁶² Based on the rabbinic requirement for intention (*kavanah*) as codified by Maimonides, "a person should not pray in a place that distracts his mind or at a time that hinders his intention," the followers of Polish Hasidism extended this delay into a positive procedure of preparation for prayer and ritual performance.

Mysticism of R. Zadok HaKohen of Lublin" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Fordham University, 1994).

⁶⁰ RZ 8, 13. Determinism is seen as proportional to divine knowledge; see R. Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot HaB'erit*, Shaar Habehirah, who combines the Maimonidean and Lurianic positions. Compare R. Zadok, *Zidkat HaZaddik*, sec. 52.

⁶¹ TS 7, from *Torat Emet*.

⁶² Y. K. K. Rokotz, *Siah Sarfai Kodesh* (Łódź, 1928–31; New York, 1954) p. 7; RaDBaZ, *Responsa* (New York, 1967) part 3 #472.

The reason for the delay is not to focus one's emotions; instead, intention (*kavanah*) is defined as truth (*emet*), meaning to identify with the divine words. To pray in truth is to sense, by means of the words of prayer, God's greatness and man's smallness, and thereby to identify with the divine grandeur. One gains the proper love and fear of the divine, which leads to a pure knowledge of the divine. The quest is for sincerity, in its original sense of unadulterated and pure content, and not the modern sense of pure motives and individual authenticity.⁶³

The delay will allow for distractions to cease, and allow time to focus on the divine grandeur. The wait does not allow a deeper personal experience, but rather allows the prayer to be a "true" partaking of the divine grandeur.

When the holy Rabbi R. Meir of Aptá, of blessed memory, asked about the delay of the prayers, [R. Simhah Bunim] answered him that it is written, "A person should always fear God privately and publicly, and testify to the truth," and "awaken and say [pray]." One who has all these qualities . . . is able to pray upon arising. It is a mystical secret [lit. and words from the mouth of the wise are graceful].⁶⁴

Fear and humility enable the subjugation of the self to the divine. Prayer becomes a form of contemplation of the infinite-divine grandeur and man's insignificance before it. The two Hasidic concepts of expanded consciousness (*mohin degadlut*) and constricted consciousness (*mohin dekatnut*), which usually refer to times of psychological readiness for worship and illumination, and times of unreadiness. R. Simhah Bunim converted the two terms into synonyms for the illumination itself as the expanded consciousness, and the prerequisite humility as the constricted consciousness. If one constricts oneself through humility, God will expand one's mind in an illumination.⁶⁵

⁶³ On the use of the term "sincerity," see Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

⁶⁴ MS 23. "A person should"—daily prayer book. This is a tradition in the name of R. Zvi Yehezkel Michaelson of Plonsk (1863–1942). See N. Shemen, *Di Biographie fun a Varshever Rov ha-Rov Zvi Yehezkel Michaelson* (Montreal, 1948). He heard (or read it) from R. Moshe of Sochachew, who heard from R. Isaac Meir of Gur, who heard it from R. Simhah Bunim.

⁶⁵ TS 132, 210; RZ 106, 146.

The requirement to testify to the truth is explained in another passage.

The seal of God (*HKB"H*) is truth.⁶⁶ Why did God choose [to describe] His Torah specifically as "truth"? This was in order that no person should be able to counterfeit the seal. If it is counterfeit, then it is not "truth" but complete falsehood. It is a mystical secret [lit. and words from the mouth of the wise are graceful].⁶⁷

Truth is by definition the one thing that cannot be false or adulterated. The truth required during prayer is that there be no false thoughts and emotions in one's mind, only the prayer itself. In true prayer, there exists an identity of thought and heart between God and man.

Prayer requires the intellect and the heart to be together; prayer springs from the heart and soul, and shoots like an arrow from all the senses without any work or effort. Effort is exerted only before prayer. If one is not on this level and nevertheless forces himself with all the strength of his psychological energies (*kohót ha-nefesh*) and [still] does not reach this level, he should know that with each and every word he redeems himself from a divine death penalty.⁶⁸

This passage brings together the need for unity of the heart and the mind with the need for truth. Prayer is a passive activity in that one has already perfected the self, allowing the truth of the divine to be known.⁶⁹ One who prays untruthfully is liable to death, just as one who brings an improper sacrifice is; yet the wholehearted self-sacrifice of his effort in attempting to pray truthfully makes atonement.

