

# The Regal Way

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*The Life and Times  
of Rabbi Israel  
of Ruzhin*

David Assaf



STANFORD STUDIES IN JEWISH HISTORY AND CULTURE

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# The Regal Way: The Life and Times of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin

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Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin*

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David Assaf

*Translated from the Hebrew by David Louvish*

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## Preface

I am neither a hasid nor the son of a hasid; but when I first brought my scholarly plow to the field of traditional Jewish society in Eastern Europe, I set my sights on the hasidic movement in the nineteenth century. One might think that there was nothing new to say on the subject, but I quickly discovered it to be virgin ground, almost untouched by earlier plowmen. I was particularly attracted by one singular figure, complex and full of contradictions—the zaddik Rabbi Israel Friedman of Ruzhin (1796–1850). Having read the classic articles by Saul M. Ginsburg and Samuel A. Horodezky on the lives of the rebbe of Ruzhin and his offspring, especially his son Bernyu, who strayed from the hasidic path, I was left with the most profound impression of a thrilling human tragedy, which, it seemed to me, symbolized in a nutshell the dimensions of the crisis that beset traditional society in Eastern Europe in its troubled encounter with modernity. The farther I delved, the more fascinated I became. What more could a scholar ask of his sources than a dramatic plot with all the characteristics of a dark mystery, involvement in a homicide and imprisonment, bribery, flight, and pursuit, restoration and recovery, holiness and religious fervor—with the heady admixture of a colorful, extroverted life style, feud and reconciliation, polemics and compromise.

I have taken considerable pains to find the golden mean between total commitment to the rules of critical historical research and my desire to describe a plot and tell a story. Everything possible has been done so that “dry,” scientific writing, with its myriad details, should not stand between

the reader and the unique aroma and taste of the times, or dim the vivid colors of the personalities and events to be described in the following pages. I hope I have succeeded. Seeking an apt description of the hero of my book and his “regal way,” I happened upon a moving ballad by the Hebrew poet Shimshon Melzer, “Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin Flees”; here is a translation (with no attempt to reproduce the original rhymed structure):

The czar harassed him. He fled. And here he is,  
 Carried among the waves of the Prut.  
 At night, in darkness, he forsook his hearth,  
 A rutted road before him.  
 He forsook the golden table and the *Zohar*,  
 His majestic, ducal throne;  
 Forsook his home and the wife of his youth,  
 His six sons—the Six Orders of the Mishnah.  
 He left his brethren, who longed in secret  
 For a ray of redeeming light,  
 Left and fled—and here he is, carried on shoulders,  
 Among the crashing waves of the Prut [...]  
 Seated in the chariot is a king,  
 A ruler, a real emperor.  
 Perhaps it is he, who rules without sword?  
 Perhaps it is he, the M-e-s-s-i . . .  
 The night closes its shining eye,  
 Darkens the scene, conceals.  
 Amidst the water’s rush one still hears the sound—  
 A man striding through the waves.  
 Here he is again, carried on his Gabriel’s back,  
 The old man marches on in silence.  
 From on high the heavens darkly glare,  
 The Prut is screaming and shouting.\*

Poetic license reigns supreme here: the “old man” Israel of Ruzhin was then about forty-five years old; the river was not the Prut; and on that night, when Rabbi Israel was smuggled across the border between Russia and Austria, the river’s water was frozen hard, not a single wave licking its banks. And “his Gabriel”—Gavrilo—the Gentile who supposedly carried the zaddik on his back, was actually a Jew, a professional smuggler who helped the rebbe to escape. Nevertheless, the ambiguous image of “A man striding through the waves” is beautifully apposite for the hero of our story who, like the prophet Jonah calling upon his God from the fish’s belly, could also have cried, “All Your breakers and billows swept over me; I

\*Melzer, *Or zarua*, 127–29.

thought I was driven away out of Your sight; would I ever gaze again upon Your holy Temple?" (Jon. 2:4–5).

This book originated from a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1992 under the supervision of Professor Immanuel Etkes. Five years later, the work was published in Hebrew in book form as *Derekh ha-malkhut: Rabbi Israel me-Ruzhin u-mekomo be-toledot ha-hasidut* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1997). It gives me great pleasure to thank the publishers for their permission to translate the book.

This translation of the original Hebrew version has been reedited in order to meet the needs of the English reader. Only two chapters have been omitted—those dealing with Rabbi Israel's family background (his grandfather, Abraham the "Angel," and his father Shalom Shakhne, chapters 1 and 2 in the Hebrew edition). Two appendices added to the original Hebrew edition of the book are not included here. The first was a brief, rather telegraphic, survey of each of Israel's ten children, mainly in the period relevant to this study, with emphasis on their relationships with their father. The second was a selection of sources and documents for Rabbi Israel's life, including, among other things, the verdict of the Russian military court that conducted the inquiry into the Ushits case, documents from the Russian and Austrian interior ministries, and a memorandum written by Joseph Perl for the Austrian government concerning collection of funds for Rabbi Israel in Galicia. These sources were published there in their entirety for the first time in Hebrew; references to them appear throughout the present volume.

In addition, many notes relating to Hebrew or Yiddish sources have been abbreviated, and the reader is referred to the Hebrew text. This decision presumes that readers who know Hebrew will use the comprehensive Hebrew edition, while those who cannot read Hebrew will not use the Hebrew references at all.

Besides these omissions, many corrections have been made in the English edition, and I have added some sources that became available after the publication of the original Hebrew, such as the important testimony of a Karaite scholar who met the young Rabbi Israel around 1815 and new archival documents concerning his settlement in Sadgora.

The book could not have taken shape without the help and support of many of my relatives, friends, and teachers, all of whom have earned my heartfelt gratitude. I do not have the space here to mention them all, but I must above all express my thanks to my beloved wife Sharon, whose help in translating and editing the footnotes was invaluable, to my children Avishag and Netta, Hillel and Mishael, and to my parents, Rachel and

Moshe Krone, to whom I owe my deep regard for the heritage of East European Jewry. On the eve of the *Shavuot* festival, May 23, 1993, my father passed away, aged exactly eighty, before he could see the pages of my research bound together in book form. With his voluminous knowledge of the history of Hasidism and hasidic literature, he was a pillar of support and assistance; my efforts have now come to fruition, but he is no longer with us to enjoy them. He was what we call a “real Jew,” warm and benevolent, the soul of goodness and integrity. My book is dedicated to my father’s memory and to my mother’s honor, may she live long.

I was fortunate in having my text (minus the footnotes) translated by David Louvish of Jerusalem, a translator and translator’s son. My readers will surely sense the praiseworthy results of his linguistic talents and his knowledge of Jewish history and culture. Special thanks are due to the copy editor, Peter Dreyer, for his painstaking, professional treatment of the text, which contributed greatly to its improvement. I owe particular thanks to my colleague and friend Steven J. Zipperstein of Stanford University, not only for his inexhaustible trust and patience while the translation was being done, but for his professional attention to the editing of the book right up to its publication. The publication was supported by generous contributions from the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation and from the School of Jewish Studies at Tel Aviv University. I am indebted to all of them.

David Assaf

*Jerusalem, 2001*

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## A Note on Translation and Transliteration

The problematic nature of the spelling of both place-names and proper names is well known to anyone conversant with “Jewish” toponymy and genealogy. For the ease of the English reader, this book uses the familiar English or “Jewish” spellings for place-names (thus, the Polish “Maków” has been changed to “Makov”); the alternate forms (usually Polish) are provided in the index. When referring to famous hasidic centers, the known “Jewish” name is given preference, thus Apta is used, rather than Opatów; Gur, rather than Góra Kalwaria; Kotsk, rather than Kock; Pshishkha, rather than Przysucha; Zanz, rather than Nowy Sącz, and so on. By and large, the spellings found in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust* (Teaneck, N.J., 1991), the *Columbia Gazetteer of the World* (New York, 1998), and comprehensive modern books on Hasidism, such as *Hasidism Reappraised* (London, 1996), have been used. Personal names are usually rendered in a form more familiar to the English reader, thus Moses and not Moshe, Jacob and not Yaakov, etc.

Transliteration of Yiddish usually follows Uriel Weinreich’s system in his *Modern English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary* (New York, 1968). For Hebrew, a modified form of the general system found in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* has been followed. In cases of words that have both Hebrew and Yiddish spellings, preference has been given to the Hebrew. No diacritical marks have been used for either *aleph* or *ayin*, or to indicate the distinction between *heh* and *het*, on the assumption that the reader who knows Hebrew will know which is appropriate.

For the reader's convenience, a glossary of some Hebrew and Yiddish terms has been appended. Hebrew and Yiddish words found in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1966) have not been italicized. Other unfamiliar foreign words have been italicized upon their initial appearance and subsequently appear in roman type.

The difficulties of translating hasidic sources are also well known.\* Not only will one never be able to transfer the nuances of one language to another but, more important, although the heroes of this story, the hasidim and their rebbes, spoke and thought in Yiddish, they generally wrote in Hebrew. In other words, the translation into English is in fact a third transformation of the original source. The reader should be aware of these basic limitations, knowing that there is no real substitute for the original text or document. Repeated honorific titles have occasionally been omitted, as have frequent abbreviations and the like. For the same reason, the title *rabbi* is not always used to distinguish a Torah scholar or hasidic rebbe, especially with regard to Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, whose name is repeated on almost every page. I take the liberty of calling this book's protagonist Israel of Ruzhin or just Israel.

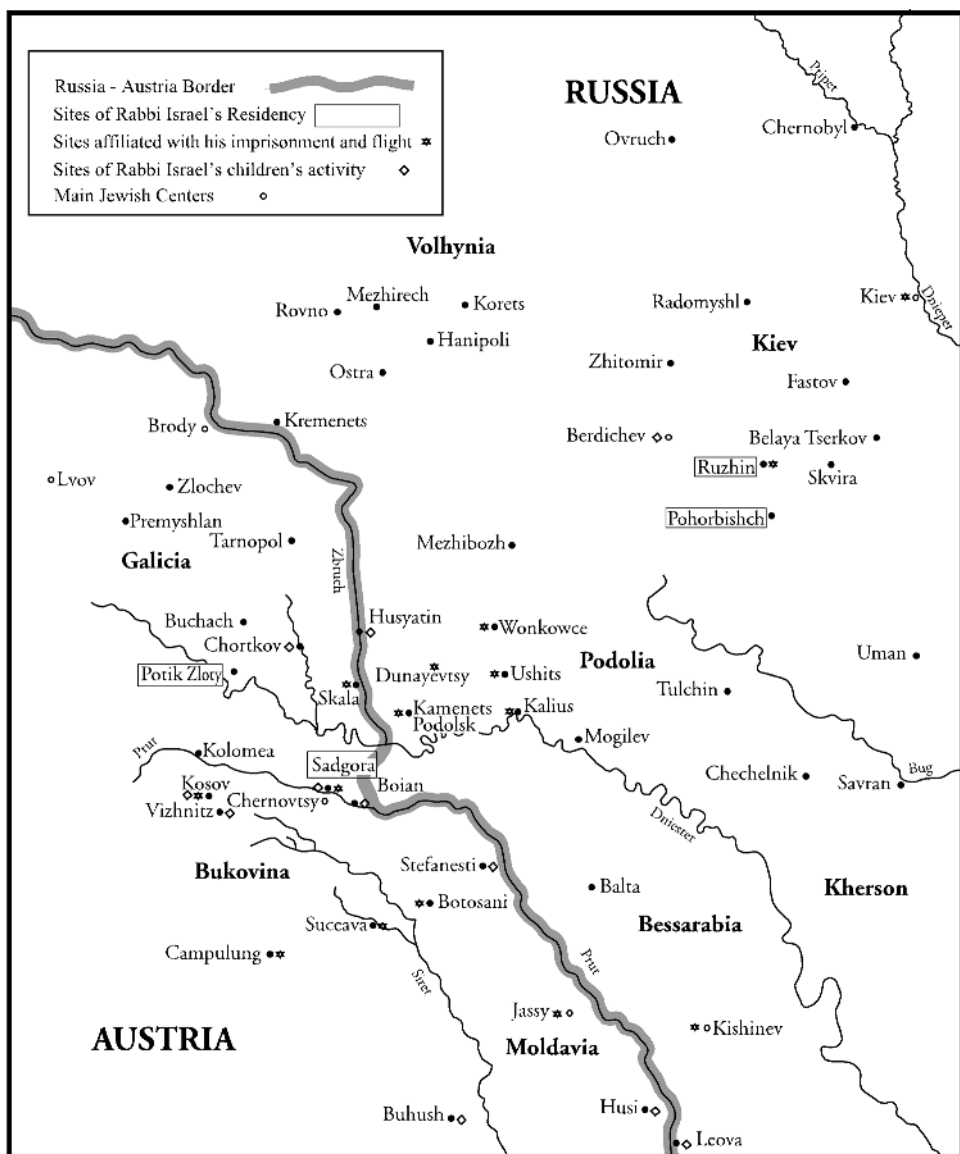
\*For a discussion, see Green, *Translating*, 63–72. For a large and valuable collection of Hasidic sources in translation into English, see: Lamm, *Hasidism*.

You can define a net in one of two ways, depending on your point of view. Normally, you would say that it is a meshed instrument designed to catch fish. But you could, with no great injury to logic, reverse the image and define a net as a jocular lexicographer once did: he called it a collection of holes tied together with string.

You can do the same with a biography. The trawling net fills, then the biographer hauls it in, sorts, throws back, stores, fillets and sells. Yet consider what he doesn't catch: there is always far more of that. The biography stands, fat and worthy-burgherish on the shelf, boastful and sedate: a shilling life will give you all the facts, a ten-pound one all the hypotheses as well. But think of everything that got away, that fled with the last deathbed exhalation of the biographee. What chance would the craftiest biographer stand against the subject who saw him coming and decided to amuse himself?

—Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*







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## *Introduction*

### *I. Method*

My object in this volume is to reconstruct the unique life of the famous zaddik Rabbi Israel Friedman of Ruzhin (1796–1850) and to determine his place in the history of the hasidic movement during its period of rapid growth. Both during his lifetime and since his death, Rabbi Israel's colorful personality and turbulent life, short though it was, have aroused widely differing evaluations of his character and identity as a person and as leader of one of the largest and most important hasidic courts of the nineteenth century.

In his monograph on Israel of Ruzhin, the hasidic biographer Abraham Isaac Bromberg asks: "Wherein lay his strength and greatness, his ability to attract tens of thousands of hasidim from many countries and from different classes and gather them all around him?" And his answer is: "He was a thinker of genius and a holy man, not only in his actions but also in his thought, and thereby he earned his renown throughout the Jewish world of his time. . . . The *admor* of Ruzhin was the thunderbolt who showed his and the coming generations the way to realize the practical world in holiness and purity."<sup>1</sup>

This romantic, idyllic attitude cannot, of course, be squared with the critical, scientific point of view aptly and brilliantly expressed by Gershom Scholem, who highlights Rabbi Israel's ambition and lust for power, as well as the constant tension between these qualities and the conservative

world of Orthodoxy:

The greatest and most impressive figure of classical Zaddikism, Israel of Rishin [*sic*], the so-called rabbi of Sadagora, is to put it bluntly, nothing but another Jacob Frank who has achieved the miracle of remaining an orthodox Jew. All the mysteries of the Torah have disappeared, or rather they are overshadowed and absorbed by the magnificent gesture of the born ruler. He is still witty and quick at repartee, but the secret of his power is the mystery of the magnetic and dominant personality and not that of the fascinating teacher.<sup>2</sup>

While admitting the zaddik's greatness, Scholem incidentally reveals his own view of the typology that informs the model of the leader in the historical continuum of Sabbatianism-Frankism-Hasidism. If the fact that Rabbi Israel remained within the Orthodox camp<sup>3</sup> was a "miracle," it follows that the transition between one leadership model and another was not only possible, but also easy and indistinct. As we shall see later, the comparison of Israel Friedman with the enigmatic figure of Jacob Frank is untenable, although the two figures do perhaps share a few superficial features. Nevertheless, Scholem accurately expresses the feeling of discomfort, amazement, and, in fact, disapproval that this exceptional figure and his highly extravagant mode of life aroused, even among his admirers. Contemporary scholars and authors are not the first to have taken up the task of deciphering the puzzle of his personality and leadership. Rabbi Israel's complex personality, fraught with a multitude of contradictions, perplexed hasidim, Torah scholars, *maskilim* and non-Jews alike during his lifetime: on the one hand, he was a man of overbearing ambition and lust for riches, honor, and authority; on the other, he possessed incomparable qualities of leadership, and hundreds, if not thousands, of loyal hasidim had nothing but praise for his saintliness, wisdom, and piety.

Rabbi Israel's power and influence did not depend on a single trait; rather, it was a whole complex of factors and circumstances that gave him and his court their unique position in the history of Hasidism. These factors can be located and identified only by closely studying the details of his life and trying to encompass the whole range of his activities.

It is generally believed that historians investigate the past out of interest in the present, and that historiography reflects both contemporary concepts and the historian's personal outlook. I do not think this can be denied, and I do not seek to exclude myself. The hasidic movement is one of the most intriguing phenomena of modern Jewish history: an organized social movement of unusual vitality and longevity, which has survived right up to the present. The amazing staying power of Hasidism, its characteristic processes of growth and decline, renewal and stagnation (not evolutionary stages emerging from one another, but simultaneous processes),

have long occupied students of Jewish history, literature, and thought. A host of scholars and thinkers, writers and journalists, are still seeking not only to reveal the religious and ideological content of Hasidism but also to understand the spiritual, political, and social identity of large communities, still active in our midst, whose influence is felt in Jewish life throughout the Diaspora.

The work of a biographer trying to reconstruct the life of a hasidic *zaddik* is no different from that of a biographer describing the life and influence of any other historical figure. It is not enough merely to collect reliable historical material, to sift it and analyze it; a critical eye must also be turned on the tangle of political and social images and myths that have been woven about the hero, mainly during the latter's lifetime and in the context of his contemporaries' conceptions. It should be noted that the word "myth" is not used here to denote a necessarily imaginary legend, far less an invented, manipulative tradition. A "myth" may sometimes be, in part or in its entirety, absolutely true; it is sufficient if a myth is accepted as such by a certain community for it to be so defined. As a rule, the factual nucleus underlying a myth is intensified by the community of believers and endowed with epic interpretations and meanings of a didactic, political, or ritual intent. Put differently, the myth and its "agents" try to inculcate in its prospective audience certain patterns of behavior and thought, to create an ethos or world of experience that is passed down from father to son, from generation to generation. In the words of Michael Konfino:

Myths are an expression of human, individual and collective aspirations and needs. They express desires and fears of a given society and are therefore defined in the context of a certain time and place; they are not, as is sometimes thought, vague abstractions, hovering in the capacious spiritual world of humanity "as a whole." They fill a certain vacuum—sometimes, the "critical vacuum"—in the spiritual life of a certain society or of parts of it. In that sense they are legitimate objects of historical research, insofar as they testify to the structure of spiritual life, to the mentality, perceptions, and conceptions of that society.<sup>4</sup>

The usual manifestations of political and social myths in the world of Hasidism are stories of *zaddikim* (that is to say, stories *about* *zaddikim*; and, rarely, as in the case of Nahman of Bratslav or Israel of Ruzhin, *by* *zaddikim* as well). This oral genre, occupying a position of ever-increasing importance in hasidic thought, to the extent that it has been likened to studying the deepest secrets of esoteric lore, has been committed to written and printed form primarily in the hagiographic literature of Hasidism (which, however, also has different, complex patterns of expression). Although this literature is not generally considered a reliable biographical source, it is actually an invaluable source for its protagonist's mythical fig-

ure as seen by his followers, as well as for the collective memory that has shaped the hasidic ethos or “hasidic experience.” To the extent that one can identify the factual core of such stories, they become a major historical source.<sup>5</sup> Not infrequently—in Hasidism as well—myths become a self-fulfilling prophecy, a significant motivating factor in the life of their protagonist, who adapts himself to some or all of them, sometimes by design, but usually inadvertently, while exploiting them for personal needs and following their lead.

According to conventional wisdom, critical biographies are crucial in laying the foundations for the creation of reliable historical generalizations and for understanding large-scale phenomena and behavioral patterns. But even a scholar aware of the problematic state of historical biography in general will be amazed to discover the poor state of hasidic biography and the small number of biographies of the central figures in Hasidism. Of course, Simon Dubnow and Samuel Abba Horodezky, the pioneers of research into Hasidism, organized their writings on the basis of biographical foundations, but their main object was not to write biographies but to create, for the first time, a description of the hasidic movement as a whole. Generally speaking, several decades after the beginnings of critical research in the field, the lacuna has yet to be filled. Anyone surveying the current state of research will realize the remarkable fact that there has as yet been no real attempt at a critical reconstruction of the major personalities in the history of Hasidism. Only recently have we witnessed the first serious attempts at a critical reconstruction of the life of the founder of Hasidism, Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, known as the Besht,<sup>6</sup> but there is nothing yet about Dov Ber, the “Great Maggid” of Mezhibezh, the central figure among the Besht’s “successors.” The same is true of other prominent figures such as Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, Jacob Isaac the “Seer” of Lublin, Levi Isaac of Berdichev, Isaac Meir of Gur or his grandson and successor, Aryeh Leib Alter, Hayyim Halberstam of Zanz, and others. Even the intriguing figure of Shneur Zalman of Lyady, the founder of Lubavitch Hasidism (Habad), is still awaiting a critical biography, despite the relative abundance of documentary material that he left behind.<sup>7</sup> Truth to tell, the available harvest is meager indeed, just a few sheaves of research, reconstructing specific episodes or dealing with topics in isolation from the full life span of the individual seen in the context of his time and place.

Later on, I shall devote some attention to the mental and social factors that conditioned the paucity of critical research into nineteenth-century Hasidism (hence, naturally, the inadequate treatment of Israel of Ruzhin). For the moment, suffice it to say that the only personality to have received adequate critical-biographic treatment—comprising both studies of specific aspects of his life and a comprehensive attempt at a biography—is

Nahman of Bratslav (d. 1810).<sup>8</sup> The reason should be clear: Rabbi Nahman's fascinating personality and his many utterances concerning himself, his hasidim, and his environment were compiled by his loyal disciple and biographer Nathan Sternhartz of Nemirov, creating a rich, reliable inventory of sources. From the standpoint of the scholar of Hasidism, there is a certain similarity between Rabbi Nahman and Rabbi Israel. Both were unique, not only because of their stormy, dramatic life stories and the vicissitudes they experienced, but also in the rich, varied historical material that they have bequeathed us and the impression they made on their contemporaries. Rabbi Israel, like his contemporary Rabbi Nahman, expressed himself directly and sometimes even crudely; his awareness of himself, his personality, and his station in the world are clearly expressed in his speech, his teachings, and the stories he told, all of which were recorded by disciples and admirers. If we wish to determine Rabbi Israel's views on various issues, we need not struggle with obscure homiletic or philosophical pronouncements, open to multiple interpretations. His views of the zaddik, his position and his function, of messianic belief, of ascetic practices, and of physical pleasure are all stated lucidly and fluently.

In contrast to many hasidic leaders, whose historical personalities are cloaked in legend based at most on internal hasidic traditions, we possess relatively rich extrahasic documentation of Rabbi Israel. The sources in question deal both with his character and with various events that he experienced. This apparent advantage, which would seem to permit a more balanced evaluation of his multifaceted personality, may, if used without appropriate caution, turn out to be a disadvantage. Rabbi Israel's colorful and controversial personality attracted attention from all camps and circles: his own hasidim, hasidim who opposed his ways, nonhasidic orthodox scholars, moderate and radical maskilim, and even non-Jews. Among these, some were objective observers, others deeply involved and interested parties. Each found what he was looking for, depending on his ideology and values. Precisely this kaleidoscopic nature of the sources hinders the historian in the attempt to draw an unambiguous, balanced picture.

Although Rabbi Israel himself wrote nothing, there is much and varied information about him in internal hasidic sources. Apart from literature deriving directly from the Ruzhin-Sadgora dynasty, there is much material in works of and about other zaddikim. Hasidic literature and its other literary expressions resemble a great river with innumerable tributaries, and I cannot pretend to have explored them all. Nevertheless, I have made every effort to locate the main relevant sources.

As is the rule among hasidim, the followers of Ruzhin-Sadgora treat their rebbes as saints, worthy of the utmost veneration. Here is a typical expression of this:

Ruzhin! the word that sent a thrill through the hearts of tens of thousands of Jews. Ruzhin! is there any other single word that expresses so much? kingship, pomp and circumstance, holiness and devotion. Can an author possibly interpret, explain the word, all that it means, in all its detail? Can a book possibly encompass its content and meaning? Has the pen been created that could describe the overwhelming, overflowing desire and longing that seizes one when one thinks of Ruzhin?<sup>9</sup>

The perplexity expressed by this author is quite genuine, and I largely share it. On the one hand, it is difficult, particularly in the context of a study based on critical and scientific disciplines, to reconstruct the moods, emotional content, and experiential world of Ruzhin Hasidism during Rabbi Israel's lifetime. On the other, it is no less difficult to find one's way through the obscuring mists of romanticizing and idealizing hagiography, which has increased apace since the destruction of Eastern European Jewry, amid nostalgic longings for and memories of a bygone world, peaking during the past two generations. It was my aim, therefore, to try and extract as much as possible from the available sources in order to reconstruct events as they occurred and to decipher their meanings, with due emphasis on the social aspects of Rabbi Israel's personality and activities. It is highly doubtful whether the "true" features of this complex figure will ever come to light in their entirety. We shall have to be content with an attempt to create a blend between his self-image and the way he was seen by others: supporters and opponents, contemporaries and later generations, whose traditions absorbed some of the values of his thought, figure, and activity.

The biography of Israel of Ruzhin divides neatly into three main periods:

The *Ruzhin period*, centering on his accession to leadership of the community, his growing fame and the spread of Ruzhin Hasidism, ending in September 1836, when he was caught up in the investigation of the double murder at Ushits.

The *Kiev period*—Rabbi Israel's interrogation, imprisonment, trial, and acquittal, culminating in his release from prison (in February 1840) and return to Ruzhin.

The *Sadgora period*, beginning in July 1841, after the zaddik had decided to leave Ruzhin once and for all and flee Russia; this period ends with his death in October 1850 in Sadgora.

In each of these periods, Rabbi Israel acted in the context of entirely different historical conditions; each period left its mark on his moods, thoughts, and behavior.

I shall try to trace his activities, as far as possible correlating the documents and sometimes fragmentary sources with the different phases of his

life. Many sources, however, are undated and it is difficult to determine whether the details extracted from them concern Israel's childhood and youth or his adulthood and old age. Do they give us information about Ruzhin or Sadgora? Only naturally, most of the surviving material relates to the last period of his life, although those sources, too, sometimes echo with memories and testimonies from the previous periods. This makes it particularly difficult to reconstruct the link between biographical events and the evolution of Rabbi Israel's ideas, such as his doctrine of the zaddik, attitude to asceticism, messianic awareness, and the like. I have been extremely cautious in such connections, trying to rely exclusively on sources that can be mobilized with a good degree of certainty for the work of biographical reconstruction.

This book is, therefore, divided into four main parts.

In this introductory chapter, the state of research concerning Rabbi Israel and his Hasidism is surveyed. The achievements as well as the flaws of this research are touched upon. The types of sources and the methodological problems involved in their exploration are described.

The first part (Chapters 1–2) is devoted to describing Rabbi Israel's childhood, youth, and assumption of leadership. He rose to his position at a time when the patterns of accession to hasidic leadership were just taking shape and a controversy was raging concerning "sons of zaddikim" and the question of whether proper lineage was the preferred prerequisite for leadership.

The second part (Chapters 3–8) is an attempt to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, Rabbi Israel's life story, from his accession to the zaddik's throne; through the dramatic events relating to the murder of two Jewish informers (the "Ushits affair"), in connection with which Rabbi Israel was interrogated and imprisoned, finally escaping from Russia and resettling in Austrian Bukovina; and ending with his death at the court in Sadgora.

The third part (Chapters 9–11) examines various aspects of Rabbi Israel's career as a hasidic leader through his work as the leader of a great community, involved in the everyday life of his followers, and of his acting out of a consciousness of mission and responsibility for Jewry as a whole. Special emphasis is given to Rabbi Israel's attitude to material possessions, to wealth, and to physical pleasures, which is the obvious meeting point between worldly life at his "royal" hasidic court and his views of the correct way to worship God. Attention is also paid to his opinions as to the nature of "the real zaddik of the generation," his self-awareness as such a zaddik, and his negative attitude to one of the most salient features in the leadership of other zaddikim, namely, to miracles.

The fourth part (Chapters 12–14) could stand as a monograph on its



own, being devoted to various aspects relating to the realia of the newly emergent hasidic court, with attention to its social and economic structure. By methodically piecing together available information about the physical appearance of the courts of Rabbi Israel, his sons, and other zaddikim of the same trend, about the various functions discharged within the courts and their methods of administrative organization, one can draw a picture of a unique, exceptional type of court in the history of nineteenth-century Hasidism. Knowledge of the real framework within which Hasidism flourished is a precondition for correct interpretation of the sources. Special effort has, therefore, been devoted to studying the economics of the hasidic court, which helped to shape the notions of *pidyon* and *ma'amad*, as well as dictating the zaddik's journeys, whether in the general region of the court or farther afield, and the journeys of the hasidim, from near and far, to the zaddik's court—journeys that in time became a kind of hasidic rite of passage.

Casting an eye on the bibliography at the end of the book, the reader will realize that I have used hundreds of sources and studies. Sometimes, some marginal detail or other is supported by a sentence, or a few passages, from a large tome. Despite the need for brevity, I have not been content merely to refer to these sources in the notes. Most of them are not readily available, and some are quite difficult to locate, so I quote many of them at length. Finally, despite my efforts, there are surely still a few errors here and there, and I welcome any comments to that effect.

## *II. On the State of Research and Hasidic Historiography*

Modern research into Hasidism has branches and roots, both of which derive—with the advantages and disadvantages thus entailed—from the Haskalah-inspired Eastern European historiographic tradition. The pioneer of this tradition was the historian Simon Dubnow, father of the critical study of Hasidism, who was succeeded by Samuel Abba Horodezky, Ben-Zion Dinur, and Raphael Mahler, whose attitudes to Hasidism, its personalities, and their works were complex. While recognizing its revolutionary message, each in keeping with his specific views, and while realizing that the movement and its literature were bearers not only of innovative, fertile ideas, but also of a tremendous vitality, devotion, and power, they also saw in it a rival movement, struggling against and even endangering the major ideological currents that were shaping Jewish history in the modern era. Thus, Mahler, typically, wrote: “Despite its rich cultural heritage, Hasidism proved to be a mere cul-de-sac along the historical road taken by the Jewish people.”<sup>10</sup>

Of Israel of Ruzhin, Dubnow wrote: "This high priest of Hasidism grew rich from the contributions of those who believed in him," but he devoted only a few lines in his pioneering work, *The History of Hasidism*, to justifying this accusation. All he did was comment on the similarity between Baruch of Mezhibozh, the Besht's grandson, and Rabbi Israel, great-grandson of the Maggid of Mezhirech, and point out the tension between the Chernobyl and Ruzhin-Sadgora dynasties. According to Dubnow, around the year 1815, Rabbi Israel settled in Ruzhin and built his court there, "a more magnificent court than the one at Chernobyl," which attracted multitudes of hasidim.<sup>11</sup> It was no accident that Dubnow specified 1815 as the year in which Ruzhin Hasidism was founded; he thereby evaded any more penetrating analysis, as he had promised from the start that his book would not go beyond that year.

Dubnow's attitude to Ukrainian Hasidism was rather ambivalent. On the one hand, the Ukraine was the cradle of the hasidic movement, the subject of his study; on the other, Dubnow—maskil, nationalist, Lithuanian Jew—disliked the more vulgar manifestations of that branch of Hasidism, as he had known it since his youth and as he saw it through the historical lens of the history of Hasidism. For him, nineteenth-century Ukrainian Hasidism represented the decline, corruption, and degeneration of the movement. The year 1815, in his view, marked "the watershed between the creative period of Hasidism and the period of its reduction to the cult of zaddikim, between growth and decline, between religious war (hasidim versus mitnagdic rabbis) and *Kulturkampf* (Hasidism versus maskilim)."<sup>12</sup> He was even more explicit in his proposed periodization of Hasidism: 1815 was the end of the "period of growth and spread" and the beginning of "the period of the predominance of zaddikim and the struggle against the Haskalah movement (1815–1870)," during which there was a visible qualitative decline in hasidic doctrine, now under the shadow of "the cult of Zaddikism . . . obscuring the light of Jewish rationalism and arousing fanatical hatred of freedom of thought." Last was "the period of absolute decline . . . old age," from 1870 till Dubnow's own time.<sup>13</sup>

The writings of Horodezky, himself a direct descendent of the Chernobyl zaddikim, are generally imbued with a yearning for the original Hasidism, whose values, he believed, were relevant to his own generation. He, too, defined nineteenth-century Hasidism as a period of degeneration and decline. For this he mainly blamed Baruch of Mezhibozh, Mordekhai of Chernobyl, Israel of Ruzhin, and, in particular, the sons of the two last-named leaders, who were the harbingers of the change and responsible for the great fall. Horodezky described three stages in the history of Hasidism: the original stage of "noble spirituality"; the stage of compromise, during which "spirituality and vulgarity" were commingled; and the stage of "vul-

garity,” during which Hasidism took on a material, commercial aspect. As he put it: “The building erected by the fathers was destroyed by the sons. They mark the beginning of a new period, the period of decline for Ukrainian Hasidism.”<sup>14</sup>

In sum, scholars considered the late, conservative Hasidism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—with which some of them were familiar not only from literary sources but also in real life, at home, from the *shtetl* and the immediate surroundings—as a degenerate outgrowth of the original Hasidism; its literature was, to their minds, a conglomeration of hagiography and preposterous yarns. The zaddik was no longer a talented, charismatic leader and visionary, but a self-indulgent, corrupt descendant running his followers’ lives like a petty trader. The dark, gloomy colors in which these scholars painted Hasidism clouded their objectivity and skewed all their forays into the history of late Hasidism. This attitude, the view that nineteenth-century Hasidism, and particularly the large hasidic courts of the Ukraine, represented a degeneration of Hasidism, left an indelible mark on the historiography of the hasidic movement and has caused scholars to avoid this period.<sup>15</sup>

However, this negative view of late Hasidism, the value judgment that condemned it as a corrupt, decadent entity, must be contrasted with the great spiritual and social achievements of the self-same zaddikim and with the impressive spread of Hasidism, reaching almost every townlet and Jewish community in Eastern Europe. At this very time when the “building of the fathers” was, as it were, being demolished, the “sons” could point to achievements of which their fathers would not have dared even to dream; at this very time, the various hasidic groups were headed by several important leaders. The fact that scholars have, only naturally, found particular interest in the beginnings and emergence of Hasidism, choosing to ignore the movement in its growth phase, has produced a distorted pattern of research. While early Hasidism has been discussed comprehensively from all points of view—theoretical, historical, social, and literary—nineteenth-century Hasidism, a period of significant growth and dissemination of the movement, is an almost untouched field, and there are few systematic studies of the evolution and expansion of the larger courts.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, most of the available sources have yet to be investigated with the tools of critical research, having been at most briefly mentioned or cursorily examined. This situation is particularly puzzling in light of the fact that, unlike the founding fathers of Hasidism, most of whom are semi-mythological figures, obscured by the mists of hagiography and cloaked in mystery, practically unlit by real historical information, the zaddikim of the nineteenth century were flesh-and-blood persons, who came into personal

contact with great numbers of observers, including not only hasidim but maskilim and non-Jews, and they figure prominently in a wealth of reliable documentary and literary material.

Hence, for the very opposite social and spiritual motives, writers who themselves belong to the hasidic camp and are attracted to historical writing have chosen to turn their spotlights on the heroes of late Hasidism. In contrast to the critical historians' feelings of repulsion and alienation from what they consider "corrupt" Hasidism, Orthodox writers see themselves as representing its spiritual and genetic continuation. Most such writers are themselves hasidim; either they or their fathers were directly acquainted with the subjects of their essays and venerated them. For them, this was the authentic Hasidism, nothing like the Hasidism of the previous generations, although both represent this unique phenomenon in Jewish history. Whereas the early generations are enveloped in the mists of history, and the religious radicalism that they embodied is not always concordant with the conservative inclinations of Orthodoxy, the zaddikim of the nineteenth century are closer in their modes of thought and behavior to the modern writers. This category of authors has thus produced a great number of monographs and biographies, mostly motivated by a profound personal identification with their protagonists.<sup>17</sup>

However, this deep personal involvement is a serious flaw. The major object of these authors is generally to portray a "model personality," a worthy object of emulation and identification. Their telling of the story is generally imbued with a spirit of longing for those "olden times," driven by didactic and romantic motives, completely subordinated to the grandeur of those heroes of the past and lost in their adulation and veneration. They are not committed to a disclosure of all the relevant details, nor do they abide by the critical criteria customary in modern historical research. The high-flown, elaborate language, selective range of sources, deliberate concealment, obfuscation, and even distortion so common in this literary genre consign it to the ranks of popular, apologetic literature or pseudo-research, ostensibly useless for historical scholarship.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the faults of this literature, it does have value for the scholar. Since the scholarly world has, as stated, devoted little attention to nineteenth-century Hasidism, the field has been left almost exclusively to members of the hasidic camp itself. Consequently, their work has preserved important sources and traditions, as well as interesting interpretations, although their use should be appropriately circumscribed and properly sifted and analyzed. One characteristic property that hinders the use of this literature is the lack of references for the sources and the quotations.<sup>19</sup>

The most acute problem is that internal hasidic historiography falls into the category of what one might call "recruited literature," that is, literature

that is deliberately committed to serve certain interests, overt or covert. In the context of Orthodoxy, it aims to present the heritage of the past as an ideal, to be passed on down the generations and to be imitated in both the present and future. There are many aspects to my definition of this literature as “recruited,” some of which are surveyed below.

(i) *The blurred borderline between testimony and interpretation.* Not infrequently, a book whose declared aim is to describe or investigate events and reconstruct them “objectively” may itself become a source for the critical scholar. A good example is the remarkable book *Yeshu’ot Israel*, written by Yossi Rath, Rabbi Israel’s personal valet and factotum, who accompanied him during some of the dramatic events connected with his move to Sadgora. Rath, whose book will be discussed later, was thus a witness to the events of which he is telling and in fact participated in some of them. At the same time, however, he is trying to don the cloak of historian and interpreter. Another author who might be cited here is Aaron Marcus, whose book *Der Chassidismus* claims to present an overall view of the emergence of Hasidism and the lives of its central personalities. Gershom Scholem has already pointed out that this is a tendentious albeit “original hasidic book,” rather than an objective study. Scholem stresses Marcus’s indiscriminate sympathy and adulation of everything that has anything to do with Rabbi Israel and his successors. The book has received its just deserts from both hasidim and mitnagdim, but the traditions that it cites, which sometimes appear nowhere else, should nevertheless be examined carefully to separate the wheat from the chaff.<sup>20</sup> Yet another example is Isaac Even’s memoir *Fun’m rebin’s hoyf* (From the Rebbe’s Court), which is a reliable and in fact invaluable source for the history of the Sadgora court: the author wrote his recollections as a *yoshev* (resident) at the court of Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, incorporating various hasidic traditions and stories that he had learned. Thus, the book may justifiably be seen as an independent source for the critical historian, not as a study or summary of research.

(ii) *Avoidance of problematic topics.* In light of the writers’ proclaimed object—to disseminate “positive” religious and social values through their writing, it is only to be expected that negative phenomena are concealed or at least blurred in it, that disputes and controversies are swept under the carpet or described from a harmonizing standpoint, and that views prone to misinterpretation receive no mention at all. Such neglect of “embarrassing” episodes in the history of Orthodoxy has obvious religious and psychological roots,<sup>21</sup> but there is no place for this approach in the context of critical research. A few typical examples of this kind of writing, all relating to the Ruzhin dynasty, are given below.

## I. DISREGARD AND OMISSION

The tendency to disregard awkward facts is particularly prominent with regard to the affair of Dov Ber (Bernyu) of Leova and the infamous Zanz-Sadgora controversy. This Bernyu, Rabbi Israel's third son (?1821–1875), a rather colorless and mediocre figure, became the focus of one of the stormiest episodes of 1870s Hasidism. The events of what was known as his “fall” were dramatic: he was reported to have renounced religious observance and abandoned the admor's throne in 1866 or 1867. The climax came in 1869, when he was kidnapped by his family from Leova to Sadgora; subsequently released, he then allied himself with radical maskilim in Chernovtsy, but later returned to Sadgora, where his life ended in solitude and silence. These events caused a furor in the whole region: polemical tracts flew back and forth between the different camps; rumors abounded; the Hebrew press and other publications took up the story; the affair is frequently mentioned in correspondence, memoirs, and even plays and stories. It was in fact the last “straw” that broke the back of the zaddik Hayyim Halberstam, the admor of the great Zanz dynasty, who was incensed by the behavior of the Sadgora zaddikim. The fierce conflict that broke out between Sadgora and Zanz Hasidism cast a dark shadow over Galician Jewry right up to the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

Rabbi Israel himself had no part at all in this convoluted affair, which is thus outside the scope of this study, but it undoubtedly influenced perceptions in hindsight of his time. Nevertheless, authors strongly committed to Ruzhin Hasidism were wary of trying to steer a course between Scylla and Charybdis and preferred not to “stain” the harmonious history of Ruzhin with the gloomy colors of conflict. Not only did they ignore the whole affair and its implications; they made efforts to suppress all record of it and, in fact, to rewrite the events. Here are a few examples.

*a.* Marcus's above-mentioned book, *Der Chassidismus*, was first translated into Hebrew in 1954. It was clear to the ultra-Orthodox translator, Moses Shoenfeld, that Marcus's stormy spirit and forthright opinions on every issue might annoy his readership. He therefore announced in the introduction that, although he had tried to remain faithful to the original work,

he has permitted himself to soften some harsh expressions that might have implied disrespect for the princes of Torah and Hasidism, and even to omit a few lines, for the same reason. He is sure that he has thereby pleased the soul of the late author, for his text was written at a time when a great tempest was shaking the foundations of the hasidic world, before the controversy for the sake of heaven between hasidim and mitnagdim had died down, but the fire of conflict had already flared up within the hasidic camp itself, because of different approaches to and methods of worshipping God.<sup>23</sup>

Despite this disclaimer, the translator did not dare to expunge the chapter of the book describing the Zanz-Sadgora controversy against the background of the Bernyu affair. In time, this first edition of the book went out of print, and a “new revised edition” was published in 1980. Despite the presumption that the controversy was not motivated by personal factors, but only by “different approaches to and methods to worshipping God,” the introduction to the new edition announces the nature of the revisions: “The publisher has seen fit, in light of the previous revisions by the translator, the late M. Shoenfeld . . . to omit from the book *a further few paragraphs and certain expressions* that seem disrespectful to our saintly rabbis, after consulting with luminaries of Torah and Hasidism of this generation, who have agreed to the revisions.”<sup>24</sup> The censor’s sharp scissors have, in fact, cut fully fifteen pages from the chapter dealing with Bernyu.<sup>25</sup>

b. A reader perusing Mordekhai David Abramowitz’s book *Dover mesharim*, which attempts to garner the poor pickings of Bernyu’s teachings, will find no hint of this zaddik’s betrayal of his faith. The only indication of the entire affair is the following sentences:

While his father was still alive, he was the chosen one. . . . However, after his father’s death, for several reasons—in particular, the distance between him and the other brothers and the hasidic communities, as well as his brother’s death . . . his heart was broken into smithereens; he found the throne of the admor an unbearable burden and fled his home, etc., until he came to his saintly brothers in Sadgora, where he stayed till the end of his life.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, Rabbi Israel’s death in 1850 influenced his son’s behavior some twenty years later! The abbreviation “etc.” provides a veil for the dramatic events that kindled the fire of conflict throughout the hasidic world.

c. Yet another example may be found in the introduction to a three-volume biography of the zaddik Hayyim of Zanz, written by Joseph David Weisberg:

My object in writing the book was to enhance the glory of Heaven and to acclaim the way of Hasidism, particularly that of our saintly rabbi. . . . For that reason, I have omitted many things that are not likely to teach a proper, ethical way of life, or actions in the conduct of the rabbi that we do not understand, and therefore the affair of the well-known controversy that broke out in 1869 has been omitted, although our rabbi was involved in it with all his might and stormy nature. The imprint of that controversy was apparent in the Jewish world for many decades, but in our own time, the rabbis have made peace among themselves, and the relations between the grandsons of the two dynasties are cordial, while both are engaged in the struggles for the strengthening of Judaism in our generations.<sup>27</sup>

One may rightly ask, how can one write a complete biography of Hayyim of Zanz if this essential chapter in his life is left out? The desire to smooth

over the details of the controversy, which neither side was later eager to recall, has, over the years, produced a conspiracy of silence, further compounded by the physical destruction of relevant written material—books, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, and private correspondence—to the extent that surviving copies are extremely rare today.

*d.* Hasidic historiography prefers to pass over in silence facts that might be interpreted, at first blush, as disrespectful to the zaddik. Thus, for example, hasidic writers try to conceal Rabbi Israel's lack of a regular Torah education and ignore the fact that he wrote with difficulty. Bromberg, while quoting extensively from the journal of the apostate traveler Bonaventura Mayer, who visited the zaddik in 1826, confined himself to the positive reports, omitting the sentence in which Mayer noted that Rabbi Israel wrote with difficulty and could barely sign his name. Similarly, the fact that Rabbi Israel rendered financial help to some contemporary maskilim, in particular, to his relative Isaac Ber Levinsohn, was obscured.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. APOLOGETICS AND NAÏVETÉ

Orthodox writing is characterized by its apologetic or naïve point of departure, strongly influenced by the writers' values. Authors decide in advance that the hero of their work has sterling qualities and is a paragon of virtue, free of any faults—religious, ethical, or intellectual. Another common element is the conviction that the hero's later characteristics were already in evidence in his infancy.

Thus, for example, no one contests the fact that Rabbi Israel had a great deal of property, behaved in a princely manner, and lived in a magnificent palace; but it is inconceivable that he should also have *enjoyed* such a life, for it is supposedly a great sin to enjoy sensual and material things. The dialectic governing the hasidic view of Rabbi Israel's attitude to his riches is aptly summed up in the following quotation: "His clothing was decorated with gold, but on his body it became sackcloth and ashes, mourning the sorrow of the world. His shoes were magnificently made, but the soles of his feet were bare to every painful thorn and any ice and frost upon the ground. His food was fit for a king but pierced his innards like swords."<sup>29</sup>

Rabbi Israel's sons, too, although their lifestyle and ostentatious behavior kindled the fires of controversy, are said to be "people for whom corporeality meant nothing."<sup>30</sup> It is indeed hard to argue with such manifest exaggerations, which are typical of the conventions of ultra-Orthodox writing. One certainly cannot contend with those who know Rabbi Israel's innermost thoughts and feelings. We cannot determine whether he *really* enjoyed such physical pleasures. All we can do is investigate the facts as we have them and compare them with his views on the subject as expressed by



himself: vehement negation of asceticism as a hasidic norm and a positive, expansive attitude to “worship through corporeality.” It is important to stress that, by focusing on Rabbi Israel’s mental attitude to material possessions and his ability (or readiness) to benefit from them, it has been possible to obscure his major innovation: the Ruzhin dynasty’s legitimization of the accumulation of wealth and of materialism. This legitimization is an undeniable fact; indeed, it was the core of the revolution wrought by Rabbi Israel and his contemporaries in Hasidism.

The hasidic worldview may even lead to manifestations of naïveté in the study of the movement. Thus, for example, a letter by Shneur Zalman of Lyady is printed in a book entitled *Hesed le-Abraham* (1851), which sets forth the teachings of Rabbi Israel’s grandfather, Abraham the “Angel.”<sup>31</sup> In the first editions of the book, the letter was attributed to an anonymous disciple of Levi Isaac of Berdichev. The Habad scholar and bibliographer Hayyim Lieberman, pointing out the publishers’ ignorance, naïvely asked: Is it conceivable that the three signatories of the approbations to the book—Rabbi Israel and his two sons—had never looked into *Sefer ha-Tanya* and did not know that this letter was nothing but Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s “Commentary on the Ten *Sefirot*”?<sup>32</sup> His basic assumption was that these zaddikim were men of letters, familiar with hasidic literature, and had at least read the book they were endorsing—an unprovable thesis.

### 3. EXAGGERATIONS AND IMAGINATION

In order to glorify Rabbi Israel’s reputation, many authors have given full rein to their imaginations, simply inventing fantastic scenarios. One field in which this has been done with a vengeance is the depiction of Rabbi Israel’s wealth, his palace, and his carriage. The exaggerations have gone so far as to fabricate non-Jewish testimonies that prove, upon examination, to be nonexistent. Nevertheless, they have been reprinted over and over again, particularly in Orthodox literature, as a conclusive proof of Rabbi Israel’s greatness, as if to say, “See, even non-Jews recognized his eminence.” The psychological position underlying such flights of fancy is that this zaddik successfully demolished the traditional image of the submissive Diaspora Jew, so that his displays of wealth and airs of royalty made a tremendous impression on any gentile who had some sympathy for Jews. A good example is the description of Rabbi Israel’s palace allegedly written by the Polish prince Xawer Branicki in his book *Brama pokuty* (Gate of Repentance). The above-mentioned Aaron Marcus quotes the description from this book:

Let us imagine this zaddik in his white silk coat, fastened by a diamond pin on his chest, a golden girdle about his waist and a shining gold skullcap on his head. . . .

Instead of a scepter, he has in his hand a pipe whose tip is made of precious stone. A grand palace in the town of Rizhin, a magnificent carriage harnessed to four speedy steeds, and a special court orchestra of hasidic instrumentalists complete this picture, which seems as if taken from a mirage, except that it arises not in the desert sands but against a background of mud in the ancient Polish street. The gate opens, the carriage flies through, and behind it, riding on neighing horses, come the zad-dik's five sons. . . . Their faces are as if hewn from marble, looking like princes of military mien, quite inconceivable among the Jews of Poland, in Polish-Jewish dress. . . . The youngest son, Rabbi David Moses [of Chortkov], an aged man today, renowned since his youth for his wonderful piety, is the fastest horseman of them all, overtaking all his brothers at a gallop.<sup>33</sup>

Now it turns out that neither of the two versions of this book, first published in Paris in 1879—which are translations (into French and Polish) of a Hebrew account of the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648—makes any mention whatever of Rabbi Israel's palace or his horseback-riding sons. The sole relevant piece of information in it is Branicki's report of a meeting he had with a certain bishop in Italy (around 1866): "We sat at the table, and so I could better see his face, which much surprised me. He was tall, and his face was very pale. His facial features reminded me of Jesus' visage as seen on Saint Veronica's cloth. Those features, and the paleness, reminded me of the picture of the famous rabbi of Ruzhin whom I met once in the Ukraine."<sup>34</sup> There is no mention of any palace, horses, orchestra or riders. Branicki (1814–79), scion of a distinguished aristocratic family, was a Polish philo-Semite who spent most of his life in France. He indeed met Rabbi Israel, but the latter's tallness, pallor, and facial similarity to the supposed imprint of Jesus' features on a Roman Catholic relic—surely not a recommendation in Orthodox Jewish eyes—are all one can glean from his report.

Branicki's "testimony" as cited in Marcus's book has been taken up by many other writers, who have copied it without checking the source. Here is a typical account, beginning with Branicki and going on to extravagant fantasizing:

The local and foreign press frequently described the rabbi's magnificent palace and all its appurtenances. A detailed description of the beauty and magnificence of the Rizhin house may be found in the book *Brama pokuty*. . . . Well-known architects, sculptors, and painters came especially from Paris and Italy to that same little village, Rizhin, in Volhynia, to erect the grand building and decorate it. The house was not only decorated outside, for people to see, but was built entirely of the most select and expensive materials. The floor of the great dining hall was paved with silver ruble coins. The door handles and locks were made of precious, rare amber, which cost a fortune. The household utensils and furniture were gleaming and shining. The wealth scattered all around fascinated anyone who saw it.<sup>35</sup>

This description, as it turns out, was taken from a different source: an

article published by Arnold Hilberg in an illustrated German family journal, *Die Gartenlaube*, in Leipzig in 1876. Hilberg, a Christian German journalist who visited Sadgora in the 1870s, published an interview with Rabbi Israel's son Abraham Jacob, together with an assortment of stories and rumors about Rabbi Israel and his life. Hilberg was never in Ruzhin, which he describes as a "remote, small, dirty place," and he expressed doubts about the veracity of the tall tales he quoted about coin-paved floors and the zaddik's fantastic wealth.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. TENDENCIES IN NONHASIDIC WRITINGS

As already noted, even the writings of scholars who supposedly represent objective disciplines are tainted with prejudice to one degree or another, as their view of Hasidism in general and of Rabbi Israel in particular tends to reflect the hostile attitude of *Haskalah*. A typical example is the following passage by Abraham Kahana, who considered Rabbi Israel and his contemporaries palpable evidence of the decline of Hasidism, which he regarded as historically inevitable in the evolution of any religious or social movement:

The Great Maggid's grandson, Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, had already abandoned the middle path and gone astray. He deviated from the ideal aspect of Hasidism and drew closer to the practical aspect. He knew how to take from the practical aspect of Hasidism whatever he could as a wonder-working zaddik, perhaps more than he should have taken. . . . We need not speak here of his conduct as a member of the nobility, with his carriages and horses, with his court and the practices of his house. Let the hasidic epic come and testify to its bearers.<sup>37</sup>

As proof of his argument, Kahana cited two stories. One was about the Besht risking his life confronting the Angel of Death to cure one of his disciples. The other concerned Israel of Ruzhin, who told his hasidim a story about the Besht saving the life of a rich Jew's daughter. At the end of the story, he asked his hasidim if they knew how much money the Besht had demanded from the rich Jew. "They fell silent. The Rizhiner said: The rich man gave him ten gold coins. But I, even for a smaller miracle, would not have budged for less than 300 gold coins!" Here, Kahana stressed, was a clear reflection of the "decline of the generations." Whereas, in the first, the Besht had endangered his life to save a dying man, by the fourth, not only was he reported to have requested payment for such service, but "the zaddik of the generation proudly states that he would not have budged for less than 300 gold coins."

Does the rise in the "cost" of miracle healing indeed express such a decline? Perhaps it is merely a reflection of a change in patterns of thought and action? Such changes, deplorable to modern scholars who have pic-

tured early Hasidism in a romantic spirit, in keeping with their own values, might seem for the hasidim themselves a worthy indication of the living link between the hasid and his rebbe, as enabling the zaddik to exploit his special powers to the full. From this point of view, the distinction between the “golden age” of the Besht and his disciples and the period of “decline” of Rabbi Israel and his contemporaries is anachronistic.

Whatever the case, we must check whether Kahana at least had his facts right. There is no doubt that Rabbi Israel lived comfortably and amassed considerable wealth and property. Nevertheless, the story as told is highly suspect, as Rabbi Israel’s attitude to miracles was negative. As we shall see later, he did not perform “miracles” in everyday life and ridiculed those zaddikim who based their leadership on doing so. If the story is true, it should clearly be understood in an ironical sense. In the original source, incidentally, the story is that Rabbi Israel would not have stirred for “less than two gold coins,” which Kahana converted into 300!<sup>38</sup>

From the other side of the map, surprising as it is, one must admit that concern regarding respect for zaddikim, as related above, was not confined to hasidim; its traces may be found in the writing of maskilim. Here, for example, is the exceptionally impressive reaction of the author and the essayist David Isaiah Zilberbusch, who was a Sadgora hasid in his youth before he became a maskil and a critical observer of Hasidism. In his memoirs, he describes a meeting between the popular poet Velvele Ehrenkrantz, the playwright Abraham Goldfaden, the author Moses Orenstein, the latter also an ex-Sadgora hasid, and himself. It happened that they began to ridicule hasidim and Hasidism, and Orenstein read aloud a work named *The Golem*, a barbed satire about Dov of Leova, to which Ehrenkrantz responded with a recital of his bilingual satire *Makel hovlim* (The Birch), also about Dov and Rabbi Israel’s sons. Zilberbusch flew into a rage:

The whole company around the table broke into merry laughter. I alone was like a man amazed. The ember that had long been extinguished, so I thought, glowed once again. It was as if all my innards awoke, to cry out to them: “Do not touch my anointed ones!” I am not ashamed to admit that such is my “weakness” to this very day. I myself may sometimes harshly criticize the admor institution among Jews. But when I hear from an “outsider” something that might cause disrespect to the Rizhiners—“there is no wholeness in my bones.”<sup>39</sup>

## 5. THE NUMBER OF HORSES: A METHODOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

One example of the methodological difficulties facing anyone who wishes to rely on both the critical study of Hasidism and hasidic historiography is the question of Rabbi Israel’s wealth. I have already noted more than once

that no one denies his great riches; but what was he really worth? Clearly, hasidim and other admirers exaggerated in order to enhance his reputation. They considered his wealth and his regal behavior as reasons for pride, not for shame: the richer he was, the greater his distinction. Sources written by maskilim, of course, had contrary motives, which were also shared by some critical scholars: they, too, exaggerated the extent of his wealth, for they regarded these rich zaddikim as a symptom of the decline and decadence of Hasidism.

Consider, for instance, such an apparently simple, easy-to-answer, factual question as the number of horses harnessed to Rabbi Israel's carriage. The answer, however, is not entirely dependent on the objective reports. Thus, in different sources we read:

(i) "He had *two fine horses*, on one of which the Messiah is to ride, and himself upon the other";<sup>40</sup>

(ii) "When he went abroad in his marvelous carriage, harnessed to *two pairs of galloping horses*, and rode on them together with the driver and a servant in costly livery, with the hasidim running before him, everyone who saw the sight believed that one of the great princes was out";<sup>41</sup>

(iii) "Living in palaces and driving in a gilded carriage pulled by no fewer than *two or three sets of horses*";<sup>42</sup>

(iv) "Once the two zaddikim met on the road. The Premyshlaner rode in a simple cart harnessed to a single horse, and the Ruzhiner rode in an ornate carriage harnessed to *four galloping horses*";<sup>43</sup>

(v) "His palace was like a royal palace. A band of twenty-four instrumentalists played regularly before his table; when he went out he traveled in a sprightly carriage harnessed to *six galloping horses*";<sup>44</sup>

(vi) "He traveled with *three carriages* that belonged to him."<sup>45</sup>

So, were there two, three, four, or perhaps six horses? The question is really irrelevant, not merely because the fact is unimportant but because the zaddik's carriage and horses have been divested of any "reality," becoming a symbol, interpretable in either a positive or negative sense. In Haskalah writings, the cart and the carriage are contrasted, the rickety cart being an expression of the original, poverty-stricken Hasidism, the luxurious private carriage an indication of decadence and corruption. The same contrast is featured in hasidic sources. The encounter between the zaddik Meir of Premyshlan, who lived in poverty and traveled in a simple cart pulled by a scrawny horse, and Israel of Ruzhin, who rode in "an ornate carriage," is presented as a unifying meeting of two friends, representing different but equally legitimate trends in Hasidism.

### III. The Sources and Their Nature

Despite Rabbi Israel's undeniably important place in the history of Hasidism, and despite the abundance of reliable material available to the historian, no proper critical biography of him has been written to date. Lacking any systematic summary, the would-be student of the history of the Ruzhin dynasty is forced to depend on inadequate sources, none of which use historical research methods or conform to the standards of academic writing. The most prominent are the previously mentioned books of Even, *Fun'm rebin's boyf*, and Bromberg, *Ha-admor Rabbi Israel Friedman mi-Ruzhin*.<sup>46</sup>

Of the critical scholars who have dealt with various aspects of Rabbi Israel's life, mention must first be made of the pioneering articles of Russian-Jewish scholars, and in particular S. A. Horodezky. Although he has not won the appreciation of scholars of Hasidism, his articles (first in Russian, then in Hebrew) published, for the first time, interesting and important new information, presenting the Ruzhin dynasty as a worthwhile object of research.<sup>47</sup> S. M. Dubnow published the text of the verdict delivered by the Russian military tribunal that tried Rabbi Israel, acquitted him of complicity in murder, and released him from imprisonment.<sup>48</sup> Iulii Gessen also published a brief study, with the texts of interesting documents from the archives of the Russian Ministry of the Interior concerning the circumstances of Rabbi Israel's flight from Russia and his sons' attempts to return there.<sup>49</sup> A most important contribution to the study of nineteenth-century Hasidism was made by Raphael Mahler, who published numerous archival documents relevant to Rabbi Israel's story, mainly about his contacts with Sir Moses Montefiore and the struggle against him conducted by Joseph Perl.<sup>50</sup> Mahler's most important study in this field may be found in his impressive monograph on the protracted controversy between the Zanz hasidim and their supporters, on the one hand, and the Sadgora dynasty, on the other. Although this controversy broke out some twenty years after Rabbi Israel's death, it throws considerable light on him as well.<sup>51</sup> Saul Ginsburg published some brief popular studies of the "Ushits case," in connection with which Rabbi Israel was arrested, and of the episode of his rebellious son Dov of Leova.<sup>52</sup> N. M. Gelber published a few Austrian archival documents relating to the settlement in Sadgora and the negotiations between the governments of Russia and Austria concerning the extradition of the escaped zaddik.<sup>53</sup> Since then, however, no scholar has devoted particular attention to Rabbi Israel and the story of his life.

A special and important branch of "late hasidic studies" is genealogy. In this area, we have at our disposal a rich literature relating to the lineage of zaddikim, their dates of birth and death and the tangled marital bonds link-

ing the most distinguished hasidic families. Most of this literature originated in the hasidic world and drew primarily on oral traditions rather than systematic research. Despite the relative reliability of these traditions, they, too, are sometimes corrupted; there are also occasional contradictions and gaps in the genealogies.<sup>54</sup>

A major source for learning about a person's character is his letters or diaries. Rabbi Israel, who wrote only with difficulty, left no kind of intimate writing—a genre in any case rare in traditional Jewish society. The thirty-eight letters and approbations that he signed (there were surely more, but they have yet to be located)<sup>55</sup> cannot justify the expectations they might have aroused. Although these letters cover a wide chronological range (from the mid 1820s until a month before his death), and although they provide an abundance of historical knowledge regarding his fields of activity and his position, they do not reveal the deeper levels of his personality. The style is not his personal one but that of secretaries and scribes, who received the desired content of the message from the zaddik and wrote the letters themselves; moreover, the contents are generally formal, not transcending the well-known genre of “letters of the zaddikim.”

Despite Rabbi Israel's keen appreciation of the importance of preserving the past,<sup>56</sup> he wrote no books or any other kind of composition, making no efforts to collect and publish his homilies, Torah teachings, tales, and conversations. What we have of his teachings does not add up to a systematic, orderly system, being made up of random remnants, of which it is sometimes doubtful as to whether their author sanctioned their publication.

The first printed volume of homilies (*derushim*) attributed to him, *Irin kadishin*, was published in Warsaw in 1885 by the hasidic author Aaron Walden. It is a fragmentary anthology of homilies, some quite long and sophisticated, arranged in the usual order of hasidic books of homilies: the order of the weekly and festival readings of the Torah. Also included in the book are some teachings of Rabbi Israel's son Abraham Jacob of Sadgora. The material in the book, and in other books of its kind, was presumably taken from the notebooks of hasidim who wrote down the zaddik's talks.<sup>57</sup> The homilies are, therefore, basically authentic, although rewritten by their very nature (since they could not be written down before the evening after the Sabbath or festival and they had to be translated from colloquial Yiddish into written Hebrew).<sup>58</sup> Another indication of their basic authenticity is the dating of many homilies and the fact that one can identify various regular linguistic patterns characteristic of Rabbi Israel's spoken style.<sup>59</sup> It seems rather probable that the publication of *Irin kadishin* (unusually printed without any endorsement, to avoid—it claimed—any semblance of disrespect for the zaddik) was received with reservations by

the Sadgora hasidim.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, several sequels followed the book,<sup>61</sup> and from then on, printed collections of teachings and homilies attributed to Rabbi Israel and his sons began to proliferate. Many of the writers and compilers copied from one another and simply reprinted the same teachings and stories.

One of the most active publishers of Ruzhin Hasidism was Reuben Zak of Ustila (Volhynia), a devoted hasid of David Moses of Chortkov. His book *Kneset Israel* was printed in 1906, and shortly thereafter, he published further valuable anthologies: *Beit Israel* (1913) and *Kerem Israel* (1930). Zak's books generally contain original, valuable, and reliable material, some of it episodes and tales relating to Rabbi Israel, the rest homilies and Torah teachings. Mention should also be made of Solomon Tellingator, a Boian hasid of Jerusalem, who collected important traditions about Rabbi Israel in his books *Even Israel* and *Tiferet Israel* (1945).

One point needs emphasis here. Although the pronouncements attributed to Rabbi Israel and stories told about him were published many years after his death, it is assumed as a rule that the material is basically authentic, although perhaps not as actually worded. There are several justifications for this assumption. First, it is commonly agreed among scholars of oral culture that the written, literary crystallization of oral traditions, particularly hagiographic ones, requires the passage of one or two generations.<sup>62</sup> Second, it is doubtful whether any real need arose to fabricate sayings for a zaddik like Rabbi Israel, who in any case did not excel in the field of Torah. In addition, it is generally not difficult to decide when a given hasidic source is authentic or rewritten. Rabbi Israel's son David Moses, for example, once said that his father phrased his homilies and stories differently each time he delivered them, "for the stories that zaddikim tell are adapted to the needs of that particular time."<sup>63</sup> Thus, variant versions are not always proof of forgery or rewriting; sometimes they may be an indication of authenticity.

An additional factor here is the growing historical awareness among Ruzhin hasidim themselves, in recent years, of the need to record the history of their group and preserve its heritage.<sup>64</sup> As a result, many books have been written and anthologies compiled, letters and documents have been edited, and the work has gone hand in hand with a heightened sensitivity to the importance of authentic material that may help to trace the history of the dynasty.<sup>65</sup>

Data about Rabbi Israel's life, practices, and ideas are scattered throughout all branches of hasidic literature from the nineteenth century to the present day, and not even only in literature of Ruzhin-Sadgora origin. The student of Hasidism is obliged to scan many hundred volumes of hasidic homilies, hagiography, anecdotes, and anthologies in order to get at the



details of his subject. This “internal” hasidic literature on which much of our work must rely is, however, suspect to some degree, because it is uncritical to an extreme. The hasidic storyteller is a kind of all-knowing narrator; he is present at private encounters between zaddikim, at “heart-to-heart” conversations between father and son, man and wife; he participates in the most intimate events; and he is sometimes familiar with his protagonists’ innermost thoughts.

The fact is that not only critical scholars from the world of academe are aware of the limitations of hasidic hagiographic literature and its didactic tendencies. Not a few writers from within the hasidic camp freely admit that not every tradition attributed to some zaddik or rabbi is authentic, and that hasidic literature is replete with forgeries and, even more, errors and inaccuracies. “What is the difference between the stories of the hasidim and the tales of the other great men of Israel?” asks the hero of S. Y. Agnon’s novel *A Guest for the Night*; and he answers, among other things, “sometimes stories are ascribed to them which are already told of our early rabbis. Sometimes the name is the reason, as when an event that happened to the great Rabbi Meir of Tiktin is told of the righteous Rabbi Meir of Przemyśl, and the like.”<sup>66</sup>

David Moses of Chortkov’s response when asked about the different versions of the same stories told by his father reflects the flexible way the zaddik used his homilies and the stories originating among his closest associates, depending on the situation in which the story was told, its audience, and so on. But it was not only the zaddikim who made changes; the hasidim themselves also molded such materials as they saw fit. Hayyim Eleazar Shapira, the learned zaddik of Munkatsh, expressed this succinctly: “A book entitled *Sihot Hayyim* has recently been published. . . . Though this book has been approved by great rabbis, its essence and fate are like that of most of such books of stories and history, most of which are confused and jumbled, mixed with falsehoods and figments of the imagination, not true to facts and not distinguishing between different people.”<sup>67</sup>

This was the case even with the writings of bona fide hasidim like Abraham Hayyim Michelzohn, the son of Zevi Ezekiel, a well-known rabbi and scholar in Plonsk and Warsaw, who wrote numerous books on hasidic figures. In 1912, he published his book *Mekor Hayyim* about Hayyim of Zanz. The book was not well received by Rabbi Hayyim’s descendants, who issued a public protest, claiming that it had been published by ignorant, greedy opportunists and contained lies, inaccuracies, and fabrications; some of the stories, they claimed, had been written solely to arouse laughter and ridicule.<sup>68</sup>

The tendency to suspect stories about zaddikim, while recognizing their “positive” aspect as one of the factors shaping the hasidic experience, was

aptly expressed by the zaddik Isaac of Neskhez. He said that his father, Rabbi Mordekhai, “did not value any stories told as stories about the zaddikim, for many stories are fabricated and mixed with errors, except for the stories told of the Besht, for even if the actual events did not happen exactly that way, it was within the Besht’s power to act in that way.”<sup>69</sup>

Alongside these limitations, a few other considerations must also be taken into account while studying this literary genre.

(i) The golden age of the hasidic anthology, beginning in the 1860s, was overtly and covertly influenced by the folklore renaissance sweeping through Europe at the time. It also became fashionable to publish collections of edited and reworked ethnic folk literature (e.g., the tales of the brothers Grimm). The anthologizing of popular traditions to lay the foundations for a tribal or national ethos (or “experience”) was an integral component in the emergence of modern European nationalism and romanticism, and it naturally had its effect on the Jews as well. Another significant development of the period was the rise of local history, in which contemporary Jewish writers also played a part. There were various manifestations of this trend: tracing the history of a community on the basis of internal and external documents; recording the epitaphs on tombstones; writing biographies of distinguished community leaders and rabbis; and so on. In other words, this was an explicitly modern phenomenon, driven not only by manipulative factors, such as the creation of spurious traditions (whether for religious or economic reasons), but also by political and romantic motives. Local traditions were collected and preserved, sometimes by amateur scholars, to form a firm cultural-historical foundation for a national or group identity.

(ii) The writers, anthologists, or publishers of much of hasidic literature, mainly from the last decades of the nineteenth century onward, regarded their works as “mobilized leisure literature,” that is to say, literature that offered the Orthodox reader a devout alternative to the tremendous quantity of available Haskalah or secular literature and journalism in Hebrew and Yiddish. In Orthodox eyes, the modern literature and journalism then thriving among East European Jews were the major element disseminating secularization in general and undermining hasidic values in particular. The reader to whom hasidic literature was addressed, eager to “protect” family and associates from the temptations and evil influence of the environment, was able to read that literature from this defensive point of view and to decipher its explicit and implicit signs and hints.<sup>70</sup>

(iii) The many compilations of hasidic stories constitute a broad variety of genres and subgenres, each presenting its own methodological problems. One cannot compare the “well-developed hasidic story” from the prolific and highly imaginative school of Michael Frumkin-Rodkinsohn,

Menahem Mendel Bodek, or Aaron Walden<sup>71</sup> to the genre of short episodes and “tales of sages” that constitute the overwhelming bulk of hasidic literature and should as a rule be seen as fairly reliable. But an element of exaggeration and invention may be traced even in stories defined as based on authentic historical foundations. In other words, a single piece of writing, whatever its length, may contain a bewildering mix of facts and interpretations, exaggerations and inventions.

As a consequence, the critical scholar has to make a great effort to sift the material and separate the wheat from the chaff. This is by no means an easy task, for there are as yet no systematic methodological principles for the critical treatment of this literature; and it is, in fact, doubtful whether such principles can be elaborated at all. Perhaps the best approach to such hagiographic sources is not to reject them out of hand as suspect and unworthy of critical attention, but rather to take advantage of them through what we might call a principle of “separation”: in any source that is not *prima facie* unacceptable, there is a core of truth grounded in factual reality, such as names of persons and places, realia, ties of family, study, friendship, and so on. This core may also prove to be corrupt, but sometimes it is only of marginal significance to the story, and in that case, being disinterested, it may well offer reliable witness, making an important contribution to reliable historical reconstruction.<sup>72</sup>

I have tried, therefore, to use only such core material as the basis for the story of Rabbi Israel’s life. In light of the poor state of research in some areas of hasidic history, hagiographic literature is sometimes the only source for the confirmation or evaluation of a thesis. I have therefore used a criterion often reserved for the historian: where there is no good reason to reject them, and details can be corroborated, sources or parts of sources that ring true, in the sense that they fit into a picture, will be considered acceptable; any argument to the contrary must be proved.

In the spirit of Ahad Ha-Am’s classic essay on the “historical” Moses and the “archeological” Moses, I believe that even the most obviously legendary-hagiographic sources, which do not represent objective historical truth and are obviously grounded in imagination and exaggeration, may turn out to be of major significance for the history of Hasidism. They reflect, not only the currents of thought that shaped the story itself, but also the “other truth,” representing the consciousness of the hasidim who consumed it and in its light created an image and mythical likeness of their leader. The hasidic tale, whether oral or written, functioned as a self-fulfilling prophecy, shaping the real world of its readers or hearers, who believed it without question. If the hasidim pictured for themselves a zaddik of the House of David, conducting himself like a ruling monarch, all his efforts directed at fulfilling his messianic mission and restoring the former glory

of Jewish autonomy in the Diaspora, that picture was reflected back, nurturing the regal pretensions of both Rabbi Israel himself and his descendants. If we are to examine the complex of images that has filtered into hasidic heritage over the generations, we must naturally ascribe greater significance to the hasidic story in all its manifestations.

Nevertheless, I have rejected and discarded much more than I have accepted and quoted here. Many hundreds of traditions, anecdotes, tales, hearsay reports, and homilies attributed to or told of Rabbi Israel have left no mark on this study, whether because their potential contribution would have been slight or because they seemed quite clearly to be untrustworthy (exaggerations, anachronisms, with transparent motives, or subject to idealization).

It goes without saying that I could not content myself with the tendentious hasidic sources alone. The extensive memoir literature written by maskilim, although also one-sided and prejudiced, albeit in a different sense, has an important role to play too. Most of this literature was written by former hasidim who had become maskilim, to a greater or lesser degree, who looked back at their past through cruelly critical and sometimes hate-filled lenses. Among the more prominent of these writers were Abraham Ber Gottlober, Moses Orenstein, Israel Taler, and Asher Ginsberg (Ahad Ha-Am).<sup>73</sup> But some of them diluted their critique with a dose of longing, regret, and nostalgia, as did David Isaiah Zilberbusch and Samuel Abba Horodezky. Particularly worthy of mention is the neoromantic writing of Isaac Even, a Sadgora hasid who, although he had had a taste of the modern world, remained within the limits of hasidic Orthodoxy. His memoir *Fun'm rebin's hoyf* is a reliable, picturesque, and abundant source for the history of the Sadgora court, mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century. Because of his open sympathy for his hasidic heritage, one can define his writings as faithful expressions of the Sadgora tradition and its internal world of images.

Valuable material may be found in the work of radical maskilim of Rabbi Israel's time who abhorred him and his methods and even worked actively against him. The most prominent of these was the brilliant satirist Joseph Perl of Tarnopol. Also to be mentioned in this category are Samuel David Luzzatto (*Shadal*), who, although he lived in Italy and his knowledge of Rabbi Israel was confined to rumors, found the latter sufficient to aim some of his sharpest barbs at him; and Isaac Ber Levinsohn of Kremenets, who was probably a distant relative of Rabbi Israel. Another important Haskalah source, the first to describe a few episodes in the lives of Rabbi Israel and his sons at length, is the polemical articles of Alexander Tzederbaum (Erez), the editor of the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-melitz: Keter kehunah* (The Crown of Kingship), which devoted only a few pages to

Rabbi Israel, and *Lo dubim ve-lo ya'ar* (No Bears and No Forest), on the affair of Dov Ber of Leova.

Finally, one cannot avoid mention of the imprint left by the Ruzhiner's life and figure in belles lettres—prose, poetry, and drama—in Hebrew and Yiddish. One cannot really glean historical information from literary works, but nevertheless, the best such works enable us to hear the life pulse and everyday experience of which direct historical sources can tell us little. Whoever wishes to experience the atmosphere of the hasidic court, with its colors and tastes, its combination of sacred and sublime with prosaic and lowly, its everyday events interweaving joy, human warmth, petty quarrels, narrow-mindedness, and intrigues, cannot be content with the perusal of historical documents and homiletical writings. The art of prose and poetry is capable of bearing the reader on the wings of imagination to those far-off regions to which this study seeks to return concrete historical meaning.



P A R T I

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## *The Young Rabbi Israel*

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## *“But I Was Never a Boy”: Accession to Leadership*

### *I. “That Child Understood Everything”: Childhood*

Israel of Ruzhin did not come easily into this world. His mother, Chava, spent her entire pregnancy shut up in her room, with no one to keep her company “save the maids she needed to do her daily work.”<sup>1</sup> All through the New Year festival, she groaned in labor, and on the following evening, October 5, 1796, a baby was born.<sup>2</sup> Later, of course, legends were woven about the birth—how the infant had revealed his sanctity while still in the womb by refusing to emerge before the end of the festival.<sup>3</sup> His mother would later relate that when her son was born, there was not a drop of milk in her breasts, so that a special wet nurse had to be brought, “but [Israel] would by no means suck from her.” Distraught at her son’s suffering, Chava told her husband, Rabbi Shalom Shakhna, who cleverly suggested closing the curtains in the room, so that the child would not be able to see the strange wet nurse and would think her his mother. But the precocious child continued to refuse, agreeing only after three days to take the meager amount of milk that his mother could offer him.<sup>4</sup>

Ruzhin tradition has it that the father, Shalom Shakhna, had first wanted to name the baby Feibish, after his grandfather, but changed his mind just before the circumcision and decided to call him Israel, after Israel Ba’al Shem Tov (the Besht), the founder of Hasidism. Israel later held that his name was significant and by no means a random choice: “What would I have looked like had my name been Feibish?” he would ask.<sup>5</sup> He worked



his name into homilies and abbreviations celebrating his own place in the heroic genealogy of Hasidism. One such intellectual exercise was based on the verse “You went up to the heights, having taken captives” (Pss. 68:19), specifically, on the Hebrew word *shevi* (“captives”): Rabbi Israel interpreted the three letters of this word, *shin*, *bet*, and *yod*, as the initials of the names of four persons who signified the continuity of hasidic tradition: Simeon b. Yochai, Isaac b. Solomon (the Ari), Israel b. Sarah (the Besht), and himself, Israel b. Shalom.<sup>6</sup>

Israel was born in Pohorbishch, a small town on the bank of the Rus river, which belonged to the Berdichev district of Kiev Province.<sup>7</sup> By that time, his father, Shalom Shakhna, was a well-known and highly respected figure among hasidim in the Ukraine. He had an impressive lineage: he was a grandson of the Maggid Dov Ber of Mezhiresh, the most important figure in early Hasidism after the Besht, and son of Abraham *ha-mal'ach* (the “Angel”), one of the most unusual and mysterious figures in Hasidism. In addition, he was married to Chava, granddaughter of Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, a famous zaddik and close companion of the Besht. In a society that considered lineage a prerequisite for leadership, he was a member of a highly respected elite, a kind of “royal family.”<sup>8</sup> The names Shalom Shakhna chose for his three children also bespeak continuity. The eldest, Abraham, was named for Shalom’s father, the “Angel”; the second son, Dov Ber, for his grandfather, the Maggid of Mezhiresh; and the third, Israel, for his spiritual father, the Besht. Israel’s two elder brothers died young, having left no mark in the history of the Ruzhin dynasty, and are all but forgotten.

As a child, Israel was strong-willed, tough, and self-confident. Once, his father, preaching to his hasidim, asked the young Israel for his view on a certain matter then under discussion. The child replied: “Everything has an implement that fits it, that is to say, a prince’s dwelling is beautified with a fine brush, a simple dwelling is cleaned with a broom, and an animal pen with an iron tool called a spade. Now you are beautifying the hasidim with a brush, while they need a spade.”<sup>9</sup>

Even if this tradition is reflective (after all, Israel was only six years old when his father died), it is clearly indicative of the qualities ascribed to the mature Rabbi Israel, who is depicted as a tough leader who treated his hasidim sternly, never hesitating to chastise them. His toughness also comes to light in the following story. In his youth, he was afflicted by a serious skin disease (possibly the reason why, as an adult, he could not grow a beard—a point that puzzled many people). His face was covered with “very terrible lesions and boils and he suffered greatly.” His brother Abraham’s wife, who tried to cure him, once saw the boy holding a piece of metal, heated in a candle, to his afflicted face! According to the hasidic

source of this story, Israel did so to show the evil inclination that it could not scare him through physical pain.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the case may be, the tale portrays a determined person, capable of fearful self-inflicted cruelty. As an orphan, unchecked by discipline, growing up from the age of six in the court of his brother—he, too, relatively young—Israel could do as he wished. Refusing to study regularly, he preferred to roam the fields by day, returning home only at sundown to reassure his concerned mother. He smoked a pipe—a status symbol reserved for zaddikim—even before he was married.<sup>11</sup>

Rabbi Shalom Shakhna passed away on the eve of the Sukkot festival in 1802, leaving Chava a widow with young orphans. Unlike his father and his uncle Israel Hayyim, who had also been orphaned at a young age and had been placed in the custody of other zaddikim, Israel and his brother were entrusted to the protection of their mother, Chava (the eldest brother, Abraham, was already married). What little we know of Israel's childhood is shrouded in hagiographic mist. The story goes that Chava took Israel and his brother Abraham to visit the great zaddikim of the time, and that Jacob Isaac, the "Seer" of Lublin, predicted to her that Israel would surpass his brother;<sup>12</sup> however, this trip to Poland probably never took place. Around 1805, when Israel was "about seven or eight," the mother brought the two brothers to Berdichev, where Shneur Zalman of Lyady, the Angel's friend and admirer, was then staying.<sup>13</sup> The young Israel amazed Shneur Zalman by posing a question of weighty religious import about the recitation of the *Shema*. Shneur Zalman replied in detail and later remarked, "I gave him a methodical, lengthy explanation . . . and that child understood everything."<sup>14</sup> One should remember, however, that hasidic hagiography crowns almost every zaddik with a halo of wisdom and piety, even in childhood, as it were confirming his future talents.<sup>15</sup>

## II. Rabbi Abraham of Pohorbishch

Shalom Shakhna's eldest son, Abraham (ca. 1787–1813),<sup>16</sup> as his father's "natural" heir, became a *yenuka*, that is, a child officiating as a zaddik, perhaps the first in the history of Hasidism.<sup>17</sup> His accession to the zaddik's throne was surprising in the extreme. As a youngster in Pohorbishch, Abraham was considered a peculiar, undisciplined boy. His uncle, Aryeh Leib Wertheim of Bendery, remembered that "in his youth he was a mischievous boy; he could hardly be considered human . . . he was not a worthy person. So much so that it was considered a disgrace that my brother-in-law Rabbi Shalom had such a son." Aryeh Leib admitted openly that he, too, had detested the youth, "because of the shame I felt for his deceitful behavior. . . . Later I heard, after the passing of my brother-in-law Rabbi

Shalom, that his son Rabbi Abraham was seated on his father's throne and was leading the community and his name was renowned far and wide, and I wondered greatly, how could a person like him become the shepherd of a holy flock."<sup>18</sup>

Abraham's accession to his father's throne at the age of about fifteen was certainly dramatic. As we have seen, his father died on the eve of Sukkot in 1802; "and lo, on the eve of the first night of that Sukkot, his son Rabbi Abraham, of blessed memory, entered the *sukkah* and sat on his father's chair and began to rule in his father's place." After making sure that Israel, his younger brother, then six years old, was at his side in the *sukkah* when he announced his assumption of leadership, Abraham proceeded immediately to obtain his mother's blessing. Needless to say, his mother was dumbfounded at her son's joyful behavior so soon after his father's death. Even though the prescribed seven-day period of mourning (the *shiv'ah*) had been annulled by the festival, in accordance with Jewish law, she nevertheless felt, "What place is there for such joy? Even an ordinary person, who had an ordinary father, would not be so joyful after his father's passing."<sup>19</sup>

Shalom Shakhna had died young and presumably had had no chance to nominate an heir during his lifetime. Although it was agreed among hasidic groups that the heir should be picked from the genetic stock of the deceased leader's family, the formal machinery that dictated such agreement had not yet been established. Abraham's behavior was presumably due to an urgent need for legitimization, and he therefore rushed to secure his family's unanimous agreement to impress his father's leaderless followers. This cynical behavior, unprecedented in the existing social structures of Hasidism, predictably met with opposition. We know of at least one of Shalom's "greatest hasidim" who "in his heart opposed the zaddik Rabbi Abraham who had taken greatness upon himself very soon after his father's passing and without the agreement of the great zaddikim of the era then living, while he was still quite young."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this episode should be viewed in a broader context, as reflecting the uncertainty typical of a social movement that still lacked fixed patterns of succession. The protest reflects the view that some time should be allowed to elapse between the death of one leader and the accession of another. The time could be devoted to internal consultations among the hasidim, so as to seek a fitting successor and secure recommendations from the reigning zaddikim of the time. Assuming authority while the deceased's body was still awaiting burial betokened arrogance and a lust for power; it was intolerable. In addition, it was inconceivable that an inexperienced, immature youngster should lead an adult community. We may assume that this hasid, who went off "to

find himself another zaddik in whose shadow to shelter," was not alone.<sup>21</sup>

Little is known of Abraham's leadership.<sup>22</sup> Like his father—and later also his brother—he liked to spice his talk with stories and parables. Practically nothing has survived of his talk or his teachings.<sup>23</sup> Little Israel, orphaned at six, grew up in the court of his newly great brother.<sup>24</sup> Abraham was very fond of his younger brother; even promising that anyone able to cure him from his terrible skin ailment would be granted a place in the World to Come.<sup>25</sup> A Jewish woman of Pohorbishch, accused of licentious behavior, denounced Abraham to the owner of the city, who had him arrested, but he was released quite soon.<sup>26</sup> Abraham died in February 1813 and was buried beside his father in Pohorbishch. He died childless, and Israel had to release his brother's widow from the levirate tie through the *halizah* ceremony.<sup>27</sup>

Israel had another brother and a sister: Dov Ber, born between Abraham and Israel and named for his great-grandfather; and Chana Ita, born after Israel. Both of them are even less well known than their elder brother, and as far as we know they had no influence whatever on Israel's life.<sup>28</sup>

Rabbi Israel was thus orphaned at an early age, followed by a brief "apprenticeship" at the court of his elder brother, the yenuka, whose accession to the leadership of the Pohorbishch hasidim was apparently marred by discord.

### III. "I Myself Have No Time to Study": Adolescence

In 1803, some time after young Israel had lost his father, his mother betrothed him to Sarah, daughter of Moses Halevi Efrati of Berdichev, a wealthy scholar known as "the head of the yeshiva." Moses' father, Eliezer, was a well-known yeshiva principal in Pinsk who traced his descent back to Moses Isserles (the Rema).<sup>29</sup> Hasidic tradition tells us that when the young groom and his mother came to Berdichev, the largest and most important city in Volhynia, to sign the terms of the betrothal (*tena'im*), they received an exceptional reception. All the children of the city's elementary schools (*heder*), exempted from their studies, flocked onto the main street. As told by a late source, "the pupils stood on either side of the road for a stretch of half a kilometer, while the coach bringing the groom passed through between them. Klezmers played their instruments, and there was no one in the city, large or small, who did not come out to greet the groom."<sup>30</sup> Some sources report that the reception was organized on the instructions of Moses, the "head of the yeshiva," Israel's prospective father-in-law; others held that the person responsible was none other than the renowned zaddik Levi Isaac of Berdichev, who was related to the bride's father.<sup>31</sup> Years later,

looking back at his life in the midst of adversity, Rabbi Israel confessed that only once in his life had he fallen into the sin of pride and presumption—on that occasion in Berdichev.<sup>32</sup>

Levi Isaac, one of the oldest living zaddikim and the central figure of Ukrainian Hasidism, took part in the tena'im ceremony and congratulated Israel and his fiancée. The old man laid his hands on the youth's head with such devotion, as if ordaining a rabbi, that Israel, who "was extremely fastidious . . . felt that if he [Levi Isaac] held his hands much longer on his head, he would no longer be able to bear it." As far as the hasidim were concerned, Levi Isaac's blessing was construed literally as the ordination of a leader, and Israel never forgot the blessing he received from the zaddik, who was now his relative. He used to say that the mere mention of the name of the rabbi of Berdichev was in itself "a guarantee that judgment would be mitigated and mercy be urged for the people of Israel."<sup>33</sup>

The child and his mother returned home to Pohorbishch, and six years later, in 1809, when Israel was about thirteen, the wedding was held in Botosani, northern Moldavia, where the bride's father had been appointed head of the rabbinical court.<sup>34</sup> Shortly after the wedding, Israel returned to the court at Pohorbishch. On August 21, 1809, "the precious and wondrous young man, the esteemed Master Rabbi Israel," gave his bride "Mistress Sarah, daughter of the rabbinical person, the rich and wondrous person . . . Moses Halevi," a deed guaranteeing the bride the requisite "increment" over and above the basic sum of money promised her should her husband die or divorce her. Two of the most respected members of the Pohorbishch community signed the contract, from which we may estimate the extent of the wealthy young couple's assets. Passing over the usual descriptions of clothing and jewelry ("whether of silver or of gold or of precious stones and pearls"), we learn from this deed that Israel increased the value of his wife's *ketubbah* by 1,548 rubles—a considerable sum at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup>

After the wedding, according to hagiographic tradition, Israel lived apart from his wife for a few years, and only the intervention of the zaddik Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta—on the urgent request of Israel's mother, who feared that the line of the Maggid of Mezhirech would die out—brought the young man back to normal life.<sup>36</sup> This tradition is puzzling, as Israel's eldest son, Shalom Joseph, was born in 1813, so that Israel must have begun to fulfill his conjugal duties, at the very latest, when only fifteen years old.

Israel ascended the throne of his brother Abraham when he was at most sixteen years of age. The event was noted in 1816 by the maskil Joseph Perl, who deplored the idea that a fledgling of fifteen, "Sohn des Rebei Schulimke Pohorobiszczzer," was heading a band of hasidim. It was, he

believed, a perfect example of the hasidim's reprehensible custom of basing their choice of leaders on the dynastic principle, so that even minors could inherit leadership from their fathers; real leaders, he thought, should be picked on the basis of rational criteria, according to their talents.<sup>37</sup> Around 1820, Perl again offered the same criticism, referring again, most probably, to Rabbi Israel: "Their arrogance is so great that some of them keep musicians and singers with instruments before the one who was accepted as rabbi when he was fifteen years of age, and now he is twenty-two."<sup>38</sup>

It was not only the new leader's youth that annoyed his opponents and amazed his supporters, but also his intellectual immaturity and lack of education. He was so young, taunted a contemporary, the maskil Abraham Ber Gottlober, "that he had not even had time to learn the art of writing like an ordinary person in Yiddish script and with great difficulty signed his name and his father's name 'Israel son of Shalom,' but in his later days he made a great step forward and was able to sign 'Israel son of our teacher the Rabbi Shalom.'"<sup>39</sup> One of his descendants described the same embarrassing situation in somewhat more charitable terms: "Rabbi Abraham did not live long, and his younger brother [Israel] sat on his father's throne when still quite young. Well, he had had only a few years to complete his studies, for afterwards, when he was seated on his father's throne, thousands of Jews pursued him with material and spiritual requests and most of his time was given over to them."<sup>40</sup>

Israel's difficulties in reading and writing made him easy prey for the maskilim, who ridiculed him as an illiterate who, despite his obvious ignorance, was able to lead a large number of stupid devotees.<sup>41</sup> This was, they claimed, yet another demonstration of the irrational foundations of hasidic leadership: uneducated youngsters, devoid of any maturity or responsibility, could determine the fate and behavior of masses of hasidim, who adulated them uncritically, entrusting them with their material possessions. The maskilim set great store by the ability to express oneself, whether orally or in writing, and advocated learning foreign languages (especially the local vernacular), grammar, and calligraphy.<sup>42</sup> Far from encouraging such values as intelligence and education, they believed, the zaddikim's bad personal examples militated against them. However, although it is clear that Israel wrote with some difficulty, it should be emphasized that nothing can be learned from these complaints by Gottlober and other maskilim. The fact that Israel's letters were written by scribes and only signed by him means absolutely nothing, because that was what almost all the zaddikim did, including Israel's sons. They dictated their letters to special scribes at their courts—or told them in general terms what should be written—and themselves merely signed their names.<sup>43</sup> Even literate Polish nobles employed scribes, as well, whose task was to formulate their master's

instructions and letters, while he himself only signed to confirm the letter's authenticity.<sup>44</sup>

However, even unbiased reports mention Israel's writing difficulties, which extended even to signing his own name. We read in a hasidic source, which is surely not hostile: "It is known that the holy rabbi of Ruzhin, of blessed memory, was almost unable to write the shape of the letters, and he once said that the reason was: One learns to write when one is a boy, but I was never a boy."<sup>45</sup>

No adequate explanation for this unusual phenomenon suggests itself. The most logical conjecture would be that Israel suffered from some learning disability, whose symptoms seem to coincide with a diagnosis of dyslexia. This disorder, which may manifest itself in all aspects of language—reading, writing, and spelling—is usually defined as a difficulty in learning to read or write coherently and occurs unexpectedly at all levels of intelligence and in all socioeconomic groups; it is not due to any visible mental, physical, or sense-linked disorder, and dyslexics do not fail in other fields of study. Although they have to expend tremendous efforts whenever required to read or write, they have no difficulty expressing themselves, their memories are quite normal, and their vocabularies are unimpaired. The dyslexic's main problems lie in an inability to translate visual codes (such as letters) into verbal ones, in shaping letters graphically, in spelling, in grasping the continuous transition from letters to words, and in remembering the patterns of words. As we have no hint that Israel had any neurological or motor difficulties in writing, we must assume that his disability was primarily phonological (inability to identify or combine letters, etc.). One should also note in this context the well-known ability of dyslexics to camouflage their disability through learning by heart, improvising, and the like. Clearly, the more dyslexics persist in concealing their difficulties, the more difficult it is for them to overcome them and learn to read and write properly.<sup>46</sup> In the modern world, dyslexia is discovered fairly quickly, because people's lives are organized along certain formally determined lines (school, job applications, etc.) and one's literacy is under constant view. That was not the case in the social milieu of the families of *zadikim* in the first half of the nineteenth century, and everyday life did not necessarily put their reading and writing abilities to the test. Because of Israel's anomalous educational opportunities (no teachers, no schools), his natural intelligence, and the technical aids at his disposal (scribes and servants who wrote everything for him), his difficulties were not revealed—perhaps they were in fact kept concealed—and he was able to function normally as a leader.

Even Israel's followers could not ignore his lack of formal education, which, of course, affected his religious erudition. Hasidic hagiography

acclaims his wisdom and knowledge of Torah, but it also betrays some perplexity and an obvious need to explain away his meager formal education in that field. "It was said of him that he never forgot anything of all that he had learned when [God's] lamp shone over his head"<sup>47</sup>—in other words: he had never forgotten the Torah that, as told in the midrash, an angel teaches every child in the womb before birth—unlike normal children, who are made to forget everything upon emerging into the light of day.

Unlike other boys and youths of similar age and position, who were sent away from home to spend several years in the courts of famous zaddikim, or were at least educated in the home of their father the zaddik and under his supervision, neither Israel nor his brother had traveled to any important contemporary hasidic center in Volhynia, Galicia, or Poland. Their mother preferred to keep them in their native Ukraine, not exposing them to the teachings of other zaddikim. At most, they paid brief visits to great luminaries of Hasidism to receive blessings—but not to learn from them. Their mother by no means neglected their education, however. As usual in the homes of wealthy and distinguished persons eager to give their children better education than was possible in the heder environment shared by all children of the community, Israel and his brother Abraham studied with specially hired private tutors. A special *melamed* took the six-year old Israel to synagogue each day to make sure he recited the orphan's kaddish. But Sashkele, as Israel was called as a child,<sup>48</sup> was not particularly interested in studying, preferring to roam the fields. Despairing of ever disciplining his wayward pupil, the melamed asked his elder brother, the yenuka Abraham, who was already a zaddik, to chide him about his behavior. Abraham called for his brother, and a strange scene followed, which left the melamed gaping. Abraham spoke briefly with his brother, placed his hand on the table, bent down his head, and drowsed a little,<sup>49</sup> while little Sashke simply looked out of the window. A tense silence filled the room, and then Abraham told the melamed:

You have earned great merit by being a melamed for myself and for my brother, the saintly boy, for otherwise you would have been banished from both worlds, because you have spoken words against the Supreme One. For know that with us, when a son is born, he has to be taught only the shapes of the twenty-two [Hebrew] letters, the rest being taught him from Heaven. How has your mouth emboldened you to utter such things about my little brother Israel, that he does not wish to learn?!<sup>50</sup>

Whatever the reasons, it is clear—and on this point there is agreement between hasidic tradition and criticism expressed by maskilim, each offering its own explanations—that Israel did not receive a full, regular education, not even to the extent customary among children of zaddikim who,



like him, were destined to lead hasidic communities when they grew up. This is quite obvious not only in the reports of his writing disability but also in his teachings, which did not demonstrate a proper grounding in Halakhah or a familiarity with talmudic or rabbinic literature. As usual among his contemporaries, his sermons, too, quote and interpret various sources from midrashic, ethical, and kabbalistic literatures, but all the quotations stem from the popular, classical works of literature that were on the bookshelf of almost any reasonably educated Eastern European Jew at the time. Nevertheless, as we shall see later, his sayings do reveal a certain intellectual flare, and his creative abilities and originality, though undoubtedly affected by his flawed educational background, were not entirely suppressed, largely thanks to his acuity and natural intelligence.<sup>51</sup>

Israel's near-illiteracy has been recounted in many sources. Surprisingly, he himself did not conceal it, indeed made no attempt to do so. For him, it was no disadvantage but in fact the very opposite, for only a zaddik like himself could put it to good use: "I can live one hundred years on a desert island without a single book and worship the Lord God without a minute's interruption."<sup>52</sup> The following tale provides another example. Several of Israel's hasidim use to sit in the *kloiz* in his court studying the Talmud and halakhic literature. Israel would take part when they celebrated the completion of an entire tractate of the Talmud, and the learners, who had decided what tractate each would learn for the next study cycle, wished to honor their leader, requesting that he too choose a tractate. He gave an evasive answer: "I myself have no time to study. . . . Believe me, if I wanted to discover new interpretations of the Torah, I could do so like the sages. That is, because I have a good memory, so that if I studied I would remember. But what shall I do? For I do not want to cease for even one minute from communion with the Holy One, Blessed be He."<sup>53</sup>

Although trying at least to give the impression that he possessed an unrealized mastery of Torah ("I could discover new interpretations"), Rabbi Israel proposed an alternative value to the traditional study of Torah: constant communion with God (Hebrew *devekut*). What he envisaged was a kind of primeval, "primitive" communion, not requiring the cognitive-intellectual foundation provided by books; such a level could be reached only by a zaddik like himself. That is to say, he did not neglect his studies because of laziness, inability, or lack of talent, but out of deliberate reluctance, motivated by different priorities. "What do you think?" he once asked, "that the zaddikim cannot learn Torah?" And he answered: "What is Torah? It teaches one how to worship the blessed Lord. And casuistry [Hebrew *pilpul*] in the Torah is merely its outer clothing. Whosoever grasps the King and communes with Him, grasps His clothes too."<sup>54</sup> The proper relationship between the intellectual dimension characteristic of

Torah study and the ecstatic dimension of communion with God was a question that had plagued Hasidism from its very beginnings.<sup>55</sup> Israel did not follow the teaching of the Besht and other hasidic leaders that one could also achieve communion through studying the Torah for its own sake. He held *devekut* and Torah study to be equivalent religious values, interchangeable and therefore competing, as it were, for the zaddik's time and attention. It was up to the zaddik himself to decide which to stress, and Israel chose *devekut*.<sup>56</sup>

#### IV. The Power of Inferiority

The young zaddik's star was rising in the heavens of Ukrainian Hasidism; as far as one can determine, his fame as a leader was spreading rapidly. Many of the reports highlight his tender age, because he was young even by hasidic standards. "One cannot achieve true knowledge until one reaches one's fortieth year," said Jacob Isaac, the "Seer" of Lublin, "but in the land of Ukraine there is a young man, very young, who already possesses knowledge of the truth."<sup>57</sup> The "Seer," the most important zaddik then living in Poland, did not know much about Israel; he had heard no more than fragmentary information.<sup>58</sup> Jacob Isaac died in 1815, so Israel could not have been more than eighteen years of age, and had been a zaddik for two years, when the "Seer" made the above statement (if it was indeed made by him and not attributed to him in later years). Abraham Joshua of Apta, the oldest zaddik of that generation, who lived in Mezhibozh as an old man, greatly admired the young zaddik. The two were personally acquainted (Abraham Joshua died in 1825, when Israel was twenty-eight), and whenever they met—which was fairly often—the old zaddik took pains to make his admiration known and defend Israel against his detractors. Here is a typical story:

When the zaddik of Apta, of blessed memory, paid tribute to the rebbe of Ruzhin, of blessed memory, when the latter was still quite young, it made others wonder. But he replied that it was written in the midrash. . . . "In the future everyone will be amazed at those who have heard the Holy One, Blessed be He, and say: How is he thus, so-and-so who sat and has never learned all his life, nor read, and behold, he is seated with the Patriarchs and conversing with them? And the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them: Why are you amazed? These persons have been privileged to do so only because they obeyed Me during their lives."<sup>59</sup> And he grasped his beard and said: I swear by my beard that the midrash had him [Rabbi Israel] in mind.<sup>60</sup>

Israel himself helped in no small degree to cultivate this image of himself as homely and ignorant, but he did so in an enigmatic, cryptic manner,

so that his very inferiority could be explained as an admirable trait. He would often tell his hasidim, “Ikh bin grobyan,” which was as much as to say: I am a coarse, homely, shallow, and uneducated person. What have I to do with all this? Similarly, when queried about his unwillingness to immigrate to Palestine, he is reported to have said: “I am homely and coarse. What have I to do with the Land of Israel?”<sup>61</sup> Such utterances are so audacious that one cannot imagine Israel’s hasidim inventing them, and they are presumably quite authentic.

Joseph of Radvill, grandson of the Maggid Michel of Zlochev and an enthusiastic devotee of Rabbi Israel, reported a similar statement. It too brings out the “primitive,” anti-spiritual image that Israel wove around himself, the image of a person well versed in earthly matters and therefore capable of “restoring” them:

For he said of himself, in these words, “Ikh bin a grobyan.” And he himself interpreted his holy words, saying that, just as people refer to a person engaging in some trade according to his trade—for example, a person who mills [flour] is called a miller, and a person who works in tin is called a tinsmith, and so on—so I too am engaged in earthly things, to elevate them to their source, therefore am I called a *grobyan*.<sup>62</sup>

The zaddik’s readiness to work for the “correction” or “perfection” (Hebrew *tikkun*) of earthly things exemplifies his readiness to step down from his elevated level. However, Israel’s descent from his level was not designed to perfect human sinners but to achieve restitution of the lower, physical elements of life in the earthly world. It was not to be compared to the Sabbatian “descent,” which was a means for the “correction” of sin, for such earthly matters as eating and drinking, material possessions, creature comforts, and so on, are not usually defined as sin in religious thought, whatever the period. At most, they are considered of no religious value in themselves, except insofar as they are indispensable for human life; they are therefore permitted, but only to the degree that they benefit spiritual values (eat so as to have strength to worship, etc.). In Israel’s case, however, as we shall see later, “worship in corporeality” became the preferred approach to worship, possessing religious value of its own. One might say, then, that Israel knew how to convert his own personal inclination toward physical, earthly life into a powerful lever, to achieve great heights through his very self-presentation as a *grobyan*, thoroughly immersed in the physical world and capable of its correction.

A later, more mature expression of this dialectical awareness may be found in a declaration made by Israel before the ritual search for *hamez* (leaven) on the eve of the Passover festival. Standing beside “his silver box in which his money was kept,” he began to list the parts of the Messiah’s

body, which he identified, in a corporative-organic spirit, with the spiritual essence common to the various zaddikim of his time. Reaching himself in the list, he said:

And what am I? A clumsy, coarse youth. An inanimate stone. A stone. The jewel in the crown. Suffering and persecution were also experienced by the Patriarch Jacob and by King David, but because of the suffering and persecution that I have experienced I have nothing to be ashamed of even before the Patriarchs. When the Messiah comes, I shall throw a feast for all the Jews, in particular for my own people, and then I shall place all the money on the table and shall reap benefit from the money, and the money will reap benefit from me, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, will reap benefit from both of us.<sup>63</sup>

The coarse, inanimate stone, simple and at first sight worthless, is really "the jewel in the crown." The real worth of the zaddik, who seems outwardly coarse and rude, intent on amassing riches and property, will come to light only when the Messiah comes. The advent of the Messiah will produce a marvelous three-way unity involving money, as the material expression of physical life; God, as the expression of spiritual life in the messianic era; and the zaddik, Rabbi Israel, mediating between the two worlds.

In fact, in all aspects of life Israel espoused an outlook that we might define as "the power of inferiority"; namely, the fact that he and his generation were inferior in practically everything to previous generations (in keeping with the saying of the Sages, "If the first generations are like angels, we are like human beings") could not be disregarded or denied. However, that inferiority was not to be perceived in a negative light; on the contrary, it signified a strength that was lacking in other zaddikim. Israel's perception of the advantage in his uneducated status is graphically expressed in the following statement attributed to him:

My beloved, do you know what I fear? . . . I, with my Torah, do not fear even the messianic king. It is said that when the righteous Messiah comes he will reveal a new Torah. . . . Heaven forbid!—it is one of the Thirteen Principles that there will never be a new Torah. But our righteous Messiah will reveal and discover such new interpretations that all the new interpretations of the great Torah scholars will be as naught, and the Messiah will show that they understood nothing. Therefore it will seem to them to be a new Torah. . . . But I, with my Torah, will not be as naught even before the Messiah. Do you know why? Because I received my Torah from no one. When my father departed this world, I was a child and I had no rabbi, but I received my Torah from the very Source of Life, and Torah that is received from the Source of Life—even the Messiah can reveal nothing new in it.<sup>64</sup>

This remarkable statement constitutes a different legitimization of the uneducated zaddik, founded on the idea that charisma and communion with God are equal, perhaps even superior, to scholarship as preconditions

for spiritual leadership. Taking that idea to its extreme, Israel seems to be saying that although his unique upbringing kept him from receiving a normal education (“I had no rabbi”), that in no way affected his special position as zaddik. On the contrary, it enabled him, as it were, to draw his wisdom and his learning informally, directly, from God Himself (“the very Source of Life”). No one since Moses had achieved this level, receiving the Torah through revelation, and it was this unique quality that invested Israel’s teachings with everlasting value—even in the messianic era, although the world order would change and all the teachings of those considered as “great in Torah” would disappear, Israel’s Torah would persist.

### *V. Conclusion*

Was the pattern of leadership represented by Israel of Ruzhin an exception in Hasidism?

Joseph Weiss has aptly defined the leadership of the hasidic zaddik as a charismatic leader, not necessarily possessing intellectual excellence:

The zaddikim of Hasidism, the bearers of the new religiosity, are charismatic figures. The zaddik, by definition, does not have to be proficient in Torah. A knowledge of Torah is a personal asset and many *admorim* professed such knowledge, but the zaddik’s overriding concern was not to know or even to excel in Torah; intellectual prowess indeed enhanced his charismatic qualities, but it did not create them.<sup>65</sup>

Jacob Katz writes in a similar vein:

The movement’s central figures acquired their status as leaders on the basis of new criteria that were diametrically opposed to those by which traditional Jewish society had picked its leaders up to then. Halakhic erudition was no longer an essential qualification for leadership. Of course, Hasidism never denied the value of Torah study; it could not, since it had not rejected the halakhic basis of Judaism. And, of course, it was advantageous for a hasidic leader to add great scholarship to the list of his other qualities. . . . Nevertheless, it is clear that halakhic erudition was not one of the basic marks of the hasidic leader. The primary and ultimate prerequisite for leadership was an individual’s ability to achieve communion with God and ecstatic contact with the divine sphere. This was a personal talent that could not be acquired through rational study.<sup>66</sup>

These definitions are wholly appropriate for the case of Israel of Ruzhin: his leadership, too, did not derive from scholarly ability, as was the norm in traditional society, and it did not need the legitimization of scholarship. Its power and authority came from distinguished lineage, personal charisma, irrepressible self-confidence, and the many hundred hasidim who confirmed his position by their adulation. The hasidim, who flocked to his court out of free choice, not out of institutional coercion, were attracted to

the spontaneity and charismatic element in his personality—the very element that effectively compensated for his lack of "Torah" and his scholarly shortcomings.

But these and other similar observations<sup>67</sup> need some amplification. It is true that a revolution in leadership patterns enabled such charismatic figures as the Besht and Israel of Ruzhin, despite their deficient erudition in the traditional sense, successfully to assume leadership. The Besht, however, compensated for his lack of learning by the mystical part of his personality and the magical practices that gained him fame as a *ba'al shem*. There was no such compensation in Israel of Ruzhin, a charismatic leader who was neither scholar nor mystic. One should not think, however, that Israel (or other, similar, *zaddikim*) expressed through his leadership any deprecation of the traditional value of Torah study. On the contrary, throughout the nineteenth century, it was still a universal axiom in all sectors of traditional Jewish society in Eastern Europe—including hasidim and their leaders, the *zaddikim*—that the supreme criterion of achievement was, as always, scholarly ability. It did indeed occur in Hasidism, particularly in the later generations, that the dynastic element outweighed all others, so that the validity of the Torah-study criterion might be weakened temporarily. In general, however, the basic pattern of the social hierarchy was molded by that criterion alone. Even from Israel's personal viewpoint, the precept of Torah study was still the main experience that shaped the Jewish "agenda," although it had lost its exclusiveness as the basic trait of hasidic leadership.

The new Hasidism of the Besht and his disciples had begun to broadcast its message at a time of profound crisis in traditional Torah learning; Hasidism was not the cause of the crisis but, to a considerable degree, its outcome. The collapse of the scholarly ethos had its institutional and economic manifestations: the old, traditional institutions of learning, such as the community *yeshiva*, were in decline, giving way to institutions that were disseminating a new, semi-formal kind of Torah knowledge, such as the hasidic *beit midrash*, or community study societies. The crisis also manifested itself in the religious and intellectual field: Torah scholars lost some of their social prestige and status; study techniques (mainly the casuistic method of *pilpul*) were criticized; and there was a feeling that, in view of "the dryness and unfruitfulness of rabbinical studies"<sup>68</sup>—as the contemporary Jewish philosopher Solomon Maimon described the background to the emergence of Hasidism—the obligation to study the Torah should be extended to new fields of knowledge and new study techniques.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, despite this unrest, the learning experience (whatever its substance: Talmud and religious-legal works, or Hasidism, Kabbalah, and ethics), still topped the accepted scale of values in all strata of traditional society, although the responses of those strata to the crisis took very different forms.

The hasidic community, then, also continued to cultivate Torah study as a central value. Of course, one could always ask, "Where in all the Torah do we find that it is a commandment to be a great, astute scholar? One is only required to observe the precept, 'You shall meditate upon it day and night' and never cease from words of Torah." Nevertheless, the ideal was, as always, "to be counted among those who learn Torah, to know the proper thing to do, for an ignorant person cannot be pious."<sup>70</sup> Hasidism, as a movement of religious revival, although socially revolutionary, was quite conservative in its attitude to observance of the commandments and the Torah-learning experience.<sup>71</sup> Many zaddikim, including Israel of Ruzhin, considered it a privilege to receive talmudic or halakhic scholars in their courts. Hasidic families still considered a learned groom a desirable match for their daughters and a model to be emulated and admired. The process of "Orthodoxization"<sup>72</sup> that characterized nineteenth-century Hasidism, mainly in the courts of Poland and Galicia, was also expressed in a return to the values of the "old" scholarship (for example, in the Pshishkha dynasty and its offshoots) and an increase in the prestige of more learned zaddikim who, besides leading their flocks, would also issue halakhic rulings (such as Hayyim Halberstam of Zanz, Isaac Meir of Gur, and Abraham of Sochachev). From the beginning of the twentieth century, it was also obvious in the formation of hasidic *yeshivot* in practically every court,<sup>73</sup> under the influence of the supracommunal yeshivot of Lithuania, and the courts of Ruzhin-Sadgora were no exception.

The salient point in the case of Israel of Ruzhin is, perhaps, his embodiment of the new leadership model that Hasidism made possible. This new kind of leader, although not himself a scholar and quite at peace with that fact, did not challenge—or even belittle—the overriding contribution of the traditional world of Torah study to the shaping of the hasidic experience in general. Despite Israel's carefully cultivated anti-intellectual image—that of a person who had no need of books, because he had received his inspiration and Torah directly from God—his various expressed thoughts and leadership were characterized by creative elements of logic, imagination, and emotion, which could be neither ignored nor dismissed. Nevertheless, the fact that he never wrote troubled his hasidim. It was necessary, therefore, to resolve the apparent contradiction between the undisputed conviction and consciousness of his greatness, on the one hand, and the "classical" image of the leader as a scholar, on the other. This was done in two, mutually complementary ways: a whole set of explanations was devised for the fact that Israel had no need of learning, as his greatness was inherent; and considerable efforts were made to collect and record any ideas, sayings, tales, and homilies that could prove his possession not only of greatness but also of Torah.<sup>74</sup>



## *“The Main Thing Is One’s Own Distinction”: The Argument over Succession*

### *I. Hereditary Leadership and Schism in Nineteenth-Century Hasidism*

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, as Hasidism gained ground and could count on a broad base of families whose allegiance to the movement had been handed down to the second or third generation, one of the major social issues that demanded attention was the question of the “sons of zaddikim” and the significance of ancestral lineage. Israel of Ruzhin’s assumption of leadership should be viewed in the context of that issue.

By this time, the pattern of hasidic leadership and succession was fundamentally different from what it had been in the early days of the movement. During the formative years of Hasidism, accession to leadership could take one of several different forms, which were essentially variations on a small number of basic themes. At the earliest stage, a charismatic leader might appear suddenly, unexpectedly transformed from anonymity, from an individualistic life of “concealment” (Hebrew *hester*), during which he had to suppress his secret message and his unique powers, to “revelation” (Hebrew *hitgalut*) and public exposure, by dint of which people recognized his qualities—the most typical example is, of course, the Besht, the founder of Hasidism.<sup>1</sup> Another pattern, typical of the second generation of leaders—the Maggid of Mezhibezh and his disciples—was basically intellectual and gradual: certain disciples of a “reigning” leader



stood out as clearly superior to their contemporaries in talent, maturity, and ability; consequently, they were accepted, whether by their own initiative or that of their admirers, as communal leaders (examples are Shneur Zalman of Lyady, Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, and the “Seer” of Lublin). We may presume that there was no real difference in historical reality between the pattern of sudden revelation, which was largely a literary-mythical invention, and the pattern of gradual assumption of leadership. In any case, “revelation” was no longer characteristic of hasidic leaders of the nineteenth century,<sup>2</sup> having become in the main a romantic myth aiming to explain the exposure of zaddikim who were supposed to be concealed.<sup>3</sup>

There are almost no instances in early nineteenth-century Ukrainian Hasidism of a leader being “revealed” unexpectedly, whether by virtue of charisma, magical knowledge, mystical vision, or “suppressed prophecy,” or by virtue of scholarly and intellectual talents.<sup>4</sup> From now on, accession to the zaddik’s throne would take place in a natural, moderate, predictable manner, for it was based on fixed, established criteria—as in any organization with a bureaucratic apparatus created to perpetuate its own existence. From now on, the zaddik’s family was almost the exclusive environment for the growth of future leaders.<sup>5</sup> The major factors in the assumption of leadership were now ancestral lineage, appropriate age, and a degree of spiritual maturity in the person closest to the previous leader. In time, these criteria became the main factors that conditioned the process of choosing a new leader and maintaining the cohesiveness of the community in its previous traditional frameworks.

The change was not confined to the leaders—the followers who gathered around the zaddikim were no longer tightly knit, elitist groups of old-style pietists and kabbalists struggling for legitimization. Nineteenth-century Ukrainian Hasidism was a victorious movement, peopled by Jews from various walks of life, whom it bound together with ties of tradition, social cohesion, and economic dependence. One’s feelings for the zaddik were based, not only on devotion to a venerated teacher and emulation of his behavior, but, primarily, on the “hasidic experience”: the ethos and lifestyle that the hasid absorbed from his parents, relatives, neighbors, or companions. In Podolia and Volhynia, the cradle of Hasidism, the hasidic courts and the “famous”<sup>6</sup> zaddikim who headed them became a kind of religious-social-economic “order,” whose members included large portions of the Jewish population, sometimes even whole communities. The “rules” for being admitted to this order—or for leaving it—and its modes of operation and development were flexible and nonuniform, and the different hasidic communities were highly diversified. The leadership, however, was invariably based on genetic inheritance, being entrusted exclusively to

members of certain selected families of distinguished lineage, who married among themselves.

This phenomenon was not entirely foreign to Jewish history. The "secular" leadership of Jewish communal organization had always been based on a small oligarchy of rich, well-born families, which handed down the leadership roles from generation to generation.<sup>7</sup> Even in the realm of the professional rabbinate (rabbis and rabbinical judges) and religious functionaries (*shohatim*, *mohalim*, cantors), genetic heirs were frequently preferred over other candidates (provided they possessed a modicum of professional ability); this preference was in fact supported on halakhic grounds.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, these privileges of the genetic heirs were by no means exclusive, and individuals of other origins could always reach even the highest levels of leadership on the sole basis of personal talent.

Hasidic leadership, however, was supposed to rely on the Holy Spirit, on personal charisma and on exceptional qualities and virtues. This apparent contradiction arouses one's curiosity. Could a zaddik's sons achieve his level merely by virtue of being his offspring, lacking any prior education or preconditioning? Did they also inherit his spiritual and charismatic qualities? Did these qualities, even when apparent, necessarily invest them with exclusive leadership?

These questions did not originate in Hasidism. They are characteristic of almost any organization or group whose leadership was based on charisma at the formative stage and that, only naturally, found itself in trouble after the decease of the founding father. The answers that have been given are as numerous as the patterns that have typically evolved beginning in the second generation of such movements. Sociologists of religion and society who have studied the phenomenon have described some of the possible solutions:

- Seek out a new charismatic leader, whose personal qualities recall those of the founder. This pattern generally ends in disappointment and despair, for there can never be a leader the equal of the founding father, capable of wearing the latter's very large shoes.
- Some external revelation, say by prophecy or dream, singles out the new leader or points in his direction.
- The charismatic founder himself appoints a successor, while the rank and file, for their part, accept the new leader on the strength of that appointment.
- The members of the group agree among themselves that charisma can be inherited, so that the leader's relatives indeed possess it. This consensus becomes an element of group consciousness by virtue of the common tradition uniting the members and it is never challenged. It carries

the implicit thesis that charisma is not an “objective” trait, necessarily associated with the leader and his qualities; rather, it flows mainly from the willingness of the group to accept the authority of the new leader.<sup>9</sup>

Many spiritual movements, including Hasidism, have opted for the last two solutions. The ideal solution would, of course, be for the previous leader himself to choose a successor, whether from his own family or from the ranks of his followers and disciples. This occurred only rarely in Hasidism, however, and it could not constitute a fixed, regular pattern for the transference of leadership. Failing this, whether for lack of will or lack of ability, the choice of the successor was relegated to the potential heirs themselves, i.e., the leader’s kin, the bearers of the charisma, who thereupon engaged in a “dialogue” with the rank and file of followers. Such situations not infrequently involved controversies over the “correct” order of priorities (firstborn, most talented son, or most learned son) within the remaining “kinship group.” Appointment of the successor might then proceed in accordance with one of the aforementioned criteria, and it might also involve a power struggle, a war of succession, ending in agreement or schism, with one or more of the rivals seceding from the group.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from the theoretical explanations that have been proposed for the hasidic phenomenon of inherited charisma, the structure of the movement’s leadership during those years of growth was dictated primarily by the new social reality: a hasid had to have a rebbe. In other words, there was no point to one’s being a hasid without a mutual relationship with a certain zaddik or a certain hasidic court. The increased “demand” for zaddikim and courts, together with the expansion of the families of the “famous” zaddikim and the gradually woven network of marital ties among them, produced a large “supply” of leaders from the genetic inventory of those families. Consequently, most hasidic groups not only accepted the religious legitimacy of the phenomenon of inherited charisma but also came to consider such genetic ties a necessary condition for accession to leadership.

The second quarter of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a new stage of the leadership-formation process in the hasidic movement: atomization of the hasidic court. This innovation quickly became a permanent feature; indeed, it has been one of the hallmarks of Hasidism up to the present. Prior to that time, the normal procedure was to single out one agreed heir, who would be accepted by all branches of the dynasty as successor to the deceased zaddik and could be either a scion of his family or a disciple. Now, however, a splintering process set in: each of the descendants, with few exceptions, became a zaddik in his own right, competing for the same potential body of hasidim. A specific scion did not become a

zaddik by dint of some formal or rational procedure, such as election or appointment, but in one of two ways: either he was crowned, or "accepted," as zaddik by circles of older hasidim who rallied spontaneously to his flag and informed him that he was henceforth their new leader, or he crowned himself as zaddik, or was so crowned by a small, interested group of close associates.

The second alternative was not considered "natural," and the new zaddik found himself in constant confrontation with rivals for the throne of leadership.<sup>11</sup> In such cases, the zaddik generally preferred to remove himself physically from the previous center, establishing his court in a new location "free" of other zaddikim who might compete with him.

This splintering phenomenon was typical mainly of Ukrainian and Galician Hasidism: the five sons of Jehiel Michel of Zlochev; the five sons of Isaac of Safrin (who established the courts of Zhidachov, Komarno, and Sambur); the six sons of Israel of Ruzhin (including Ber of Leova, who would not have been worthy of a leadership role under normal circumstances); the eight sons of Mordekhai of Chernobyl; and others. With this increased weight of the genetic factor, a closed oligarchic elite soon took shape. On the one hand, almost all the hasidic leaders in the southern, older courts were "sons of zaddikim"; on the other, it was almost impossible to find marital ties beyond this closed circle of the great "clan of zaddikim"; and it was common to find marriages of cousins and other relatives within the same family. A perusal of the "family trees" of each hasidic dynasty will reveal amazing ties between grandchildren, uncles and aunts, and cousins within the same family, over several generations.<sup>12</sup>

For anti-hasidic maskilim, such methods of choosing leaders were yet another sign of the irrational elements pervading Hasidism. As they saw it, such indispensable traits for responsible leadership as intelligence and maturity were less important to the hasidim than ancestry; this gave rise to various distortions, verging on the grotesque, such as the placing of a *yenu-ka*, a fifteen-year-old youth, at the head of a social organization.<sup>13</sup> However, it was not only the maskilim who frowned on the phenomenon. Echoes of criticism and debate could also be heard from within the hasidic camp. Before dealing with the personal stand of Israel of Ruzhin in this connection, let us examine some of our sources for the diversity of views on the subject in the hasidic world of the time.

## *II. "Ancestral Merit" or "One's Own Distinction"?*

The question of "sons of zaddikim" and their status already figures in the writings of Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, a prominent disciple of the Maggid of Mezhyrech, considered the "founding father" of the Galician Hasidism.

Although Rabbi Elimelekh himself attained his position by dint of his talents and not his ancestors, he was much concerned with the issue of the process whereby a zaddik reached that position:

For a person might be a zaddik by virtue of ancestral merit [Hebrew *zekhut avot*], or because he was always among the zaddikim. But in truth one should pay no attention to that. Indeed, the zaddik who is son of a zaddik should not pay attention to his ancestral merit, saying that ancestral merit will sustain him and that, accordingly, he will not invest any effort in serving the Creator. He should not pay any attention to that! Rather, he needs encouragement and great strengthening in serving the Lord. Hence the zaddik who is not son of a zaddik should not despair, saying that since he has no ancestral merit to sustain him, he will not be able to achieve service of the Creator. He should not say so! Rather, let him serve the Lord truly, and Heaven helps him who would be purified . . .<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere, he writes:

There are two kinds of zaddikim. There are zaddikim who were consecrated because of their ancestors, who were saints and God-fearing, perfect men, and the Torah seeks its natural dwelling place. And there are zaddikim who are called Nazirites, for they abstain of their own will, although they are children of ignorant people. Now those zaddikim will not quickly fall from their holy level, for they have nothing to fall back on, and they are humble of their own accord and watch themselves always, incessantly, with an open eye. But the saintly zaddikim who were consecrated because of their ancestors, though they be full of Torah and commandments—by virtue of the ancestral merit that helps them—they may sometimes, precisely because of that, become unduly proud and fall from their high level. That is the meaning of the verse “Speak to the priests, *the sons of Aaron*” [Lev. 21:1], namely: the allusion is to those zaddikim who are sons of zaddikim. . . . He admonished them gravely, that they should not think of their ancestral lineage, but abstain and segregate themselves anew and choose the good path on their own. . . . They should pay no attention to their ancestral merit, so as not to fall, Heaven forbid, into some pride by reason of their lineage.<sup>15</sup>

Of what “zaddik” was he writing? He was apparently not referring necessarily to the leader of a hasidic group, but rather to the ideal “servant of the Lord” in general. He places emphasis mainly on the relative advantage of “ancestral merit” in the individual’s worship. Rabbi Elimelekh does not deny that “sons of zaddikim” enjoy an advantage, for the spiritual atmosphere in which they grow up and receive their education sets them far ahead on the road to spiritual perfection. Nevertheless, it seems clear that, in his mind, “zaddikim” of the second kind are more deserving of admiration, since, lacking lineage, they have to face tougher tests of “survival” and, in particular, demand more of themselves (they “watch themselves always, incessantly”); they are thus, in a sense, more resistant than those who can fall back on their ancestry.

Hence, there are two sides to the coin. On the one hand, the zaddik's son should beware the thought that ancestral merit is an absolute guarantee of success; the road to perfection is long and arduous, and the greater the advantage conferred by ancestral merit, the greater the fall that might result from excessive pride and arrogance. On the other hand, the lack of ancestral merit does not detract from the chances of a person who is not the son of a zaddik, because, as it is written: "Heaven helps him who would be purified" (Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat*, 104a), and the road to spiritual and ethical perfection is, by its very nature, open to all sincere explorers. The more difficult starting point of those who must advance on their own ("for they have nothing to fall back on") actually encourages constant self-criticism, which in turn works against pride and self-aggrandizement.

Rabbi Elimelekh's admonishments were not, it seems, aimed directly at the question of accession to hasidic leadership in his time. At this early stage, in the 1780s, one doubts whether the problem of "sons of zaddikim," in the later, established sense of the term—that is, the dynastic inheritance of leadership—was already so acute. Nevertheless, these sentiments, and similar ones expressed by his contemporaries in hasidic thought, indicate the considerable weight ascribed by Hasidism to "ancestral merit" as a preferred element in the figure of the ideal religious leader. The fact that Elimelekh of Lyzhansk expressed his reservations at the advantage enjoyed by "the son of the zaddik," also pointing out the latter's weaknesses and the pitfalls lurking in his path, reinforces one's feeling that he was speaking out against popularly held views that "sons of zaddikim" were superior to other spiritual figures. Such views, which later crystallized into the doctrine of inherited charisma and leadership, ultimately supplanted Elimelekh's more moderate view.<sup>16</sup>

It was only in the second quarter of the nineteenth century that it became customary for the position of "zaddik" to pass automatically to a son, to the degree that the phenomenon began to arouse concern and to constitute a problem even in the hasidic view. Clear-cut traces of the issue may be found in contemporary writings, indicating that it had assumed practical importance in the everyday life of the hasidic communities. One fierce opponent, who objected on principle to what he termed "inheritance of honor," was the zaddik and scholar Hayyim Halberstam of Zanz (1797-1876). He was queried about an ongoing, generation-long dispute, stemming from a disagreement between the three sons of the zaddik Judah Zevi Brandwein of Stratyn (Eastern Galicia). Judah Zevi, who was probably a ritual slaughterer, was crowned zaddik in 1826, after the death of his master Uri of Strelisk. He died in 1844, leaving no will, and his throne went to his son Abraham, the favorite of most of the hasidim. The sons, however, disagreed over the estate and challenged Abraham's right to rebuild their

father's old *beit midrash*. The construction, they believed, was their brother's way of seizing control of their father's entire hasidic heritage. Abraham persisted, however, renovating the *beit midrash* and increasing its capacity to accommodate the increasing numbers of hasidim who were flocking to him.

Rabbi Abraham's death in 1865 did not put an end to the dispute over the ownership of the *beit midrash*. The two surviving sons were joined by a few members of the next generation; opposing them were Abraham's widow and his son-in-law, Uri Langer of Rohatyn, who also claimed the right of inheritance and thereby of leadership over the Stratyn hasidim. The involved familial bickering was brought before Hayyim of Zanz, who based his verdict, among other things, on the historical development of hasidic leadership:

As to the inheritance of honor, may I ask, with due respect to your excellencies . . . if the hasidic rabbis' dominion as a position is like that of a rabbi, whose son has priority?! Indeed, it is known that the saint Rabbi Abraham and his saintly father [Judah Zevi] were not rabbis, and it was only by virtue of their holiness and fear of God that their words were heard throughout the province, and people flocked to them to learn from them Torah and fear of God. They also gave them contributions, to honor such God-fearing persons, and sought their advice as a person seeks of God, for they possessed the Holy Spirit and their holy prayer and speech produced results. But what shall we do if their successors do not possess such holiness? What have they inherited? To give advice—they lack knowledge; and if to pray—who knows what rises up to Heaven? I know of no relevance to inheritance in that connection.

And here is a perfect example: the saintly rabbi, the man of God, teacher of the whole Diaspora, Dov Ber of Mezhibezh bequeathed the greatness to his disciples—the saintly Rabbi [Levi Isaac] of Berdichev and the Ma'or *eynayim* [Nahum of Chernobyl] and Or ha-Meir [Zeev of Zhitomir]. Similarly, his teacher, the Besht, left that position to his disciples, not to his son, who was a saint. Similarly, our saintly master, the author of *No'am Elimelekh* [Elimelekh of Lyzhansk], bequeathed the position to his disciples, not to his son. And this despite the fact that [the sons] too were very holy, as is known. Therefore, inheritance is quite irrelevant, and only one's deeds will bring one near and one's deeds will remove one . . . and regarding the honor and the leadership of the *beit midrash*, it will be up to the consensus of the righteous men who live nearby.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Rabbi Hayyim prefers *zaddikim* like Judah Zevi and his son Abraham, who had no need of the heritage, as they themselves possessed the Holy Spirit. The ideal was to pass on the leadership to disciples, not to progeny, whose deeds would determine their worth. "Inheritance of honor" and "leadership of the *beit midrash*" would be determined not by genetic chance but through the consensus of "the righteous men of the time."

Hayyim of Zanz's adamant opposition to the inheritance of hasidic leadership was at variance with the living reality of the hasidic world, in which that mode of succession had become an undeniable fact. In fact, Rabbi Hayyim himself was the founding father of a ramified dynasty of admorim. One could, indeed, detect other trends of thought, which not only reconciled themselves to the situation but even assigned crucial importance to the biological fact of being the son of a zaddik. It was reported, for example, of the "Seer" of Lublin that he would "pray each day for the sons of the zaddikim," out of the conviction that he would thereby gladden their ancestors, the zaddikim, in Paradise.<sup>18</sup> Issachar Dov of Radoshits, a celebrated Polish zaddik famed for miracle-working, in conversation with his good friend Jerachmiel, son of the "Holy Jew" of Pshishkha, defined the difference between them in terms of a military metaphor: "You resemble the son of a general, engaged in battle, who, if he sees an arrow coming toward him, hides himself behind a simple soldier. While I have no ancestral merit but stand at my post. I have to stand in my place like a simple soldier."<sup>19</sup> Isaac Kalish of Warka, a disciple of the "Seer" and a hasidic leader in his own right, not by "ancestral merit," acknowledged the superiority of sons of zaddikim: because of their inner readiness, their inherent goodness, they were capable of easily and quickly achieving what an ordinary Jew could achieve only by dint of considerable efforts and constant perseverance:

A parable concerning the sons of zaddikim: Consider an ordinary soldier who first serves for five years and becomes a commander of ten, then serves five more years and becomes a commander of twenty, and again serves for five years and becomes a commander of a hundred, until he is sixty years old or more, and then he becomes a commander of thousands. But if he is the son of a commander of thousands, the son too has to progress from rank to rank, but where an ordinary soldier has to serve for five years, he serves for one month, so that in a few years, he becomes a commander of thousands. The meaning of the parable: Whoever is son of a zaddik will easily achieve high levels within a few years, so that where an ordinary person has to serve for sixty years, he serves for five years, as his foundation is good.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, the difference between the zaddik and an ordinary Jew is one not only of quality but also of quantity. The ability of the zaddik's son to "take shortcuts" gives him a real advantage over an ordinary person, who is indeed capable of the same achievements but only in a much longer time.

A person who takes such shortcuts will generally have to pay a price, sooner or later. Religious thought has always held that such omission of intermediate, gradual stages of spiritual improvement is undesirable and may even, in certain contexts, lead to catastrophe. An echo of these dangers may be heard in the following words, attributed to Abraham Joshua



## Heschel of Apta:

A person who wishes to ascend to God, level by level, at each level it is necessary that he first receive a call from Heaven, and then he will be given that level. . . . For we have seen with our own eyes *many of the hasidim who have gone mad, Heaven forbid, or fallen into melancholy*, and where does this come from? . . . For those persons indeed wish to ascend to God, but they did not see the ladder, for they do not serve the Lord gradually but seize something that does not belong to them without any call or permission from Heaven. . . . A person should beware of this.<sup>21</sup>

This statement, rather exceptional in the literary landscape of Hasidism, clearly reflects the social-spiritual dilemma in which the movement found itself at this stage of its development. On the one hand, it was now clear that spiritual leadership could not be democratized. Not every person was worthy of wearing the crown, and if an ordinary person leaped too quickly from level to level, there was a heavy price to pay, ending perhaps in mental imperfection or even madness. On the other hand, the solution was not a slow, gradual progress, in the spirit of equal opportunities; on the contrary, this assertion by the rabbi of Apta exudes an atmosphere of exclusivity, delimiting the zaddik's position as a professional occupation reserved for the zaddik and his progeny. Like Moses in his time, a person could not become a zaddik unless he answered a call from Heaven, a vocation. This vocation was imposed on zaddikim, as persons for whom the rapid leap from one level to the next presented no danger. They, and they alone, were not "seizing something that did not belong to them."

The power of this new reality, in which the hereditary pattern of succession prevailed over all other patterns, was indeed stronger than any reasoned considerations. Isaac of Warka, interpreting his parable of the commander of soldiers, described the possibility of gradual ascent to leadership, which could still be achieved in the first generation of Polish zaddikim, although the rabbi of Apta warned against the possible outcome. There were thus theoretical arguments both pro and con, but in practice the trend toward genetic succession was victorious, and almost every son of a zaddik who claimed leadership in the name of ancestral merit did indeed succeed to his father's throne. The pattern of succession had become a clearly visible process. Accordingly, sons of zaddikim were educated from infancy as "crown princes," being prepared to take over their fathers' thrones at any time; and the hasidim, for their part, looked to them as future zaddikim. The historical cost of this development was the accession to leadership of persons who sometimes, apart from their ancestry, had practically no other virtues; it also resulted in the unceasing atomization of hasidic communities, which splintered in accordance with the number of descendants claiming the throne.

### *III. Ancestral Lineage in the Ruzhin Clan*

Only naturally, Ruzhin sources made their contribution to the debate over "sons of zaddikim." As pointed out, the new hasidic groups that emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century in Poland and Galicia were headed mainly by zaddikim who had assumed their positions by virtue of ethical-scholarly authority, religious charisma, a high degree of piety, or loyal service in the households of previous zaddikim (such as Naphtali of Ropshits, Simhah Bunem of Pshishkha, Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, Isaac Meir of Gur, Hayyim of Zanz, and Zevi Hirsch, the "Servant" of Rimanov). These new groups largely endeavored to recreate the original development patterns of Ukrainian Hasidism in Podolia and Volhynia at the time of the Maggid of Mezhirech: disciples sheltering under the wing of a great luminary, becoming leaders in their own right after his death. In point of "evolution," however, Hasidism in the Ukraine (Ruzhin, Chernobyl, and their branches) had already reached a "higher" level of development. In other words, they had already left behind the "low," formative stage of charismatic leadership, operating now in the institutionalized, dynastic mold that in time came to characterize the new groups as well. The leading zaddikim of the Ukraine since the generation of Baruch of Mezhibozh (grandson of the Besht), Nahman of Bratslav (great-grandson of the Besht), Moses Zevi of Savran (whose father Simeon Solomon was a disciple of the Maggid of Mezhirech), Mordekhai of Chernobyl, and Israel of Ruzhin based their claim to legitimacy first and foremost upon descent from the mythical aristocracy of the founding fathers of Hasidism. They had no need of charisma, authority (whether halakhic, kabbalistic, or ethical) or service under previous zaddikim, although such qualities, if present, could only buttress their legitimacy.

The theoretical foundations of this issue are dealt with in a unique homily attributed to Rabbi Israel or to his son Abraham Jacob:

He was asked concerning a wonderful thing, why were the last generations different from the first generations, for there were then several great zaddikim, most lofty and great, born to parents of lesser value, people of a very low level, but, at any rate, such persons had several times been privileged to beget sons of a Divine stamp, saints of the Lord. Whereas in these last generations, one hears only of a zaddik son of a zaddik, and only the holy zaddikim beget offspring of their own ilk.

And he said: The explanation is that when the time comes for a lofty soul to descend to this world then, when this comes to the knowledge of Sammael [the devil], he invests great efforts and seeks ways to delay this by making accusations. For it pains him that the soul of a zaddik should come down to this world to bring many back from iniquity, to perfect the world in the Kingdom of God. But He Who is Perfect in Knowledge takes deceptive action, so that the soul descends

through a very low place, as it does not occur to the devil that a pure soul, daughter of the King's palace, should descend into darkness. Who can produce something pure out of something impure? Afterwards, however, when that lofty soul has come down to this world, it illuminates the whole world with the sun of its righteousness. Later, however, when the devil saw that much light is sown for the many righteous who came to this world, he began to investigate the matter: by what path has the light of the righteous been able to go forth to the world? And he discovered that the path of the holy souls was twisted so that it passed through very lowly begetters, he then began to make even stronger efforts to keep watch over the highway of the souls, even in the lowest places. But He Who acts wondrously and desires the good of His people, He, our blessed Creator, found a wonderful ruse: when the soul goes forth into the world, it is diminished here and there and its light reduced by taking off many sparks that spread its light. And the sparks are divided among small souls, and when it descends to this world, it is very small. But when it reaches this world and conjoins with the small souls, that is, with the sparks that were extracted from it, then the glory is restored to its former state and its light appears as at the first and it illumines the whole world with its glory. And that is why the zaddik must gather pious people around him, for they are from the root of his soul, and they are the sparks that were split off from his soul before it descended to the world, and they must be conjoined with him later.<sup>22</sup>

The question that was addressed to Rabbi Israel does not seem to imply any challenge to the legitimacy of the new phenomenon, that is, to the almost complete disappearance of the old-style zaddik, born to parents of a lowly social or spiritual level, who had been replaced in most cases by a "zaddik son of a zaddik." Rather, this was simply an attempt, with no critical overtones, to understand the meaning of the changing leadership patterns, on the assumption that the process of change had to have some significance, to stem from some sublime, mysterious idea.

Rabbi Israel tried to explain to the questioners that the development of this social process was not a necessary consequence of evolution, but the outcome of a metaphysical development in the supernal worlds. His explanation, minus a few details, may be summarized as follows. Owing to the constraints of the historical struggle against the forces of evil (symbolized by "Sammael"), the descent of the zaddik's soul ("the lofty soul") to the lowly world had to be through "lowly begetters." In the past, therefore, the great zaddikim were sons of persons of a lowly station. However, this "ruse" could not be maintained for long, and once it had been exposed, it became necessary to employ other tactics, for the devil, with his destructive powers, blocked that passage too. The only way to outwit him, as devised by the Creator, "Who acts wondrously," was to impair the quality of the zaddik prior to his descent. The new zaddik (meaning the "zaddik son of a zaddik," although the text does not make this explicit) reaches the world with a reduced, defective soul (so that the devil has nothing to fear from

him). The situation is remedied on earth, after the birth of the zaddik. The symbiotic encounter between the zaddik and the hasidim ("the small souls") is nothing but a reunification of the sparks removed from the zaddik before his descent and entrusted to his hasidim. Thus, in these generations, the zaddikim achieve their real perfection in the material world, and a necessary condition for that to occur is that the hasidim who belong to the "root of the zaddik's soul" be identified and reunified with him. That is the meaning of the mystical bond between the zaddik and his followers.

I have no idea whether this answer satisfied Rabbi Israel's interlocutors. It is indeed possible that such leaders as Israel or Mordekhai of Chernobyl believed in principle, like their predecessors, that sons of zaddikim possessed only relative superiority. In reality, however, as I have pointed out, the method of inheritance and dynastic lineage won out entirely over all the other patterns of leadership and was the dominant factor in shaping the historical image of Hasidism in general, and of Ruzhin Hasidism and its offshoots in particular, down to the present time.

What did Rabbi Israel himself think of the issue of lineage in general and of his own lineage in particular? As we do not possess a systematic exposition of his views on the question, my attempt to reconstruct them will begin with a few anecdotes relating to his children's marriages. The ceremonies of the engagement, at which the *tena'im* were signed, as well as the actual marriage ceremonies, were opportune occasions to stress the zaddik's appropriate lineage. It was on such occasions that Israel would boast of his ancestry, while at the same time investigating that of the other family involved.<sup>23</sup>

One such occasion was the wedding of his son Abraham Jacob to Miriam, daughter of the zaddik Aaron ("the second") of Karlin. This marriage, solemnized in June 1833 in Pinsk,<sup>24</sup> began with an embarrassing incident illustrative of Rabbi Israel's self-confidence, which sometimes bordered on youthful impudence and arrogance. One of the participants in the negotiations for the match, several years before, had been Rabbi Aaron's father, the elderly zaddik Asher of Stolin, son of Aaron "the Great," founder of Karlin Hasidism. Rabbi Asher was astounded when the young Israel demanded a dowry of one thousand silver rubles; as a poor man, he could not, and did not wish to, pledge such a tremendous sum of money. Israel was adamant, and the match was canceled. Abraham Jacob was then matched to the daughter of Rabbi Joseph David of Olik, but that agreement was also abrogated because of the sudden death of the bride-to-be.

Once again, contact was made with the Karlin court, although Rabbi Israel continued to insist on the high dowry. In the end, his demand was accepted, and Asher of Stolin, it is reported, said, "It seems difficult that a young man should place such a heavy burden on an old man like myself, to

give him one thousand silver rubles. Where shall I get such a sum?" Nevertheless, he was so eager to finalize the agreement that he agreed to Israel's conditions and undertook to procure the money. Before the wedding ceremony—thus says the hasidic legend—Rabbi Israel said to his son: "My father said, 'From my children they shall know who I am,' but I say: 'From my children they shall know who is the Lord.' My beloved son, I have chosen for you a very holy soul, go to the wedding canopy in good fortune."<sup>25</sup>

Rabbi Israel expressed similar sentiments when his daughter Leah married David, son of a rich banker of Berdichev named Jacob Joseph Heilperin. After describing his distinguished lineage in detail, Israel said:

Lineage [Hebrew *yihus*] is from the same root as "shelter" [Hebrew *mahaseb*], that is, when a man is in a shelter, that shelter is of use to protect him. Our grandfather the Maggid conferred lineage upon his son the Angel, and the saintly Angel conferred lineage upon his son, my saintly father Shalom, and my father conferred lineage upon me, and I am now conferring lineage upon my saintly sons.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, when the *tena'im* were signed between Asher, Rabbi Israel's grandson from his son Abraham Jacob, and Rachel-Leah, youngest daughter of Zevi Hirsch, the "Servant" of Rimanov, Israel peremptorily asked the latter for his pedigree.<sup>27</sup> This was a particularly arrogant and insulting demand, as Rabbi Zevi Hirsch was known to be of lowly origins, having been born into a working-class family. Orphaned at an early age, he had been apprenticed to a tailor but had somehow managed to penetrate the innermost circles of the zaddik Menahem Mendel of Rimanov. After the latter's death (in 1815), Zevi Hirsch, despite severe criticism aimed at him and his methods by some of his master's veteran hasidim, was accepted as zaddik in Rimanov and headed a large group of hasidim. There are indications that Rabbi Zevi's witty, profound answer—"I have learned to refine the old and not to spoil the new"—put Rabbi Israel in his place by hinting at the proper proportions to be assigned the question of ancestry. It is a fact that, despite the grandson's sudden death a few weeks later, the ties between the families were not broken and the deceased's brother Solomon was proposed as a new groom.<sup>28</sup> Much later, as we shall see, after the death of Rabbi Israel's wife, he married Rabbi Zevi's widow and even adopted his son Joseph.

Rabbi Israel's distinction had two aspects, which influenced both his self-consciousness and the basic features of Ruzhin Hasidism as they took shape: his real, genetic ancestry—namely, his famous father, grandfather, and great-grandfather—which will be considered presently, and his mythical ancestry—namely, King David—which contributed to the creation of

the myth of his kingship and the messianic consciousness of the dynastic hasidim, discussed in a later chapter.

Rabbi Israel was born into the second most important hasidic family on the internal scale of hasidic distinction (after the Besht and his descendants). The fact that he was almost the only surviving descendant of the Maggid of Mezhibezh greatly enhanced his leadership and authority, both in his own consciousness and in that of his hasidim. In time, the Ruzhin dynasty would forge marital ties with the dynasty of the Besht himself, thus becoming the most "aristocratic" dynasty of Hasidism. "The Ruzhiners considered their rabbi the greatest and only successor to the Besht," Samuel Abba Horodezky wrote in his memoirs, thus explaining the unceasing disputes between the Ruzhin and Chernobyl hasidim.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the fiction of Rabbi Israel's genetic descent from the Besht had already become entrenched in his own lifetime. This was the case, not only in the perception of the hasidic masses, but even in the reports of the Russian police and in the impressions of foreign visitors, who were surely unfamiliar with the subtleties of hasidic genealogy.<sup>30</sup> Thus, when the great controversy broke out between Hayyim of Zanz and the Sadgora zaddikim in the late 1860s, it was charged that, by attacking Rabbi Israel's sons, Rabbi Hayyim was essentially attacking the entire line of hasidic leadership since the Besht himself.<sup>31</sup>

A statement that Rabbi Israel made one Sabbath before the Shavuot festival provides instructive evidence of his high regard for ancestral lineage. Playing on the ambiguity of the Hebrew words *yihus*, *meiyuhas*, and their derivatives, which may refer to distinction in general and in particular to distinction by virtue of ancestry, he was trying to explain to his audience why the second day of the Hebrew month of Sivan, sandwiched as it were between the New Moon on the first of the month and the three preparatory days before the festival on the sixth (which commemorates the giving of the Torah), was known as "the distinguished day" (Hebrew *yom ha-meyuhas*), although possessing no real distinction of its own. Rabbi Israel observed: "People say: This day is known as the distinguished day because Yom Kippur falls on this day of the week according to the Jewish calendar. Now, what merit is that if one of greater rank is close to it, though it itself is nothing? But I, too, am distinguished. At any rate, the main thing is one's own ancestry."

At this point, he cited a well-known parable from medieval ethical literature, concerning a king who held a competition among four artists commissioned to paint the walls of his palace. The winner was the artist who painted his wall in bright, transparent colors, so that "all the paintings of the other three walls shone their light in it." The meaning of the allegory,

said Rabbi Israel, was as follows: "Thus it is with a person of distinguished ancestry. If he purifies and cleanses himself in all manner of purification and clarity, then all the powers of his ancestors the zaddikim shine through him. That it what is called of truly distinguished ancestry."<sup>32</sup>

Here, again, we have the perception that ancestry itself is of no avail unless combined with due preparation ("purification and clarity"), which results in his own kind of distinction ("one's own ancestry"), independently of his ancestors or neighbors. A person of "distinguished ancestry" enjoys an initial advantage thanks to the zaddikim among his ancestors, whose special virtue acts like a lantern, throwing its light on the figure of their descendant; but this light is efficacious only provided the descendant has polished his own inner mirror, so that the light will then be properly reflected. It seems probable that Rabbi Israel was alluding here to his three distinguished ancestors. Perhaps the three artists in the parable symbolize those three zaddikim—the Maggid, the Angel, and Shalom Shakhna;<sup>33</sup> Israel, then, is the fourth artist, who knew how to make proper use of his predecessors' successful actions, thus becoming "distinguished" in his own right. It is also possible that the parable implies some criticism of "sons of zaddikim" who claimed superiority on the sole basis of ancestral merit, not understanding that "one's own distinction" is "nothing." In other words, the distinction conferred by ancestry is not invariably effective; it is merely a potential advantage, which can be realized only if the "distinguished" person himself knows how to exploit it. Indeed, Israel himself made such a statement, cited later in the same work: "The distinction of ancestry without one's own distinction is worth nothing. . . . Whoever possesses distinguished ancestry without distinction in his own right—the influence of his ancestors is of no avail, for he himself is not capable of receiving [that influence]."<sup>34</sup>

There are indeed recorded utterances by Rabbi Israel that may, *prima facie*, be understood as disdain for or disavowal of the tradition of his metahistorical distinction. On one occasion, he noted that the Maggid of Mezhirech had a recorded genealogy going back to King Hezekiah but concealed it beneath a stone, for he had received a Divine communication to the effect that he would initiate a new dynasty. Rabbi Israel claimed to know where that genealogy had been hidden; but he did not need that distinction and was confident that his sons would not either.<sup>35</sup> This declaration, clearly recalling the story of the Besht's concealment of ancient "writings" beneath a stone of a mountain,<sup>36</sup> was not intended to deny the value of the zaddik's mythical ancestry; rather, it indicates Israel's abundant self-confidence. He had no need of the random support supplied by his lineage, which he had done nothing to earn or to procure. He was convinced that his own actions—perhaps reinforced by his descent from the Maggid—

were sufficient to create a new genealogy, which, brief though it might be, could be likened to his great-grandfather's tracing of his ancestry to Hezekiah and was perhaps even superior to it.

So far the theoretical aspect of Rabbi Israel's attitude to hereditary merit and lineage has been discussed. Theory apart, his practical actions in the last years of his life, when the time came to bequeath his achievements to his sons, are also instructive. As we shall see later, all signs point to Rabbi Israel's awareness of the issue, for he himself prepared his eldest son, Shalom Joseph, for the succession. We cannot tell whether he did so because of Shalom Joseph's special talents or merely in recognition of his seniority. Whatever the case, by designating a successor in advance, he guaranteed the community's agreement to the transference of charisma and leadership, which was indeed willingly accepted by all the other sons and by most of the hasidim.

In sum: Rabbi Israel considered ancestral lineage a most important asset of the "zaddik's son" in the consolidation of his leadership. At the same time, he constantly emphasized that ancestral merit was little more than a jumping-off point. It was inadequate in itself, requiring the addition of "one's own distinction." Such distinction required constant preparation, with an eye to polishing the inherent merits of the zaddik's son and making him an ideal religious leader. Put differently: the advantages of ancestral lineage were a potential to be realized; without such realization, distinguished ancestry was meaningless and insignificant. Sons of zaddikim who neglected this principle were wasting the natural potential to which they were heirs and were, ipso facto, unworthy of taking up the scepter of leadership. It goes without saying that Israel, not to speak of his many hasidim, considered himself as possessing both a magnificent ancestral pedigree and self-distinction of the highest stamp.

#### *IV. The Victory of the "Sons of Zaddikim" and Its Implications*

The principle of "sons of zaddikim" has dominated the historical development of Hasidism since the nineteenth century, so much so that today one can hardly imagine Hasidism in all its variety without this hallmark (Bratslav Hasidism is the exception that testifies to the rule). So absolute was the triumph of genetic inheritance that hasidic groups whose zaddik died without issue, leaving no other relatives, found themselves in a crisis of leadership that often led to schism and bitter controversy. A good modern example is Lubavitch Hasidism today, left without an heir to the last admor, Menahem Mendel Schneersohn (d. 1994), notwithstanding



attempts to camouflage the situation with theological casuistry. Although few of the Habad hasidim themselves are willing to admit it, no one can foretell the fate of this major hasidic sect in the near or distant future.

It was only natural that succession to the zaddik's throne could go hand in hand with ugly, negative manifestations, such as open nepotism and financial corruption, as well as expressions of vulgarization by individuals who saw in "zaddikism" a "profession," a form of livelihood.<sup>37</sup> This is the background, for example, to Abraham Dov of Ovruch's immigration to Palestine, which was a direct outcome of his dispute with a few of Mordekhai of Chernobyl's sons, who tried to oust him as a zaddik from their spheres of influence.<sup>38</sup> Another example is the tragic fate of Mordekhai b. Nahman Judah, known as the "Bahur," or "Youth," of Mikolayev, a charismatic leader with a large flock of followers who was ultimately supplanted and even excommunicated by the zaddik Isaac Meir of Zinkov, who had looked on helplessly while many of his hasidim abandoned him for his young competitor. The uncompromising measures taken by Isaac Meir against the "Youth," as well as the moral support the former received from Israel of Ruzhin, reflect not only the intergenerational struggle for acceptance among the hasidim but, mainly, the inherent disadvantage of any person who could claim no ancestral ties to the central oligarchy of zaddikism and the fact that such a person had no chance of becoming a hasidic leader by dint of "his own distinction" alone.<sup>39</sup>

One extreme instance of zaddikism seen as a mere profession, a privilege "possessed" by a family and passed down from one generation to the next, is the following story by Rabbi Aaron of Chernobyl of how his father Rabbi Mordekhai urged him to establish his own court:

Once, while he [Aaron] was still being supported by his father, the Zaddik Rabbi Mottele, his father began to pester him, saying: Here I am, burdened with a large family, and it is hard for me to support you. How long shall you be a burden upon me, and when will you begin to make your own way? For you too can travel and go from town to town, receiving *kvitlekh*, and you will be able to make a living at your own expense.<sup>40</sup>

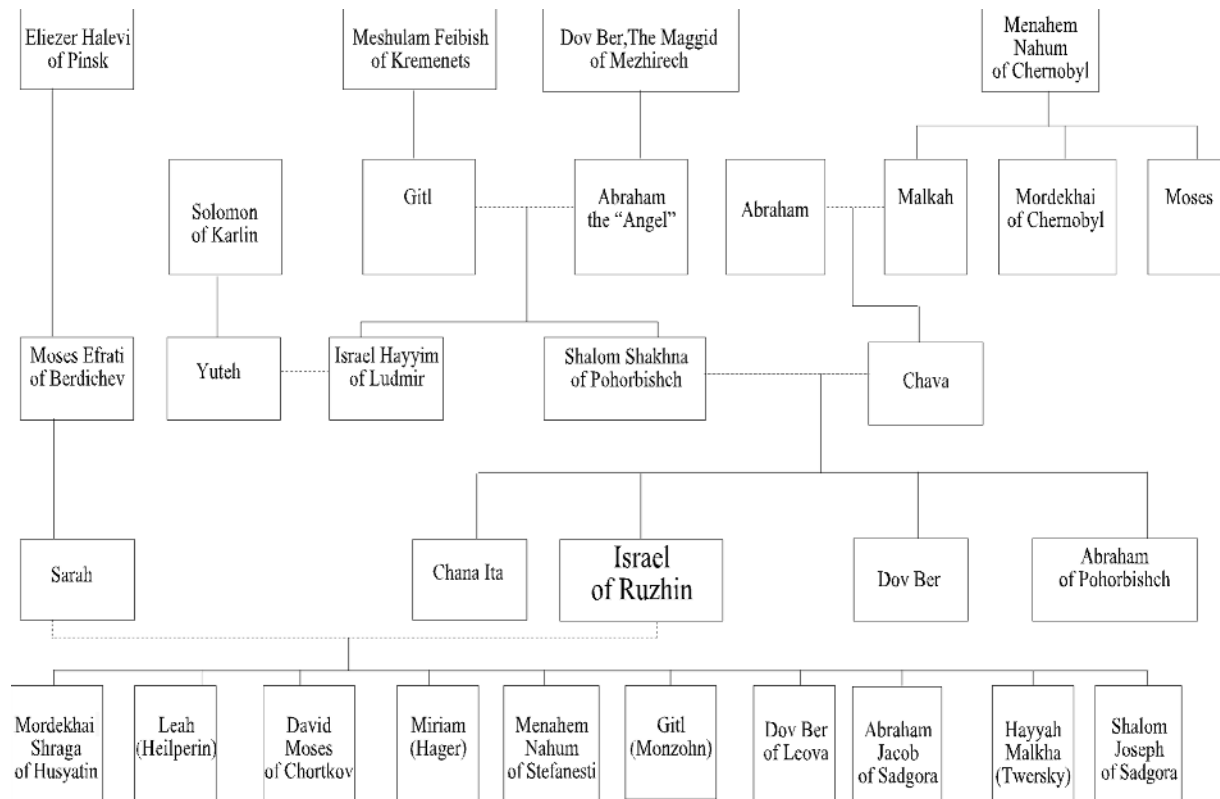
Another aspect of the considerable social weight of ancestral lineage deserves brief mention here. Various literary genres—memoirs, folklore, belles lettres, and, in particular, the Jewish press—of the nineteenth century provide abundant examples of would-be "zaddikim" who claimed descent from celebrated hasidic luminaries. These "grandsons" and "great-grandsons," popularly known by the Yiddish term *einiklekh*, wandered around the towns and villages of Eastern Europe displaying their family trees, sometimes genuine but generally bogus; they begged and solicited contributions, performed "miracles," and misled many gullible Jews. Some

of them became "fixtures" in the courts of famous zaddikim; and, inasmuch as no one could disprove (or, for that matter, confirm) their claims, they were able to live out their days in idleness at public expense. Most common were men (and women!) who styled themselves "grandchildren of the Besht" or of other famous zaddikim. Their fictitious lineages brought them a comfortable livelihood. Here is what Abraham Ber Gottlober had to say about the rabbi of Apta's numerous "grandchildren":

The other grandchildren of the rabbi of Apta are nameless, for they did not make a name for themselves in the land, and they are very numerous and wander around the length and breadth of the land begging for alms, going from door to door like any poor person, the only difference being that they claim to be descended from their grandfather and call themselves "grandchildren," as is also done by many grandchildren of the Besht these days—not only men, but women, too . . . roam from one city to the next seeking alms, for they are "granddaughters." For in our days it is hard to know—whose grandchild? For that is the name assumed by the grandchildren of the Besht and the rabbi of Apta in particular, and by grandchildren of the other rebbes in general, so much so that a poor man merely says, "I am a grandchild," for he will say to himself: "I, too, surely had a grandfather."<sup>41</sup>

Genuine grandchildren of zaddikim who were known to be ruffians and criminals also took advantage of their ancestry to collect contributions.<sup>42</sup> Although that was not their intention, such impostors caused the very institution of ancestral lineage to fall into disrepute, exposing its most grotesque manifestations for all to see and revealing its potentially destructive elements.

Israel of Ruzhin was far removed from that fraudulent world. In the coming chapters, we shall follow his development as a zaddik, leader of a large community, and see how his court built up its power. This process, however, while revealing his considerable talents as a leader and spiritual mentor, was rudely interrupted when Israel found himself involved, willy-nilly, in a dramatic murder case that set his whole life on a new course.



Family tree: Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, his ancestors and descendants.



PART II

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*From Ruzhin to Sadgora:  
The Making of a Hasidic Leader*

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## *“The Untrod Path”: Emergence and Expansion*

### *I. On the Throne of Leadership*

To all intents and purposes, leadership was almost forced on Israel of Ruzhin by domestic circumstances—the untimely deaths of his father and his elder brother. Since the tradition of succession then prevalent in Ukrainian Hasidism did not envisage several candidates competing for the leadership, the question of whether Israel possessed the necessary talents for the job was never raised. His accession, moreover, did not fit the model of a leader revealed suddenly, after a period of concealment or maturation. He succeeded to the throne, not by dint of his personal charisma, scholarship, virtues, or piety, but simply because he was the lone scion of a family boasting four generations of zaddikim. Possessing genuine leadership qualities, he successfully and single-handedly created a unique, powerful hasidic empire. But we may assume that, even had he lacked such qualities, Israel could still have headed a small hasidic congregation, simply because of his lineage.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Israel reckoned—rightly—that his position would improve if he brought his followers a message of his own or blazed a new, untrod path, one not walked by his predecessors. Only thus would he be able to realize his abilities as a leader of an exceptional, unprecedented stamp. He was to express this inner feeling explicitly in later life:

Abraham our father, peace be with him, worshiped the blessed Lord with the attribute of love [Hebrew *hesed*]. . . . So Isaac, peace be with him, had to choose

another path of worship for himself, and so also Jacob our father . . . chose another new path for himself. . . . And so all righteous men who have existed from that time to now, each one of them had to seek himself out some untrod path or way.<sup>1</sup>

Israel was expressing, in his own words, a common feeling that famous zaddikim should realize their uniqueness through some original approach to worship; whoever was incapable of so doing was no different from any other worshiper. Levi Isaac Monzohn, Israel's grandson, reported the same idea in the name of the zaddik Aryeh Leib of Shpola, but it surely expresses the self-confidence and sensation of "progress" so typical of the Sadgora dynasty in general:

"If you do not know, O fairest of women, go follow the tracks of the sheep" [Song of Songs 1:8]—the allusion is to the zaddikim of the generation. Each zaddik in his generation makes for himself a new path to the worship of the blessed Lord, for the path that was taken by the previous generation is already known to the Evil Inclination and he schemes against it. So if you do today what they did in the generation before you—you have done nothing.<sup>2</sup>

In 1813, the young Israel rose to the rank of zaddik, leader of the band of hasidim who had remained in Pohorbishch since the time of his now deceased father and elder brother. The first steps he took were intended to enlarge his congregation, in respect of both territory and number of followers. The change that then took place in Hasidism, the transition from small, elitist groups to a popular movement, with a message for the masses too, for the Jewish people at large, in all its variety, was described by A. I. Bromberg as follows:

[Rabbi Israel] attracted multitudes of Jews, of all walks of life, whose interest lay not in spirituality alone, and he became the father of those multitudes. . . . Not mere hundreds flocked to him, but thousands and tens of thousands. For the first time since the appearance of the Besht, Hasidism departed from the narrow channel of its influence and began to flow in broad channels. . . . For the first time, the zaddik became the father of the masses. And for the first time in the history of Hasidism, a young man, a youth of sixteen, attracted and arrested the attention of thousands of faithful followers.<sup>3</sup>

Bromberg attributed the change to the historical background of the times: the heavy economic burden imposed by the Russian government on the Jews in the Pale of Settlement, persecutions, and the like. Israel of Ruzhin, he wrote, offered the Jews what they wanted: not a pure spirituality but a surrogate compassionate father or father-figure, applying all his energy and special talents to encourage, comfort, and love them. However, even if this description is taken as it is, neither the external historical situation (was the Jews' situation any worse than before?) nor Bromberg's neoromantic, psychological concept (the zaddik as a surrogate father-figure) can explain

Israel's drive to expand and govern, as well as the amazing response of masses of Jews.

Samuel Abba Horodezky, one of the first scholars and historians of Hasidism, suggests a different explanation. Israel's success as a leader was based on the effective, manipulative exploitation of the desire, on the part of contemporary zaddikim, to preserve and nurture the dynasty of the Maggid of Mezhirech, the Besht's "deputy," whose sole descendant Rabbi Israel was.<sup>4</sup> This explanation, too, is inadequate, for we have no evidence for such deliberate cultivation of the descendants of the Maggid, nor do we know of any similar efforts in relation to descendants of the Besht himself.

The developments, therefore, should be understood both in the broad, social context of the spread of Hasidism throughout Eastern Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century and against the background of Israel's unique personal circumstances.

As to the broader social context, it should be remembered that the phenomenon of masses of followers flocking to the zaddik's court was not exclusive to Ruzhin Hasidism, but typical of almost all the courts of the "famous" zaddikim, ranging from Lyady and Karlin in White Russia, through Lublin and Kozhenits in Poland, to Berdichev and Chernobyl in Volhynia.<sup>5</sup> At any particular time, in all the tremendous expanses of Eastern Europe, wherever Hasidism had taken root, there were never more than a few dozen zaddikim in action; and the number of "famous" zaddikim, leaders of large congregations, was never more than, perhaps, two dozen. However, the attraction of Hasidism at the time, the thirst for what zaddikim had to say, was so overpowering as to produce a kind of intermediate status of "secondary" zaddikim, particularly in those branches of Hasidism that spread to the southern stretches of the Pale of Settlement.<sup>6</sup> It was an attempt to provide a geographical-social solution to the problem of hasidim who lived at great distances from the home of the nearest "famous" zaddik but were nevertheless eager for living contact with the zaddik or his representative, whether to bring him money or a gift, to receive his blessing, or to spend the Sabbath or a festival at his court and pray in his company together with other hasidim. Israel of Ruzhin, thanks to his organizational abilities and outstanding charisma, cleverly took advantage of the waves of sympathy for Hasidism then sweeping through Eastern Europe to build up his court—and himself in the process. In this respect, he was no different from other zaddikim of his time and country, who were also able to consolidate their courts and their personal positions against the same background.

The particular circumstances of Israel's court were shaped by his complex personality, to be described in detail below, and in particular by his predilection for originality, always accompanied by an element of provoca-



tive exhibitionism. He did almost everything differently from other zaddikim of his time. Thus, he dressed in modern, black clothes, rather than long white robes;<sup>7</sup> he wore patent leather shoes and a modern hat (unlike other zaddikim, who took care not to violate the prohibition on *sha'atnez*) or a sable cap; his sidecurls were short and his face beardless; he adopted an opulent lifestyle, keeping a splendid coach drawn by magnificent horses, living in a palatial mansion with rich furnishings, gold and silver tableware, an orchestra to entertain him, and watchdogs; and his relationship with his followers was a mixture of seclusion and carefully kept distance, coupled with constant interest in their lives.<sup>8</sup> Israel must have been aware of the outward effect of his behavior, and he knew how to capitalize on it. In modern terms, one might say that he was adept in the sophisticated use of techniques of propaganda, advertising, and molding of public opinion. He created a figure to which one could not remain indifferent, inspiring in the beholder either respect and adulation, contempt and repulsion, or, at the very least, intense curiosity. In this context, there is another factor to be considered. As Joseph Perl pointed out, hasidic stories about the miracles performed by zaddikim, transmitted by word of mouth, played an important role in the dissemination of Hasidism in general and in consolidation of the zaddik's power in particular.<sup>9</sup> The myth of royalty that such stories associated with Israel, as well as his extravagant behavior, did much to increase his fame, create his persona as an exceptional leader, and provoke natural interest in him and his court.

The curiosity we have described infected not only the popular levels of the Jewish public, but also its elites. A perusal of the list of zaddikim and other prominent hasidic personalities who maintained contact with Rabbi Israel, whether in the earlier period at Ruzhin or, later, at Sadgora, reveals something without precedent in the annals of nineteenth-century Hasidism. In fact, almost all the contemporary zaddikim were in some kind of contact with him, ranging from adulation and devotion to chance visits to feel him out. They came to his court or sent emissaries, quoted his teachings or teachings that had been reported in his name, evinced an interest in everything relating to him, and reacted to his approach—generally positively, but sometimes otherwise. This is an impressive phenomenon; it is doubtful whether any other hasidic figure of the time caught such widespread attention.<sup>10</sup>

## *II. From Pohorbishch to Ruzhin*

Rabbi Israel first made his name as a hasidic leader in Ruzhin, a small former Polish town in the district of Skvira, in the province of Kiev, southwest of the city of Kiev and not far north of Pohorbishch.<sup>11</sup> It had been found-

ed in the sixteenth century, halfway between Berdichev and Belaya Tserkov, and annexed to the Russian empire in the second partition of Poland (1793). There, Israel established his new court, and he would continue to be known as Israel of Ruzhin even after he had left it and made his home in foreign parts.

Why did Israel leave Pohorbishch, where he had been born, and where his father and elder brother had lived and died, and when did the move occur? We do not know for sure. The move to Ruzhin may have been motivated by psychological-social considerations: the natural desire to begin afresh, in a place where he had not been known as a child or youth, so that familiarity would not breed contempt and he could start with a clean slate (although, admittedly, the distance from Pohorbishch to Ruzhin was not great).

According to an oral hasidic tradition, Israel lived in the town of Skvira for a short time before he moved to Ruzhin; but the sources do not confirm this.<sup>12</sup> There is indeed an Austrian document, dated 1842, which states that in 1834 Israel relocated from Pohorbishch to Skvira,<sup>13</sup> but the reference is most probably to Skvira district and not to the town of that name in the same district (later made famous by the zaddik Isaac Twersky of Skvira). At any rate, this detail of the document is of rather dubious authenticity. We know from an eyewitness account that Israel was firmly established in Ruzhin by 1815. He must therefore have moved there sometime before, probably not long after his brother's death in 1813.<sup>14</sup> In that case, he would have been about eighteen years old when he arrived there and been active in Ruzhin up until his imprisonment, more than twenty years.

A very unusual testimony supports this dating. Writing in 1841, Mordekhai Sultansky of Chufut-Kale (Crimea), a prominent Karaite sage and historian, recalled his encounter in Ruzhin with the young Israel, which probably took place around 1815:

When I was young I had heard of the fame of the *ba'al shem* Israel, who was adored by his believers. I had a desire to see him and to assess his quality. I went there, to the town of Ruzhin; however, I could not see his face because of the crowd who flocked from all over the country to ask his assistance. Finally, I had an idea. I wrote a letter of poems and phrases dedicated to his honor and delivered it to his attendant, and then he ordered that I be invited. That is how I came to see him, and he was then eighteen years old. He said to me: My dear, you wrote your letter in vain, since I will not understand any of it. That is because I haven't any knowledge in wisdom or in books. I am devoted only to theoretical and practical Kabbalah. When I tested him, I realized that he had neither faith nor knowledge or sense, but he is one of Jezebel's prophets, who merely consumes the remnants of the brainless Jews and strips them of their skin with his crazy tricks. However, in their eyes, he is as lofty as an angel.<sup>15</sup>

From this hostile maskilic evaluation of the unlearned young rabbi, we learn not only of Israel's move to Ruzhin around 1815 but also of his tremendous fame and reputation early on in his career.

The period of 1825–30 was crucial to Israel's consolidation of his leadership. During those years, some ten years after the elders of the previous generation of zaddikim (Levi Isaac of Berdichev, Baruch of Mezhibozh, Jacob Isaac the "Holy Jew" of Pshishkha, Jacob Isaac the "Seer" of Lublin, Israel the Maggid of Kozhenits, and Menahem Mendel of Rimanov) had passed away, some other major hasidic leaders died. The spring of 1825 saw the death of the oldest living zaddik, Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta, who had encouraged Rabbi Israel and believed him one of the future leaders of Hasidism. In late summer 1826, Uri of Streisk passed away, and many of his followers came over to the Ruzhin court. The passing of so many of the older hasidic leaders left a vacuum; almost no "famous" zaddikim remained in the southeastern Pale. The only important zaddikim active in the region after the death of the zaddik of Apta, who "spread fear and dread over all the Jews in the land of Russia, and none dared do a thing without their permission,"<sup>16</sup> were Mordekhai of Chernobyl, Moses Zevi of Savran, and Israel of Ruzhin. Rabbi Mordekhai, who died in 1837, seems to have relinquished his leadership some time before his death and to have handed over the reins to his sons while still alive. Moses Zevi died early in 1838 and left no heir of comparable stature. The dearth of other prominent leaders who might have competed with Israel of Ruzhin by attracting followers, his illustrious lineage, his unique, original style of worship, and his inherent leadership qualities—all these helped him to stand out at a crucial point in time, when a change of guard was taking place in the hasidic leadership.

Independent literary evidence of Israel's acceptance as a zaddik lends further support for the conjecture that he first became known as a hasidic leader of a sizable congregation in the mid 1820s, and that was apparently no accident. The earliest surviving letters bearing his signature clearly reflect the change in his standing. For example, in the summer of 1825, while in Sharogrod, Podolia, he confirmed the appointment of a rabbi and head of rabbinical court in the town of Murachawa in Podolia—hence, he must have been consulted. Around the same time, in an undated letter, which, judging from its content must have been written in 1825–26, he demanded that the Jews of seven communities in Volhynia and Podolia pay his emissaries the *ma'amadot* tax so as to support his household.<sup>17</sup> In return for the *ma'amad* money, if paid on time (once every six months), Rabbi Israel promised to persevere in his prayers on the donors' behalf. The fact that one of the communities involved was Mezhibozh indicates that the

letter was sent after the death of Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta, who lived there in his old age. This last letter may attest to Israel's organizational endeavors to establish his new court at Ruzhin on a firm economic basis and to his attempts to extend his "rule" to veteran hasidic communities in the Ukraine. At around this time, too, he sent encouraging letters to a copper lessee from Konstantin and a ritual slaughterer from Wolodarka (and there were presumably other letters of this sort that have not survived), upholding their rights in the face of oppression. These letters are also evidence of his gradual acceptance as a leader whose promises and instructions were respected by the public.<sup>18</sup>

Another important point in this context is Israel's firm economic position. When still quite young (about twenty), he enrolled as a member of the second merchants' guild in Ruzhin.<sup>19</sup> It was Russian policy to consider major merchants of the first and second ranks, like farmers and landowners, a "useful," productive sector that contributed to the national economy (in contrast to petty traders, unpropertied persons, and those lacking a regular income). However, in order to join the merchants' guild and enjoy the attendant privileges—in particular, the right of free movement even outside the Pale—it was necessary to prove ownership of capital sufficient for the merchant's economic activities and also to pay the royal treasury an annual tax of 1 percent of the declared capital. Membership in one of the three merchants' guilds was based on the extent of one's capital and property.<sup>20</sup> Israel of Ruzhin, as the main heir to his father's and brother's property, could present sufficient capital, as well as land owned at Ruzhin,<sup>21</sup> in order to register as a member of the second guild.