An alternative justification for the delay in prayer, based on a need for a structural completeness, is also given.

One time he answered an inquirer regarding the delay of the time of prayer by his teacher the Yehudi HaKadosh of blessed memory, that there are limbs in the body which even if the person is awake, are still sleeping. It is written "all my limbs shall proclaim, etc." (Psalms 35:10);

⁶⁶ TB Shabbat 55a, Yoma 69b, Sanhedrin 64a.

⁶⁷ MS 25.

⁶⁸ TS 226, quoted from RZ 6.

⁶⁹ This passivity is also found in R. Zadok, *Kedushat Shabbat*, chap 2.

all the limbs need to praise God. Therefore, one waits until all one's limbs awaken.⁷⁰

The purpose of waiting is for an identification of one's limbs with the divine. "When a person waits and stills himself a while before performing a commandment, Torah, or worship, he is able to fulfill [it] as God commanded."⁷¹ Stilling the mind allows the act to truly be a divine act and not an act of human intention.

Repentance and Sin

The same relationship of humility with sensing the divine grandeur is found in R. Simhah Bunim's doctrine of repentance. "At first glance, the Biblical requirement of repentance is an easy matter, because thought alone is sufficient. Further, the methods (*tikkunei*) of repentance explained in the holy books and Tanya are well known."⁷² The methods of achieving repentance, even the extreme requirements of Hasidei Ashkenaz and Luria, were already set out in many works. "Nevertheless, know that repentance is a sensation in the broken soul and heart, similar to a person who fell from a building, breaking his bones from head to toe."⁷³ "Certainly his pain is great," because he sees and realizes the degree from which he fell and into what he has fallen.⁷⁴ The one who repents must completely break his will and heart in order to experience an agonized regret for his descent into sin.

R. Simhah Bunim defines sin as a psychological distance from God, which needs to be overcome by repentance.

Would that the penitent (*baal teshuva*) saw how through his very thoughts of repentance his soul stands in the same grandeur as the completely

⁷⁰ MS 24; M. Idel, *New Perspectives* 146–153. In the earlier sources, the identity of the limbs and the divine is accomplished by the ritual action of the limbs, while here the limbs are personified as conscious selves requiring alertness. In TS 322, quoted from Yehiel Moses, *Niflaot Hadashot* 4, R. Simhah Bunim rebuked his son for delaying prayer. His son answered that only David as portrayed in the Zohar is able to arise and pray, whereas others are not ready at all times.

⁷¹ TS 19; *Kol Simhah*, R. Ahron Walden edition, 14a, 24a.

⁷² TS 212, RZ 108.

⁷³ TS 212, RZ 108.

⁷⁴ TS 223, RZ 123.

righteous (*zaddikim gemurim*). He would rejoice greatly, because his soul has gone out from darkness to great light.

But this is not shown to him until he sees the results of sin. [Otherwise,] free will would be obliterated for him. He would detach himself from this world . . . because even good deeds would not count for him. . . .⁷⁵

God in His mercy wants man to be in this world, "Thy thoughts are very deep; that no outcast is banished from him" (Psalms 92:6, 2 Sam. 14:14).⁷⁶ [Therefore, God] does not show him [His greatness], instead, he encourages the penitent through greatly strengthening, and rejoicing in good deeds done, and increases compassion, contrition, and trust in His abundant mercies.⁷⁷

The true, divine nature of reality is kept from mankind in order to give man the choice of recognizing God or ignoring Him. Those who think that they are banished from God are not really; if they realize that their perceived distance from God is only psychological. In hindsight, even sin plays a role in the development of the person from sinner to truly righteous. From this perspective, which integrates good and evil, one can find the actual presence of God in his heart, if one seeks it.

Repentance cannot be achieved by a fixed routine, despite its incorporation into the regular prayers. The meaning of repentance

is to recognize that one is not worthy of any benefice, rather one is worthy of punishments and difficult suffering. One should accept in truth all the suffering of the world and direct one's self and soul to the blessed creator. There in His blessed will (*vezono*), He will treat [the penitent] with absolute love. He should not think of returning to his [former] stage. When one is on this level, a new light will be sent to him with God's will, fulfilling [the prayer] "God, create for me a clean heart."⁷⁸ [He receives the new light] because he made himself nothing (*ayin ve-efes*) and has thus justified God's judgement.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ "... as by angels." They do things as obedience and not for reward.