Some maskilim wrote disapprovingly of zaddikim who took advantage of *pidyon* money in order to register as merchants, thereby not only making improper use of the gullible believers' contributions but also securing various privileges for themselves and their dependents, chief among which was exemption from military service.<sup>22</sup> Even if fear of conscription was the main reason Jews registered as merchants, we know of no other zaddikim who registered in the first or second guild.<sup>23</sup> In Israel of Ruzhin's case, he seems to have enrolled before 1827, the year of Czar Nicholas I's statute introducing compulsory military service for Jews. His registration seems to reflect a shrewd conformance to the existing social structures of the ruling powers. Many years later, when released from prison, he took advantage of his privilege to secure an exit permit to travel to Kishinev, supposedly on commercial business; this helped him to escape from Russia. Another motive for Jews' registration as merchants was the "tax shelter" that it provided: as they paid a percentage of their capital as taxes, Jewish merchants were exempted from the poll tax and from their part in the collective tax that the *kahal* paid on behalf of the community.<sup>24</sup> However, we do not have

the slightest evidence of any tension between Israel and the local kahal that might indicate tax evasion as one of his motives for registering in the merchant guild.

### *III. Avenues of Expansion and Growth*

What induced many hasidim and zaddikim to seek out Israel of Ruzhin and associate themselves with his court, while other zaddikim, nonhasidic scholars, and maskilim perceived him as a danger and vigorously opposed him?

Important evidence of the social background to the spread of Ruzhin Hasidism in the Jewish communities of the provinces of Kiev, Volhynia, and Podolia comes from the memoirs of Abraham Ber Gottlober, a former hasid who most probably knew Israel personally and, on his own admission, used to travel to the Ruzhin court three times a year.<sup>25</sup> In 1824, he married the daughter of Nahman Leib, a rich but ignorant leaseholder from Chernigov, who journeyed to Israel's court "once or twice a year," contenting himself at other times of the year with visits to the court of another zaddik, Abraham Dov of Ovruch, who lived in nearby Zhitomir.<sup>26</sup> Why, Gottlober wondered, would someone (in this case, his father-in-law), with a whole gallery of zaddikim available, pick one (in this case, Israel of Ruzhin) as the object of his adoration and devotion, rather than another? This clearly authentic account by Gottlober also provides a description of a typical Ruzhin hasid:

The rebbe to whom my father-in-law used to travel was the Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin. Now my father-in-law did not know how to choose himself a rebbe to adore, of all the multitude of hasidic rebbes that existed in those days, and he believed in all of them with an absolute and limitless faith; for there was none like him, a simple person who would believe anything, and how could such an ignoramus not believe in what greater and better people of his time, Torah scholars and leaders of the people, believed (whether truly or outwardly)? And why did he see fit to choose the rebbe of Ruzhin as his special rebbe? You need not wonder; Nachman Leib had a son, Eliezer by name, who married a woman from the town of Radomyshl, where there was a special house for Ruzhin hasidim, and as Eliezer was young and innocent (as I was when I got married), it was easy for the Ruzhin hasidim to ensnare him in their schemes and entice him to their prayer house. So Eliezer became a Ruzhin hasid as long as he lived in the home of his father-in-law in Radomyshl, and he earned great renown, for the hasidim praised him for feeding them and filling their gullets with liquor.

And it came to pass afterwards, upon his return to his father's house to eat at his table, after he had completed his term at his father-in-law's home, fear of the young son fell upon his father, for upon departing his father's home for Radomyshl, he had been a little boy, childlike in his behavior; not a day had passed without his

being beaten for the abominations he performed. One day he would run away from his teacher's heder and hide all day in the governor's garden to eat of his fruit; the next day he would drink himself drunk in his father's liquor distillery, and it turned out that he had recited neither afternoon nor evening prayers. Such had been his conduct before marrying, and as such he had gone to Radomyshl to live with his father-in-law.

And now he suddenly returns from there after two years—a different person, elegantly dressed in hasidic garb, wearing a black coat fastened across his chest with iron loops, each fitting into the other with trimmings of silk, woven work overlying the coat like lacework around the neck and falling down on the chest on either side, on the right of the coat to the feet (for that was the length of coats in those days, down to the floor), and on his left down to the belt around his waist; a large hat upon his head, of black hairy fur, and a staff in his hand, as long as Eliezer himself, with a silver knob at the top of the staff in hand. His sidecurls were braided around his face,<sup>27</sup> his ears exposed and sticking out behind him like a rabbit's ears. His eyes rolled upward like the eyes of the rabbi of Ruzhin, and his entire demeanor and gait and everything he did were like those of a person behaving like a madman—but the madman of today was formerly called a spiritual and holy man. Therefore did Nahman Leib tremble to see his son, the fruit of his loins, walking in the path of saints and behaving like a pious person, and his heart filled with fear, and he turned his eyes to the holy one, Israel (of Ruzhin), whom his son had chosen. And since then Nahman Leib used to travel once or twice a year, and he tried to persuade the rebbe to come to the town of Chernigov as well on his travels to bless the people and empty their purses to bring benefit to his own house. So Nahman Leib became a loyal Rizhiner hasid and the rebbe loved him.<sup>28</sup>

This is probably a typical example of how young men aged thirteen to fifteen, mainly of wealthy families, attached themselves to Ruzhin Hasidism. Ruzhin hasidim set up their own prayer groups (*minyān*) in various Volhynian communities, such as Radomyshl. These groups were particularly on the lookout for youths, perhaps in the hope that after partaking of the hasidic experience, they would bring their entire extended families with them. This was how Hasidism had been disseminated during its early generations, as reflected in accusations voiced by mitnagdim and maskilim, who complained particularly of the hasidic practice of forming separate prayer groups and making special efforts to attract young men.<sup>29</sup> However, in contrast to the earlier period, the minyan to which Gottlober was referring was Ruzhin, whose practices and style set it apart even from other hasidic congregations.<sup>30</sup> The young man, married early, had left home when still receptive and susceptible to outside influence. He returned an adult, mature and confident in his new way of life. The fervor and inner conviction of the youth's new behavior electrified his family, with particular influence on his father, who was persuaded to attach himself to Israel of Ruzhin. Having had no inspiring religious experience like

his son's, the identity of the rebbe or zaddik whose court he joined was immaterial to the father. Underlying the traditional Jewish way of life was the assumption that everyone should submit to some spiritual authority, be it a rabbi or halakhic authority, the principal of a yeshiva or a zaddik, and it was preferable that the person in question should "rule" the geographical area in which one lived. This basic principle may explain the origins of the elemental force that moved tens of thousands of Jews throughout Eastern Europe, creating the future social substrate of Hasidism as a victorious movement. That Hasidism became a mass movement was due, not only to its social endeavors and religious innovations, but also to its leaders' ability to exploit the profound mental dependence of traditional Orthodox Jewish society on a spiritual authority and to expand that dependence, replacing it by loyalty of the entire family unit to the zaddik's court. In later generations, this loyalty became a natural part of life experience, of the reality into which one was born; it did not have to be chosen.

Another person who had an experience similar to that of Gottlober's brother-in-law was Nehemiah Jehiel, the youngest son of the "Holy Jew" of Pshishkha. His case was apparently typical of the second and third generations of hasidic families who were enthralled by the figure of Rabbi Israel and his new approach. In 1822, at the tender age of fourteen, Nehemiah married the daughter of a wealthy merchant of Wolodarka, near Ruzhin. He left Poland and, as was the custom at the time, moved into his father-in-law's home. There he began to learn various hasidic and ascetic practices (bathing at midnight in the *mikveh*, studying till dawn, and so on), but soon "a new light appeared to him, a lucid, brilliant light," namely, Israel of Ruzhin, and he became a faithful adherent of the neighboring zaddik. Israel himself liked his highborn follower and treated him almost as a family member. When Nehemiah was forced by family circumstances to return to Poland, he began intensively to spread the word of the new leader, particularly in the court of his brother, Jerachmiel of Pshishkha, and in his family circles. On his rebbe's advice, he later founded a hasidic court at Bychawa, in the Lublin district, and was active there as what we have called a "secondary zaddik." Throughout that time, he continued to visit the court at Ruzhin (and later at Sadgora) and stay with his mentor for brief or longer periods.<sup>31</sup>

The interest of famous zaddikim in the happenings at Rabbi Israel's court, and their desire to gauge the character of the new zaddik, whose fame had spread far and wide, is additional evidence of his growing popularity. By this time, indeed, the mutual curiosity of zaddikim in one another and their visits to each other's courts were a matter of routine. The zaddikim considered themselves as belonging, albeit not formally, to one elite, to a unique, separate spiritual-social body. The fact that the members of

this group were personally acquainted with one another was of much significance in its consolidation: apart from the mere satisfaction of natural curiosity, it also had spiritual aspects (learning different ways of worship) and practical, organizational aspects (such as examination of different patterns of leadership behavior, joint initiatives, matchmaking).<sup>32</sup>

An account of visits to Ruzhin by several of the most celebrated zaddikim in the hasidic movement at that time, including Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta and Naphtali of Ropshits, was given by Asher Isaiah Rubin, Naphtali's son-in-law, who also took part:

They were all in the place of residence of his glory in Ruzhin and were waiting in the rooms of his residences until he should come. And when he came, they all stood until the holy rabbi of Ruzhin had taken his seat on his Throne of Glory. And afterwards, too, they stood until he commanded them to sit. Although they were elderly men and he was then in his youth, this was all proper in their eyes.<sup>33</sup>

This meeting left a particularly strong impression on the rabbi of Apta, who was then living in Mezhibozh. I have already referred to his overt admiration for the young zaddik of Ruzhin, which surely enhanced the latter's prestige and fame as the great "promise" of the world of Zaddikism. A hasidic tradition about the rabbi of Apta's visit to the community of Sdeh Lavan (Belaya Tserkov) quotes his address to the people who welcomed him:

I was in the Ukraine, where I met one who is the son of a great zaddik, and he is a holy fruit, so much so that it is the duty of every man and woman to give themselves up, in money and honor, to the extent of their ability. . . . I was in the little town of Ruzhin, and there I saw a young man with whom you can associate yourselves; to whom you can communicate yourselves.<sup>34</sup>

Naphtali of Ropshits, on the other hand, was more circumspect and jocularly mocked at the splendor of Israel's palace. When the rabbi of Apta asked him, we are told in a hasidic folk tradition, if he knew what "the cut carpets on the floor of the Ruzhiner's room" were used for, he replied, "They are necessary because of the fleas."<sup>35</sup>

Reports of Israel's court at Ruzhin picture it as humming with activity and thronged with people. A variety of characters, hailing from all parts of the hasidic Diaspora of Eastern Europe, could find what they wanted at the court. A typical visit of hasidim from a geographically and conceptually distant region is described in the following report, dated 1827, following the death of Dov Ber, the so-called "Middle Rebbe" of Habad Hasidism:

It occurred to a few members of Habad to probe the nature of the rabbi and zaddik of Ruzhin, thinking that they might perhaps attach themselves to him as his disciples. Now, the customs of the hasidim of White Russia, who are always used to



hearing words of Habad Teachings, are well known. But when they came before our master of Ruzhin, who is famed for his habit of saying few words of Torah, for “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter” [Prov. 25:2], his ways were concealed from the Habad hasidim and their desire was not fulfilled by him.<sup>36</sup>

These hasidim, from Disna (Belorussia), could not find satisfaction in Ruzhin. The kind of Hasidism to which they were accustomed, with its emphasis on proficiency in the Torah and its image of the zaddik as a figure in whom the world of Torah was intertwined with Hasidism, was too different from Rabbi Israel’s conception, which—at least, on the face of things—eschewed traditional scholarship. Others, however, found in Israel and in the values he represented the ideal figure of a leader. Thus, for the same motives of curiosity that brought the Habad hasidim to Ruzhin, others whose former rabbi had died, leaving no generally accepted heir, came looking for a new zaddik.<sup>37</sup>

Of particular interest is the attraction of some hasidim of Strelisk to Israel’s court. These were the disciples of Uri the “Seraph,” who were generally known for their extreme poverty and destitution.<sup>38</sup> To any impartial observer, they seemed, with their emphasis on ascetic values and spiritual contemplation rather than material well-being, to be the very antithesis of the Ruzhin hasidim. Unlike those of the Ruzhiners, their prayers were ecstatic; they swayed vigorously, yelled, and distorted their faces. After their rebbe’s death in late summer 1826, a few of his hasidim reached the Ruzhin court, both as individuals and in groups.<sup>39</sup>

It is not clear what attracted the Strelisk hasidim to Ruzhin, of all places; various explanations have been proposed. Some authors wrote that Rabbi Uri himself, before his death, had instructed his hasidim to join Israel’s court: “They should disregard the fact that the distance is great. . . . and they should disregard the fact that his worship is concealed.”<sup>40</sup> At any rate, it is striking that Rabbi Uri’s former hasidim were not completely assimilated into the new court but continued to maintain their own social frameworks and unique customs: “They had a minyan of their own and used to pray in a loud voice, as was their practice in their rebbe’s presence.”<sup>41</sup> As a result, the clash between their specific values and those of their new, chosen dynasty was inevitable: the kvitlekh they forwarded Rabbi Israel were concerned with purely spiritual affairs and not, as usual, with questions of livelihood and health. It is reported that Israel sent back all their kvitlekh and peremptorily demanded that they write new ones, also requesting his intervention for their physical welfare.<sup>42</sup> He had had considerable regard for Rabbi Uri and on occasion had taken an interest in him and his peculiar practices. Nevertheless, his discerning psychological sense prompted him to tell the Strelisk hasidim who sought his attention that they had better forget their former rebbe and adopt the customs of their new brand of

Hasidism: "When one comes to the second rebbe, it is like marrying a second wife, insofar as so long as one does not forget the first one, there cannot be love for the second. So when one journeys to the new zaddik, one must forget the first zaddik."<sup>43</sup>

Even after the court had moved to Sadgora, whole groups of hasidim continued to join Rabbi Israel's court en bloc. For example, we learn from a manifesto that Israel issued in 1847 that some Rimanov hasidim did so after the passing of their admor, Zevi the "Servant": "And now there are with me people who had been followers of the zaddik during his life . . . and I ordered them."<sup>44</sup> It is clear, however, that in that case only a few dozen hasidim were involved.

Finally, attention should be called to a little passage in a letter of Nathan Sternhartz of Nemirov, the celebrated disciple of Nahman of Bratslav, who wrote his son, in 1836:

The famous rabbi of Ruzhin was near here [Nemirov] before the last Sabbath, and some important people traveled from here and asked him to come for the Sabbath, but he refused their request. However, he will be in our neighborhood again on the Sabbath of the Torah portion of *Beshalach*, and then he may comply with their request. And you will certainly understand that I had great doubts in this respect, whether to travel to him as well. And for several reasons it was not possible for me to travel. Now, too, I do not know how to act in this matter. But who knows what the day will bring.<sup>45</sup>

In this letter, Rabbi Nathan lays bare his innermost doubts, which were surely characteristic of many hasidim: should he join the "important" members of his community who were going to stay with Rabbi Israel, and what significance would attach to such a step? On the one hand, before his association with Nachman of Bratslav, Nathan had been a disciple of Shalom Shakhna, Israel's father,<sup>46</sup> and the new zaddik's fame had certainly reached his inquisitive ears; on the other, absolute commitment to his late master's heritage precluded any move that might be interpreted as abandoning Bratslav Hasidism and seeking the patronage of another zaddik. Nathan's doubts persisted, but other hasidim most probably gave in to their curiosity.

#### *IV. His Personality and the Secret of His Charisma*

What, then, was the secret of Rabbi Israel's success? Few sources directly address this question, but there are nevertheless a few descriptions from which some information may be derived about Israel's leadership qualities and the fascination he held for people.

In 1826, a strange visitor, Bonaventura Mayer, paid a visit to Israel's

court at Ruzhin. In later years, this eccentric Jewish adventurer converted to Christianity, in all probability in order to secure an appointment as professor of oriental languages at the University of Vienna.<sup>47</sup> In his book *Die Juden unserer zeit*, Mayer describes his travels, beginning in 1825, through all parts of the Jewish Diaspora in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. He was particularly intrigued by the Jews of Eastern Europe and especially by the hasidic communities. Hasidism, he believed, was the authentic Judaism (in contrast to the Reform Judaism of Germany), for in his view strict observance of the commandments was the only proper way to reveal the true meaning of Christianity. His instructive observations of Israel's charismatic personality, his customs and daily behavior, his hasidim's veneration for him and the customs of his court are of prime importance. His testimony is that of an objective, unbiased eyewitness. Giving praise where it was due, he was also able to criticize and deplore. His standpoint was mainly anthropological in nature, and as we have few such accounts, his report is doubly significant:

They [the hasidim] study Kabbalah and Talmud diligently and successfully, and consequently they have among them excellent Talmud scholars. They also comprise three groups, each of them under one chief rabbi. We shall describe just one group.

This rabbi, Israel, lives in the town of Risen in the province of Volhynia, six miles from Zhitomir. He is a man lacking much scientific education, but of excellent natural intelligence. If he is still alive,<sup>48</sup> he should today be in his middle forties. He married at fourteen and since then has been serving as chief rabbi. Several times a year, he journeys to places where his followers live and stays there over the Sabbath. Whoever has something against someone else comes to him with his complaint, and he delivers his verdict—not according to the Written Law but according to his natural intelligence. And his verdict is the law. His scribe writes the verdict, and he himself signs it with great difficulty. He is so illiterate that he is barely capable of signing his own name. His sentence is sacred and everyone must obey. People come to him for advice and help not only in legal matters but also in all other matters of life: if someone has a barren wife, or if his liquor business is not progressing well, if something has been stolen, or if he is not satisfied with his business dealings. In brief, they come to him in any situation and request his advice or his prayer. Sometimes, such a request succeeds; at other times—as indeed happens—things do not work out well.

His reputation is so great that even Russian noblemen come to consult with him, respect him, and love him. Thus, when I visited the rabbi in 1826, I met Field Marshal Wittgenstein.<sup>49</sup> This nobleman accorded him every honor, even offering him his most beautiful palace in one of the towns in his dominion if he would agree to live there. He is indeed worthy of this general regard. Even important, complicated affairs do not escape his intelligence and are clear and obvious to him. His personality, too, has a good influence on his followers. One might say that he is a person of noble appearance. His face, except for a mustache, is smooth and beard-

less. He has the rare talent of being able to make everyone like him. His look has such magnetic power that even his enemy cannot withstand him.

Although his living quarters are built with royal splendor, he himself lives frugally and, unlike the other Jews of Russia, greatly values cleanliness. One might say, without exaggeration that during the week he eats no more than another person eats in a single meal.<sup>50</sup> He sleeps no more than three of the twenty-four hours of the day. The other hours are devoted to his occupations. From early morning till eleven o'clock [in the morning], he receives the visitors. From twelve to one o'clock, he secludes himself to pray. During the afternoon hours, his chambers are again open to all. Each day he feeds many people, from all walks of society. They are all his guests. Sometimes, especially at festivals, the number of guests may be as much as a thousand. He himself does not attend the meal, except on Sabbaths and at festivals.

Eight years ago<sup>51</sup> he had the misfortune to be implicated in a bad business, of which, as it later turned out, he was innocent. Among the Jews under him [i.e., the hasidim], there was an informer against his coreligionists, who informed about someone who was dealing in stolen goods. All this he testified in Russian courts. His followers were highly incensed at this, and they captured the informer secretly and set him afire. The affair did not remain a secret, and these people, to save themselves, accused the chief rabbi of having instructed them to do so. We do not know what the end of the legal process was.<sup>52</sup>

This account is important despite the confused version of the "bad business" Israel was involved in (discussed in chapter 4). It provides us with information not only about Israel's daily routine, but also about how, at the beginning of his career as a leader, he obtained his followers' loyalty and admiration. Of particular note is his practice of spending long hours in personal, intimate contact with the hasidim who came to see him, listening to their requests, talking to them, and trying to solve their problems.<sup>53</sup> Rabbi Israel earned his visitors' affection with his warm personality and innate keen intelligence. He made his name as a leader by forging a living relationship with his hasidim in their hometowns (not necessarily at his court). He visited his followers' communities several times a year, staying with them, thus creating close contacts, whether by holding court temporarily in the distant community, with the requisite pomp and circumstance, or by acting as a kind of "itinerant magistrate," arbitrating and settling disputes. This account deserves particular attention from the standpoint of the history of Hasidism, because it furnishes interesting evidence of the role assumed by the zaddikim as substitutes for the communal institutions, which had lost their authority and credibility—including even the communal rabbinical court, which dealt with civil disputes.<sup>54</sup>

Rabbi Israel did not achieve this position by dint of scholarly authority, supported by knowledge of Halakhah, but by virtue of charismatic leadership and natural intelligence. Indeed, his charisma, his acuity in worldly

affairs, and his ability easily and clearly to grasp complicated matters are stressed as the main elements in his status as a zaddik. Without these qualities, it is doubtful whether he could have provided reliable counsel in domestic or economic affairs and earned such great affection and esteem. By virtue of these characteristics—and no doubt also thanks to his wealth—he enjoyed the respect of Russian aristocrats, who also sought his advice. His charisma relied both on impressive physical features—an aristocratic appearance and a magnetic gaze, which could paralyze his worst foes—and on the physical accoutrements of his life, which made a tremendous impression on all observers: a magnificent palace, exemplary cleanliness, and a carefully structured, well-planned daily schedule, constituting a kind of antithesis to the idle lifestyle of the hasidim. Moreover, “they are all his guests”—his court and rooms were open to all comers, and all comers were considered guests, entitled to dine at the court’s expense.

It is interesting to compare Mayer’s account of Israel’s schedule to the later, reworked version by the orthodox writer Abraham Bromberg:

He slept only three hours in twenty-four. He would rise in the small hours of the morning and sit, locked in his room, studying Torah for several hours. At nine in the morning, he began to receive people until twelve, after which he got up to pray. After prayers, he ate something and again received people. He spent one hour each day doing physical labor, as commanded by the doctors, and he would cut down trees and saw them. Between the afternoon and evening prayers, he would go out riding in his carriage. After the evening prayer, until midnight, he again received people.<sup>55</sup>

Bromberg has converted the early morning hours, in which Israel received visitors (until midday), into hours of Torah study. He also reports that the zaddik devoted one hour a day to hard physical labor, cutting and sawing wood—a most surprising occupation for an Eastern European Jew, especially for a zaddik who otherwise seems to have behaved more like a delicate, pampered lover of luxury. This fable probably developed from the testimony of Israel’s son David Moses of Chortkov that his father did light carpentry work—not on his doctors’ orders but rather, apparently, as a novel way of worshiping God.<sup>56</sup>

Mayer also devotes a few words to Rabbi Israel’s appearance: his facial features, his piercing gaze, and the fact that he was clean-shaven, except for a mustache. Lacking pictures, one is curious to know what he looked like. Many other writers also refer to his noble appearance, but the term “noble” tells us next to nothing. There is obviously a conscious correlation between one’s identification of a person as noble by virtue of role, position, or lineage, on the one hand, and a social consensus that the person’s face has an aristocratic aspect, on the other. It is not always clear what came first, or

whether a person's face would have been considered noble had he or she been a mere shopkeeper and not a reigning monarch. At any rate, "noble appearance" is hardly an objective description.

Another writer, a Polish aristocrat by the name of Xawer Branicki, incidentally referred to Israel's appearance and his pale features, which reminded him of the suffering face of Jesus as impressed on Veronica's kerchief.<sup>57</sup> Another, more detailed description may be found in the command issued at the end of 1843 to the Russian border guards with a view to preventing Israel's entry into Russia (he was then forty-seven years old). The description includes the following details: of medium height; light brown hair; very small, light-colored beard; gray eyes; "clean" face (probably meaning "clean-shaven"); long nose (presumably the inevitable anti-Semitic stereotype); unexceptional mouth; no external signs.<sup>58</sup>

Rabbi Israel clearly had no beard other than a short, barely visible tuft of hair. This feature—very unusual for a zaddik—was probably due to physical causes, namely, the skin ailment from which he had already suffered in childhood, which made it impossible for him to grow a beard. But the physical causes were combined with ideological reasons: Israel objected on principle to growing a long beard and sidelocks; his objection is reflected in various sources and in addition influenced his followers' outward appearance. He himself was well aware of being "different" and would crack jokes about it: "Once . . . he grasped his holy beard and said: King Solomon had only a little hair. Indeed, one who has much hair has a small brain, and it was said of King Solomon, 'He was the wisest of all men,' that he was a very wise man; hence he had only little hair. That is the truth! And even people say: 'Long hair—short sense.'"<sup>59</sup>

An old Polish hasid named Israel Gorzichenski, who had met Rabbi Israel as a child, recalled:

And this writer was privileged to view the purity and splendor of his face. When he was still in Ruzhin, he had no beard, like a man fifteen years old, and he was then forty years old, only near his lips he had hair. Afterwards I was privileged to shelter in his shade at Sadgora, after he had been imprisoned in Kiev. He had a small mole, and in that mole there were a few hairs; you could count them.<sup>60</sup>

An oral tradition in fact ascribes to Rabbi Israel the statement that the authorities had issued the infamous "clothing decree" ordering Jews to cut off their beards and sidelocks—which was indeed brutally carried out in some cases—because the Jews had allowed their sidelocks to grow too long.<sup>61</sup>

In September 1839, when Israel was already in prison in Kiev, a group of Scottish missionaries was visiting towns and villages of Bukovina and Moldavia. A chance conversation they had with a few Jews from Barlad,

south of Jassy, apprised them of the great prestige and respect accorded Rabbi Israel even in those parts, quite distant from his hometown:

They told . . . that they all believe in the Divine authority of the leader of the Chasidim, in Russia, a rabbi of wealth, who used to have attendants and a band of music following him whenever he rode out in his carriage. He had a chamber in his house, where it was believed that Messiah will stay when he comes; and at the beginning of each Sabbath [he] went into this chamber, pretending to salute Messiah and wish him "Good Sabbath." He had two fine horses, on one of which Messiah is to ride, and himself upon the other. Not long ago, being accused before the Emperor by the Jews who are not Chasidim, of sending great sums of money to the Holy Land, and teaching that it is no sin to cheat the government by smuggling, he was imprisoned at Kiow [Kiev], and, though large sums have been offered for his release, he is still in prison.<sup>62</sup>

If this report is true—and there is no reason to doubt it, as it is supported by other sources too<sup>63</sup>—it describes Rabbi Israel's deliberate creation of a special messianic ceremonial. Clearly, with the full knowledge and in the sight of his hasidim, he set himself up as destined to be an intimate partner of the Messiah.

Thus, in addition to the contribution of Israel's eminence and wealth to his personality as a leader, one must also note the messianic element. The sum total of all these elements aroused respect and veneration among the masses and made him a legend even during his lifetime. Also notable is the broad geographical scope of his influence even when still at Ruzhin—and this influence increased in time because of the prestige he earned as a prisoner. Israel's name was renowned throughout the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, and he had followers not only in the provinces of Kiev, Volhynia, and Podolia but also in Poland and Lithuania, the principalities of Moldavia and Bukovina, Bessarabia and the provinces of New Russia, Galicia, Hungary, and even as far away as Germany.<sup>64</sup>

Most surprising is a report that Rabbi Israel maintained contacts with the so-called Mountain Jews of the Caucasus region, in the east of the Russian empire. Elijah b. Mishael of Derbent, one of the most important rabbis of that region, having heard of the greatness of Rabbi Israel from a Berdichev merchant, corresponded with the zaddik (unfortunately, the correspondence itself has not survived) and even exchanged gifts with him. This was reported in 1867 in a newspaper article, written from Dagestan:

The Sephardim told me here that the late Rabbi Elijah, toward the end of his life, used to correspond with the Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, for a Jew from Berdichev who had come to the city of Derbent with various kinds of petty goods had set out before Rabbi Elijah the great deeds of Israel of Ruzhin. Accordingly, Elijah then sent a letter to Israel of Ruzhin with that merchant, together with a little box of pomegranates as a gift. And the said Rabbi Israel, upon receiving the letter with the

pomegranates, also sent Rabbi Elijah a letter with two or three *tallit katan*. And from that day on, they wrote one another letters many times, by post. In 1855, after the death of the said Rabbi Elijah, his nephew Abraham b. Hanukkah decided to set out and travel to see Israel of Ruzhin, and he also took with him the letters that the rabbi had sent his late uncle Rabbi Elijah. But upon arriving in the province of Kiev, he learned of the death of the Rabbi Israel.<sup>65</sup>

This communication, clearly rather exotic in nature, reveals both the traditional method of transmitting information from country to country—by merchants on their travels<sup>66</sup>—and the impression that Israel's actions made on a great variety of audiences.

Another description of Rabbi Israel comes from letters written in 1909 by Solomon Rubin to Samuel Abba Horodezky. Rubin (1823–1910), a hasid in his youth (he claimed to have served under the zaddik Zevi Eli-melekh of Dinov), later became a maskil. He despised the vulgar Hasidism that he had known in his young days in Volhynia and Galicia but admired the early, "theoretical" Hasidism, which, he claimed, was just "one small step" away from Spinoza's philosophy. Although he claimed that remoteness in time and place from the hasidic congregation enabled him to view the past objectively, what he wrote should be treated with caution, as various details in his accounts are tendentious and false. In fact—on his own admission—he had never met Rabbi Israel, so he was only reporting stories at second hand. His sarcastic reports are nevertheless valuable, because they give us an idea of Israel's mythical figure as imagined by those of his contemporaries who had only heard of it. As in all myths, alongside the exaggerations and tall stories, one also discerns authentic elements, which are consistent with information from other sources. Rubin's letters again paint an impressive picture of Rabbi Israel, his magnificent garb, and his unique practices.

I never met Israel of Rizhin face to face, but I heard my melamed and others saying that there was no doubt but that he was the Messiah,<sup>67</sup> who would reveal himself if he found the generation worthy of it. I also heard that he was not proficient in Torah, his Torah being concealed inside him, and he did not bring it out during the Third Meal [on the Sabbath], and that every day, when he was seated upon his chair, the *Zohar* was open before him on the table.<sup>68</sup> Already then I was becoming convinced that this zaddik was a complete ignoramus—he did not perform miracles in heaven and Earth, no one knew his innermost person, but his exterior was a golden image; if he was a fake, there was no greater master of deceit. One of the two: he was either a flesh-and-blood angel or a demon born in the underworld.

. . . I am sorry that I cannot tell about the zaddik rebbe Srulsthe more than I have written you, for I knew him only by hearsay and never saw his face. Neither did I discuss him much with others who had actually seen him, as he was not proficient in Torah—and that was what I sought from the zaddikim of the time, while he was like a dumb man, never opening his mouth other than to say what was most



necessary. He did not comfort the wretched, nor promised much, merely bowing his head; all his movements seemed to be pre-planned. When he appeared before his visitors in open court, he would sit upon his chair dressed cleanly in expensive clothes like a Russian nobleman, with a hat upon his head that was said to have cost hundreds of silver rubles;<sup>69</sup> he was spick and span in his expensive clothes from head to toe. Stuck in his mouth was a pipe, which was said to be worth several gold ducats,<sup>70</sup> and before him on the table was an open book of the *Zohar*. The donations people had brought him were laid on the table, but he did not look at them. He never ate or drank in public, only touching the dish or the glass with the tip of his finger, upon which those standing before him would immediately snatch it and divide it up among themselves. As to his being as silent as a graven image, it was said that he was not of this world but had come only to wait until the time came to reveal himself as the Messiah. And when he did not find the generation worthy of that, he kept silent and awaited the day when he would return whence he had come. He bequeathed the soul of the Messiah to one of his sons—we know not which. My melamed, who was attached to him, going to visit him twice a year, once told us, upon returning from his journey to him, that he and his companions had visited the zaddik in his room and found him sitting at the table, with a small vessel full of preserves before him, which he was eating, tasting a little at a time. They waited at a distance until he had finished eating, and when he had finished, they heard him saying, “May the words of my mouth and the prayer of my heart,” etc. [Pss. 19:15], that is, the verse recited at the end of the *shmoneh esreh* prayer. Then, our melamed told us, we realized that he had not been eating preserves, not a bit of it, but when he had seemed to us to be eating, he was actually reciting the *shmoneh esreh* prayer, and the proof is that he ended with the verse “May the words,” etc. This much I heard in my youth in the heder of my melamed, who was a big *z . . .*,<sup>71</sup> God save us.<sup>72</sup>

These testimonies, as well as others to be discussed below, paint a picture of a natural-born leader, blessed with common sense and a healthy logic. Although he is not a scholar (“a complete ignoramus”), it is clear to all that “he is the Messiah.” He neither resorts to working wonders or miracles nor tries to deceive his visitors, but calls upon his natural wisdom to answer them and sway them with the power of rational logic. These elements stand out in contrast to what we know of the behavior of other contemporary zaddikim of the region. For example, the Scottish missionaries mentioned previously also described the zaddik Meir of Premyshlan, who ruled his court in wealth and splendor and took particularly high *pidyonot* from his followers. Nevertheless, thousands flocked to his court from all parts of Galicia and Bukovina to tell him of their problems and seek solace for their ills. No fewer than three thousand hasidim came to his court on festivals, each donating his *pidyon*. His table provided for about five hundred diners. The Scottish observers compared Rabbi Meir to the biblical figure of a prophet who claimed to know the future and reveal hidden things and thoughts by simply gazing into the faces of his interlocutors.<sup>73</sup>

However, the similarity between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Israel was superficial. There are few reports in Ruzhin sources of hasidim appealing to their rebbe to cure their troubles. The zaddik's prayer had many merits, but it was not often used at the Ruzhin court for prosaic, earthly purposes. Israel preferred to deal with such matters through general benedictions ("May the Lord help you"), stories, personal conversation, examination of the kvitlekh brought by the hasidim and, as far as possible, practical, rationally motivated action. His leadership had almost nothing of the magical-prophetic element, emphasizing instead the rational-pragmatic. Most of those attending his court were not lame, barren, blind, or otherwise afflicted, but ordinary hasidim, attracted to him not because of economic or physical problems but because of their esteem for his style and his personality.

### *V. A New Mode of Worship*

One secret of Rabbi Israel's success as a hasidic leader was his open rejection of the common image of the zaddik as an intellectual figure who, through his Torah and hasidic teachings, passes on the spiritual abundance coursing through him to his followers. This rejection was, paradoxically, explained in terms of a well-defined theoretical reason. The hasidim were indeed greatly attracted by the fact that, unlike other zaddikim, Israel did not usually "say Torah," as the hasidic expression has it, at the table.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, he gave his guests the unmistakable feeling that his calm, introspective exterior<sup>75</sup> was not a sign of weakness, ignorance, or spiritual shallowness, but the very opposite. His direct, authoritarian way of addressing his hasidim, always peremptory and commanding; his occasional brief sermons, culminating in a topical message; his habit of praying alone, without outward manifestations of ecstasy or devotion;<sup>76</sup> his folksy, direct, simple speech; his positive attitude to material, esthetic values—none of these were seen as signs of arrogant contempt for his followers or "aristocratic condescension,"<sup>77</sup> but simply as a novel, different mode of worship, stemming from a person supremely confident in the justice of his convictions and well aware of his place in society.

One person who frequented his court provides us with a glimpse of Israel's substitute for the more traditional "words of Torah" uttered at the dinner table:

He who studies the Torah that was given at Sinai can achieve such a high level even though living in this world, cleaving to corporeality and speaking to the world in words that strike people as simple . . . so that even when he speaks to those who understand a little of the innermost essence of things, and it seems to them that the zaddik is saying simple things, nevertheless the zaddik's head reaches heaven, nay,

even higher than heaven, cleaving to the supernal spheres and conjoined with Infinity, blessed be He, in holiness and purity. As my eyes beheld several times in the case of admor, Holy of Holies, the pure and bright light, brilliant in the heavens, whom praise befits, our master Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, may his soul rest in peace.<sup>78</sup>

By “simple words,” reaching the heavens, this author means the stories that Rabbi Israel would tell his hasidim instead of “words of Torah.” For him, a story was the most fitting medium to impart Hasidism to his followers, the most apt mode of worship in this “little,” lowly generation, while struggling to overcome the evil powers pervading the world.<sup>79</sup> For example, he offered the following homily on a famous biblical verse:

Therefore, the righteous of Antiquity, when they had to benefit the world, did this through Torah and prayer, for the world was then in the aspect of greatness. Now, however, the world being in the aspect of smallness, when the zaddik has to benefit the world, he cannot do this other than by stories and simple things. That is the meaning of the verse (Song of Songs 8:8) “We have a little sister,” for “sister” refers to the Congregation of Israel, when Israel is in the aspect of “littleness”; “whose breasts are not yet formed” refers to Wisdom and Intelligence; “What shall we do for our sister”—whereby can the zaddik benefit the Congregation of Israel? only “when she is spoken for”—when the zaddik tells tales, thereby he benefits her.<sup>80</sup>

The objective fact that the generations were in decline had, in Rabbi Israel’s view, caused a qualitative change in the acceptable modes of worship; in essence, however, there had been no change, and the power of worship through simple things and stories was no less than that of the traditional mode of worship, through Torah and prayer.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, even in the seemingly superficial exterior of the “simple things” a person able—and willing—to delve deeper could, with a little effort, discern highly significant spiritual content. Israel knew how to tell the hasidim who flocked to his court revolutionary, novel things, which came as music to the ears of people accustomed to the cynical, overbearing elitism of contemporary zaddikim. Hasidim who could make no sense of a complicated, obfuscating plethora of quotations from the *Zohar* and other kabbalistic literature easily understood Israel’s “simple” ideas, and he, for his part, made them feel that what he was saying was not meant merely for a small minority of initiates.

Here is an example of such a simple tale, in which Rabbi Israel invoked familiar, realistic items to convey an ethical message:

Once he came to his beit midrash, and said: I’ll tell you a story. A villager once came to town for Rosh Hashanah and went to services. Now the villagers of old did not know how to pray, so he stood there and looked around. When they were reciting the shmonah esreh prayer, everyone was weeping. He began to wonder: What is

this weeping? Who struck them and made them weep? Surely there was no quarrel in the beit midrash! And he thought about it until it occurred to him: They are probably weeping because they are so late in the beit midrash and they are hungry. He, too, was hungry, so he began to weep and make sounds. And after the shmoneh esreh, when they stopped weeping, he again wondered: How come they are no longer weeping? Until it occurred to him that at home, before coming to the beit midrash, he had seen a piece of dry meat being placed in the food called *tzimmes*, and this piece of meat needed much cooking, and the smaller the piece of meat, the better the food. So he, too, calmed down. And when they came to the blowing of the shofar and once again began to weep, he began to wonder again. Until he decided that indeed the dish would be better, the longer it cooked, but no one has strength to wait so long, and he began to weep bitterly. In all probability this is an allegory of Exile.<sup>82</sup>

As simplistic as this tale and its moral might seem, it was surely an effective means of moving his audience: likening the sufferings of Exile and the long, frustrating wait for redemption to the muddled thinking of an ignorant peasant, using his simple mind to explain the weeping of the congregation on the High Holy Days.

Other aspects of Rabbi Israel's outlook and of his qualities as a hasidic leader will be examined later. At this point, two examples will suffice to illustrate the new social doctrine implicit in Israel's "simple" teachings; this doctrine was a major factor in the rapid spread of Ruzhin Hasidism. And so he said:

In every Jew there is a holy spark, the like of which does not exist even in the zaddik, but its light is not revealed equally in each person. For example, when a precious stone in a wall is covered with plaster, its brilliance and light are not visible, but when it is distilled from the matter, the stone begins to shine somewhat, and when it is well cleaned, it shines strongly. And when it is taken out of the wall and cleaned very well, then it shines more and more. All the more so when it is placed in silver and gold vessels.<sup>83</sup>

Implicit in this allegory is a remarkable idea: not only is there a hidden spark of holiness in every Jew's heart (known in Yiddish as *dos pintele yid*),<sup>84</sup> but this spark may exceed in quality even the spark hidden in the heart of the zaddik himself. However, just as a prisoner cannot free himself from jail and a precious stone embedded in a wall cannot pull itself out, so the individual Jew needs the zaddik's help. Only the zaddik, in an intimate operation likened here to cleansing the precious stone of the plaster adhering to it, is capable of uncovering the spark. Moreover, the encounter between the precious stone and the "silver and gold vessels" (i.e., the zaddik) enhances and magnifies the light emitted by the spark.

This surprising promise, revealing as it were a "democratic" element in

the potential of sanctity, must surely have attracted many Jews seeking some way of perfecting their worship in the context of the ties binding the hasidim to the zaddik. Although Hasidism in the first half of the nineteenth century was already showing some signs of becoming an impersonal mass movement, it was still the preferred option of the multitudes of Jews in the southeastern reaches of the Russian Pale of Settlement. This was particularly true with regard to the Jews in villages and medium-sized towns who had no scholarly background but nevertheless wanted to remain an organic part of traditional Jewish society. All they had to do was to choose the zaddik most to their liking, in whom they could believe and trust, and through him define their religious and social identity.

Israel of Ruzhin's doctrines also placed emphasis on the unbreakable bond of dependence between him and his hasidim. It was this dependence that animated the zaddik, lent meaning to his work, and enabled him to function properly. Although the idea may also be traced in the teachings of other authors who pondered the role of the zaddik, Israel's version added a radical element. He tried to impart to his hasidim a special nuance, which set them apart from other hasidim and at the same time set him, too, apart from other zaddikim. In actual fact, he proclaimed, all good, God-fearing Jews in the world were his hasidim. This puzzling declaration—in palpable contrast to reality as seen by any child—received an intriguing interpretation. His “direct” hasidim, he argued, both those who came to his court and those who were spreading his teachings in their own localities, were merely the outward, partial manifestation of Ruzhin Hasidism; the real, tremendous dimensions of Ruzhin were invisible:

He began to speak: Lo, there are zaddikim who are twelve combinations of the Divine Name *havayah* [the Tetragrammaton] and twelve combinations of the Divine Name *adonay* [the name of God as traditionally pronounced]. The permutations of the combinations change according to the points [vocalization]. The zaddikim are the letters and the hasidim who travel to them are the points. Hence the zaddikim and the hasidim need one another. And just as the hasidim need the zaddik, so the zaddik needs them, and through them he can be elevated or, Heaven forbid, fall.

But I am the actual, simple Divine Name *havayah*, therefore I do not care whether people come to see me or not; wherever there is a decent Jew, he is mine anyway. Indeed, the whole world needs to be perfected, and therefore my hasidim are dispersed and scattered in many places. And when someone travels to me and he is on the way and seeks a coach, and in so doing happens upon a coach in which *deitshen* [“Germans,” i.e., maskilim] are going his way, and he makes an agreement with the driver to take him on the box, and when the time comes for the Afternoon Prayer and the hasid gets off the coach to make a preparation for prayers, and the driver has to stop and wait for him, and the passengers call out, “Why do you

stop?" Because they are in a hurry and are vexed at the interruption of the journey—then that is their [the *deitshen's*] perfection.<sup>85</sup>

This passage expresses Israel's view that there are different gradations in the bond between the zaddik and his followers. The natural, desirable norm is to travel to the zaddik and visit his court. This bond has many advantages and indeed strengthens both parties. However, in his case, he considered himself in his mystical aspect as "the actual, simple Divine Name *havayah*," not just a "combination" made up of letters and points like the other zaddikim. Hence the mere fact of visiting or not visiting his court could not alter the mystical dependence between him and all the hasidim who "belonged" to him. Whether they come to the court or not, no conceivable power could possibly separate the leaves scattered on the ground from the tree trunk from which they had fallen or been plucked.

The testimony of a son of the Polish zaddik Solomon Judah Leib of Lentshna, Joshua of Ostrov, who attended Rabbi Israel's court in his youth, can serve to conclude this section. The following conversation aptly illustrates the uncertainties besetting young hasidim seeking the proper approach to worship, as well as the invigorating attraction of the Ruzhin doctrines:

As the Holy Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin told me . . . when I visited him in my youth and I spoke with him about spiritual healing and physical healing, and I told him that my prime interest was spiritual healing. He said to me: Not so, for first one must be a receptacle. And if, Heaven forbid, the body is incomplete, then it is not a receptacle. To that end, physical healing must come first.<sup>86</sup>

The natural course of hasidic thought, after three generations of Hasidism, implied that "spiritual healing," that is, the perfection of the soul, which prepared it for the constant tension of sanctity, devotion, communion with God, and other mystical values, was the culmination of hasidic worship. The dualistic conception of the supposed opposition of soul versus body, according to which the body was merely the "prison" of the soul, hence not worthy of special attention, had been a constant motif in diverse genres of Hebrew literature since the early Middle Ages; as early as the late eighteenth century, it had penetrated various strands of hasidic thought, which received it from kabbalistic ethical literature. Some zaddikim were no longer averse to preaching ascetic behavior and repeated fasting, despite the apparent contradiction or retreat to ideas that the Besht and his companions had rejected. Even a fellow zaddik like Mordekhai of Chernobyl, who also held sway over a "royal" court, openly encouraged his hasidim to fast and practice self-mortification. Against this background, Rabbi Israel's vehement objection to ascetic practices (a subject to which

we shall return later), and his insistence that “physical healing” was a positive value *ab initio* (and not merely *a posteriori*) and a necessary step on the road to the desired level of the soul, should be seen as a refreshing, original innovation in the petrified ideological world of hasidic thought in his time.

## *VI. Opposition*

Only naturally, support for Israel of Ruzhin was by no means universal; his leadership was not accepted unhesitatingly everywhere, and in certain places it aroused opposition or at least created tension. This section looks at contemporary hostile reactions on the part of various circles—other zaddikim within the hasidic camp and nonhasidic Torah scholars.

There is little surviving evidence of zaddikim expressing real objections (as opposed to criticism or bewilderment) to Rabbi Israel. Presumably, reservations were voiced mainly by zaddikim who feared that he would take over communities traditionally included in their spheres of influence. The actual geographical scope of the spread of Hasidism is a rather complicated problem, and in the absence of any comprehensive geographical-historical or ethnographical research in this area, historians cannot at this point offer satisfactory explanations for the “geography” of the various hasidic dynasties.<sup>87</sup> It is nevertheless clear that whenever a zaddik encroached on tacitly agreed borders, struggles broke out between the rival dynasties,<sup>88</sup> expressed variously as personal tension between zaddikim, altercations among the rank and file, appointment of favored companions to key positions, displacement of rivals, and the like.

Tensions over Israel’s “conquests” broke out between him and his older relative and neighbor the zaddik Mordekhai Twersky of Chernobyl. The two “divided among themselves the kingship over all the Jews in Russia, and almost no names of other zaddikim have been heard in these provinces.”<sup>89</sup> They evince many similar traits, and their relationship was a complex one of simultaneous attraction (evidenced by numerous marital ties) and repulsion, but the nature and background of the hostility are unclear and the traces have been all but obliterated in hasidic sources.<sup>90</sup>

Particularly acrimonious discord flared up between Israel and Moses Zevi Guterman of Savran, one of the most respected leaders of Ukrainian Hasidism, who also conducted himself with royal airs and was known as a zealous and quarrelsome person.<sup>91</sup> Despite some cooperation between the two in organizing financial aid for the hasidim in the Holy Land (a traditional source of friction),<sup>92</sup> there was apparently considerable hostility, mainly motivated by power struggles in various Jewish communities. The rebbe of Savran, besides his apprehension at the threat to his position

offered by Israel of Ruzhin, held the latter's lack of scholarship in much contempt.<sup>93</sup> Intervention by Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta led to a visit by Moses Zevi to Ruzhin with a view to settling their differences; however, the encounter did not have the desired results and the hostility did not abate, it seems, until Moses Zevi's death early in 1838.<sup>94</sup> The dispute over a certain *shohet* in Berdichev, to be discussed later, was probably part of this broader conflict, as was the story of a fire at Krivoye Ozero (Podolia province). A rumor spread among the townspeople that the fire had broken out because the town notables had not greeted Israel with sufficient respect, "on the contrary, they had not allowed him to pass through." The hasidim of the town, mostly Savran hasidim and a few Bershad ones, were constantly skirmishing, but united against Rabbi Israel:

When the Saint of Ruzhin, before going into exile to the town of Sadgora, wished to come to our town to ensnare souls and take gifts of men, as is the custom of all the zaddikim, the people who were constantly quarreling made peace among themselves and sent to tell the alien zaddik: Beware, lest you sustain disgrace rather than honor. The zaddik was sorely wrathful and his anger burned like fire.<sup>95</sup>

The best-known dispute between Rabbi Israel and his opponents took place in the then Austrian city of Lemberg (Lvov) in 1835. This episode deserves some attention, because it is a good illustration of the difficulties encountered by Israel in his attempts to get himself accepted by circles outside Hasidism.

Israel had from his youth suffered various ailments. Like many other zaddikim of his time who forbade their hasidim to consult physicians, he also permitted himself that "sinful" luxury. Despite his oft-expressed dubiety as to the value of physicians and medicines,<sup>96</sup> he regularly consulted a famous physician, Jacob Rapoport. On these occasions, while in the bustling Lemberg with its many Jews, and on his way to and from the city, he would visit friendly rabbis and zaddikim who happened to be there, also receiving hasidim and other admirers in his lodgings.<sup>97</sup>

Rapoport, not only an active proponent of the Haskalah movement in Galicia but also the personal physician of Hasidism's sworn enemy Joseph Perl,<sup>98</sup> was well known among the zaddikim. Although very different from them in his lifestyle and philosophy, he agreed to treat the hasidic leaders (some say he did so gratis),<sup>99</sup> and they, for their part, trusted him and frequently consulted him.<sup>100</sup> Israel would come to him when he was still in Ruzhin,<sup>101</sup> and later, after escaping from Russia, he took advantage of Rapoport's close relations with the Lemberg authorities in order to avoid expulsion from Austria.<sup>102</sup> After he settled in Sadgora, Rapoport became his personal physician, and there are unconfirmed traditions that he examined Rabbi Israel on the latter's deathbed.<sup>103</sup>



Around the beginning of June 1835,<sup>104</sup> suffering from bladder pains, Israel came to Lemberg to consult Rapoport. He stayed in the city for at least three weeks, during which he met the rabbi of Lemberg, Jacob Meshullam Ornstein (known for his book *Yeshu'ot Ya'akov*), and his son Mordekhai Zeev, both leaders of nonhasidic Orthodoxy in Galicia. The numerous rumors and legends about what took place at the meeting indicate that the attitude of the scholarly elite to Rabbi Israel in the early years of his career was one of condescension and hostility.

Rabbi Ornstein was anything but a sympathizer with Hasidism.<sup>105</sup> He valued scholarship and, having heard about the hasidic rebbe from Ruzhin, found it difficult to conceal his contempt for him. "How come you are traveling to a man who is not learned in Torah?" he once asked Rabbi Reuben Hortenstein of Odessa, who stopped at Lemberg "to entertain himself with [Ornstein] with discussion of the Torah" while on his way to Ruzhin. He could not understand what Rabbi Reuben, known as an accomplished scholar, was doing in the company of an ignoramus like Israel.<sup>106</sup> When Hortenstein cited what he claimed was proof of Israel's Torah knowledge, Ornstein was immediately able to offer a rebuttal, and a spirited argument ensued.<sup>107</sup> It was also reported that his son, Mordekhai Zeev—who wielded considerable influence over his father—intensely hated Rabbi Israel.<sup>108</sup>

At any rate, Israel met with father and son, whether as a matter of courtesy or out of mutual curiosity. According to one hasidic version, the rabbi was immediately incensed at the zaddik for his impudence in lighting up his pipe in his home.<sup>109</sup> However, as it is clear that the meeting took place in Israel's lodgings and not in Ornstein's home, this version is unfounded.<sup>110</sup> Whatever the case, father and son both expected the conversation with the famous zaddik to proceed, as usual among Jewish spiritual leaders, along the lines of a discussion of Torah matters. To their amazement, Rabbi Israel, as was his wont, began to tell a story. "A nice tale," said Rabbi Jacob, "but I have come to hear words of Torah." Israel, insulted by this remark, retorted with a sharp homily on the verse "that is why your words should be few" (Eccles. 5:1), whose main point was "One needs only a little bit of Torah." Ornstein, according to the hasidic version, humbly answered: "I have received my just deserts with this answer; surely there is no other human being on earth who could say such a thing."<sup>111</sup> This is presumably a rather slanted hasidic interpretation, rather than evidence of the rabbi's real feelings.

Another, more common, version reports that Ornstein, expecting to hear from Israel "some innovation in the Torah and an apt explanation or distinction," was astonished at the other's detached answer. The rest of the conversation perfectly illustrates the typological difference and unbridge-

able gap between the two leaders. One of them was a typical *mitnaged*, scholarly and rationalistic, who valued intellectual accomplishment and judged things by external, palpable manifestations that could be examined and estimated through criteria of logic and commonsense. The other was a hasidic zaddik, whose talents lay not in acute Torah scholarship and debate but in a penetrating, profound view of the innermost, hidden essence of everyday life, through which he could draw conclusions of value for Divine worship:

The holy Rizhiner rebbe asked: Of what are the roofs of the walls of the city of Lemberg made? The great rabbi answered: Of iron plates. The Rizhiner persisted: Why are they made specifically of plates? Answered the *ga'on*: For protection against fire. Once again, the holy rebbe asked: If so, they could have been made of those bricks known as tiles! And when the holy rebbe had left the presence of the *ga'on*, the latter broke out in laughter, saying: Is this the man who is agitating the whole world and its people, to whom flocks of hasidim have gathered—and he busies himself with such matters?!

An explanation of this curious conversation was suggested by another zaddik, Meir of Premyslan:

The *ga'on* understood nothing of the holy rebbe's talk, for the rebbe was exercising his wit, asking: Just as the roof furnishes protection for the house, so should the rabbi of the city protect the whole city and he should have a broken heart, like bricks that are easily broken. Why, then, is he [Ornstein] as hard as iron plate?<sup>112</sup>

Jacob Ornstein died in summer 1839, but his only son Mordekhai Zeev died nearly three years before him, in autumn 1836, at the untimely age of forty-seven.<sup>113</sup> The Sadgora hasidim attributed this early demise to Rabbi Israel's rage at the rude discourtesy paid him. Simeon Bernfeld described the event as he had heard it "from an old man":

The Ruzhiner zaddik once came to Lvov to consult with the doctors. In those days, the *ga'on* Reuben of Odessa was also living in Lvov, and he was a sick man, who dabbled in medicine. He was impoverished, and when the rich men of Lvov heard that the *ga'on* needed charity, they sent him gifts as a token of respect. When the zaddik Israel came to Lvov, he went to greet the Rabbi Jacob Ornstein. A great crowd followed him, and the police stationed guards before the rabbi's house lest the crowds be too big. One of the police officers, a Jewish maskil, who used to quarrel with Rabbi Jacob Ornstein and provoke him, was standing before the room in which Rabbi Ornstein and his guest Rabbi Israel were meeting. During the conversation between the rabbi and the zaddik, Rabbi Mordekhai Zeev was also in the room. He asked Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin: Does your honor know that Rabbi Reuben of Odessa is here? The zaddik replied: Reuben of Odessa, yes, I know that he is sick and I sent him 100 silver rubles. Reuben of Odessa, said Rabbi Mordekhai Zeev angrily, You sent him 100 but you took 200 from him.<sup>114</sup> The zaddik was silent.

Wine was brought for the visitor and his cup was filled. Rabbi Israel drank a little and gave the cup to Rabbi Mordekhai Zeev. The latter took the cup from him, opened the door, and gave the wine to the police officer standing there. Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin was greatly insulted and left immediately. That year Rabbi Mordekhai Zeev died while his father was still alive, and Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin was exiled. The people of the time said: When two scholars insult one another, "one dies and one goes into exile."<sup>115</sup>

This episode and the ethical interpretation it received became an integral part of hasidic and folk tradition, but it was not the only dramatic event of the journey, which ended in a serious confrontation with the Austrian authorities in Lemberg. Throughout Israel's visit to the city, crowds of Jews converged on the house where he was living. The director of police, Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch, concerned to prevent disorderly behavior and rioting, sent detectives to patrol the area and keep the zaddik under surveillance. Finally, the police issued an expulsion order, which Rabbi Israel and his companions were able to postpone for two weeks.<sup>116</sup> As it turned out, the initiative came not only from the non-Jews but also from a group of maskilim, who had no compunctions about appealing to the Austrian authorities with the request that the hasidic threat, namely, Rabbi Israel, be thrown out of the city. The event had yet another implication: it was the first encounter between Israel of Ruzhin, in the flesh, and the Galician maskilim; this encounter was largely to shape the subsequent attitude of the maskilim to him and their view of him.

### *VII. Rabbi Israel as Seen by the Maskilim*

While Rabbi Israel was establishing his position in Ruzhin as a leader of masses of hasidim, awareness was growing among radical maskilim that Hasidism and its major luminaries had fallen to new depths of moral degradation. The fact that Israel based his leadership on relatively rational grounds, that he entirely repudiated wonder-working, opposed asceticism and self-abnegation, and advocated esthetic and hygienic values, was of no avail. One might have expected these virtues to throw some "positive" light on his image in the maskilic view; but his flamboyant, ostentatious lifestyle seems to have overshadowed all his other qualities, arousing his opponents to accuse him of many other vices as well.

Israel was a tangible, extreme example of the dissolute, irresponsible lifestyle adopted by zaddikim, which had by then become a common complaint. Joseph Perl, writing as early as 1816 in his German tract *Über das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim*, attacked the corruption that was evident to any observer of Hasidism and its leaders. The central role of the zaddik and his cult in hasidic ideology, argued Perl, was the worst feature of Hasidism and

signified bankruptcy of the Jewish society within which the movement had emerged. In contrast to more moderate maskilim, who were willing to believe that some early hasidic leaders had favorable qualities or intentions, Perl painted an unrelievedly black picture, tracing the moral corruption back to the Besht and his circle. The Besht, he wrote, had been the first person to teach his followers to enjoy the pleasures of the physical world; he ate and drank heavily, kept a horse-drawn carriage, received money and gifts, and was not ashamed of his ignorance.<sup>117</sup> Clearly, Perl was writing against the background of the social realities of his own time and place. Zaddikim such as Shalom Shakhna (Israel's father), Mordekhai of Chernobyl, Baruch of Mezhibozh, and others did indeed fit Perl's biased, hostile portrayal. For a zaddik to act like a gentile nobleman was no longer exceptional; it was, in fact, characteristic of most of the courts that flourished in the Ukraine in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Even so, Israel (who received mention in Perl's book only because of his youth—his career as a zaddik reached its zenith only later) had adopted practices that were particularly ostentatious and offensive; inevitably, the enemies of Hasidism, whose weapons were their tongues and pens, would not remain silent. The reaction of Ukrainian and Galician maskilim to the social and religious-moral threat presented, they believed, by Rabbi Israel and his activities is shown by the examples of Ribal and Shadal.

Later, we shall have occasion to note the surprising, "positive" aspect of Israel's ties with the maskil Isaac Ber Levinsohn, known as Ribal (1788–1860), and to see how the latter availed himself of money donated by Israel, who was in fact his relative. For the moment, let us consider the other, more predictable, side of their relationship—the negative side. Possible allusions to Israel may be traced in Ribal's writings as early as the 1820s. In the fiercely anti-hasidic satire *Emek refa'im*, Ribal paints a grotesque picture of a wonder-working zaddik, condemned to hell, where he confesses his past sins.<sup>118</sup> This satirical work is a unique document, in that through the supposed confession of the zaddik, one can follow the whole emergence of a hasidic court in Volhynia and trace various relevant social elements (of course, from the tendentious viewpoint of a maskil). The portrayal of the zaddik in *Emek refa'im* was based on realistic motifs culled from the collective biography of several famous zaddikim of the time, mainly Israel of Ruzhin, Zevi Hirsch of Riminov,<sup>119</sup> and Zevi Hirsch of Zhidachov,<sup>120</sup> as well as probably a few others;<sup>121</sup> these motifs were, of course, exaggerated and parodied in the most negative way possible.

Ribal describes an ignorant, boorish, greedy, power-hungry zaddik. His hasidim, mostly fourteen-year old boys, are attracted to him by the miracles he performs and his supposedly holy way of life. He intentionally establishes his court in a very small town, where there are no Torah schol-

ars and none of the townspeople know his past. After consolidating his position, the zaddik sets out to “conquer” the periphery, beginning to travel from one place to another in the vicinity. He dismisses shohatim and appoints his own favorites in their stead; he forges ties with rich leaseholders and landlords; he circulates stories about his holiness and his wonders, exploiting sophisticated, cynical methods of propaganda. He solicits excessive pidyonot from his followers; he uses outright, brazen falsehoods to enhance his authority and obscure the gap between his shallow, uneducated personality and his sanctity and undoubtedly charismatic leadership. He is illiterate, rides in an ornate carriage drawn by magnificent horses, is accompanied everywhere by an orchestra, and entertains parasitic frauds like himself at his court.

This description is, of course, a stereotypical parody. Nevertheless, it displays obvious similarities to Israel of Ruzhin’s biography. Thus, for example, the zaddik can sign his own name only with difficulty and even boasts of that fact. When a woman comes to him to ask his help and cure her sick son, he instructs her:

You must undertake with an oath that, if your son should become healthy again, he should not learn one verse, certainly not grammar, and should not learn to write even Yiddish, just to sign a little like myself and my dear sons. . . . And I, from my youth, recite new blessings each morning, pronouncing the Name of God. . . . [Blessed be He] Who has not made me a scholar. . . . Who has not made me a grammarian, so that I should not be able to write and sign properly. . . . And tell your invalid son that he should constantly observe the conduct of the zaddikim, how they eat and drink and travel in a coach, and how the zaddik’s sons and daughters and wife dress up in jewelry and precious stones.<sup>122</sup>

Another episode in the book that recalls the Ruzhin court is a description of a grotesque ceremony held in the zaddik’s court after the departure of the Sabbath. It is a festive, noisy affair of Blessing of the New Moon (*kiddush levanah*), accompanied by the zaddik’s orchestra and ending in a messianic ritual: a conversation purporting to be between the zaddik, the Messiah, and the Prophet Elijah. This conversation takes place in an ornate, gift-filled “Messiah’s room.” Such a ritual and a room, designed to welcome the Messiah, existed only at Israel’s court:

Now the rebbe called out, Let no man leave his home, even to relieve himself. And he said to his young son: Go out and see if the sky is clear and if the new moon is clearly visible, and we shall go and sanctify it. The youth hastened and said: The moon is partly visible, but the sky is covered with clouds. And the rebbe said: Go, tell the moon to shine very brightly and the clouds will scatter and disappear from the sky till after the prayer. The youth hastened and returned. The prayer was recited quickly, in the flash of an eye. Then he sent the beadle and said: Go and see if the moon has heeded my command, and if not tell it that it will be punished. He

went, and returned, and said: The moon is shining very brightly and the clouds have disappeared. So the people went out, the rebbe at their head, and before them the rebbe's instrumental players, twelve men with trumpets and violins, harps and drums and timbrels, and with resounding cymbals and pipes. . . . Now the crier proclaims aloud on the rebbe's behalf: Players! and they lead the rebbe and the people at a slow pace, singing and playing a march, to the rebbe's house, and from there to the chamber known as the Messiah's room. This is a very wonderful chamber, and there are many valuable vessels in it. . . . And the rebbe calls in a loud voice: Sing a new tune in honor of the Messiah to the Supreme God, in honor of the Son of David who has come here with Elijah the herald. . . . And he gave them chairs and bowed, and said, See, O Messiah, I have prepared you a very magnificent house, and it has been filled with expensive tables donated by all the rich and noble people who believe in me.<sup>123</sup>

Another example of the negative perception of Israel (and of the widespread extent of that perception) may be found in the writings of the Italian maskil Samuel David Luzzatto, known as Shadal (1800–1865). Shadal's knowledge of Eastern European Hasidism was rather vague, for he relied exclusively on rumors and letters received from fellow maskilim with whom he corresponded. The following passage should be seen, therefore, as a kind of mirror reflecting the observations and fears of Galician maskilim faced with the new threat offered by Israel's personality. Shadal was writing in 1835, in a letter to Samuel Leib Goldenberg, editor of the Haskalah periodical *Kerem hemed*:

I know not whether to laugh or to cry at the rumor you have told me, my friend, of the man named Israel, whose name is like that of his master, that is, the famed Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, who misled the Children of Israel in your country in the previous generation. . . . He is the Besht, who performed wonders and miracles unspeakable and unprecedented; and now, in the month of last Iyyar, there came to your country from Russia a second Israel, riding in a carriage, with fifty runners.<sup>124</sup> And in every city great crowds throng to see him, with their women and children, hundreds and thousands, to see the Holy Israel, as he sits in his carriage with a pipe in his mouth, smoking all day in the presence of all those attending him. From his carriage, he waves his hand and returns their greetings with closed eyes and strange gestures; accordingly, he has waxed great and rich, for all the fools bring him their silver and gold in the hope that he will heal their sicknesses and make their barren women give birth and bless all their actions. And some people hire him at one hundred or two hundred gold coins as a gift, so that he should come to their homes and eat and drink with them. With all this nonsense, he has consumed the remnant of the children of Jacob in your land and skinned them, so much so that intelligent people among you have risen up and reported the matter to the rulers, and the authorities have hastened to rid you of him and expel him from your country, so that he has returned in shame (but with full pockets) to his homeland.

My friend, shall I laugh at such matters, or shall I weep? For on the one hand, where is there nonsense more worthy of laughter? When the masses are seduced by

such a person, bereft of any wisdom or good virtue, and have exalted and lifted him on high, taking him for the most perfect of people, believing even that he can alter the laws of nature and do whatsoever he pleases in heaven and earth. . . . But a person immersed in eating and drinking and other pleasures, a lover of money who never has his fill of money, and he is not concerned with the good of the world, self-seeking and proud and boastful, a disciple of the wicked Balaam; no! such a person is not the man the Lord has chosen.<sup>125</sup>

There is no doubt whatever that Shadal is referring to Israel of Ruzhin (“the man named Israel,” “a second Israel”), whose journey to Galicia and expulsion, engineered by the maskilim, we described above. The other descriptions are also in perfect agreement with what we know of his ways. Shadal notes that he is relying entirely on information passed on to him by his friend Goldenberg, which he is merely echoing in his inimitable, witty Hebrew style. The warm, sympathetic reception accorded Israel by ordinary people on his visits to Lemberg and other Galician towns greatly upset the local maskilim. As we have seen, they made every effort to confine the damage and, in fact, successfully secured his expulsion and his return to Russia. From their point of view, Israel was a grave threat, “imported” from abroad, capable of perverting the entire fabric of Jewish life in their part of the world.

As far as the Galician maskilim were concerned, this kind of zaddik was quite new: a complete ignoramus, seemingly lacking any knowledge and Torah, a greedy impostor cynically milking the admiring masses while making false promises to cure the sick and barren. Till then their picture of the zaddik had been based on the figure of the late mystic Zevi Hirsch of Zhidachov (d. 1831). They despised him, hated him, saw in him their worst enemy, did their utmost to obstruct him, and had him driven out by the authorities.<sup>126</sup> Rabbi Israel, however, represented a completely different image: an “old-fashioned” Ukrainian zaddik in modern guise, acquiring public sympathy not through mystical practices but by clever manipulation of public relations and promotional tricks. Far from understanding Israel’s real nature, the maskilim were misled by his external airs, which reminded the better informed among them of the Besht, as portrayed in the hagiographic text *Shivhei ha-Besht*—a figure they held in much contempt. This image of the Besht, as a fraud performing so-called “miracles,” and thus enticing the public, was projected onto Israel of Ruzhin (who, as noted, did not dabble in magic or miracle-working). The maskilim were thus adopting the popular identification—quite common among hasidim—of the Ruzhiner as the Besht’s spiritual “heir.” For Shadal and his colleagues, therefore, it was enough to point to the fact that the Besht and the zaddik of Ruzhin had the same name, Israel, in order to invoke a host of stereotypi-

cal prejudices that had no relation whatever to his real personality; they made no attempt to understand or grapple with his actual hasidic ideology.

It is common knowledge that the maskilim, in their war against Hasidism, as throughout their struggle to change the face of Jewish society, were active on two parallel levels: educational work and literary (mainly satirical) propaganda, on the one hand, and practical endeavors in government circles, on the other. Their exertions to bring the general public over to their side, and in particular to combat Hasidism, which reached their peak in the first half of the nineteenth century, were not only frustrating in view of their meager achievements, but also, historically speaking, a miserable failure. In retrospect, the expulsion orders secured against Israel of Ruzhin and other zaddikim were merely passing episodes, temporary victories that emphasized the considerable influence of the zaddikim on the masses. Joseph Perl could not have foreseen in his worst nightmares that only three years after his death, Israel of Ruzhin, of all people, would obtain the protection of the Austrian authorities. Even the ardent maskil Ribal, who fiercely fought Hasidism, did not hesitate to take advantage of its considerable financial power and to receive assistance from Israel, although, in his heart of hearts, he presumably despised the zaddik.

Ribal had sufficient intellectual integrity to point to the reasons for the Haskalah movement's failure: internal disputes and lack of organization. As against this sorry state of his own camp, he recognized the unity of the hasidic forces, which came to expression particularly in reaction to external attack: "For till when shall we see the sect of the hasidim cleaving together, strongly linked, cooperating. . . . so that they are victorious, while our own people are weakening. Surely it is our disunity that does this."<sup>127</sup>

The conclusions to be drawn from *Emek refa'im* also reflect Ribal's realization that the real struggle with Hasidism was hopeless. In his book, the charlatan zaddik and his sons, literary portraits of Rabbi Israel and his colleagues, achieve resounding success in their lives; nothing can stand in their way. Although the zaddik confesses his sins in hell, the confession takes place in a fictional hypnotic framework ("a vision in the world of emanation, seen by a visionary"),<sup>128</sup> not in real life, where the mere idea that a zaddik might "confess his misdeeds" was a pipedream. The justice of the Haskalah cause would therefore come to light only in the future; in the meantime, they would have to be content with literary propaganda, whose prospects of affecting reality were close to zero. Literary victory was tantamount to "revenge of the defeated"—the enemy was far stronger and could be overcome only in writing.

Rabbi Israel and the flourishing hasidic center he established at Ruzhin are just one of many examples demonstrating the tremendous difficulties



facing the Eastern European maskilim in their struggle for the right to dictate a fitting scale of values and priorities to Jewish society. A broad circle of maskilim shared Ribal's pessimistic sensation of despondency in the face of this reality: the triumph of Hasidism in the competition for the sympathy of the masses. This feeling is aptly summed up in a letter sent to Ribal in 1832 by a maskil named Berish Blumenfeld, who had avidly read the former's anti-hasidic satires:

I must tell you the truth, that it is not worth spending valuable time on the follies and inanities of all the hasidim in the world; we are fighting a useless war against them, and we shall not prevail. They have increased and spawned and multiplied exceedingly, and all the multitudes and feeble-minded masses, women, and children, have been ensnared in their net and their faith implanted in their hearts. We, on the other hand, are few in number, and the weapons at our disposal, that is, words of wisdom and good understanding, cannot harm them. For they know not and understand not, their hearts are held captive by their idiocy; and to my mind, should all the winds in the world come, they will not move them from their position—on the contrary, they will only become stronger and redouble their efforts.<sup>129</sup>



## *“The Jewish Kingdom Is Falling”: The Ushits Case*

### *I. Informers and the Law of the “Pursuer”*

On December 13, 1838, General Dimitri Gabrilovich Bibikov, governor-general of the southwestern provinces of the Russian empire, issued a special circular in which he instructed the provincial governors of Kiev, Volhynia, and Podolia to keep a close watch on what was going on in synagogues and small study houses. In such places, he wrote, “cases not infrequently occur, as a result of which Jews have been found slain.” “This crime,” he went on to say:

is even more heinous because it is committed in places intended for prayer and for studying the principles of the faith. Such action is in the nature of autonomous adjudication by a court of Jewish rabbis, carried out on the basis of their false law concerning the elimination of informers who reveal their coreligionists’ crimes. The greater the crime, the more tricks the Jews devise to conceal the guilty parties and the real reasons that brought it about. Despite all efforts at intensive investigation, they succeed in obfuscating the inquiry to such an extent that not only does the identity of the guilty parties remain unknown for a long time, but even the identity of the murdered person.<sup>1</sup>

Events of that period in the northwestern provinces of the Russian empire are described by the historian Saul Ginsburg as follows: “Were the Dnieper able to speak, it could tell of many informers who were drowned in its waters by decision of the kahal in the Shklov region.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, we know of such murders, committed on the initiative of the

communal institutions, rabbis, or zaddikim in the Russian Pale of Settlement, at least up until the 1870s. In 1873, the author Peretz Smolenskin described a shocking affair of that kind in his novel *An Ass's Burial*, published in installments in his journal *Ha-shahar*. His account of the appalling killing of a young Jewish boy who had been misled by corrupt community heads (*parnasim*) was at first met with disbelief. So much so that, one year later, one of Smolenskin's friends wrote that whoever disbelieved such terrible stories and thought them a mere figment of the author's imagination was surely living abroad or in a large city. "But whoever has lived in the towns of Lithuania and Byelorussia knows full well that these tales are not based only on the imagination." Whoever believed that the abolition of the kahal in 1844 put an end to the power and malice of the parnasim was sadly mistaken: nothing had changed. As proof he cited a "well-known" episode—the reality, as he claimed, behind Smolenskin's story—in which an informer named Sinogov had been drowned in the river on the instructions of the heads of the Shklov kahal. As to the writer's questioning Smolenskin's knowledge of the event—as he had left Shklov in 1858, long before it took place—the publisher, that is, Smolenskin himself, interpolated a comment that he had indeed never heard of Sinogov, but "such things were almost daily occurrences."<sup>3</sup>

Informers (Hebrew *moserim*), who were dealt with according to the Talmudic law of the "pursuer" (Hebrew *rodef*), were not necessarily violent persons or potential murderers. They were Jews who cooperated with the authorities and revealed various secrets. They were thus responsible for undesirable government interference in the internal affairs of the Jewish community and endangered both the personal fortunes of individual Jews and the standing of the entire community. Informers were therefore forced to live on the periphery of the community and had essentially excluded themselves from it. They generally did so willingly, in return for a monetary or other benefit that could sometimes be earned from both sides. Sometimes, however, informers' goals were quite different, even "positive" (depending on one's point of view), such as fighting the corruption and moral depravity then common among communal leaders. One of these well-intentioned individuals was Binyaminke Goldberg of Kletsk (Minsk province), whose informing was a protest against the cruelty of the parnasim in his community, who used to round up children of poor families for military service; in the end, he himself was exiled to Siberia.<sup>4</sup> Jews were sometimes driven to inform in order to avenge themselves on the communal leaders, the entire community, or individual members who had treated them cruelly or unjustly. Jacob Hayyim, the hero of *An Ass's Burial*, and the band of informers in Shklov with whom he becomes associated, are of this latter type. These, however, were a minority. Most of the informers did not

go unrewarded; on the contrary, some of them earned a good living by routinely conveying reliable information to the authorities concerning offenses by individuals or groups, about people who escaped or disappeared for various reasons; they also reported on persons liable for army service or for payment of taxes. The information they provided not infrequently placed their fellow Jews in physical danger. Conscription into the czarist army, for example, was considered by all as spiritual apostasy and physical danger; to evade it was tantamount to saving one's life.

Informing usually flourishes when the ruling authorities are suspicious and insecure. It is, indeed, astonishing to realize how fearful and apprehensive the czarist authorities were, particularly during the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55), and what drastic measures they were willing to take to collect information about real and imaginary acts of sedition by enemies of the government, including, of course, the Jews. The main agency for tracking down seditious activities, whether overt or covert, was the "Third Department," a powerful, semi-secret body established in 1826. It was to all intents and purposes a political police force, responsible for the internal security of the czar and his regime. It was also charged with coordinating intelligence activities and keeping suspects under surveillance, as well as gathering information throughout the empire through a ramified network of agents and informers.<sup>5</sup>

The authorities encouraged such purveyors of "inside information" and considered the data they provided highly reliable. The informers, for their part, took advantage of the situation—sometimes doubly so: they would sell accurate information (and not infrequently also exaggerated or false reports)<sup>6</sup> to the local or provincial authorities; at the same time, they blackmailed the Jewish community into buying their silence. Accordingly, informers became the most hated and despised element in Jewish society. "They were known among the people as 'bad business,' hated and detested by everybody," Zevi Lipschitz wrote of them toward the end of the nineteenth century. "Wherever they went, their disgrace followed them. A person suspected of informing brought shame on the community, whose members sought every opportunity to rid themselves of such villains in their midst. An informer was an eternal disgrace to his family."<sup>7</sup>

Another writer, Yekhezkel Kotik, in his memoirs, paints the following picture of an informer who plied his trade in his community, Kamenets Litovsk, in the middle of the nineteenth century:

In those days there was almost no town without its informer, and in Kamenets too, of course, there was one—Itche Shaytes. He was a tailor who patched old clothes, although he never had to make his living from it. His real work was informing. He was not content merely to inform on individuals; he informed on entire towns. He used to go to Grodno on foot and inform the authorities mainly about matters con-

cerning the population registry. The governor would then set up a special commission of inquiry, and the town on which he had informed would be reduced to poverty. Committee members shamelessly accepted exorbitant bribes, and the payments were prohibitive. It goes without saying that Itche Shaytes himself had to be paid off to stop him from squealing to the authorities. He simply ruined almost all the communities in Grodno Province, causing much agony. For his own town of Kamenets he had, at least, a little respect. The townspeople didn't stint on flattering him, but each praised God in his heart that this informer left Kamenets in peace.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, he would station himself on the pulpit in the synagogue and pray with such weeping and wailing that even those not easily moved by their own prayers could not help crying and moaning with him. His howling shook the congregants to the bone. He moaned like someone being beaten and tortured. I remember one afternoon service on the eve of Yom Kippur, when I was about nine years old. I burst into tears because of Itche Shayte's wailing. I cried so much that I fainted and had to be taken home in the middle of services. But immediately after Yom Kippur, off he marched to Grodno in order to inform on another town.<sup>8</sup>

It goes without saying that Jewish Law, in all generations, treated informers with the utmost severity. An informer was defined as a "pursuer," a menace who could legally be killed even before carrying out his intentions.<sup>9</sup> No prominent halakhic authority ever dreamed of committing rulings against specific informers to writing, let alone publishing them in responsa. The reality, however, was that informers were indeed killed, and the authorities, aware of the existence of an independent Jewish power that pursued informers and considered them worthy of death, were helpless in their attempts to locate the guilty parties. When they did succeed in catching them, they therefore treated them with the utmost severity.

## *II. The Murder Case and the Investigation*

One of the most intriguing episodes in the history of Russian Jewry during the first half of the nineteenth century was the murder, by Jews, of two Jewish informers in the Nova Ushytsia district of Podolia province. The story is an enthralling tale of dark mystery, brutal murder, and police inquiries, involving rabbis, zaddikim, and communal leaders. It culminated in a military trial, in which the judges handed down severe sentences that shook Jewish public opinion. These events, known in the sources as "the Ushits *mayse*," that is, the Ushits case,<sup>10</sup> ensnared Israel of Ruzhin in a protracted, exhausting trial; in lengthy imprisonment; and finally in a dramatic flight from his Russian homeland to Austria, forced by events beyond his control to begin a new life.

Our information about the course of events is rather scant, and there is much that still remains enigmatic.<sup>11</sup> Such cases were hushed up, leaving

few traces in the written sources and documentation. At the same time, the aspects of Jewish Diaspora life revealed by the affair—a radical Jewish judicial system, empowered to sentence Jews to severe punishments, including death; strong self-discipline, mutual responsibility, and self-sacrifice—have intrigued historians of Jewish autonomy in Russia. Thanks to these scholars, certain rare documents (in Russian and German) throwing light on the affair have been preserved, including the verdict of the military court that pronounced the sentence and a memorandum written by Joseph Perl concerning the appeal held throughout Galicia to secure Rabbi Israel's release.<sup>12</sup> The record of the sentence, apart from its historical significance as evidence of a Russian military court's treatment of Jewish suspects, is also an enthralling but tragic document, laying bare, as it does, the sorry situation of the Jews of Russia under Czar Nicholas I.

The opening scene of the Ushits case took place in February 1836, when fishermen from the village of Wonkowce in the province of Podolia brought up in their nets an unidentified human body, pulled from beneath the frozen ice cover of the river. The body showed signs of severe wounds, and it had been weighted down by tying heavy stones about its legs and neck. The district police were informed and launched a routine investigation. The investigation was directed by a committee, headed by the *ispravnik* (district police chief), Safranovich; the other members were a district court clerk, Oslikovsky; the district doctor, Afanasyev; and another court official, Magerdich. Despite an intensive inquiry, no one was able to identify the victim, suggest a motive for the murder, or identify its perpetrators. The body was immediately buried, and the whole episode might have ended quietly, as many similar cases most probably did. However, that was not to be.

Isaac Kenigsberg, a professional Jewish informer from Disna, Vilna Province, reported to the civilian governor of Podolia province, Grigory Lashkarev,<sup>13</sup> that the murdered person was none other than Isaac Oksman, a Jewish informer from Ushits, well known to the authorities. According to Kenigsberg, Jews had murdered Oksman together with another informer, Samuel Shwartzman, of the town of Sokolci in Ushits District, who had also disappeared. The governor instructed Safranovich to reopen the investigation. In reply, Safranovich stated that the investigators were indeed well acquainted with Oksman, but the body had certainly not been his. However, it proved impossible to locate either Oksman or Shwartzman. Lashkarev suspected that his officials in Ushits were not telling him the truth and sent a personal representative to initiate an independent inquiry. The new investigator had the body exhumed and shown to the three officials and to the local Jews; none of them, however, identified Oksman. The whereabouts of Oksman and Shwartzman remained a mystery.

Lashkarev reported to Count Alexander Dimitri Guriev, governor-general of the southwestern region, which included the provinces of Kiev, Volhynia, and Podolia.<sup>14</sup> Guriev, conscious of the extreme gravity of the case and the necessity of a thorough investigation, instructed that the local officials be removed from the investigation and appointed a special committee of inquiry, whose members came from the nearby provincial capital of Kamenets Podolsk.<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of May 1836, Guriev drew up a detailed report of the course of events and sent it to the capital, Saint Petersburg. Czar Nicholas I, who was informed of the case, took a personal interest and instructed Guriev to do everything necessary to determine the truth and bring those responsible to trial.

Guriev, presented with an opportunity to prove his mettle to the czar himself, went to work with considerable vigor. The body was exhumed once more, and this time the physician on the new committee, Doctor Fokelman, successfully identified Oksman, who had been a patient at his clinic. The commission of inquiry held several sessions, and by the end of May 1836, Guriev was able to report that many Jews had been arrested, and that efforts were being made to locate all those involved, some of whom had in the meantime escaped. At the end of June 1836, the czar ordered Guriev to submit a monthly written report of his progress.

Oksman and Shwartzman had indeed been thorns in the flesh of the Jewish communities of Ushits District, mainly in exposing the identity of "missing persons," that is, Jews who were not registered in any community and thus escaped forced military conscription and evaded payment of taxes. Communal representatives tried to bribe them to stop their tale-bearing, but they persisted, making ever-increasing demands for blackmail and redoubling their threats. It was therefore decided in some intercommunity forum, of which we know absolutely nothing, to have them killed. Rumor had it that the community heads had consulted on the matter with Israel of Ruzhin, who had then been staying in the community of Kalius in Ushits District, and that he had given his consent to the murder.

The two informers were brutally murdered. Oksman was probably killed while traveling through the forest by the town of Dunayevtsy, northeast of Kamenets Podolsk, and his body was thrown into the river that same night. Shwartzman, whose body was never found, was strangled while praying in the Ushits town synagogue; his body was dismembered and cremated in the bathhouse furnace.<sup>16</sup> According to Ginsburg, all the Jews in the region (including the victims' families) knew of the murder, which was practically committed in public; they kept silent out of discipline and communal solidarity, however, divulging no information to the authorities. After the chance discovery of Oksman's body, efforts were made to obliterate all traces of the event, and the local officials were

silenced, as usual, by large bribes. Had it not been for the intervention of the third informer, Kenigsberg, who aroused the authorities to reopen the investigation, this event, too, would have faded into oblivion.<sup>17</sup>

Guriev's intensive activity bore fruit. By July 1836, some fifty Jews, from various communities in the district, had been arrested; most were heads of communities and elders, but there were also women and children. The prisoners were brought to Dunayevtsy and imprisoned in separate rooms (to prevent coordination of their testimony) in an old building, formerly a Capuchin monastery. The interrogation, during which the prisoners were mentally and physically tortured, exposed almost all details of the affair. Consequently, more and more Jews were arrested, and in August the hasidic rabbi of the Dunayevtsy community, Michel Averbuch (grandson of the famous zaddik Zusya of Hanipoli), was also thrown into prison, on suspicion that he had taken part in the assembly of community leaders that had declared the informers subject to the law of the "pursuer." The rabbi's library was confiscated and sent for examination to the Censorship Board at Vilna; the board prepared a memorandum listing translated excerpts from halakhic books and rulings that discussed the position of informers and permitting their "execution."<sup>18</sup>

Israel of Ruzhin's involvement in the affair was apparently evident from the very first stages. Aware that his arrest would stir up the local Jews, most of whom were followers of the Ruzhiner, Guriev was at first unsure how to proceed. Moreover, Israel's membership in the Second Merchants Guild entitled him to be interrogated outside prison; and there is surely no doubt that some of the officials engaged in the inquiry had their palms well greased and turned a blind eye.<sup>19</sup> Thanks to Guriev's temporary indecision, the hasidim had time to conceal evidence, and the murderers themselves escaped from Russia and found refuge among the Ruzhin hasidim in Galicia. Only in September 1836 did Guriev, realizing the scope of "the unlimited power of the hasidic rabbis" (as he pointed out in his report to Nicholas I), finally decide to arrest Rabbi Israel and have him interrogated.<sup>20</sup> The story of the arrest and the interrogation is told in the next chapter.

In March 1837, it was decided to set up a special military commission in Kamenets Podolsk to investigate and judge the Jewish prisoners, as well as the Russian officials arrested for their role in hushing up the affair. The local government, for reasons of security, expressed its opposition to transferring such a large number of Jews from Dunayevtsy to Kamenets, where there was not even a suitable building in which all the prisoners could be isolated. The point was conceded, and it was decided to hold the trial in Dunayevtsy. The commission held its first session on July 27, 1837. Eighty Jews and four Russian officials were brought to trial. Most of the prison-



ers were members of the older leadership of the Jewish communities in Ushits District, including, as already noted, Michel Averbuch and Israel of Ruzhin. In the meantime, Guriev had been replaced by General Bibikov, appointed in December 1837 as military governor of Kiev Province and governor-general of the southwestern region, who was now charged with continuing the judicial proceedings.<sup>21</sup> Because of the large number of accused, the trial proceeded at a snail's pace, lasting about one and a half years. At the end of 1838, the commission completed its deliberations and, in keeping with routine procedure, sent its decision to be examined by the highest military court, the *general auditoriat*, at the War Ministry in Saint Petersburg.<sup>22</sup> The matter rested there for another year, and only on January 18, 1840, did Czar Nicholas I give the verdict his final stamp of approval.

During the inquiry, further details about Rabbi Israel were brought to the judges' attention. They were contained in a special memorandum written by the radical maskil Joseph Perl of Tarnopol, Galicia, and presented to the judges in March 1838. Perl, not afraid of being labeled an "informer," revealed that an extensive appeal for funds was being conducted clandestinely in Galician Jewish communities to pay the zaddik's court expenses. He made his own inquiries and sent his detailed discoveries to the governor of Tarnopol. The latter passed them on to the governor of Galicia, who in turn (probably in early April 1838) sent them to Lashkarev, the governor appointed in Bibikov's place, so that the judicial commission would be able to take them into consideration while passing sentence. Even discounting the thick layers of anti-hasidic invective pervading Perl's writing, his memorandum still gives one an impression of the special esteem in which Israel was held and the measures taken to obscure the crime.

The gist of Perl's memorandum was that Israel of Ruzhin was the most revered zaddik among the Russian and Galician hasidim. Being registered as a member of the merchants' guild, Israel enjoyed freedom of movement and so was able to work unimpeded for the dissemination of Hasidism.<sup>23</sup> It was for the same reason that he was treated with much consideration during the inquiry. Perl went even farther, insisting that, on the basis of the information at his disposal, and notwithstanding the other prisoners' depositions, it was clear that the murder had been committed on the zaddik's *direct instructions*, and not just that his name had been used without his knowledge or prior consent to persuade the murderers that the deed was permitted. For Perl, these discoveries only reinforced his view that Hasidism inevitably led to catastrophe and bloodshed.<sup>24</sup> For the imprisoned zaddik himself, of course, this memorandum, linking him directly to the killings, was of crucial import. Perl pointed out that Israel and his hasidim had taken advantage of the long inquiry, during which he had been free to obscure his tracks and solicit contributions from his followers in

Galicia. The real murderer, as Perl had determined, had fled from Russia to Galicia, where he was hiding in the homes of Ruzhin hasidim and being supported by a few rich hasidim, who were buying his silence.<sup>25</sup>

Apparently, however, Perl's memorandum had practically no influence on the judicial proceedings, since the outcome depended not upon the evidence alone but also upon the zaddik's "political" standing. As the trial dragged on, the court heard a considerable number of witnesses, "both Jews and landowners"—that is, Polish magnates and aristocrats—"who know Friedman, attesting to his exemplary life and generosity to the poor, irrespective of their religion." "It is inconceivable," wrote the judges in their verdict, "that he did anything out of malice."<sup>26</sup> There was indeed a brief reference to Perl's memorandum, but his accusations against Israel were rejected, mainly on formal grounds. It was the irony of history—Perl, who died in 1839, did not live to see it—that although acquitted, Rabbi Israel was forced by the trial to resettle in Perl's homeland of Galicia, of all places, with the result that his influence there was considerably enhanced. Just as the Russian authorities were loath to accuse Israel of direct involvement in the murder, the Austrian government later, for formal reasons, rejected the Russian request to extradite the escaped zaddik back to Russia.

Nevertheless, the verdict, delivered in February 1840, about three and a half years after the beginning of the affair, was severe beyond the most pessimistic predictions. The court explained the severity of the punishments by the need to deter Jews from similar deeds in the future. It declared that the murder

had been committed as an ostensibly legal execution, according to the verdict of their court, which was made up mostly of respected Jews and the leaders of the town of Ushits. . . . They took counsel and resolved to murder the informers. Right away they appointed murderers and personally persuaded them to carry out the plan decisively; this was not only done through bribery but also for motives of mad fanaticism, citing deplorable ordinances from a few religious tomes, according to which the mutilation and assassination of an informer is the personal obligation of every Jew.

Six elderly parnasim—probably those who had first proposed the idea of murder—were sentenced to hundreds of lashes, banishment to Siberia, and hard labor. The others, who had actively participated in the murder or were accessories after the fact, having helped to obscure the tracks, as well as those who had known but kept silent, were also sentenced to severe physical punishment, confiscation of property, exile, and police surveillance. Michel Averbuch was exiled to Siberia, and his property was confiscated, as the judges declared in their verdict, "because of his unconcealed contacts with the criminals and because of the books discovered in his home, in which there were rules contrary to the law." The judges had found him "a

man who thinks in a harmful manner, injurious to society.” The Russian officials implicated (inspector, prosecutor, and physician) were deprived of all their privileges and ranks as government employees. Rabbi Israel was the only one of the accused to be acquitted, most probably as a result of strenuous efforts made outside the prison and, mainly, the willingness of other prisoners to conceal his real role in the events. The court declared him innocent of direct involvement, but nevertheless decided to keep him under surveillance.

The trial over, the authorities applied themselves to carrying out the verdict. The lashes were the most painful and dangerous of the punishments. The style of flogging customary in czarist Russia essentially meant a sentence of slow and cruel death, especially for the old and weak.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, most of the Jews sentenced to lashes died while the punishment was being administered. On his way to exile in chains, Michel Averbuch was forcibly rescued by a group of Jews, who helped him flee Russia. At first, he stayed with the zaddik Zevi Hirsch, the “Servant” of Rimanov, in Galicia; later, he moved to Korima in Hungary, where he died.<sup>28</sup>

### *III. The Historical Significance of the Ushits Case*

It is difficult today to determine Rabbi Israel’s actual part in the Ushits case, which, as already noted, is still largely shrouded in mystery. Quite naturally, internal Jewish sources are silent, while the Russian sources have survived only in part. At first sight, one might think that the authorities must have had good grounds for holding a prominent personality prisoner for such a long time. The cruel tortures inflicted on the other accused must surely have forced them to divulge reliable information about the details of the affair and the direct or indirect involvement of the zaddik; had his innocence been established beyond a doubt, he would certainly have been released quickly. The information supplied by Joseph Perl also presumably supported the suspicions of his involvement. However, it is a commonplace that Nicholas I’s regime was anything but blameless and frequently perpetrated arbitrary acts of injustice and political oppression, particularly against the Jews. We cannot confidently assert, therefore, on grounds that “there is no smoke without fire,” that Israel’s lengthy incarceration necessarily attests to his guilt or to some link with the affair; it is quite possible that he was innocently implicated. Whatever the truth, it is most probable that the decision to acquit him was primarily a political one, not based merely on the evidence; after all, people had been found guilty on less evidence. The authorities, well aware of his standing in the hasidic community, were reluctant to take any drastic action against him. Had he been found guilty, his sentence would not have been less than flogging

(which he most probably would not have survived), confiscation of his property, and exile from the Pale of Settlement—something unheard of for a hasidic leader. Such measures would inevitably have aroused a storm in the Jewish community; perhaps that was why the judges preferred to acquit him and focus on those in the lower echelons who had actually committed the murder. The fact that Rabbi Israel was left under police surveillance indicates that the bench was unconvinced of his complete innocence, and possibly also that there were further motives underlying the decision to acquit him.

Historically speaking, the affair reinforced the position in Russian government circles that it was time to abolish the kahal, the last vestige of Jewish autonomy. The kahal was seen as a body of almost mythical power, operating secret agencies that were responsible for such criminal acts, both "internal," politically motivated assassinations of Jews (as indeed was the case) and "external" killings of Christians for ritual purposes (of which Jews were not infrequently accused in the Blood Libels). "The autocracy of the kehalim has given some people reason to believe that the kehalim are a tool in the hands of the strong circles in the Jewish community who enjoy the fruits of the deplorable activity of poor Jews," Count P. D. Kiselev, chairman of the Committee for the Transformation of the Jews, wrote in February 1841. "Others think that the Jews have, above the kehalim, *a secret court* that is responsible for the murders with torture that occur among the Jews."<sup>29</sup>

There is no doubt, either, that the events of the Ushits case also reinforced the image of the zaddik, internally, in the Jewish community, and externally, in relation to the government, as enjoying a supracommunal authority, capable of influencing events more than the formal institutions of the kahal. The hasidim's real fear of facing an unknown future without their leader is reflected by a typical hasidic anecdote: "During the Third Meal he [the zaddik Leibush of Opole] began to scream: Help! the Jewish Kingdom is falling! And the people surrounding him did not know what he was saying. Later the news came that our Master the Rizhiner rebbe had been arrested."<sup>30</sup>

For Rabbi Israel, humiliated and dishonored after an exhausting, painful interrogation and a long sojourn in jail, the acquittal could be likened to an act of salvation, a burst of blinding light in the darkness. Quite naturally, the afflictions he had suffered during this period helped to spread his fame throughout the Jewish world. Undoubtedly, his prestige as a leader was substantially enhanced, particularly among Ukrainian Jews, who regarded the Ushits prisoners as martyrs.<sup>31</sup> Now, however, he had to rebuild his life and his court, planning his future anew.



## *“Princes Have Persecuted Me Without Reason”: In Prison*

### *I. The Imprisonment and Its Repercussions*

For three and a half years, from September 1836 to mid February 1840, Rabbi Israel was subject to various stages of interrogation and imprisonment. He was uprooted from his home and his luxurious court at Ruzhin and separated from his family, his hasidim, and his admirers. It is true that for much of that time, he was under police interrogation and essentially free; but for twenty-two months, he was a prisoner, in unbearable conditions, in “the prison compound at Kiev,”<sup>1</sup> namely, the *krepost* (“fortress”), which also served as a military jail.<sup>2</sup>

The chronology of Rabbi Israel’s imprisonment is not quite clear; neither are the places where he was kept. He was apparently moved around, undergoing interrogation and imprisonment in several locations. Most of the time, he was incarcerated in Kiev, but some of the interrogation occurred in different towns: Dunayevtsy, where all the Uhsits prisoners were interrogated; Kamenets Podolsk; and perhaps also Berdichev<sup>3</sup> and Zhitomir.<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Israel, who knew no Russian, was accompanied by his own interpreter (the grandfather of Asher Ginsberg, the famed Zionist thinker known as Ahad Ha-Am). The interpreter translated the investigator’s questions for him and then answered himself; one may assume that he did not always take the trouble to convey the true story.

Rabbi Israel was first taken to Dunayevtsy for interrogation in September 1836. He was not put in prison with the rest of the accused but

was allowed his freedom—although under police surveillance—in return for a high bail. He stayed in Dunayevtsy at least until February 1837.<sup>5</sup> Some time later, he was moved to Kamenets, where he was kept under surveillance and subjected to daily interrogation. Here, too, he was subject to what might be termed “open arrest,” being permitted to maintain the normal lifestyle of a hasidic leader.<sup>6</sup> His family apparently stayed with him for at least some, if not all, of this time.<sup>7</sup> The length of this phase of the interrogation is not clear; according to a presumably reliable hasidic tradition, it lasted for a whole year.<sup>8</sup> At that time, Israel still believed that he would emerge unscathed and be able to return to Ruzhin. He once even complained bitterly of his financial loss and the expenses that he and his followers were suffering because of his prolonged sojourn in Kamenets: “People are saying that I want to stay in Kamenets. That is quite false!”<sup>9</sup> Clearly, then, there must have been a rumor according to which Rabbi Israel was quite content to have his court moved to Kamenets.

In the meantime, the hasidim came to visit him in the “Polish” suburb where he was imprisoned, staying with him on Sabbaths and festivals.<sup>10</sup> Both the zaddik and his faithful followers derived encouragement from these visits. On one occasion, on a Sabbath, having received two well-known rabbis, Rabbi Israel summoned a young hasid from Ruzhin and announced that this quorum was to act as a religious court, charged with ruling “that Israel should enjoy this year a good, beneficial year.”<sup>11</sup> Even in those times of despair, frustration, and disappointment, he had no compunctions about approaching his God in an intimate, direct, and even accusing tone. On Rosh Hashanah, which he had to celebrate at Kamenets, he pronounced what he called a “great threat” during the festive dinner:

Sovereign of the Universe, I have known you these thirty years as governing the world in justice. Well, is this a good way to do things? I say, it is better that you should rain down abundance, blessing, and every benefit upon the world, and then the Jews will be able to worship you in comfort. But if you don’t want to listen to me, what am I doing in this world?<sup>12</sup>

Rabbi Israel was apparently taken to Kiev in May or June 1838; one tradition has it that this occurred just before Yom Kippur, in September 1838. He was well aware that the “easy” part of the interrogation was over; the next phase would involve considerable pain and suffering. Hasidic tradition described his imprisonment in terms of religious heroism:

While they were taking him to jail, he spoke this verse: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear not evil, for You are with me” [Pss. 23:4]. That is to say: “I fear not”—for it is Your decree; but that is “evil” for me “for You are with me.” As it were, God was suffering with him.<sup>13</sup>

And in the same spirit, the hasidic tradition continues:

"Princes have persecuted me without cause; my heart stands in awe of Your word. I rejoice over Your word as one who obtains great spoil" [Pss. 119:161–62]. When sitting in jail, he recited this verse. That "princes have persecuted me" is "without cause"—I do not fear that. But only "my heart stands in awe of Your word"—lest that is Your decree and Your hand has afflicted me. But in a moment, he composed himself, saying: If it is indeed the word of the Lord and the will of the Creator, blessed be His Name, then "I rejoice over Your word as one who obtains great spoil," for I accept Your decree with love.<sup>14</sup>

We have no details of his imprisonment; it is hardly conceivable that he was imprisoned together with criminals, and he was most probably kept in an isolated cell. After all, he was merely a suspect, not a convicted criminal, and accordingly his associates were allowed to visit him. As usual in those days, his guards were not above taking bribes,<sup>15</sup> and he was thus able to assure himself of reasonable conditions and to maintain constant contact with his hasidim. Thus, for example, his personal valet of many years, Samuel Malchik, known as "Shmulik the Chamberlain" (Hebrew *meshamesh*), was allowed to stay with him in jail—not as a prisoner but as a privilege for Israel, in return for a considerable bribe; Shmulik was able to help his master in the dreary routine of prison life.<sup>16</sup> It was told of a favored hasid named Jehiel Singer that he visited Israel twice and had to bribe one of the guards with "a hat full of gold coins."<sup>17</sup> Another—rather dubious—tradition relates that the jailers deliberately placed the zaddik "under a tall tower where a great bell rang regularly [i.e., a church bell tower], so as to distract his holy thoughts."<sup>18</sup> Every Saturday, the hasidim would bring him wine for Kiddush, challah bread, and kosher food; they even brought him a shofar for Rosh Hashanah, but "much effort," i.e., bribery, was required to fetch him the Four Species for the Sukkot festival.<sup>19</sup> A story of a jailer who permitted the zaddik to leave his cell for the Benediction of the New Moon also tells of the jailer's fears that he might be caught and punished for doing so.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, one's impression is that Rabbi Israel was treated fairly and with consideration, for otherwise we would surely have heard stories of cruelty and mistreatment. His mother and other family members were not given permission to visit him; at any rate, we have no evidence of such visits while he was in Kiev.<sup>21</sup>

Although the imprisonment at Kiev aroused a tremendous reaction throughout the Diaspora and greatly agitated his hasidim, Rabbi Israel felt himself abandoned and alienated, mainly in relation to his colleagues, the other zaddikim. Frustrated, he told his companions that when Shneur Zalman of Lyady had been imprisoned in Saint Petersburg forty years earlier, all the zaddikim had offered prayers for him; "but for me the zaddikim

did not pray, for they are youngsters." He attributed his release to the identification with his plight of his hasidim—ordinary Jews like Shmulik, who had stayed with him in jail, all of whom had recited psalms incessantly; but, he complained bitterly and sarcastically, he had not seen the prayers of the zaddikim, which were supposed to create wonders, rising to heaven.<sup>22</sup>

This was not the first time that a hasidic leader had been arrested by the Russian authorities. On this occasion, however, the zaddik was indeed in real danger of his life. Sympathizers and followers, together with critics and opponents, expressed their feelings for the imprisoned zaddik, all doing their utmost to secure his release. The zaddik Shalom of Belz once said that he had gone blind in one eye because of the many tears he had shed while Israel was in prison.<sup>23</sup> It was also reported of Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, who considered Israel a hero who had openly—and hopelessly—challenged Czar Nicholas I ("to subdue the powers of that *kelipah* [demon], the well-known evil king who reigned in his time"),<sup>24</sup> that he became quite distraught upon hearing of his imprisonment.<sup>25</sup> The news of Israel's persecution and incarceration aroused in the rebbe Samuel Abba of Zychlin a deep hatred of the Russians in general, and of Nicholas in particular (to the extent that he rendered active help to the Polish rebellion against the czar and was in fact imprisoned for his part).<sup>26</sup> Various personalities outside the hasidic world tried to give help, exerting their influence to free Israel. Among these was apparently the great Torah scholar Moses Sofer (known as the Hatam Sofer), who was approached on the matter by Moses Teitelbaum of Ujhely, Hungary. This hasidic zaddik wrote the following message to the sage, immersed in the world of Halakhah: "Although I do not recognize his [Israel's] worth in Torah casuistry, at any rate I can testify that many thousands of Jews are walking around with broken hearts because of his situation."<sup>27</sup>

A particularly impressive expression of identification with Israel's bitter straits came from Meir of Premyshlan. This zaddik undertook to sit in the dark as a symbolic expression of solidarity with his colleague. This rather curious story is corroborated by the son of the celebrated hasidic halakhic scholar Shalom Mordekhai Shvadron (known as Maharsham). When Shalom was six or seven years old, his father, a devoted hasid of Rabbi Meir, took him to visit the zaddik:

The two of them went, and it was then about the time that the aforementioned rebbe and zaddik was sitting on the ground on a low bench, in the dark, in an inner room, one could almost feel the dark with one's hand. He had taken a vow to do this when the holy rebbe of Ruzhin was imprisoned in Russia. He vowed to sit in the dark on the edge of the bed seven years, and so he did.

So deep was the darkness that the boy's father almost fell over the zaddik. Rabbi Meir wanted to bless the boy, sat him on his knees, and in the



dark felt his head and sidelocks. Needless to say, this experience left a deep impression on the boy.<sup>28</sup> According to another version, Rabbi Meir did not sleep in his bed but tormented himself “on the sharp end of a beam at the side of the bed.”<sup>29</sup> Others reported that he took a vow never to use silver vessels again. This last tradition is particularly interesting, for some years later, Rabbi Meir made an attempt to have the vow abrogated, arguing that “then, when I made the vow, I did not know what I now know, with God’s help, that by using silver vessels one can bring abundance [to the world].”<sup>30</sup> This story clearly reveals the influence of Rabbi Meir’s association with Rabbi Israel, which began only after the latter had settled in Sadgora.

The reaction of the maskilim was the very opposite. The very fact of Rabbi Israel’s imprisonment was for them proof positive of his guilt, even before he had been brought to trial. Surely his hasidim had not spirited him out of jail because of some paltry transgression of Halakhah—thus wrote, many years later, one maskil who had no doubt of Rabbi Israel’s guilt.<sup>31</sup> Contemporary echoes of the affair may be discerned not only in Joseph Perl’s memorandum about Israel’s direct involvement, but also in a venomous remark by a forgotten Ukrainian maskil named Hayyim Malaga:

The rebbe Israel is now being interrogated in Berdichev. For our many sins, poor thing, he has been forced to stand whole days before Russian officials, who distract his holy thoughts. For our many sins, we can in no way understand for what great sins of this generation the zaddik is suffering such great affliction. Perhaps it will bring atonement for the whole generation.<sup>32</sup>

While the lengthy, tortuous investigation was in progress, intercession was constantly being made to secure Rabbi Israel’s release. We have few details of these efforts, which were, only naturally, clandestine, but there are hints in abundance. The appeal for contributions to pay the legal expenses was so aggressive that it not only enraged hostile maskilim like Joseph Perl, who promptly reported it to the authorities, but also gave informers an excuse to accuse their enemies of participating in the appeal for the imprisoned zaddik. Thus, for example, letters were forged, purporting to come from Rabbi David Luria of Bykhov Yashan, expressing interest in Israel’s welfare and urging that large sums of money be collected and sent to Saint Petersburg, presumably as bribes.<sup>33</sup> Even the apostate traveler Bonaventura Mayer, who had visited Rabbi Israel in 1826, claimed to have been involved in diplomatic efforts to obtain his release. As he wrote in 1850 to Sir Moses Montefiore: “Surely you are aware and have not forgotten the good things I have done for the Jews in Russia, and of this too you are aware, that it was I who saved the great scholar Rabbi Israel from prison in Russia.”<sup>34</sup> This seemingly empty boast receives a modicum of support from a hasidic enigmatic source: “It is known . . . that the per-

son who first gave him the news of his impending release from prison was an apostate."<sup>35</sup>

There are reliable reports of practical measures taken by Rabbi Israel's followers: organizing an appeal in Galicia, which set itself the target of collecting the enormous sum of 30,000 rubles to finance legal expenses and bribes.<sup>36</sup> Of the moving spirits behind the appeal, we know the names of the wealthy Jacob Joseph Heilperin of Berdichev, whose son was married to Rabbi Israel's daughter;<sup>37</sup> a rich hasid of Borshchev named Isaac Fischler;<sup>38</sup> Yekutiel Shmelke of Kolomea, son of the famous zaddik Moses Leib of Sasov;<sup>39</sup> Samuel of Botosani, Rabbi Israel's brother-in-law;<sup>40</sup> and the zaddik Zevi the "Servant" of Rimanov.<sup>41</sup> Special emissaries made the rounds even in Polish towns and visited hasidic courts there.<sup>42</sup>

Most of our information about this appeal comes from Galicia, thanks to Joseph Perl's independent investigation. Perl happened upon the appeal by chance (the hasidim made every effort to conceal it), while looking into an entirely different matter. His surprise findings filled him, as he said, with "amazement and repulsion," and he therefore committed them to writing. On March 6, 1838, he dispatched a memorandum informing the Austrian authorities of the illegal activities in Galician towns and villages, pointing out that they were intended to benefit a person suspected of being implicated in a murder. Recalling that it was forbidden to take money out of the Austrian empire, Perl hoped that the authorities would indeed see the appeal as a serious offense and put an end to it. He discovered that there had been appeals in various communities in the districts of Sanok, Jaslo, Tarnov, Tarnopol, Chortkov, and even in Lemberg, under the authorities' very noses. The money, he claimed, had been smuggled into Russia. Despite the clearly anti-hasidic tone of the memorandum, there is no reason to doubt the factual aspect of Perl's findings; it is in fact not improbable that the dimensions of the appeal were even greater than what Perl had uncovered (he estimated the total sum collected at from forty to fifty thousand gulden). He further argued that the appeal had been imposed on the contributors, against their will;<sup>43</sup> this observation, however, may well have been colored by his hatred of Hasidism. On the contrary, it seems plausible that, as Rabbi Israel had been able to collect large sums of money for his activities prior to the Ushits affair, his hasidim would surely have been even more willing to contribute to his release when he was in such acute distress.

## *II. Rabbi Israel versus Nicholas I*

It goes without saying that for the Ruzhin hasidim, their rebbe's arrest was an odious, false accusation, aimed at extirpating the royal dynasty and the

messianic hopes that it offered: "For the ministers of the [Russian] government were jealous of him, seeing the splendid glory of his majesty. So when an informer in a certain city was eliminated, they accused him of having authorized the deed";<sup>44</sup> "For from his ways and comportment as rabbi and leader, [Rabbi Israel's] intention is clear from his actions, that he wants to rise and reign as king over Israel and to create a new monarchy in the days to come."<sup>45</sup> In other words, according to the hasidic perspective the reason for the authorities' picking on Rabbi Israel was entirely political: jealousy and apprehension of the tremendous veneration in which thousands of Jews held the zaddik, whose personality and behavior resembled those of a monarch or a messiah. The affair of the murdered informers was held to be merely a peg on which the government hung its vindictiveness.<sup>46</sup>

Since we have no proof that the Russian authorities indeed entertained any fears of Rabbi Israel before the Ushits case, this "political" argument seems untenable. What we have here is simply a natural process of hasidic heroization and mythologizing, which had already begun then, and had the goal of glorifying the figure of the persecuted zaddik and investing his suffering and wanderings with a metahistorical meaning.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the zaddik has nothing to do with the murder, as one might have thought from the course of events. The "earthly" judicial process was nothing but a "pawn" in a supreme plan, whose goal was to pit the zaddik against his ultimate "rival," represented by the figure of Czar Nicholas I. At the end of the day, the winner of this unequal "struggle" against the hated, anti-Semitic Nicholas and his sprawling, evil empire will be Rabbi Israel, in his own special way. Thus it turned out that the hasidim shared with the maskilim—although, of course, for entirely different motives—the image of Israel as the archetypal zaddik who is an eternal rebel against authority, hence a dangerous, provocative figure. The truth was generally the opposite. Contrary to the thesis of most maskilim, the zaddikim constituted a stable, conservative element, quite averse to challenging the gentile government or undermining the ancien régime; accordingly, they were usually viewed with approval by the authorities. It was the maskilim who constituted an active, politically aware element who, despite their declared loyalty to the regime, were considered suspect and seen in a dangerous, subversive light.<sup>48</sup>

Czar Nicholas I, who came to the throne in 1825, became in Ruzhin tradition a mythic, demonic archetype of evil, constantly warring on the good of the world as personified by Rabbi Israel. In fact, the Russian czars, in particular Alexander I and his brother Nicholas I, also cultivated images of themselves as messianic figures, charged with a Christian religious mission. Nicholas, "the sworn enemy of Judaism . . . was eager to hunt down the leader of the national Jewish movement [Rabbi Israel]," the religious writer

Aaron Marcus characteristically observes.<sup>49</sup> In various stories and parables attributed to Israel, Nicholas appears sometimes merely as a typical example of a powerful monarch, sometimes as a cunning schemer, employing different stratagems to avert the threat presented him and his kingdom by the Rabbi Israel. The myth of Nicholas being unable to sleep at night for fear of the zaddik reigning at Ruzhin took root in popular hasidic folklore and consciousness; there were even tales of their face-to-face meetings, around which a wealth of legends were woven.<sup>50</sup> Here is what the playwright and ethnographer Solomon Zanol Rappoport [S. Ansky], on a tour of the devastated communities of Galicia, Volhynia, and Bukovina after World War I, was told in Sadgora:

Nicholas hated the Ruzhiner intensely and persecuted him all his life. This amazed the Russian ministers, and once they asked Nicholas: Is it proper for a great king like yourself constantly to persecute this lowly *zbid*? Nicholas jumped up and called out in great anger: What you say is not true, that he is a "lowly *zbid*." For all my life I have been weighing down the world in one direction and he weighs it down in the other, and I have never been able to prevail!

And Rabbi Israel himself once said: "I was born on the same day as he, but three hours later, and I cannot catch him. . . ." "The Ruzhiner did not want to reveal himself and sit upon the zaddik's throne as long as Nicholas was reigning as czar. He stipulated a condition: He or I! And he raised a commotion in all the palaces and it almost happened that Nicholas was deposed from his royal throne."<sup>51</sup>

Rabbi Israel's negative attitude to Nicholas was presumably a matter of public knowledge among the Jews, who generally took care to remain loyal to the secular government and its leaders. Hence one of the most absurd slanders ever brought to the knowledge of the Third Department, which actually came to the attention of the czar himself, was the accusation fabricated against Israel by an enterprising Jewish informer from Zhitomir, Abraham Kuperbant, in 1846. He reported that he had found a letter in a Berdichev street describing an assembly of rabbis in the wake of the meeting of Montefiore and Rabbi Israel at Sadgora—a meeting that, needless to say, was a figment of Kuperbant's imagination. This assembly, so said the informer, had resolved to crown the zaddik as king of the Jews and to foment a revolution against the czar, with the aid of Polish landowners.<sup>52</sup> In addition, it was claimed, Israel had recommended in a circular letter that the Jews everywhere, when cleaning out the leaven on the eve of Passover, should read Psalm 12, throw a little mercury into the stove, and recite, "Just as this quicksilver is burning, so should Nicholas and his whole family burn."<sup>53</sup>

Although it is plausible that various details of Rabbi Israel's person and

actions were brought to Nicholas's personal attention, and Nicholas is known to have personally ordered him expelled from the Pale of Settlement,<sup>54</sup> the affair should not be taken out of all proportion. Nicholas I's bureaucratic regime dealt with many thousands of similar episodes; hundreds of thousands of legal documents flooded government offices every year, and the thousands of clerks were hard put to cope with the paperwork, let alone to verify the underlying facts and events.<sup>55</sup> The establishment of the Third Department, Nicholas's department of internal security, only heaped thousands of new documents onto the mountain of reports and records, describing surveillance of genuine and spurious suspects. One doubts whether Rabbi Israel and his actions caused the czar any personal concern, as depicted in hasidic legend. After all, he was only one of thousands of other "professional troublemakers"—Russians, Ukrainians, White Russians, Poles, and Jews—throughout the great expanses of the Russian Empire who were hounded by a tangled, corrupt, constantly self-perpetuating bureaucracy. The fact that Israel is mentioned in a few official records and was subjected to petty, bothersome surveillance by the local police surely made him a "local hero" for his faithful adherents, hence also in popular folklore; but one doubts whether his fame spread beyond those limits and became a national issue.<sup>56</sup>

### *III. Affliction and Its Significance*

This question did not, of course, trouble Rabbi Israel's hasidim, who became increasingly convinced that his imprisonment and suffering were merely part of the price to be paid for his messianic task. Thus, when the Scottish missionaries Bonar and M'Cheyne tried to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah, the Jews of Siret, in Bukovina, answered in the following vein: Every generation has its own Messiah, who suffers for his contemporaries and atones for their sins; the example of such a messiah in our generation is Rabbi Israel, languishing in a Russian jail.<sup>57</sup> The Siret Jews presumably used the Talmudic expression "Righteous persons are punished for their generation,"<sup>58</sup> while the missionaries, who sought their own Messiah everywhere, introduced a slight change, putting the word "Messiah" into their mouths. Whatever the case, it was commonly believed among the hasidim that Israel's suffering was in atonement for the transgressions of his generation. Years later, when he died, his disciple Joseph Landau of Jassy was to eulogize him in almost as many words: "While still alive, he was imprisoned for a long time, to atone for the sin of the generation, and indeed all his days suffered ailments in his internal organs to mitigate the judgment due his contemporaries. . . . And he was crushed because of our sins, wounded because of our iniquities."<sup>59</sup>

Rabbi Israel was released from prison on February 19, 1840. One month later, celebrating the Purim festival as a free man, he preached to his hasidim, conveying a sober, pessimistic message centering on the significance of suffering for the fate of the zaddik and his world mission. God grants the zaddik wisdom through suffering, he said. This wisdom is the strength given to the zaddik to perfect souls and to restore them to their good "root": "And for that reason we find in every generation that the zaddikim suffer. . . . For the zaddik receives afflictions and restores them to their root by the strength of wisdom. . . . Thereby the strength of wisdom is strengthened in the zaddik." The miracle of Purim also involved the universal suffering of the people of Israel. The biblical Mordekhai, the zaddik and *axis mundi* of his generation, restored the suffering to its root and in so doing annulled the decree of destruction. "Thus, the zaddik, the axis mundi," Rabbi Israel continued, now speaking presumably of himself:

when he receives afflictions and then comes out of the afflictions, thinks that by coming out of his own afflictions . . . he will thereby benefit Israel in general to come out of afflictions, poverty, and exile. But when he sees that the suffering of all Israel is still in force, he understands that he still lacks the aforementioned spirit, which is in the hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself. . . . And that is the spirit of the Messiah, which is from the hand of God. Hence it is impossible for the zaddik to rejoice upon coming out of his afflictions, for he still lacks that spirit, that is, the spirit of the Messiah.<sup>60</sup>

The notion of suffering and its meaning is highly developed in Rabbi Israel's thought. In his teachings, he frequently stresses the importance of this experience in the biography of the real zaddik, the leader of his generation. Although most of these sermons are not dated, it may be presumed that they were delivered in connection with his own experience of suffering, first as a prisoner and later as a fugitive. He was troubled, above all, by the injustice of it all, but not because of the classical problem of theodicy, but because of the unjust "division" of suffering among his fellows, the other zaddikim:

And the rabbi asked: At any rate, there are perfect zaddikim who have no suffering, while there are other zaddikim who have suffering in this world. And he said that the zaddikim who do not radiate spiritual abundance to the world, and of their own, too, they have no sin, they therefore have no suffering, Heaven forbid. But the zaddikim who do radiate spiritual abundance to the world, and there are in this world people who do not perform good deeds through this radiation, and the abundance is superfluous for them, for that reason the zaddikim are made to suffer.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, suffering is the lot of zaddikim, who have undertaken to bring down the flow of Divine grace to the earthly world, even though it is known that some human beings misuse it. Such zaddikim, of whom

Rabbi Israel considered himself one, are therefore taking great risks, but they realize that the mission is imposed upon them, and they have no choice in the matter; they cannot just cut themselves off from the rest of the world. This dichotomy of the zaddik's community has other manifestations, but they, too, relate to the acceptance of suffering and affliction:

For it is known that there is a zaddik who is constantly engaged in the nullification of harsh judgment, and there is a zaddik who is constantly engaged in the mitigation of harsh judgment. Now the zaddik who is engaged in the mitigation of harsh judgment is the leader of the generation; he takes all the suffering upon himself, and thereafter he is capable of mitigating it.<sup>62</sup>

The zaddik's physical condition is of course affected by his suffering. Rabbi Israel considered this not only a religious test but also a touchstone for the definition of the zaddik's spiritual level:

The zaddik progresses from level to level until he brings himself to the greatest possible level, which no longer belongs to this world. But the will of the Lord, blessed be He, is otherwise; He wishes the zaddik to belong to this world and to pray for Israel. What does the Lord do? He inflicts him with suffering, which is in the nature of contraction [*zimzum*], so that he necessarily belongs to this world.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, it is in the Divine interest, as it were, to limit the zaddik's powers. God prevents the zaddik from realizing his full potential, because that might cut him off from the earthly world. This "contraction" or, better, "curtailment," results in suffering, which demonstrates for the zaddik the importance of his continuing link to the physical world. The zaddik himself, in a dialectical process, "finds in suffering Divine aspects." Here we have an interesting manifestation of a difficulty that faced many zaddikim, namely, the apparent contradiction between the endeavor to achieve spiritual perfection on a personal level ("the zaddik progresses from level to level"), which is liable to sever the link with the everyday world, and the "descent" implicit in the zaddik's fulfillment of his public mission.<sup>64</sup> Rabbi Israel interpreted his personal troubles as an indication of the correct way: "to belong to this world and to pray for Israel." When a certain hasid requested his advice, asking how he could overcome various afflictions which prevented him from studying and praying with the proper devotion, he answered: "How do you know what is more important before the Holy One, blessed be He—your Torah and prayer or your suffering?"<sup>65</sup>

It seems likely that Rabbi Israel's long spell in prison affected his consciousness and reshaped his worldview. It was reported that, when taken to prison, "he wept copiously. And people were amazed at this, why he was not fulfilling the precept to rejoice in one's suffering."<sup>66</sup> In view of the teachings that extol suffering as a purifying personal experience, people

expected the zaddik to be glad of the "opportunity," so to speak, that had come his way.

Now, having been released from prison and experienced the kind of suffering of which other leaders had merely spoken, Israel underwent both a psychological crisis and a crisis of leadership: "He paced to and fro in his room and said: Why do they call me rebbe if I am not heeded above in heaven?! I only dozed a minute, and see what happened!"<sup>67</sup> He taught his hasidim that, in such difficult times, the mere recitation of one of the most routine, familiar prayers, known as *Ashrei* (Ps. 145), might be considered an act of tremendous devotion.<sup>68</sup> The minimization of religious observance implicit in this idea is also related to the image of "the descent of generations" and Rabbi Israel's doctrine of "the power of inferiority." In hard times of persecution and harsh decrees, such as those now inflicted upon the Jewish masses under the czarist boot, there was no need of devotion and martyrdom in the usual sense of dying for one's faith. The same spiritual level and strength previously implied by dramatic, isolated acts may now be found in the most everyday actions, such as the everyday recitation of the psalm and its preceding verses—something every devout Jew knew by heart. Thus each and every Jew is a martyr, risking his life. Such teachings meant a marked exaltation of the most trivial religious act, a legitimization of the most ordinary Jewish lifestyle, which Rabbi Israel, as we may infer, was comparing in quality and value to the greatest scholarship and righteousness of the religious elite.





## *The Fugitive: Flight from Russia*

### *I. The Memoirs of Yossi Rath*

Rabbi Israel's flight from his town, Ruzhin, and the district where he was born, although endowed with all the elements of a thriller—forgery, bribery, smuggling across borders, and treks on foot in freezing cold—is not frequently described in hasidic literature. The main historical source for the details of Israel's exodus from Russia and his adventures until he settled permanently in the Austrian town of Sadgora is a book named *Yeshu'ot Israel* (Salvations of Israel).<sup>1</sup> This unique work was written by Rabbi Israel's personal valet and confidant, Yossi Rath of Kolomea, who accompanied the zaddik on all his travels and jotted down his experiences.

Eliezer Shenkel, a bookseller from Tarnov, first printed the book anonymously in 1904.<sup>2</sup> The publisher, who for some reason tried to conceal the author's real identity,<sup>3</sup> claimed that the manuscript had awaited publication for sixty-one years, that is, that it had been written around 1843. Clearly, however, that date is fictitious, as the text refers among other things to events that took place much later.<sup>4</sup> The author's identity, moreover, has been established without doubt, on the basis of both the book itself and family traditions.<sup>5</sup>

Yossi's memoirs are a sort of personal diary. He wrote his comments at different times, describing Rabbi Israel's flight in all its details. His style was influenced, overtly and otherwise, by the new maskilic literature of his time,<sup>6</sup> and the reader may also detect a certain effort to convert his private

experiences into readable, exciting literary material. Despite his assertion that he wrote his book while Rabbi Israel was still alive, it seems clear that most of it was written in the author's old age.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the material is historically reliable and is probably a faithful representation of the real course of events. Significantly, the author presents the composition of his book (the only similar work in hasidic literature, although admittedly much broader in scope, is Nathan of Nemirov's writings on his zaddik, Nahman of Bratslav) as a response to a request by Rabbi Israel himself, who supposedly expressed the wish to have his experiences recorded "so that they should be remembered for a long time by future generations."<sup>8</sup> If this is true, it indicates Israel's exceptional sense of the importance of historical records and the role of memory as an educational tool capable of molding the hasidic experience of future generations.

Rath set himself strict rules, noting that he had recorded carefully and absolutely truthfully only what he had actually seen and heard. Whenever he was unsure of some event or detail, he explicitly indicated his uncertainty.<sup>9</sup> Rath made a living as a merchant,<sup>10</sup> seeking the zaddik's company only after the latter's release from prison. Prior to that, he had been a hasid of the rank and file, visiting Ruzhin for Sabbaths three or four times a year; at the same time, he also traveled occasionally to the court of Hayyim of Kosov.<sup>11</sup> Upon hearing of Rabbi Israel's release, he was overcome by eagerness to be with the zaddik and hastened to Ruzhin. From then on, until Israel's death, the two never parted company. Historical accident has thus provided us with an opportunity to describe some of the events through a combination of internal hasidic documentation and Russian documents, which complement and corroborate one another.

## *II. Return to Ruzhin*

On January 18, 1840 (January 30 by the Gregorian calendar), Czar Nicholas I confirmed the military court's verdict. One week later, on January 24, the Russian war minister notified General Bibikov, governor-general of the southwestern provinces, of the confirmation. He also hinted that, despite the approval of Rabbi Israel's return to his home in Ruzhin, there would be no objections if the local authorities saw fit to banish him—but the action should be taken judiciously, without any overt link to the Ushits case. Two weeks later, on February 6, Bibikov also confirmed the verdict and Rabbi Israel was immediately released and allowed to return home. On Wednesday, a day afterwards, he walked through the prison gate a free man. Two days later, on the eve of the Sabbath, he reached his old court at Ruzhin.<sup>12</sup>

We may assume that the government authorities involved were not at all

pleased at Rabbi Israel's release. They continued to regard him as a dangerous, seditious element, whose doings and behavior had to be constantly watched. As we have seen, even the verdict of acquittal stated that he should be kept under official surveillance. During the investigation, the Russians had come to realize the extent of the zaddik's influence on the hasidic sector of the Jewish population and the danger it held for public stability and order. Bibikov's fears, as expressed in a memorandum sent to the czar (but unfortunately not preserved), were stated as follows in a hasidic source reflecting the Ruzhin tradition of the circumstances surrounding the flight:

It is true that this man is innocent of the slightest guilt, but since he is very great in the eyes of the Jews . . . one should beware of future developments, lest the Jews agree that he is the Lord's Messiah and take him as their king. And [Bibikov] ventured the suggestion that they should send him to a distant land and that he should not maintain a prayer group, only ten people that he needs to pray, no more.<sup>13</sup>

This reading of the events is confirmed by documents from the Russian Interior Ministry archives. Immediately after the verdict had been approved, Bibikov was instructed that, despite Rabbi Israel's acquittal and the permission he had received to return to Ruzhin, if he (Bibikov) were to decide to exile the zaddik on the basis of some new data, unrelated to the Ushits case, he should "consult on the matter with whosoever should be consulted."<sup>14</sup> The intention is quite obvious. In addition, a special memorandum written in September 1840, commissioned by the Third Department, supports the impression that the authorities considered Israel and his court a potential source of friction and unrest. This rabbi, wrote the authors of the memorandum, was highly respected among all the Jews of Russia, Poland, Moldavia, and Bessarabia, as the Ba'al Shem Tov—also believed in his time to be the Messiah—had been. He was viewed as a chief rabbi and had considerable influence on both religious and everyday, practical affairs. Multitudes came to him, bringing him tithes and gifts, which, they believed, were equal in value to sacrifices in the temple. His hasidic admirers were registered in a special notebook and received his special protection and patronage. The memorandum's writers had the impression that the Ruzhin court was nothing if not a miniature headquarters, from which communications went out to distant places. The zaddik was in effect operating as a kind of autonomous ruler, recognizing no borders and maintaining his own tax-collection system; he had the power to protect his followers and to persecute his opponents, sometimes to the extent of bloodshed.<sup>15</sup>

Rabbi Israel was therefore put under surveillance and frequently harassed by the authorities. Although his merchant status was not revoked

after the trial, he was restricted to his hometown and warned that any irresponsible acts on his part would entail his exile to Siberia.<sup>16</sup> Israel remained in Ruzhin for about one and a half years, until August 1841, almost completely cut off from his hasidim, who could no longer come to the court. Early in 1841, Bibikov reported that Israel was indeed greatly esteemed by the local Jews, but that he was living in quiet solitude and had no outside visitors. His influence, concluded the governor, had been much weakened by his two years in prison.<sup>17</sup> Of this period in Israel's life, we know very little; it is indeed likely that his activities as a hasidic leader were at a standstill.

### *III. Flight from Russia*

When Rabbi Israel realized that the dream of reestablishing the Ruzhin court would never come about, he decided to move away and to settle at Kishinev, the capital of Russian Bessarabia, just over the Austrian border.<sup>18</sup> In February 1841, he submitted a request for permission to move to Kishinev; but it was only at the end of July that year, after an inquiry on behalf of the district court at Skvira had determined that Israel was behaving in an exemplary manner, that the Interior Ministry gave "the former rabbi and merchant Srul Friedmann" permission to leave Ruzhin.<sup>19</sup> The main reason for the authorities' acquiescence was Rabbi Israel's assertion that he had abandoned the rabbinate and was now making his living as a merchant, in partnership with a Jewish merchant of Kishinev. Freedom of movement was a prerequisite for success in his business, and Israel demanded that he be permitted to ply his trade without hindrance, as his status as a member of the Second Merchants' Guild entitled him to do. His arguments were accepted, among other things, because his lifestyle and activities since being released gave no cause for suspicion. The desired permit was therefore granted, conditional upon police surveillance continuing in Kishinev as well. The travel certificate itself states that it was granted to the bearer for commercial purposes only and not for permanent settlement in Bessarabia.<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Israel did not wait long, immediately moving the entire content of his court, hiring carts to transport all his belongings and household effects to Kishinev, "at a cost of some three hundreds rubles";<sup>21</sup> clearly, he had no intention of returning to Ruzhin and considered this chapter of his life as closed.

The reasons for Rabbi Israel's change of venue are quite clear. The governor-general of Bessarabia and the provinces of New Russia, Count Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontzov, was known for his liberal attitude to the Jews and to hasidim, and Israel could expect to be relatively safe from harassment there. The move was presumably convenient for Bibikov and

Lashkarev as well, because they could present the zaddik's departure from his "realms" in Volhynia and Podolia as a significant political achievement. However, Israel's original plan—to make his home in Kishinev and rebuild his court there—soon went awry.

In his very first few days at Kishinev, news reached him that plans were under way to move him and his family out of the Pale of Settlement, to one of the new eastern districts in Inner Russia. Of course, Rabbi Israel never saw the correspondence containing these directives. He heard of the plan through his son-in-law's father, the banker Jacob Joseph Heilperin of Berdichev, who had residential rights in Kiev and maintained close commercial contacts with military and government circles.<sup>22</sup> Israel had no reason to doubt the veracity of the information and dispatched some of his associates to Pavel Ivanovich Fyodorov, commissioner of Bessarabia, who lived in Kishinev, "so that they should intercede, paying a large bribe, to procure for him a travel permit to the land of Moldavia."<sup>23</sup> Russian documents indicate that Israel did indeed register at Kishinev "in a special capacity" as a member of the merchant class, and, after some of his men presented guarantees to the government that he would indeed return from his trip to Moldavia, received a legal travel permit.<sup>24</sup>

Surprisingly, the intercession for the zaddik may have involved maskilim as well, led by Bezael Stern, principal of the Jewish school at Odessa and a student of Joseph Perl. This hypothesis is corroborated by a remark of Alexander Tzederbaum (Erez), editor of *Ha-melitz*: "Only after much intercession by the hasidim, and upon their request it was also agreed by *Notables* of Odessa and the bright *Stars* among the maskilim of Israel to give a good report of him before the mighty, exalted, righteous, and merciful prince, Vorontzov, so that he was given freedom to set out and leave this land."<sup>25</sup>

The words "Notables" and "stars" (in the original, the Hebrew words *efrati* and *kokhavei*), emphasized in the original text, probably allude to Hayyim Efrati, a rich Jew of Odessa, and to Bezael Stern, who was a personal friend of Governor-General Vorontzov's.<sup>26</sup> Here, then, is yet another manifestation of cooperation in the complex relationship between Israel of Ruzhin and contemporary maskilim,<sup>27</sup> although the nature and real motives of the cooperation are not clear.

Rabbi Israel and his men lost no time; crossing the Prut River, they immediately turned west, toward Jassy, capital of Moldavia, then an independent principality under Ottoman rule and Russian protection. The zaddik's family remained in Kishinev in the meanwhile, awaiting developments.<sup>28</sup> The zaddik had long been acquainted with many leaders of the Jassy Jewish community, headed by Rabbi Joseph Landau and the rich laymen Michel Daniel and Naphtali Kaufman, and they were glad to receive

him and help him settle down in his new home. Israel's advance information and sharp senses had not misled him; there was a plan afoot to evict him from the Pale of Settlement. According to Rath, an order to that effect had indeed been issued, but sent first, by mistake, to Ruzhin. From there it made its way to Kishinev, but by then the zaddik had already left Bessarabia. The governor of Kishinev, who had confirmed the issue of the travel permit, hastened to instruct the Russian consul at Jassy to do everything possible to return the escaping zaddik. But these plans, too, came to the knowledge of Israel's associates in time, and they issued appropriate warnings.<sup>29</sup>

It was clear to Rabbi Israel and his attendants that the eviction decree beyond the Pale of Settlement had to be evaded at all costs, for, as his son put it in diplomatic language, "For him, to live in such places, as a man who does not know Russian, seems impossible in respect of his spiritual position."<sup>30</sup> In other words, if the zaddik were to be cut off from his main source of power—the hasidim—there would remain practically no chance of restoring his court. The only alternative, clearly, was to move the zaddik's home to Austria, far from Russian influence—and the sooner, the better.

To their chagrin, the escape had to be postponed, because Rabbi Israel's permit was valid only for a journey from Russia to Moldavia and travel to Galicia required a special permit. A few stressful days passed, during which he quickly left Jassy and hid, probably in Botosani, northwest of where some of his wife's relatives lived.<sup>31</sup> In the meantime, his associates once again proved their mettle, securing a forged travel document made out in another name. And then yet another problem materialized: the document had originally been intended for a youth of twenty-six, whereas Israel was then forty-four years old. The solution was to enlist the active help of a rich merchant, Nathan Simeon Horowitz of Suceava, a professional smuggler, whose wife was an admirer of another zaddik, Meir of Premyshlan.<sup>32</sup> Being accustomed to smuggling goods across the border and maintaining good relations with the Austrian border officials—who received a regular bribe from him—he would be able to get the fugitive safely into Austria. Rabbi Israel was eventually allowed across the border with his forged passport, without any further examination.

Rabbi Israel and two of his associates (his beadle Shmulik and the *shohet* Yudel Landau) stole across the border on a freezing cold night, early in January 1842.<sup>33</sup> The inhospitable road, blocked at frequent intervals by incessantly falling snow, forced the small party to use a special horse-drawn sleigh. Thus they traveled as far as the Siret River, the natural boundary between Moldavia and Bukovina. The river was frozen over and the travelers could cross easily; but all of a sudden the ice broke beneath the hooves of one of the horses and the carriage sank in and was irreparably damaged.

The merchant Nathan Simeon, a burly, muscular man, did not panic, and “he risked his life and carried the holy zaddik on his shoulders, going on foot over the waters of the frozen river until he reached the other side.”<sup>34</sup> They probably stayed for a while in Suceava, the merchant’s hometown. This town, the ancient capital of the Moldavian principality, was built on the banks of the Siret, just across from Botosani. Here the party hired a local carriage and continued westward, to their first stop in the new country.

Rabbi Israel spent his first days on Austrian soil, in early 1842, in a Bukovinan village named Campulung, some one hundred kilometers west of Jassy. A few followers had joined him, and now the exiled zaddik was eager to gather around him a larger group of hasidim, to remain with him regularly and give him the feeling of heading a hasidic court, albeit a small, temporary one. He sent emissaries to his son-in-law’s father, the zaddik Hayyim of Kosov, an important hasidic luminary in Galicia; to Yekutiel Shmelke of Kolomea, son of the zaddik Moses Leib of Sasov;<sup>35</sup> and to Yossi Rath, the chronicler of these events, who also lived in Kolomea. Keeping his actual whereabouts a secret, he asked the above three persons to come to him; they were told to travel to a certain village, where a special messenger would wait to bring them to his new home. Rabbi Yekutiel and Yossi secretly hired a carriage and hurried to their master’s side. Despite the badly snow-bound roads, Rath reached the zaddik on Saturday evening. The fact that Rabbi Israel recognized him and patted his shoulder in appreciation, coupled with the feeling that he had obeyed his master absolutely, without question, filled Rath with joy. In the meantime, fifteen other hasidim had arrived from nearby villages, and three days later, Hayyim of Kosov also came. Upon the latter’s arrival, he sent a messenger to Rabbi Israel, requesting permission to see him—just as if they had been at the crowded, pulsing court of Ruzhin.<sup>36</sup>

It was quite clear from the start that Campulung was merely a temporary base. A short time later, Rabbi Israel accepted Rabbi Hayyim’s invitation to move farther north, to Kosov in Galicia. Rabbi Hayyim promised him that the district governor of Kolomea, whose sphere of jurisdiction included Kosov, was favorably disposed toward the hasidim and would surely assist. Rabbi Israel arrived, but found out that the governor in question was soon to be replaced and could no longer be relied upon. As Shmulik the beadle relates, the frustrated zaddik shut himself up in his relative’s house, refusing to see anyone but Rabbi Hayyim, who kept him abreast of developments.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, one of the questions that occupied Rabbi Israel upon reaching Rabbi Hayyim’s home was: “Did he [i.e., Hayyim] have rich hasidim?”<sup>38</sup>

In the midst of all this uncertainty, messengers to Rabbi Israel arrived from the Bukovinan Baron Mustatza, landlord of the town of Sadgora.<sup>39</sup>

They brought an attractive proposition: the zaddik should move to their town, where he would be safe from surprise and fear of any kind. Rabbi Israel sent his faithful border guide Nathan Simeon to Sadgora to test the baron's intentions, and the impressions were favorable. The whole group picked itself up and hastened southward to Sadgora,<sup>40</sup> where a new chapter in Rabbi Israel's life was to begin.





## *“A Guest at the Inn”: The New Court at Sadgora*

### *I. The Danger of Expulsion and Legal Problems*

Rabbi Israel was to live only eight and a half years in Sadgora. Within that relatively brief span of time, he resuscitated his opulent court and created a powerful hasidic center—in a region where the impact of Hasidism had previously been negligible. Once again he held sway over one of the most important hasidic courts. At the same time, he never forgot his hurried flight from Russia, hoping against hope that some day he would be able to return and reestablish the old court. For him, Ruzhin was his original, warm Jewish home, which he had been obliged to abandon under a cloud. As one hasidic author put it in the 1880s:

And I have heard that all the time [Rabbi Israel] was living in Sadgora, he lived the life of a stranger, as a guest and lodger at an inn, and that is a high level in Hasidism . . . inferior to none. Therefore it is stated in the Bible, “The Lord loves the righteous, the lord loves [should be “preserves”] the stranger” [Pss. 146:9–10], and Scripture is referring to the great zaddikim who live lives of strangers in the land, as a person coming from a distant land, from the town of his birth, and he is not concerned for his honor, nor in any way for his own good, but is only concerned to return to his place of birth and throughout the time he lives here thinks only of his birthplace.<sup>1</sup>

He had indeed been loath to leave the country where, as he himself had said, the Messiah would first reveal himself. For himself and his followers, he had to think of some convincing—spiritual rather than secular—expla-

nation as to the "real" reasons for the move. Asked "why he was not living in the land of Russia, and why he should have settled in the Austrian empire, and what was the reason and why had this come to pass," he compared himself to Joseph going down to Egypt to sanctify the Divine Name there. Like Joseph, his relocation from one country to another involved a religious, spiritual mission: "For in the land of Russia they already know and recognize His Divinity, blessed be He, and I wish to advertise His Divinity . . . here in this land as well."<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, he said, "My holy ancestors lived in the land of Russia and there announced and advertised His Divinity, blessed be He, and so I have come here, for here nothing is known yet."<sup>3</sup>

Rabbi Israel came to Sadgora a bitter man, exhausted and ravaged by the trials and tribulations of his journey. The exact date of his arrival is hard to determine. According to one enigmatic hasidic source, his first Sabbath at Sadgora was the Sabbath of the Torah portion *Korah* (Numbers 16–18), June 8, 1842. The large and distinguished audience gathered at his new home was curious to see and hear the famed zaddik. He refused to preach Torah at the table, however, preferring to shut himself up in his room. Only after much effort was he persuaded to emerge and speak. But then, it appears, all the bitterness and suspicions of his years of imprisonment and wandering exploded at once. He accused his visitors of intrigue and treacheries, resentfully complaining that they had only come to dispute with him, like the biblical Korah and his band.<sup>4</sup> More probably, however, Rabbi Israel actually reached Sadgora a few months earlier. An Austrian memorandum referring to his application for permission to settle there indicates that he was already there in February 1842, "and immediately upon arrival he attracted the attention of the Jews, who hurried there from near and far."<sup>5</sup>

Rabbi Israel found those first few days in Sadgora extremely trying. He was alone, for his wife and family had remained in Kishinev under guard, lest they, too, escape, constantly threatened by the Russian authorities. In fact, the governor of Kishinev had summoned Israel's eldest son, Shalom Joseph, warned him that if his father did not return, the whole family would be exiled to Siberia, and directed him to write his father to that effect and ask him to come back. In addition, the governor told the Jews who had vouched for Rabbi Israel when he received his travel permit that he held them personally responsible for the fugitive's return; should they fail to bring him back, they would be prosecuted.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, Israel's wife, Sarah, sent her husband an urgent secret letter, warning him that the missive he was soon to receive from his son had been written under duress and did not express the son's real opinion. She wrote:

Know that we have been surrounded by policemen. The governor summoned my son Shalom and told him that if you do not come back home, he will banish us,

Heaven forbid. He ordered us to write you a letter that you should do just that—come back home. But we are not expressing an opinion, and if you do not want to come back, we must warn you that you should just travel to France or England.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear from this letter (which was sent to Jassy, although Israel had in the meanwhile left that city) that the fugitive zaddik still had no idea of his final destination; and that was surely true of his family. Sarah was most likely not aware of the precise geographical location of France and England; presumably, all she meant was: run away, as far as you can. One can hardly imagine what nineteenth-century Hasidism would have looked like had Rabbi Israel heeded his wife's advice and, instead of settling in Bukovina, set up court in Paris or London, say.

The danger of expulsion was constantly hovering over him, since his residence permit for Bukovina was temporary, and the Russian authorities, as we shall see, still hoped to get their hands on him. Clearly, as long as Rabbi Israel had no permanent residence permit from the Austrian authorities, he would be living in constant fear of extradition. Hence, almost as soon as he had arrived in his new home, his associates began to pull strings and devise plans. As far as they were concerned, everything was justified: forged documents, bribery of officials, seizure of letters addressed to the authorities, pressure on prominent members of the community, lobbying for their rebbe, and the like; every effort had to be made to save the zaddik from the threat of expulsion back to Russia, a fate on a par with death.

The whole story of how Rabbi Israel managed to settle down in Sadgora, if it were not true, could have come from the barbed pen of a maskil like Joseph Perl. It was a real-life drama embodying many of the elements attributed to the hasidim in such satirical works as *Megaleh temirin*. Immediately after Israel's arrival, his hasidim began to spread the false tale that he had been born in Sadgora.<sup>8</sup> Very soon, they found a marvelous piece of deceit through which they might secure a residence permit. One of the townspeople happened to find in the municipal records that an eight-year-old boy named Israel Donenfeld had disappeared from Sadgora fifty years before; his fate was not known. The boy's parents, Hertz and Feige, were no longer alive, and it was decided that the rebbe would take over the boy's identity. He would spin a tale for the Austrian government officials at Chernovtsy, telling them that, as his family had been desperately poor, he had been adopted as a child by his rich relative, Shalom Friedman of Pohorbishch, then on a business trip to Sadgora, who took him back to Russia. Having grown up in Russia as Shalom's adopted son, he, too, came to be known as Friedman.<sup>9</sup> As to the obvious question of why he had returned to Sadgora—he had a ready answer: "Because of his physical weakness and ill health, he desired to consult the best physicians, the likes of which could not be found in Russia."<sup>10</sup> This was the cover story

used when an official request was made for a residence permit in Israel's name.

Rabbi Israel was summoned to nearby Chernovtsy for interrogation and verification of his papers, but his resourceful hasidim, who had feared some such measure, secured a certified document from the Chernovtsy district physician to the effect that he was sick and could not travel for a long distance. The authorities had no choice but to dispatch an investigator to Sadgora. The rebbe, not knowing German and using Rath's services as an interpreter, was required to answer a long, tiresome series of formal questions about his family and himself. It was a well-organized and extraordinarily successful tissue of lies, making the most of the Christian townspeople's gullibility. Rabbi Israel, full of self-confidence, even told the official to ask the Sadgorans about him: "And all of them, Jews and Christians alike, would testify and tell that his words were true." The official, who did in fact call on several Jews and Christians to testify, was dumbfounded by the flood of false memories:

One said that they had studied [Talmudic Tractate] *Bava Kama* together; another gave another sign. And he summoned a certain very old judge, who testified that he remembered [Israel's] father, for he had had little children and had been his neighbor, and one of his sons had leapt and jumped onto the fruit trees that he had in his garden and picked fruit from the trees. And then came some sort of relative from Russia and took that son [Israel] with him and he was overjoyed, for now nobody would damage the fruit of the trees in the garden. Again, an old gentile, who had once been a tax collector, testified that the boy's father, Donenfeld, had been poor and had been unable to pay his taxes, so that he had been obliged to give his bed linen as a pledge.<sup>11</sup>

The description of the whole episode in hasidic sources is so unguarded that the writer Yossi Rath unhesitatingly related that he himself, eager to ward off any further investigation, had traveled to Chernovtsy and bribed "a certain man whom the commissar thought important (for the commissar himself did not take bribes)."<sup>12</sup>

The results of the investigation were not surprising. The official prepared a report in which he declared that to the best of his knowledge Donenfeld, that is, Rabbi Israel, was telling the truth and had indeed been born in Sadgora. The Bukovina district governor, whose seat was in Chernovtsy, was content with this report and passed it on for confirmation to the governor of Galicia, Franz Krieg von Hochfelden, who resided at Lemberg. Krieg, as Rath reports with his customary candor, "was well aware that all these protocols were not based on truth, but he did not wish to harm the holy zaddik." Krieg knew the truth because, among other things, he had received the Russian extradition request, which came together with the details of the Russian investigation—and that investiga-

tion contradicted all Israel's arguments. Accordingly, he rejected the findings of the investigation and the false evidence, but he was in no hurry to answer the Russian extradition request. In keeping with directives received from Vienna, which instructed him not to expel the zaddik, Krieg reminded the governor of Bukovina that, according to the Austrian emigration laws, any person possessing a minimum sum of "ten thousand silver coins" could obtain a residence permit. If Israel could prove such possession before the Chernovtsy district court, he would be permitted to settle in any Galician district he desired.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, this reflected the Austrian policy of encouraging the settlement in Austrian territory of people of means. However, as will be seen below, the hasidim did not rely on money alone, and there were other fingers in the pie: the fingers of Doctor Jacob Rapoport, Rabbi Israel's celebrated physician and a personal friend of Krieg's;<sup>14</sup> and those of the imperial liaison office in Vienna.

The Russians, however, were determined to bring Rabbi Israel back to Russia and put him on trial for fleeing. They had soon picked up his tracks and, of course, disbelieved the whole "Donenfeld" story. In July 1842, the Russian consulate at Jassy requested that the Austrian authorities extradite the escaped Russian subject.<sup>15</sup> The Austrians refused, and on October 9, 1842, the Russians filed a further request, basing it on the extradition treaty signed between the two countries at the Vienna Conference of 1815; a detailed report of the Russian inquiry at Ruzhin, Pohorbishch, and Skvira was attached.<sup>16</sup> The findings of this inquiry, which reached Krieg's office early in November 1842, were quite categorical; they repudiated Israel's claim to be none other than Israel Donenfeld. Eight Jews from Pohorbishch did indeed testify at first that Israel Friedman had been a mere ward of Shalom Friedman, but after their testimony had been compared with other evidence, they retracted it and confirmed that the man had indeed been born in Pohorbishch, and that they had been inveigled into giving false testimony.

The Russian authorities now demanded that Rabbi Israel be brought under armed guard to the border town of Husyatyn and handed over to them. Krieg knew that the Russians were within their rights—among other things, from his own men's inquiries—and he quickly relayed the request to the Imperial Office at Vienna, for the final decision to be made there. At the same time, he directed his superiors' attention to two formal complications in connection with the extradition request: (i) the Russian request did not specify the nature of the accusation leveled against Friedman and the actual reason for the extradition; (ii) Friedman had entered Austria from Moldavia and not from Russia.

A few Austrian archival documents, dated November and December 1842 and May to December 1845, reveal something of the feverish diplo-

matic activity that was going on behind the scenes. Involved in this activity were officials of the Austrian Interior Ministry, who were negotiating at one and the same time with Russia and with the administrations of Galicia and Bukovina.<sup>17</sup> It seems clear from the correspondence with the Imperial Office and from the various legal maneuvers that the Austrians were reluctant to extradite the zaddik. While agreeing with the Russians that Friedman, or Donenfeld, was a Russian national ("There is now no doubt that this Friedman is not an Austrian subject, but still a Russian subject"), they pointed out that the Russians had not provided an adequate, detailed explanation of the charges against him; accordingly, they felt constrained to deny the request. It was an obvious evasion, based on rather pointless legalistic arguments; for the gist of the accusation was also known in Vienna—Joseph Perl's detailed memorandum of 1838 on the Ushits case and Israel's involvement in the murder—had been sent through official Austrian channels (the Galician authorities) to the provincial governor of Podolia. Moreover, the Austrians could always have demanded that the Russians provide them with full details of the accusations against the zaddik. What was the reason for the Austrian position?

One possible hypothesis suggests that in Vienna's view, Rabbi Israel's presence in Bukovina might help to promote emigration and commercial activity in this developing region, despite the explicit prohibition against the admission of foreign-born Jews to Bukovina. Although Israel was a religious leader, he could also be presented as a businessman with capital, capable of promoting the economic and agricultural development of the region and therefore deserving encouragement. This may have been why such emphasis was placed on the regulation permitting Jews willing to engage in farming, or rich emigrants with abundant property, to settle wherever they wished. Nevertheless, such a consideration can hardly have played a major role; it seems mainly to have served the needs of the hasidic chroniclers, who saw fit to exaggerate the importance attached by the Austrian authorities to Rabbi Israel's presence in Sadgora. The fact is, as will be seen below, that the Austrians were in no hurry to terminate the affair and grant Israel permanent residence rights in Bukovina. The Austrian empire was not so desperate for his moderate riches and his local business ventures; in any case, there were weighty arguments against his presence: diplomatic considerations affecting the relations between the great powers; the legal-official argument concerning the prohibition on permanent residence of Jewish emigrants in Bukovina; and the "ethical"-enlightened point of view—the man was not welcome in Galicia, whose ultra-religious Jews were known for their fanaticism and opposition to secular education.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the ultimate reason that Rabbi Israel was never extradited was a

combination of several factors connected with Austrian bureaucracy: (i) formalism for its own sake, seizing on the Russians' careless preparation of the application for extradition; (ii) clever hasidic activation of a political lobby, backed by bribery in the right circles; and (iii) the intricate web of contradictory interests typical of the decision-making machinery of the Austrian administration. The local authorities in Bukovina were eager to rid themselves of the zaddik by expelling him to some other place in Galicia, but the provincial government of Galicia refused to admit him and favored his "immediate banishment" back to Russia. The Imperial Office in Vienna accepted his presence in Bukovina for its own reasons, however, probably being reluctant to create a focus of tension with well-to-do Jews working on Rabbi Israel's behalf.

Austria's official policy, as stated in an internal memorandum, was that "Russian refugees should not be extradited if there were adequate reasons to avoid such measures."<sup>19</sup> One of these "reasons" relates to efforts made by various people to intercede on Rabbi Israel's behalf with the authorities. These efforts were being made, naturally, behind the scenes, and so we know very little of them, or of the persons who played a part in the whole chapter and their real weight. Interestingly enough, hasidic sources refer to figures outside the hasidic camp, such as Rabbi Dov Berush Meisels of Krakow,<sup>20</sup> the Orthodox politician Isaac (Ignace) Deutsch,<sup>21</sup> and even the reform preacher Isaac Noah Mannheimer of Vienna.<sup>22</sup> However, the evidence for their involvement is inconclusive, and skepticism must prevail as long as no reliable documentary evidence comes to light.<sup>23</sup> Credit for the most important efforts probably goes to Doctor Jacob Rapoport, who interceded on a regional level in Lemberg, and even more, to the banker Baron Salomon Mayer Rothschild.<sup>24</sup> Rothschild appealed to his personal friend Prince Klemens Wenzel von Metternich, the Austrian chancellor and foreign minister—the most important single figure in the Austrian empire until 1848—and asked him to use his influence to keep Rabbi Israel in Austria. Presumably, Metternich, eager to maintain good relations with the influential Rothschilds, intervened personally in the affair and gave instructions not to extradite the zaddik.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, Rabbi Israel sought some way of persuading the Russian authorities to suspend the extradition measures, counting mainly on the efforts of Sir Moses Montefiore.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the danger of expulsion was quite real, and Rabbi Israel, aware of the Russian endeavors to bring him back, actually prepared for the eventuality that he might be forced to flee once again. As usual, before making a final decision, he consulted with his closest associates.<sup>27</sup> It was suggested that he escape to Hungary, and Rabbi Israel, pessimistically convinced that he had little choice, was inclined to agree: "So he said that

Hungary would be like a room within a room, and when the governor of Kishinev writes the imperial government and demands to return me to the border, he will have to write first to Lvov or to Vienna, and from there they will write to Hungary, so it will be easy for me to get advance knowledge of this"<sup>28</sup> Finally, however, the idea was rejected; it was decided to stick to the original story that Rabbi Israel had been born in Sadgora and to await further developments. Judging from the sparse information at our disposal, Rabbi Israel left his new home and stayed a few months in a village named Skala in the Tarnopol district until the whole affair blew over and a temporary residence permit for Sadgora was received.<sup>29</sup>

In the meanwhile, the Russians were losing patience. After receiving a negative official response from Austria, they understood that the Austrians were intentionally dragging their feet and that there was no chance of laying their hands on the culprit. In March 1843, Bibikov informed Interior Minister Lev Perowski of the Austrian refusal; he recommended retracting the extradition application and merely revoking Rabbi Israel's Russian citizenship.<sup>30</sup> His suggestion was accepted. In June, Bibikov instructed the Russian border police that under no circumstances were they to allow Israel to set foot inside Russia. As usual in such "Wanted" notices, a description of the fugitive's appearance was attached.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, the zaddik's family—his mother, wife, and children—were ordered to leave Russia. In June or July 1843, Rabbi Israel's wife, Sarah, still in Kishinev, applied for an exit permit. It had originally been planned that only Sarah should join her husband, the sons remaining in Russia, probably in order to keep an eye on the family's economic interests and maintain contact with the remaining hasidim. Before leaving, Sarah tried to register her six sons as having merchants' status, declaring that she was leaving them a considerable sum of money for commercial purposes. Shortly thereafter, however, she canceled her request, for no obvious reason and announced that the money would be transferred to her firstborn Shalom Joseph only. The reasons for this change of mind are unknown. In any case, the governor-general of the provinces of New Russia, Vorontzov, after consulting with Perowski, the commanders of the Third Department, and the police chiefs, had already decided to reject her request and to expel the whole family from Russia.<sup>32</sup> Sarah was the first to leave, but the sons followed soon afterwards, once they had received their exit permits and their Russian passports had been canceled. They traveled to the port of Odessa and from there to Sadgora, arriving in August 1844. The harassed family had been reunited.<sup>33</sup>



## *II. "For I Have No Strength to Endure": Instability and Discontent*

The Friedmans' troubles, however, were far from over. On April 18, 1845, Rabbi Israel applied officially to the Imperial Office in Vienna, requesting a permanent residence permit for Sadgora, his previous applications to the Bukovina district office all having been rejected. He noted that he had indeed lived previously in Russia but had been forced to flee, being persecuted as a Jew. No mention was made of the Donenfeld stories—it must have been obvious to all concerned that they were worthless and that his chances were better if he resumed his real identity. The reasons cited by the zaddik for his application are interesting: he was a respected, wealthy industrialist, with investments in the district, he said. He needed to be in Bukovina in view of his active partnership in a pickle factory in Chernovtsy, and also to ensure that people in the region to whom he had lent money would repay their debts. He also mentioned his ill health, which obliged him to stay in the more clement Bukovina climate, where, moreover, he could be assured of proper medical care; he pointed out his sterling moral standards. And the last reason was the most interesting of all: permission for him to remain in Bukovina, he promised, would not enlarge the number of Jewish residents in the region, since two local Jewish families were willing to give up their residence privileges for his sake.

The application was quickly processed in Vienna, and on May 21, 1845, an Austrian clerk wrote in the margin: "We believe that the circumstances cited above justify the aforementioned request."<sup>34</sup>

We do not know why this application was not enough for the authorities; but the fact is that Rabbi Israel's application for permanent residence privileges at Sadgora was discussed again on October 16, 1845. This time the application was filed by Rabbi Jacob Nathan Rosenzweig of Chortkov, one of Israel's closest associates.<sup>35</sup> It was delivered to the Imperial Office by none other than Baron Rothschild. This fact was presumably of no little weight, and this time the application received sympathetic attention.<sup>36</sup>

As far as we can tell from the memorandum of October 1845, the events were as follows. After the Russian extradition requests had been denied and Rabbi Israel's real identity confirmed once and for all, an order was issued on May 31, 1843, by the provincial government of Galicia, to the Chernovtsy district governor, forbidding him to extradite Rabbi Israel to Moldavia (from which he had entered Bukovina). However, Rabbi Israel was advised to file an official application to settle in some Galician town-ship and to prove that he had sufficient capital to operate as a merchant—at least ten thousand florins. The zaddik proved possession of such a sum

and chose Kosov (in Kolomea district), where, it will be remembered, a relative of his, the zaddik Hayyim, was living, and where he himself had stayed for a time shortly after coming to Austria, before moving to Sadgora.

But a report was soon received that Rabbi Israel had not settled in Kosov. On the contrary: he had purchased a home in Sadgora, and there were ample indications that he intended to remain there. The local government of Kolomea district, which was not eager to have another hasidic zaddik living in Kosov, recommended that Rabbi Israel be permitted to stay in Bukovina. This recommendation was rejected, and it was decided to allow him to move to Kosov or to any other Jewish community in Galicia, permitting him to extend his stay for a while. At this point, Rabbi Israel himself refused the offer and, appealing directly to the court at Vienna, requested permission to settle in Sadgora. The reasons he now gave were as follows: commercial life in Kosov was almost nonexistent and there were no conditions for medical care (he had to eat abundant milk products and bathe in the Prut river); the decision to bar Jews from Bukovina was in any case a dead letter; the military exemption once granted the Jews of Bukovina had been canceled, and now the Jews had no advantage over other residents. Above all, he pointed to his exemplary lifestyle, his large investments in local industry, and the fact that the Sadgora community was eager to have him settle there.

The provincial government, upon learning of the application, rejected the reasons given and recommended that Rabbi Israel nevertheless be compelled to settle in one of the Galician townlets. Shortly afterwards, the Imperial Office received two applications of relevance: one was from the Sadgora community, asking that Rabbi Israel be permitted to settle there; the other was from a few local Jews, requesting that he be banished to Kosov or to Chernovtsy.<sup>37</sup> Rabbi Israel filed a further appeal, this time attaching several documents: a document from the Sadgora municipality extolling his "moral behavior"; confirmation from the Christian and Jewish communities "that he gave to charity, irrespective of religion and race"; and an appeal from several Viennese merchants testifying to his character and honesty, and to his ability "to do much for the advancement of international trade and industrial development."

Once again, officials deliberated feverishly. Finally, the district office in Bukovina admitted that Rabbi Israel had indeed behaved in an exemplary fashion, had given generously to the local poor (fifteen to twenty florins per week), and, in particular, "that his special reputation among the ignorant Jews as to his scholarship had diminished considerably during his stay at Sadgora; gradually, some of his previous hasidim were leaving him." It now mattered little whether he settled in Bukovina or in Galicia. Indeed,

perhaps it would be easier to keep a watch on him in Sadgora. Moreover, wrote the authors of the memorandum, "Friedman would presumably have little lasting influence on the Jews of Bukovina, who were more educated than those of Galicia, where there were more ignorant, superstitious Jews."

The authors of the memorandum admitted that Austrian policy vis-à-vis Jewish settlement in Bukovina had shifted, in practice if not in theory, and there was no longer any justification to treat the region differently than any other part of the administrative province of Galicia. "The Imperial Office has conducted itself with moderation in connection with interpretation of the law forbidding foreign Jews to settle in Bukovina"; in any case, "from the standpoint of the good of the state . . . it is immaterial whether the single Jew Friedman be permitted to remain in this province on one bank of the River Prut or on the other." In the end, the Imperial Office suggested to Emperor Ferdinand I that he permit Rabbi Israel to remain in Sadgora without making a final decision about his citizenship. On November 14, 1845, a unanimous decision was taken in Vienna: "The foreign Jew Israel Friedman will be permitted to stay on in Sadgora as long as there is no reason to the contrary." The decision was signed by the emperor.<sup>38</sup>

On January 29, 1846, four years after he had first felt Austrian soil underfoot—and apparently before actually receiving Ferdinand's confirmation of his application—Rabbi Israel was still complaining in a letter to Moses Montefiore of the great sufferings that had come his way because of the slanderers who were making life difficult for him. He even complained of Baron Rothschild, who had promised to help him but had done nothing. Rabbi Israel begged Montefiore to intercede for him at the imperial court, if he happened to pass through Vienna on his way to Saint Petersburg:

For I have some urgent things that I must inform you before your journey. And should you travel through Vienna, the capital, and meet with the great princes, please speak for me, that they should not heed slander from wicked men, who hate the Lord and his Torah. In particular, as, with God's help, the hearts of kings and princes are in God's hand and they have hitherto treated me well, nevertheless, when they see that such a great man [i.e., Montefiore] supports me, the haters of the Lord will be shamed. For I have no strength to endure when slanderers and whisperers continuously emit their slander. The letter that the respected prince [Montefiore] sent to Baron Rothschild for me was to no avail. But if this should cause a delay in your journey, I wish it not. For the whole community of Israel is dearer to me than my spirit and myself.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, Montefiore had already corresponded with Rothschild about Rabbi Israel. The letter presumably dealt with the need to secure a permanent residence permit for the zaddik in Sadgora and to deny rumors that he had entered Austria in a fraudulent manner. Clearly, Israel knew

how to take advantage of his multiple international contacts to further not only all-Jewish interests, but his own private affairs.

Who were the slanderers, "haters of the Lord and his Torah," who were making life a misery for him? The Austrian memorandum of October 1845 reports:

Some Jews from Tarnopol have on numerous occasions sent secret messages to the provincial government of Galicia in which it was reported that Srul Donenfeld of Sadgora is none other than the son of Shalom Friedman, the previous rabbi of Ruzhin . . . and that, with the help of Donenfeld's family in Sadgora, he was endeavoring to be seen as belonging to that family, in order thus to obtain recognition from the authorities as an Austrian subject and thus to evade extradition.<sup>40</sup>

The reference to Tarnopol as the source of the reports underpins the hypothesis that Rabbi Israel's enemies were maskilim from the circle of Joseph Perl (d. 1839), who were trying to keep him out of Galicia. Recently found documents point to the name of Perl's disciple Zevi Hirsch Reithman, who, in June 1842, provided the police a secret report against Rabbi Israel.<sup>41</sup>

Further on, the aforementioned memorandum mentions four Jews of Chernovtsy who had appealed to the Imperial Office to bar the zaddik from settling in Sadgora, "because he is a smuggler and provides shelter for criminals, nomads, and persons without a passport." Shortly afterwards, however, a further application reached Vienna, in which two of the signatories claimed that their signatures had been forged and demanded an investigation.<sup>42</sup>

### *III. Between Center and Periphery*

Once Rabbi Israel had left Russia for good, he was faced with a serious problem: how could he maintain intimate contact between himself, the zaddik, and his flock of hasidim, most of whom had been left behind in the towns and villages of the Pale of Settlement? The center and the periphery had switched roles. It was essential to maintain contact between the new center and its scattered offshoots—and not merely because of the zaddik's economic dependence on his hasidim. Three and more generations of evolving Hasidism had created the paradigm of the zaddik who was faithful to his hasidim and intimately involved in their lives, and the hasidim, for their part, harbored natural expectations of living, continuous contact with the zaddik. Moreover, Hasidism, as a spiritual movement aimed at all Jews, did not—and could not—recognize geographical or political boundaries, which are inherently changeable. Zaddikim and hasidim alike thought of Eastern European Jewry as a single social and spiritual body

whose limbs could not with any logic be detached. Thus, the zaddik's "rule" extended to wherever there were hasidim who desired his leadership; the fact that the court had been uprooted and transplanted should not affect the mutual relationship, spiritual and material, between the zaddik and his dispersed hasidim.

As a political fugitive, Rabbi Israel could no longer return to Russia, not even for a visit. Had he so much as set foot on Russian soil, he would have been arrested on the spot. As the leader operating at a distance from the "natural" location of his flock, conscious of the importance of keeping in living touch with his followers, he would now have to cultivate an intimate relationship with them independently of the physical distance. Such questions, and others of the same kind, had already been pondered by past zaddikim, such as Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, Abraham of Kalisk, and Abraham Dov of Ovruch, who had immigrated to Palestine and left behind hasidim thirsty for their guidance; however, their attempts to maintain "leadership at a distance" had generally failed.<sup>43</sup> The distance between the Holy Land and White Russia or Volhynia, the main arena of Hasidism's development, was indeed greater than that separating Bukovina, on the one hand, and Volhynia and Podolia, which were after all parts of a single geographical entity. However, the physical, financial, and bureaucratic difficulties that would now challenge Ruzhin hasidim making their way from Russia to the new center in Austria were considerable. The fact that they remained loyal and devoted to their rebbe, overcoming so many obstacles, is an indication that Rabbi Israel successfully bridged the newly formed distance without the need of written messages (homilies, letters of various kinds, written guidelines)—the technique used by some of his predecessors.

Another factor, however, must be considered here. After Rabbi Israel's departure, in the absence of any other famous zaddikim, the leaders of the Chernobyl dynasty began gradually to "take over" communities that had formerly been under the sway of Ruzhin. Skvira, for example, became the seat of Rabbi Isaac, son of Mordekhai of Chernobyl. Although he was Rabbi Israel's son-in-law (having married the latter's daughter Hayyah Malkah), he acted as an independent zaddik, answering to no one. "The masses were attracted to him," wrote a local Jew, "and would ask his advice on every possible occasion, as they had previously sought the advice of the rebbe of Ruzhin. But those were just the ordinary masses, whereas hasidim on a higher level remained loyal to the Ruzhiner." On one occasion, the young rebbe Isaac's prayer successfully brought on rain during a drought: "The hasidim of the new rebbe rejoiced and exulted at this 'miracle,' but the old Ruzhin hasidim mourned and bowed their heads in sorrow."<sup>44</sup> Further disputes broke out in Skvira between the various hasidic sects, among

other things, over the question whether the Sadgora hasidim could build a new Torah study house in the town. These disputes reflect the power struggle then in progress between neighboring hasidic groups in the Ukraine, each of which was fighting for its territory of influence and leadership.<sup>45</sup> It was in this context that the young Asher Zevi Ginsberg (later known as Ahad Ha-Am), son of a loyal Sadgora hasid, who grew up in Skvira and lived there till the age of thirteen, was forbidden to visit the court of the local zaddik.<sup>46</sup> Rabbi Israel himself, rather sorrowfully, it may be assumed, recognized the Chernobyl "takeover" of some of his followers. "Tit for tat," he said, in a philosophical vein, upon his flight from Russia. "My uncle, Rabbi Nahum [of Chernobyl], of blessed memory, was forced to leave Pohorbishch for my father . . . and so I am forced to leave the land of Russia for my uncle's sons."<sup>47</sup>

Needless to say, Ruzhin Hasidism also embarked on an expansion campaign from its new location in Sadgora, and some of the communities where it mobilized new recruits had formerly "belonged" to other hasidic courts. This sociogeographical phenomenon of fluctuating interhasidic boundaries is what lies behind the following popular tale, which demonstrates how palpable and self-evident the sensation of a zaddik's "rule" could be:

Not far from Tarnopol, there was a little village called Mikulince. Early one morning, a Jew is on his way to services, robed in his *tallit* and *tefillin*, as he is wont to do every day. All of a sudden, a carriage drawn by four horses stops by him. The nobleman seated in the carriage asks the Jew, "To whom does this village belong?"—that is to say, to what nobleman does this village belong? And the Jew answers him, "Before the Ruzhiner sons came to Galicia, the town belonged to the zaddik of Stratyn, but after the Ruzhiner sons had come the town was split into two: Half belongs to the zaddikim of Ruzhin and half to those of Stratyn."<sup>48</sup>

#### *IV. The Geographical Context*

Sadgora was a tiny village, surrounded by a large, forested plain on the banks of the river Prut, some six kilometers north of Chernovtsy, the capital of Bukovina; its Jewish community was essentially subordinate to that of Chernovtsy. It was there that Rabbi Israel, on the invitation of the Romanian Baron Mustaza, had decided to make his home. Were there any other reasons for this decision? Ruzhin tradition has it that Rabbi Israel had been invited by other Bukovina communities, but there is no concrete evidence to that effect.<sup>49</sup> It has been suggested that Rabbi Israel actually wanted to live in Chernovtsy, but local extremist maskilim had foiled that plan.<sup>50</sup> Most probably, Sadgora was chosen for lack of any better alternative. Nevertheless, the proximity of Chernovtsy could not be ignored. Such

proximity to a large city was well suited to the new trends then emerging in the hasidic world in general—to relocate the courts to large urban centers or their vicinities.

Moreover, Rabbi Israel was somewhat acquainted with these parts, as his father-in-law and brother-in-law, Rabbi Moses and his son Samuel, lived in Botosani, in northern Moldavia, a short distance from Bukovina (it will be remembered that he had in fact been married there). His relative Rabbi Hayyim of Kosov also wielded considerable influence in Bukovina and had many admirers.<sup>51</sup> Another possible consideration may have been the relatively short distance from the Russian border to Sadgora. One of his prime interests was the welfare of his hasidim still in Russia, and he was at pains to make things as easy as possible for them. In addition, even before his arrival, Rabbi Israel's influence had been considerable both in Bukovina and in Bessarabia and Moldavia (both Russian protectorates since 1829). Thus, for example, two Jews of Barlad in Bukovina told the Scottish missionaries Bonar and M'Cheyne, who had visited their town in September 1839, that all local Jews believed in the sacred authority of the rich hasidic rabbi from Russia who was then in prison in Kiev.<sup>52</sup> As the missionaries told it, in visiting towns where his hasidim lived, Rabbi Israel had also reached the towns and villages of Moldavia (and in particular Jassy, to which he was attached through the rich Jew Michel Daniel), riding in his magnificent carriage and accompanied by a band of musicians. He had deepened and reinforced his influence there long before he knew that he would need those connections as a lifeline for himself and his court.<sup>53</sup>

Up until 1774, Bukovina had been part of the principality of Moldavia. In October 1774, after its desolate terrain had been wrested from Turkish hands, Bukovina was annexed to the Austrian empire and governed as a military area under separate administration. The Austrian government saw Bukovina (as they did nearby western Galicia) as a development area, encouraging its settlement, particularly by farmers and merchants. In 1786, Emperor Josef II decided to combine Bukovina and Galicia into a single administrative unit as part of the province (*Gubernium*) of Galicia, subordinate to the administration of Lemberg (rather than Vienna). Only in 1849 was Bukovina recognized as a separate unit, with its own administration and constitution.<sup>54</sup>

As far as the Jews were concerned, Bukovina was insignificant. When it was first taken from the Turks, the Jewish population (according to an official census) was only 526 families, out of a total population of 17,000. However, there was now an increasing influx of Jewish emigrants, in particular from neighboring parts of Galicia, halted only intermittently by occasional expulsions of Jews. Bukovinan Jews were better off, in some respects, than their brethren in other districts of Galicia. Among other

things, they could take advantage of a strategic position athwart international trade routes and indeed became involved mainly in international trade and brokerage; until 1832, they were not subject to military service; and they were exempted from the payment of the kosher meat and candle taxes, although subject to certain other taxes.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, however, it was Rabbi Israel's settlement in Sadgora—a small, economically and politically insignificant village—that almost instantaneously gave a tremendous boost to the "Jewish significance" of the region in general and of Sadgora in particular.<sup>56</sup>

Not only was Bukovina considered the military and political periphery of the Austrian empire, as well as a geographical buffer between Western Europe and Slavic Eastern Europe; it was also culturally marginal as far as Eastern Europe was concerned. Bukovina, Moldavia, and Bessarabia had also occupied a very minor position on the map of hasidic expansion (in contrast to Galicia, where Hasidism had flourished in both quantity and quality). A few hasidic personalities of some note had indeed stayed in these regions for a time (although they were neither born there nor settled down for any length of time). Among these were Hayyim Tyrer of Chernovtsy (who immigrated to Palestine in 1813), Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta (who officiated as rabbi of Jassy in 1808–13, until forced to leave as a result of a dispute), and Aryeh Leib Wertheim of Bendery (Bessarabia). As there were no local hasidic leaders of the first rank, hasidic groups were dependent on distant figures. Thus, despite the great geographical distance, Jews in these regions were strongly influenced by such "remote" zaddikim as the "Seer" of Lublin, Hayyim of Kosov, Meir of Premyslan, Shabbetai of Rashkov and his son Joseph, Moses Zevi of Savran, and, of course, the Ukrainian zaddikim Mordekhai of Chernobyl and his sons and Israel of Ruzhin. Even so important a local dynasty as the Wertheims of Bendery was completely dependent on the courts of the zaddikim of Savran (Aryeh Leib, the founder of the dynasty, had been the brother of Moses Zevi of Savran), Ruzhin, and Chernobyl.<sup>57</sup>

The village of Sadgora (Romanian: Sadagura; Polish: Sadagóra) was founded in 1770 by a Baron Gartenberg (the name is a Polish translation of the German surname: *sady* = garden, *góra* = hill), who established a Russian mint there, where the first inhabitants made their living.<sup>58</sup> Administratively speaking, Sadgora was entirely dependent on Chernovtsy (of which it is now a suburb). It had no economic importance and was mainly known as a venue for cattle fairs, which attracted traders from far and near.<sup>59</sup>

We know of Jews, and even rabbis, living there even before Israel's arrival, but in respect of Torah studies and Hasidism, Sadgora was clearly of quite marginal significance.<sup>60</sup> Ruzhin tradition also contributed, pre-



sumably by design, to exaggerating the change that occurred after Rabbi Israel had arrived: "When he came to the town of Sadgora, most of it lay in ruins [i.e., spiritually] and there was no fear of God in that place." Like Joseph in the Bible, Rabbi Israel undertook to spread God's name "throughout the country of Egypt [i.e., Bukovina]."<sup>61</sup> Another source attributes the following statement to him:

The worst and filthiest place in the whole world is the district of Bukovina, and the worst place in Bukovina is Chernovtsy, and the lowliest place in Chernovtsy district is Sadgora, and the courtyard of his house is the worst place in the town of Sadgora, and his room in which he sits is the worst in his courtyard, and the place where he sits in his room is the worst place in his room, and there the Divine decree placed him in order to subdue the impurity and filth that are there and make it holy.<sup>62</sup>

Whether Rabbi Israel indeed said this or whether the statement was only attributed to him in later sources; whether he was referring only symbolically to the spiritual challenge facing every person (to perfect first himself and his immediate environment, only then going on to perfect the entire "world") or whether the statement was to be taken in its literal sense, this was the picture that the hasidim, as a collective, had of the inferior spiritual level of the place where their rebbe had chosen to make his home and of the tremendously difficult task of "purification" that he had undertaken.