⁷⁶ The first half of the verse from Psalms is combined with the end of the verse from Samuel.

⁷⁷ TS 209, RZ 83.

⁷⁸ See Ps. 51:5, "For I know my transgression, and my sin is ever before me."

⁷⁹ TS 291, RZ 24. In TS 293 and RZ 118; the need to contemplate the effect of the sin is quoted from a student of Cordovero, R. Abraham ben Mordekhai Galante (second part of the sixteenth century) in his commentary on Lamentations 3:40, "Let us search and try our ways, and return to the Lord," *Kinat Setarim* in *Kol Bokhim* (Venice, 1589).

Nó prescribed act of repentance is a substitute for the punishment that one deserves. When one realizes and accepts this, and follows it up with a conversionary return to the divine, one receives absolute love and an illumination. True love of God comes only from the humility and responsibility for having sinned before God's grandeur.

The author of Ramatayim Zofim writes that he heard this presentation of repentance on the Friday night of the Shabbat of Repentance. He writes that the words of R. Simhah Bunim so affected him that

all Shabbat evening these matters burned in my heart until on Shabbat day, when I prayed, I did not turn my mind from these matters. After prayer I went to his room, and he asked, "Who is there?" I gave my name. He said, "Come close." He asked me, "What were you doing today? With each and every page of my prayers, you appeared to me [lit. standing]." He repeated this and then allowed me to leave. When the people who were there that [Friday] night heard this, they directed their hearts in the outpouring of the soul like water. In this there was an immeasurably great joy, and it was appropriateness to call him rebbe.⁸⁰

Here, poignantly described, is the image of R. Simhah Bunim and his court held by the editor of one of the major collections of R. Simhah Bunim's thought.

In TS 211 and RZ 106, the need to accept one's punishment is quoted in the name of R. Yonatan Eybeschütz, *Yaarot Devash* (Vienna, 1818) and from the Lurianic custom to affirm God's kingship during the recitation of the Shema by accepting the death penalties upon oneself as a restitution for one's sins.

⁸⁰ TS 291, RZ 24. In the passage following he states that the word "rebbe" is related to the root "draw a bow" (*roveh keshet*), that a rebbe like this can shoot arrows against hell (*kela*) to save the souls that hear him. I assume the autobiographical account to be from R. Samuel of Sieniawa. Compare the note in Marc Shapiro, "Suicide and the World to Come," *AJS Review* 18/2 (1993) 251, citing *Ha-Peles* 3 (1903) 47, in which R. Joseph Lewinstein claims that he wrote the work, rather than R. Samuel of Sieniawa. R. Lewinstein writes that for "hidden reasons I did not place my name upon it." On R. Joseph Lewinstein (b. 1840) as a traditionalist scholar of biographical and genealogical studies, see *Ej* vol. 11, col. 175. Anonymous editorial work by *maskilim* on traditional works published in Warsaw and Vilna was common.

The editor's Shabbat of Repentance experience explains why these themes formed the central patterns in the collection.⁸¹ The awakening of religious consciousness produces a theory of sacred time in which one experiences the ontic dimensions of the Sabbath as the source of divine vitality in the world.⁸² Similar teachings are contained in R. Simhah Bunim's Rosh Hashanah letter of 1825, in which he exhorts his students to attain "joy and fear hidden by dread . . . and for understanding to grow from action because the secret of action is the light of understanding; both are one."⁸³ One needs to cultivate an external dread by means of thought and action in order to achieve an internal joy and fear; without the external dread there can be no internal understanding.

The passage on repentance which most influenced R. Simhah Bunim's students concerns the contrasting actions of Joseph and Judah. Jacob and Joseph are portrayed by the Midrash as ascetics serving God by means of fasting and sackcloth, while Judah is exemplified as bringing the Messiah by his taking Tamar as a wife. "In human eyes, [Jacob's and Joseph's] actions were oriented toward God, while [Judah] was busy with his own marriage. Nevertheless, the Midrash states that humans do not know the thoughts hidden in the heart of man, but God saw more in Judah's action." Among the many (at least eight) interpretations of this passage, which tone down its individualistic conclusions, are the comments of R. Ahron Walden in the name of R. Menahem Mendel of Kock. He explains that the positive intentions of Judah's marriage, as his undertaking a new start after dashed dreams and despondency for a future, lead to humility, a broken heart, and submission to the divine.⁸⁴

Based on Maharal, R. Simhah Bunim writes that God will raise a sinner in proportion to his lowliness because growth only comes

⁸¹ See TS 77, quoting *Beit Yaakov Pinhas*. These teaching on repentance are found in both R. Zadok and R. Gershon Henoch as heard from R. Mordechai Yosef of Izbicha, who heard them from R. Simhah Bunim himself.

⁸² TS 2, MS 15.

⁸³ Printed with variants and commentaries in the back of both *Kol Simhah* and *Ramatayim Zofim*. There is a commentary from manuscript by R. Israel of Pilov in the new edition of *Kol Simhah* (Rananah, 1992) 160-184.

⁸⁴ KSN 55-56 #8. KS, Ahron Walden edition, p. 26. compare KSN 68 #3 on Judah as personifying "depth of the heart and essence of the soul."

from a prior deficiency.⁸⁵ He develops the idea that only acceptance through repentance and humility, and the understanding that sin remains inherent to human nature, can lead to true understanding of God's grandeur and plan for the world. Rather than a hindrance to reaching God, sin advances the process of growth.⁸⁶ However, in the End of Days there will be an increase of heresy and rebellion, so that in comparison to today's wicked, the wicked of the past would be regarded as righteous.⁸⁷ This increase of heresy is God's will because "the gematria of Yaakov and Satan equals Israel." That is to say, to truly defeat Esau, Jacob needs to "incorporate [Esau's] power into himself."⁸⁸ The integration of evil within the complete person as part of God's plan is not developed here, but it is developed in the thought of R. Mordechai Leiner of Izbicha.

This world is an illusion compared to the world as willed by the divine. "Revealing the end [of the exile] means knowing that there will be an end to exile because the [exile] is only a hiding [of the divine] and not an independent force."⁸⁹ The redemption from exile and sin involves the realization of their illusionary nature. A similar sentiment is found in the writings of Maharal, where knowledge of the messianic age consists of a centering to attain the true nature of reality.⁹⁰ While for the individual, true repentance can turn sins into merits through transforming oneself to reach a different level.⁹¹

⁸⁵ TS 96, 97; RS 20b.

⁸⁶ Whereas for Calvin some cannot avoid sin but it does not have a positive role in divine justification. R. Simhah Bunim's view is similar to the Anabaptists, in that there is a continuity between justification through grace (or repentance) and the difficult path of sanctification through overcoming sin. On the Anabaptists and Calvin, see *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, trans., edited, and introduction by Daniel Liechty (New York: Paulist Press, 1994).

⁸⁷ TS 5.

⁸⁸ TS 260, 145; RZ 59b; *Kol Simhah*, Walden edition only, p. 24. KSN deletes this passage. This is also linked to the method of Biblical exegesis in Polish Hasidism which explains the importance of the Biblical sinners, including Cain, Korach, the spies, and Pharaoh. See TS 211, where the comments of R. Yonatan Eybeschütz on Cain are used as the starting point for R. Simhah Bunim's exegesis.

⁸⁹ TS 175; Sefat Emet, Yayehi 173.

⁹⁰ Maharal, *Netzah Israel*, chap. 2; Rivka Shatz, "Existence and Eschatology in the Teachings of the Maharal (Part II)," *Immanuel* 15 (1982-83) 62-72.

⁹¹ TS 104, 290; MS 47. The notion of sins into merits occurs at T.B. Yoma 26b.

From Rural Mezhibezh to Urban Przysucha

R. Simhah Bunim's world was the urban, nontraditional one of the rising middle class. He accepted the modern world as part of God's will. R. Simhah Bunim internalized Hasidic piety into a this-worldly asceticism by preaching an elite doctrine of personal self-perfection that sought to awaken his followers from the slumber of their routine business life. The Hasidic doctrines of the Maggid of Mezhibezh and his followers were characterized by sensing divine vitality in the world, tending toward a panentheistic nonduality, and the doctrine of the zaddik, striving for *devekut*, along with the need to fight foreign thoughts. The Hasidic doctrines of Poland no longer maintained any of these elements. Why, then, was it still considered Hasidic?

First, Polish Hasidism still holds that there is no place devoid of God's divinity. R. Gershon Henoch writes that R. Simhah Bunim perfected the doctrine of the Baal Shem Tov.⁹² For the Baal Shem Tov, the earth was filled with divine vitality as an immanent divine essence, while for R. Simhah Bunim the modern world in its manifest plurality is filled with the transcendent grandeur of God and the immanent divine will. God can be experienced as a mental presence, and behind all the varied manifestations of the modern world, including evil, one can consciously find the hidden will of the divine.