The presence of the zaddik inspired a change, a spiritual expansion that, as always, brought economic growth in its wake. As long as his legal situation and fate had not been clarified, Rabbi Israel lived with his close associates at a local inn, where he also dined.<sup>63</sup> Only after his status had been favorably decided did he begin to consolidate his position and spread his wings. Eyewitnesses report that, within a short time, the place had become a pilgrimage site for many hasidim; some came to settle, but most were content with visits, whether brief or extended.

The Romanian governor of Bukovina, Georg Isăcescul, and Baron Mustaza, the greedy owner of the estates on which Sadgora had been built, who had invited the zaddik to come and refused to extradite him to Russia,<sup>64</sup> understood what the Russian and Galician maskilim also knew in their heart of hearts but refused to admit: "The arrival of a zaddik makes an impression." The zaddik and his court had a restraining presence, which also promoted the political stability of the Jewish population; in particular, it made a tremendous contribution to the economic development of the whole region.<sup>65</sup> In 1776, there were only 186 registered Jews in Sadgora; by 1873, there were 3,591—more than a nineteenfold increase.<sup>66</sup> The hasidim who flocked to Sadgora promoted the development of commercial life in the town, as well as the provision of services in the area of food and lodgings. Those among them who possessed capital took advantage of their

journeys to establish commercial ties between Russia and Bukovina in various areas. This economic boom continued right up to World War I, when the family of zaddikim left and Sadgora declined in importance.<sup>67</sup> It is noteworthy that in comparison with Poland or Galicia, Moldavia and Bukovina remained backward as regards Torah scholarship throughout the nineteenth century, the rapid hasidic awakening having brought about no change in this respect.

## *V. Economic Consolidation:*

### *Purchase of the Potik Zloty Estate*

In order to consolidate his position, Rabbi Israel bought the Potik Zloty estate, not far from Chortkov and Buchach.<sup>68</sup> We do not know just when the purchase took place, how much was paid, or how the purchase was implemented, whether directly and openly or through a Christian middleman, as was customary before 1848. However, Jewish purchase of land was not exceptional in Galicia, particularly after the partial emancipation, and we have abundant evidence of Jews buying "villages and townships" or "sowing fields and vineyards."<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, it was not a common practice among zaddikim and presents several puzzling features. Some writers hold that Israel was compelled to take this step in order to avoid expulsion: "Someone offered the holy rabbi advice that he should buy some town or village. For there was a law that if a fugitive from one country to our country bought himself a place and became a master and owner of the town, it was forbidden to remove him and send him back to the country whence he had flown. So then he bought the town of Potik."<sup>70</sup>

It is indeed quite probable that the purchase of Potik was intended to strengthen Rabbi Israel's foothold in Austria by presenting him as a person of means and a landowner; as such, it was in the economic interests of the state to keep him in its territory. In addition, the transaction enabled him to invest his considerable capital and property in real estate. Nevertheless, the deal was probably effected only in 1848 or 1849, when it became legally permissible for Jews to buy land in Galicia; there was no connection whatsoever with the deliberations about his extradition to Russia.<sup>71</sup>

The zaddik lived in Potik now and again, particularly when he needed some respite from the intense atmosphere of the court. The estate boasted fields, a few small factories (such as distilleries), and a huge area of cultivated land, as well as "spacious dwellings and a pleasant palace . . . and he had there a booth garden where he could breathe fresh air." Growing on the grounds were fruit trees, and hasidim particularly close to Rabbi Israel, as well as relatives, were allowed to hold weddings there, sometimes in the presence of the zaddik himself.<sup>72</sup>

The purchase of the Potik estate also aroused certain halakhic problems, characteristic of the conditions under which the Jews of Galicia had been living since the annexation to Austria. First and foremost, there was the unavoidable clash between the need to observe the Sabbath and the operation of the economic system of the *arenda* (leasing) in which Jews and Christians had been interlocked for many generations. It was only natural that Rabbi Israel did not dare make his own halakhic decisions, so in 1850, he appealed through his firstborn son Shalom Joseph to Rabbi Solomon Kluger of Brody, the most prominent Torah authority of the time in that region.<sup>73</sup>

The main problem concerned the distilleries, which were operated by gentiles on Saturdays. Shalom Joseph asked Kluger to permit the family to employ gentiles on the Sabbath through the usual legal fiction, that is, by drawing up a bill of sale. The basic idea underlying this technique was similar to that of selling leavened products on Passover: the transaction transferred the property from Jewish ownership to gentile for the duration of the Sabbath, and the gentile, of course, was allowed to desecrate the Sabbath and work as usual. This solution was rather controversial, and some halakhic authorities accepted it only reluctantly. Rabbi Kluger himself had permitted the technique, although not lightly. This time, however, he wrote a detailed responsum, no doubt intended for Rabbi Israel's eyes, and forbade the practice entirely. The responsum expresses, on the one hand, Kluger's considerable regard for the zaddik's family ("although it is not my intention here to detract from your dignity, for I am aware of my insignificance, for who am I that I should be worthy, Heaven forbid, to detract the least degree from your dignity") and his appreciation of the family's considerable influence on the Jews; on the other hand, it implied harsh criticism, even a rebuke, of the grave breach of Jewish Law to which the family was partner. Kluger's halakhic about-face was due to the events of the 1848 revolutions in Europe and their effects on the situation of the Jews. This conservative halakhic scholar perceived in the emancipation, which now enabled Austrian Jews to purchase land and become owners of villages and towns, not a message of salvation and redemption but a catastrophe and dire threat.

"May their excellencies know that it was bitter news to me when I heard that they have purchased a town and a village," wrote Kluger to Rabbi Israel's son:

Heaven is my witness, as are the people of our country witnesses today, that before I heard this, at the very beginning of the news about the emancipation, by virtue of which the House of Israel may be like all nations, to purchase villages and towns, I bewailed this and thought ill of it. For lo, although I lack the knowledge of his master's house in esoteric lore, like a fledgling whose eyes are yet unopened, and even

in exoteric lore my knowledge is no more than a drop in the ocean . . . nevertheless, in my view even a newborn babe will see and realize that this decree will harm Israel, Heaven forbid, leading to further continuation of exile.

Moreover, the granting of civil rights to the Jews was a plot that would lead not only to mass desecration of the Sabbath but also to assimilation. The purchase of villages, fields, and vineyards—in contrast to the purchase of a house to be lived in, which was unavoidable—was an act of the devil and a transgression of rabbinical injunctions:

Who should bewail this more than your esteemed father, the famous rabbi and zaddik? And if he were merely to reveal his view calmly, that he . . . did not approve of this matter, many persons would avoid doing so. And if only one person of a thousand avoided it, even then his reward would be immeasurable. And now, not only have you not protested, but on the contrary, you have lent a hand to many persons and done so yourselves, cooperating with them and participating in this evil decree. . . . He may believe me that not I alone say so, but there are many whose hearts are touched by the fear of God and protest at this, but they lack the courage to say so in public, and I have been so brazen as to tell you all this. . . . It would be right that you and your like, even the smallest of the smallest among you, should have no hand or part in this act of the devil. But I have spoken too much and I crave your pardon. . . . Happy is the generation that great men [like you] obey humble men [like me].<sup>74</sup>

The final words of Kluger's responsum are interesting, as they betray an additional ideological position that dictated his decision. In his view, the acquisition of the Potik Zloty lands represented a territorialist-exilic trend diametrically opposed to the vision of the redemption to take place on the physical terrain of the Land of Israel:

In the Diaspora at this time, when it is necessary to reinforce faith, and the exiled will not be gathered in [to the Land of Israel] else by virtue of faith, if they see that the zaddikim are buying fields outside the Land of Israel, they will say: Verily, redemption is still far off. And they will despair, Heaven forbid, of redemption and thus the Exile will again be lengthened. Therefore the news I have heard is not good.<sup>75</sup>

We do not know how Rabbi Israel and his sons reacted to this overtly critical halakhic ruling. Nevertheless, they could hardly have ignored it and disobeyed Rabbi Kluger, whom they respected and admired. Kluger in fact intimated that he was not the only authority to criticize the Friedmans ("there are many . . . [who] protest at this"), but that the others did not dare express themselves openly. It is also possible that the ruling was made public to some extent by Kluger or circles close to him, for as early as 1852, Joshua Heschel Schorr printed the responsum anonymously in his yearbook *He-haluts*, referring to the author as "a certain rabbi in our country."

Schorr, the radical maskil of Brody (who had apparently studied for a while with Kluger), did not cite the long responsum in the interests of halakhic discussion, but as part of his twofold public campaign: against the hypocritical, conservative rabbinical orthodoxy, which on the one hand lauded emancipation and on the other worked against it; and against the corrupt Hasidism of the zaddikim (he accused Rabbi Israel of having bought Potik with money obtained from pidyonot), which was cooperating with the rabbis.<sup>76</sup>

The Potik estate remained in the Friedmans' hands for a long time. For the first year after Rabbi Israel's death (1851–52), his sons continued to live there, but from 1853 on, most of them scattered to their respective homes.<sup>77</sup> Only Israel's son David Moses (later of Chortkov) and grandson Isaac (son of Shalom) remained there (the latter also left around 1857, to earn fame in his own court at Buhush).<sup>78</sup> The land was still thereafter owned jointly by the brothers, the financial profits being divided equally among them; Rabbi David Moses seems, however, to have had some seniority throughout his life.<sup>79</sup>

## *VI. The Fame of the New Court*

Paradoxically, the Sadgora period—a veritable Golden Age for Ruzhin Hasidism—was also the most frustrating and depressing period in Rabbi Israel's life. Throughout those years, he was plagued by depression, fear, and melancholy. Imprisonment, flight, removal from his family and hasidim and the constant danger of being returned to Russia and reimprisoned—all these left their imprint upon him, affecting his mental condition. There was little similarity between the proud, self-confident zaddik of the Ruzhin days and the broken, melancholy one who settled in Sadgora after years of humiliation and oppression. His son David Moses once said to his hasidim: "You knew my late father . . . when he was living in Sadgora and wore a black skullcap and was a little melancholy. But you did not see him when he was still living in Ruzhin, when he wore a gilt skullcap; he was very different then."<sup>80</sup> Rabbi Israel changed not only the color of his skullcap in Sadgora but also some of his previous habits. Whereas he had formerly spent most of the daylight hours receiving hasidim who sought his presence, he now took to receiving only a few, passing much of his time in seclusion and meditation. This situation was aptly described by David Goldschmidt, a hasid of Sighet, Hungary, who wanted to go to Rabbi Israel's court:

"I wish to be in Sadgora, but since I have heard that it is often impossible to see his holy visage, save once in one or two weeks, for he sits closed up and secluded. . . ."

So he traveled there, and when he approached the holy rabbi's house he inquired of the "insiders" to receive greetings. They laughed at him, saying, "For several days the door has not opened, and we too are waiting, standing crowded together to receive greetings. And you wish to see him immediately, face to face?! You have only just arrived!"<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, there is abundant evidence that during this particular period many hasidim—and other inquisitive souls—were attracted to the court from far and near. After all, it was very common, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, for young hasidim to travel from court to court to examine the merits of various zaddikim, so as to pick one particular zaddik as their mentor. Thus, the zaddik's court at Sadgora became a thriving, bustling hasidic center; it was large even in terms of the hasidic movement as a whole, and later became known as "the Jewish Vatican."<sup>82</sup> The Jerusalem hasid and printer Nisan Bak, in a letter to Moses Montefiore in London, reported that on Yom Kippur of 1845, there had been "more than three thousand people" at Rabbi Israel's court in Sadgora; even if he was exaggerating in order to glorify his rebbe, the figure still represents an impressive order of magnitude.<sup>83</sup>

Among those who came to the court were not only new hasidim from the surrounding region but "veterans" from various parts of the Ukraine, obliged though they were to cross the Dniester on their way to Bukovina.<sup>84</sup> They came bringing "tenfold gifts of silver and gold, and made him [Rabbi Israel] a table of pure silver and a great golden lampstand with seven branches."<sup>85</sup> Crossing the border, particularly with valuable tributes in their luggage, created problems, and many of the hasidim did so illegally—whether on their own or by utilizing an organized network of smugglers. Among those who crossed over illegally were presumably Jews who wished to escape the draft and evade service in the czarist army.<sup>86</sup>

In contrast to the Jews of the Pale of Settlement, whose journey to the zaddik was now fraught with obstacles, hasidim from Galicia could come to him relatively easily: "And they came in flocks to greet his sacred visage," as one hasid wrote of a group of hasidim from Kosov preparing to travel by cart to Sadgora immediately upon hearing that Rabbi Israel had settled in their region.<sup>87</sup> However, even before he settled in Bukovina, when he was still a fugitive, moving from place to place, the news of the fleeing zaddik spread rapidly and became known to his hasidim everywhere. Interesting evidence to that effect comes from a letter written in 1841 by Rabbi Aaron Moses of Kamenets, known by his respected family name *mi-geza Zevi* (of the stock of Zevi). This rabbi, a disciple of the "Seer" of Lublin and a respected personality in his own right, immigrated to Palestine around the year 1838 and took part in the establishment of the hasidic Kolel Volhynia in Jerusalem together with the Bak family. He wrote his grand-

son, Zevi Aryeh of Botosani, as follows: "If it should occur to the Holy admor of Ruzhin to make his home in Walachia, you should be among the first to bathe his feet and drink of his water [i.e., study under him]."<sup>88</sup> It transpires from the letter that at the time Rabbi Israel was wandering from place to place, and his hasidim knew nothing of his plans. Because of the distance between him and his hasidim in the Holy Land, they were ignorant of the most recent developments and had no idea of his fate. Rabbi Aaron was apparently aware of the general direction of Israel's flight and advised his grandson to seek out Israel's court, under any circumstances and wherever it might be. The grandson presumably took his grandfather's advice and followed Rabbi Israel, as did many others.

Maskilim like Abraham Dov Gottlob, examining each hasidic practice for "hidden" reasons in the effort to expose the corruption and two-faced behavior of the hasidim, harped on their illegal border crossings and laid particular emphasis on the economic motives of trips to visit the rebbe, claiming that such trips were opportunities to smuggle goods across the border. Gottlob, who, it will be remembered, had been associated with Ruzhin Hasidism in his youth, pointed to such practices among hasidim traveling from the various provinces of Russia to Sadgora, purportedly to visit Rabbi Israel's sons: "We saw and knew quite clearly that some of those people who call themselves hasidim and travel to Galicia to their rebbe there, one of the sons of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin who fled there, bring goods with them upon their return, and this is practically all their desire and purpose, their trip to the rebbe being only a cover."<sup>89</sup>

Gottlob pinpointed a common phenomenon: counterbalancing the physical and financial effort of the journey to Sadgora with economic and commercial profit. However, while Gottlob condemned this practice as hypocritical, the hasidim had a very different view; on the contrary, they considered it a legitimate and respectable way to finance the expenses of the journey and the time spent at the zaddik's court. As far as the hasidim were concerned, "all their desire and purpose" was simply to visit their rebbe and spend time with him; if they could also make some money on the side, they saw nothing wrong in so doing.

Torah scholars and ordinary Jews, including many from outside the ranks of Hasidism, were also beguiled by his personality and made efforts to come to the court and scrutinize him. Here is a typical account about a Polish scholar who visited the court at Sadgora:

While Rabbi Israel was living in Sadgora, a certain young scholar from Poland came to hear his Torah. He trudged a long distance, traveling several weeks till he came to Sadgora for the *Lag ba-omer* meal. So he stood close to the rebbe's throne to hear his Torah. And now he finished the *tish* but then preached no Torah. The young person was very upset, for he had made the difficult journey and spent so much

money and time in vain, having heard nothing, thus he thought. After Grace, my grandfather [the writer was Israel's grandson] stood by the table and said: It is written, "For he is an angel of the Lord of Hosts and men seek Torah from his mouth" [Mal. 2:7], and then he said: "If the rabbi resembles an angel of the Lord of Hosts, do you seek further Torah from his mouth?!"<sup>90</sup>

At Sadgora, Rabbi Israel refrained almost entirely from any kind of preaching in public. When he did see fit to say something, it was brief and pithy. In the above story, he found the most fitting comment for the thoughts troubling the young man. One is reminded of Solomon Maimon's story of how the Maggid of Mezhibezh could always gauge the thoughts and feelings of his flock and chose his words accordingly.<sup>91</sup>

Rabbi Israel established a few new customs at Sadgora. Most notably, he abolished the practice of preaching Torah at *se'udah shelishit*, the "third meal," eaten on the afternoon of the Sabbath. In hasidic tradition, this meal had become one of the major social and spiritual foci of the zaddik's communication with his flock. Since coming to Sadgora, however, Israel would take this meal alone in his room, with no one to keep him company.<sup>92</sup> This self-imposed solitude, practiced specifically at a time considered especially auspicious according to esoteric lore, was surely a result of the bitter depression that had taken hold of him during his years of hardship.

How, then, was Rabbi Israel able with such success to attract hasidim and admirers from far and wide, despite this increasing tendency to seclude himself? One can only conjecture. First, the zaddik did not shut himself up entirely, cutting himself off from the outside world, as in the enigmatic case of Menahem Mendel of Kotsk. On the contrary, as we shall see presently, these very years witnessed an increase in his involvement in such activities as intercession with the authorities on behalf of his fellows Jews. Second, quite possibly, it was precisely the barrier between him and his followers that stimulated their curiosity and enveloped him in an aura of mystery. Moreover, his long imprisonment, the suffering that he had endured and his dangerous flight—details of which, highly exaggerated, were bandied about among the hasidim and the masses in general—helped to turn him into a living myth, a "cultural hero" who aroused his followers' imagination, emotions, curiosity, and veneration. In a society lacking modern means of communication—and such, of course, was traditional Jewish society in the first half of the nineteenth century—the dramatic figure of Israel Friedman was a constant focus of public interest, an unquenchable focus of popular creative imagination, irrespective of the zaddik's actual action or inaction.

Whatever the reasons, numerous hasidim and zaddikim from all parts of Eastern Europe made efforts to reach Sadgora and meet Rabbi Israel, of whom they had heard so much. Of course, not all of them could afford the



expense of the journey or endure the hardships it entailed. Rabbi Zevi Hirsch of Liszka, Hungary, “was eager to travel to Sadgora to appear before the holy Rabbi . . . Israel of Ruzhin. . . . But he was unable to do so for he was so poor.”<sup>93</sup> Among those who came to visit Rabbi Israel were not a few zaddikim of the first rank in Galicia: Hayyim Halberstam of Zanz, who later became a bitter foe of the Sadgora zaddikim; Shalom Rosenfeld of Kaminka; Yitzhak Isaac Eichenstein of Zhidachov; Isaac Judah Jehiel Safrin of Komarno; Judah Zevi of Rozdol, and many others.<sup>94</sup>

Not all Galician zaddikim, however, were so eager to be received by Rabbi Israel, and some made no secret of their reservations.<sup>95</sup> A hasidic tradition credits the scholarly zaddik Zevi Elimelekh of Dinov with such sentiments: “When the kingdom of Russia banished our saintly rabbi of Ruzhin from the borders of their country, the hasidim sought a dwelling place where the zaddik could lay his head. [Rabbi Zevi Elimelekh] offered up many prayers that the saint of Ruzhin should not enter the realm of Galicia, for he feared that his [i.e., Rabbi Israel’s] method would harm the people of Galicia.”<sup>96</sup>

Another tradition has it that Zevi Elimelekh did go to see Rabbi Israel at Sadgora, where he made his reservations explicit;<sup>97</sup> but this tradition is unreliable. Rabbi Zevi died toward the end of 1840, at a time when Israel had not yet settled down in Sadgora. This is most probably a projection back in time of the later dispute between the hasidim of Zanz and Sadgora, and of the outcome of that dispute. It is not without interest that Zevi of Dinov’s son, Eleazar Shapira of Lancut, and even more his grandson, Solomon Shapira of Munkatsh, also traveled to the Sadgora court and viewed Rabbi Israel with deep respect.<sup>98</sup>

The reputation of the exiled zaddik reached even Lithuania and Poland. Famed Lithuanian zaddikim came to Sadgora, and some of them even became lifelong adherents of the Ruzhin dynasty.<sup>99</sup> Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, who was apparently suspicious of Rabbi Israel, sent his Warsaw disciple Isaac Meir Alter (later the leader of the famous hasidic dynasty of Gur) on a special “mission” to Sadgora to investigate Rabbi Israel and his ways.<sup>100</sup>

In summer 1844, about four years after his master had gone into his mysterious seclusion, Rabbi Isaac Meir, who had in the meantime become the unofficial leader of the Kotsk hasidim, traveled to Brody, intending to continue to Sadgora. For reasons unknown, he preferred to conceal his plan, reacting angrily to an attempt by one of his hasidim to reveal it: “I do not know what he meant by this nonsense, what fool told him something that I have neither spoken nor remember at all.” However, he could not deny the truth of the report and noted in a letter to his family: “Perhaps I said that, should I be only a few miles away, I would pass through there

[=Sadgora]. But that too I know not."<sup>101</sup> It seems plausible that the main reason for Rabbi Isaac Meir's concealing his intentions and for his anger at their exposure was his fear that the trip would be misinterpreted. In fact, there was already a rumor among the Kotsk hasidim that he, too, was abandoning the sinking ship of the "Kotsker."<sup>102</sup>

Rabbi Isaac Meir did finally come to Sadgora. Faithful to his secret mission, he chose to mingle with the visitors and remain incognito. "Nevertheless, upon his arrival Rabbi Israel gestured to his servant to give him [i.e., Isaac Meir] . . . a bench on which he could sit."<sup>103</sup> There are various reports of the ensuing conversation.<sup>104</sup> Rabbi Israel expressed his criticism of the "Kotsker,"<sup>105</sup> while Rabbi Isaac Meir was struck by the very different approach of Ruzhin Hasidism. When he returned to Kotsk and the rebbe asked him what he had seen, he told him: "Every day they send in to him two measures of gold coins, and he busied himself with them."<sup>106</sup>

Despite—or perhaps because of—the difference in hasidic style, Rabbi Israel was approached by Polish zaddikim, disciples of the Kotsker, chief among whom were Isaac of Warka and Isaac Meir Alter, one year after the latter's meeting with him; on this occasion they requested his help in obtaining the abrogation of the prohibition forbidding Jews to wear traditional dress.<sup>107</sup> Rabbi Isaac Meir himself in fact recommended to curious hasidim, among them the prominent Rabbi Eleazar of Sochachev-Pultusk, that they travel to Sadgora without fear.<sup>108</sup>

The unique attitude of other zaddikim to Rabbi Israel, which sometimes bordered on fear, may be gauged from a letter sent in 1845 by Asher Isaiah Rubin, son-in-law and successor to the zaddik Naphtali of Ropshits, to his friend the zaddik Shalom of Kaminka. Rabbi Asher wrote that his son Jehiel was being mentioned favorably as a possible bridegroom for one of Rabbi Israel's granddaughters. The son had accordingly been invited to spend a Sabbath at Sadgora, probably to enable Rabbi Israel to "check him out." Rabbi Asher therefore asked Rabbi Shalom to accompany the party with his son, "lest some harm emerge from this, Heaven forbid."<sup>109</sup>

While, as we have seen, Rabbi Israel stirred up waves of curiosity and sympathy among the hasidic elite, one is struck by a not insignificant fact: Despite his fame, he did not actually have students or disciples, in the profound sense of the word (as distinct from hasidim). None of his admirers, including those in the first ranks of hasidic and rabbinical society, became his successor or even led a hasidic group in the same style; and Rabbi Israel, for his part, took no steps in that direction. Martin Buber notes this in his characteristic style: "He [i.e., Israel] did not wish to bind anyone to himself. He wanted visitors who hung on his words, not disciples who entailed and sustained mutual relationship."<sup>110</sup>

At first sight, this is not surprising. Rabbi Israel was not a teacher. He

did not propound a well-defined spiritual method, something that could be imparted to pupils. His strong point was a charismatic personality, which created a unique, personal leadership style based only loosely on an ideological platform. Nevertheless, there is no leader of stature who does not have imitators, striving to adopt his practices and follow in his footsteps, or self-styled disciples who claim to be his successors. Moreover, even though it may be argued that he had no “real method,” he and his hasidim were convinced that they did have a “method”; why, then, did no hasidic leader of the time actually take up Ruzhin Hasidism?

Perhaps the explanation is simple, stemming from Rabbi Israel’s personality and not from the lack, or otherwise, of a well-defined ideology. Curiosity, flattery, and admiration by others would always cultivate the zaddik’s personal pride and ego, enhancing his self-confidence for the short term. The teaching of a real or imaginary ideology is a strenuous, thankless everyday chore, whose long-term outcome is not immediately discernible. After all, despite his exceptional qualities, Rabbi Israel did not invest much effort in developing his worldview and laying ideological foundations for his approach to Hasidism. He evidently lacked any natural desire to see his life’s work being taken up by others. Alternatively, one might surmise that he was content to see his six sons in that capacity, considering them the “hard core” of his students, who would maintain his practices and be responsible for perfecting and disseminating them.



## *“Broken and Mortified”: The Last Years*

### *I. In the Evening of Life*

One indication of stability and routine in court life were the joyous occasions and tragedies that occurred as a matter of course in the zaddik's family. Naturally, these were not merely private events, confined to the immediate family; they radiated out to the life of the court as a whole and provided a focus for identification, joy, or mourning on the part of the masses of hasidim. Since Rabbi Israel's family had been reunited in Sadgora, almost every year was marked by some joyous event—the wedding of a son or daughter, the birth of a grandchild and the wedding of another grandchild—or, conversely, by a sad occasion.<sup>1</sup> Another sign of family stability and the comfortable lives of the zaddik's progeny was the fact that almost all the sons and daughters<sup>2</sup> chose to stay in their father's home in Sadgora and did not go off to seek fame elsewhere, despite the opportunity to do so. For example, Shalom Joseph, the oldest son, rejected an offer to come to Kishinev—although his father was by no means opposed—on the grounds that “I will not distance myself from my father. And even if he does not want to maintain me, I shall feed myself.”<sup>3</sup> The sons made (unsuccessful) efforts while Rabbi Israel was still alive to return to Russia, but their motive was probably to conserve, if not promote, the family's and court's economic interests, not to resettle in Russia.<sup>4</sup>

The year 1847 marked a tragic turning point in Rabbi Israel's personal life. In November 1846, his close friend Zevi Hirsch of Rimanov died.

Rabbi Zevi had been active during Israel's imprisonment to organize the collection of money for him, but only toward the end of 1843 did the two zaddikim first meet face to face, in Sadgora.<sup>5</sup> In 1844, the families concluded a marriage agreement, which turned out to have bittersweet overtones. From the start, the agreement struck all the hasidim with amazement that their revered zaddik, scion of the house of King David, should forge such ties with Rabbi Zevi, whose status as a zaddik was controversial and his lineage so inferior as to be humiliating.<sup>6</sup> The agreement matched Rabbi Israel's four-year-old grandson Asher, son of Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, with Rachel Leah, Rabbi Zevi's three-year-old daughter; however, the boy died suddenly, and the agreement was changed to apply to his infant brother Solomon (only just one year old).<sup>7</sup>

In January 1847, just two months after Rabbi Zevi's death, Rabbi Israel issued a public appeal to the hasidim of the deceased zaddik, entreating them to collect funds to support the widow and her children. The wording of the letter implies that some of the Rimanov hasidim had come over to the Sadgora court after their leader's death, so that in any case Rabbi Israel had the moral authority to issue such instructions.<sup>8</sup>

Not long afterwards, in late March 1847, Rabbi Israel's beloved wife, Sarah, died. Although he was at first devastated and inconsolable,<sup>9</sup> human nature took its course, and soon afterwards he proposed to Malkah, Zevi of Rimanov's young widow, of whom he had been fond in the past.<sup>10</sup> Malkah, Rabbi Zevi's second wife,<sup>11</sup> who "was still very beautiful,"<sup>12</sup> agreed.

At the beginning of August 1847, only four months after his wife's demise (and eight months after that of Rabbi Zevi), Israel married for the second time. The wedding ceremony was performed by the scholarly Rabbi of Skala, Solomon Drimmer,<sup>13</sup> but Rabbi Israel preferred to make it a modest affair, without guests, and actually forbade his associates to take part.<sup>14</sup> He was ashamed, hasidic tradition tells us, of marrying a young woman of twenty-nine.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he was perhaps rather uneasy at wedding a new wife well within the ritually required year of mourning, all the more so because this was Malkah's third marriage, making her a "killer wife" (*ishah katlanit*) in Jewish law. Malkah now moved to Sadgora, accompanied by her own children: Rachel Leah (who had been matched with Israel's grandson Solomon, as mentioned above), who was then about seven years old, and the three-year-old Joseph, who now grew up in the court, to all intents and purposes as an adopted son, even taking the family name Friedman.<sup>16</sup>

This rapid course of events created a whole flurry of rumors and gossip about the marriage of the widow and widower so soon after their spouses' deaths.<sup>17</sup> People recalled the ugly stories about Rabbi Zevi's own marriage.

It was said that Rabbi Zevi had hankered after Malkah when her first husband was still alive. Solomon Rubin, a Galician maskil born in 1823, later told of rumors that had been circulating in his birthplace Dolina, when he was a child: Malkah, who was particularly good-looking, and her husband had come before Rabbi Zevi, complaining that their married life was unhappy. The zaddik, who was attracted to her, instructed the husband to divorce her, on the grounds that the match did not have Divine approval. The husband did as he was bid, and Rabbi Zevi himself married the woman shortly thereafter.<sup>18</sup> Several details of the story have been conclusively refuted (Rabbi Zevi was of priestly stock and would never have married a divorced woman),<sup>19</sup> but it has a core of truth. The original version, as told in a hasidic source, is also not very kind to the protagonists. According to this seemingly reliable source, Malkah came to the zaddik as a young, childless widow, complaining that she could not remarry until her late husband's two-year-old brother was old enough to release her from the levirate bond. Rabbi Zevi asked her if she would like to marry him, as he "understood that she had a great soul," and Malkah gladly agreed:

But she said: "What shall be done with regard to the brother?" And he replied: "Don't worry about it." Thereupon the infant brother died. His mother came and remonstrated with the rebbe: "Because you wanted to marry, you removed my son from the world?" . . . And after the death of the rebbe Rabbi Hirsch, the saintly rabbi of Ruzhin took her for wife. . . . And I heard that she almost had children from him, except for a reason that cannot be written, for the sons of the saintly rabbi did not approve.<sup>20</sup>

This is clearly a late moralistic reaction: Rabbi Israel was punished for the immoral behavior ascribed to his second wife and had no children with her. We do indeed have indications that he himself harbored feelings of guilt at having remarried. He in fact told his son Shalom that his first wife Sarah had appeared to him in a dream, from which he inferred that she was displeased with his second marriage.<sup>21</sup> There is also evidence in a report by the zaddik Isaac Judah Jehiel Safran of Komarno of harsh criticism leveled at Rabbi Israel by scholarly circles for having married a "killer wife," whose third marriage this was. The zaddik of Komarno defended Israel's behavior, declaring that the marriage did not violate Jewish Law: "For I have seen one great saint in our generation, a holy and awesome man of God, who married a woman that had two husbands and they died. And since I have seen certain Torah scholars who criticized the zaddik, I declare in strict accordance with Halakhah that the zaddik's deed is perfectly legal, as clearly as the sun shines."<sup>22</sup>

On Passover 1848, exactly one year after the death of his first wife, Sarah, a severe cholera epidemic struck the provinces of Volhynia, New Russia,

Galicia, and Bukovina. There were many casualties and Sadgora was also hard hit.<sup>23</sup> The zaddik and his family were forced to leave the court temporarily, moving to a nearby village, where there were empty houses. Staying on at Sadgora alone, apparently to look after the court, Israel's new wife, Malkah, fell seriously ill and was saved only by devoted medical care.<sup>24</sup>

Despite these trials and tribulations, Rabbi Israel enjoyed considerable prestige during his Sadgora period, not only because of his solid economic position and numerous, widely dispersed hasidim, but because of his fight to secure abrogation of the prohibition on traditional Jewish clothing and his considerable influence in the life of hasidic communities in Palestine. Evidence of his special position as "patron" of all Galician hasidim may be seen in a report written by Rabbi Abraham Cohen, preacher of the Lemberg Reform Synagogue (who was latter poisoned by hasidim in 1848). Referring to the government proposal to ban traditional Jewish dress, Cohen—who, of course, supported such measures—noted that the proposal was important not only for its own sake but as one way of stemming the spread of Hasidism in Galicia, whose beginnings he reckoned since the arrival of "the patron Israel Friedman" in Austria.<sup>25</sup>

It was around then that Rabbi Israel also became interested in international politics. The revolutionary events of 1848 and the uprisings of various national groups against the central Austrian government fascinated him. Not much is known about his reactions, but it appears that he supported the Hungarian rebels "and gave them his blessing, but they were sorely defeated by the imperial armies. Who can fathom a saint's heart?"<sup>26</sup> Although we have no idea whether this support had any practical expression, there are hints of messianic agitation among zaddikim and hasidim in 1848, and some voices named Rabbi Israel as worthy of being the Messiah.<sup>27</sup>

Around this time, Rabbi Israel began to feel the effects of old age and had sensations of increasing weakness. He received fewer visitors, and his mood was generally dark; accordingly, he initiated practical steps toward the appointment of a successor. As early as 1848, fully three years before his death, he summoned his three eldest sons, Shalom Joseph (the firstborn and hence the natural heir), Abraham Jacob, and Dov Ber:

He asked them why they did not wish to receive *kvitlekh* from people. They replied: We do not know how to receive them. Said he: I like what you are telling me, the Lord, blessed be He, knows the truth that from the day of my birth, I have not benefited even one hairsbreadth from this world, and I am confident in the Lord, blessed be He, that you too have not benefited even one hairsbreadth from this world. And only a person who has not benefited even one hairsbreadth from this world is entitled to receive *kvitlekh*.<sup>28</sup>

Subsequently, Shalom Joseph began to take part in administering the court, to write letters to hasidim and to prepare himself for his role as the zaddik next in line.<sup>29</sup>

Rabbi Israel's sensation of decline and imminent death is pathetically expressed in a homily he preached to Isaac Judah Jehiel of Komarno, one of the most precious zaddikim in Galicia:

The saintly man of God, Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, said that initially he was a rebbe like a lamp in which there was a burning wick that illuminated everything. But now he is like the knob in the middle of a chandelier, with lamps around and none to kindle them. For that knob had no vitality whatever, not even a little light.

And I [i.e., the author] in my humility do not intend to reveal details [i.e., gossip] about zaddikim of our generation, Heaven forbid, for who can gauge the mind of zaddikim? For it may be that outwardly he behaves like a king, while inwardly his heart is broken and mortified before his Creator, broken into a thousand smithereens, consecrated to his God.<sup>30</sup>

This profound psychological evaluation—outward (“behaves like a king”) as against inward (“his heart is broken”)—is a major clue to understanding Rabbi Israel and his conduct.

A student of Hasidism attempting to decipher the phenomenon of Rabbi Israel, the veneration he aroused, and his tremendous influence, must pick his way carefully between two radical interpretations: that of the maskilim, for whom he was a wily, cynical, corrupt leader, misleading and exploiting his followers; and that of the hasidim, who considered him the archetype of a leader with two faces, whose unique lifestyle was simply a special way of worshiping God. This dualistic approach implies the presence of an inner level (or “point”), diametrically opposed to the misleading outward appearance; the inner level is the true representation of the man, his qualities and the plane on which he operated.<sup>31</sup>

The historian, of course, will try to find some middle way to assess Rabbi Israel's personality, out of a broad spectrum of possibilities. Whatever the case, the interpretation of some maskilim is untenable, if only for the reason that Rabbi Israel's leadership qualities stood the most elementary social and historical test: his leadership was never challenged; it was not imposed on anyone, for his hasidim and visitors were perfectly free in their actions. It is quite implausible that a charlatan or corrupt personality, along the lines of the caricatures drawn by Joseph Perl, Isaac Levinsohn and their ilk, would have earned so much admiration for such a length of time and from such a great variety of persons: scholar and ignoramus, rich and poor, young and old, Jews from the Ukraine and from Lithuania. On the principle that “You can't fool all the people all the time,” one might say that Rabbi Israel passed the test of public acceptance with flying colors.



On the other hand, the hasidic interpretation is also inadequate, as its apologetic bent obscures the power-oriented and hedonistic aspects of the zaddik's personality and endeavors to adapt his extroverted lifestyle to the conservative, normative world of the nineteenth-century hasidic society. The dualistic interpretation was probably a major element in shaping the way Rabbi Israel's contemporaries, and in particular his hasidim, viewed his character. It is not inconceivable that he himself internalized some such image. Even so, this does not explain all the many and sometimes contradictory aspects of his personality.

## *II. The Zaddik's Death and Succession*

Despite Rabbi Israel's increasing frailty, there was evidently no danger to his life. Otherwise, it is hard to imagine that five of his sons, including the heir apparent, Shalom Joseph, would have considered going to Russia late in 1849. In their application for an entry permit, the brothers noted their father's sudden aging as one of the reasons that justified granting them a permit: "His fatherly support has gradually weakened because of his old age, and despite the natural love and filial duty that bind us to the old man, the place of our birth, our love and loyalty for the all-Russian royal throne . . . smash the ties that bind us to our father and summon us to return to Russia, cradle of our youth."<sup>32</sup>

Naturally, this application was phrased in keeping with regular formulas of flattery. The sons were mainly motivated, not really by patriotic longing for their old homeland, but by concern for the considerable property that had remained in Russia and for the old Ruzhin hasidim there. Since we must assume that the possibility of a favorable reply was taken into account, it seems clear that their father's health at that time was reasonable.

In 1850, Rabbi Israel celebrated the last seder night of his life with his hasidim. A seder in the zaddik's presence was always considered a unique experience. Only a few selected hasidim and close associates merited such a privilege.<sup>33</sup> Those who did participate in the proceedings that evening were left with an indelible impression:

He recited the hymn *Ve-bi she-amedah* forty-two times, and each time it was seen that he was changing his visage. The last time, he was seized with an awesome ecstasy for more than half an hour, and then he repeated the words "For not one alone has attempted to destroy us" several times and finally said: "There will come a time that the nations of the world will hate the people of Israel most intensely, and when they see that they cannot get rid of them by persecutions and massacres, they will forcefully banish the Jews from their countries back to the Land of Israel. It will not be a great honor to return to the Land of Israel in such a manner. . . . Whatever the case and however that may be, the main thing is that we shall immi-

grate to the Land of Israel." . . . When he reached the song *El beneh*, he repeated: "They [i.e., the Jews] want redemption through miracles, but what shall I do, for I do not believe in miracles at all."<sup>34</sup>

Rabbi Israel's great sensitivity to the Jewish fate, to the persecution of the Jews and the ravages of anti-Semitism, was presumably an outcome of his own bitter experience. The profound, sublime idea that he propounded on that seder night, which sounds even today like a shattering prediction of the fate of the Jews in Eastern Europe, might be seen as a back projection of the pogroms in the late nineteenth century or even as a foreshadowing of the ideas of the Zionist movement. Nevertheless, Isaac Even, who first published this account in 1917 in the name of an old hasid named Aizik'l of Berdichev, who claimed to have been present, was known for his reliable sources; moreover it is hard to conceive that the old hasid could have invented or imagined such a bold conception.

But signs that Israel's death was imminent came from unexpected directions. Hasidic hagiography tells us that a messenger from his friend Meir of Premyshlan (d. spring 1850) reached Sadgora on Passover 1850, with a curious message. The travel documents of both persons were signed and certified, the missive declared, and from this time on they were free to cross all boundaries; Meir's papers, however, would become invalid first. Of course, this was interpreted as a prediction of the imminent decease of both zaddikim. Nevertheless, Rabbi Israel maintained his usual routine till shortly before his death.<sup>35</sup>

About one month before his death, Rabbi Israel received at his court the old Polish zaddik Moses of Lelov, who was on his way to Palestine and was taking his leave of various zaddikim.<sup>36</sup> He also had time to write an approbation, phrased in highly personal, emotional tones, to a book titled *Hesed le-Abraham*, a collection of homilies reported in the name of his grandfather Abraham the "Angel" and conducts (*hanhagot*) of his father Rabbi Shalom Shakhna.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from his journeys to Lemberg for medical consultations, Rabbi Israel almost never left Sadgora, except to rest and recuperate on his estate at Potik Zloty. One and a half months before his death, he was visited at Potik by a Lithuanian admirer, the zaddik Moses of Kobrin, whom he told of his feeling that he was about to depart this world.<sup>38</sup> Toward August 9, 1850, Israel returned from Potik to Sadgora. On the first night after his return, the sons came into his room, and his daughters saw him the next night. The atmosphere was naturally highly charged and emotional. One of his daughters asked him if he liked being in Potik, and he replied: "What a pity I bought it! Why do I need Potik? Four cubits are enough for me."<sup>39</sup> Taking a walk with his sons David Moses and Mordekhai Shraga and his son-in-law Menahem Mendel of Kosov around that time, he said to them,

too: "Do not think that I bought the Potik estate for myself. I have already prepared for myself more pleasant and fitting living quarters."<sup>40</sup>

During the High Holy Days of autumn 1850, the ailing Rabbi Israel shut himself up in his room and came out only rarely to see his hasidim. Once, when he opened the door, the crowds of waiting hasidim pushed their way in, straining to hear his every word. But all he said was: "Go, pray for me," adding pessimistically: "Times will come when things will be bad for the Jews, and especially the hasidim, and especially my hasidim."<sup>41</sup> His son David Moses was also sick that New Year's Day, so the father and son recited the festival services alone in Rabbi Israel's "private *shetibl*." Later, the son would remember that his father's prayer had been "quite supernatural, and after the service, father said to me: 'Today I have heard the Messiah's shofar.'"<sup>42</sup>

On the Day of Atonement, Rabbi Israel fasted despite his condition. During the day, he suddenly felt very thirsty. Dipping his hands in water, he wet his face and felt the cooling effect of the water. Gesturing to the rabbis with him in the room, he tried to hint to them that this was a life-and-death situation, expecting them to permit him to drink water. However, as the zaddik Solomon Rabinowitz of Radomsk later told his admirer Aaron Marcus, the rabbis were oblivious, failing to understand that "even such a great and holy man, though entirely divested of corporeality, nevertheless also surrenders to the laws of nature."<sup>43</sup>

Rabbi Israel's condition rapidly worsened. On Simhat Torah, the zaddik looked out of the window of his room and said to the disconsolate hasidim: "Today is the festival of the Rejoicing of the Torah! Why are you not rejoicing?" Thereupon, he ordered them to go and drink wine at his expense.<sup>44</sup>

Surrounded by psalm-reciting hasidim, Rabbi Israel Friedman passed away on Wednesday, October 9, 1850, probably of heart failure.<sup>45</sup> He was only fifty-four. The Ruzhin hagiography relates that his dying words were: "I have not benefited from this world by even a hairsbreadth—why, then, have I suffered so much?"<sup>46</sup>

Immediately after his death, his son Abraham Jacob delivered a brief mourning sermon, based on the verse "And it came to pass, on the day that Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle" (Num. 7:1). Since Mount Sinai, he declared, Divine revelation has been in a process of diminution (*zimzum*). The sin of the golden calf was followed by the erection of the Tabernacle; after the destruction of the Temple, "holiness was diminished through the zaddik and emanation to the world is channeled through him. And what shall we do now, when the zaddik, the foundation of the world, has also gone, and through whom shall the abundance be channeled? And as he said this, the tears flowed from his eyes."<sup>47</sup>

Rabbi Israel's many admirers and followers were devastated. "A day of cloud and fog, an accursed day, an eclipse of the moon. On Tuesday, the third of the second month, that is [the Hebrew month of] Mar-heshvan . . . the rainbow appeared in the cloud. . . . On that day the crown fell from our head, the majesty of Israel, the sun set at midday." Thus wrote Rabbi Abraham Teomim of Brody, then rabbi of Zbarazh, a scholar, but not a member of any hasidic group, in his eulogy of the zaddik.<sup>48</sup> The more intellectually minded hasidim, using the occasion, as usual in Jewish tradition, as an opportunity for reflection and repentance, could not but note that their zaddik had died so soon after Meir of Premyshlan, who had expired about six months previously:

First there departed from us the saintly . . . Rabbi Meir of Premyshlan, and that was necessarily because of the sin of this generation. But because we did not take heed or find the way to repentance . . . we caused ourselves a further great evil, for the Ark of the Lord that was in our midst has been taken from us, our master the saintly rabbi and man of God, the light of Israel [of Ruzhin]. . . . The breath of our life, the Lord's anointed, our saintly rabbi, in whose shade we had thought to live.<sup>49</sup>

The news of the revered leader's death spread rapidly, bringing shock and dismay to many of the hasidim. In the town of Belaya Tserkov, for example, "all the hasidim gathered in the kloiz and wept copiously, and among them was the marvelous hasid Levi, who was so struck with emotion that he cried 'the crown has fallen from our head' and the weeping and wailing increased even more."<sup>50</sup> It was said that the relatives of the Polish zaddik Nehemiah of Bychawa tried to keep the news from him, fearing his reaction. When the news finally reached him, he suffered a severe physical and mental breakdown, from which he was not to recover, dying two years later.<sup>51</sup>

Rabbi Israel's great wealth was divided among his six sons. In the process, many disagreements and problems arose, mainly around the question of the daughters' rights to a part in the inheritance; for they, contrary to Jewish Law, demanded to be placed on an equal footing with the sons.<sup>52</sup> The Potik Zloty estate was not divided up, but, as already mentioned previously, remained for a long time in the joint ownership of all the brothers, with some priority (the details of which are unclear) to David Moses. In the meanwhile, the brothers lived at Potik, each in his own home, acting in a sense jointly as zaddikim. From now on, each of Rabbi Israel's many hasidim would have to decide, in keeping with his own predilections, which of the brothers would be his rebbe.<sup>53</sup>

Although Rabbi Israel had not explicitly designated his successor, in his last years, as his sickness worsened, he took several measures that indicated his intention to prepare his sons for the succession. He allowed three of

them to receive kvitlekh from the hasidim, for example, thus experiencing one of the major contacts between a zaddik and his flock. However, he gave preference to his beloved firstborn Shalom Joseph, at times permitting him to write letters and issue instructions in his own name. As far as we know, Shalom, then about thirty-seven years old, ascended his father's throne without any objections on the part of his brothers. The hasidim, for their part, also accepted his leadership. "There is no vessel holding good fortune but Shalom Joseph; he is the ruler of the land"—such is the title of a document printed in 1851 in Jerusalem by the Bak family, in which the Ruzhin hasidim in the Holy Land accepted Shalom's spiritual leadership ("and we accept him over us as head and leader, to shelter beneath his sacred shade"). They also recognized him as "Prince" and treasurer of the hasidic community in Palestine, as his late father had been.<sup>54</sup>

Shalom Joseph, the new zaddik, did not hold sway for long. He was weak and sickly, and less than one year later, in late summer 1851, he too died suddenly, while on a visit to the baths at Leipzig. The brevity of his leadership was such that almost no information survives as to his period. It appears that after his death, most of the hasidim, the brothers included, accepted the next son, Abraham Jacob, as the central figure of the dynasty. At the same time, each brother continued to conduct himself independently, with his own court. Indeed, in contrast to the inner disputes that characterized other hasidic dynasties, which frequently broke up under different leaders, Israel's sons maintained friendly relations, almost unaffected by competition for influence on the hasidim (except for the complicated affair of Dov of Leova). Sadgora, the home of most members of the family—the widow Malkah, the son Rabbi Abraham Jacob and his family, and the daughters Gitl Monzohn and Leah Heilperin and their families—was the throbbing center of Ruzhin Hasidism until Abraham Jacob's death in 1883. Ruzhin Hasidism grew to unprecedented dimensions; fifteen years after Rabbi Israel's death, the maskil Alexander Tzederbaum could express amazement at the founder's immense legacy: "In almost every city of our country [Russia], there are synagogues, study houses and kloizn for the Sadgora hasidim. Many travel there [i.e., to Sadgora]; others send pidyon for their souls to their saint."<sup>55</sup>

The night of 3rd Heshvan was celebrated as a *hillula* in memory of Rabbi Israel: the hasidim used to gather from afar, sit together the whole night, and listen to the sons, grandsons, and other descendants, or to older hasidim who remembered him. Through the night, the memory of the founder of the dynasty was cherished with homilies, prayers, stories, and reminiscences by and about Rabbi Israel.<sup>56</sup>



PART III

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*Rabbi Israel as a Hasidic Leader*

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## *“The Law of People”: Rabbi Israel’s Approach to Communal Leadership*

### *I. Between Rebbe and Rabbi*

“The Ruzhiner was a ‘political’ zaddik,” the historian S. A. Horodezky writes, referring to Rabbi Israel’s unique practical talents and his unique stature, head and shoulders above almost every other zaddik in almost every respect. He resembled the Maggid Dov Ber of Mezhirech, his great-grandfather, “in his organizational talent. Like him, he united and organized the hasidim and promoted Hasidism. But . . . while the Maggid’s Hasidism was full of inner content, all noble and spiritual, that of his grandson excelled in nothing but external glitter.”<sup>1</sup> As always, we may ignore Horodezky’s implicit assumption that nineteenth-century Hasidism was ideologically inferior to the earlier movement. I prefer here to examine certain phenomena that teach us something of Israel’s own perception, at different phases of his career, of his leadership and its meaning. Everything he did points to a strong character, to the decisive, “political” figure of a public leader who refused to remain within the confines of his own household. These traits are also clearly reflected in the style of his correspondence and written instructions, which were phrased by his scribes in uncommonly brusque language, expressive of an air of authority and the innate self-confidence of a born leader.

Rabbi Israel’s understanding of the nature of ideal leadership and the importance of a zaddik’s involvement in the everyday life of his hasidim is aptly expressed in his address to some Jews from Balta, Podolia, who came



to greet him when he was visiting the town. Balta was the home of the zaddik Benjamin Zeev (Velvel) of Balta's grandchildren, whose father Azriel had recently died.<sup>2</sup> The family eked out its livelihood from the sale of yeast, a monopoly (like the right to sell candles or salt) reserved for rabbis and zaddikim and handed down from father to son as a birthright.<sup>3</sup> After Azriel's death, however, the people of Balta decided to deprive his heirs of the privilege; the latter appealed to Rabbi Israel for help. Here is his response:

There are two laws: "the law of animals and fowl" [Lev. 11:46], and "the law of people" [2 Sam. 7:19]. As to the law of animals and fowl, it is easy to hire a *dayan* and give him ten gold coins a week to rule on such matters, whether a thing is kosher or *treif*. But as to the law of people, who can rule? And if a person were to come and ask what is permitted to do and what is forbidden to do, that would be very good, for then the dayan would also be able to rule in such matters. But who comes to ask? Indeed, in the law of people, too, there is a *posek*. Some rule over one city and some rule over two or three towns, and some lay down the law over the whole world; if such a person could appear and instruct a person's heart not to do what is forbidden to do—that would be a posek in the law of people.<sup>4</sup>

This fragment may offer us the key to understanding Rabbi Israel's view of his role as a zaddik in particular and of the hasidic way in general. As he sees it, there are two main categories of leadership. The inferior one ("the law of animals and fowl") is that of the legal authority, dayan or posek. Based on Torah scholarship, it is confined by nature to the more "technical" aspects of life and worship: ritual fitness of food, purity and impurity, permissibility or otherwise of various actions. It is not particularly difficult to locate leaders of this type: one readily finds a suitable candidate, who—in return for a small salary—will put the knowledge accumulated during his studies to use and answer such questions, which are considered inferior on the scale of hasidic worship. Not so the second category ("the law of people"), which embraces the realm of interpersonal relationships from the standpoint of justice, integrity, and ethics, and is the supreme goal of the hasidic way. As people do not normally appeal to the rabbis for decisions relating to interpersonal affairs (or even to purely personal matters), it is in this area that the hasidic zaddik has a part to play, as a moral figure capable of filling the gap by virtue of his newfound authority.

The ideal leader, then, is one who concerns himself with questions of "the law of people." He does not have to be an halakhic scholar, dayan, or posek, for the latter are two a penny, and no one is likely to consult him in that area; but neither is he a minor local zaddik whose influence extends no farther than "two or three towns." He is the rare, unique individual whose moral voice knows no geographic limits, whose opinion is heeded the world over. Such—and Rabbi Israel is presumably referring to himself—is

the ideal zaddik, who "descends" from his high level to the earthly world of his hasidim, straightens out their problems, and tries to shape their lives in keeping with his particular ethical worldview. Issues relating to "the law of people" have profound ethical implications; in the present case, the issue was the exclusion of a rabbinical family from the livelihood that had sustained it for generations. The challenge to the hasidic leader who wishes to achieve the level of a posek in "the law of people" is, on the one hand, to remedy the fact that no one seeks a "legal" opinion in moral and interpersonal matters ("But who comes to ask?"); and, on the other, to acquire the special status of a zaddik capable, by dint of his spiritual level and credibility, of "instruct[ing] a person's heart not to do what is forbidden to do."

As far as one can judge from the available sources, Rabbi Israel was never particularly troubled by a difficult question that occupied not a few major hasidic leaders: what is the proper relationship between a life of saintliness, devotion to holy worship, Torah study and personal perfection, on the one hand, and everyday concern with the communal and individual needs of the hasidim, on the other. For Israel, involvement in worldly affairs, responsibility for the hasidim and for the relations among them, was not merely a role imposed upon him as leader, at the head of a social entity, but also an expression of spiritual leadership. He was unable to express his leadership through "the law of animals and fowl," that is, as a scholar, kabbalist, or pietist, steeped in learning. Indeed, given his unique personality and his specific upbringing and education, once he had ascended the zaddik's throne, he had no choice but to shoulder responsibility for the affairs of his flock—and, as he saw it, of the entire Congregation of Israel—in the spirit of "the law of people."<sup>5</sup>

Viewed in the context of the historical development of Hasidism as a social movement, we have here yet another manifestation of the gradual process by which zaddikim assumed authority and leadership roles, against the background of the decline of respect for the traditional elites and the disintegration of the old communal institutions. Rabbi Israel believed that his concern with issues of interpersonal relations was a channel through which the community's regard for his authority as a zaddik could be realized; consequently, he would be able to enforce ethical standards of the type the conventional rabbinate had been unable to impose. Hasidic leaders accumulated power not only through their control of communal appointments and their supervision of such economic areas as ritual slaughtering and leases, but also through successful involvement in the limitless sea of personal relations—among individuals in the community, in families, and between the individual and the community.<sup>6</sup>

Rabbi Israel's hasidim sought his help in a variety of problems, ranging from aid to collapsed businesses and repaying debts to the authorities;

through dedication of new cemeteries, healing of the sick and the barren, succor to deserted wives, and encouragement to repentant sinners; to support for the poor and Jews in the Land of Israel. Far from the customary picture of Rabbi Israel as a zaddik who favored the rich, he by no means scorned simple folk who were not members of the economic, scholarly, or social elite; on the contrary, he sought their company, arguing: "When the ordinary people come to greet the zaddik, the zaddik can exert his influence and fill everyone's heart with remorse and repentance, to fulfill the scriptural verse 'True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit.'"<sup>7</sup>

A typical example of the everyday problems that concerned him is the story of Etia Rachel, a deserted wife (known in Jewish Law as *agumah*) from Kalush, Galicia, and I shall therefore discuss it in some detail. The episode also attests to the inner tension between the different leadership systems involved: the rabbinate and the zaddikim. It is, moreover, particularly significant, as the rabbis involved were not of the camp in constant confrontation with zaddikim, but were actually close to them and venerated them.

In the course of her attempts to locate her husband or, at least, get permission to remarry, the poor woman came to Jassy, where the officiating rabbi was Joseph Landau, an accomplished scholar who was particularly experienced in dealing with deserted wives.<sup>8</sup> Landau was an enthusiastic follower of Rabbi Israel and indeed largely owed his position to the latter's recommendation. The woman managed to find a single witness to her husband's death, who testified, as required, before a rabbinical court. With the deposition in hand, the woman appealed to Landau for permission to remarry; this was the beginning of a fruitless quest that lasted almost three years. When Landau failed to respond, Etia Rachel, on the advice of some friends, decided to take the documents back and present them to Landau's colleague and relative Rabbi Aaron Moses Taubes, also serving on the bench of the Jassy rabbinical court, who decided, after examining the documents, to grant the woman's request. She, for her part, naïvely returned to Landau and asked for confirmation; he, however, wrote on the verdict: "This woman is forbidden to marry, for a reason to which I alone am privy."

The devastated woman, utterly bewildered by the rabbi's incomprehensible behavior, appealed to the communal leaders of Jassy to influence him, but to no avail. She traveled to Galicia, seeking help from some prominent rabbis, but they, too, were loath to act.<sup>9</sup> Desperate, the woman went to Sadgora, where her plight aroused Rabbi Israel's sympathy. Incensed, he wrote to Joseph Landau in harsh terms:

In regard to the sorrow of the woman, entangled in the shackles of her deserted state for the past ten years, her sorrow has touched my heart and her soul is embittered. And all her pain is because my honored friend has not explained himself in

the matter of the permission, saying that she is forbidden for a reason known only to himself, and for that reason all the officiating rabbis in Israel are afraid even to consider issuing a permit, owing to your mysterious words. Now that is inconceivable in such matters. Rather, such things should be fully explained in accordance with the Torah. If I have heard rightly, that you are referring to the witness who testified that her husband died, meaning that the person is not a reliable witness in accordance with the law of our Holy Torah, I am quite amazed at that. Indeed, I know the man and his practice, and I do not consider him an incompetent witness; perhaps his way has been hidden from me and my friend knows more. Accordingly, take your time to make a careful examination of the matter of the said deserted woman. . . . Perhaps the Lord, blessed be He, will show you the way of the true Torah, to find a way to permit the wretched woman to remarry. However things turn out, whether she be permitted or, Heaven forbid, forbidden, at any rate, you should explain your opinion clearly, so that your view on the matter will be visible to the eyes of Israel.<sup>10</sup>

This letter reveals Rabbi Israel's "law of people": his moral sensitivity, his emphasis on the injustice done the woman because of the unjustified delay in deciding her case, his identification with her distress. In addition, he had no scruples about criticizing Landau on halakhic grounds, both in regard to the latter's refusal to reveal his reasons and because of the zaddik's conviction that the central witness was indeed reliable. Thus, he peremptorily urged Landau to find the time to reexamine the question, after which he should publish his decision, together with his reasoning, whatever the outcome might be.

In response to Israel's sharp letter, Landau hastened to answer, informing him that he could not clarify the matter unless the two men met personally. After a short while, he traveled to Sadgora and divulged the hidden reason for his original decision.<sup>11</sup> The affair ended happily for the woman, because she in fact accidentally found her lost husband; but the main point to be made here is how Rabbi Israel's letter reveals an important aspect of the relationship between the zaddik as leader and the halakhic authority functioning in the same region. The system of contacts between the two figures (who were also related) provides us, therefore, with a point of departure for an examination of Rabbi Israel's conception of the relationship between the zaddik, the formal rabbinate, and the traditional communal leadership.

Joseph Landau, a scion of a distinguished hasidic family, had grown up in close proximity to the zaddikim of his time. Appointed rabbi of Lityn and Kamenets Podolsk at the age of twenty-two, he was famous for his scholarship and piety. Rabbi Israel, who esteemed him highly and respected his learning, recommended that the leaders of the Jassy community appoint Landau as rabbi of the city. They complied, and he officiated in that function from 1834 till his death in 1853.<sup>12</sup>

It was only natural that Rabbi Israel, who did not dare decide halakhic questions on his own, came to Landau when faced with a halakhic problem. Thus, for example, when his daughter Hayah Malkah (d. 1840) had to perform *halitzah*,<sup>13</sup> a rather unpleasant ceremony, best carried out discreetly, Rabbi Israel appealed to Landau for help, and the latter organized the ceremony, which involved two hasidic courts with which he had contacts: Ruzhin and Apta.<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Israel consulted him both in halakhic matters and in other connections, while Landau for his part would turn to Rabbi Israel as any hasid to his rebbe.<sup>15</sup> When Rabbi Israel died, Landau eulogized him emotionally and helped to distribute the estate among his heirs.<sup>16</sup>

The mode of Landau's appointment as rabbi of Jassy reflects the considerable geographical scope of Rabbi Israel's influence even at that relatively early stage, when he was still in Ruzhin. The leaders of the Jassy community (Jassy was the capital of Moldavia, then still part of the Ottoman Empire, although under Russian protection) sought a first-ranking zaddik for a certain operation of unknown nature. The chief candidate was Abraham David of Buchach (d. 1841), famed as a zaddik and saint, whom they approached, sending him a delegation representing all factions and social groups in the town. However, Rabbi Abraham was repelled when a hasid in the delegation intimated that the mission carried a considerable material reward, and he refused to undertake it. He advised the town leaders to approach Rabbi Israel, who would surely accompany them: "And especially if you tell him explicitly from the start that he will get much money there, for his ways are of great sanctity and he does not fear evil thoughts." So delegates were sent to Ruzhin:

And he came to Jassy with a large company and much pomp, and sojourned there several days. And there flocked to him a great multitude, and the people contributed money in plenty and honored him with suitable gifts. Now when he left Jassy, there sat with him in his carriage a distinguished and very learned man of the nobility of Jassy, Michel Dayan by name,<sup>17</sup> to accompany him out of respect. And then he said to the zaddik: I suppose that our rabbi received a considerable sum in Jassy. And our master answered: Can you imagine what I received in Jassy? The said Michel answered: I would imagine that our rabbi received about five hundred coins. So our holy master said: Is such a sum also considered a fortune among you? For verily, all the money in the whole world belongs to me!<sup>18</sup>

Even though from a hagiographic source, this story is credible, because it is confirmed by nonhasidic sources. In 1834, Rabbi Israel did indeed visit Jassy, where he lodged at Michel Dayan's home. Hundreds of admirers came to welcome him, and crowds formed outside the house. One man was actually killed in the disturbances, and the Ottoman authorities were obliged to station soldiers at the house to maintain order. The communal

leaders asked the zaddik to recommend a suitable candidate for rabbi; he proposed Landau, who moved to Jassy before the end of the year.<sup>19</sup>

Another letter from 1847, in which Rabbi Israel responds to questions posed by Landau about his status as rabbi, illustrates the zaddik's rather patronizing attitude to his hasid. In the letter, he expresses concern for Landau's welfare and livelihood and gives him advice as to where to make his home, but he also threateningly importunes his protégé to find a well-paid position for a relative of theirs, concluding: "It would be only right and proper for him [Landau] not to forget all I have done for him, right from the outset, and that I helped raise him to his high position. And he should recompense my relative for the favors I have done him. Because if he forgets in this respect, I shall forget too."<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between Rabbi Israel and Rabbi Landau indicates that the zaddik aimed, not to eliminate, weaken, or ignore the rabbinical establishment, but to integrate it organically into hasidic society. At no time did Israel consider himself a substitute for a halakhically competent rabbi, although he had no scruples about hinting what kind of halakhic ruling he favored (as in the case of the deserted wife discussed above). His conception of the rabbinate was a functional one. It was, he believed, an indispensable tool for the organization of everyday religious life on a firm halakhic basis. Nevertheless, he maintained a position of supremacy, by virtue of which he could reprimand the rabbi on occasion, hinting at the favors he owed his master and even using admonishing and threatening terms.

Further examples of Rabbi Israel's involvement in Jewish community life are considered below, in two main contexts: (i) the varied network of appointments to official positions, whether within the community (rabbi, rabbinical judge, ritual slaughterer) or within the hasidic system (encouraging candidates to undertake the leadership of a community, or discouraging them from so doing); and (ii) acts of intercession, assumption of responsibility for the fates of individuals or communities, whether in his locality or elsewhere (such as in the Land of Israel or Poland), and whether the persons affected were his allies or opponents (such as the maskilim).

## II. *Appointments and Dismissals*

The appointment of rabbis, rabbinical court judges (*dayanim*), ritual slaughterers (*shohatim*), cantors (*hazanim*), circumcisers (*mohalim*), teachers (*melamdim*), and other religious functionaries was one of the most effective tools in the zaddik's struggle to consolidate his power in his own neighborhood and to spread Hasidism and its message in new, "unconquered" regions.<sup>21</sup> "They [the zaddikim] divided up the land among them-

selves as an inheritance, not as secular rulers do, according to geographical borders, but according to cities in each province and district," the maskil Alexander Tzederbaum notes. "Without them, no one is to lift hand or foot, and in all communal matters, their instruction is awaited, and they send them rabbis, judges, slaughterers, cantors, teachers, beadles, and even bathhouse attendants."<sup>22</sup>

Similar sentiments were later expressed by S. Y. Agnon regarding his hometown, Buchach: "This is what sustained Hasidism, so that it produced most of the shohatim, hazanim, and melamdin. And even those of them who did not believe in Hasidism in their hearts subordinated themselves to the zaddikim of the generation, for any rabbi, shohet, or melmed who was not subordinate to the zaddik had no hope in his community."<sup>23</sup>

It was in this way that the "outer" borders of the spread of Hasidism, as well as the "inner" borders between spheres of influence of different courts, were drawn. This special "hasidic geography" was particularly salient in the southwestern provinces of the Russian empire. It depended largely on a judicious system of appointments and supervision, embracing all the main centers of power and influence in the traditional community, and helped to create a complex economic system in which the zaddik and his court were fully integrated into the communities under his sway.<sup>24</sup>

Whoever controlled these appointments, which were indispensable for Jewish communal life, was the real authority. The area of ritual slaughter (*shehitah*) was particularly important and sensitive. The founding fathers of Hasidism had already considered it more than just a profession. It combined serious spiritual and mystical elements with the economic interests stemming from the collection of the meat tax, so much so that the special hasidic method of slaughter became a hallmark of Hasidism and a constant bone of contention between hasidim and mitnagdim in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup> In the nineteenth century, during the rapid growth of Hasidism, hasidic slaughterers (as well as cantors)<sup>26</sup> were not merely the main cultural purveyors of hasidic propaganda but also, by dint of appointment by a given zaddik, the representatives of that zaddik's power over the community.

The controversy over hasidic slaughter, at first expressed in objections by mitnagdim to the new hasidic methods (the special type of knife),<sup>27</sup> shifted in the course of the nineteenth century into the hasidic camp itself, where it touched upon the reliability and merit of hasidic slaughterers. Bitter rivalry and conflicts between neighboring hasidic groups, against the background of the appointment of slaughterers—whether occasioned by questions of honor and prestige or motivated by economic matters—became quite common. On occasion, threats were made, one group condemned the purchase of meat slaughtered by another, and various mea-

asures were taken to terrorize slaughterers and ensure that they adopted the "correct" way.<sup>28</sup>

In 1827, Rabbi Israel sent a sharply worded letter to the leaders of the Wolodarka community (Kiev Province), warning them not to dismiss a certain shohet. In order to settle the dispute between the shohet and the kahal, he wrote, he was sending an emissary who would arbitrate on his behalf between the two parties. This should not be seen merely as a zaddik's intervention in the community's internal affairs, though he himself did not live there (similar steps were taken by other zaddikim, not to speak of the Besht himself). The letter is firm evidence of the new status of the zaddik as decision maker (and in this case also arbitrator) in a community under his sway.<sup>29</sup>

More important was the case of "the shohet of Berdichev." In the 1830s and 1840s, Rabbi Israel and his hasidim were involved in a serious scandal that broke out in Berdichev in relation to the fitness of meat slaughtered by one Abraham b. Solomon of Uman, a hasid of Moses Zevi of Savran. This shohet came in 1832 to Berdichev—where Rabbi Israel's influence was particularly strong—and his actions almost immediately aroused trouble. The affair went beyond the boundaries of the local community, involving numerous rabbinical authorities, in particular Solomon Kluger of Brody, who disqualified the shohet, while his bitter adversary Enzil Tsuzmir of Stry declared him competent.

There are numerous literary echoes of the dispute, and one's impression is that, more than being just a question of rabbinical disagreement, it was a kind of trial of strength between zaddikim and various nonhasidic leaders. Rabbi Enzil himself, one of the most interesting figures among the nonhasidic rabbis of Galicia, hinted that the shohet was disqualified on invalid grounds, as part of an internal hasidic struggle aimed against the zaddik of Savran.<sup>30</sup> The few hints scattered in the sources indicate that the dispute had something to do with "territorial" and personal tensions that had already arisen between Savran and Ruzhin.<sup>31</sup> Thus, for example, we read that "the wealthy men and hasidim sheltering in the shadow of His Holiness, the admor of Ruzhin, let it be known that they did not wish to eat meat that he had slaughtered"<sup>32</sup>—the reference is, of course, to the Ruzhin hasidim in Berdichev, headed by the rich banking family of Heilperin, Rabbi Israel's relatives.<sup>33</sup> Rabbi Joseph Landau, requested by the zaddik of Savran to express his opinion, refused point-blank, because of his relations with the Ruzhin court.<sup>34</sup> Thus, this affair demonstrates the position of shohatim and shehitah in general in the context of internal hasidic rivalries and disputes, to which Rabbi Israel was no stranger.

For all the importance of ritual slaughterer, the appointment of rabbis, confirmation of the status of junior zaddikim, and protection of their



rights and privileges constituted a far more important and prestigious area. Rabbi Israel was involved in the appointment of rabbis at the very beginning of his career as a zaddik. On one occasion, in 1826, whose details and background are unclear, the zaddik Mordekhai of Chernobyl took up the case of Solomon b. David, head of the rabbinical court of Kashvatin, whose position had been challenged by some members of his community. Rabbi Mordekhai wrote the communal leaders: "There came to me . . . Rabbi Solomon . . . of the aforementioned place, with the agreement of the renowned rabbi of the community of Ruzhin, with a serious complaint."<sup>35</sup> Clearly, the man had been appointed to his position with the approval of Rabbi Israel, who was then in his twenties. Another example, also dating to the early years of his career, is his approval in 1825 of the appointment of a certain rabbi in Murachawa (Podolia). The people of the town brought the proposed rabbinical contract to Rabbi Israel, who was then staying nearby, and sought his support—a procedure that not only points to the feelings of trust and admiration that they felt for him, but also, in particular, to a desire to invest the formal-traditional appointment of the rabbi with the new legitimization of the hasidic leader.<sup>36</sup>

Around 1844, following an acrid dispute over the transportation of the deceased to the cemetery by wagon, Solomon Kluger, the major halakhic authority of his time, became disaffected with his city of Brody. The furious Kluger wished to leave his place, where he had no office, and sought a rabbinical appointment somewhere. He turned to Rabbi Landau with a request to help him find a new position in one of the communities in Moldavia,<sup>37</sup> but Landau's efforts were in vain. Finally, Kluger reached an understanding with the Moldavian community of Falticeni, which offered him conditions commensurate with his stature in return for his agreement to take up residence there. However, the Falticeni leaders wrote the zaddik Meir of Premyslan in spring 1846 to say that, although agreement had been reached with Kluger two years earlier, he had reneged, notwithstanding all their financial offers. Visibly disappointed, they described the vacuum that had been created in the town, which had been left:

without a leader or custom and without an instructor, and everyone does as he pleases. Until God moved the hearts of the zaddikim of this generation, the one and only light of Israel of Sadgora, and his relative the zaddik Rabbi Samson of Ozieran, and Rabbi David of Zablatov, and our teacher Rabbi Israel Leib of Buchach. And they wrote to us and to the hasid Isaac Moses of Jassy that we should accept the learned rabbi Ephraim Halevi Horowitz, formerly dayyan of Wolochisk, as our rabbi.<sup>38</sup>

Here, then, was a community that implicitly obeyed the local zaddikim in regard to what was always a traditional appointment, within the juris-

diction of the "old" communal system. It is noteworthy that the rabbi recommended was by no means a member of the hasidic camp. Among the "zaddikim of this generation" whose opinion carried such weight in Falticeni (note further that the recommendation was given in writing), Rabbi Israel appears as the most prominent figure.

Another interesting appointment in which Rabbi Israel was certainly involved was that of Judah Leibush b. Jonah Landau as rabbi of Sadgora. Israel's opinion carried crucial weight in the community, and any candidate who secured his recommendation was sure of the nomination. Indeed, as this Landau was a close associate and known to be a pious and learned young man, who had officiated as rabbi in various Podolian communities, his appointment was quite natural.<sup>39</sup> It is not known when he became rabbi of Sadgora; we know of his formal occupation of the position only from 1867 on, and he may have acted previously only as "unofficial" rabbi of the court and not as town rabbi.

Ruzhin tradition has preserved a particularly painful memory relating to Landau's rabbinate: he was accused of having shortened Rabbi Israel's life by his excessive piety. On the last Day of Atonement of his life, the zaddik felt ill, but would not drink without proper rabbinical sanction. He appealed to Landau, then rabbi of Sadgora; the latter, apparently not realizing the life-and-death aspect of the situation, would allow him only to smell water and not to drink it. Rabbi Israel's sons bore him a grudge on that account, and during the first week of mourning one of them, Bernyu, said that Landau personified the verse "I gave them laws that were not good and rules by which they could not live" (Ezek. 20:25).<sup>40</sup> However, this tradition is dubious, because it is hard to understand how Landau could have kept his rabbinate in Sadgora and served the zaddik's family for many years after Rabbi Israel's death if he were indeed guilty of such a grave moral lapse.

Some zaddikim agreed to assume positions of leadership only after securing Rabbi Israel's permission; or, conversely, refrained from exercising their authority once he had expressed disapproval. Among them were sons of well-known zaddikim such as Yekutiel Shmelke of Kolomea (son of Moses Leib of Sasov), Joseph of Radvill (grandson of the Maggid of Zlochev), Nehemiah Jehiel of Bychawa (youngest son of "The Holy Jew" of Pshishkha), Israel Isaac (son of Issachar Dov of Radoshits), Ezekiel Shraga (son of Hayyim Halberstam of Zanz), Abraham of Stratyn, Elimelekh Shapira of Grodzisk, and many others.<sup>41</sup>

The affair of the "Bahur of Mikolayev,"<sup>42</sup> in which Rabbi Israel was involved, although only marginally, deserves special attention. This story throws some light not only on Israel's dominant position but also on the ways in which Hasidism spread through Podolia in the first half of the

nineteenth century and on the clash between charismatic leadership and the old, established zaddikim. The tale is known, as yet, from only one source: a tradition handed down from generation to generation and first committed to writing only in 1899; nevertheless, it rings true.

Mordekhai b. Nahman Judah was born in 1817, in a small village near Kamenets Podolsk, and orphaned at a tender age. At fifteen, he wandered to Galicia, where he apparently came under hasidic influence. Upon returning to his village, he was first thought to have gone mad, for he had become a learned and pious ascetic. But people slowly changed their minds: rumors and fantastic tales of miracles that he had performed spread through the village and beyond, and the lad (Hebrew: *bahur*) began to behave like a zaddik, traveling to the nearby villages and towns and preaching his message of Torah and Hasidism. People who flocked to see him called him “a king in his own right,” claiming that this was his distinctive feature: in that respect, he resembled the Besht, who likewise had not inherited his sanctity and had been an ordinary person before being “revealed.”

The Bahur’s great enemy was the zaddik Isaac Meir of Zinkov (d. 1855), known as the Old Man (*zaken*), many of whose hasidim went over to the Bahur’s camp. The rebbe of Zinkov, himself a son of the famous zaddik Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta, took various steps in an attempt to terrorize would-be “traitors” and delegitimize his rival. He hurled curses at the Bahur, accusing him of sorcery and Sabbatianism, and promised his own hasidim that the Bahur would burn in Gehenna. The struggle went on for two years, with some success: the Bahur gradually lost his followers, who drifted away, until he decided to go to Zinkov himself and find out why the zaddik hated him so fervently and appeal for an end to the persecution. The zaddik refused to meet him or even look at him, however, publicly insulting and abusing him.

In his desperation the artless young Bahur decided to appeal to Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, believing that the latter would support him and influence the rebbe of Zinkov to desist. He sent messengers to Rabbi Israel, telling him the details of the affair. After some deliberation, Rabbi Israel stated his view in extreme brevity: “Why should I give judgment on his account? The old man has already ruled and the law has been decided accordingly.” This pronouncement spread quickly, sealing the Bahur’s fate: “For great was the zaddik of Ruzhin in the eyes of his hasidim, seven times more than the Old Man. And then the defeat of the Bahur was complete: his lovers retreated and his sanctifiers and admirers left him alone, for they feared lest they come to a bitter end if they disobeyed these saintly zaddikim.” Thus deposed, he married and settled in Mikolaiev, where he died in 1879 in obscurity.<sup>43</sup>

The story illustrates Rabbi Israel's universally recognized role as an arbitrator of delicate issues involving prestige, honor, and social status. We have no further details of the affair; in particular, the zaddik of Zinkov's version is unknown, and it is pointless to conjecture. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Rabbi Israel preferred to remain loyal to his natural reference group: the oligarchy of established zaddikim, with whom he was bonded by familial and societal ties.<sup>44</sup> This preference for the hereditary leadership, rather than a young, charismatic leader of undistinguished lineage, reflects the gradual deterioration of the institution of zaddikism.

### *III. "A Remedy to Aid Israel": Intercession for the Jewish Community*

In 1854, some three and a half years after Rabbi Israel's death, his son Abraham Jacob of Sadgora made a reference to his father's character: "If our saintly father had known of this misfortune, he would have moved heaven and earth to find a remedy to aid Israel."<sup>45</sup> Rabbi Israel's activities, while he considered himself a representative of the Jewish community as a whole, were indeed a blend of personal talent and qualities with a feeling of responsibility for all Jews. For his contemporaries and his heirs, he was a link in a long tradition of intercessors, leaders who possessed the gift of speech and appearance and maintained vital contacts with gentile dignitaries and rulers.<sup>46</sup>

We shall now consider in detail some cases of Rabbi Israel's involvement in issues of crucial importance for all of Eastern European Jewry in the first half of the nineteenth century: the attitude to the reforms that the authorities tried to impose on traditional Jewish society, and cooperation with leaders outside the hasidic camp.

#### I. FORCED CONSCRIPTION

Our earliest information about Rabbi Israel as an intercessor dates from the 1820s, when he was apparently asked to help in the efforts to replace the forced conscription of Jewish youths to the czarist army by payment, but it is shrouded in hagiographic mist, and the factual basis is rather shaky. Compulsory military service for Jews was introduced on August 26, 1827, under Czar Nicholas I. Although the law was proposed to further the emancipation of the Jews, it aroused grave concern in the Jewish communities, in view of the concomitant danger of assimilation. Compulsory conscription, which brought, in particular, untold suffering upon the "cantonists"—youngsters kidnapped from their homes to be trained for twenty-five years of cruel military service—was one of the most tragic phenomena in

the life of the Jews in the Pale of Settlement, and it left its mark on the collective memory of Russian Jews for many generations.<sup>47</sup>

Rabbi Israel took action on the request of Lithuanian Jewish scholars, who hoped that his ties with wealthy Jews with high-placed connections would be of some avail. Just what he did is not clear, except for the bare fact that his efforts failed. Isaac Zeev Soloveitchik, who was sent to Ruzhin, reported that the zaddik answered him: "What more can I possibly do? I have already done everything that I can; I have indeed sent two letters in my own handwriting to 'Auntie Leah' in this matter, and what more should I do?!"<sup>48</sup> If there is something true in this story, whatever its factual background, the cooperation implied, between the heads of the largest super-communal yeshiva in Lithuania and a renowned young zaddik in Ukraine, is a unique manifestation of intercessory efforts: here were two extracommunal organizations, both of a voluntary nature, working together in a capacity that should have been reserved for the now declining institutions of Jewish autonomy.

As it happens, we possess a bold statement of Rabbi Israel in relation to the issue of compulsory service, expressing his awareness of the responsibility imposed upon him, willy-nilly, to act on behalf of the entire community. Judging from this source—a handwritten report penned during the 1860s by one of Rabbi Israel's hasidim—he considered himself and the other zaddikim as failures, embodiments of a missed opportunity. The frank and harsh style of the text surely enhances its authenticity:

In the second year, when the order was issued to take soldiers from among the Jews, and the decree came in the month of Elul—all these days were days of fasting, weeping, and mourning wherever our brethren the Children of Israel live. For about three or four months, there were almost no travelers, and in Ruzhin too there were no visitors throughout the High Holy Days and the festivals, and our rebbe sat and studied. Sometimes he would enter the kloiz and sit there studying Maimonides and other books. During that time, there came a man who lived in a village near Ruzhin who was one of his associates. He went to the home of our rebbe and found him sitting in his room, preparing himself for the Morning Prayer. . . . And the rebbe asked him: What is happening in the world? And he was silent and answered nothing. He asked him again: What is happening in the world? And he answered: Surely your honor knows . . . that they are taking soldiers from our brethren the Children of Israel?! Our rebbe answered: That I know, but I am asking, what are people saying about it? He fell silent and did not reply. . . . Our Master said to him: I know what they are saying, that the zaddikim of this generation are to be blamed. . . . Why did they allow such a decree to be issued from Heaven? And I say that it is all, as it were, from God's hand, for why has he appointed such zaddikim in this generation? . . . If the Holy One, blessed be He, had appointed good zaddikim and leaders, surely they would not have allowed this decree to be issued. And it is because he appointed us as zaddikim and leaders of

the generation, because of that the decree went forth. Thus I heard from that person himself, to whom he spoke the said holy words.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly, Rabbi Israel was well aware of what people expected from the zaddikim—they were supposed to embody the popular saying: "A zaddik decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, complies."<sup>50</sup> The sorry reality, the inability of the zaddikim to nullify the new law, was seen as a reflection of their inferior spiritual level. Israel, however, does not blame himself or his colleagues, the zaddikim, themselves: he points, as it were, at God Himself, who could have produced worthy zaddikim but preferred this weaker kind.

In his following explanation (not quoted above), Israel likens his times to those of Moses. Then, too, Moses believed that a lowly, unworthy person like himself not only could not carry out the mission that God had given him but might even cause greater damage. He therefore requested that God appoint someone else: "Send through whomever You will send, that is, through whoever is worthy of such a mission." Nevertheless, the Lord chose to perform the miracle of the Exodus through the stammering, halting Moses; and though at first it seemed as though the Israelites' situation had worsened, the redemption ultimately took place. The "power of inferiority"—a concept already referred to, which will appear again as a cornerstone of Rabbi Israel's general outlook—plays a major role in understanding reality and in recognizing the zaddik's role. The sufferings of the present, the helplessness of the spiritual mentors, do not attest to a "decline of generations," but, on the contrary, to a hidden Divine plan. God Himself is, as it were, "guilty," but His motives will be revealed in the future. For the moment, the zaddikim should not sink into depression: they must understand that God Himself assigned them, like Moses in his time, their task, despite their inferiority.

Another case of intercession, of a rather unclear nature, also involved cooperation between the Ukrainian zaddik and circles in far-off parts—the Lubavitch hasidim. Rabbi Israel had good contacts with the admorim of Habad, stemming from the good relations between the founder, Shneur Zalman, and Israel's grandfather Abraham the "Angel."<sup>51</sup> The third admor, Menahem Mendel (Tsemah tsedek), who held Israel in high esteem (although the two had never met), was particularly appreciative of his qualities as an intercessor and communal leader. He therefore sent a distinguished ambassador to Ruzhin, Yitzhak Isaac Halevi Epstein of Homel (d. 1857), in order to collaborate in planning some kind of operation for the public good.

When did the meeting take place and for what purpose? What was the issue concerned—compulsory conscription, or perhaps the question of

government schools, or maybe the decree of modernizing Jewish dress? The available sources do not clarify the matter; all we know is that the visit to the Ruzhin court made a tremendous impression on Rabbi Yitzhak.<sup>52</sup> As we know of no personal involvement of Habad *admorim* in activities of the *zaddikim* to avert either compulsory conscription or modernization of clothing, we may assume that Yitzhak of Homel's mission had something to do with the preparations for the rabbis' assembly of 1843, in which the *admor* Tsemah *tsedek* took a considerable part.

The assembly was convened in Saint Petersburg by the Russian minister of education, Sergei Uvarov, and his Jewish aide, Max Lilienthal, with an eye to finding agreed ways to spread secular knowledge among Russian Jews and to reform education in Jewish schools.<sup>53</sup> Rabbi Israel wielded considerable influence at this assembly, which was also attended by his banker relative Israel Heilperin of Berdichev, who represented circles of Jewish merchants from Volhynia. Although his part in the conference has been completely obscured, and we do not know what he was doing there,<sup>54</sup> we may assume that he represented the conservative positions common to the White Russian and Volhynian *hasidim*; most probably, he made common cause with Schneersohn against the other Jewish delegates, Rabbi Isaac b. Hayyim of Volozhin (representing *mitnagdic* circles from Lithuania) and Bezalel Stern of Odessa (representing the *maskilim* from the provinces of New Russia), who were more inclined to moderation and in fact favored the proposed reforms. If the ties between Habad and Ruzhin indeed became closer in connection with the rabbinical assembly, it may be assumed that the time was the interim period between Rabbi Israel's release from prison and return to Ruzhin (March 1840) and his flight from there (August 1841). This rather mysterious episode cannot be clarified unless new sources are discovered.