Second, Polish Hasidism still considered itself true to its heritage because it was socially linked to early Hasidism. The social identity with early Hasidism allowed the founders of Polish Hasidism to accept and transform the role of the zaddik. R. Simhah Bunim of Przysucha was a Hasidic leader giving sermons, advice, and offering charismatic leadership. He claimed the power of mind-reading and of knowing all that a person had done in his life. It is reported that he said about himself: "I am a miracle worker and possessor of the holy spirit (*ruah ha-kodesh*)."⁹³ He rejected, however, the collective life of the zaddik's court, and the role of the zaddik as intermediary before the divine. Instead, Polish Hasidism transformed the zaddik into a spiritual guide and teacher who aided the individual quest for a religious self-perfection.

⁹² Gershon Henokh, *Petihah veHakdamah*, included in recent reprint of Yaakov Leiner, *Beit Yaakov on Genesis* (Brooklyn, 1978).

⁹³ RZ 3.

This self-perfection was based on dedication to intellectual Talmud study as conceptualized by medieval rationalistic thought and Maharal. R. Simhah Bunim's followers attempted to achieve experiences that reflected the rabbinic descriptions of God's presence and the sacred time of rabbinic ritual. These changes in social organization and Hasidic doctrine are reflective of a change from traditional rural life to that of urban life and thought. To understand why R. Simhah Bunim made these choices one must look at his own life.

R. Simhah Bunim was part of the generation of the initial migration to the cities of Congress Poland. In Warsaw, he worked for the wealthy Zbitkower-Bergson family (whose converted grandson was the philosopher Henri Bergson).⁹⁴ He traveled with rapidly assimilating coworkers to do business in the modern cities of Danzig and Leipzig. He went to pharmacy school and lived in the newly settled town of Przysucha, placing him near his teacher R. Yaakov Yitzhak of Przysucha.⁹⁵ Steven Zipperstein points out that the immigration to the cities of Eastern Europe already began the breakdown of traditional life.⁹⁶ Przysucha Hasidism was part of the social climate of the decline of the traditional social life.

The challenge of the social changes of the nineteenth century, including the rise of factories and cities, which generated a quickened pace of life, hindered traditional devotion, as is evident in the pietistic prescriptions of R. Simhah Bunim. A disenchantment, as described by

⁹⁴ On the Zbitkower family and its role in the formation of the Jewish community of Warsaw, see Emmanuel Ringelblum, "Samuel Zbitkower," *Zion* 3 (1938) 246-266, 337-355. Jacob Shatzky, *Di Geshikhte fun Yidn in Varshet*, 3 volumes (New York, 1947-53). R. Simhah Bunim worked for one of Zbitkower's sons, Ber (Berek) Sonnenberg, and his wife Tamar (Temerel), who were still observant and supported Hasidim.

⁹⁵ There has been little research on Przysucha itself. Its synagogue was founded as late as 1777; see Joram Kagen, *Poland's Jewish Heritage* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1992) 112. On the province of Radom, which contains the town of Przysucha, see Adam Penkalla, "The Socio-Cultural Integration of the Jewish Population in the Province of Radom, 1815-1862," *Polin*, vol. 3 (1988) 214-237. In the suburbs of Radom, residence to Jews was banned in 1746 and then allowed only to those with a profession. In 1765, there were 67 Jews in the entire region. The *kehillah* of Radom was founded in 1814 to serve a community of 413; see William Glicksman, "Radom," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 13, 1500-1501.

⁹⁶ Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 15-16.¹

Max Weber, occurs to the miraculous Hasidic world, with a rejection of traditional wonder-workers, public community celebrations, and voluntary devotional ritual. In its place, R. Simhah Bunim created an internal religion with a neoscholastic return to classical theological issues, moral seriousness, and self-initiative, and, most strikingly, saw the secular domain as an expression of God's will. The external world was now a place of economic advantage, while religion was limited to personal growth. As opposed to the communal elements of religious life, the individual cultivates purity of the heart and accepts his destiny as willed by the divine.⁹⁷

R. Simhah Bunim's thought was a reaction to the breakdown of traditional piety, parallel to American Puritanism and its tensions in trying to embrace the new prosperity and still achieve salvation. The Puritans formulated the tension of prosperity and piety as, "the darker our sanctification is, the cleaner is our justification." Instead of advocating a return to premodern religion, both the Puritans and R. Simhah Bunim advocated entering the modern city with a pietistic religion of mystical inwardness. The Puritans wanted grace; predestination was an assurance of one's status. R. Simhah Bunim wanted to obey God's will; humble submission made it possible. Crediting everything to the will of God simultaneously invokes a religious feeling of dependence and an assurance that one understands how God's grandeur is found in the world. One can confidently wait to pray because one has a sense of assurance that one can reach God. Entering the modern city required for R. Simhah Bunim an acceptance of its unpredictability as divinely willed. The seemingly injurious qualities of sin, the temptations of the city, self-initiative, free enterprise, and disenchantment from the miraculous are, for R. Simhah Bunim, part of God's plan. Finding God in daily life is transformed from an otherworldly quietism into an

⁹⁷ On the turn to an internal religion and its concurrent disenchantment of the magical as connected to a doctrine of assurance through predestination, see Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) 193–198; Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1912); B. A. Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). While these variants on the Weber thesis discuss Protestantism, many of the themes can be profitably applied with caution to Jewish history as well.

innerworldly asceticism of self-reliance and inner growth; the city has been transformed into a monastery in the mind.⁹⁸

R. Simhah Bunim writes that everyone needs a rabbi to teach him Torah and worship, but if one can find God's will in everything and can learn from all people, even those far from religion, one can rely on oneself and does not need a rabbi at all.⁹⁹ Przysucha Hasidism is known for its emphasis on living truthfully in accord with one's own individuality. Yet the truth that is lived up to is to merge with the divine truth, and one's individuality must be a preordained part of the divine manifestation. R. Simhah Bunim's teachings are intended for an audience that is willing and able to change its ways and reach the spiritual levels which he advocated. This elitism is similar to the elitism found in Safed, a *kloiz* modeled after Safed or the inner circle at the court of the Hozeh.¹⁰⁰ A rebbe is someone who can raise people from their ensnarement in the routine pattern of Hasidic religious life to sense the divine will in the world around them:

The vitalistic and romantic idea of reviving the living from their rote slumber of observance has been used to show the closeness of Polish Hasidism to existentialism. However, this idea is not unique to existentialism and Polish Hasidism; it is also found in many religious texts. However, the purpose of awakening in these religious texts is to realize the perfection of the *true* nature of one's soul. The purpose of the encouragement of individuality is to lead to individual spiritual growth, and not as a form of existential antinomianism, to live in the moment, and against the routine "bad faith" of life.¹⁰¹ While R. Simhah Bunim and his students adhere to an individualistic, vitalistic, and sometimes situational ethic, these qualities lead to growth and a greater identification with a higher self, not to authenticity to the autonomous self.

⁹⁸ Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 113–114, 193–198.

⁹⁹ KSN 45 #17.

¹⁰⁰ Rachel Elior, "The Innovation of Polish Hasidism (From Love and Fear to Depth and Variety)" [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 62 (1993) 381–432. There are no studies of the process of becoming part of the elite circle at the court of the Hozeh or of the process of becoming a rebbe.

¹⁰¹ Charles Tart, *Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential* (Boston: New Science Library-Shambala, 1986).

R. Simhah Bunim's method initiated a turn to internal religion and metaphysical determinism, a return to medieval philosophy, and seeking God in the modern world. His followers include later Polish thinkers such as R. Mordekhai Yosef of Izbicha, R. Yehudah Leib of Gur, and R. Zadok Hakohen of Lublin. Though R. Simhah Bunim may have developed metaphysical doctrines, his ideas remain fragmentary due to the aphoristic and homiletic nature of the sources in which they are found. However, his successors found enough in them to develop them into fuller theological schemes of determinism, repentance, and revelatory intention. R. Simhah Bunim's internal religion also influenced the culture of urban Polish Hasidic life, including the many editors of Hasidic stories, in their writings about the early Hasidic masters, brought to their work their own affinity for the world of Polish Hasidism. This caused future readers not to differentiate between the two paths of the early Hasidim and Polish Hasidim. In the path of R. Simhah Bunim, mystical experience of the divine grandeur occurs when there is a complete identity of wills; so that instead of the Maggid of Mezhibezh's emotional experience described as "your word is fire," R. Simhah Bunim's humble experience of the divine grandeur can apply be described as "your mind is fire."