## 2. MODERNIZATION OF DRESS AND CONTACTS WITH SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE

In contrast to these rather confined activities, of which, moreover, we have little positive knowledge, Rabbi Israel was the central figure in the campaign against what was known as the "Clothing Decree," that is, the reforms in the Jews' external appearance proposed by the authorities under Nicholas I.<sup>55</sup> Orthodox spokesmen considered this decree a grave threat to traditional values, endangering the coherence of the community, its daily life, and the old social order, as expressed in such external manifestations as clothing and hairstyle. Like earlier Polish thinkers who had sought ways to "reform" the Jews, the Russian authorities detested traditional Jewish dress, which they considered an expression of separatism and a barrier to

any integration of the Jews into mainstream society and the absolutist state, and a decree was therefore published in the Russian Pale of Settlement in 1841 ordering the Jews to adopt the usual clothes of Russian townspeople, cut off their sidelocks, and trim their beards.

Rumors that the Russian government intended to apply the new regulations in Poland as well surfaced as early as 1845, and hasidic circles made plans for intensive action to intercede with the authorities. They put their hopes in the impending visit of the Anglo-Jewish philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore, of which the zaddikim had learned some time before, enabling them to plan their intercession.<sup>56</sup> They supposed that Montefiore, as a devout Jew with leanings toward Orthodoxy, would realize the grave import of the "Clothing Decree" and help to avert it. But how were they to reach him and enlist his cooperation?

The "international network" established in 1845–46 between the zaddikim of Poland and Galicia, on the one hand, and Montefiore in England, on the other, with Rabbi Israel in Bukovina serving as intermediary, attests not only to the determination of those involved but also to the extraterritorial nature of Hasidism and its modern political scope, which ignored national or geographical borders. Although Rabbi Israel was at the time a subject of the Austrian empire, he still considered himself responsible for the fate of the Jews in the Russian empire.<sup>57</sup>

How was contact first established between Rabbi Israel and Montefiore, the new star in the Jewish firmament? To answer this question, we must digress somewhat from the Eastern European arena and turn our attention to the connecting link, namely, international voluntary activities of Jews for the benefit of the Land of Israel and its small Jewish community.

The intermediary was apparently Nisan Bak of Jerusalem. Bak, a hasid who had been associated with the Ruzhin court when his family lived in Berdichev, first met Montefiore in Safed in 1839, during the latter's second trip to Palestine. Montefiore saw in the Baks—Nisan and his father Israel, a famous printer—a model for a new type of entrepreneur, signaling the transition of the "old" Yishuv in Palestine to modern patterns of productivity. He financed Israel Bak's purchase of a new printing machine and invited three young Jerusalemites, of whom Nisan Bak was one, to come to England at his expense and under his protection in 1845 to study weaving.<sup>58</sup>

Nisan made good use of his stay in Western Europe: during his course of study, he also operated as a hasidic emissary, dealing both with the affairs of the Jerusalem branch of Volhynia kolel, which he had headed since its establishment in the early 1840s, and with various missions on behalf of Rabbi Israel, traveling to Sadgora and returning to England. As his co-student Mordekhai Zoref wrote: "Afterwards I heard from Nisan that, while



learning the trade of weaving, he was nevertheless obliged to travel to Russia to complete his mission and notified the nobleman [Montefiore] thereof.”<sup>59</sup> Rabbi Israel, as we shall see later, was the patron of Volhynia kolel and Bak therefore suggested that his rebbe obtain Montefiore’s help in promoting the kolel’s affairs. It was also Bak who proposed appointing Montefiore “president” (Hebrew *nasi*) of the whole hasidic kolel of Palestine. Zoref also reported Bak’s return to England in the early summer of 1845 on behalf of Rabbi Israel “with a letter appointing Sir Moses to be a trustee [Hebrew: *gabbai*] of the Holy Land in England.”<sup>60</sup>

Motivating this appointment was the feeling of the hasidim that Montefiore’s considerable fervor, his self-regard, the economic power behind him, and his political influence would not only revolutionize the ways in which funds were transferred from Eastern Europe to Palestine and substantially increase the flow of contributions, but would also call his attention to other aspects of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Moreover, they were eager to examine alternatives to the traditional channels through which money reached the Holy Land. Until then, the main channels were through either the traditional emissaries (Hebrew *shadarim*), or the modern voluntary Orthodox organization, known as the “*Pekidim ve-amarkalim* [trustees and administrators] of the Holy Land,” headed by a rich Amsterdam Jewish banker, Zevi Hirsch Lehren. The latter exercised sole control over the transfer of funds from Europe to the Land of Israel, which he did efficiently and with attention to every detail. Nisan Bak and Rabbi Israel were aware that the “old” Yishuv was at odds with the contentious Lehren, while the inimical relations between Lehren and Montefiore were an open secret to anyone acquainted with international Jewish politics. As for Rabbi Israel, besides his dislike of Lehren, he, like many others, was captivated by the myth of Montefiore, the belief in his tremendous, worldwide influence, his unlimited financial means, and his efficiency.

Against this background, it is clear that the close contacts between Rabbi Israel and Montefiore, together with the latter’s appointment as the head of “Kolel England,” could not but annoy Lehren, who repeatedly warned the Jews of Palestine against giving Montefiore any official position. Lehren, who took a dim view of the soliciting of contributions by the zaddikim and by independent hasidic emissaries sent from Palestine to Eastern Europe without consulting him, made considerable efforts to gain Rabbi Israel’s confidence. There survives a long series of letters from Lehren to and about Rabbi Israel, from which it transpires that the latter almost never answered his letters; Lehren therefore sought other ways of attracting the zaddik’s attention and getting him to answer.<sup>61</sup> Rabbi Israel and Nisan Bak believed that Montefiore himself was personally interested in competing with Lehren and that, in his ambition to control Jewish life

in the Holy Land, he would seize any opportunity that came his way to supplant his competitor and limit the influence of his organization. Thus, the appointment was a clever, if surprising, political move, and Mordekhai Zoref, himself a representative of the nonhasidic kolel (known as Kolel Perushim), who also enjoyed Montefiore's support, wrote his father in Jerusalem to encourage the *perushim* and Sephardim there not to lag behind, but rather to get together and offer Montefiore a similar appointment on their part.<sup>62</sup>

Zoref reports that Montefiore received contradictory advice about this proposal from two of his associates. Louis Loewe (Eliezer Halevi), his personal secretary and right-hand man, advised him to accept the appointment of the hasidim, noting that it would probably be followed by a similar appointment on the part of the *perushim* and the Sephardim. On the other hand, the banker Louis Cohen cautioned him to wait until he had received written appointments from all communities in the Holy Land, i.e., from all the kolelim. To which Zoref himself added a note: "I myself heartily agreed with this rich man [Cohen]." Indeed, Cohen's counsel was clearly more to his liking; for if Montefiore had agreed with Loewe and immediately accepted Rabbi Israel's initiative, the *perushim* would have been left in the lurch. The acute Loewe, however, understood that the *perushim* could not abandon such an important political and economic position to the hasidim. The implication from Zoref's letter to his father, urging the latter "to publish this matter, and the earlier the better," is that Montefiore was in no hurry, probably believing, like Cohen, that a joint appointment on the part of all the kolelim would lend special force to his standing among the Jews of the Holy Land.

A letter sent by Montefiore to Loewe in November 1845 gives the impression that he was sometime dubious as to Rabbi Israel's ability to collect money and was not particularly cognizant of his stature. Up till then he had viewed the zaddik solely through Nisan Bak's rose-tinted glasses. However, if Israel, "our new acquaintance," proved his ability to collect a sufficiently large amount, Montefiore said, he would then "believe him to be the clever fellow the world gives him credit for [being]."<sup>63</sup>

Montefiore willingly accepted the honors showered upon him by the Volhynian hasidim in Palestine through their patron in Sadgora, regarding them as recognition of his dominant position in the Jewish world on the part of circles with whom he had hitherto had no contact. Before Montefiore's appearance on the Jewish horizon, the hasidim had taken various steps to counter oppressive measures, but these were largely local in nature. This was probably the first time that contact had been made between hasidic leaders in Eastern Europe and a Jewish philanthropist of the Jewish economic elite of Western Europe. The members of this elite,

now occupying a place of increasing importance on the international political scene, took a keen interest in influencing the fate and future of Eastern European Jews; examples to that effect from this period may also be found in the philanthropic activities of Jacques Altaras and the Rothschilds.

It seems plausible that voluntary action in relation to the Land of Israel, with the participation of all sectors of Jewish Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe, was a major factor in the extension of the intercession to other channels as well. In this respect, the hasidic leaders were continuing a long-standing tradition of taking responsibility for the Jewish people as a whole, which was characteristic of the now no longer extant supercommunal establishment. Thus, the Holy Land was the connecting link between the old, traditional world and the upheavals of modernity. It is no accident that Nisan Bak, on the one hand, a loyal hasid and emissary of the “old” stamp, and, on the other, well entrenched in the world of “moderate” Haskalah and familiar with the modern world, was the person who forged the contact between Rabbi Israel and Sir Moses.<sup>64</sup>

We can now return to the Russian government’s attempt to impose modern dress. An opportunity to enlist Montefiore’s help in the struggles of traditional Jewry in Eastern Europe offered itself, as already noted, when his plan to visit Russia in 1846 became known. The visit aroused great expectations, and each sector of the Jewish world—maskilim, hasidim, and mitnagdim—hoped that the renowned philanthropist would help it to realize its own vision and recommend it to the Russian authorities. Reality, needless to say, was rather different. The personal encounter with Montefiore, the gap between his image and his actual views and actions, disappointed many people.<sup>65</sup> But at this point, however, the Polish zaddikim did not know how to contact Montefiore and were loath to do so without appropriate mediation. Rabbi Israel took upon himself the task and initiated the composition of an appeal, which was supposed to bear the signatures of the most distinguished hasidic leaders of Poland and Galicia. This initiative is mentioned in a letter from Aryeh Leib Lipschutz of Brigal (d. 1846), a well-known rabbi and halakhic authority, to the zaddik Shalom of Kaminka.

Rabbi Aryeh had never met Rabbi Israel but, like many others, he had heard of his saintliness and sagacity. He had received a letter from Rabbi Shalom, from which he understood that Rabbi Israel wished him to prepare a “Letter of intercession for our brethren the Children of Israel in the state of Russia,” to be presented to Montefiore. The humble Lipschutz, a complete novice in public affairs, was astounded at the request. He sought the advice of Rabbi Hayyim of Zanz, who told him, on the basis of talks he had had with Rabbi Israel, that Lipschutz had indeed misunderstood the Sadgora zaddik’s intentions, and that Israel’s original plan had been to

send Montefiore a letter of intercession signed by about fifteen zaddikim from Poland and Galicia; Rabbi Aryeh had just been asked to add his signature.<sup>66</sup> In the end, however, the plan materialized only in part, and the letter was signed by Polish zaddikim only.

It might seem rather surprising that the moving spirit behind this affair was a zaddik whose domicile was quite distant from Poland. Moreover, Rabbi Israel, himself in favor of some moderate reform in the Jewish image, wore clean, modern clothing and disapproved of long sidelocks.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, he willingly shouldered the burden, sensing a responsibility for Eastern European Jewry in general, which, as far as he was concerned, was a single cultural unit; in addition, many of his hasidim, not having moved with him to Sadgora, were still in Russia. Israel and his sons themselves wore modern clothing and "dressed as noblemen";<sup>68</sup> and there is a Ruzhin tradition that when Menahem Mendel of Lubavitch (Tsemah tsedek) appealed to him to cooperate in the efforts to have the forced modernization decree revoked, he answered: "The patriarch Jacob received the blessings [from his father Isaac] while dressed in Esau's clothing."<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that Israel, who distrusted the Russian government's intentions in the extreme, was opposed to any extraneous attempt to force the Jews to change their traditional mode of dress. He understood that it was nothing but an excuse for embarking on a comprehensive secularization project, a mere prelude to a systematic campaign to eradicate the Jewish religion.

On Rabbi Israel's initiative, five distinguished Polish zaddikim convened in Warsaw on September 19, 1845, headed by Isaac of Warka and Isaac Meir of Gur (then still in Warsaw), both of whom had already met Rabbi Israel. The zaddikim phrased a written plea to Montefiore, which was presented as a follow-up to a letter Rabbi Israel had previously sent from Sadgora; the new letter begged Montefiore to contact the imperial court at Saint Petersburg and try "to abolish the harsh decrees, God save us, from his brethren from our country of Poland and from the provinces of Russia." Not content to await Sir Moses' arrival in Poland, the zaddikim dispatched Israel Binenfeld of Krakow as a special messenger to explain their position personally and report certain things that could not be committed to writing for fear of government censorship. Montefiore was requested to co-opt their emissary, described as "an educated man, well-versed in the affairs of our country," as a member of his mission to Saint Petersburg.<sup>70</sup>

The high regard in which the leaders of Polish Hasidism held Montefiore and their ostensible willingness to travel to London themselves, were it possible, "but what shall we do, for that is impossible for the great fear we have here; and a word to the wise must suffice"; the choice of

Binenfeld, who personified a combination of Hasidism and modernity, as their representative; and the extensive network of intercessory activities that the Polish zaddikim directed inward, at nonhasidic scholars and the wealthy, assimilationist Jewish oligarchy in Warsaw—all these were indications that the spokesmen of traditional society had launched a two-pronged operation: (i) intercession directed outward, at the gentile authorities—a highly effective type of action, reserved for professional Orthodox *shtadlanim*, or emissaries working for the public benefit (like Binenfeld), or people from outside the world of traditional society (such as Montefiore), who were “allowed” to act in an “irregular” fashion; and (ii) inward-directed intercession, aimed at uniting disparate sectors and camps within Jewish society—this was the preferred method of the zaddikim. Figures like Montefiore, as well as maskilim and non-observant, even assimilated Jews, were considered a legitimate object of such activity; it was permissible to appease and even to flatter them in order to enlist their efforts on behalf of the Jewish people as a whole.<sup>71</sup>

Rabbi Israel’s preliminary letter to Montefiore, referred to in the letter from the Polish zaddikim, has not survived; but a second letter, sent on September 24, 1845, only a few days after the Polish leaders’ missive, notes that it repeats the message of the first:

Behold, I venture to speak, to arouse His Excellency’s good heart, that he should agree . . . to intercede in favor of our brethren, the Children of Israel, who are in distress. I have therefore come once again to plead with His Excellency. Let him not hearken to the noisy voices of slanderers, who invent in their imagination things that do not exist. Let my words be believed . . . as they are spoken in truth and in innocence for the good of the public and the individual. . . . And inasmuch as our brethren the Children of Israel in Russia are steeped in the darkest gloom, overwhelmed by troubles and hardships . . . their hands are tied and they are unable to write, and they are powerless to voice their distress.<sup>72</sup>

Rabbi Israel went on to describe the sufferings of Russian Jews, explaining the measures being taken by the hasidim to intercede and noting, no doubt in light of his own experience as a former prisoner, that the Russian authorities were open to such activities, and particularly to bribery: “For I know the customs of that country and salvation [of its Jews] may be achieved by way of intercession. . . . It has been thus many times.”

In order to convince Montefiore, the prime figure in these plans, of the justice of their plea, the Polish zaddikim instructed Binenfeld to travel to London. He set out from Krakow around September 22 and arrived in London, carrying the letters from these zaddikim and from Rabbi Israel. He immediately approached Sir Moses in writing, requesting an audience. At the same time, he met with the British chief rabbi, Nathan Adler, and received from the latter a letter of recommendation to Montefiore, who

agreed to receive Binenfeld on November 16.<sup>73</sup> On his way back, Binenfeld brought a letter from Montefiore to Rabbi Israel (which has not survived). The latter was quick to write a reply, which he sent on January 29, 1846, by mail together with "copies of the harsh decrees . . . both those already issued in this country, and there are further decrees that are still being planned by the rulers and could not be copied." Rabbi Israel's letter contains an interesting statement, which is typical of the new Jewish Orthodoxy then taking shape in Eastern and Central Europe:

Indeed, some of them are decrees, which, as His Excellency says, seem to be for the good, such as the decree relating to the schools. But I, observing from afar, am sure that the decrees are specifically intended to damage and violate the law of our holy Torah, to cause desertion of the Jewish faith. In particular, for our sins, in these times, when the sinners of Israel themselves desire this. For we have seen this recently in regard to a slight decree promulgated to change Jewish clothing, which the rulers are doing in relation to the law of the holy Torah, and how much more so with other decrees.<sup>74</sup>

In other words, while Montefiore was not supportive of the view of the zaddikim, believing some of the reforms to be positive and indeed necessary, the fact that the Russian authorities themselves, enjoying the support of the maskilim ("the sinners of Israel"), saw a connection between this "slight decree" and the Jewish religion as a whole was a warning signal and should have shown that the hasidic position was correct. The uncompromising stand of the hasidic camp on what sometimes seemed like insignificant reforms stemmed from the assumption that, once such compromises were accepted, the road would be open to utter destruction of the basic tenets of Judaism.

The hasidic efforts to secure revocation of the "Clothing Decree" ended in complete failure. The attempt to enlist a broad coalition of all Jewish circles in Warsaw, then the center of political operations, was in vain. Opinions even as to the need to put up a fight were divided, not only between the hasidim and the more moderate who favored the reforms, but also within the hasidic camp itself. Prominent zaddikim, such as Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, argued that the struggle had no chance of success. Moreover, the real meeting with Montefiore was a great disappointment: they found that, contrary to their expectations, Sir Moses was very much in favor of the initiatives to reform traditional Jewish dress.<sup>75</sup>

The decree instructing Jews to modernize their clothing was published in Warsaw on July 2, 1846. Jews who might find its implementation difficult were allowed a few years of grace (until the end of 1849), but were required to pay a special annual tax. However, religious functionaries, the poor and the elderly were exempted to some extent (for example, they

were permitted to wear the traditional clothing in synagogue on Sabbaths and festivals). The full implementation of the reform was postponed several times, and the authorities habitually turned a blind eye. But even the partial execution of the order shook the foundations of traditional Jewish society. Beards and sidelocks were cut and trimmed in public in Warsaw; long clothes were shortened within full view of jeering crowds. Protests on the part of all circles, in particular against the cruel enforcing of the regulations, increased (Isaac Meir of Gur was actually imprisoned for a few days on charges of anti-government incitement), but to no avail. In 1851, the decree was enforced in full. Little by little, the Jews of Warsaw became accustomed to the new garb. At the same time, the enforced costume was “sanctified” in a typical process of assimilation, becoming “Jewish” in every sense of the word. Jews who refused to adapt to the reforms and were unable to secure an exemption or pay the fine incurred by violation of the law went into hiding or fled the country.<sup>76</sup>

Montefiore’s views of the reforms, whether Rabbi Israel knew of them or not, did not prevent the zaddik from maintaining his contacts with the philanthropist, which continued after the latter had returned from his trip to Russia. He even planned to meet Rabbi Israel in Vienna on January 1847 and to discuss his proposals and requests personally, but the meeting never took place, and the two never met.<sup>77</sup>

### 3. COOPERATION WITH MASKILIM:

#### THE CASE OF ISAAC BER LEVINSOHN

Although the maskilim were generally inimical toward and critical of Rabbi Israel in particular and Hasidism in general, relations were on occasion more relaxed, and there were even cases of cooperation between the two groups. Now and again, one finds Rabbi Israel acting as a real leader, capable of transcending narrow group interests and seeking a unifying common denominator, temporarily ignoring the differences.

Rabbi Israel’s ties with the famous maskil Isaac Ber Levinsohn of Kremenets provide a unique, almost unprecedented, manifestation of relations between Hasidism and Haskalah in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>78</sup> Levinsohn was one of the most eloquent and balanced representatives of moderate Haskalah in Russia. Nevertheless, his sharp criticism of Hasidism, which he defined as “poisoned water,” was aimed specifically at the conduct of zaddikim like Rabbi Israel, who had, in his view, corrupted and debased Jewish society. He expressed his anti-hasidic views both in his programmatic books (especially in *Beit Yehudah*) and in his satire (particularly *Emek refa'im*). Among other things, he appealed to the Russian government to close down Hebrew printing presses so as to prevent the pub-

lication of hasidic literature, which, he believed, disseminated negative and conservative ideas and so obstructed reform of Jewish society. The "regal" brand of Hasidism, with its glorification of wealth and opulence, symbolized for Levinsohn degradation of the Torah and the degeneration of contemporary zaddikim. The remedy lay in doing away with "expensive silk clothes, silver and gold and jewels . . . costly objects and . . . splendid carriages."<sup>79</sup>

Against this background, it is surprising to find evidence of Rabbi Israel's support for Levinsohn's work. A footnote to the latter's preface to the second edition of his notable book *Te'udah be-Israel* reads as follows:

This book was the first candle lighting the way of Haskalah here in this country for our brethren the Children of Israel. . . . Moreover, some of the greatest rabbis of the hasidim in this country, who generally reject such new books, also praised it, and honored me with letters of thanks. . . . Chief among them was my relative the late Israel Riziner, a great, famous, and pious rabbi, who lived at the end of his days in Sadgora in the province of Galicia.<sup>80</sup>

Not only do we learn here that Rabbi Israel, together with "some of the greatest rabbis of the hasidim,"<sup>81</sup> lent his support to a work generally considered the main manifesto of the Haskalah movement in Russia,<sup>82</sup> but Levinsohn declares that the zaddik was actually his relative! Although I have not been able to determine the kinship between these two so diametrically opposed figures, there is no reason to doubt the veracity of this statement, which was published during Levinsohn's lifetime (he died in 1860). On the contrary, it seems probable that the connection was suppressed and concealed by both parties, neither of them being particularly proud of such a relative.<sup>83</sup> In fact, in a personal letter to Joseph Perl, Levinsohn explicitly ridiculed Israel's father, Shalom Shakhna,<sup>84</sup> and he derided Israel himself on numerous occasions (though without ever referring to him by name). We have no evidence of the relationship other than this one footnote by Levinsohn. The exaggerated politeness and admiring adjectives ("great, famous, and pious rabbi") used of his relative, whose behavior and actions he so deplored, were not, apparently, merely due to tactical or conventional considerations; after all, instead of publicly taking pride in his relationship with the zaddik, Levinsohn could have concealed the fact and expressed his gratitude in some other way.

The second edition of *Te'udah be-Israel* was published, not in the wake of any exceptional literary success, but because it was selected by the Russian authorities as a compulsory textbook in all Jewish schools. The book contained a few anti-hasidic utterances. For example, Levinsohn fiercely attacked the works of Nahman of Braslav and the hagiographic book *Shivhei ha-Besht*, sneered at the custom of bringing pidyonot to the



zaddikim, and ridiculed believers in the ability of zaddikim to exorcise demons by smoking pipes, excessive drinking, and storytelling.<sup>85</sup> Had Rabbi Israel read the first edition of *Te'udah be-Isra'el*, which was received with great annoyance in hasidic circles,<sup>86</sup> before he supported the second edition? If so, did he agree with its content, or did he simply ignore what were for him problematic passages and concentrate on its more favorable points? Was the support merely moral, or also financial? And should one perhaps attribute it, not to the ideas expressed in the book (which was provided with approbations by other Torah scholars, including Rabbi Abraham Abale of Vilna), but to the author's kinship with Rabbi Israel, which prompted him to help his impoverished relative? It is also worth noting that, like most Ukrainian maskilim, Levinsohn had been a hasid himself in his youth. In a letter to Joseph Perl, he confessed: "When I read therein [i.e., in Perl's *Megaleh temirin*], I imagine that I am living in a congregation of hasidim, and I remember the days of yore, when I was flesh of their flesh and a comrade of these corrupt people."<sup>87</sup>

But that is not the whole story. It turns out that Rabbi Israel assisted his relative once again, not only with a "letter of thanks" but with tangible, material aid. In 1832, Levinsohn published an apologetic tract titled *Efes damim* ("No Blood"), in which he refuted the blood libel—a few cases had surfaced in the region in those years. In this book, which enjoyed considerable success and was even translated to other languages,<sup>88</sup> internal Jewish disputes were glossed over, bringing out instead a broad consensus of opinion among the different camps; there were practically no anti-hasidic sentiments. We in fact have independent evidence of Rabbi Israel's support for the book in an approbation written by Rabbi Moses Berenblum of Konstantin Yashan, on February 27, 1835, presumably with the knowledge of Rabbi Israel and Levinsohn, who were still both alive at the time. He wrote:

So let us express our gratitude to the friend of God, and our friend . . . Isaac Ber Levinsohn of Kremenets, whose practice it has always been to embark on a worthy cause with all his soul and his might, to lend his support to our brethren the Children of Israel, and he has taken upon himself a holy burden, importuned by several scholarly rabbis and several rich men of Lithuania and Byelorussia. . . . And those rich men have promised to render him support for the expense of translating the book into other languages and printing. . . . But the very small amounts of money that they sent at the start . . . were not sufficient even for one-third of the expenses. . . . And moreover the great and renowned, pious rabbi Israel of Ruzhin has sent some aid and a worthy letter to that scholar on this matter, for I have personally viewed his holy letter, and surely his example will be followed by all those who shelter in the shadow of that pious rabbi, for who is he who has seen such people issuing forth and has not himself issued forth.<sup>89</sup>

Here, then, is reliable evidence that the book was commissioned by scholarly circles in Lithuania and White Russia, who also promised the author financial aid. But as Levinsohn soon discovered, this aid was not forthcoming. Among the few supporters of the book before its publication was Rabbi Israel, who also sent a laudatory letter (which Berenblum personally saw) and a monetary contribution. It seems very probable that the zaddik's support was provided through his wealthy banker relative Jacob Joseph Heilperin of Berdichev,<sup>90</sup> who, contrary to his image as a fanatical opponent of Haskalah, was in fact positively inclined toward moderate Haskalah and even rendered material assistance to various maskilim, for which he earned their gratitude.<sup>91</sup> Thus, Rabbi Israel is mentioned in a positive tone, as an example to be emulated, with a call to all his admirers to follow suit and open their pockets. The book is presented as a work of general Jewish interest, around which all Jewish circles in Russia—maskilim, rich laymen, scholars, and hasidim—could readily band together and pool efforts to have it published.

At first sight, the surprising connection between two such seemingly disparate figures may be explained against the background of their tacit agreement as to the concept and goal of intercession. As far as Rabbi Israel was concerned, the connection was limited to the funds provided for the publication of Levinsohn's apologetic works. That these books, especially *Efes damim*, served the general Jewish interest in Russia was agreed upon by the zaddikim as well, although they dared not say so in public. Rabbi Israel could see Levinsohn (and also Montefiore) in the same light as others saw him: an intercessor, or shtadlan, working for the public benefit. Such intercession for the good of the entire community, such as refutation of the blood libel or explanation of Jewish positions to the outside world, could readily blur internal differences and present the common interest of the Jewish community as a whole, regardless of its divisions.

There is a strong element of modernity here, for the traditional image of the intercessor had already been considerably modified. The old-style shtadlan had been allowed to stray only temporarily from the accepted norms of the traditional society, adapting himself and his mode of operation to the nature of his objective. The new-style intercessor was no longer necessarily part and parcel of traditional society. Although he did consider himself a faithful representative of that society, he did not subordinate himself to its authority, but rather expressed an interest in aiding it by reforming it. Traditional society did not consider him a legitimate member of itself, and since he regularly departed from its norms, he could not properly represent it. Rabbi Israel had no scruples about enlisting Levinsohn's assistance, although the latter certainly did not recognize the authority of rabbis and zaddikim. When Israel did so, it was merely a temporary mea-

sure, required at that particular time as protection from an outside force threatening general Jewish interests; it by no means implied legitimization. From now on, this flexible definition of intercession was to characterize the contacts of Jewish Orthodoxy with the ruling authorities and other influential elements, both inside and outside the Jewish community.<sup>92</sup>

From Levinsohn's point of view, taking money from hasidim did not create an ethical dilemma. Although in his heart of hearts he despised them, in his literary campaigns, he considered himself a representative or emissary of all groups and sectors of the Jewish people.<sup>93</sup> Of course, in his writings, he avoided any emphasis on controversies, blunted the barbs of his characteristic anti-hasidic polemic (although not eschewing it entirely, as we have seen) and painted an idyllic, harmonic picture.<sup>94</sup>

#### *IV. Working for the Land of Israel*

There is a wealth of material relating to efforts made for the welfare of the Jewish communities in the Holy Land. Rabbi Israel was particularly active in patronage of the large, important Volhynia kolel, which represented the Ruzhin hasidim in the Land of Israel, and in various initiatives toward building and development, first among which was the building of the Ruzhin hasidim's synagogue in Jerusalem, later named Tiferet Israel.

##### I. THE VOLHYNIA KOLEL

From their inception, hasidic communities in Palestine were dependent for their livelihood on money collected among Diaspora Jews. The different hasidic groups were combined from the start in a single organizational framework (Kolel Reisen), whose task was to centralize the collection of funds and control their distribution—the *halukkah*. The protracted disputes that broke out in Tiberias and Safed between arrivals from different territories of origin finally created a schism toward the end of the eighteenth century. Hasidim from Volhynia and Poland, who felt that they had been discriminated against in the existing division of funds, decided to separate from their fellows from Lithuania and White Russia and establish their own kolel, which would be based on collecting "Land of Israel money" in their countries and districts of origin and take their own interests into account. This kolel is known in the sources as Volhynia kolel, or Kolel hasidim, and it soon became the largest and richest of the hasidic kolelim in the Holy Land. The schism was based on a local-geographical principle, which later became the cornerstone—but also a stumbling block—for the organization of halukkah funds. Volhynia hasidim in Palestine began to dispatch separate emissaries to their countries of origin

and to appoint prominent personalities of their community to act for the Jews in the Holy Land and to supervise the collection of contributions.<sup>95</sup>

The largest hasidic community in Palestine until the 1820s was that of Tiberias. However, whether because of bitter disputes between the two hasidic kolelim, or owing to the belligerent personality of the leader of Kolel Reisen, Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk (d. 1810), Tiberias was eclipsed and the center moved to Safed, which became the linchpin of the community of Volhynian hasidim in the Holy Land. Beginning in the second half of the 1830s, the Volhynia kolel became the active responsibility of Israel of Ruzhin and his descendants. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the hasidic community in Safed became the administrative and human center of the Volhynia kolel (the kolel of Volhynian hasidim in Jerusalem was not established until the early 1840s). The kolel was made up primarily of hasidic families of Russian nationality, originating in the provinces of Ukraine. They maintained their loyalty to the important hasidic courts of that region, such as Chernobyl, Ruzhin, and their offshoots. In time, the kolel frameworks broadened to include hasidim from the provinces of New Russia and Bessarabia, as well as those who were Austrian subjects from Galicia and Bukovina. In the course of the nineteenth century, the kolel experienced numerous mergers and splits, along the lines of parallel schisms in Eastern European Hasidism; but it generally retained its position as the largest and richest kolel in the "old" Yishuv and maintained its association with the zaddikim of the Sadgora dynasty.<sup>96</sup>

Rabbi Israel's association with the kolel was manifest, not only in the prestige that it derived merely from his readiness to head it and act as its patron, but also in his explicit involvement in its affairs: he sent letters and dispatched emissaries; helped emissaries from the Holy Land to the Diaspora; organized collections of funds in regions "under his control" and coordinated them with zaddikim in other regions; sent money to Palestine with instructions for its distribution; negotiated with Jewish philanthropists on behalf of the kolel; settled disputes; and so on. This was not something he could do in his spare time: his work for the kolel and the hasidic community in the Holy Land—an impressive external expression of the zaddik's power and position—took up much of his time. For example, out of his approximately thirty letters that have survived at random, about one-third are concerned with these issues.<sup>97</sup>

Traditions differ as to the person from whom Rabbi Israel "inherited" the patronage, or "presidency" of the Volhynia kolel.<sup>98</sup> As we shall see presently, Holy Land affairs were never the exclusive province of a single zaddik; they were managed jointly by several "famous" zaddikim of the time and the region. Any use of the "inheritance" concept is largely anachronistic; indeed, it seems that the title of "president" is merely a sign

of the tendency, typical of late hasidic historiography, to organize and centralize the past. We know of no authentic document from the first half of the nineteenth century in which the title appears. Only from the 1870s onward, when the hasidic kolelim began to break up and a process of atomization set in, did the use of the title become common, particularly when hasidic leaders vied among themselves for the right to use it.<sup>99</sup>

The real situation may be deduced from a letter sent in 1836 by Joseph b. Shabbetai, a nonhasidic immigrant from Kalish, Poland, who had settled in Safed. Writing to his family, who had stayed behind in the Diaspora, he described the hasidic network of collection, as well as the sources of income and independent machinery of emissaries maintained by the hasidim:

The funds . . . are provided by three important men who live abroad. One is the great rabbi . . . Moses of Savran; the second, the rabbi . . . Israel of Ruzhin; the third, the rabbi . . . Yossel of Rashkov. These three rabbis are engaged in this mitzvah. That is, emissaries are sent to them from here [Safed], and the rabbis attach to these emissaries important people of their own and they travel around the communities of Russia, Podolia, Walachia, and other provinces and collect donations for the Land of Israel. The money that is collected is brought back to the Land of Israel by the emissaries before Rosh Hashanah or soon afterwards, and then the money is distributed according to the number of people. . . . This group [the hasidim] has income from houses purchased by rich people abroad so that they should have a territorial portion in the Holy Land, and they put them at the disposal of their leaders. They rent out these houses and the rent is also distributed according to the number of people. . . . In addition, rich people send special contributions, called "Sabbath money," which are distributed only to the poor.<sup>100</sup>

This account tells us something of the varied sources of income and livelihood of Jews in Palestine: regular collection of donations in the Diaspora by teams of emissaries, including both emissaries from Palestine itself and local representatives authorized to do so by the zaddikim; funds and properties, income from which was sent to Palestine; and special contributions from the rich ("Sabbath money"). These types of income were almost exactly the same as those of the perushim, as described by Joseph of Kalish further on in his letter. We also learn that the Safed hasidim maintained close contacts with Rabbi Israel and his court at Ruzhin, and that the responsibility for the collection of Holy Land funds in southern Russia was held jointly by three major hasidic leaders. However, this situation was about to change. The rebbe of Savran died late in 1837; around that time, Rabbi Israel was caught up in the Ushits affair; and the rebbe of Rashkov died also around the same time. Rabbi Israel was able to resume his interest in the kolel's affairs only after he had settled in Sadgora—and then he was on his own, bearing the burden alone.

A striking example of Rabbi Israel's interest in controlling the hasidic

community in the Holy Land and directing its development may be found in a letter written, most probably, after the earthquake that devastated Safed early in 1837, and addressed to the members and officials of the kolel there. The implication in the letter is that, in view of the difficult economic situation of the Jewish community in Palestine, Rabbi Israel had decided to limit the number of hasidic immigrants:

I hereby venture to decree to my brethren, the Children of Israel abroad, that they should not, Heaven forbid, set a man to travel to the Holy Land from this day on, until he prepares sufficient livelihood for himself and his family for a period of three consecutive years, not counting the expense prior to his arrival in the Holy Land. . . . Therefore, I decree absolutely and empower the officials, from this day on, not to give one penny from the halukkah to any newcomer for a period of three consecutive years, unless he brings with him my signed agreement.<sup>101</sup>

In other words, Rabbi Israel required any hasid immigrating to Safed who sought money from the kolel (immigrants who did not avail themselves of such funds were rare) to obtain his signed agreement. It seems improbable that this demand was fulfilled, and we indeed have no further information in that respect. However, the letter demonstrates the nature of Rabbi Israel's public leadership: sensitivity to the difficult economic conditions prevailing in the Holy Land, prompting him to take a rational, pragmatic, and responsible stand that accorded well with his ambition and desire for centralized control.

Rabbi Israel's move to Austrian Bukovina caused no change in his position and his responsibility for the hasidic kolel in the Holy Land. Immediately after settling down in Sadgora, he resumed his dealings with the affairs of the Jewish community in Palestine, in fact, more vigorously, thanks to the consolidation of his internal hasidic position in Eastern Europe and the steady increase in the membership of the kolel in the Land of Israel. He had the authority to appoint officials (on the strength of which he made Montefiore "president" of the kolel), to distribute honors, and to settle arguments and arbitrate in the constant altercations regarding the halukkah. Representatives of the different kolelim all came to the court at Sadgora to present their pleas and request his arbitration.<sup>102</sup>

An important document from the end of 1849—one year before Rabbi Israel's death—has survived, which lists the names of the persons authorized by the Austrian government to collect funds in Galicia for the residents of Palestine. The official request for permission to launch a campaign was presented to the government by the veteran printer Israel Bak, who traveled to Galicia to collect funds for the kolel and for the building of a special synagogue for the community in Jerusalem (see below). The positive response of the governor of Galicia, Count Agenor Goluchowski, who

permitted the collection of donations through the district rabbis, demonstrates the authorities' efforts to maintain a balance among the different sectors of Orthodox society: three of the appointed officials were well-known rabbis not identified with Hasidism, and the other three were all renowned zaddikim. Reference is made to an authorized collector of funds from Potok named "F. Schuller," who was appointed in the district of Chortkov-Kolomea. It will be remembered that Rabbi Israel had bought a large estate in Potik Zloty, and it is highly probable that this Schuller was none other than Rabbi Israel or his son Shalom (the letter "F" stands for "Friedman," and "Schuller" is probably a corruption of "Schulem," i.e., Shalom). The letter goes on to state that all money was transferred from Lemberg to Beirut by Schuller and thence to the halukkah in Palestine.<sup>103</sup>

Another piece of information, also associated with Bak's journey, appears in a memorandum sent by Count Joseph Pizzamano, Austrian vice-consul in Jerusalem, in July 1849. Pizzamano provides a brief account of the Jewish community in Jerusalem. One group is described as "the community of the hasidim, two-thirds made up of Galicians; their chief rabbi is situated in Sadgora in Bukovina, and they collect their charity funds through their own emissaries in Galicia."<sup>104</sup> The "chief rabbi" is, of course, Rabbi Israel, for the memorandum was written about six months before his death. It also follows from this source that, as early as 1843, the Volhynia hasidim had purchased land to build a synagogue. Since then, they had amassed the necessary materials and funds; only the refusal of the Ottoman authorities to grant them a permit was holding up the building.

As to the number of the kolel's members and their affinity with the center at Sadgora, we have a report describing the different groups making up the Ashkenazi Jewish groups in Palestine, dating from 1856, by Ludwig August Frankl, an Austrian Jew, who observes of the Volhynia hasidim:

The members of this community are natives of Volhynia, of the province of Moldavia and Bessarabia, and have been residents of Safed and Tiberias for some time now, and for the past twelve or sixteen years, they have established themselves and settled as a community in Jerusalem. The seat of the headquarters of these three holy cities is in Berdichev and Sadgora in the province of Bukovina, and there is also the seat of their spiritual mentor.<sup>105</sup>

Frankl, who was acquainted with the Bak family, estimated the Volhynia hasidim to be the second largest group in the Yishuv, judging from the financial returns of the Volhynia kolel, which were less than those of the kolel of the perushim but more than those of the Austrian kolel (which split off from the Volhynia kolel in the early 1850s), Kolel Habad, Kolel Warsaw, or the Dutch and German Kolel Hod.

Other sources confirm that Berdichev (most of whose hasidim were af-

filiated with Ruzhin), in Russia, and Sadgora, in Austria, were the main centers where funds were concentrated and sent off to the Volhynia hasidim in Palestine. A secret Russian report of June 1861 refers to a hasid named Gedaliah Reznik collecting contributions raised in the Lipowiec district and sending them out of Russia to Sadgora in Austria, the home of Abraham Jacob Friedman, son of the former rabbi of Ruzhin. Reznik had procured a special passport and took the money to Sadgora by way of the border post at Husyatin. Other hasidim sent the money to Berdichev, whence it was relayed to Yankel Friedman in Sadgora, who dispatched it to Jerusalem "to rebuild the temple for the Messiah and also to give charity to poor Jews."<sup>106</sup> Presumably, the Heilperin family bank in Berdichev was also involved to some extent in this transfer of funds.

There is abundant evidence that Rabbi Israel maintained his links with the Volhynia kolel even after settling at Sadgora. The implication is significant: despite the shift of the center from Volhynia, in Russia, to Bukovina, in Austria, the kolel not only retained its "historical" name but remained loyal to the Volhynian hasidim. Here we have yet another demonstration of the fact that Hasidism as a movement was not confined to any one territory, so that border changes and political upheavals did not necessarily influence its development. In addition, Rabbi Israel's move to Sadgora was not voluntary, but took place under duress. Most of the former hasidim continued to live in Russia, and the zaddik was naturally eager to stay in contact with them. At the same time, as Rabbi Israel accommodated himself to his new geographical circumstances, the kolel in the Holy Land also extended its membership, now also admitting hasidim from Galicia, Bukovina, and Moldavia.

After Rabbi Israel's death, the patronage of the hasidic kolel passed to his son Shalom Joseph. We possess a document, printed in Jerusalem in 1851, bearing the signatures of over one hundred and fifty Sadgora hasidim in Palestine accepting his leadership.<sup>107</sup> Rabbi Shalom died in the late summer of 1851, and his position was taken over by his brother Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, who held it for more than thirty years.

## 2. BUILDING PROJECTS

Rabbi Israel's association with the hasidic community in Palestine is intimately bound up with the major role played by Israel Bak and his son Nisan, the hasidic printers from Berdichev, who, officially or otherwise, represented the interests of Ruzhin Hasidism in the Holy Land. In 1840 or 1841, the family moved from Galilee to Jerusalem and, together with Rabbi Aaron Moses of Kamenets (d. 1845), founded the Volhynia kolel of Jerusalem, which they headed.<sup>108</sup> Thanks to Israel Bak's appointment as



acting consul of Walachia (then under Ottoman rule), he had contacts that helped him in transferring funds from abroad.<sup>109</sup> As heads of the kolel, both father and son paid several visits to Sadgora. Nisan's activities in the service of Ruzhin Hasidism peaked in 1869, during the major Zanz-Sadgora controversy: on his initiative, a ban was proclaimed at the Western Wall of the Temple Compound against Rabbi Hayyim of Zanz, arousing much agitation throughout the Jewish world.<sup>110</sup>

The Bak family's building initiatives were in various areas, including education, health care, and religion, and they were generally inspired and supported by the Sadgora zaddikim. In 1844, the hasidim were already cooperating with the Sephardim in establishing a Jewish hospital—the first of its kind in Jerusalem—in open confrontation with Lehren and his Amsterdam organization's officials, who opposed the plan.<sup>111</sup> In 1856, the Volhynia hasidim (again together with the Sephardim, in opposition to the perushim) gave their vigorous support to the abovementioned Ludwig Frankl, who had been sent to establish a “reformed” school (later known as the “Laemel school”) in Jerusalem.<sup>112</sup> Two years earlier, in 1853 or 1854, the Sadgora hasidim purchased a plot of land in the old city of Jerusalem for a synagogue. They took this step after Rabbi Israel had expressed an explicit desire for his hasidim to hold their own prayer services rather than worship together with other hasidic communities. This follows from a letter he wrote to the leaders of the kolel in September 1844:

I have recently received the deed of purchase for the purchase of a place in the Holy City of Jerusalem, to build there a synagogue and other things required for the settlement of Jerusalem. This pleased me very much; that the Lord, blessed be He, has fulfilled my desire, for it is my desire and my will that there should be a special synagogue for all [our] hasidim to pray there, adult and child, together. But I protest at your laxity in regard to such a great mitzvah, that the building has not yet begun. Therefore I am writing this letter to urge you to make immediate efforts to build the synagogue with all dispatch, and I hereby send you the sum of two hundred and fifty rubles. As to the rest that you will need for building the synagogue . . . you must borrow up to a few hundred gold coins.<sup>113</sup>

The construction itself was fraught with difficulties, both in procuring a special building permit from the Ottoman authorities (it was granted only in February 1859) and in accumulating the considerable funds required (beginning with the large contribution sent by Rabbi Israel himself and culminating some thirty years later in a tremendous financial effort by his son Abraham Jacob of Sadgora and a contribution from the Sassoons of Baghdad). The synagogue was dedicated in a festive ceremony on the Sabbath after the Fast of the Ninth of Av in August 1872. The magnificent building, considered one of the most beautiful in Jerusalem, was officially named Tiferet Israel, after Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, but was popularly

known as the "Nisan Bak Synagogue," after the hasidic communal leader whose devotion had brought the project to completion. It was destroyed during Israel's War of Independence in 1948 and never rebuilt. The traditions about its protracted construction are shrouded in hagiographic mist. Rabbi Israel was said to have waged a "war" against his sworn enemy, Czar Nicholas I, who supposedly wished to build a church on the same site. A charming story is also told of Emperor Franz Josef's visit to Jerusalem in 1869. The Austrian emperor, amused by Nisan Bak's witty comment that the building, which still lacked a roof, had "taken off its hat to the emperor," donated 1,000 francs to complete the dome.<sup>114</sup>

### *V. Conclusion: Rabbi Israel as a Leader*

The zaddik Zevi Hirsch of Liszka used to end his Torah teaching with a special prayer: "May it be Your will that the strength of Israel and the strength of the Torah be exalted speedily in our days, Amen. And he told me . . . that by 'strength of Israel' he was also referring to the house of the saintly Rabbi Israel, of blessed memory."<sup>115</sup>

The dozens of examples cited and examined in this chapter confirm not only Rabbi Israel's "political" role but also the prestige he earned in many and varied circles, particularly among zaddikim and hasidim. We do not have information about all the details of his activity and actions as a leader; presumably, many of them have disappeared into oblivion and cannot be reconstructed. Nevertheless, what we do know of the extensive network of appointments that he controlled, of his intercession and diplomatic activity on behalf of the Jewish community, of the accumulation of funds for his court and for his faithful in Palestine, and of the building and organizational projects that he promoted gives a clear picture of intense involvement in communal matters, of a strong awareness of the link between his wealth and legitimization of his political authority, influence, and power. Rabbi Israel was always concerned to uphold his reputation and consolidate his position, both materially and spiritually. As a zaddik also gifted with considerable organizational talents, he attached importance to such matters and worked hard, with much success, to extend the limits of his community, quantitatively and geographically, and to rebuild it in a new home after a few lean years. Ruzhin-Sadgora Hasidism became the largest hasidic group in respect of its importance and size, both in the southern reaches of Eastern Europe and in its most important offshoot in the Land of Israel.

Rabbi Israel enjoyed dealing with affairs relating to the community in Palestine and was kept abreast of developments there. He knew that the existence of the Jewish community in the Holy Land was precarious: "For

our many sins, now that the Land of Israel lies waste, and the Temple is destroyed, and [the people of] Israel are scattered in exile among the nations, and none lives in the Holy Land save Arabs and Ishmaelites, and a pitiful few of our brethren of the House of Israel live there, why should it still be called the Land of Israel?"<sup>116</sup> Why, then, did he never draw the logical conclusion and settle among his hasidim in the Holy Land?

It should be remembered that Hasidism was always—and still is—a Diaspora movement, concerned not with shattering political and social systems but with preserving the familiar Jewish world of Eastern Europe as it was then, while trying to find solutions and remedies to the hardship of everyday life for the multitude of Jews who lived there. Palestine and its Jewish community, then at the very edge of the Jewish world, were of marginal importance for the zaddikim. Like all contemporary zaddikim, Rabbi Israel did not consider it his personal duty to immigrate to the Holy Land, or even to visit it. Immigration was a religious duty imposed exclusively on a select few; well aware of their goals in life, he said: "I am clumsy and coarse, and what have I to do with the Land of Israel?! Rabbi Mendel of Vitebsk belonged to the Land of Israel, and the Land of Israel belonged to him. . . . But if I were to come to the Land of Israel, people would ask me, why have you come here without your Jews?"<sup>117</sup>

And, on another occasion, he observed: "No one should go to the Holy Land, only a person who feels its 'taste,' like the zaddik Velvel [Zeev Wolf of Charny-Ostraha], or like an ordinary Jew who wants to worship the Lord and cannot worship Him here in Exile."<sup>118</sup>

In this context of the disparity between vision and reality (which was typical not only of Rabbi Israel but of most zaddikim of the time), we might note a barb shot in Rabbi Israel's direction by Rabbi Solomon Kluger. Responding in 1853 to Israel's faithful follower Nisan Bak, who had boldly accused Kluger of misunderstanding the talmudic discussion of the circumstances under which one could compel a person to immigrate to the Holy Land, Kluger wrote: "As to his argument that I am mistaken concerning the mishnaic ruling that a person can be compelled to come from the Diaspora to the Land of Israel . . . why do the hasidic rabbis not immigrate to the Land of Israel, for they surely have the means to do so? And the late renowned Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, why did he never go to the Land of Israel, neither he nor his sons . . . ?"<sup>119</sup>

Nevertheless, Rabbi Israel operated as a "national" leader, concerned with the fate and suffering of the Jews as a whole and assuming the burden of acting on their behalf and for their good. Moved by this feeling of responsibility, he did not hesitate to violate convention, even rendering assistance to a maskil and opponent of Hasidism when the latter came to the defense of the common interests of the Jewish people. He cooperated

with the zaddikim of Poland in their efforts to avert the enforced modernization of Jewish costume and maintained constant contact with wealthy and distinguished Jews in Western Europe, such as Moses Montefiore and Zevi Hirsch Lehren, in order to further the material interests of his flock. His original approach to his position as zaddik, his moral sensibility, and his political pragmatism earned Rabbi Israel a standing attained by few other hasidic leaders. In that respect, he is worthy of being included in the same category as the Besht, the Maggid of Mezhirech, and Shneur Zalman of Lyady, who left their imprint on the historical development of Hasidism as a whole.



## *“All the Money in the World Is Mine”: Visions of Wealth and Royalty*

### *I. The Novelty of the Regal Way*

Israel of Ruzhin was famous, far beyond his own time and place, for his great wealth, his love of money and property, and the ostentatious lifestyle of his court. “He is Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, who excited the whole world with the story of his greatness, his carriages and his horses, his dogs and the goats in his stables, the sound of his drums and trumpets and all manner of instruments, for he had a band of musicians who played wondrously, and he comported himself with pride and arrogance like a king of Israel,” the maskil Abraham Gottlober wrote.<sup>1</sup>

Not only hostile masikilim, but other zaddikim, his colleagues, were amazed by his way of life: “I wonder at such a holy man as the saintly Rabbi of Ruzhin, who hankers for all the money and the honor in the world,” exclaimed the zaddik Zevi Hirsch of Rimanov, upon returning in 1843 from his first visit to Sadgora; but he added: “All he wishes is to enhance the glory of Heaven. This may be understood only when our righteous redeemer comes.”<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Zevi came face to face with Israel’s love of riches a year later, when he tried to arrange a marriage between his youngest daughter and a grandson of Rabbi Israel’s. The latter insisted that he would not sign his agreement to the match until Zevi had made a cash deposit of half the dowry money, namely, six hundred silver rubles. When Rabbi Zevi expressed surprise at Rabbi Israel’s distrust of him, implicit in the demand that he pay such a large sum in cash, Israel answered that the

virtue of trust was all very well, but he did not rely on old people's promises: "Therefore I will not speak until at least half the dowry money is placed before me on the table."<sup>3</sup>

According to hasidic hagiography, Rabbi Israel gave his "official" answer to the charges of avarice and hedonism on his deathbed: "Tell the world, this I want you to say: lo, my carriage is worth such-and-such a sum, and the horses are worth such-and-such a sum, but I have not benefited from this world to the tune of even one hairsbreadth."<sup>4</sup>

This answer, typical of the dualistic, apologetic vein affected by the zaddikim of the Ruzhin dynasty and others like them, justifies the zaddik's extroverted lifestyle by claiming that it does not represent his real, inner essence; in effect, the zaddik had derived nothing from his worldly riches.

How new were these ideas? Was Israel of Ruzhin really the "first zaddik who gathered wealth and riches to his house and enjoyed all the pleasures of life"?<sup>5</sup> What set him apart from earlier zaddikim and from his contemporaries?

The origins of this unique, materialistic approach, known in both the sources and the research literature as *malkhut*, "royalty," can be detected as early as 1800. It was the style of zaddikim active in Ukraine such as Baruch of Tulchin (later also of Mezhibozh), Israel's father Shalom Shakhna, Mordekhai of Chernobyl, and others. One can, indeed, find earlier anti-hasidic literature venting sharp disapproval of zaddikim for their accumulation of wealth by fraudulent means,<sup>6</sup> but in those cases, the truth of the accusations seems rather dubious (the hasidim themselves always hotly denied them). Moreover, even when such allegations were not absolutely baseless, they concerned sporadic, isolated instances, which can in no way be compared with the exaggerated opulence of the Ruzhin court, either in scope and style or in their implications for the historical evolution of Hasidism. On the other hand, it is important to stress the general similarity between Ruzhin and Chernobyl Hasidism—two dynasties whose mutual relationship was constantly fluctuating between friendship (including marital ties), competition, and downright hostility.

Contemporary accounts and later reminiscences pertaining to the two dynasties resort again and again to identical metaphors of wealth and royalty, while emphasizing the similarity and difference between these "Jewish kings" and the gentile nobles. The recurrent motifs are a magnificent mansion, a carriage harnessed to aristocratic horses, large numbers of companions, bands of musicians, ornate ritual objects and luxury clothes, expensive furniture and household appliances (silver and gold cutlery, ivory pipes, etc.), cultivation of rich hasidim, and collection of large pidyonot.<sup>7</sup> Relying on hasidic sources, Samuel Horodezky, himself a scion of the Chernobyl dynasty, described Rabbi Mordekhai as an imperious person

who “built himself a beautiful house and rode out in a beautiful carriage harnessed to four horses . . . in the style of the Polish noblemen of the time.”<sup>8</sup> The similarity to the accounts of Rabbi Israel is obvious. Indeed, in the 1870s, when the Zanz-Sadgora controversy broke out over the ostentatious lifestyle of the Ruzhin zaddikim, one of their sympathizers’ major arguments was: Why do you reserve your attacks for them? They are not the only ones behaving in this way!<sup>9</sup> In point of style and operation, therefore, Ruzhin and Chernobyl Hasidism were quite similar.

Some idea of the novelty of the “regal” way, of the contrast between it and everything that had previously been considered the true hasidic way, and of how perplexing it seemed to zaddikim of the “old” generation, may be inferred from a complaint voiced by the mother of the zaddik Yitzhak Isaac of Zhidachov about the extreme wealth of her progeny. This complaint is a typical example of the feeling of “decline of the generations” in Hasidism. Her father, she said, had worked for his living from morning to evening, studying the Torah by night; “and what were his household utensils? A bed and a table and a book and a lamp, and he did not run after luxury. But nowadays they need spacious homes and magnificent palaces, gold and silver vessels and jewelry.”<sup>10</sup> The same sentiments emerge from Nahum of Chernobyl’s reactions to his sons’ conduct. The hasidim told him that his firstborn, Moses (a forgotten figure, who left almost no mark on the history of Hasidism), was “behaving like a rich man. For there was a cupboard in his home . . . covered with lacquer and some drawings; there had never been such a cupboard, save in the homes of magnates and princes.” Of Rabbi Nahum’s second son, Mordekhai “the Maggid,” it was reported that “he comports himself with greatness and wealth even more than his brothers.” Rabbi Nahum (d. 1797), a poor and ascetic figure, typical of the first generation of the founding fathers of Hasidism, was dumbfounded by these reports and at first refused to believe them; once he had witnessed their truth with his own eyes, he could not understand why his son Mordekhai needed such opulent appurtenances:

And when he came to the home of his son, the Maggid, and said to him: People say of you that you have many silver and gold vessels and watches, please show them to me. And the Maggid Mottele had to show his saintly father all his possessions. Said his father to him: And why do you need them? And the Maggid replied: The Talmud describes the great wealth of Rabbi [Judah the Prince], which was most abundant, as is known. Now we find it written in Tractate *Ketubbot* [104a] that when Rabbi [Judah the Prince] was dying, he raised his ten fingers toward heaven and said: I did not enjoy any worldly benefits even with my little finger. That raises the difficulty: if he had not benefited from this world at all, what use was all that wealth to him? Hence you must conclude, that too is a way of worshipping the blessed Lord. Then the saintly Rabbi Nahum left the home of his son, happy and

lighthearted, and placed his hands on his body and said: Rejoice, my bowels, rejoice!<sup>11</sup>

One may doubt Rabbi Nahum's sincere joy upon leaving his son's house, but the ideology of the "new way" emerges clearly: a rich and comfortable lifestyle constitutes a legitimate way of worshipping God; it has roots and precedents in Jewish history, and emphasizes the discrepancy between external manifestations and inner content. Extrinsically, the zaddik seems to be a materialistic, hedonistic figure, amassing earthly possessions; intrinsically, however, he derives no benefit whatever from his property. His outwardly ostentatious conduct serves other values.

Should one accept this explanation at face value, or was the ideology perhaps created only *ex post facto*, as a cynical justification of the materialism and avarice of corrupt zaddikim (as the maskilim argued)? This is, of course, a key question in any attempt to understand the phenomenon and to assess the character of each individual zaddik. Quite naturally, there is no one, clear-cut answer; nevertheless, it is evident that, as the phenomenon was extremely widespread, the personal, individual dimension seems much less significant. Even should it transpire beyond a shadow of a doubt that a particular zaddik was an unprincipled charlatan whose sole purpose was to attain power and wealth, would this necessarily imply that the same holds for the many other zaddikim who had embraced the "regal way," or for their sons and grandsons and the thousands of devoted hasidim who believed in them? It would seem, rather, that although one should not, of course, ignore the individual personality of this or that zaddik and his style of conduct, one should at the same time give considerable weight to ideological and mythological motifs, which, as always in human life, were often intertwined with personal and collective passions and interests.

Critical scholars studying the phenomenon of "royalty" as represented by Israel of Ruzhin have mainly insisted on the cynical and manipulative aspects of the "public relations" and propaganda to which he resorted in order to realize his lust for power. Witness, for example, the historian Saul Ginsburg:

Rabbi Israel was a great psychologist, well acquainted with human nature, who therefore realized full well that there is nothing more likely to make an impression on simple, ignorant people than opulence and riches. . . . Everything was elegant and brilliant, appointed in its proper order, and everything was designed to make an impression, to arouse admiration and wonder. . . . Everything was preordained, weighed, and thought out in advance. . . . It was this way of his that secured him so many hangers-on, who were devoted to him body and soul.<sup>12</sup>

These characterizations are largely correct, and presumably Rabbi Israel's hasidim themselves would have agreed with them—although they would surely have given them a positive interpretation. One might add that Rabbi



Israel was surely influenced by his non-Jewish environment and was evidently eager to adopt the customs and extravagant, extroverted lifestyle of the Polish magnates and the Russian nobility. However, such psychological characterizations and socially motivated explanations are inadequate. One must also seek the ideological sources, which were called upon (whether a priori or a posteriori) to justify or to create Rabbi Israel's exceptional lifestyle as he worked to realize his vision of kingship, wealth, and power.

## *II. The Claim of Descent from King David*

The theoretical basis for Rabbi Israel's vision of kingship was, first and foremost, the tradition that he was descended from King David. Such descent was doubly significant: it entitled him not only to royal but also to messianic pretensions. The scions of the House of David were considered in Jewish tradition to be "holy seed," bearing the potential of the messianic king who would redeem the nation from its suffering. Thus it is not surprising that lineage, claims to royal status, and messianic consciousness are interwoven in the life and views of Israel of Ruzhin. The fact is that in the course of Jewish history, numerous families—unrelated to one another, and in different parts of the Diaspora—have laid claim to Davidic descent.<sup>13</sup> Such claims cannot, of course, be corroborated by historical means and properly belong to the realm of myth or folklore. For our present purposes, suffice it to say that the zaddikim of the Ruzhin dynasty, and their hasidim as well, fully believed in their own Davidic pedigree, and that in that light, they shaped their ideological and educational activities and their personal attitudes to the messianic message.

Rabbi Israel based his claim to royalty on his descent from Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezhibezh, whom he considered "the origin of all the righteous people in the world since the time of Creation until the advent of the righteous redeemer, and he was the crown of Torah and the crown of kingship, and his saintly progeny are the crown of kingship."<sup>14</sup> However, the beginnings of the Friedman family's claim to royalty were also associated with Rabbi Shalom Shakhna's father-in-law, Abraham of Koristyshev, who "possessed a genealogical record reaching back to King David."<sup>15</sup> When the zaddik of Apta once asked Rabbi Israel if his father had put on the same royal airs as himself, Rabbi Israel answered in an obscure vein: "My father . . . was the aspect of father . . . and I am in the aspect of kingship, and a king is obligated to stand on his dignity."<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere, he said: "My late father had the soul of King David, and as to his spirit—who knows, who knows."<sup>17</sup>

The myth of kingship also relied on small details: Rabbi Israel owned a small, invaluable Torah scroll, "as is the custom of the kings of Israel."<sup>18</sup>

Some hasidim swore that there was a groove in the zaddik's skull—the unmistakable physical mark of Davidic lineage according to the Talmud, so that the royal crown of the House of David would fit only such people as possessed it. The tension between Rabbi Israel and Mordekhai of Chernobyl was also seen to reflect the ancient tension between David and Saul: the Maggid of Chernobyl was said to be the prototype of King Saul, envious of the more talented and successful David (i.e., Rabbi Israel). There were even some who compared the unsuccessful marriage of Bernyu of Leova, Israel's son, with Sheindl, Rabbi Mordekhai's daughter, to the failed marriage of David and Saul's daughter Michal.<sup>19</sup>

However, despite the firm family tradition of the Friedmans, the claim to royal lineage and Davidic descent became a veritable "fashion" among other early nineteenth-century zaddikim. This was surely largely promoted by the tradition according to which the Besht was "of the spirit of King David." The Besht's grandson Baruch of Mezhibozh was also said to be of "the quality of kingship,"<sup>20</sup> and more or less the same was reported of the Besht's great-grandson Nahman of Bratslav, that "his family came from the kingdom of the House of David, as is known to everyone."<sup>21</sup> Isaac of Skvira, son of Mordekhai of Chernobyl, claimed that "on his father's side, they were descended from the kings of the House of David."<sup>22</sup> So also believed his brother, David of Talne, of whom it was told that he built a special throne bearing the inscription "David, king of Israel, still lives."<sup>23</sup> Aaron of Karlin and his son Asher,<sup>24</sup> Zevi of Rimanov,<sup>25</sup> and surely many others also saw themselves and their lineage in this light. The court of Menahem Mendel of Kosov was also considered a "royal" court; Uri of Strelish, Rabbi Menahem's brother-in-law, sternly rebuked Abraham Hayyim of Zlochev, who had the temerity to put his hand on the zaddik's shoulder: "Are you yet not aware that Kosov is the aspect of kingship?"<sup>26</sup> And Zevi Hirsch of Zhidachov admonished his hasidim in similar terms.<sup>27</sup> Isaac of Neskhez was angry with one of his hasidim who spoke arrogantly before him: "Do you know before whom you are speaking? Behold, we are descended from the seed of the kingdom of the House of David, and in a space of four hundred miles by four hundred miles around me the Heavens act only with my agreement."<sup>28</sup> In other words, Israel of Ruzhin was by no means exceptional in his claim to Davidic descent. However, none of those who claimed such descent and kingly privileges actually personified them as convincingly, successfully, and intriguingly as Rabbi Israel.

Whether he was motivated *a priori* by a systematic ideology, or whether the "ideology" was merely a convenient excuse devised *ex post facto*, hasidic literature took great pains to explicate the zaddik's behavior in theoretical terms taken from its own characteristic world. The explanation was rooted, first and foremost, in Rabbi Israel's family heritage. Thus, David

Moses of Chortkov, who preserved important authentic traditions of his ancestors, described his grandfather Shalom Shakhna's "ascent of the soul":

Once he had ascents of the soul and went from heavenly palace to heavenly palace, till he came to a palace, which was a magnificent palace, inlaid with all manner of precious stones and all priceless treasures beyond imagination. And in this palace stood a table and a throne made of precious stones, sapphire and diamond. Placed on that table was a crown inlaid with all royal treasures, so priceless that no mouth can speak of them or describe their value. On that throne by the table there sat a very great zaddik. . . . And they said to my grandfather Rabbi Shalom that that wondrous crown resting on that magnificent table was from the Torah and commandments of that zaddik who sat on the throne by the table. And since he ruled his people strictly . . . he had not been privileged to place his crown upon his head. . . . And then my grandfather Rabbi Shalom woke himself up from his ascents of the soul and sent to call my father of Ruzhin and told him the whole story. And he said to my father: I am telling you this story deliberately, for a time will come when you will need it.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the journey through the heavenly palaces full of gold and precious things, and the royal crown in particular, would be the zaddik's, provided he was not content merely with Torah study but would also conduct himself as a leader in exceptional ways and not strictly. Rabbi Shalom was supposed to place the crown upon the head of the anonymous zaddik for whom it had been intended (probably Baruch of Mezhibozh); and since he had not succeeded, he taught his son the moral of the vision. Rabbi Israel interpreted it as a testament, pointing him in the direction he must take and defining his mission.

### *III. "Hidden Worship": The Ideological Basis*

Ruzhin Hasidism's vision of kingship and wealth was founded on a maximal interpretation of the concept of "worship in corporeality" (Hebrew *avodah be-gashmiyut*). Although the roots of this concept may be found much earlier, especially in the Lurianic Kabbalah literature, it became prominent in eighteenth-century hasidic thought and generally understood as an expansion of the framework of normative worship by revealing the positive religious potential hidden in trivial, earthly life.<sup>30</sup> Put differently: even the most "mundane" everyday actions, such as eating and drinking, sleeping, sexual relations, making a living, and business, were not "wasted" from a religious point of view and in fact helped to blaze a trail in Divine worship and to realize the supreme ideals of "communion," "equanimity," and "divesting oneself of corporeality"—at least as much as Torah study or prayer. The simple Jew may find the mystical "spark of the

Divine light" even in material existence, "repair" it, and "raise it up," provided he is properly guided and shows the right amount of effort. There was no point, therefore, to the feeling of religious inferiority that seized people upon encountering pietists and ascetics thought to represent a "purer," ascetic alternative of worship.

With the advent of Rabbi Israel, we are faced with a tremendous, extreme expansion of the concept of "worship through corporeality," which was now not only held equivalent to worship through Torah study or prayer but even considered several grades superior. Not only was the term "corporeality" interpreted as applying to the everyday things needed by ordinary people; it was also held applicable to the life of comfort, luxury, and wealth led by the zaddik, the earthly representative of the idea of kingship. Eating was not only a means of worship, but also an element of worship. The same was true of the material world surrounding the eating experience: the magnificent hall in which meals were served, the costly, exquisite dinner service, the choice food, and the like—all these were a kind of worship if performed properly. Worship through corporeality was no longer seen only as an inescapable necessity; it was an *a priori* valid form of worship, not recommended for the masses but to be practiced by the zaddik alone.

The concept of corporeal worship was therefore an indispensable basis for the justification of the concept of kingship as a superstructure; the rafters cannot exist without the foundations. The explanation generally given for the extravagant conduct of the "regal" zaddikim was based largely on this idea. Baruch of Mezhibozh (d. 1812), one of the first zaddikim to assiduously acquire money and material possessions and to ride in a magnificent coach,<sup>31</sup> devised an interesting explanation, positing a causal relationship between the zaddik's material activities and the superior quality of his worship, based on a unique interpretation of the verse "If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved . . . he must accept the first-born, the son of the unloved one, and allot to him a double portion" (Deut. 21:15–17):

There is one zaddik who worships the blessed Lord through Torah and prayer alone, and he is like a "loved wife," for such worship is loved and favored by all who see it. And some zaddikim also make themselves a rule of worshipping the Almighty through earthly matters, by eating and drinking and other bodily needs . . . and he is like an "unloved wife." . . . Now almost all people think that the zaddik fulfills his corporeal needs without devotion to Heaven, like other, ordinary people. . . . But Scripture said: He may not treat as firstborn the son of the loved one, etc. Instead, he must accept the firstborn, the son of the unloved one. . . . For the Lord, blessed be He, considers the worship of that zaddik through corporeal needs to be worth double the worship of the loved one.<sup>32</sup>

Rabbi Baruch was aware that such materially motivated conduct of the zaddik offended the masses, who expected his behavior to be that of a saintly person, not of a vulgar boor. Nevertheless, he argued, God Himself valued the worship of the “corporeal zaddik” twice as highly as that of ordinary, conventional worship through Torah and prayer. On another occasion, when a certain zaddik who refused to accept *pidyonot*, was praised in Rabbi Baruch’s hearing, he exclaimed: “On the contrary, precisely because he accepts little money, it would seem that he is not as great as you say,” for God had influenced the minds of the real zaddikim, “so that they should crave the money that the people give them, and in that respect they bond with the totality of the Children of Israel.” Rabbi Baruch went so far as to define zaddikim of the previous generation, such as Nahum of Chernobyl, who had evaded earthly honors, as “transgressing God’s will.”<sup>33</sup>

If these views and homilies were indeed pronounced by Rabbi Baruch himself, they may well constitute the theoretical basis on which Rabbi Israel and others like him based their broad understanding of the corporeal and regal life appropriate for a zaddik. Little wonder that David Moses of Chortkov, Rabbi Israel’s son, guided more by the myth of Rabbi Baruch than by real facts, declared that he should be identified with “the quality of kingship.”<sup>34</sup> However, our knowledge of Baruch’s life is scant, and the traditions and homilies attributed to him are of dubious authenticity. His relationship with Israel’s father Shalom Shakhna is unclear, and Rabbi Israel himself seems never to have met him in person, having only heard about him.<sup>35</sup> As Rabbi Baruch never had a proper community or body of disciples, and the antagonism aroused by his personality was so great, his historical influence on the development of Hasidism in the nineteenth century was slight and at most marginal.

More important in its influence on the “royal way” was another theoretical school, whose major representative was the zaddik Eliezer Horowitz of Tarnograd (d. 1806). He postulated a dialectic, paradoxical relationship between the pursuit of luxuries, which produces the vice of pride, and the quality of humility, the typical quality of zaddikim. A brief sample of his writings runs as follows:

It is the quality of zaddikim not to seek luxury beyond what is necessary . . . and they are not at all interested in amassing silver and gold and despise it, for that brings man to pride and arrogance. . . . Hence they do not desire gold and silver save as is necessary, no more. But sometimes the Lord our Master graces the zaddik with an abundance of wealth and riches. . . . And that zaddik to whom this has happened sometimes sorrows and grieves, unable to comprehend, for he fears lest the wealth should detract from his quality of humility. But the Lord our Master, whose thoughts are profound indeed, takes no notice of that. Let us explain the reason for this, so that it should enter the ears of those capable of intelligence and

knowledge. For the fact that wealth engenders pride . . . is only because that is the way of human beings. . . . Wealth and money do not in themselves engender pride, but only because they constitute the fulfillment of the heart's desires. Accordingly, if he has it, such wealth will not do any damage to the zaddik, who does not crave money and in whose eyes gold is unimportant, since he does not want it at all; on the contrary, his heart will grieve over the abundance of money. On the contrary, if he has no wealth, there will be desire in his heart and he will, Heaven forbid, become proud, holding himself moreover to be humble. . . . Hence it is beneficial for the zaddik to have an abundance of possessions and wealth, and these things should be well understood. . . . And that is an important issue in Divine worship for those who understand.<sup>36</sup>

The idea of the "supreme and true zaddik of the generation" also helped to shape the double standard of morality inherent in Rabbi Israel's view of earthly pleasures as the preferred tool of worship for a zaddik like himself (but not for his flock). While the "zaddik of the generation" at the time of, say, Rabbi Michel of Zlochev (d. 1781) knew that "he had not come to this world to experience pleasures, but he had come to perfect himself or the people of his generation,"<sup>37</sup> this concept took on a different nuance in the next generation. It was then believed that wealth and comfort were the most commendable way of life for the "zaddik of the generation," whose supreme desire was that the world in which he operated should benefit from Divine abundance. In Rabbi Israel's view, this abundance was to be understood in a physical sense as well, for there was a mystical relationship between the conduct of the "zaddik of the generation," whose task was to sustain the world, and the material condition of his contemporaries: "The zaddik of the generation has to behave like a rich man in order to bring down abundance to the world." Rabbi Israel claimed that a typical misunderstanding of this special reality could be found in the behavior of the Rabbi Hanina, a Mishnaic sage who had eaten nothing but a few carobs from one Sabbath to the next, although he was "zaddik of the generation" by virtue of his personality and spiritual talents. Hanina's self-mortification was responsible for the prevalence of catastrophic poverty in this world.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the leader "responsible" for the fate of the whole world is forbidden to derive any benefit from the "luxury" he enjoys as he strives to achieve personal perfection; it is incumbent upon him to renounce his own, personal desires (his preference for poverty and suffering as a tool to acquire perfection) for the good of the whole world, which depends upon him.

Rabbi Israel was harshly critical of the common idea, shared by zaddikim and hasidim alike and deeply impressed on Ashkenazic Jewish civilization, that poverty is the select path to true worship. He attributed this approach to the "evil spirit," entirely antithetical to the "holy spirit," which

favors worshipping God out of contentment and comfort. It was no accident that he ventured this opinion at a time when he himself was in circumstances of some distress, at the height of the inquiry into his involvement in the Ushits affair, saying: "We find nothing of the spirit of holiness when a Jew wants to worship the Lord out of poverty, for such a desire issues from the evil spirit. But we find that from the standpoint of holiness, a Jew can worship the Lord only out of great comfort."<sup>39</sup> Similarly, he also attributed his adherence to "worldly desires" to what he defined as the generation's weakness:

In these generations, it is difficult to achieve perfection of souls through Torah and prayer, for since the souls in these generations are like feet, when they wish to bring themselves near through Torah and prayer, one is not confident of himself and may be affected by distracting thoughts, Heaven forbid. And the zaddik, too, finds it difficult to raise them up through Torah and prayer, but that must be done through corporeality and matters of this world. . . . For the zaddik must engage in the matters of this world and its desires in order to raise up the souls in these generations, which are very small.<sup>40</sup>

Here, then, is yet another manifestation of what I have called "the power of inferiority": the weakness of the Jews of "these generations" becomes a powerful lever in the hands of the zaddik. Divine worship in the traditional modes—Torah, prayer, innocent faith—is trivial and ipso facto of inferior quality; it is the province of the masses, who are incapable of achieving more. Corporeal worship and the affairs and appetites of the physical world, as tools for improving the generation and raising up the "small souls," are reserved for the zaddikim alone. Such views illustrate Rabbi Israel's perilous path, on the borderline between halakhic normativity and antinomianism.

"He who pursues honor, honor evades him, but he who evades honor, honor pursues him," a popular saying (based on Babylonian Talmud, *Eruvin* 13b) asserted, and Rabbi Israel offered a unique interpretation of this paradox:

The real zaddik, who is above all the seven virtues and stands on the level of real equanimity, such a zaddik can pursue honor in order to elevate it, doing so precisely for the glory of the Torah, for he surely has no intention or will to give himself credit for it. Loftiness, that is, the evil inclination, in whose nature it is to be proud and arrogant, flees before such a zaddik like leaven in the dough. For, on the contrary, if the evil inclination should come before him, he will elevate it to holiness. . . . Such a zaddik, who can pursue honor, honor evades him because of the fear that he will elevate it to holiness and it will be annihilated. But the zaddik who is still not confident in himself, lest he fall into the net of the evil inclination, it is he who must evade honor.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, only the true zaddik, confident in himself and in his powers, possesses the spiritual ability to contend with the evil inclination that lurks in honor and not to be tempted by it; moreover, he is able to draw out the good that is in the evil inclination and to raise it up from the low level of physical honor to a level of holiness. It was in such ways that legitimization was sought for qualities in Rabbi Israel's conduct that both hasidim and mitnagdim might consider avarice and exaggerated hubris. Just as "the people of Israel sustain their Heavenly Father," although God has no need of such sustenance, but He Himself, out of gratification at such human behavior, as it were, showers the world with abundance, so "the real zaddik receives so as to bestow abundantly, and that is his pleasure." However, while God is content with prayer and observance of the commandments, the zaddik needs something palpable.

Among the zaddikim, too, declared Rabbi Israel, there are different levels: "Some zaddikim are great, others greater, with several levels, for one higher than the high watches. And he who can bestow can also receive, and money pursues him. . . . Although we see that there are [zaddikim] who are pursued by money and we know not why that is so, perhaps it is because of their ancestors' merit, which is very great."<sup>42</sup>

Rabbi Israel delivered an important homily on the subject after some Lubavitch hasidim in Jassy had insulted the zaddik Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta. The latter, who served for a short time (till the end of 1813) as rabbi of the town, preached one Sabbath at length, probably on the topic of "worship through corporeality." The Lubavitch hasidim ridiculed his sermon and, on the morrow, "wrote the rabbi's Torah on the windows derisively." The rebbe of Apta might indeed have aroused ridicule; he was well known for his exaggerations and inventions and also famous for his gluttony. Nevertheless, Ukrainian and Galician zaddikim venerated him, and Rabbi Israel naturally was affected by the insult. After telling his hasidim about the incident, he said:

There are two kinds of servitude. One person serves the blessed Lord through Torah, prayer, and worship, while another serves the blessed Lord out of eating, drinking, and other worldly pleasures. Because of this service, there are people who question his conduct. Now, why did the Holy One, blessed be He, create such a zaddik? . . . Since most people stumble and become entangled in the lusts and pleasures of this world, therefore, when the zaddikim worship the blessed Lord through all these things, they raise up all the people. . . . Now, these two kinds of servitude are known as "the revealed world" and "the hidden world," and they may be likened to "Leah" and "Rachel." That is to say, the aspect of "Rachel" is the "revealed world," relating to one whose worship is achieved simply, through Torah and prayer. While the aspect of "Leah" is the "hidden world," that is one who serves the blessed Lord through eating and drinking. Hence the zaddik, insofar as he is from the "hidden world," all the mysteries and all the secrets are revealed to him.



Therefore, there were zaddikim who used to announce the date of the redemption, but they did not really know. But those who knew would not have revealed. And that was the matter of the aspect of Joseph the righteous (Hebrew *zaddik*), who curled his hair and served the blessed Lord out of the pleasures of this world. . . . Therefore, as to this zaddik, there are people who question his conduct, for they do not see his ways in the service of the blessed Lord. . . . And thus said my late father: The main zaddik is the one who worships in the aspect of the hidden world. And he also said the only such a zaddik is capable of raising up and bringing down souls.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, attributing the idea to his father Shalom Shakhna, Rabbi Israel was not content merely to present “worship through corporeality” as a legitimate mode, equal in value to worship through Torah and prayer. As far as he was concerned, this was the preferred mode, *superior* in importance to Torah and prayer. Such views were totally opposed to the value scale of traditional Jewish society and the normative world that it had shaped. Rabbi Israel was well aware of the magnitude of this revolution, and that this approach, which was only naturally “hidden” and not generally understood, might arouse derision and criticism. However, he argued, those zaddikim who follow in Joseph’s footsteps and worship God “out of the pleasures of this world” enjoy an advantage over other zaddikim: they alone know the secrets of the redemption. Zaddikim who reveal such eschatological knowledge prove that they actually do not belong to the category of zaddikim from “the hidden world,” who are surely aware of the date of redemption but refuse to divulge it. Moreover, the zaddik who worships his God by corporeal means is the only one who could properly cope with what was seen to be the zaddik’s prime task: raising up sinful souls from the depths and perfecting them. One is struck by the contrast between classical hasidic ideas—annihilation of selfhood, equanimity, spreading forth of corporeality—and Rabbi Israel’s view of corporeality as an organic part of the zaddik’s personality. However, despite this contrast, one should note that Rabbi Israel required the zaddik to withstand the temptations of sensuality. It was the zaddik’s task to blur or even obliterate the element of enjoyment—an ability held not by everyone, but only by unique zaddikim like himself.

Undoubtedly, the ideology of “revealed” versus “hidden,” although not invented by Rabbi Israel and in fact used intensively after his time, took a heavy ethical and public toll, as it exposed its proponents to accusations of double standards, hypocrisy, and even antinomianism.<sup>44</sup> Underlying such charges was the assumption that the zaddikim were corrupt personalities who, in order to veil their hedonism and avarice, had invented a pseudo-ideology to legitimize and sanctify their improper behavior. Such arguments were based, not only on theoretical or psychological considerations,

but also on famous episodes in which the idea of "hidden worship" was misused (as, for example, in the case of Bernyu of Leova, whose hasidim considered his abandonment of religion an act of hidden sanctity), and on rumors and gossip (such as those about the immoral behavior of the daughters of the Chernobyl zaddikim).<sup>45</sup> It was indeed true that Rabbi Israel's "revealed," i.e., visible conduct, coupled with the ideology of "hidden worship," contained the potential for corrupt behavior. It is against this background that one should view the formation of the myth of the "suffering rich man" as an integral part of Rabbi Israel's biography. As we shall see, a zaddik "wearing patent-leather shoes without soles" is a highly moral personality. He, and he alone, can walk the tightrope between "hidden worship" and "revealed worship."

#### *IV. Objection to Self-Mortification*

As a natural corollary to Rabbi Israel's view of physical life, he was vehemently opposed to excessive fasting and self-abnegation. Fasting as a tool to spiritual improvement was indeed legitimate in itself, but it was by no means to be recommended, for only unique individuals could stand its test. Scolding one of his hasidim for habitually fasting, Rabbi Israel described for him how Eliezer of Karlin, a pre-Beshtian pietist-kabbalist, used to fast from one Sabbath to the next:

On the eve of the Holy Sabbath after prayers, he recited Kiddush over a large glass of wine, of the size in which one drinks beer, and then they brought him a butter cake and he ate and drank. Then he drank another similar glass of wine and recited the final blessing [after wine] and then drank a similar glass of liquor and washed for the meal. Then they brought him a dish with fish, twelve large pieces with twelve large loaves of bread, and he ate the bread with the fish and drank another glass of liquor. After Kiddush, too, he drank a draft from a barrel to purge his innards. After the fish and the liquor, they brought him a large dish of gravy, and he drank another glass of wine, then consumed much meat and wine, and more roast meat and four kinds of vegetables, and more wine. Then he recited Grace and lay down to sleep. When midnight came, they began to awaken him from Heaven. He would shake his limbs a little and plead tiredness and fatigue because of the fasting and the eating and drinking. And he said: Perhaps I will not be needed. But they answered him [from Heaven] that it would be impossible without him. Then he rose and did what had to be done. Then he drank a large glass of liquor and slept. And our master Rabbi Israel concluded: If one can fast thus—it is permitted.<sup>46</sup>

Any reader of this grotesque description will agree that such fasting is quite absurd. The long fast culminates in an unrestrained bout of eating and drinking; the unavoidable fatigue following upon such fasting and

subsequent overeating brings about an inner struggle—should one go on sleeping or conquer one's physical desires and do "what has to be done"? One receives the impression that, in Rabbi Israel's view, only a select few could withstand such an experience, so that constant fasting was not to be recommended as a rule. But not even every zaddik could accomplish such a feat; indeed, this source seems to illustrate a real tension between two opposing tendencies: the religious inclination toward asceticism, on the one hand, and unbridled physical desire, on the other. Which of these feelings is better? Which is more dangerous?

The highly materialistic environment of Rabbi Israel's activities and views of "worship through corporeality" seemed to be antithetical to another hasidic ethos that was part of his generation's heritage: divesting oneself of corporeality and nothingness. Rabbi Israel also made use of the concept of "nonbeing" (Hebrew *ayin*), but one doubts whether this referred to his efforts to annihilate his own selfhood and to deny the value of the physical world around him. In his view, "equanimity" and "divesting oneself of corporeality" were not the only ways to achieve supreme communion with God; his approach was to take actual, positive action within physical reality and thereby to perfect the world. Nevertheless, hasidic hagiography, feeling the need for a more balanced biography of Rabbi Israel, as it were, created the apologetic myth of a zaddik suffering in secret. His acts of self-privation, such as eating small quantities and without chewing, wearing shoes without soles (as a partial fulfillment of the penitential practice of rolling in the snow), and the like, were not known, it was claimed, to his hasidim and other observers, but only to a few close associates, and it was they who publicized them.<sup>47</sup> However, these stories are apparently purely legendary, for we know that Rabbi Israel was opposed to self-abnegation, whether by an individual or by a community; in his view, self-denial not only harmed the body but also was spiritually destructive.

This firm rejection of asceticism was essentially in keeping with the spiritual heritage of the founding fathers of Hasidism, although that heritage was already showing signs of decline in the first half of the nineteenth century. There were indications of a return to the ancient Ashkenazic ascetic tradition, and it was not rare to hear zaddikim urging their hasidim to repent their misdeeds by extreme acts of privation. "If you are able to fast one day of each month—this is good," said Rabbi Israel's contemporary the zaddik Mordekhai of Chernobyl, easing the recommendation of his father, Menahem Nahum, to fast one day each week.<sup>48</sup>

But Rabbi Israel held that the value of such acts was to be seen in the historical perspective of the difference between "first generations" and the present. "If the earlier [scholars] were sons of angels, we are sons of men,"

ran a traditional saying (Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 112b), and in this spirit, the past was always seen in an ideal light and historical figures became mythical paragons of virtue and perfection, in comparison with the lowly present and its denizens, weak in body and soul. Accordingly, people of the present are expected to behave differently in their worship:

The first generations would fast and mortify themselves because the world was full of pleasures and joy. . . . But in these generations, one should not just follow the maxim "True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit" [Pss. 51:19], for our generations are very weak, and their hearts and minds are small. Therefore, each and every person should just pray before God in a contrite spirit. . . . Moreover, when a person eats, he sacrifices on all four levels—inanimate, vegetable, animal, and human—to the blessed Lord. When he fasts, however, not only does this cause harm in corporeality, but he may also, Heaven forbid, harm himself in spirituality.<sup>49</sup>

Reportedly, Rabbi Israel recommended that one subdue the evil inclination by inflicting suffering on a single limb, say, "the ears, so as to hear only something that is a commandment and to speak for the sole purpose of fulfilling a commandment. . . . But mortifying the whole body is of little avail, and in addition it reinforces the evil inclination."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps this approach expressed a trend toward minimization and sublimation of extreme asceticism, while at the same time stressing the religious value of a well-balanced corporeal life. Fasting, or any other form of physical self-denial, might have the opposite effect, strengthening lust and desire in reaction to hunger and privation. Better, then, symbolically to cause "pain" to one limb, say, the ear, lest it listen to gossip, or the mouth, lest it utter slander.

The zaddik of Apta once admitted to him—so Rabbi Israel told his hasidim on one occasion—that as a child he had been used to fasting. When he queried his rebbe, Elimelech of Lyzhansk, about his practice, the latter answered, "If I had two other persons to join me [i.e., to form a "court" of three magistrates, which has the authority to void vows] in abolishing fasts, I would abolish them." Rabbi Israel drew the following conclusion: "Just as it is a meritorious act to keep a Jew away from sin, it is no less meritorious to warn every person that if he is slightly weak, he should not fast."<sup>51</sup> Rabbi Israel gave public expression to this dislike of ascetic practices in 1824, when he refused to join a public fast that had been solemnly declared by the Apta rebbe. Explaining his refusal, he offered the same argument, distinguishing between the early generations and his own time: "The generation is weak, and one should not decree fasts in this generation."<sup>52</sup>

Revealing a facet of his relationship with his hasidim, Rabbi Israel instructed one of his followers who was accustomed to fasting: "I am

telling you not to fast. I am not talking about the wicked, but I am telling whoever wishes to be a Jew that he should eat, drink, pray, and study, and I shall take all the self-abnegation upon myself. If you do not obey me, do not come to me again, and if you do, I shall tell my people not to let you in!" When the hasid asked him, "So how shall I save myself when I feel bad?" Rabbi Israel retorted: "You fool, if it is so hard for you, study a chapter of the Mishnah and a page of *Ein Ya'akov*, and if, Heaven forbid, as happens to flesh and blood, it is very hard, think of me and you will feel better."<sup>53</sup>

### *V. Criticism of the Regal Way*

How did Rabbi Israel respond, on the ideological plane, to the criticism of his approach, which came from a variety of circles? It is noteworthy that, just as with his education, no attempt was made to obscure the facts of his economic standing. On the contrary, they were publicized for all to see, and the emphasis was not on concealing them but on explaining their true significance. Critics and doubters were informed that the reality they saw was merely an external manifestation, as it were, outer "attires" that concealed an "inner point" and sublime spiritual values. The regal way was not suitable for all Jews, but only those who were fit for it by their very nature and unique qualities, that is to say, those zaddikim whose intrinsic humility would not allow them to misuse the many physical temptations offered by such conduct. Such zaddikim would walk the dangerous path with caution, exclusively for the honor and glory of the Torah, without themselves deriving any physical benefit or pleasure. A characteristic expression of this idea may be found in a forthright letter from the Polish zaddik Elimelech of Grodzisk to Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam of Zanz, who bitterly opposed the Sadgora methods:

As to the practice of amassing silver and gold and living in comfort, my ears have heard from my late father [Rabbi Hayyim Meir Jehiel of Mogielnica] who testified of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin that he had need of all that, *for without it he could not exist in this world*, because of his humility. And as I now know and have come to know the best of the holy zaddikim [i.e., Rabbi Israel's sons], whose humility is immeasurable, they surely need all that and it is forbidden to question their motives.<sup>54</sup>

Underlying this pronouncement, which is imbued with a spirit of surrender to the unchallenged authority of zaddikim, is the perception of Rabbi Israel as trapped in a dilemma on the borderline of the absurd. So humble and contrite is his spirit that his very physical existence is in real danger, so that he is certainly incapable of working for the good of the Jewish people in this world. The indispensable remedy is an extreme shift

to a life of wealth and comfort, opposed though it may be to the innermost essence of the zaddik. Only such conduct can improve his mental and physical state and enable him to operate and realize his qualities.

However, if the hasidim accepted such explanations, critics outside the hasidic camp did not. Rabbi Israel's methods seemed to them deplorable; as far as they were concerned, such conduct merely confirmed the decline of Hasidism and demonstrated that its leadership was now in the hands of worthless charlatans. Moderate maskilim, mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century (most prominent among whom was Eliezer Zevi Zweifel), stressed the contrast between the founding fathers—now endowed even by maskilim with a mythical halo of saintliness—and their corrupt descendants, who had strayed from their ancestors' path of righteousness. Critics who claimed that the Maggid of Mezhirech was driven by a desire for riches were wrong, wrote Pessach Ruderman, a former Habad hasid who had become a maskil and was one of the most vehement critics of Hasidism in his time: "No, no, the first zaddikim, up to a few years after the death of the Maggid of Mezhirech, were not interested in money." Degeneration had set in, he held, only in the grandsons' generation, and as an example he cited the Chernobyl dynasty: Rabbi Nahum, the founder, "did not labor to amass money and build houses, for he lived in comfort but no more; neither was Rabbi Mordekhai of Chernobyl, who succeeded him, as bad as his eight sons." Using abusive language, he condemned the eight brothers as the height of degeneration in Hasidism, for all they desired was "to darken the eyes of the people"; they had turned their positions into "a spring from which they drew silver and gold."<sup>55</sup>

Echoes of such criticism were clearly heard within the camp, too. A hasidic source quoting Rabbi Israel's witty response to his detractors is evidence of hasidic awareness of the criticism and of the apologetic arguments devised in response:

A nonbeliever once asked the saintly rabbi of Ruzhin: We have heard with our ears, and our ancestors have told us, that the first zaddikim were humble and lived in poverty, but his honor has blazed him a new path, inconceivable to our ancestors. His house is full of expensive objects, his home is like the home of a nobleman, and he rides in dancing carriages, and travels in horse-drawn chariots like the nobles of the land. And the saintly rabbi answered him in gentle tones: Behold, among the masses who come to visit the zaddik of the generation and give him money, there are different classes, and they fall into three groups. One class consists of righteous and devout men; the second, of the householders; the third, of unbelievers and heretics. The zaddikim, who weigh all their actions carefully, divide the money they collect for their sustenance and for purposes of pious acts. The money given by the righteous and the devout, they distribute for fulfillment of the commandments. . . . The money collected from the well-to-do householders, they use for the sustenance of their households; and the money brought by the unbelievers, they distribute for

buying horses and carriages and the like. Now, in the first generations, the unbelievers were few, and the zaddikim received no money from them, so they could not buy horses. Not so today, when, for our sins, there are many unbelievers and rebels, and they give money to zaddikim, so the zaddikim are obliged to use that money to buy expensive horses and dancing carriages.<sup>56</sup>

However, this humorous, evasive excuse, addressed to the outside world, did not answer the critics at home: Why did the zaddik see fit to depart so radically from the principles propounded by the founding fathers?

Ruzhin sources contain further echoes of attempts to deal with such questions, which testify, incidentally, to the effectiveness of the criticism from the Haskalah camp. The perplexity is particularly evident in attempts to explain away the custom of *pidyonot*. One sometimes gets the impression, in fact, that Rabbi Israel himself adopted an attitude of mockery and irony toward his own conduct:

Maskilim once asked our master of Ruzhin, who, as is known, conducted his court with signs of royalty and behaved largely and like a wealthy man, how can the way of the zaddik and riches be reconciled? He answered: Our father Abraham, when he went to disseminate God's word, had to take much property with him, for stupid people relate politely and respectfully to one who has money. . . . For had they not found greatness in Moses our master, the conveyor of the Torah, and in Rabbi Judah the Prince, the compiler of the Mishnah, and in Rav Ashi, the compiler of the Talmud, they would not have accepted their Torah. . . . If a person has thousands of gold and silver [coins]—people also like to hear Torah from his mouth.<sup>57</sup>

Rabbi Israel's answer—based on a humorous interpretation of Psalm 119:72—seems ambiguous. Who are the “stupid people”? The maskilim, who do not understand Hasidism at all, or—as seems more probable—the hasidim and lower classes of Jewish society, who respect only power and wealth and are incapable of distinguishing between inner content and outer shell? The Rabbi Israel who emerges from this answer is a man who understands the popular mentality and can thus make calculated use of his possessions. The truth of the matter is that property and power are not the main thing, but his Torah and his unique approach to worship. He had come to realize that the most efficient way to spread his teachings among the masses was to appear as a rich man, radiating dignity and reliability upon the “stupid people,” who would accept Torah only from a wealthy person. As Rabbi Israel was not interested in confining his flock to an intellectual elite, but also wished to attract the lower classes, he had no choice but to resort to such means, although he admitted that they were worthless in themselves.

The comparison of Rabbi Israel to prominent personalities of times

gone by—Moses, Rabbi Judah the Prince, or Rav Ashi—should not surprise us. Besides justifying the radical innovations by rational or emotional considerations, it was felt—only naturally—that they had to be linked in some way to authoritative sources or figures from the past, whose fame precluded criticism or objections. The figure most frequently appealed to was that of the Mishnaic sage Rabbi Judah the Prince, who had been known for his wealth and opulent lifestyle, but nevertheless—we are told in many sources—had never derived any benefit from the physical world. Revered personalities from the more recent past were also associated with regal conduct and extravagant behavior. Thus, for example, Ruzhin tradition relates that the Maggid's disciple Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk (d. 1788) "behaved with great extravagance, as is well known, and used to travel in a carriage with three horses"; he "conducted himself with proud attire" and "lived the life of a nobleman of exalted lineage. When he traveled on a journey, two people ran before him. His house was most magnificent and his household utensils were made of silver and gold. But it is known to all that by nature . . . he was broken and most humble."<sup>58</sup> Rabbi Israel himself related that Naphtali Katz of Poznan (d. 1719), a pre-Beshatian pietist and mystic, "behaved very extravagantly, with splendid clothing like that of kings, and he had a soft little cushion [*sic*] that he used to wear upon his heart, and it was worth one hundred and twenty coins." Only by virtue of the new trail that he, Rabbi Israel, had blazed, was Rabbi Naphtali saved from heavenly retribution for this dangerous conduct.<sup>59</sup> There seems to be no historical basis for these details, and they are presumably projections of the exaggerated riches and opulence of nineteenth-century zaddikim.

As a rule, critical comments were quoted in the name of "maskilim" or "unbelievers," that is, outsiders who viewed such external trappings superficially and, blinded by their hatred of Hasidism, were incapable of truly understanding their inner essence. However, similar sentiments were voiced by several contemporary zaddikim, who could not reconcile themselves to Rabbi Israel's behavior and considered it a mark of rank materialism, a perversion of the original hasidic ethos and values. Even if the internal hasidic voices of protest and bewilderment were censored or moderated in the sources, or explained away by various pretexts, the mere fact that Rabbi Israel's lifestyle was criticized indicates that he was an anomaly. For example, on one occasion, the Galician zaddik Moses Teitelbaum questioned Rabbi Israel's conduct on many counts, but he settled all his queries by the next day.<sup>60</sup> Meir of Premyshlan defined the difference between himself, as a representative of Hasidism's old values, and Rabbi Israel as follows: "It was said of him that 'wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness lasts forever' [Pss. 112:3], that is to say, although wealth and riches are in his *house*, nevertheless his righteousness lasts forever. But of



myself, Meir, it was said, 'He gives freely to the poor, his righteousness lasts forever' [Pss. 112:9], that is, all my strength and worship are through the virtue of righteousness."<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, the extent and quality of the charity given by the rebbes of Sadgora later became one of the bones of contention in Hayyim of Zanz's polemics against Rabbi Israel's sons.<sup>62</sup> When Isaac Meir Alter (later the founder of Gur Hasidism) told his teacher, Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, what he had seen on his 1844 visit to Sadgora—"every day they sent in to him two measures of gold coins, and he busied himself with them"—the rebbe of Kotsk retorted: "We, too, know about that, but we interpret the verse [Pss. 119:72] 'I prefer the Torah from your mouth to "thousands" [Hebrew *alfei*—the same root means "to study"]', as those who study with 'gold and silver pieces.'"<sup>63</sup>

Criticism was also aimed at other practices that seemed most curious and exceptional in the court of an Eastern European hasidic zaddik: fearsome dogs roaming around and riding horses neighing in the stables. Such sights and sounds, so common in the world of the Polish nobility, were rare among Jews in general and in particular in traditional Jewish society. Rabbi Zevi Hirsch of Litzka, despite his admiration for Rabbi Israel, nevertheless raised "some weighty questions about the ways of the saintly rabbi"—to be precise, two questions: "I saw lying in his court a large dog that could punish one by its looks alone, although our Sages said, 'A person should not rear a bad dog in his house' [Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Kama* 15b]. . . . There was just one partition between the prayer house and the place where the horses stood, and the horses' neighing and the stamping of their feet could be heard in the prayer house."<sup>64</sup>

Such strictures hurt Rabbi Israel, who saw them as petty, narrow complaints, representing a misunderstanding of his regal leadership and approach to worship. As noted by one of his descendants: "It happened to my grandfather the Ruzhiner . . . that he was told of a certain rabbi who had challenged his conduct: Why did he need an orchestra, why the halls, and why a carriage and horses? And the Ruzhiner said: How strange, even among the zaddikim, there are those who do not understand that there is worship through material things."<sup>65</sup>

Even a devout admirer of his, the zaddik Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta, could not refrain from voicing his doubts, and Rabbi Israel agreed to answer him only after being convinced that he earnestly wanted to understand the underlying secret and had no intention of scoffing at him or censuring him. The rebbe of Apta asked: "Why does he need all this extravagance, derived from human pleasures, to make himself singers and carriages and costly horses and grand clothes? The zaddik of Ruzhin answered him: If you are just posing provocative questions, I shall not answer you.

And the zaddik of Apta answered and said: No, for it is my earnest wish to know your true intention in this matter."

Rabbi Israel's surprising answer, which became the basic religious-ethical explanation of the regal perception of Hasidism and of the opulent court life, involved an allegory. The virtue of humility, he explained, is "the greatest of all existing virtues," and the model of this virtue was Moses, of whom the Bible says, "Moses was a very humble man" (Num. 12:3). However, this virtue is so precious and rare that it must be hidden from prying eyes. Now the best hiding place for a valuable treasure is not in underground vaults or cellars, where it will surely fall prey to thieves, but outside, in the rubbish heap, visible for all to see. Thus the best "hiding place" for the virtue of humility is in careful and judicious use of the quality of pride, for which the model was Solomon, whom the Bible calls "the wisest of men" (1 Kings 5:11). Thus, humility is the precious jewel, and pride is the rubbish heap. In other words, Rabbi Israel's extroverted conduct was merely a sophisticated, paradoxical way of concealing his humility and fear of God.<sup>66</sup>

## *VI. Musicians and Singers, Carriages and Horses*

Two of the major elements in the reality underlying the myth of royalty and wealth in the Ruzhin court were the orchestra (Yiddish *kapelye*) and carriage. The Ruzhin court was not the only hasidic establishment boasting a band, which used to play marches and hasidic tunes on various occasions. Menahem Mendel of Kosov also had musicians, who studied in the study house of his court and were summoned to his home when needed;<sup>67</sup> the same was true of Aaron "the Second" of Karlin.<sup>68</sup> That this was not unusual also follows from Joseph Perl's ironic comments on the way some zaddikim had themselves accompanied with music on their journeys: "We transported our rebbe with exceeding honor to the countryside. In the front of the carriage went the musician Reb Yehude with the fiddle, and his brother Reb Yoysef went with him, beating the drum and cymbals. We went—a very big crowd around the carriage and following the carriage—singing very lovely melodies. . . . Whoever did not see this celebration never saw a celebration."<sup>69</sup> Perl's barb was most probably aimed at Rabbi Israel. As he wrote elsewhere: "And their impudence is so great that some of them keep musicians and singers with instruments before that person who was accepted as rebbe when he was fifteen years old, and now he is twenty-two. Thirty-six of his subordinates play instruments before him, and when he travels men run before his carriage, and he has an abundance of silver, gold and jewels."<sup>70</sup>

People who marveled at the prominence of the orchestra were told that

its most important task was to advertise Rabbi Israel's perception of the correct way to worship God: worship through corporeality and an emphasis on joy. For Rabbi Israel, joy was of paramount importance, while melancholy posed a danger to faith. Sadness was not merely a temporary mood, but a threat to the very existence of joy; "and when the quality of joy is lost, thereby you may forget the Lord your God."<sup>71</sup> There was nothing new in this idea as far as Hasidism was concerned; here Rabbi Israel was simply continuing in the spirit of previous generations (as concisely expressed in writings from the school of the Maggid of Mezhiberech, such as *Tsava'at ha-Ribash*): sadness could detract from the quality of worship. Worshipping God in joy was not the exclusive province of zaddikim and other members of the elite. It was also the way offered to the masses: the zaddik, worshipping God in joy, was a guide, a model to be emulated by his hasidim. Rabbi Israel and his hasidim, it should be noted, did not understand joy as wild, unrestrained fervor—at least, not in their style of prayer, which was known for its restraint and self-control, and certainly not as large-scale feasting and drunkenness. Besides an orchestra, Rabbi Israel also had a special court jester (a position also known in other hasidic courts), who would make him smile and gladden his heart when he was depressed.<sup>72</sup>

The Ruzhin court orchestra included both instrumentalists and singers, most probably of the best available,<sup>73</sup> who took part in all special events held at the court, but were primarily employed in playing and singing before the zaddik: "He kept by him a band of men appointed to their task, that of music, known as *kapelye*, about forty men, and when the musicians played before him, no one, not even the most important people, had permission to go in there; only after the music was finished were people permitted to go in."<sup>74</sup>

The orchestra might also be ordered to play in honor of famous zaddikim who came to visit the court. This was known among contemporary zaddikim, and some of them, such as Uri of Strelisk, considered it a manifestation of Rabbi Israel's ability to divest himself of corporeality.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, the report of the maskil Alexander Tzederbaum—that the musicians played for the zaddik "in his bedroom to put him to sleep with the pleasure of their playing, and in the morning they came to awaken him from his sleep"—does not seem reliable. It was perhaps based on hearsay, which was readily believed, since it helped portray the zaddik as behaving like a self-indulgent Roman emperor.<sup>76</sup>

Instructive evidence of Rabbi Israel's use of the orchestra as a tool to disseminate his views comes from an argument that broke out in 1824 between him and Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta, who was then living in Mezhibozh. Rabbi Abraham, responding to the news of the Russian

authorities' plan to deprive the Jews in the provinces of Vitebsk and Mogilev of their livelihood and expel them from their villages, wanted to declare a public fast. Rabbi Israel, who was opposed in principle to fasts and ascetic practices, objected to the old rebbe of Apta's ruling (although it was supported by other important zaddikim) and openly countered him:

At this time, our saintly rabbi of Ruzhin was accustomed to worship through song, for, as is known, he had a band of players of instruments. And when the instruction of the rabbi of Apta was heard concerning the said fast, he summoned his band of players and commanded that they play well before him with cymbals and lyres and trumpets. And this came to the knowledge of the rabbi of Apta. And everyone believed that he would rebuke the righteous rabbi of Ruzhin for doing the opposite of his ruling, transforming it from mourning to a festival. Indeed, when the news came to the ears of the rabbi of Apta, he answered, saying: We cannot behave like the righteous rabbi of Ruzhin, for he follows the path of Scripture, "When you are at war in your land against an aggressor who attacks you, you shall sound short blasts on the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the Lord your God and be delivered from your enemies" [Num. 10:9].<sup>77</sup>

The fact that Rabbi Israel did not bow to the will of the senior zaddik of his time, whose authority was accepted by all contemporary zaddikim, also indicates his considerable self-confidence as a hasidic leader. His independence (at the age of only twenty-seven) and opposition to the rebbe of Apta were so prominent as to leave their mark even in Haskalah sources.<sup>78</sup>

Another major element of life at the Ruzhin court was Rabbi Israel's predilection for ornate horse-drawn carriages. In contrast to the cart or wagon that had been the "trademark" of humility and simplicity for the earliest zaddikim, the carriage was seen as more than merely a modern vehicle whose purpose was simply to transport the zaddik from place to place as safely and quickly as possible. Elaborate carriages were credited with special qualities, expressive of the unique essence of the zaddikim traveling in them. This innovation did not escape the stern censure of several zaddikim, who disapproved of the implied ostentation. One such critic was Rabbi Meir of Premyshlan, but his critique was softened in popular folklore by being clothed in a witticism:

Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin set out in a rich carriage to which four noble horses were harnessed, as was his wont, and he met Rabbi Meir of Premyshlan riding in a poor cart to which a thin, scrawny horse was harnessed, as was his wont. Said Rabbi Meir to Rabbi Israel: Four noble horses—to what end? Retorted Rabbi Israel: So that they should extricate you from a swamp. Rabbi Meir replied, saying: To each his own. One thin, scrawny horse will not get you into a swamp.<sup>79</sup>

Rabbi Israel did not, however, heed such reprimands. The Hebrew word for "carriage" is *merkavah*, which of course also denotes the heaven-

ly Merkavah, the Chariot, harnessed to four holy beasts, in which the Lord God Himself rides in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 1), and Rabbi Israel considered his horse-drawn carriage a miniature model of the mystical Chariot. His father, Shalom Shakhna, had established this central position of the carriage in his consciousness, as the following story indicates. One of the father's former hasidim, asked by Rabbi Israel for his reminiscences of life in Shalom Shakhna's household, related that they had once been discussing the matters of the four beasts in the Merkavah, which are the lion, the ox, the eagle, and man:

And the man in the Merkavah is sometimes called Jacob, and sometimes, Israel. The distinction between Jacob and Israel is that of Israel it was said, "Israel in whom I glory" [Isa. 49:3], as if the Holy One, blessed be He, glories in Israel; while of Jacob it was said "the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself" [Pss. 135:4], that is, Jacob glories in the Lord and is subordinate to Him. And thus said your father: If you wish to see Israel in the Merkavah, you will understand about my son Israel, of whom it was said, "Israel in whom I glory."<sup>80</sup>

In Shalom Shakhna's vision, as preserved in Ruzhin tradition, his young son Israel is compared to the essential "Israel," to an organic part of the heavenly Chariot, and, as it were, the source of Divine glory and pride. This similitude between the heavenly Chariot and Rabbi Israel's earthly carriage may also be inferred from his bold statement concerning the zaddik of "perfect stature"—most probably referring to himself. As he put it, the wise man, the ideal leader, may be on either of two levels: the level of the Chariot, which he claimed for himself; and the level of *beit midrash*, the study house, which he considered inferior:

Which is the wise man who can bring down the heavenly abundance from those worlds that are beyond free choice? Such a wise man is capable of being strong and firm enough to conduct himself in the vanities of this world and to make the world repent. For thus said my master and father—and it is true—that such a zaddik, who conducts himself in this world in chariots, he himself becomes a Chariot on high. And whoever does not achieve such great worship and conducts himself as one of those who frequent the study house, he will be in the study house on high as well. And the said great zaddik, who conducts himself in a chariot, he will be able to bring down the abundance.<sup>81</sup>

The metaphor of the righteous person, the zaddik, who becomes, as it were, God's Chariot by virtue of communion with God or devotion to Torah study occurs not infrequently in prehasidic and kabbalistic literature, and is not in itself a new motif in hasidic writing. However, when a zaddik like Rabbi Israel exploits the Chariot symbol, pointing to the similarity between conduct "in the vanities of this world" and conduct "in chariots," proposing that such a zaddik "becomes a Chariot on high," the comparison

is no accident and assumes further, personal significance. Rabbi Israel did not boast of scholarly prowess, of frequenting the study house, but of his carriage and horses and of the mystical meanings with which he endowed them. As far as he was concerned, physically riding in the carriage expressed the dynamic, effectual element in the personality of the "great zaddik." Such mobility was in stark contrast to statically sitting in the study house; it was equivalent to riding in the Heavenly Chariot as seen by Ezekiel in his vision.

The rank-and-file hasidim, too, thought of the carriage and its horses on a mystical level, not as a mere tool to exalt the zaddik, enhance his stature, and stress his uniqueness. Hasidic hagiography and popular folktales in fact relate that the old zaddik of Apta, upon his first meeting with Rabbi Israel, kissed the wheels of the carriage, saying to the bewildered onlookers: "Fools! Don't you see that this is the holy chariot of the Lord?"<sup>82</sup> Arnold Hilberg, a German reporter who visited Sadgora in the 1870s, wrote that the carriage was still venerated, to the extent that the driver used to charge a fat fee for the right to sit in the zaddik's seat (presumably in secret).<sup>83</sup> In Husyatín, where Mordekhai Shraga continued his father's practices, the story was told of a simple hasid who used to approach the zaddik's noble horses, stroke them, and whisper in their ears, "Zaddikim!" He believed that the horses were transmigrations of zaddikim who had sinned and were now condemned to serve the admor as punishment. When one of the horses died, the hasid recited kaddish in its memory for a full year.<sup>84</sup> There were manifestations of reverence for the carriage and the horses in the courts of Rabbi Israel's other sons, too, as well as in the courts of zaddikim who were influenced to some degree by the regal ways of Ruzhin.<sup>85</sup> It was no accident that maskilim "advised" any zaddik desiring to earn fame to purchase horses and a carriage.

The orchestra, the carriage, and the horses were, of course, only part of the regal atmosphere of the court. The magnificent buildings, the gold and silver utensils, the expensive furniture and gleaming costumes, the personal hygiene of the zaddik's family, the dogs in the courtyard, the goats and horses' stables, as well as the overall atmosphere of luxury and frivolity—all these had a unique influence on the hasidim and on all visitors to the court. It was generally felt that they were in the presence of a member of the gentry, a magnate—but he was "one of ours," not a gentile nobleman.

Rabbi Israel's horses, stables, and carriages were renowned beyond the limits of the Jewish community. It was even reported—surely an exaggeration—that the well-groomed horses, however many there were, were famed in the Russian sporting world and viewed with considerable envy by Russian aristocrats.<sup>86</sup>

Of the carriage itself, we know very little. It was padded with costly fab-

rics; it contained a special passenger compartment with windows and a driver's cabin; and it was presumably equipped with various luxury items. Zaddikim and other hasidim who had somehow earned Rabbi Israel's favor were invited to accompany him in his regular trips in the carriage: "Every day our father goes on a trip to breathe fresh air, and every day he takes one of his sons with him on the journey," his son Shalom Joseph reported.<sup>87</sup> Rabbi Elimelech of Grodzisk related that in his youth, upon a visit to Ruzhin, he had been taken for a ride by Rabbi Israel in his carriage, and his host had begun "to speak of the quality of his horses . . . [saying,] 'Do you understand, Elimelech, that my horses are very good indeed?'" Rabbi Elimelech, of course, interpreted this statement in a mystical sense ("it is known that great secrets were hidden in this utterance"), as a special instrument of worship, admitting that he understood nothing about horses.<sup>88</sup>

This is not the only report of the importance that Rabbi Israel attributed to his horses and to related details. There is a tradition that Rabbi Shalom Shakhna, or perhaps Rabbi Israel himself, instructed his associates that whenever they assembled they should "speak of his customs and also of his horses and his carriage and his prayers, etc. For they are all instruments of holiness and a casing for the Torah scroll."<sup>89</sup> Horses, carriage, and prayers are here placed on the same level, as equivalent values, and seen as ritual objects in every sense.

### *VII. Wealth and Honor as a Religious Test*

Rabbi Israel was intensely conscious of his power and of the inner dialectic that informed the myth of his wealth. On one occasion, he traveled to Jassy in Moldavia, a town that lay within his sphere of influence, where he was able to collect a considerable sum of money. When one of his admirers tried to guess the total amount collected, Rabbi Israel, presumably very pleased with himself, answered: "Do you really think this is a large amount of money? All the money in the world belongs to me! And he began to tell a story. . . . And he ended with the words: I am one of the children in whom there is no blemish, and all the riches and the wealth in the world belong to me."<sup>90</sup>

Such claims recall some of the more extreme utterances of Jacob Frank, who likewise asserted that all the gold in the world belonged to him. It was this resemblance that led Gershom Scholem to brand Rabbi Israel another Frank, and to say that it was a "miracle" that he had remained within the Orthodox fold.<sup>91</sup> There is a basic difference, however: the founder of Frankism made no effort to camouflage his greed and lust for power and in fact considered them wholly positive values, complementing the antinomian, nihilist, and licentious worldview that he offered his followers.

In contrast, Rabbi Israel's lifestyle cannot really be described as hedonistic. His life was shaped by a dialectic view of worldly pleasures. Offsetting his extreme statements in favor of wealth and "worship through corporeality" as supreme spiritual levels for the zaddik, he propounded a whole system of physical and spiritual checks and balances that kept the zaddik and his doctrines from straying across the "red line" in his own soul between what was permissible and what was not. In his public utterances Rabbi Israel rejected outright any expression of sensual enjoyment or physical pleasure due to his wealth, his carriage, or any of the luxury items in his possession; and we have no hint that his more intimate conversations conveyed any different message. This anti-sensuality, contrary to what might be expected from such a seemingly materialistic figure as Rabbi Israel, only naturally prepared the ground for the emergence of the romantic myth of the rich zaddik who despised his riches and suffered in secret, expressed later by the poet Uri Zevi Greenberg:

The surging regal prayer of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin;  
The body—a Torah scroll with its rolls in patent  
leather shoes, visible to all those around . . .  
But patent leather shoes without soles, in the snow . . . <sup>92</sup>

Rabbi Israel in fact went even farther, likening riding in his carriage or, at any rate, his feelings when riding in it, to being in a prison or even a coffin.<sup>93</sup> Deep inside, he may possibly have been inclined to hanker for corporeal possessions and riches; of course, we have no way of confirming or denying this conjecture. Whatever the case, he could not afford to admit such feelings in public, for the hasidic ethos would not have countenanced a leader from within the movement who considered the accumulation and enjoyment of wealth positive values in themselves. The only enjoyments permitted the zaddik were those deriving from worship or observance of the commandments (and even in that respect, the question of whether it was permitted to derive benefit from the commandments had been in dispute ever since talmudic times). The purpose of material possessions, according to both pre-hasidic and hasidic ethical and homiletic literature, was exclusively to promote other values, such as charity, averting severe "judgment," influencing the workings of the supernal worlds, glorifying the institute of zaddik, and the like.

As has been noted, the essential novelty of Rabbi Israel's approach to his role as zaddik was the accumulation of wealth and material possessions for their own sake, not for the sake of deriving any benefit from them. It was therefore convenient for him and for his hasidim to veil the novelty by diverting attention to the secondary, marginal question of how much the zaddik benefited from his property. Indeed, Rabbi Israel frequently took



the trouble to point out that he had no special interest in physical pleasure per se. For example, he once stressed the spiritual balance that must govern the actions of a rich Jew: "I say: When the Holy One, blessed be He, rewards a man with riches and honor and all the pleasures of this world, he must know and believe that all is from the Lord, blessed be He. . . . And he must not say, Heaven forfend, 'My own power and the might of my own hand [have won this wealth for me; Deut. 8:17].' . . . And he should not do with his riches anything that is against the will of the Creator."<sup>94</sup> He himself, as quoted by his son Bernyu,

was never affected by anything in the world to derive pleasure from it and the like. And he related that once, when he was very young, his late mother, the righteous Chava'le, had traveled with his brother . . . to a doctor in Ostra. And then he [i.e., Rabbi Israel] had also traveled there, and upon his arrival he was received with great honor, young and old people lining the streets, and he remembered that then he was pleased thereby, but never again, all his life, was he so affected by anything.<sup>95</sup>

By the same token, Rabbi Israel could not understand how other zaddikim became entangled in excuses for the honor they had received, while he himself took such matters for granted. He was once told that when Rabbi Moses Zevi of Savran came to a certain town, the townspeople honored him by seating him in a carriage drawn by noble horses. The zaddik then began to behave in a manner reminiscent of the conduct of the earliest hasidim of the Besht when they wished to dismiss "distracting thoughts": "From whence is all this honor derived? From the carriage drawn by horses! Now the horse is an unclean, repulsive thing, and when its carcass is skinned, it emits a terrible stench. And he thought so much of how bad and repellent it was that he felt nauseous."

In reaction to this story, Rabbi Israel, honest and forthright as usual, said: "Poor man! the righteous rebbe of Savran had no other device to remove the honor from his mind, other than such a way? For there is a direct way, to receive all the honor and nevertheless not to be affected at all." He explained this way, his own way, by his favorite method—a parable:

Once there was a great minister, exalted above all the king's ministers, all of whom used to kneel and bow down to him and accord him great honor. Once that minister went together with the king on a trip, and all the lesser ministers did not know the king and when they saw that the great minister was accompanied by some other person, they immediately knelt and bowed down with great honor before the minister, as they were wont. Now it is readily understood that this minister did not approve of the honor accorded him when he was walking with the king himself and was much ashamed before the king of this honor that he was receiving.<sup>96</sup>

The great minister (the zaddik) knows that the honor he receives from "the lesser ministers" (the hasidim) is due only to his proximity to the king

(the Almighty), and so he feels uneasy at their failure to perceive his merely secondary role. The great minister is presumably Rabbi Israel himself. He does not think it necessary to reject the homage paid by his hasidim in itself; he deserves such treatment, because he is "exalted above all the king's ministers." Rather than rejecting such homage, he must accept it as natural, albeit rather embarrassing, while remembering his proper place in the hierarchy.

As already pointed out, Rabbi Israel's hasidim were also aware of this duality. They therefore likened their rebbe to Rabbi Judah the Prince, the rich mishnaic sage, who was known to have honored rich people and had maintained a luxurious, rich household; on the eve of his death, Rabbi Judah declared that, despite his great wealth, he had not derived any material benefit from the world. As one of Rabbi Israel's devoted hasidim wrote:

See, my beloved sons, how mistaken people are about them [the zaddikim] and their conduct, that they possess much property and amass silver and gold—that is all in order to bring to the world, but they themselves do not benefit at all. . . . As we have seen the glorious wealth and greatness and carriage of the aforementioned saintly admor and his home and his residence already in Ruzhin, and nevertheless he said of himself that he had never derived any benefit from this world.<sup>97</sup>

What created this dialectic of a desire for wealth without the ability or will to enjoy it? Was it the sign of a venerated leader, so sated with honor and comfort from a young age that he ultimately held material things in contempt? Did it, perhaps, express a lack of sophistication, or a vulgar outgrowth of the notion of worship through corporeality? Or perhaps it stemmed from inability to overcome the guilt feelings of any person operating within a normative society who feels that he is destined to lead, to blaze new pathways unknown to his predecessors? Whatever the reason, it is apparent that Rabbi Israel, a man of inner contradictions, considered his wealth and his "regal way" as purely instrumental and not as an end in itself. His wealth and luxury were purely extrinsic: he did not know how to enjoy good food, and his food was indeed quite poor, although he could have afforded much better; he thought nothing of possessions and the external trappings of luxury, although he never ceased to accumulate money and possessions and continued to conduct his court in the very style that he himself despised. Perhaps one should also take the public reactions to his practices into account. As long as he was successful, and his conventions of nobility and kingliness were accepted by his hasidim and viewed with affection, he was encouraged and understood that he was on the right path, which he therefore continued to develop.

It was only the zaddik and his family who were entitled to apply this ide-

ology in practice. The “regal” way was never held to be a normative mode of behavior for the hasidim as a community. Ruzhin hasidim were never called upon to live “regal” lives, for the very justification of the approach lay in its exclusivity. In Rabbi Israel’s world, therefore, there was room for just one “great minister,” namely, the zaddik himself; and all the “lesser ministers,” that is, the rank-and-file hasidim (and perhaps also other zaddikim?), put their trust in the great minister to lead them along the right path.

At the same time, it cannot be doubted that these “regal” habits left an imprint on the congregation of Ruzhin hasidim as a whole, setting them apart from other hasidic communities. The hasidim also considered themselves apart, unique, understanding that it was incumbent upon them to strive for proximity to the king. Even while Rabbi Israel was still alive, emphasis was laid on such values as esthetics, care for one’s apparel and personal appearance, manners, and investing large sums in observance of the Divine precepts.<sup>98</sup> The differences between the Ruzhin-Sadgora hasidim and those of other dynasties could be found in a variety of areas, such as conduct during prayer services and care for cleanliness, hygiene, and external appearance. A secret report of the Russian police in Kamenets Podolsk, dated 1865, described the local synagogue of the Sadgora hasidim as follows:

In comparison with other synagogues, the maintenance of the Sadgora hasidim’s synagogue always excels in its cleanliness and internal order. The prayer service itself is conducted, by the rabbi’s promise, in the same way as it is in the other synagogues, without any differences, and with the same books that have been confirmed by the censorship. In general, in this synagogue, called for no particular reason Sadigorskaya, one cannot see anything harmful or deplorable. . . . This synagogue causes no harm, neither to the believers in the Mosaic religion and the customs of the Jewish religion, nor to the government. The slanders against this synagogue as harmful derive from unjustified rumors and the internal intrigues of the Jews.<sup>99</sup>

The Hebrew author S. Y. Agnon, too, described them as a hasidic community distinguished from other hasidim in their external trappings:

And how did Eizikl know that there were no Sadgora hasidim among them? The truth is that the earlocks of Sadgora hasidim are tidy and their beards are well trimmed and their clothes are clean and their speech is pleasant and their manners good, unlike those hasidim of the Galician rebbes, who let their earlocks and beards grow wild and are careless about their clothing and their manners and the way they talk, so that each word stumbles over another word and swallows it.<sup>100</sup>

Rabbi Israel’s motives, personality, and outlook, in combination with his numerous hasidim and other admirers, who willingly placed themselves

under his unique style of leadership, shaped the historical view of Ruzhin hasidim as a kind of miniature royal court, a symbolic focus of veneration and identification. Against the background of the decline in the traditional autonomous institutions, the increasing disintegration of the Jewish community, and the waves of modernity, Haskalah, and secularization then threatening to inundate the innermost bastions of Hasidism, one might perhaps interpret the success of Ruzhin Hasidism in the same spirit as past evaluations of the Council of the Four Lands, the supreme and prestigious leadership organization of all the Jewish communities in Poland: "It was a small solace and a little honor too, proving that Almighty God, in his great pity and great loving-kindness had not deserted us."<sup>101</sup>



## *“The True Zaddik of the Generation”: Rabbi Israel as Zaddik*

### *I. The Question of Uniqueness and Superiority*

The belief in the zaddik, his elite socioreligious standing, and his unique abilities is a cornerstone of hasidic ideology. The “doctrine of the Zaddik,” as the topic is called in the scholarly world, has been a basic tenet of all hasidic groups and dynasties, from the very beginnings of the movement down to the present; and, unsurprisingly, a great deal of ink has been spilled in scrutinizing the scope of the doctrine, its sources, variations, and mystical and social aspects.<sup>1</sup> We shall be concerned here exclusively with certain implications of the doctrine as Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin applied it to himself: (i) his conception of “the zaddik of the generation”; (ii) his messianic consciousness; (iii) his attitude to wonder-working.

In this area, too, Rabbi Israel left no systematic teaching—only a few scattered scraps, which cannot always be pieced together consistently. Perhaps the best approach to summarizing his position as a zaddik is to appeal to the definition provided by Mendel Piekarz, who generally belittles the significance of the zaddik as a mystic and tends to stress the social and institutional aspects, “as a focal point for a new socioreligious grouping and as head of an eparchy which extends its domination over communities and communal office-holders, establishing itself in the public consciousness as an integral element of normative Judaism and Jewish society.”<sup>2</sup>

The major innovation in Rabbi Israel’s doctrine was the concept of “the

supreme zaddik," Raphael Mahler writes. In each generation, there is a zaddik who surpasses all the other zaddikim in his qualities, merits, and his worship of God; it is he who brings down the Divine abundance and distributes it to the other zaddikim of his time.<sup>3</sup> The idea of a uniquely endowed zaddik, superior not only to the masses of his hasidim but also to other zaddikim, was indeed present in Israel's thought, but it is doubtful whether this particular point was the main innovation in his Hasidism, for it had been propounded by other zaddikim before him.

The concept of "zaddik of the generation" (not "supreme zaddik") is very common in hasidic sources. It is generally understood as a synonym for "zaddik" alone, probably deriving from such organic statements as "for the soul of the zaddik comprises the souls of the people of his generation, so that he should be able to lift them up."<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Israel declared that "indeed, there is one zaddik in each and every generation who is superior in his source and in his practical worship to the entire world, while he is inferior in his own eyes to the entire world. . . . Through this zaddik pass all the souls of Israel and all the prayers of Israel."<sup>5</sup> Theoretically speaking, Rabbi Israel was merely following well-trodden paths, in a tradition cultivated by his predecessors; in that respect, there was no innovation. Clearly, like other contemporary zaddikim, he, too, considered himself "the zaddik of the generation."

The historical question facing us now is whether this consciousness of supremacy also had some practical sociopolitical significance, or whether it was merely an empty turn of speech. To my mind, Rabbi Israel indeed considered himself the foremost zaddik of his generation, both as an incomparable individual, to be obeyed by all other zaddikim, and as the only zaddik of messianic potential. However, as far as I have been able to ascertain, this self-identification never went beyond the limits of metaphor and had no practical implications. However, any discussion of the meaning of the "zaddik of the generation" concept in nineteenth-century Hasidism has to consider two important, immanent developments: literary and social.

With respect to literature, there is no doubt—as proven by examining the occurrences of the term in nineteenth-century hasidic sources—that it did not have any precise meaning. It became little more than a worn turn of speech, employed to describe the most important zaddik (or zaddikim) of the time from the standpoint of the speaker or writer. Thus, for example, the following statement, attributed to the zaddik Shalom of Kaminka, exemplifies how different terms, each theoretically capable of expressing a distinct concept, became completely blurred: "The zaddik of the generation is the saintly Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta. . . . And the zaddik who is the foundation of the world is Rabbi Mordekhai of Chernobyl. . . . The leader of the generation is the saintly Rabbi Moses Zevi of Savran.

. . . And the man of God, called saintly by all, is . . . our master Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, each of the zaddikim mentioned receives a special title, and the differences between the titles mean nothing to any listener, although they seem to have had some significance for Rabbi Shalom himself. Elsewhere, we read that when Rabbis Moses of Kobrin and Isaac of Warka were visiting Rabbi Israel, each of them extolled his own master’s greatness. Rabbi Israel summed up as follows: “In the early days, the saintly rabbi of Lublin [Rabbi Isaac’s master] was zaddik of the generation, and the saintly rabbi [Mordekhai] of Lachovich [Rabbi Moses’ mentor] was leader of the generation, and now they say of me that I am the zaddik of the generation.”<sup>7</sup> There are many other examples of different leaders being defined at a given time, sometimes by the very same speaker, as “zaddik of the generation” or, in parallel terms, “the true zaddik,” “the greatest man of the generation,” and so on.<sup>8</sup>

In the social aspect, these titles do not—and never did—reflect any formal, hierarchic, centralized system of a “supreme” zaddik, considered head and shoulders above other zaddikim and considering himself entitled to rule them or supervise their activities. We may therefore assume that such titles expressed the zaddik’s vision and self-image, his view of himself as absolutely unique, and the collective consciousness of his hasidim, who considered their rebbe the greatest of them all. Such “competitive” titles among disciples and hasidim of different groups, claiming ascendancy for one zaddik over another, are characteristic of societies operating under a constant spiritual tension, and their existence should come as no surprise—it would be more remarkable if there had been none.

The plethora of titles like “zaddik of the generation” and the abundance of candidates for the crown, whether of their own accord or promoted by their followers, were of course self-contradictory. After all, if a given generation has only one “zaddik of the generation,” what is the point of having so many zaddikim appropriating the title, there being no agreement as to the identity of the “genuine” one? Moreover, over several generations, the number of “famous” zaddikim gradually increased, and the pristine ideology had to accommodate a tendency toward atomization and internal divisions—a situation whose very existence belied any claim to exclusivity. An impressive contribution to this development was the fact that, since the early days of Hasidism, the families of the prominent leaders of the movement had frequently been linked by marriage. By the time a few generations had passed, all the zaddikim had become part of an extended oligarchy. Thus, paradoxically, there was a decline in the weight of distinguished lineage, which might have reinforced claims that a certain zaddik was superior to any other. On the one hand, the prevailing atmosphere and

conditions were such that a leadership entirely unconnected with the hereditary elite could hardly achieve legitimacy; on the other hand, if almost all zaddikim were members of a single family and interrelated in some way, none of them enjoyed any essential advantage of lineage over another, and in the final analysis, they could all claim ancestry from one of the mythological founding fathers, such as the Besht or the Maggid of Mezhirech.<sup>9</sup>

This inner contradiction troubled the leading spokesmen of Hasidism through the nineteenth century, and they tended to resolve it by harmonization. Thus, for example, the zaddik Yizhak Isaac of Zhidachov wrote in the name of his famous uncle, Zevi Hirsch: "He says as follows: [Suppose] there is a group who travel to their rebbe and say that there is no rebbe in the world but their rebbe. That is idolatry, Heaven forbid! But what should one say? Each and every zaddik and every rebbe is good for his disciples, but our rebbe is best for our purposes."<sup>10</sup>

A similar tendency to blunt the competitive sting of the idea of "zaddik of the generation" may be discerned in the preface written by the Habad historian Hayyim Meir Heilman to his book *Beit Rabbi*. Heilman rejects the competition among zaddikim, holding it to be meaningless, given the great growth, variegation, and wide dissemination of Hasidism. Although he too held that there was only one "zaddik of the generation" at any one time, he argued that, owing to the limitations of human nature, we are unable to identify that unique person among the many "available" candidates. Every hasid should, therefore, choose "his own" zaddik of the generation, and since he cannot be convinced beyond a doubt that "his zaddik" is the right one, he should not disparage the sterling qualities of other contemporary zaddikim:

It is surely true that in every generation there is a special zaddik who is called "the zaddik of the generation." Now this is the secret of the divisions among the hasidim, that this one travels to this zaddik and that one travels to another (each and every one according to the source of his soul), and each and every one thinks that the zaddik to whom he travels is the unique zaddik of the generation. But shall we, for that reason, discredit the other zaddikim of the generation? Heaven forbid!<sup>11</sup>

The dissension in the hasidic world concerning the relative merits of zaddikim troubled Rabbi Israel as well. His involvement with the problem of the possible tensions between different zaddikim stemmed from a fierce controversy that had broken out a generation earlier between some contemporary zaddikim and the Besht's grandson Baruch of Mezhibozh, who thought himself the greatest zaddik of all. Indeed, it was not plausible that all contemporary zaddikim should be on the same level, without some inner hierarchy and without one of them standing out as a zaddik with "the



attribute of kingship” and ipso facto worthy of dominating all others. In Rabbi Israel’s view, this privilege was not a question of that zaddik’s scholarship or unique approach to worship; rather, it flowed from the mysterious “attribute of kingship” invested in him. Against this background, there might emerge disagreement due to contradictory identifications of this kind of zaddik:

Indeed, in each and every generation there are numerous zaddikim, but there is one zaddik whose attribute is the attribute of kingship. The substance of this zaddik is that, although there are in this generation very great zaddikim, and perhaps even greater ones, nevertheless, the zaddikim must submit themselves to him. And if there should happen to be a zaddik who does not submit to him, this will cause him distress. And the zaddik whose attribute is the attribute of kingship may be harmed, so much so that he may perhaps, Heaven forbid, depart this world, for his attribute is the attribute of kingship, and two kings cannot reign simultaneously.<sup>12</sup>

Rabbi Israel uses the Hebrew phrase *bulshat da’at*, translated here as “distress,” in the sense of a danger that the zaddik might “fall from his level,” i.e., lose his spiritual level and, accordingly, his superiority. Such a “fall” indeed happened to Rabbi Baruch, because of threats to his standing by other zaddikim. The implication in regard to the zaddik’s fragile “immunity” is instructive. The slightest threat to his position may damage him in a religious and spiritual sense, even causing his premature death. As Rabbi Israel understood, a zaddik’s declaration that he was “the zaddik of the generation” would automatically cause dissension and controversy. This was true not only of controversial personalities like Rabbi Baruch but also of more distinguished figures, of undisputed merit. A good illustration is the story, ascribed to Rabbi Israel, of how the Maggid of Mezhirech tried to hasten the advent of redemption. When he ascended to heaven, he was asked to prove that he was indeed the “zaddik of the generation.” Thereupon, he asked “his holy company. . . . Is it true that I am the zaddik of the generation? But none could answer this in the affirmative. . . . Now they all knew well and believed with all their heart that the late Maggid was the zaddik of the generation, and with all that, they all fell silent and did not answer.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite the fact that everyday life contradicted the claim of the “zaddik of the generation,” coupled with the lessened prestige of the title in literary sources, the term (and others like it) continued to be used in hasidic homilies, as expressive of the idea that a certain zaddik considered himself superior to the other zaddikim. Even if the title had no practical value, it possessed didactical significance—at least, for the zaddik who was speaking; that is to say, a zaddik speaking of the characteristic traits of the zaddik of the generation, his duties and his mission in the world was presumably

considering himself in that light. It will therefore be instructive to consider Rabbi Israel's interpretation of this concept, to see if it was in any way uniquely representative of his own personality and qualities.

As always in Jewish homiletic literature, Rabbi Israel turned to the biblical past to find the perfect model for the zaddik of the generation, as a basis for comparison. Here, too, however, he found no fully appropriate single model and instead usually mixed the traits of several biblical personalities. This mixture reflects the fact that Israel's teachings did not represent a unified, systematic doctrine but actually comprised random reactions, which do not come together to form one orderly, consistent ideology.

Thus, for example, he used to say of the patriarch Jacob that he knew how to draw out "that slight evil that is in a permitted thing, so that it should be altogether good."<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Israel was fond of Jacob's figure and frequently compared himself to the patriarch. Jacob's sanctity and merit were of a lower level than those of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham; nevertheless, he was "the favorite among the patriarchs" and it was within his power to help his generation. So, too, Rabbi Israel's sanctity was less than that of his ancestors, each of whom was an "all-inclusive zaddik." Nevertheless, in the final analysis, his powers were greater: "Indeed, we are more capable of helping this generation."<sup>15</sup> Another figure with whom Rabbi Israel liked to identify himself was Moses. As "zaddik of the generation," chosen to take the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses submitted to all the suffering, distress, and harsh judgment meted out to his people.<sup>16</sup> Bezalel son of Uri, who built the Tabernacle, was also "zaddik of the generation." He successfully made "all the world like the world of the angels." And here Rabbi Israel went on to speak of himself: "Now, too, that can be done; but what shall I do? The world is not worthy of it!"<sup>17</sup> Bezalel could restore the world to its natural, virginal state, as envisaged by the Almighty before He created the universe; so could the true zaddik of the present generation, i.e., Rabbi Israel. The fault lay in the inferior condition of the generation, not in the zaddik's capacity to change it.

Other biblical figures with whom Rabbi Israel identified were the kings Solomon and Hezekiah. "We, too, belong to the essence of Solomon," he said, as he painted a picture of the wise monarch as an archetypal "all-inclusive zaddik": "the attribute of Justice in heaven and the attribute of Justice on earth can be forced to agree with the attribute of justice of the all-inclusive zaddik. . . . And Solomon is the Messiah."<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, he publicly announced "that he was the soul of king Hezekiah,"<sup>19</sup> who had also been considered "the true wise man of the generation and the true zaddik of the generation and the true king of Israel."<sup>20</sup> "The true zaddik," Rabbi Israel taught his astounded hasidim, "is in the image of Ancient Man in the world. . . . Hear, O Israel, how I have today secured a mitigation of judg-

ment in the upper worlds. May it be God's will that there should be no change in any of them. And they all fell silent. And he told them to answer Amen to all that"<sup>21</sup> Like the biblical heroes, each of whom was a "zaddik of the generation" for his own time, Israel considered himself the "zaddik of the generation" for his period. What Jacob, Moses, Bezalel, Hezekiah, and Solomon had been for their times, Rabbi Israel was for his; and despite the basic inferiority of recent generations compared with earlier times, "we are more capable of helping this generation."

Rabbi Israel was aware that both nonhasidic Orthodoxy and the maskilim took exception to the way the masses idolized the zaddik; accordingly, he was constantly trying to reinforce the belief of his hasidim in the importance of the institution of the zaddik and the value of "cleaving" to the zaddik of the generation. Here is how he explained the verse "some of every first fruit of the soil" (Deut. 26:2) to his followers:

Now Rashi explained: "Some of the first fruit, not all of it."<sup>22</sup> "Some of the first fruit" refers to the zaddik of the generation. "Not all of it"—because there are many zaddikim. But every person should attach himself to the zaddik of the generation. And that is the meaning of "some of the first fruit," for the zaddik of the generation may be likened to a pipe, as the pipe through which all the abundance descends to the world, and therefore the zaddik of the generation has to take care that it should not be blocked by anything. . . . And each and every person must beg the Lord, blessed be He, to receive the abundance from the zaddik of the generation. . . . But there are foolish people and mitnagdim who ask the hasidim, Why do you need the zaddik, and what action have you taken with the zaddik? But they are fools and do not know the action of the zaddik.<sup>23</sup>

So there are indeed plenty of zaddikim around, but it is the duty of every hasid to make the effort and locate the one and only zaddik of the generation, for only through him can one benefit from the Divine abundance that descends to earth. Rabbi Israel added that absolute faith in the real zaddik is not only the elixir of life and the key to receiving material and spiritual abundance in this world; it is also a precondition for receiving the Divine bounty in the next:

The true zaddik . . . exerts influence both in corporeality—sons, life, sustenance—and in spirituality . . . in particular, for those who are attached to him, and even in the World to Come it is through him that they receive beneficial abundance. And everyone must believe all this implicitly. . . . Therefore, whoever loses this power and does not believe, Heaven forbid, in this power of the zaddik is called a fool. For the main vitality of man is this belief.<sup>24</sup>

The special standing of the zaddik of the generation, which in some respects resembles God's standing in relation to His world, also imposes responsibility upon the zaddik himself. He is expected to maintain a special level of awareness in regard to his relationship with his flock. He is sup-

posed to treat them with compassion, not harshly, for otherwise he would lose their confidence and be less capable of influencing them:

And just as the Holy One, blessed be He, treats His creatures, so should the zaddik, who is the leader of the generation, treat all those subordinate to him with compassion. For if he were to treat them with harsh justice, they would not be able to attach themselves to him. . . . Just as the commandment was to our master Moses, so should the zaddik, the leader of the generation, treat those people who wish to attach themselves to him.<sup>25</sup>

The zaddik senses the pain of every Jew, anywhere in the world; he is aware of both harsh justice meted out to God's people and of Divine compassion for them. These elements all come together, so Rabbi Israel believed, in the physical and spiritual state of the zaddik:

He would say of himself that he was like quicksilver, sensing the difference between heat and cold, so do I sense the sorrow of Israel from one end of the world to the other.<sup>26</sup>

When strict justice, Heaven forbid, is imposed upon Israel, then I am sick and sad, and when there is compassion, I am healthy and joyful. For the zaddik can feel with his body all kinds of changes that take place in the world, whenever they occur, from compassion to strict justice, Heaven forbid, and from strict justice to compassion.<sup>27</sup>

Zaddikim of the special category represented by Rabbi Israel were in constant need of defense and justification, for their whole appearance and external behavior were the very opposite of those one might expect in a zaddik. His response was:

There are zaddikim whose righteousness and Torah and worship are revealed for all to see, and there are zaddikim whose revelation and Torah are invisible, only their lips move. . . . And that is the meaning of the verse "All streams flow into the sea" [Eccles. 1:7]. "All streams" are the zaddikim, [and] "flow into the sea" signifies the zaddik. . . . For the great zaddik brings beneficial abundance and vitality to the worship of all the zaddikim and all of Israel.<sup>28</sup>

On another occasion, Rabbi Israel elaborated on the verse "What great nation has laws and rules as righteous . . . ?" (Deut. 4:8). He interpreted the word "righteous" (Hebrew *zaddikim*) here as alluding to two categories of zaddikim—those of "laws" (Hebrew *hukim*) and those of "rules" (Hebrew *mishpatim*). It is clear in which category he classified himself: "Just as laws have no explanation and rules have an explanation, so there are zaddikim who are of the essence of laws, who have no explanation, for they are entirely incomprehensible and all their behavior is essentially law. And there are zaddikim who are of the essence of rules, who pursue Torah and worship in the plain sense."<sup>29</sup>

The meaning of these statements is probably as follows. Rabbi Israel is the greatest zaddik of all, but he operates in secret, and his Torah and Divine worship are concealed, invisible. His deeds are performed covertly—only his lips move—but the impression created thereby is nevertheless tremendous, for it turns out that he is the “great zaddik,” the sea into which all streams flow, and it is he who enlivens, or energizes, all other zaddikim. The reason for the selection of Rabbi Israel as the great zaddik is not clear to the observer, for he is one of a special kind of zaddik—those who are unexplainable, like the particular precepts of the Torah known as “laws” (in contradistinction to “rules,” the precepts for which there is a logical explanation). This fact must therefore be accepted without question (he was probably addressing an audience of his own hasidim) as a precept whose Divine origin and profound, underlying reasons will never be properly known.

While insisting on his own uniqueness, Rabbi Israel naturally leveled criticism at other kinds of rebbes who failed to realize the true ideal of the zaddik. Commenting on the verse, “I am sure it is a holy man of God who comes this way regularly” [2 Kings 4:9], he asked: “Surely a *guter yid* [Yiddish for “good Jew,” i.e., zaddik] should be recognizable from his deeds, that he calls out in prayer and fasts and the like. And he answered . . . that a man who is known as a saint—his worship is all inward and is not visible from outside.”<sup>30</sup> Rabbi Israel was definitely referring to the quiet, introverted nature of his own prayer, which seemed at variance with the loud, extroverted nature of his self-image as the greatest and most important zaddik of all.

Yet another statement may illustrate his awareness that he was a unique zaddik:

There are people who ask of me, in what way am I a *guter yid*. And the truth is that I am not a *guter yid*, and I myself am nothing. For I know my value. I seek only the truth, and whoever speaks of me—it is as if he were speaking of the Holy One, blessed be He. . . . Now I do not mean to glorify myself, Heaven forbid. Believe me that I am part of the soul of Israel, and if one Jew at the end of the world is in pain, Heaven forbid, I sense it immediately.<sup>31</sup>

Such statements, and the similar ones already quoted, point to the basic elements of Rabbi Israel’s self-image: a deep conviction of being a unique, supreme zaddik, capable by virtue of his special status in the supernal worlds of causing radical changes in the lives of his hasidim and of all Jews. Such changes could be effected by the zaddik’s “descent” to his hasidim and his simple, everyday behavior as an ordinary, unrefined person. The sentence “And the truth is that I am not a *guter yid*, and I myself am nothing” is ambiguous and open to several interpretations. At first sight, it seems to

imply humility and modesty, but the Hebrew word *ayin*, translated here as "nothing," has another meaning, which betrays the real message. In this context, *ayin* is a mystical term for nonbeing, opposed to the Hebrew word *yesh* (being). The many layers of significance of *ayin* have been discussed at length in kabbalistic and hasidic literature as expressing a level of extreme humility, of material and spiritual self-effacement before God and man until full unification with the divinity, but also as expressing a supreme level of proximity to the Divine. Rabbi Israel is thus saying: I am not just a guter yid like all other zaddikim, but much more: I am of the essence of *ayin* in its esoteric sense, and therefore "whoever speaks of me—it is as if he were speaking of the Holy One."<sup>32</sup> Other sources, too, indicate that Rabbi Israel considered himself a zaddik with a particularly high level of *ayin*:

He said of himself that he is lowest of the low and *ayin*, and so on. And then he said as follows: The whole of the Torah is included in the book of Genesis, and the book of Genesis is included in the first verse. . . . And all of the first verse is included in the [first] word *bereshit*, and that word is included in the [first] letter *bet* of *bereshit*, and the letter *bet* is included in the innermost point of the *bet*, and I am that point, for the zaddik is the point of the Torah.<sup>33</sup>

That awareness also had some practical applications. As a zaddik conscious of his own value, Rabbi Israel allowed himself a great deal of freedom in relation to the times of prayer. It is well known that late prayer in the morning and the afternoon was one of the hasidic practices that incensed the mitnagdim; this was particularly so with regard to hasidic circles who had turned this tardiness into a banner and a mark of socioreligious identity.<sup>34</sup> Rabbi Israel, too, delayed his prayers, explaining this as due to his being a zaddik "who could mitigate strict judgments at their source." Such a zaddik, he held, could also pray at an "unpropitious time" (the propitious time being, of course, the usual time for prayer, intended for normal human beings and for the other zaddikim). All this depended on whether the zaddik was praying specifically for himself, i.e., to fulfill his personal potential in order to mitigate the strict judgments; but if he wished to pray for others, i.e., a prayer for materialistic interests, not for the public interests, he had to pray at the usual times.<sup>35</sup> Rabbi Israel was apparently aware of the anarchic and antinomistic potential of his practice, and he therefore instructed his followers scrupulously to maintain the regular prayer times. Departure from the norm, he told them, was the prerogative of the zaddik alone. He adorned his injunction with a story:

The story is told of a certain man whose wife cooked him a bean dish every day, and that was the practice for a long time. Once his wife began cooking late in the morning, and he had to wait some hours until the bean dish was ready. So when she set

the table for him with that dish, he was very angry and told her: I thought that today you had cooked some special dish and that that was why you are so late. For a special food needs much preparation and great care in all its ingredients. And for that reason I was willing to wait till now. But for a dish of beans, which is a daily occasion, I do not want to wait at all.<sup>36</sup>

On another occasion, Rabbi Israel was asked why zaddikim are frequently late in their prayers. He answered with a parable concerning a king who set certain “receiving hours,” outside which no one could be received. “But if a person should desire to come to the king in relation to the king’s own affairs, and matters of government, concerning the king only, having nothing at all to ask for himself, how could such things be confined to the official hours? Since in matters concerning the king one can come before him at any time.”<sup>37</sup> The king here is, of course, God, while the person permitted to enter the king’s presence whenever his business concerns the king or his government is the zaddik. Significantly, Rabbi Israel held court for his hasidim on a similar basis: he would receive them at certain fixed times but not otherwise. Only rarely did he agree to receive someone outside the regular times. Perhaps this was another reason that he urged his followers to observe the proper prayer times.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Israel’s lack of punctuality regarding regular prayer services was criticized even among his hasidim. Once, when he was saying Torah and a certain hasid asked him why he always prayed late and not at the proper time according to the Halakhah, Rabbi Israel’s surprising answer was:

Zaddikim are above time in all that they do. . . . That is the meaning of the verse “It is a time to act for the Lord, for they have violated your Torah” [Pss. 119:126], that is, where do we learn that we act as if there is “a time for the Lord,” that is a time for worship? That is because “they have violated your Torah,” thereby becoming below time.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, the zaddik, whose soul has no part in the great historic sins (the sin of the snake and the sin of the golden calf, as explained in the same source in a passage not quoted here), exists in his mystical essence “above,” that is, beyond normal concepts of time. Thus, paradoxically, by violating the Halakhah in regard to the times of prayer, the zaddik enables the denizens of the material world (“below”), which are governed by the ordinary concept of time, properly to observe the Halakhah. Here we have a new interpretation of an ostensibly defunct Shabbatean formula, according to which the very abrogation of a law is its observance.

The most extreme expression of Rabbi Israel’s awareness of himself as the zaddik of the generation is probably his view of the significance of the mutual relationship between the zaddik and his hasidim, and of the mes-

sianic mission of the "zaddik of the generation." The special mystical bond between the zaddik and his hasidim, wherever they might be, also dictates a physiological link. The zaddik is supposed to feel physical pain whenever one of his hasidim is suffering. As the trunk of the tree feels the pain of a plucked branch, the zaddik will feel betrayed and physically pained if one of "his" hasidim should leave him for another zaddik. Essentially, there is little new in this idea, and similar thoughts were expressed by many zaddikim before Rabbi Israel. He does not stop there, however, but draws further conclusions: all this is true of "other zaddikim," and Rabbi Israel specifically mentions Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta and Mordekhai of Chernobyl, two of the most famous zaddikim of the time. "But as for me, it is permissible to tear oneself away from other zaddikim and come to me. Because I am the Ineffable Name, in which are included all twelve combinations of the Tetragrammaton in sequence."<sup>39</sup> In other words: I am different. The agony that seizes other zaddikim when their hasidim leave them derives from the mystical distress felt when the branch is broken off the trunk of the tree planted by the former zaddik. Leaving the zaddik is a betrayal of the branch's life source, a kind of spiritual suicide. However, leaving a zaddik in order to connect with the tree planted by Rabbi Israel does not involve such suffering, for the hasid is now attaching himself to the Ineffable Name itself.

This is perhaps the most explicit formulation of Rabbi Israel's conception of his position: He is superior not only to his hasidim—that would be self-evident—but also to all other contemporary zaddikim, a prototype of the total, pristine concept of the zaddik.

## *II. On Messianism and Redemption*

Gershom Scholem wrote: "A few years ago I asked [Martin] Buber why he had concealed and omitted in his books the tremendous words about the messianic era, those deeply penetrating words, reported in the name of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin. Buber's answer is engraved on my memory. He said, 'Because I do not understand them.'"<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, Rabbi Israel's conception of messianism is one of the most obscure elements in his thought. His own statements on the subject are quite baffling, for they offer both pessimistic visions of miraculous-catastrophic redemption and more traditional, optimistic ideas, which see redemption as a natural historical and political process.<sup>41</sup> It is also hard to trace any ideological development and change over the years, because most of these statements are undated. Possibly, they are merely further evidence of inconsistency and random declarations that do not add up to a responsible, systematic doctrine.



Redemption, he believed, is not dependent on the Jews' good or bad behavior. As redemption is the end of history, it will surely take place, and the change that will accompany it will bring about a great wave of collective repentance ("First there will be the redemption and afterwards people will repent").<sup>42</sup> However, this pre-messianic period ("the footsteps of the Messiah") will be catastrophic, almost unendurable, as described in many sources. A careful examination of the relevant utterances will show, I believe, that Rabbi Israel was referring to his own time.

Rabbi Joseph of Radvill, Israel's disciple and relative, heard him making an amazingly bold statement concerning the events prior to the redemption: "The last three hours before the time of redemption will be very difficult for a person to maintain his Judaism, as if there were a smooth iron wall and one had to climb it without one's fingernails, and that is the meaning of the text in the *Hoshana* prayers: 'Save, we pray You, three hours. . . .'"<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, addressing an intimate group of his hasidim, he declared: "The time will come when a simple man will fare well in both corporeality and spirituality, whereas a spiritual man will not fare well in either corporeality or spirituality, that is, he will not be capable even of saying a chapter of Psalms. And he concluded: Why am I telling you this? So your hearts should not fear."<sup>44</sup>

On yet another occasion, dated to 1842, while he was strolling in a near-by forest, he told his associates that the generation prior to the redemption would be characterized by "small-mindedness." Spiritually speaking, the situation would be so bad that mere adherence to the simplest, most elementary (Yiddish *dem pintele*) faith would be considered true greatness of spirit.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, he said, "Before the coming of the Messiah everything will be permissible, and a person will not be ashamed of sinning in public; on the contrary, he will be respected even by the zaddikim and they will admit them to their circle, and that will be the ultimate clarification [Hebrew *berur*]."<sup>46</sup>

An interesting tradition was cited by Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, the fanatically anti-Zionist leader of Satmar Hasidism, in the name of a hasid who had been close to Rabbi Israel for twenty years:

Know that just as fire descended from heaven to Elijah on Mount Carmel and did not descend for the prophets of the Baal—in the "footsteps of the Messiah" period, the opposite will happen: fire will descend from heaven to the prophets of the Baal, and there will be great and daunting tests, difficult and bitter; and I am here to warn you of this, so that you should be aware and take care.<sup>47</sup>

Another explicit statement by Rabbi Israel reveals his desire for cosmic change in the universe: "Now, too, I have entreated the Lord that the redemption should not come in the natural way . . . only that the Lord will help with a great change."<sup>48</sup>

Comparing these statements with Rabbi Israel's known views of his contemporaries and his times, one immediately notices the similarity. He was convinced that redemption was imminent, although his generation was very weak "and hearts and minds are small."<sup>49</sup> When trying to explain the difference between ancestral generations, which had witnessed miracles, and his own time, he explained that the former had prayed and been answered immediately, for the very reason that it was not yet time for redemption. "Not so at this time, when the time of redemption has already come, so that it is desired in heaven that there be further birth pangs." He compared the situation to that of a woman in childbirth, in whom more frequent birth pangs and increasing pain accelerate birth.<sup>50</sup> Or, elsewhere: "Just as, in the time of 'the footsteps of the Messiah,' when the Divine visage is entirely hidden, we hope for revelation of the most supreme light."<sup>51</sup> Similarly:

Now, in recent generations, the main thing is that the Children of Israel should become much stronger in their faith. . . . The souls of the last generations are the footsteps of the Messiah. . . . So man's heart should believe and not be faint, saying: Behold, the souls in these generations come from a low place, and hearts and minds are low—so what use is there in one's speaking?! But one should believe that even the smallest speech of a Jew makes an impression on high.<sup>52</sup>

Clearly, then, far from being a vision of some far-off, theoretical future, his statements about the catastrophic nature of the pre-messianic era referred to his own time. If these sources are authentic (although perhaps rewritten) and not a late projection, one cannot ignore the new sounds that come out of them. They are imbued with the winds of the modern times, which were already shaking the fortified walls of traditional Jewish society and beginning to undermine its foundations. Rabbi Israel, prophetically, is expressing his fear of the possible effect on the faithful and on the old, good tradition of the new spiritual and social trends: Haskalah, secularization, acculturation, and assimilation, whose seductive powers were already evident in the 1840s.

What was Rabbi Israel's personal standing as "zaddik of the generation" in the new world order that would emerge before the messianic era? Contrary to the cosmic turbulence characteristic of the "footsteps of the messiah," in this context, we find a moderate, "natural" portrayal of redemption. A tradition cited in Rabbi Israel's name notes: "The masses think that the Messiah will come down like an angel from heaven. But the truth is that if all great leaders of Israel agree that the zaddik of their generation is the Messiah, then the spirit of the Lord will be revealed upon him and he will be the Messiah for Israel."<sup>53</sup>

The idea that the Messiah would not be some marvelous personage who would descend from heaven in a fiery chariot, but the zaddik of the generation, has been shared by other hasidic leaders, ranging from Nahman of

Bratslav to the fervent followers of the last Habad rebbe, Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, some of whom continue to believe that he is the Messiah even after his death.<sup>54</sup> Rabbi Israel's statement, however, is surely one of the most explicit expressions of such a view.<sup>55</sup> Considering himself a worthy candidate for the mission, he knew that there was little chance of securing the agreement of all contemporary zaddikim that he was "the zaddik of the generation." If, as we saw above, there was no such agreement concerning his grandfather, the Maggid of Mezhibezh, why should he be more fortunate? Nevertheless, he was constantly hinting that he was the zaddik worthy of being God's intimate partner in the messianic process. Here, for example, is his paradoxical explanation of why he refrained from discussing messianic matters and why he refused to specify the date of the End of Days:

He said: Why have all the zaddikim spoken of the matter of the coming of Messiah, the righteous redeemer, while I do not like to talk about it? This may be likened to two fathers who have come together to discuss a match between their children, one's son with the other's daughter. That is the custom and the common practice in the world, that fathers discuss the matter, but the groom himself sits silent.<sup>56</sup>

His meaning is obvious: the "fathers"<sup>57</sup> who discuss the match are all the other zaddikim, who have the power to prepare the ground for the marriage and negotiate the details. The groom-son is Rabbi Israel himself, the Messiah-zaddik, while the bride-daughter is presumably the Jewish people awaiting redemption.

Many of his colleagues and followers also saw him in an explicitly messianic light. For example, Meir of Premyslan said of himself that he had received the soul of the Messiah son of David, while Rabbi Israel had been granted the soul of the Messiah son of Joseph: "But since the Messiah son of David has to endure suffering . . . he [Meir] decided to change places with the saintly rebbe of Ruzhin and received the soul of the Messiah son of Joseph. . . . And his concluding holy words were: Immediately thereafter the saintly rebbe of Ruzhin was thrown into prison."<sup>58</sup>

This statement reflects not only Rabbi Israel's messianic image as seen by his contemporaries but also the "logical" connection they discerned between his messianic role and the events of his life (i.e., his imprisonment). There is copious evidence for this concept. His admiring disciple Elijah Lerman explicitly referred to him as "Messiah of the Lord."<sup>59</sup> The maskil Solomon Rubin also reported hearing many people saying that "there is *no doubt* that he is the Messiah, who will reveal himself if he finds the generation worthy of it."<sup>60</sup> Rabbi Israel defined himself as "the soul of king Hezekiah"—an explicitly messianic figure he also considered "the true king of Israel."<sup>61</sup>

Of particular interest is a letter sent from Jerusalem, probably in 1841, by Rabbi Aaron Moses of Kamenets, a leader of the hasidic community in Palestine, to his grandson in Botosani. The letter describes a revelatory experience that the writer had in 1840 and clearly expresses the fervent messianic hopes that hasidic mystics associated with Rabbi Israel:

If it should occur to the holy admor of Ruzhin to settle in the country of Walachia, you should be one of the first to wash his feet and drink of his waters. For I had reached it [i.e., a mystical vision] in the 600th year of Noah's life,<sup>62</sup> as explained in the book *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* concerning the time of the opening of the fountain of heavenly wisdom and the streams of earthly wisdom, and [as revealed to me] beside the cave—that he [Rabbi Israel] is the soul of the saintly Rabbi Israel the Besht. And you do not know his stature and greatness in the Supreme Court in Heavenly Jerusalem, for all fear him and seek his favor, and it was said of him: "Israel, in whom I glory," in the heavens above and on earth below. The whole world is not worthy of recounting his praises, even one drop of the great sea.<sup>63</sup>

This letter, which is undoubtedly authentic, most probably reflects the messianic unrest around the year 1839–40 and the belief, based on the book of *Zohar*, that this year (600 of the sixth millennium according to the Hebrew calendar) marked the opening of the "gates of wisdom," through which the Messiah would pass.<sup>64</sup> A mystical vision apprised Rabbi Aaron of the zaddik of Ruzhin's lofty position in the "Supreme Court in Heavenly Jerusalem." That vision contained indications of Rabbi Israel's messianic potential; accordingly, it was advisable to seek his proximity and remain with him even if he wandered to the farthest reaches of the earth. Clear-cut evidence of the explicitly messianic interpretation placed on the experience may be found in one copy of Rabbi Aaron Moses' letter, which reads as follows: "For he [Rabbi Israel] is our king, the king Messiah in truth, and he is the soul of Rabbi Israel Besht."<sup>65</sup>

Despite Rabbi Israel's self-image and the complex of messianic qualities associated with him, he was not above ascribing messianic qualities to other zaddikim, such as Solomon of Karlin and Moses Zevi of Savran, whom he identified with the Messiah son of Joseph, or his father Shalom Shakhna, who he believed to be the soul of the Messiah, for all contemporary zaddikim said that his soul came "from the shrine of the bird's nest, which is the Messiah."<sup>66</sup> This point also bears examination. Just as there was a decline in the significance of the concept "zaddik of the generation," it would seem that here, too, such ideas were little more than a religious-literary fad, which was quick to detect messianic elements in renowned zaddikim. Hence one cannot necessarily draw any conclusions as to a concrete messianic awareness or actual messianic tension; such references merely aim to emphasize a certain zaddik's mystical uniqueness and his superiority to other persons in the hierarchy of hasidic leadership.

Can one say that in Rabbi Israel's case, consciousness—whether his own or his admirers'—of a messianic mission reflected an acute messianic tension, which also had practical consequences? That was probably not the case. First, we know that Rabbi Israel never emigrated to the Holy Land to realize his mission; indeed, neither he nor his sons even visited Palestine; the sum total of his efforts in this context consisted of traditional expectations of redemption. Such expectations never went beyond a theoretical affirmation of his supreme stature and of his messianic potential, which, for various reasons, was never realized. Even the ritual of the "Messiah's room," which at first sight would seem messianic, did not represent real messianic ferment or an attempt to hasten the Messiah's advent. It was merely an extravagant component in the long-term process of consolidating Rabbi Israel's position as a zaddik.<sup>67</sup> In this context it is worth mentioning that not one of his many public projects in Palestine was attributed to messianic agitation or construed as an instrument of intervention in the natural process of redemption. This may be contrasted with the sentiments commonly expressed in the writings of perushim in the Holy Land.<sup>68</sup>

There was, however, yet another unique strand in Rabbi Israel's doctrine of the Messiah, which, as far as I know, is unparalleled anywhere in Hasidism. His son David Moses of Chortkov reported having heard from his father that "our righteous Messiah will come first to the Land of Russia, although how can one say 'first' of our righteous Messiah? Can he no longer travel quickly from place to place?! But so said my late father of Ruzhin."<sup>69</sup> This idea, in its preference for the Diaspora, in a sense deprives the Land of Israel of its traditional role as the main arena of events in the messianic era, shifting that role instead to Eastern Europe. However, in contradistinction to the territorialism of the Frankists, who believed that the redemption would take place in Poland,<sup>70</sup> there is no intention here to rob the Holy Land of its sanctity. Rabbi Israel was simply placing emphasis on the terrible suffering of Russian Jewry; in light of this suffering, he believed, it was appropriate that the painful process of "birth pangs of the Messiah" should begin there, where the Jews stood in the most pressing need of redemption and perhaps also needed him, Rabbi Israel, most urgently.

Rabbi Israel was also regarded by many other zaddikim as "zaddik of the generation."<sup>71</sup> Surprisingly, however, he was not pleased at such attitudes, even deploring them as to some extent belittling his value. When he was told that Mordekhai of Chernobyl told his hasidim that Rabbi Israel was "the zaddik of the generation," his reaction was one of derision: "People will say of me that I am the zaddik of the generation, but the Lord knows that the zaddik of the generation is nothing (Hebrew *ayin*) under my feet. I am a, a, . . . and he threw his head back and fell into his holy thoughts."<sup>72</sup>

If this source indeed preserves an authentic conversation, it expresses Rabbi Israel's uncertainty as to the proper definition of his standing as a zaddik. Perhaps he felt that the mere definition of "the zaddik of the generation" did not properly express his unique personality as the supreme zaddik of all.

### *III. Objection to Wonder-Working*

For some researchers of Hasidism, the performance of miracles has become a kind of touchstone: if zaddikim are "wonder-workers," they are automatically categorized as "practical" or "popular" (euphemisms here for hallucinatory, fraudulent, or primitive); if they question wonder-working, they may be considered representatives of rational, intellectual trends in Hasidism. No doubt, some distinction should be made between zaddikim who claimed to perform miracles and those who did not; but the qualities traditionally associated with each category (thereby also linking a given spiritual trend with a particular geographical region) are outcomes of simplistic reasoning and generalization.<sup>73</sup>

Just how faulty this distinction is follows from the case of Rabbi Israel, who might be thought to represent a popular, nonintellectual brand of Hasidism. As it happens, however, he strongly disapproved of wonder-working and rejected miracles as an instrument of worship.<sup>74</sup> In this respect, he was continuing the tradition of other zaddikim, like Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk and Shneur Zalman of Lyady, who refrained from performing miracles and denounced zaddikim who made use of them.

Rabbi Israel, of course, was by no means a critical rationalist, denying the very existence of miracles. It was his view, rather, that miracles should be performed only by "a very great zaddik, one of the elect," and even then only rarely. His reason was that a miracle performed in one place might cause damage elsewhere, and the result would sometimes contradict the Creator's express wish:

He was quite amazed at these generations, who praise the most renowned of this generation for many miracles. And he asked: Who is greater than Elijah of whom it is said that he performed seven or eight miracles, and of Elisha that he performed twice as many? And now they praise fifteen miracles each day! But truly, one should take care not to request a miracle from any but a very great zaddik, one of the elect, who can grant what is requested to a person in such a way that some deficiency will not be caused elsewhere. For, Heaven forbid, when one grants something to a person, there may be a deficiency in a different matter. . . . And therefore, when a person comes sometimes to the zaddik with some deficiency, that he should pray for him from the Lord, but when the zaddik is not acquainted with the person's source, not knowing that it may sometimes happen that the Lord intentionally created him

with his deficiency—then the zaddik requesting mercy for him may be making his request against the will of the Holy One, blessed be He.<sup>75</sup>

The polemical bent in these words is quite obvious. Miracles had become quite common in the hasidic world: any minor, beginning zaddik could slip them out of his sleeve with ease to impress his flock. Hasidim were sometimes inclined to measure a zaddik's spiritual qualities by the number of miracles, real or otherwise, that he had performed—that much is familiar from works of fiction and memoirs, as well as hasidic folklore. Rabbi Israel, however, ridiculed these manifestations. This plethora of miracles, he argued, represented the true decline of his times: not only were many of the self-styled wonder-workers unworthy, but their pretensions, if true, would make them greater than an Elijah, who had performed fewer miracles in his whole life than some of them claimed to have done in one day. Such superabundance of supernatural acts implied a vulgarization of the “pure” miracle, namely, the single, isolated miracle, impressive by its very uniqueness, performed by the most sublime, supreme zaddik, who could ensure that this intervention in the normal world order was not against God's will.

Another source once again reveals the polemical thrust characteristic of Rabbi Israel's attitude to miracles: the fact that any zaddik, great or otherwise, could perform miracles made wonder-working useless as a criterion for distinguishing between “the truly great zaddik” and the unimportant “minor zaddik.” This was, in fact, a blessing in disguise. From now on, a hasid would have to use his own judgment to identify the “true zaddik” on the basis of other criteria: “And he said this about the zaddikim in our time: the minor zaddik will also be able to do a miracle like the truly great zaddik, and that is so that no one will know who the true zaddik is, but in your mind seek the true zaddik by your own choice.”<sup>76</sup>

The words “minor” (Hebrew *katan*) and “great” (Hebrew *gadol*) are not accidental, but recur frequently in other relevant statements by Rabbi Israel. There is a homily of his in which he explains why, as the Midrash relates, other barren women bore children around the same time as Sarah. One finds in this not only an echo of his inner grading of “great” and “minor” zaddikim, the rules of which are none too clear, but also the positive side to minor zaddikim's performing miracles: “With regard to Sarah herself there is no question, for she was a righteous woman; but what about the other barren women who were remembered? . . . For this reason, even the minor zaddikim sometimes show that they can perform miracles, so that the principle of free choice is not violated, for if they did not show miracles, only the great zaddikim doing so, everyone would travel only to them.”<sup>77</sup>

The fact that "minor zaddikim" frequently resorted to wonder-working was, in Israel's view, a reflection of the hasidim's freedom of choice and a stratagem controlling the distribution of hasidim among the zaddikim of their time. By virtue of miracles, the "minor zaddikim" were able to attract those hasidim who sought that sort of leadership.

The following typical expression of Rabbi Israel's attitude to wonder-workers was ascribed to him by one of his hasidim:

I heard that once someone asked his holiness the admor of Ruzhin why no one ever saw him do miracles as do other zaddikim. And he answered that every zaddik goes from the world to a higher world, and there is one world called the world of miracle. Now there are zaddikim who are not so clever, so when they come to the world of miracle, they say to themselves that there is no world greater than that. Therefore they stay there, and that is why they show many miracles. But there are zaddikim who know that there are further worlds, higher than the world of miracle, and they go to the higher worlds. But when there is a great need, they come down to the world of miracle. Now I, when I was six or seven years old, I was in the world of miracle; but I am clever and I went to the higher worlds.<sup>78</sup>

In other words, too many miracles are a sign of childishness and spiritual immaturity. Those zaddikim who go on performing miracles as adults are simply exhibiting their simplemindedness and spiritual rigidity.

Rabbi Israel buttressed his anti-miracle polemic with the argument that superfluous wonder-working was a cause of anti-Semitism and scorn for the Jews: "Moses did not want to be an emissary with miracles, he wanted to fulfill the plan in the natural way, without miracles and wonders, so as not to arouse thereby the haters of Israel. . . . For when miracles are performed visibly and publicly for Israel, they arouse hatred among the nations."<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, we have reports that both Rabbi Israel and his sons made use of amulets and charms<sup>80</sup> and on occasion even performed some miracles.<sup>81</sup> It should be noted, however, that there is a difference between charms and miracles, particularly as the Besht himself, and famous zaddikim after him, also wrote charms and believed in their power. Amulets and charms were considered part of everyday "medical" practice, not necessarily classified as mystical-magical acts.

Little wonder, therefore, that Ruzhin Hasidism has left us almost no stories of a magical nature or reports of exorcism and the like. When someone asked Israel's son Bernyu of Leova, if he too had exorcised demons, he retorted, "People do not come to us with that nonsense."<sup>82</sup> This overall attitude percolated down to the hasidim, who knew that the rebbe of Ruzhin should not be praised for his miracles as hasidim generally boasted about their zaddikim.<sup>83</sup>

Elijah Lerman, a hasid of Rabbi Israel's, who conveys various reliable



traditions about his mentor in his book *Mikhtevei Eliyahu*, testified to the following episode reflecting Rabbi Israel's unique attitude to miracles, to which he had been an eyewitness:

I the writer myself heard from the holy mouth of the saintly and pure admor (the late Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin) in the town of Borshchev that the world needed rain and people came to him to pray to the Lord. And I heard in the field, on the day of *Lag ba-omer*, . . . after he had told a very sublime parable, he said: "Sovereign of the Universe, today, too, there are zaddikim, such that the Holy One, blessed be He, commands, and they nullify harsh decrees. I entreat you that rain fall, for people need rain." And before he reached the town, it began to rain. I saw this with my own eyes.<sup>84</sup>

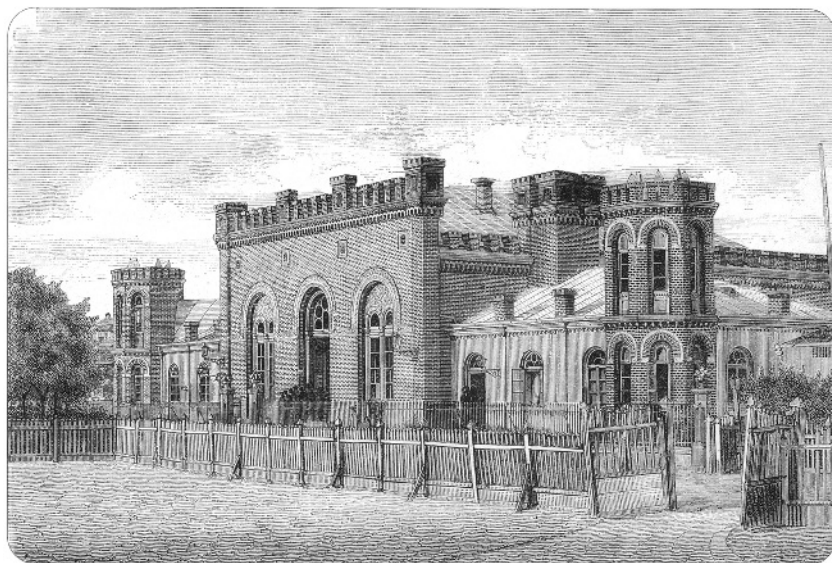
The visible miracle was performed "passively" through telling "a very sublime" parable and offering up a simple prayer, which made the worshiper's very weakness and inferiority ("today, too, there are zaddikim," i.e., not only in the time of the famous mishnaic sage Honi ha-me'aggel, who "forced" the Lord to make rain) a source of power and finally brought on the desired miracle.

In sum, Rabbi Israel's attitude to miracles was most probably also influenced by the need to cope with his followers' expectations and the pressures that they, puzzled that he refrained from this popular mode of action, exerted upon him. His objections to miracles were based not on a religious or rational critique of them, but rather on their sociological aspect: the processes by which a miracle came to be "accepted." Among the hasidim, miracles had become a common yardstick by which to gauge a zaddik's popularity. This criterion was distorted by incorporation of a quantitative dimension, however, so that the more miracles a zaddik performed, the saintlier and greater he was considered. The truth, however, was just the opposite: performing a miracle had dire implications for the world order, and a zaddik who had not reached the proper level might thereby cause severe damage. The performance of "true" miracles, whose existence was not challenged by Rabbi Israel, was entrusted only to the "truly great zaddikim." Nevertheless, the performance of many miracles also had its positive side, and given the great demand of the hasidim for wonder-working zaddikim, there was a proliferation of experts in that field. Over time, there was a natural division of labor: the numerous hasidim traveling to such minor zaddikim served to reduce expectations that great zaddikim would also perform miracles.





The Jewish cemetery at Sadgora. Rabbi Israel's tomb stone was destroyed during World War I. To mark his grave, a huge white concrete slab was erected (photograph from the 1980s).



The *kloiz* in Sadgora.

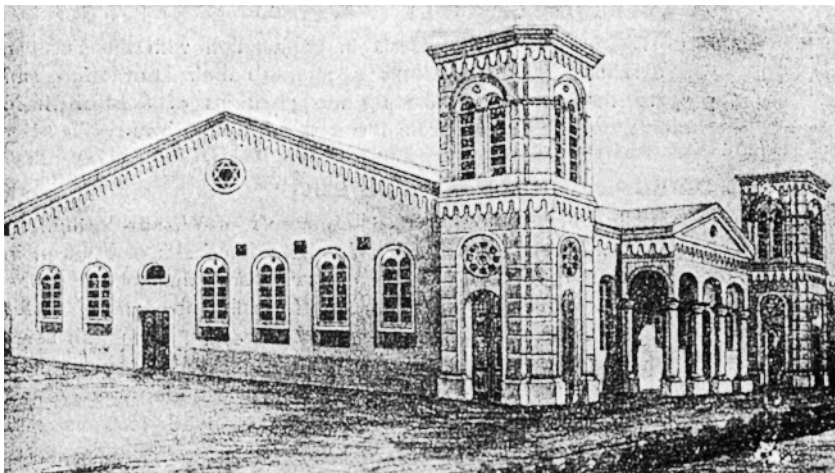


The *kloiz* in Chortkov.

Above and overleaf: four Hasidic synagogues representing the “regal” concept of Ruzhin Hasidism.



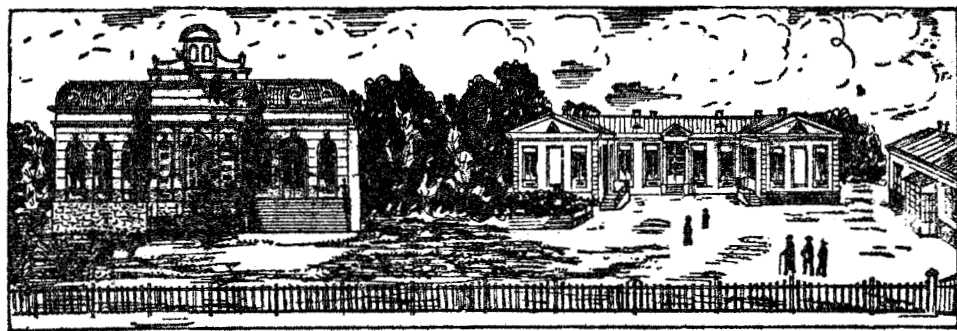
The *kloiz* in Husyatin.



The *kloiz* in Vizhnitz.



View of Rabbi David Moses of Chortkov's court.



The hasidic court in Buhush: the zaddik's residence (right) and the *yeshiva* (left).



A rare picture of Rabbi David Moses of Chortkov and his personal attendant Aaron Dohl, walking in the garden of the court on their way from the *kloiz* (in the background) to the zaddik's residence.



A wine goblet made from *shmira* coins: "This cup was made from coins of the zaddikim, which for their grace we are living." According to the names inscribed, the cup can be dated to the 1870s. Among the zaddikim's names: the late Israel of Ruzhin, his sons David Moses of Chortkov and Mordekhai of Husyatyn, his grandchild Isaac of Buhush, and some of the Apta-Zinkov dynasty. (Courtesy Kiev Museum of Historical Treasures of Ukraine and the Center for Jewish Art, Jerusalem.)



PART IV

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*Rabbi Israel's Court*



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## *“Like a Small State Within a Large One”: The Royal Court and Its Members*

### *I. The Sources and Their Nature*

“The transformation of the itinerant zaddik into the sedentary zaddik was one of the most significant events in the sociology of Hasidism,” says Joseph Weiss, one of the pioneers of the modern historical study of Hasidism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the zaddik’s court had become the main physical frame for the formation of the hasidic ethos: the very existence of the community revolved around the court, and it was there that the community lived its religious and social life. What were the architectural features of the court? What do we know of its administrative, bureaucratic, and social organization? How did it function as an economic body? Who were its members and how did they live their everyday lives? And, finally, what were the patterns of contact between the zaddik and his followers? None of these questions are easy to answer.

The sources that describe the hasidic courts are far from abundant. The hasidim themselves were not generally concerned with sociological questions and did not take the trouble to document their lives at court in any systematic sense; their testimonies are incidental and unintentional. Needless to say, quantitative, statistical data are entirely lacking. Scholarly literature, too, has also largely avoided the subject,<sup>2</sup> mainly because most of the relevant sources are relatively late, pertaining to a period generally associated with the decline of Hasidism. It was convenient for the scholarly world to view the hasidic court only in the mirror of religious radicalism.

Dealing with the “nitty-gritty,” with questions of livelihood and economics, was less pleasant, and aroused moral antagonism, even disgust and repulsion, in some scholars.

Attempts to penetrate the “private” or “mental” history of Hasidism by interrogating our sources in depth are an outcome of the realization, especially over the past two generations, that history and sociology are necessarily linked.<sup>3</sup> The present chapter should be seen as a first attempt to reconstruct the hasidic court and to describe its machinery and organization. Naturally, hasidic courts were not all the same. There were surely significant differences between a court in Ukraine or in Romania and one in Poland, Lithuania, or Galicia. There is surely little similarity between the court of a wealthy zaddik of distinguished lineage, humming with hundreds of hasidim and admirers, and the court of a self-proclaimed zaddik where visitors were few and far between. Some famous zaddikim operated without any court in the sense understood here; some courts were typically urban, others more rural. Of course, every court was influenced by its particular environment, by the surrounding Jewish and non-Jewish population, and by a host of other factors.

Since we are not interested here in tracing the earliest foundations of the hasidic court, it will suffice to give a general picture of the most typical courts of the “regal” zaddikim of the nineteenth century—those of the Friedman, or Ruzhin-Sadgora, dynasty and its “twin,” the Twersky, or Chernobyl, dynasty. The primary focus is on the court of Israel of Ruzhin, whom I consider to be the “founding father” of the “regal” hasidic court. Although we know almost nothing of his courts at Pohorishch and Ruzhin,<sup>4</sup> considerably more information has reached us about the court at Sadgora and its offshoots in Chortkov, Stefanesti, Husyatin, Boian, and Buhush. Of these, there are both photographs and surviving buildings or parts of buildings, as well as literary, documentary, folkloristic, and memoiristic sources. There was practically nothing resembling this kind of court elsewhere in Eastern Europe; and neither has anything like it survived to this day, although it has left its mark on the organization of a good many contemporary hasidic courts. The regal courts survived until World War I, during which they were either destroyed or transplanted to other places, such as Vienna. One of the reasons that these courts were not revived after that war was the tremendous economic burden that they constituted, sometimes even causing them to go bankrupt.

The expression “state within a state,” echoed in the title of this chapter, reflects the inability of the modern state to tolerate such phenomena, a familiar motif in modern European history. The evolution of this motif, from enlightened political program to derogatory anti-Semitic byword, was traced by the late Jacob Katz.<sup>5</sup> It is remarkable that, while this slogan

successfully weakened the power of the medieval corporations and of various subunits active within the state (such as the guilds, the monastic orders, and the churches)—so much so that these bodies either disappeared or were transformed in Western Europe—the regal hasidic court survived as a self-contained Jewish autonomous enclave. It was a kind of small state, seemingly operating independently of external factors and thus taking the place not only of the old Jewish community but also of the surrounding political entity. Up until the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Katz wrote elsewhere, “the self-contained Jewish community constituted a miniature state, whose constitution was Halakhah.”<sup>6</sup> As times changed, however, it lost this political quasi-independence, and only Jews who voluntarily did so obeyed the injunctions of Halakhah and accepted the authority of its interpreters and representatives. It turns out that the “regal” hasidic court was to some extent a reduced copy of the traditional Jewish community in its older, pre-crisis guise. It was not a “small state within a large one” in the sense of a state possessing legal, coercive authority, and it certainly had no physical, political power. As far as the consciousness and self-image of those who entered its gates were concerned, however, it was indeed a miniature state; and it was in that light that it was viewed from the outside.

## *II. The Physical Framework*

In his memoirs, Pinhas Minkowski, a cantor, or “singer,” at the court of the zaddik David Twersky of Talne (1808–82), depicts the latter’s royal court as a “state within a state,” using that very phrase:

Sprawling over a spacious meadow in the middle of the town of Talne . . . was a great court, surrounded on all sides by a fence, like a little townlet on its own, containing large and marvelously magnificent buildings, like little palaces: a palace for the rebbe’s wife, a palace for their only son, Mottele, a palace for their son-in-law, Meir’l . . . a special palace for the court manager . . . and other houses specially for the Beshtian great-grandchildren and grandchildren, who had settled there for life and lived comfortably at the expense of the community and the zaddik. Each of these houses excelled in taste and beauty, with good utensils and costly furniture, and had special men- and maidservants. One house was completely empty and vacant, a kind of court inn for the reception of visiting zaddikim, temporary lodgings for the zaddik’s relatives when they came for the wedding festivities of a member of the zaddik’s family. And, of course, there was the home of the zaddik, which surpassed all the others in its beauty and grandeur.

Built in this court was the rebbe’s great kloiz, which could accommodate about two thousand people, in addition to a large hall and a corridor, protruding from the southern wall of the kloiz, with a door opening into the kloiz so that the zaddik, while praying alone in his hall, could also pray with the public. In the middle of the

court was a large, long wooden building, used as a banquet hall for meals on Sabbaths and festivals, for the zaddik and his intimates. Not far from there were a bathhouse for steam baths and for washing and a large mikveh. Adjacent to each of these buildings was a beautiful sukkah, roofed all year round with thin wooden slats. In one corner was a row of special kitchens, separate ones for meat and dairy, full of various utensils and vessels for the various foods; each kitchen had its own staff, meat cooks and dairy cooks, who never switched their tasks. In another corner was another row of buildings, used as lavatories, stables for horses and carriages and sheds for cows.

In short, the court at Talne was like a small state within a large one, and from the wellsprings of this small state, the large state drew its sustenance. For the walls of the “court” were surrounded by inns, wine houses, and a great number of shops for all kinds of goods, workshops and wagon-drivers’ quarters, and a large band of loafers, religious functionaries, secretaries to write kvitlekh, temporary servants for guests, emissaries to collect the ma’amadot money for the court’s upkeep, and various hangers-on who spent the rest of their days here and always received their meals from the court. All this great multitude, from the great-grandchildren and grandchildren and all the important people sitting at the head of the zaddik’s table, down to the meat or dairy cook—all of them received plentiful sustenance from the channels of the court, that is, from the zaddik’s hasidim.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the court was a well-defined architectural enclosure, generally situated at the edge of the town—a position that was, of course, significant for the relationship between the court and the zaddik, on the one hand, and the Jewish community and its institutions, on the other.<sup>8</sup> The court of Isaac Twersky of Skvira (1812–85), for example, was built in a roughly square-shaped sandy area outside the town. On one side was the road linking the town to the Kiev-Odessa railroad; on the other, a stream that separated the court from the town. The court itself stood on a hill commanding the entire area, whose slopes were landscaped. On a nearby, lower hill was the study house, and on another, higher hill, the zaddik’s home. The study house and the zaddik’s quarters were separated by a stream, which was crossed by a small wooden bridge.<sup>9</sup>

The court at Makhnovka, where Joseph Meir (1847–1917), grandson of Isaac of Skvira, “reigned,” was also at the edge of the town, opposite the Christian neighborhood. On one side was a stream; on the other, a town square, which was used for markets and fairs. Near the entrance to the court, bordering on a large empty lot, was the great study house, through which the court was connected with the town streets.<sup>10</sup>

The contrast between the poor town, which housed the court, and the relative richness of the court itself was also one of the characteristic features of hasidic courts in Ukraine. This physical feature also possessed a spiritual, psychological, and “public-relations” aspect: rising above the filth of everyday life in the physical world was a new, pristine, pure entity, where

one could find shelter and achieve contact with holy things that were actually touchable. When Mordekhai of Chernobyl's son Abraham (1806–89) began to travel to his hasidim, he passed through the little town of Trisk. There he saw "by the town a place where there were garbage and mud and a constant stream of unclean water. Said he . . . Here shall I make my permanent dwelling. And so it was. And he built there a holy court, with pleasant quarters and a study house instead of the garbage and mud. And it was a great miracle for all the hasidim to see." The zaddik raised money for the considerable expenses that this construction required from his hasidim, comparing the collection of funds to build his own court to the contributions given by the Israelites for the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness.<sup>11</sup>

In Sadgora, too, the magnificent edifices of the court stood out against the background of the town's ramshackle hovels. It was a point of attraction for any visitor to Sadgora, a central landmark visible from all around. Martin Buber, in an essay entitled "My Way to Hasidism," commented that the repugnant contrast between "the dirty village of Sadgora" and "the palace of the rebbe, in its showy splendor" made a tremendous impression upon him as a youth, leaving him later ambivalent about Hasidism in general.<sup>12</sup>

The court complex at Sadgora comprised four main buildings, characteristic of the "regal" courts, standing close together: the old kloiz, where Rabbi Israel and his hasidim had prayed in the first years of their sojourn at Sadgora; the new kloiz, whose construction had begun during Israel's lifetime, probably because of the growing pressure of visitors, and which was completed during the life of his son Abraham Jacob; the quarters of the zaddik and his family; and a large public building known as the *salash*, where mass gatherings of hasidim were held.

The kloiz where the hasidim studied and prayed was a large redbrick building decorated with white arches. On either side of it were wings topped by two-storied, hexagonal steeples.<sup>13</sup> There was a surprising architectural similarity between the kloiz at Sadgora and that of the court at Chortkov, which was surely built on the model of the former (according to hasidic tradition, the building was designed by Israel of Chortkov, son of David Moses).<sup>14</sup> Zaddikim usually took over existing palaces or large buildings previously inhabited by local nobles.<sup>15</sup> Over the years, such buildings might be renovated, adapted to the zaddik's conception of grandeur and luxury and for the specific needs of the court and the community. Only naturally, the hasidim at the same time evolved an ideology to explain the act of absolute "perfection" or "repair" involved in transforming the gentile aristocrat's secular home into a sacred hasidic court—"a dwelling-place for the Temple of the Lord, a lofty hill to which all turned."<sup>16</sup>

Just when the main buildings of the Sadgora court were built is not clear; some authorities hold that they were originally part of the old palace of Baron Mustatsa, the landlord of the town, who had invited Rabbi Israel to settle on his property; others, that that they were a new building, erected in the time of Israel and for his use. At any rate, it was reported to be “tremendous and magnificent”; the ethnologist S. Ansky, visiting the deserted site after World War I, wrote that its sheer scale reminded him of the Kremlin walls.<sup>17</sup>

A special room in the Sadgora kloiz, known as the *praven shatub*, was used for the ceremonies—“reception of greetings” and the “setting of the table”—through which the hasidim publicly met the zaddik.<sup>18</sup> These ceremonies could go on for hours. When the number of visiting hasidim reached the hundreds, the meeting was moved to the large, long hall, rather like a factory, built of stone blocks and lined on the inside with wood, called the *salash*. The roof was mounted on rails and could be pulled back to reveal the sky during the Sukkot festival, so that the central sukkah, where the hasidim who arrived for the festival assembled and ate their meals, could be built there. In the *salash* stood a long table, with bleachers rising almost to the ceiling on either side of it to accommodate thousands of hasidim, either seated or standing. It was here that the hasidic tish—the festive meal with the zaddik—was held, which was known simply as the *salash*.<sup>19</sup>

In nineteenth-century hasidic courts, the kloiz was quite different from the kloiz of prehasidic days, which had generally been financed by a wealthy member of the community, who set aside a room in his home, or near the communal synagogue, where a few chosen kabbalists and pietists could study Torah or delve into esoteric lore.<sup>20</sup> The hasidic kloiz, on the other hand, was the private property of the zaddik, part of his home and his court. Membership in the kloiz was informal, and open to any hasid who desired to join it. In addition, its members engaged in activities unlike those characteristic of the prehasidic kloiz or even of the traditional yeshivah: for the most part, they prayed and studied, mainly popular kabbalistic, ethical, and hasidic literature, besides, of course, talmudic and midrashic literature. Each man studied by and for himself; there were no collective lectures or study sessions, no supervision and no guidance.

No yeshivah was established at Sadgora, but Rabbi Israel's court was by no means unique in this respect; the same was true of those of other nineteenth-century hasidic leaders, including some who were renowned scholars.<sup>21</sup> Other than Torah study, activities in the hasidic kloiz were generally of a social nature: the telling of stories about zaddikim, life-cycle events, festive meals held to mark the performance of various religious commandments, dancing and music-making, and eating and drinking. In times of

need, the kloiz benches might even serve as extra beds for poor hasidim and overnight guests. Such new uses for a place originally reserved for Torah study and prayer aroused halakhic problems, for the kloiz was ostensibly considered to have the sanctity of a synagogue, with the concomitant restrictions. The social and halakhic transformation of the study house during the spread of Hasidism in the nineteenth century formed the background to the following rulings of Hayyim of Zanz, a prominent halakhic authority who was himself a zaddik:

It would seem quite clear that the batei midrash that the zaddikim of our times have established in their homes are not subject to the laws of the bet midrash and do not have the sanctity of the synagogue, for we see that they are used for things that may not be done in an ordinary bet midrash. . . . Thus, wedding banquets are held there and people rejoice in *simhat mitzvah*, as is customary. . . . And in many batei midrash of the zaddikim, people sleep regularly, which is forbidden by Jewish law. . . . But the reason is that the zaddikim build such institutions only as a meeting place for learned scholars, where they can assemble and rejoice lovingly in anything that involves *simhat mitzvah*, and also for the use of the guests in whatever way they might need, provided only that they also pray there. . . . And thus I have heard quite explicitly, that one zaddik explicitly stipulated, while the bet midrash in his home was being built. . . . that he was building a meeting place, but not that the sanctity of the bet midrash should be applicable to it. . . . And presumably that is the custom of all the zaddikim.<sup>22</sup>

However, at Sadgora, as it happens, such usage was strictly forbidden. Hasidim who wished to imbibe liquor or otherwise engage in secular activities had to do so outside the kloiz, in the salash or the entrance plaza; sleeping there was inconceivable, because the kloiz was considered to possess a special aura of sanctity.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, the stables that accommodated Rabbi Israel's celebrated horses were quite close by, and sometimes, as Rabbi Zevi Hirsch of Liszka complained, their neighing could be heard during prayer services.<sup>24</sup>

Rabbi Israel did not normally pray together with his hasidim. In this, too, he was not unique: many zaddikim behaved similarly and, like him, were criticized on that account. The "official" explanation was that the zaddik's prayers demanded particular concentration; communal prayer might not only disturb him in his efforts but he might also, without wishing to do so, inconvenience the congregants. In Ruzhin Hasidism, the practice was also an outcome of Rabbi Israel's perception of regal leadership, which dictated keeping a distance between the zaddik and his followers. His great grandfather the Maggid of Mezhibezh had prayed like that, and his sons did the same when they became rabbis; David of Chortkov's "golden room" was particularly famous.<sup>25</sup> As long as the zaddik was still alive, however, the sons prayed together with the hasidim, although the latter paid them spe-



cial respect in the synagogue and the services.<sup>26</sup> For Rabbi Israel himself, a special, luxuriously furnished little room, known as the *daven shtibl* (praying room), was set aside in a corner of the synagogue. The walls and windows of this were decorated in costly wood and fabrics, the floor was covered with real Persian carpets, and light was provided by ornate chandeliers suspended from the ceiling. All around the room were ornamental items and objets d'art of gold, silver, and wood, including a small Torah ark of carved olive wood, a gift from the Sadgora hasidim in Palestine.<sup>27</sup> Here Rabbi Israel prayed alone, generally without the presence of a minyan, even on Sabbaths and festivals. A minyan of selected hasidim or relatives was only occasionally summoned to participate.<sup>28</sup>

The private living quarters of the zaddik and his family were in a large stone building close by the kloiz. We know almost nothing of the interior, for the privacy of the zaddik's family life was jealously guarded, and nobody besides close relatives or the staff of servants was permitted to enter. Rabbi Israel's children had their own rooms and beds—something almost unprecedented at the time—as well as nannies and wet nurses (many of whom were gentile women, giving rise to rumors of sexual promiscuity),<sup>29</sup> personal valets, and private tutors of religious and other subjects.<sup>30</sup>

The transition from sleeping in a common bedroom to sleeping in private quarters became widespread in Europe only in the nineteenth century and was still considered an affectation of the rich. A stranger intruding into the bedrooms would have been considered "sacrilegious."<sup>31</sup> The employment of a large army of servants and nannies was also seen as an expression not merely of wealth but of exceptional social status.<sup>32</sup> It was indeed just one aspect of the tendency to emulate "Western" or "European" (i.e., French and Austrian) lifestyles, which was rife among the Russian upper classes and also influenced the regal hasidic courts in such areas as private life, esthetics, and leisure occupations. Charges during the great controversy with Zanz Hasidism (1869–76) that Sadgora women dressed in accordance with the latest dictates of fashion, rode horses, and frequented Vienna theater performances were not entirely unwarranted.<sup>33</sup> Their living quarters were lavishly carpeted, and the walls were decorated with valuable paintings and hung with expensive tapestries.<sup>34</sup> An unusual item was a large standing mirror, a gift from one of the hasidim ("unusual" because zaddikim were generally opposed to such accessories of vanity, but particularly appropriate to the self-image of Rabbi Israel and his sons as scions of the royal House of David); it was said, facetiously, that Rabbi Israel needed the mirror so that he, too, could feast his eyes on "the zaddik of the generation."<sup>35</sup> In actual fact, it was used in the same way as any mirror today, as an aid to maintaining one's appearance and as a wall decoration. Need-

less to say, the zaddik had a private mikveh and a private washroom at his disposal.<sup>36</sup>

Another special room at Rabbi Israel's court in Ruzhin, and in all probability also in Sadgora, was the "Messiah's room" (*meshiekh's tsimer*), which was also magnificently appointed and full of costly furniture and gifts. Rabbi Israel would enter this room every Friday afternoon, as if to welcome the Messiah. The Scottish missionaries who visited the region in 1839 reported: "He had a chamber in his house, where it was believed that Messiah will stay when he comes; and at the beginning of each Sabbath went into this chamber, pretending to salute Messiah and wish him 'Good Sabbath.'" <sup>37</sup>

This room figures in various satirical accounts by maskilim, who were surely referring specifically to Rabbi Israel. "And from there to a room known as the Messiah's room, which is a most marvelous room, with many pieces of costly furniture," Isaac Ber Levinsohn writes. "And [the zaddik] said: See, O Messiah! I have prepared you a very magnificent room and filled it with expensive tables, contributed by all the wealthy and high-placed people who believe in me, so that no room is left for more valuable things donated by the people." <sup>38</sup>

There was a similar room at the court of Rabbi Israel's son Menahem Nahum of Stefanesti,<sup>39</sup> and possibly also at the other sons' courts.<sup>40</sup> The existence of such a room and the associated rituals is perhaps the most overt evidence of the Ruzhin zaddikim's royal pretensions and sense of messianic mission.

Rabbi Israel would sometimes spend hours alone—generally from mid-day to the time of the afternoon prayer service—in his private living quarters or in the garden, during which time no one was allowed to disturb him. The spacious garden around the house, as was the custom of the rich in Europe, was resplendent with fruit trees, exotic plants, and ornamental trees.<sup>41</sup> Rabbi Israel used it not only for rest and recreation, as an escape from the suffocating attention of his hasidim, but also as a "house of solitude," where he could strive for religious uplift.<sup>42</sup> Although the wall around the garden was almost impassable, admirers tried even during these hours to invade the zaddik's privacy.<sup>43</sup> To guard the house and deter curious intruders and guests, a ferocious dog was kept in the courtyard—an unusual practice for a zaddik and a constant target of criticism.<sup>44</sup> Within the garden was a trellised gazebo where Rabbi Israel could meditate in solitude or have intimate conversations with friends while pulling on his long pipe. He liked to come to the garden on the hot summer nights, to sit at the table in the company of a few chosen intimates and nibble on a piece of sweet cake with liquor.<sup>45</sup>

Rabbi Israel's sons, too, had gardens at their courts. At the court of

Mordekhai of Husyatin, the garden was thrown open to the public on the two days of the New Year festival, even children being allowed in to play. The garden at Chortkov, which was usually open to visitors, was reported to be more like a forest than a garden. The carefully tended vegetation included tropical winter plants, fruit trees, and the like. Water-filled canals ran the length of the garden, and there was even an artificial lake. There is a similar account of the ornamental garden at the court in Stefanesti. Besides delighting the locals, the gardens at these zaddikim's regal courts added to their kaleidoscopic quality and became a kind of tourist attraction.<sup>46</sup>

The royal courts were based on more or less similar principles, and many of their architectural features were common to all the courts: a spacious, magnificent kloiz, used as a hall of prayer and study; numerous residential quarters, where the zaddik, his family, and the service staff lived; gardens and lawns; and a hall for special occasions (the *salash*) to accommodate particularly large assemblies and weddings. Here, for example, is a description of the court at Stefanesti, written by a member of a family of *yoshvim* who worked at the court:

The court was situated at the northern edge of the town, a veritable "empire": a wide gate, a large garden with leafy trees, a large synagogue with a special chamber where the rebbe sat alone during the services, halls for festive occasions, innumerable rooms, each with its own unique function and special name preserved from previous generations (the Blue Room with marvelous pictures, for the reception of important visitors; a special room called "the Messiah's room," which was also used as a museum, with antique furniture and cupboards with ritual objects). . . . There was also a library with a rich selection of holy books and scientific works.<sup>47</sup>

The granddaughter of the zaddik Abraham Mattityahu of Stefanesti recorded another detailed description, dating from the second half of the nineteenth century. The zaddik's study was a large room, and its walls were lined with bookshelves. A corridor led from the study to the zaddik's bedroom and to a patio opening onto a large garden. A passage led from the bedroom to the halls, each of which had its own name (the Wooden Room, the Red Room, and so on).<sup>48</sup> The halls were spacious and luxuriously furnished with silk- and velvet-upholstered armchairs, wall paintings, soft carpets, heavy drapes, Chinese vases, and gilt-framed mirrors. Opposite the zaddik's home was "the Children's House," also large and containing many guest rooms, dining rooms, and bedrooms. A special wing was reserved for the servants, who were responsible for cleaning, purchasing supplies, delivering messages, serving the family's food, and the like. Opposite was the synagogue, adjoining which was the zaddik's private chapel, with a Torah ark and a special armchair for his comfort.

Near the synagogue were the living quarters of the yoshvim ("residents") occupied by numerous elderly men who spent most of the day studying in the kloiz and were involved in court life. Also living in this wing were female "residents," old women who cooked, sewed, cleaned, and did other household tasks. There were three kitchens in the court: one for meat dishes, one for dairy, and a Passover kitchen (which was also active during the Hanukkah festival, when chicken fat for Passover was traditionally prepared). Another building in the court housed a bathhouse, in which there were a mikveh and private bathrooms for the family. At the end of the court was a cowshed, which supplied the court with milk products, stables for the horses, and room for the carriage, a cart, and a sled. The carriage driver lived in the stable, where he had his food and even slept.<sup>49</sup>

In the court of Isaac of Buhush, there was an intricate network of rooms leading into the zaddik's quarters. A visitor might proceed from the little kloiz in the building to a small room, in which there were two servants, and from there to an office for two *gabba'im*, a scribe and a secretary. This led into yet another well-furnished room, known as *lifnim* ("inside"), for particularly important guests. Members of the zaddik's family could now go on, entering the so-called *lifnay ve-lifnim* ("the inner sanctum"), which was even better furnished. Only then could one continue into the living quarters known as the *kodesh ha-kodashim* ("Holy of Holies"), where the zaddik, his immediate family, and his sons-in-law lived.<sup>50</sup>

It was said of Rabbi David Moses' palace at Chortkov that it contained fifty rooms—presumably an exaggeration. In the middle of the court was a fountain, the walls of which were artistically decorated.<sup>51</sup> S. Ansky visited the place in 1917 and quoted the driver who brought him as saying:

Do you know how much traffic there was here?! They used to come to him from all corners of the world. And his conduct and the respect paid his family were like that of an emperor! There was an orchestra, playing constantly! . . . When he went on a journey, he would order all his servants to stay where they were, promising to pay them the same salary that they had received till then.<sup>52</sup>

The orchestra was a particularly prominent feature of the royal court. Bands of singers and instrumentalists used to accompany various events in several courts, although the most famous was certainly that of Ruzhin. The *kapelye* accompanied the zaddik when he traveled away from the court; it participated in family events and played for important zaddikim and other guests, but its primary function was to entertain the zaddik himself. It was a recognized status symbol, expressive of the wealth and opulence of the royal court and the festive atmosphere of the place.<sup>53</sup>

The impressive buildings, gold and silver ware, costly furniture and gleaming costumes, the personal hygiene of the zaddik's family, the orches-

tra and the carriage, the dogs, goats, cows, and stable, the air of luxury, the extravagance and levity of the environment, all commingled with spiritual tension, religious uplift, and the joy of ritual observance—all these imbued the royal court with a unique, almost primeval atmosphere, perhaps unparalleled anywhere else in the Jewish world of Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century.

### *III. Social Aspects*

At first sight, the “hasidic community” seems to have been a monolithic social entity, whose very definition as a “community” was determined by its members’ voluntary, explicit and absolute subjugation to the zaddik at the top of the social pyramid. Conceptually speaking, too, the “hasidim,” as compared with the zaddik, are seen as a body of persons sharing a certain spiritual essence. Nevertheless, the seemingly uniform community was actually made up of four main groups, distinguished from one another both in their relationship to the zaddik and their self-awareness and in the nature of their activity and the degree of their commitment.

(1) *The “intimates”* (Hebrew *mekoravim*). This was a small group of hasidim, consisting of those who accompanied the zaddik everywhere to assure him of always having a minyan for prayer. Among them were bea-dles and various functionaries who lived permanently in the zaddik’s home, or very close by, and who were always at his service. The hard core of this group were the gabbai’im, who were the zaddik’s most intimate advisers. The other intimates—valets, tutors, cantors, and ritual slaughterers—served the zaddik, his family, and his guests. These people were naturally expected to behave with the utmost discretion and loyalty, since they were in close contact with the zaddik and his family from morning to night.

(2) *The “residents”* (Hebrew *yoshevim*). This was the most familiar group, consisting of hasidim who came to the court to live close to the rebbe. They did not live permanently in the court, only staying there for variable lengths of time. Some came for a fixed number of weeks; these were generally hasidim who lived nearby and could therefore easily come frequently for short times. But most of the yoshevim came for relatively long sojourns, sometimes lasting several years. Among them were unmarried youths, but also hasidim who, leaving their families behind, came on their own, generally for a few months, from one festival to the next, but sometimes also for a year or more. During this period, they devoted themselves to spiritual improvement; seated in the kloiz, they spent their time in intensive study of Torah and hasidic lore. Naturally, they took part in everything that happened in the court: prayer services on Sabbaths and festivals; communal meals, sometimes attended also by the zaddik and his

family; life-cycle events in the zaddik's family; hasidic banquets; visits by zaddikim or other important guests; and so on. Since most of the yoshevim were acquainted with one another from previous stays at the court, they were bonded by common experience as "insiders," sharing a feeling of social uniqueness that heightened their cohesion as a distinct group.

(3) *The permanent hasidim*. These hasidim defined themselves both inwardly and outwardly as the hasidim of a specific zaddik and acted in his name and for his sake, in a spirit of absolute loyalty and devotion. They did so out of free choice, utterly convinced of the superiority of the particular zaddik they had chosen and the rightness of his ways. The permanent hasidim remained in constant touch with the zaddik and his court, and even if they did not live at the court, they visited it from time to time. They were involved in hasidic activities in their own localities, serving there as representatives of the court and "public relations officers"; they also collected donations and organized the ma'amadot tax. These hasidim would occasionally invite the zaddik to visit them in their home towns, where they established and maintained a local minyan, which was known by the name of the court, and participated in the spiritual and material activities revolving around it. As time passed, this group came to include second- and third-generation descendants of the "founding" hasidim, who had been born into the reality of Hasidism and identified with it by virtue of their education and familial loyalty.

(4) *The sporadic hasidim*. These were individuals who did not consider themselves, ideologically or socially, members of the specific community, but maintained a temporary, nonactive, loose connection with the zaddik and his court. Classified in this category are several types of people attracted to the court, mainly for practical reasons. Some needed the rebbe's advice or guidance in matters pertaining to business, everyday life, contact with the authorities, and so on. They believed in his intelligence, experience and sanctity, since in the hasidic way of thinking, sanctity is a guarantee not only of prophetic or magical qualities but also of wisdom and intelligence. Some of them wanted the zaddik's blessing for various reasons—usually, to assure them of children, good health, or a livelihood—believing in his special powers to influence the supernal worlds. Some despairing supplicants were simply seeking help in every possible quarter. A good many of these people were not hasidim in everyday life and did not identify with the hasidic world of values—indeed, they may not have known much about it. Nevertheless, they found it convenient to maintain some kind of loose relationship with a certain zaddik, whether through occasional prayer in his kloiz in their hometown or by paying the ma'amad tax for the maintenance of the zaddik's household. These "sporadic" hasidim came to the court from time to time—mainly at festivals, on days memori-

alizing the court's earlier zaddikim, or in times of personal distress—to consult the zaddik or obtain his blessing and give him a donation.

In Rabbi Israel's eyes, his hasidim could be classified into three groups, but his criteria were quite different. "The people who have the merit to cleave to me," he said, "are of three kinds. . . . Some have the merit to cleave to me through Torah and prayer; and some through giving me money; and there are some who cleave by rolling themselves to me in a vulgar fashion."<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere, in response to a critic who questioned his opulent lifestyle, he said: "The people who come to greet the zaddik and crown him with gold coins may be divided into three classes. One class is the hasidim and pious men who seek nearness to God; the second class is the simple house-owners, who come to obtain blessing in worldly matters; and the third class are the transgressors and the sinners."<sup>55</sup>

In other words, people of the first category come to the court for a purely spiritual motive: to be with the zaddik, to "cleave to him" in the traditional hasidic sense, that is, to study his Torah, to pray in his presence, to observe and emulate his conduct. Only thus, they believed, could they achieve their ultimate goal—"nearness to God." The second category are the "simple house-owners," that is, ordinary, not necessarily learned, laymen, whose main interest in the zaddik is material. They are not counted among those hasidim who strive for spiritual perfection, but they give the zaddik money and expect in return to receive a blessing that might help them in their livelihood, improve their health, procure them a favorable match for their children, and so on.

The third category is the most interesting: Rabbi Israel was probably referring to simple, lower-class Jews who were not particularly observant and not counted as part of normative traditional society. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, they believed it worthwhile to stay near the zaddik, hoping that the mere contact would bring them some miraculous benefit or salvation, absolving them of their sins. This seems to be a completely new phenomenon, unprecedented in Hasidism: a zaddik whose protection extends to people whom he himself defines as "transgressors." He has no intention of "improving" their souls, as the Besht did for sinners, but only to bless them. He is willing to accept their monetary gifts and to legitimize their attraction to him. Possibly, these are the first signs of a political concept that was common among zaddikim in later times—a concept that did not frown on a nonspiritual relationship between the zaddik and certain followers, based perhaps on business or social grounds, in the attempt to widen the hasidic periphery to groups that were not strictly observant.<sup>56</sup>

Did Rabbi Israel relate differently to each category, or did he treat them all as equals? In answer to a question, he once said that zaddikim used the money of the pidyonot brought by "sinners" for "things beyond the needs

of their bodies, to buy carriages and horses and to build desirable houses." In the past, he said, there had been only a few sinners, but now that "there are many transgressors who come to the zaddik, the zaddikim have a lot of money . . . and they must spend their money on luxuries, on big houses, and on carriages."<sup>57</sup> Beyond the apologetic humor, these words—quoted in a hasidic source—confirm the idea that people of this category, clearly set apart as inferior to other hasidim, were not barred from the court and that their contact with the zaddik was justified.

Let us return now to the "residents," who were, after all, the major and most visible component of the court. Israel Teller, a former hasid who spent a long time at the court of Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, defined them as follows:

What is the meaning of yoshvim? Let me explain. Besides the many guests who came to Sadgora from all lands to receive advice and blessing from the zaddik, there were in the court also many people who had left their homes for a long time and had come there to enjoy the glory of the Divine Presence. Most of them were young married students, some learned to a greater or lesser degree, who ate and drank at the great one's table or from contributions the rich guests gave them, and it was these persons who were known as "residents."<sup>58</sup>

Teller concentrates mainly on the classical category of "residents." However, there were actually two distinct groups of people known in the sources and the literature as yoshvim (although the distinction was at times blurred because of individuals who went over from one group to the other): a "spiritual" group, in the sense defined above, and a "professional" group of service providers. Both groups lived at the court and made their livings there.

The limited inner circle of the "residents" consisted of young married men and hasidim whose sole desire was to be close to the zaddik, to delight in his presence and learn his Torah and his approach to Divine worship. It is evident from various works of literature—belles lettres, memoirs, and folklore—that a good many "residents" were hasidim of no particular talent, practical or intellectual, who found the idle court life very much to their liking. As "residents," they were relieved, on the one hand, of the need to struggle for a living, of the trials and tribulations of everyday life, and of responsibility for their families; on the other, they could revel in the reflected glory of their proximity to the zaddik or, at times, enjoy respect as people who had a say in the local politics of the court.<sup>59</sup>

The wider circle, as we have pointed out, was that of the professional "residents." It was essentially these hasidim who managed the court and were responsible for its everyday physical existence. The professional group became increasingly larger as the court developed, comprising many



dozens of people, sometimes even whole families, who derived their livings directly from the services that they provided the court, mainly to the zaddik and his family: wet nurses and nannies; tutors and servants for the older children; cantors, orchestra players, and choirboys; ritual slaughterers; Torah scribes; jesters; accountants and charity administrators; cooks and bakers; bathhouse attendants and valets.<sup>60</sup>

There were large staffs of cleaning servants and gardeners, stable hands, cowhands, and the like. Isaac Even, himself a “resident” at Sadgora for a certain time, described an old hasid named Hirschel of Brody who wiped the dust from the stones over which the zaddik would walk from his room to the kloiz. He held this job exclusively for some thirty years and was greatly envied on that account by many hasidim.<sup>61</sup> There were also numerous women at the court, engaged mainly in cooking, baking, cleaning, and caring for the children. They, too, were known as “residents.”<sup>62</sup> A large proportion of these service providers received salaries from the court treasury, sometimes augmented by tips from the more generous of the rich guests. It might happen that several generations of a single family performed the same tasks at court for many decades.

The head servants and administrators (gabba'im) were the closest of all to the zaddik, hence occupying the top rung of the inner social ladder of the court.<sup>63</sup> They alone were entitled to accompany the zaddik everywhere, to care for his personal needs, and to discharge various secretarial tasks: organizing his daily schedule, classifying and regulating the flow of visitors granted a personal audience, managing his correspondence, and so on. For example, women who came for a blessing were never admitted to the zaddik's room. They had to wait in an anteroom, sending in their kvitlekh and pidyonot with the gabba'im.<sup>64</sup>

These “inner sanctum” intimates wrote letters and granted approbations of books (*haskamot*) on behalf of the zaddik, sometimes even signing them on his instructions; they dictated the seating arrangements at the tish; at times, they interpreted the zaddik's statements and Torah teachings and relayed them to the masses of hasidim, who did not always understand them or grasp the allusions they contained.<sup>65</sup> They also physically protected the zaddik from the sometimes threatening attention of the hundreds of hasidim. Some of them were large, strapping men, capable of shielding him and making way for him through crowds of admirers whose only desire was to touch the zaddik and his clothes.<sup>66</sup> The gabba'im sometimes had “sidelines,” such as the exclusive right to sell the hasidim wine or oil,<sup>67</sup> to provide lodgings and food, to write kvitlekh for illiterate or ignorant hasidim, to sell items belonging to the zaddik or bearing his blessing, and so on.<sup>68</sup> As a result, some of them amassed considerable riches, prompting the quip, “What is good for the zaddik is good for his neighbor.”<sup>69</sup>

Naturally, there were instances of corruption. It was known, as reported by a woman from Stefanesti, that anyone who wanted to gain quick access to the zaddik had to bribe one of the gabba'im.<sup>70</sup> One example of the power at the gabbai's disposal is the occasion on which the gabbai of David Moses of Chortkov averted a meeting between the zaddik and Theodor Herzl. The gabbai simply decided not to give the zaddik Herzl's letter!<sup>71</sup> Also worth mentioning is the special status of a gabbai named Israel Margulies at the court of Isaac of Boian: he always stood by the zaddik, answering questions addressed to the rebbe in the latter's presence.<sup>72</sup> The zaddik also employed interpreters in several languages, who helped him to read documents, converse with foreign guests, maintain contacts with government officials, and so on.<sup>73</sup>

Every court had a general manager, who was responsible for the logistics of the court and, in particular, for running the kitchen. This position demanded considerable practical and organizational ability, and was generally given to hasidim who were not distinguished for their scholarly talents.<sup>74</sup> Assisting the administrator were *kashrut* supervisors and accountants.<sup>75</sup> The latter made the necessary purchases and investments, also taking care of pensions or salaries for the "residents" and their families. The everyday life of the court—in particular, the organization of the kitchen—was supervised by the *rebbetsn*, the zaddik's wife, with the assistance of her daughters and daughters-in-law.<sup>76</sup>

The numerous guests arriving at the court could easily find food and lodgings at the inns built for the purpose outside but sometimes close by the court.<sup>77</sup> Many of the local townspeople made their livings supplying food and lodgings to visiting hasidim, generally preparing themselves in advance for special assembly times. When distinguished zaddikim or rabbis came to visit Sadgora, they would rent special quarters for themselves, their families and their entourage, where they could observe their own customs—particularly on the Sabbath—and at the same time easily visit the court.<sup>78</sup> Distinguished guests, specially favored by the zaddik, were invited to stay in the special guest rooms in the court.<sup>79</sup> Other rooms, inside and outside the court, were used to accommodate beggars, poor hasidim, and various idlers who flocked to the court, particularly at festivals and on various special occasions, such as weddings, to beg for alms and enjoy the free food. The rich lived in inns or specially rented private rooms, while the poor received the hospitality of the court.

It is not clear how visits of hasidim were regulated and to what extent any such regulation was attempted, for it is obvious that the maintenance of the court was very costly and depended, among other things, on the number of visitors. On Sabbaths and at festivals, the visitors dined at the zaddik's table (although he himself did not actually have his meals with

them), and this required a tremendous dining room. It was told of Menahem Mendel of Rimanov that his court at Fristik, in Poland, had a "special room in which anyone who wants may dine, whoever he may be, no questions asked."<sup>80</sup> Of Ruzhin, too, it was reported that "each day he [Rabbi Israel] feeds many people of all walks of society; they are all his guests. Sometimes, especially on festivals, the number of guests may be as much as a thousand."<sup>81</sup> On the Day of Atonement in 1845, when the Sadgora court was at its peak, "more than three thousand people" visited it.<sup>82</sup> Even if these figures are exaggerated, one still gets an impression of the large number of visitors, and there is no reason to assume that the number was significantly different at other festivals or in other years.

At the court of Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, food was distributed to hundreds of hasidim and poor people on Fridays and eves of festivals,<sup>83</sup> and this was apparently not exceptional. A typical episode, perhaps indicative of the situation at other courts, was related of the zaddik Abraham of Trisk. He distributed food to his hasidim "both on the Sabbath and at festivals and on weekdays . . . and consequently he fell into debt after the festival." This practice presumably brought him a greater number of hasidim. The food served at this court was generally quite simple and not very plentiful, but the expenses were nevertheless considerable and the rebbe was obliged "to send to collect contributions from the hasidim and to defray the debts." His intimates were disturbed by this practice, and they recommended that he stop financing meals for all his visitors.<sup>84</sup>

To defray the many expenses of the court demanded vigorous financial operations, of which the most important are discussed at length in the next chapter.



## *“Money for Household Expenses”: Economic Aspects of the Hasidic Royal Courts*

### *I. Zaddikism as a Profession*

In 1798, some time before Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav set out on his enigmatic journey to Palestine, he bewailed his fate: “He would go to and fro in his house, saying: ‘I am poor and needy, more so than all the great men [Hebrew *gedolim*]. This one has riches, and that one has money, and that one has towns—but I have nothing.’”<sup>1</sup>

The “great men” of Rabbi Nahman’s frustrated comparison were none other than his colleagues, the renowned zaddikim of his time, most of whom had by then adopted lifestyles bespeaking opulence and material wealth. From that time on, through the nineteenth century and up until the eve of World War I, such lifestyles were to characterize the world of the zaddikim and to shape hasidic life in Eastern Europe. A “great,” or, as they were usually described in contemporary sources, a “famous” (Hebrew *mefursam*), zaddik was not only one of distinguished lineage who knew how to worship God with marvelous devotion, but also one who had managed to accumulate property, wealth and economic and political power—exemplified in their “rule” over “towns.”

This notion of zaddikism as a “profession,” a means of livelihood for the zaddik and his family, is surely one of the most vulgar phenomena of Hasidism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it was an outcome of religious ideas and socioeconomic patterns that began to penetrate Hasidism toward the end of the eighteenth century, possibly even earlier.<sup>3</sup>

Even during the first, formative years of Hasidism, groups of pietists and kabbalists—some of whom were later to earn fame as the leaders of the new Hasidism—had no compunctions about soliciting financial contributions to support themselves and their activities. Elite local circles of pietist-kabbalists devoting themselves to the study of exoteric and esoteric lore with the support of rich local householders (such as the famous kloiz at Brody) exemplified what seemed like a natural mutual relationship between patrons and scholars. As has recently been suggested, one can also view the Besht's group of pietists in Mezhibozh as an "elite Torah-study circle" associated with the community *beit midrash*. This study house, although belonging to the *kahal*, was supported mainly by generous wealthy members of the community.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the Besht and some of his associates at Mezhibozh were granted free living quarters and tax exemptions,<sup>5</sup> although this did not prevent the Besht from continuing his activities as a professional healer, exacting fees for his services as a *Ba'al shem*, or from receiving monetary donations and distributing them as he saw fit.<sup>6</sup> Nahman of Kosov, a rich leaseholder and member of a group of pneumatics at Kutow, supported one of his colleagues, the preacher Aryeh Leib of Polonnoye, who later joined the Besht's circle.<sup>7</sup> Pietists and kabbalists, some of them well-known disciples of the Besht, received sizable sums of money as bequests from deceased sympathizers;<sup>8</sup> and there are many more such examples. The ideological basis for such patterns of financial aid to spiritual elites unaffiliated with the rabbinical or community establishment—even those who cut themselves off from the general public—was stated and restated in the writings and doctrines of the founders of Hasidism, frequently citing homilies and other passages from the prehasidic ethical and exegetical literature.<sup>9</sup>

Available sources concerning the means of sustenance of the eighteenth-century pietistic groups are scant and partial; one cannot be sure that the information they furnish reflects the rule or possibly just exceptions. Nevertheless, it is quite likely that as early as the 1760s and 1770s, the permanent courts of the Maggid of Mezhirech and some of his disciples supported themselves in ways not unlike those typical of courts of *zaddikim* in the nineteenth century, and comparative evidence to that effect may be found scattered throughout both hasidic literature and anti-hasidic writings.<sup>10</sup>

True, such sporadic cases of special individuals being supported by the *kahal* or by wealthy patrons cannot be compared in scope with the total maintenance of the *zaddik*, his family, associates, and court by the hasidim themselves, which became a typical feature of Hasidism in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the difference is merely quantitative: in both cases the *zaddik* could not—or would not—leave aside his spiritual and public

activities to care for his material needs. It was his self-appointed task to attend to spiritual matters for the benefit of Jews in general and his followers and supporters in particular; hence the latter were expected and willing to provide the material wherewithal to support the zaddik and his dependents. As Gershom Scholem rightly pointed out, "the truth is that the later development of zaddikism was already implicit in the very start of the hasidic movement"<sup>11</sup>—a comment that rejects any moral or ideological distinction between what some have seen as two periods in the history of Hasidism: a first period characterized by moral principles and spirituality, and a second, primitive and corrupt period. This distinction, first proposed in the work of such scholars as Simon Dubnow and Samuel Horodezky, is in urgent need of critical revision. Shmuel Ettinger, for example, forcefully criticized the dubious morality of Dubnow's distinction between pure, "theoretical Hasidism" and corrupt, "practical Zaddikism":

Why does not Dubnow complain that the Besht took payment for writing amulets—which is a kind of payment for service—whereas he condemns as corruption and exploitation the money paid to the latter-day zaddik for leading his flock? From a historical standpoint, the main problem is not the payment and its justification but the task of leadership and the way it was carried out.<sup>12</sup>

The student of Hasidism capable of safely hurdling the moral condemnation of nineteenth-century zaddikism as corrupt, and consequently concentrating on the actual manifestations of economic activity at the major hasidic courts, particularly in the Ukraine and Galicia, will discover a unique, independent financial system. The zaddik's court maintained an existence economically apart from that of the host community and was generally quite indifferent to the needs of the latter's institutions. It was self-supporting, achieving its goals through such typical economic tools as fund-raising, tax collection, loans, savings, and profitable investments. The comfortable life at the court, which encompassed not only the zaddik and his family but a whole staff of helpers and associates, with its own, self-organized fund-raising systems, was an integral part of social reality in many nineteenth-century hasidic communities, especially in the "royal" courts of the Ruzhin-Sadgora and Chernobyl dynasties. The considerable financial turnover in such courts, coupled with the fact that the use of the funds was at the sole discretion of the zaddik (or of his representative), were the cause not only of the later historians' strictures, but also of contemporary criticism, whether voiced by hasidim, mitnagdim, or maskilim, and consequently of suspicion and bitter hostility toward Hasidism in general.<sup>13</sup>

The main fund-raising tools at the court's disposal were: (i) the pidyon paid by every hasid coming to appear before the zaddik; (ii) the zaddik's

regular or occasional trips to visit his scattered hasidim, during which contributions were solicited and special fund-raising campaigns were held; (iii) special dues, known as *ma'amadot*, collected from the zaddik's followers wherever they lived; (iv) "maggidut contracts" that awarded the zaddik full control over the appointment of religious functionaries in the communities and granted him and his descendants, or their representatives, the profits from a variety of economic monopolies.

## *II. The Meaning of the Pidyon*

The pidyon, a gift of an unspecified sum of money that the hasid presented to the zaddik when visiting him, was to become one of the most distinctive indications of the hasid's ties with his leader and a major economic factor in the maintenance of the hasidic court. The zaddik would perform some kind of a mystical deed for the hasid in return for the pidyon—a blessing and a prayer for the latter's welfare or success in his spiritual or material endeavors.<sup>14</sup> The primary, literal meaning of the word—redemption, ransom money—shaped its ritual significance for the hasidim. The biblical verse "If ransom is laid upon him, he must pay whatever is laid upon him to redeem his life [Hebrew *pidyon nefsho*]" (Exod. 21:30) was interpreted as meaning that the hasid had to give a sum of money ("ransom") as commanded by the zaddik ("whatever is laid upon him"), and that doing so would save ("redeem") his soul and help him in various ways, some of them unexpected and invisible. At the same time, the pidyon created an indissoluble mystical link between the giver-hasid and the receiver-zaddik.

The various and sundry explanations and justifications of the pidyon are drawn from a broad variety of ideas, ranging from emphasis on the benefit enjoyed by the hasid, as if the pidyon had been created for him alone, to the zaddik's obligation to receive payment, as if he were being forced to act against his will. Between these two extremes, one finds the view of pidyon as an administrative measure of considerable spiritual and social import, from which both parties to the "transaction" derived benefit.

Rabbi Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, who dealt extensively with pidyon in his writings, explained it as the logical outcome of the hasid's desire to make himself dependent on the zaddik in a way that would further his spiritual development and save him from the sin of heresy:

Whosoever lets scholars and zaddikim derive benefit from his property, that benefit will have the result that he will not rush to sin, to become an absolute villain and deny the Torah, heaven forbid. . . . The conclusion is that by giving to the zaddik, the power of the *kelipot* [evil spirit] is shattered, and the donor is linked by an everlasting tie to the zaddik, so that his evil inclination will not tempt him to sin great-

ly, Heaven forfend; on the contrary, he will be sanctified by the zaddik. That is the meaning of Scripture, "I hereby give you" [Num. 18:8], that the Lord, praise be unto Him, commanded us to present an offering to the priest, and the Lord said to him: "Behold, by this I enjoin you, to be given into your hands, that you shall be the protection of my offering, that through the offering they give you they shall be protected [from sin]."<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the zaddik Yohanan of Rotmistrivka, son of Mordekhai of Chernobyl, appealed to the rather worn metaphor of "Issachar and Zebulun." Just as Zebulun the merchant supported his scholarly brother Issachar:

So, too, it is the custom of hasidim to give the zaddik, their rebbe, sufficient money for his support, and the zaddik is obliged to radiate the abundance upon them in return . . . that they should lack for nothing, whether in their health, their livelihood, or the like. Only if they lack such things, then do they come to the zaddik and give him a *kvitl* in which all their needs are inscribed.<sup>16</sup>

It is indeed true that the main theoretical justification for the idea that the masses should support the zaddik relied on a hasidic interpretation of the old ideal of partnership between Issachar and Zebulun. However, the "partnership" in question was far from egalitarian. It was derived from the elitist, class-conscious outlook pervading the writings of many hasidic thinkers, according to which the world is divided into "people of matter" (the masses) and "people of form" (the zaddikim). Despite the organism-like partnership imposed upon them, as if they were limbs of the same body, the "partners" did not occupy the same existential and spiritual level; in fact, because of the deterministic element in this idea, the masses could not expect ever to reach the same level as the zaddikim.<sup>17</sup>

It was this ideology that prompted the Besht's grandson Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sudilkov to explain the masses' duty to support spiritual leaders as the logical conclusion of their unconditional subservience to spiritual authority:

For the men of matter know and understand this, that they fulfill worldly needs solely in order that the men of form should enjoy comfort and be filled with all the good that they need, so that they should not be disturbed and desist, Heaven forfend, from their beneficial labor. Therefore the men of matter obey their every word and watch over them to supply the men of form with all their needs.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, this zaddik himself, apparently one who "did not live the life of a practical zaddik,"<sup>19</sup> possessed a written contract in which certain leaseholders undertook to obey him and, in return for his prayers and Torah study, pay him a fee of 0.6 percent of their profits.<sup>20</sup>

Alternative explanations considered the pidyon as a substitute for sacri-



fice in the Temple. Nahman of Bratslav had already made this comparison, and similar ideas were probably current among Ruzhin hasidim as well.<sup>21</sup>

The idea that the pidyon actually benefited the hasid himself was responsible not only for justifications of ugly manifestations of moral callousness but also for a paternalistic, condescending attitude to the hasidim as subjects, spiritually and materially subservient to the zaddik. Thus, the zaddik Zevi Hirsch of Rimanov explained in a homily: “[Why does Scripture say,] ‘Let them *take* for me an offering’ [Exod. 25:2], rather than ‘Let them *give* me’ . . . ? Because in order to benefit a Jew, so that strict justice shall not be meted out to him, he [i.e., the zaddik] should take from him [i.e., the Jew] a ransom for his own soul, with mighty arm and hand.”<sup>22</sup> And for one of Mordekhai of Chernobyl’s sons, the situation was quite simple: “It was our father who gave them [the hasidim] their riches, so you may surely take as much money as you wish.”<sup>23</sup>

The justification for pidyon was questioned even within Hasidism, both by zaddikim and hasidim; at times such doubts embarrassed the zaddik himself, who could not deny their logic or the inner contradictions that they exposed. Thus, Israel of Ruzhin was asked: “Why should you receive money from your followers? For it is you yourself who radiate the abundance; so why should you give away all that abundance, only to get it back from your followers? Surely it would be better for you to keep what you need and only then bestow it upon the world! and Rabbi Israel replied, You have asked well. . . .”<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, the famous complaint voiced by Eleazar, son of Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, attests to a profound unease about the contrast between the zaddik’s essence—and public image—as a supremely moral personality, supposedly in no need of the masses’ money, and the realistic need to collect pidyonot. Rabbi Eleazar’s answer to an anonymous interlocutor who solicited his father’s view on the matter essentially established the classic hasidic answer to such questions, both externally (to mitnagdim and maskilim) and internally, according to which the tension was only apparent:

And should you wish to say, if the zaddikim spurn ill-gotten gain, why should they take money from people, even if offered all day? My beloved brother, in this connection, I have several secret reasons that cannot be committed to writing; but the simplest is also the true one. For the zaddikim never place money in a box, and it never remains in their possession, even overnight, but they spend it for the need of the poor of Israel and to marry off the virgins of Israel, for there is now no greater commandment than that. . . . Alternatively, they give money to ransom captives and support students of Torah who have no one else to support them. . . . And that is the meaning of the verse “Hand to hand, the evil man shall not be cleansed [but the seed of the righteous shall escape]” [Prov. 11:21], that is to say: When one takes from one hand and gives to another hand, one is doing a favor to the person from

whom one is taking, for the evil power accusing him on high will not clean him out of his possessions.<sup>25</sup>

The main point is that the zaddikim are not avaricious at all and do not put the money given them to their own personal use—indeed, they do not allow it to remain in their possession for any length of time. The money is earmarked for various charitable causes, which would not (or could not) be taken care of by individual donors on their own.<sup>26</sup> The zaddikim are, in fact, greatly benefiting people by taking their money and thus preserving them from the strict justice that would otherwise quickly leave them destitute.

Doubts expressed by zaddikim on this count were clearly sincere and not merely apologetic or intended to improve their public image. Judah Zevi of Rozdol, himself the son of a zaddik, pondering such readiness to donate money to a single person, gives us a glimpse of his personal misgivings as a zaddik, overburdened with such weighty responsibility:

It is the custom in the world that a few hundred or thousand souls of Israel journey to a single zaddik and give him money. What does this mean, that so very many people give to one person? Perhaps the reason is that any building needs a foundation, and if there is no strong foundation, the entire building will fall and be worthless. Indeed, the entire world as a whole is also called a building . . . and the zaddik is the foundation . . . hence it is proper that all the world should give him money for his upkeep, from their silver and gold, for he reinforces and sustains them. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to understand why the masses journey to me too and give me money, for I surely know that I cannot be considered as an *axis mundi* zaddik.<sup>27</sup>

The hasidic hagiography is replete with descriptions of zaddikim inspired exclusively by unselfish motives, all of whose wealth was put only to charitable, positive use and served to benefit the public. The hasidic argumentation was not content with such self-evident charities as sustenance of the poor, financing of poor brides' marriages, or ransoming of captives. It frequently took flight into the realms of pure fancy; for example, it was claimed that all the funds raised under Mordekhai of Chernobyl's auspices were for the upkeep of the thirty-six anonymous righteous men of that generation—in fact, whoever dared to challenge this assertion was condemned as a heretic.<sup>28</sup>

A good illustration of the discrepancy between the naïve worldview of the hasidim and the actual needs of the zaddikim is the story of Moses of Koristyshev (d. 1866), Rabbi Mordekhai's son. Notwithstanding that he did not head a hasidic court proper, Rabbi Moses needed some means of sustenance. At the end of an unsuccessful fund-raising trip, he told his audience in the community he had reached that his journey had been a fail-

ure, for he had not collected more than a small amount of the money that he needed:

And they said to the rabbi: "Indeed, we believe that it is not the intention of our rebbe on his travels merely to collect money, God forbid, but rather to mend souls." And the rabbi was angry with them for holding him to be so great, saying to them that he did not know what they were talking about, because the only reason for his travels was that he needed money for his household expenses.<sup>29</sup>

Many hasidic leaders were indubitably exceptional figures whose pure intentions, modest lifestyles, and high ethical standards were beyond question. Nevertheless, the mere fact that the question of pidyon and the accumulation of wealth in the hasidic courts were constantly being debated and constituted a never-ending source of talebearing, polemics, and slander indicates that the distinctions between ends and means were not infrequently blurred. This was particularly evident with regard to the "royal" hasidic courts of Ruzhin, Chernobyl, Rimanov, and their offshoots, which could not function properly without vast funds. The means of collecting such funds often pressed the most sublime spiritual values, such as charity and morality, into the service of greed, opulence, and materialism.

### *III. The Cost of the Pidyon and Methods of Amassing a Fortune*

It was only natural that during the nineteenth century, as Hasidism became a mass movement, the number of visitors flocking to the zaddik's court constantly increased. The large number of hasidim seeking the zaddik's help, on the one hand, and the burgeoning fiscal needs of the court, on the other, encouraged a more normative and rational view of pidyon. It came to be seen among the hasidim not so much as a mystical rite, enabling the zaddik to perform certain magical operations, but rather as a fee paid for services rendered by the zaddik or for the advantages the believer reaped from a stay at his court. It was only proper that those interested should pay, and pay well. The zaddikim, on the other hand, understood pidyon, not only as a legitimate tool to promote the court's organizational interests, but also as a full expression of the mystical partnership between the zaddik and the faithful, and of the hasidic community's overall responsibility for the court's physical existence and the zaddik's well-being. Given the competition that often governed relations between neighboring hasidic courts, a zaddik's ability to extract more funds from his followers to enhance the court's visible wealth and opulence and improve its "services" were seen as evidence of his spiritual greatness, increasing his prestige in the eyes of both his own hasidim and his colleagues.<sup>30</sup>

The sums levied as pidyon varied from time to time and place to place, depending on such factors as the hasid's financial standing, the whims of the zaddik himself or of his gabba'im, or the gravity of the problem that the zaddik was expected to solve (the sums thus stipulated were not always consistent with the donor's means). The minimal sum of pidyon, a silver ruble, was viewed by some zaddikim with suspicion and contempt.<sup>31</sup> The customary payment was eighteen coins (this being the numerical value of the Hebrew word *hay*, "living"), in rubles or any other valid currency; another common sum—very high, but still of major mystical value—was one hundred and sixty coins (the numerical value of the Hebrew word *kesef*, "silver," or "money").<sup>32</sup> Particularly large sums were solicited from rich hasidim, and the larger the donation, the heartier the welcome given the donor and the more favorable the treatment he received from the zaddik and his gabba'im.<sup>33</sup> This treatment might imply a better seat at the tish or during prayers, a publicly announced appreciation, or the zaddik's personal attention to and interest in the donor's welfare, and hence more time spent in consideration of the latter's requests, small gifts, etc.—all means to ensure the donor's continued, long-term affiliation with the zaddik and his court.

Mordekhai of Chernobyl, Israel of Ruzhin, and Zevi of Rimanov were especially famous for their exorbitant demands. Rabbi Israel, for instance, once told his hasidim that "if the world knew what benefit the zaddik brings to the whole world when he has money, they would cover the whole floor of his home with gold coins."<sup>34</sup> His hasidim took the hint, the source reports, and began to work toward the goal he had set them. But when Hayyim Meir Yehiel of Mogielnica, the Maggid of Kozhenits's grandson and a zaddik in his own right, brought him pidyonot to the tune of three hundred silver rubles, laboriously collected from Rabbi Israel's admirers in Poland, the zaddik treated the tremendous sum of money with contempt, which he clearly expressed in quite amazing terms: "There is no man in the world that has no blemish. But I am the sole favorite son, for I am wholly perfect. Therefore all the money in the whole world belongs to me. So why have you brought me so little money?"<sup>35</sup>

Such megalomaniac ideas not only shaped this ethos of wealth and royalty but also determined the practical relationship between the zaddik and his hasidim. Thus, in 1838, when Rabbi Israel was imprisoned, some 30,000 silver rubles were needed to defray the many legal expenses. It was reported that this vast sum was found in cash in Rabbi Israel's home, but he refused to sanction its use, giving instructions "to borrow money from elsewhere, for he said, How can one leave the people of Israel even for one night without money"<sup>36</sup>—yet another instance of the zaddik's personal wealth being identified with public funds.

Particularly harsh criticism was leveled against Zevi of Rimanov, who did not leave the amount of pidyon to the hasid's discretion, as was the custom, but set it himself—a practice first instituted, according to hasidic tradition, at the court of Mordekhai of Chernobyl.<sup>37</sup> “When a person came to [Rabbi Mordekhai] to ask him to pray for his welfare and his salvation, he set him a sum of money, saying, If you give me such-and-such an amount of pidyon, your will shall be done, with God's help.”<sup>38</sup>

The explanations provided by these zaddikim for hoarding wealth were rather lame. The hasidim of Rimanov interpreted their rebbe's apparent avarice as a desire to realize religious and social values through money: “The love of money, too, is so that he should be able with that money to carry out his Lord's will, to give charity to the poor and to be charitable and observe the commandments through them. Otherwise, he would not have loved money.”<sup>39</sup>

Rabbi Mordekhai, who did not scruple to demand “a vast sum” from a rich hasid who came to him requesting his blessing, and in return even agreed to provide the hasid with a letter to his deceased father, Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, to be delivered by this rich man when he died,<sup>40</sup> explained that he needed “a great deal of money with which to support the thirty-six hidden righteous men.”<sup>41</sup> To convince his audiences, Rabbi Mordekhai reverted to an explanation that was commonly cited in medieval ethical literature—the mutual dependence of the “people of form” and the “people of matter” obliges them to become partners, as neither can act without the other: “The masses do not have food for the soul, while the zaddikim do not have bodily food and sustenance. . . . Ordinary people come to the zaddik and give him of the gold of Sheba, and the zaddik prays for the soul of the masses and continually blesses them.”<sup>42</sup>

Rabbi Mordekhai's son Isaac of Skvira offered an honest evaluation that reveals not only the zaddik's subjective feeling that it was perfectly legitimate to demand material recompense for his effort and the time spent aiding his followers, but also a budding modern capitalist outlook. Underlying this new way of thinking was the assumption that everything has a monetary value, and that time and investment of resources—including mystical or spiritual talents—should also be measured in economic terms: “I do not know why they give me money. . . . Later, he said that it is because I sit for several hours, and I listen to all the pains and sufferings of the Children of Israel, of each and every person, and I shatter all my limbs.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite certain vulgar aspects of the collection of pidyon money, the actual act of payment involved strictly observed ceremonial rules. Although the real purpose was obvious, neither party to the transaction desired to picture the zaddik's relationship with his followers as a purely economic

affair of "give and take." To camouflage the proceedings, therefore, a special etiquette, designed to obscure the business aspects of the deal, became customary. The money was never given directly to the zaddik: visitors placed their pidyon fees on a small table by the door to his room, and they were generally delivered to one of the gabba'im, who stood at the entrance holding a special purse.<sup>44</sup> For example, a hasid appearing before Rabbi Israel knew that he had to present the kvitl, on which his requests had been written, directly to the zaddik, but the pidyon would be placed surreptitiously in the gabba'i's purse.<sup>45</sup> The fact that certain zaddikim were known to submit pidyonot to one another, and that even the zaddik's family would on occasion pay him such fees,<sup>46</sup> served to stress the spiritual element and to blur the economic motivation.

Income from pidyonot was the fuel driving the economic machinery of the zaddik's court: it assured the zaddik and his family of a suitable upkeep, paid salaries to the various functionaries, bought food, clothing, furniture, religious objects, and the like, financed development and maintenance, and answered the needs of charity, intercession with the gentile authorities, or any other initiative that the zaddik might wish to take. One can gain some idea of the sheer magnitude of the turnover necessary to run a "royal" court like that of Ruzhin from one of Rabbi Israel's retorts to his followers when he was forced to stay at Kamenets Podolsk in 1838 for interrogation: "People are saying that I wish to live in Kamenets. That is not true! For at Ruzhin I have expenses of two hundred silver rubles per week, while at Kamenets I should have expenses of three hundred [per week], so how could I take upon myself to encumber the hasidim with such a large outlay?"<sup>47</sup>

If this testimony may be taken at face value, the weekly outlay for maintenance of the court was a very considerable sum for the time and place. During the 1870s, a similar sum was recorded as the weekly cost of maintaining the court of Abraham Jacob, Rabbi Israel's son and deputy, at Sadgora.<sup>48</sup>

To administer such a large budget, the zaddikim needed capital, which could be realized (or the profits realized) at short notice. In that sense, court funds were managed in all respects as in a bank. Any surplus money (if it existed) was invested by the zaddikim or their financial advisors in real estate, commodities, and the like. In the early days at Ruzhin, where Rabbi Israel had registered as a member of the second merchants' guild by virtue of his holdings, he owned a considerable amount of landed property.<sup>49</sup> Later, at Sadgora, he purchased a vast estate at Potik, including agricultural and industrial installations; the estate was managed even after his death like any business.<sup>50</sup> In partnership with a Polish nobleman, Rabbi Israel invested a further large sum (51,400 florins) in a pickle factory at Chernovtsy,

while his son Abraham Jacob chose to be partner in a sugar factory.<sup>51</sup> Other zaddikim ran a kind of private bank in their courts, lending money to the needy and investing capital in various profitable partnerships.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, Rabbi Israel and his descendants amassed a considerable collection of manuscripts, ancient books and expensive ceremonial objects.<sup>53</sup> Travelers who visited the court of Sadgora remarked on its splendor and estimated the value of the property, the art objects, gifts, rugs, and furnishings there to be worth hundreds of thousands of rubles.<sup>54</sup>

However, the income from pidyon and other contributions of those frequenting the court was generally inadequate, in particular when the zaddik was unwilling to draw on his own personal wealth.<sup>55</sup> Other steps were therefore necessary to meet the court's pressing needs and enlarge the financial means at its disposal; such action was aimed not only at raising funds but also at reinforcing the commitment and participation of the hasidim.

#### *IV. The Zaddik's Travels*

The zaddik's trips to visit his scattered adherents were not an innovation—they were as old as Hasidism itself. There is no doubt that the institutionalization of the zaddik's court had far-reaching consequences for Hasidism as a whole. However, the zaddikim were not content to remain passively in their courts and receive their visitors; they also traveled to visit their admirers, wherever they might be. These journeys, which generally extended over the Sabbath, were an important component in the consolidation of the zaddik's leadership; they furthered the creation of a special affinity with community members, both through the existence of a temporary court, with its own ceremonies and functionaries, and through the zaddik's presentation of himself as an "itinerant judge" of domestic and business disputes or an arbitrator in various disagreements.<sup>56</sup>

The temporary departure of the zaddik and his retinue from the home base became a typical part of the nineteenth-century picture of Eastern European shtetl Jewry. Every Jewish boy or girl was familiar with such scenes as the august figure of the admor arriving in the dusty village, the excitement and curiosity aroused by the visit, the reception ceremonies held outdoors, in the public square, and indoors, in the synagogues and study houses, the rebbe's tish on the Sabbath or holiday, the intrigues that split the community, and the patterns of cultural experience and folklore engendered by the occasion. Such scenes are well represented in the Jewish press of the time, in Jewish belles lettres, and the memoir literature.<sup>57</sup>

The zaddik's visit created a stir in the neighborhood, and many came from far and near to see him, even to spend the Sabbath with him and pray

in his presence. The members of his retinue supervised the "public relations" aspect of the trip and made considerable efforts to prepare the locals for the occasion and ensure the proper atmosphere.<sup>58</sup> A characteristic instance of the powerful propaganda effect attendant on the zaddik's journeys is the following story, told by a Jewish innkeeper from the Zlochev region in whose inn Israel of Ruzhin slept in 1835:

He travelled with three carriages of his own, and the Jews flocked to him in such crowds that more than 700 vehicles were upon the road, either accompanying or going to meet him. He slept at this inn on his way from Brody to Lemberg. The crowd of Jews that visited him was such that he could hardly get rest, and many came to look upon his face while he was sleeping. So great was the excitement that the Austrian Government became alarmed and ordered him to leave the country in three days.<sup>59</sup>

What was the meaning of the agitation and excitement, the highly charged atmosphere created by the visit of Rabbi Israel and his company? Was a zaddik's visit so rare that hundreds of Jews came in coaches and carts to gaze at the visitor, who was known to them only by hearsay? Visits by "famous" zaddikim were still not a matter of routine at this time. One should remember that many of the zaddik's followers first laid eyes upon him, not at his court, but when he came to their community (or a neighboring community). In addition, the mythological dimension of the Ruzhiner's figure intensified the experience and, as it were, electrified large sectors of society. After all, by then entire village populations in the Ukraine and Galicia were completely hasidic, so much so "that no Jew dare appear on its streets unless dressed entirely in the Jewish manner, for fear the Chasidim should tear him to pieces."<sup>60</sup> Given that background, the zaddik's royal airs presumably made a considerable impression everywhere, particularly in remote villages and small towns—it was probably a powerful tool in the dissemination of Hasidism.

There are numerous accounts of the thrilling scene: the coach, drawn by magnificent horses, was driven by resplendently uniformed servants, with the zaddik's retinue—a procession of gabbai'im, beadles, cantors, cooks, slaughterers, and the like, carrying the zaddik's personal effects—coming before and behind it. The entire colorful cortege was accompanied with music played by a full-sized band.<sup>61</sup> The ordinary Jew of the time was unused to such spectacles, and the emotional impact left by such visits was translated into a tremendous popular admiration for the zaddikim and the rapid spread of Hasidism in those places. When the Jews of Barlad reported the reasons for their admiration of Israel of Ruzhin in 1839, they referred particularly to the exterior features that identified him, namely, his splendid coach, fine horses, band of musicians, and many servants.<sup>62</sup>



The zaddik usually traveled to places in the vicinity of the court, the declared goals being to visit his hasidim and give them guidance, to cement the personal bond between the zaddik and his flock, to promote the cause of Hasidism in general and of that specific court in particular, and to widen the circle of hasidim and others who identified with the zaddik. For zaddikim like Nahman of Bratslav, these journeys took on mystical and sometimes obsessive dimensions. They were compared to the wanderings of the Divine Presence and the Ark of the Covenant. Sometimes, they were apparently aimless and remained a profound, incomprehensible mystery.<sup>63</sup> The marked improvement in means of transport (starting in the 1870s, in particular with the development of the railroads), also enhanced the mobility of the zaddikim and reinforced the communication between them and their more remote followers, and also between them and other zaddikim scattered around Eastern Europe. Visits by zaddikim left a tremendous impression on the members of the community, mainly promoting feelings of pride, unity, and brotherhood among the local hasidim and strengthening their ties with “their” zaddik. Nevertheless, it was quite clear to any observer that the major goal of the trips was the raising of funds to finance the routine expenses of the court.

One zaddik who traveled extensively was Mordekhai of Chernobyl. His overt purpose was to exorcise the impurity that had affected one community or another in the area under his sway.<sup>64</sup> But his son David of Talne, whose fund-raising campaigns in the 1860s stirred up considerable unrest and caused the Russian authorities to issue a decree forbidding zaddikim to leave their home towns without permission,<sup>65</sup> related that when his father traveled anywhere, “he heard an announcement before the journey, as to the sum of money he would collect in that city where he would spend the Sabbath.”<sup>66</sup>

Rabbi Israel, too, did not merely consolidate his spiritual contact with his hasidim, but engaged in fund-raising as well. His success was considerable, so much so that when he came to Lemberg in 1835, the local maskilim managed to persuade the city police to expel him on the grounds that he was attempting to smuggle money out of the country. During his Sadgora period (1842–51), Rabbi Israel traveled much less, and in the last five years of his life practically not at all, because of illness; but by then he was at the peak of his fame and did not have to raise funds. The myth that surrounded the wealth of the Ruzhin court was self-perpetuating in the sense that it encouraged the flow of further donations and contributions to the court without them having to be explicitly solicited.

## V. The Ma'amadot Taxes

Another major means toward establishing the distant hasid's spiritual commitment to his zaddik was the collection of an annual tax known as *ma'amad* or *ma'amad u-matzav*.<sup>67</sup> These taxes were intended mainly to finance court expenses, although at times they were earmarked for special charities initiated by the zaddik.<sup>68</sup> It is still not clear who was the first to levy this tax. The hasidic tradition relates it to Pinhas of Korets (d. 1791), but as he did not have a great following, this seems rather dubious.<sup>69</sup> Although we know that Mordekhai of Chernobyl was among the first to use it,<sup>70</sup> there are reports of the tax already being collected in the late eighteenth century.<sup>71</sup>

Evidence that the collection of ma'amadot was intended not only to improve the court's financial situation but also to help the zaddik consolidate his position as a leader of many hasidic communities may be found in a letter Israel of Ruzhin sent around 1826. Although the letter is not dated, the fact that Mezhibozh is listed among the communities required to pay the tax indicates that it was written only after the death (in 1825) of the zaddik Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta, who lived there at the end of his life. Rabbi Israel's reference to the need "to reinforce my seat and make it secure" also indicates that the letter was written at an early stage of his career. He appeals to the leaders and residents of several communities in Volhynia and Podolia, promising that if they pay ma'amadot in time, he will not cease praying for them:

Indeed, just as individuals have benefited from the matter of the ma'amad that they collected from each and every one, to reinforce my seat and make it secure and flourishing, and it is their earnest desire that I should write them a letter, I hereby comply with their will and inform them that I favor their wish and desire in this matter. May the Lord grant them courage forever, and may they trust in their hearts that I shall not desist from my prayer for their sake at every opportune time, to entreat for them within the community of Israel, that they should enjoy every possible blessing. Let them be careful to ensure the matter of the ma'amad and to deliver [the tax] to the commissioner in their locality at its appointed time, every half-year. The role of the commissioner is a permanent one. No one should send the ma'amad contribution of individuals to here. [Instead], the commissioner shall deliver [the tax] to my most learned friend our master Rabbi Alter of Bar, may his light shine, who bears this letter, and in his hand [the tax] will reach me safely. And in order that the hearts of our brethren the Children of Israel shall be secure that whatever they have sent has arrived safely and that they shall be favorably remembered, my aforementioned friend has been instructed to bring them a receipt from here, from one of my subordinates. Thereby their will and mine shall be fulfilled.<sup>72</sup>

The letter explicitly attests to the institutionalization of the tax: while it was originally collected only from individuals who wished to help the zad-

dik establish himself, the zaddik now agreed that whole communities should take part in addition to individual donors. A permanent local representative, who was permanently entrusted with the task and could not be replaced, collected it twice a year. The zaddik was unwilling to receive “ma’amad contribution of individuals,” that is, money sent to the court otherwise than through the “commissioner,” while the latter was instructed to deliver the funds he had collected to the zaddik’s personal representative on the basis of his written authorization.

To avert suspicion that the money might not reach its destination, the zaddik’s representative was to provide each contributor with a receipt. This was, of course, intended to allay people’s suspicions, which were only natural in view of the numerous requests for contributions solicited by diverse impostors, emissaries, self-appointed zaddikim, and descendants of zaddikim (genuine or spurious) who wandered from community to community in Eastern Europe throughout the nineteenth century. We do not know to what extent this description is realistic. The sources indicate that the instructions were not always followed to the letter, resulting in a broad range of collection methods, depending first and foremost on the zaddik and his collectors.

Ma’amadot—ostensibly an internal, voluntary tax—were collected only from the hasidim, and not from the community as a whole. Hasidic sources in fact describe the ma’amadot in an ideal light as taxes paid voluntarily by the hasidim, moved by their love for the zaddik.<sup>73</sup> This generalization should, however, be treated with caution. Although there were no means of actual coercion, social pressure no doubt had its effect, creating an atmosphere in which even impoverished or penurious hasidim could not evade payment; any attempt at evasion would have been seen as desertion, rejection of an object of social identification. Such pressures were presumably most effective in small localities, where the great majority of the community was affiliated with a single court.

Quite naturally, the ma’amadot and pidyon harmed the regular community institutions, as pointed out by Haskalah critics such as Alexander Tzederbaum (Erez) in his book about Berdichev in the 1860s. Not only was the tax a heavy burden for many people, he wrote, but it also undermined the financial basis of such institutions as the synagogue and study houses, because resources generally earmarked for charity and local community institutions found their way to the zaddik’s court. Tzederbaum complained that these taxes, which were supposed to be voluntary, were actually a compulsory payment that could not be evaded: “We are convinced that not even 10 percent of those who give ma’amadot and pidyonot do so of their own free will.”<sup>74</sup>

In their propaganda, the zaddikim preferred to underline the ideologi-

cal foundations of the ma'amadot: it was the individual hasid's way of expressing his loyalty to "his" zaddik, thus actualizing the mutual dependence and interrelationship between the center—the zaddik's court—and its many peripheral communities. Indeed, although the purpose was basically economic, it also had certain social and ideological aspects that could not be measured in terms of profit and loss alone. An illustration of Rabbi Israel's efforts to graft a human dimension onto the technical and organizational aspect of the collection of ma'amadot may be found in a report by his son David Moses of Chortkov:

He [Israel] had a rabbi who traveled from town to town, collecting ma'amad money from his followers. And once this rabbi came back from his rounds and gave him lists of the people [who had paid] ma'amad. The Ruzhiner read the lists of people, and while doing so inquired about a certain person who had been accustomed to give five gold pieces as ma'amad money but was no longer mentioned in the lists. The traveling rabbi replied, that the person in question lived in a village distant from any town and the journey to him would cost more than the profit. My father, of blessed memory, replied: You would not spend one ruble so as to receive five gold pieces?! I wish you to spend five rubles so as to receive from the man five gold pieces!<sup>75</sup>

On the other hand, there was no lack of vulgar displays of greed, for which a variety of excuses was proposed. For example, Israel of Ruzhin instructed his gabba'im to explain to the hasidim that it would be wrong to donate small, torn banknotes, for since the donors were "engraved on the tablet of the zaddik's heart," they should give up their money "wholeheartedly."<sup>76</sup> It was told of Aaron of Chernobyl's tax collector that he was afraid to enter Kishinev when a plague was raging in the town. He sent the money "and wrote a letter about the situation in the town, [saying] that he wished to return home." Rabbi Aaron insisted, however, that the collector not leave the town, promising that he would come to no harm, for "I have erected an iron wall between the Angel of Death and the town of Kishinev."<sup>77</sup> An interesting letter from Aaron "the Second" of Karlin to his hasidim in Ovruch (Volhynia) betrays clear signs of the financial distress of the hasidic courts at the time and, at the same time, the avarice of the zaddikim (the two elements were not unrelated):

As you know, from time immemorial I have always traveled through their community at this time of the year. . . . Now that I have not been successful. . . . I am sending my beloved friends and relatives, who bear this letter and with it lists of names [of members of the community], may they live long, and it is known of each and every one how much he was accustomed to give each year; some of them committed themselves to pay ma'amad and undertook to send it annually to my home. And now, because of the heavy yoke of debts weighing down upon my neck, and as our followers have repeatedly undertaken to contribute more than they were

wont, and after I have seen that nothing has come of it—in view of the deficit in the sum of ma'amad money, I have therefore decided to issue in this letter a command to all those who do my bidding not to donate less than their [usual] annual donation when I stay in their community; whoever adds more shall be additionally blessed, and the ma'amad should not come to less than formerly. In addition, each and every person should double his donation by not less than the amount [originally] given, this debt to be defrayed no later than the coming festival of Shavuot; perhaps in this way the yoke of my debts may be mitigated.<sup>78</sup>

The tax collectors set out on their journeys at fixed times, generally once or twice a year—occasionally four times.<sup>79</sup> They traveled to the towns and villages in the zaddik's sphere of influence, collecting money on the basis of previously prepared lists of names. These "pidyon-beggars," as they were nicknamed in the anti-hasidic literature,<sup>80</sup> were professionals, well versed in the "art" of fund-raising, familiar with the locality and with its hasidic residents. For the most part, they were respected, venerable rabbis, but also warm, personable individuals who readily established friendly relations with people. Their arrival in town was considered a festive occasion for the local hasidim, who interrupted their labors and gathered in the kloiz to listen to talks, stories, and lessons, as well as the latest news and gossip, from the rebbe's court.<sup>81</sup>

The collectors were expected to update their lists according to the results of the current collection, and the lists were kept in a special archive at the zaddik's home. Unlike the case of the government population censuses, which Jews usually evaded in order to reduce their tax assessments, here the hasidim were specifically interested in being accurately listed, for only then could they be confident that they would be remembered at the zaddik's court and receive his blessing. On the other hand, it was, of course, in the court's best economic and administrative interests to update the lists; thus, each year, after the collectors had completed their rounds, the total income was compared with the previous years' successes. Here is how a hasidic source describes a conversation between the zaddik Nahum Dov of Sadgora, grandchild of rabbi Israel, and a returning tax collector:

Once the emissary, who had returned from his journey to collect his ma'amad money, came to him, and gave him the lists of all those who had given ma'amad. And the zaddik read it by name and then went to the chest and took out last year's list, only to find that one man was missing in the new list, who had given four silver rubles in the previous year. So he asked the emissary: Why is this man not included in the list? And the emissary answered that he had died. Thereupon the revered zaddik answered: Why should his sons not give for him? Said the emissary: See, his son so-and-so, is a poor man and has nothing. And the zaddik said: But has he enough for the Sabbath expenses? To which the emissary replied that he also found it difficult to procure enough for the Sabbath. Said the zaddik: Let us calcu-

late how much he needs for Sabbath expenses. . . . Then he said: Tell that son he should save from all of his Sabbath expenses a sum of four kopecks per week for ma'amad money. For the zaddik is equivalent to the Sabbath, and the ma'amad money is as highly valued as Sabbath expenses.<sup>82</sup>

After the necessary inquiries, the zaddik would bless the localities, which had made good their payments and in fact grant them a symbolic coin as a gift; the tax collectors brought this coin back on their next visit. It was then auctioned off among the hasidim and the proceeds used for celebrations that went on for the duration of the collector's stay.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, while the collection was in progress, the tax collector would present the community with a special coin, which the rebbe had held and blessed specially as a protective charm, in exchange for the money collected.<sup>84</sup> Such customs of "reversed pidyon" were a symbolic expression of the mutual ties between the zaddik and his hasidim, of the idea that the beneficial "abundance" flowed in both directions, affecting both the zaddik and his flock.<sup>85</sup>

## VI. Concessions and Privileges

Yet another source of financial stability for the court was the zaddik's income from various concessions and privileges. Rabbis and other religious functionaries had always enjoyed various perquisites in addition to their salaries. This usage was also rooted in religious law,<sup>86</sup> and it was indeed reflected in various ways in rabbinical contracts. Thus, a commonly accepted way of compensating rabbinical employees for the generally low salaries offered by the communities was to grant them commissions for various services and monopolies for the sale of various commodities.<sup>87</sup> The zaddikim, however, were by no means ordinary employees who could be bound by contracts. They were not the "property" of the community within whose precincts they lived, and their spiritual authority could not be defined in a standard rabbinical contract, in terms of privileges and duties. Naturally, the community could not dictate terms to zaddikim, appoint them, dismiss them at the end of their tenure, or otherwise terminate their service. Nevertheless, some zaddikim held concessions that served in a sense as substitutes for salaries paid by the relevant communities. This situation, noted by both mitnagdim and maskilim,<sup>88</sup> was also associated with an institution that has gone almost unnoticed in the scholarly literature—the "maggidut contract."

The title *maggid* borne by several zaddikim of the Twersky family (the Chernobyl dynasty and its offshoots)<sup>89</sup> does not allude to the traditional *maggid mesharim*, hired to preach to the community on Sabbaths and festivals. This latter role almost completely disappeared in nineteenth-century

hasidic society, the sermons in synagogue being replaced by the “Torah” or “words of hasidut” spoken by the zaddik over the Sabbath meals at his court.<sup>90</sup> In the few places where the title survived, it was given a new meaning through a signed formal contract, known as *ketav maggidut* (in Yiddish *magidus briv*), which declared that a certain community “belonged” to that specific zaddik, who “ruled” the region, and to no other. It was by virtue of this contract that the zaddik and his entourage enjoyed monopolies and considerable economic prerogatives within and around the community, such as a set percentage of the income from the lease of various assets or taxes (e.g., the meat tax) or monopolies for the sale of various commodities (such as salt, candles, and other tallow products, yeast, and so on). In addition, they alone were entitled to appoint various religious functionaries and also had the authority to cancel appointments not to their liking. Such signed agreements were apparently common only among zaddikim active in the southwestern districts of the Russian Empire (i.e., the zaddikim of Chernobyl, Ruzhin, Aptá, Savran, and their offshoots).<sup>91</sup>

Interesting testimony about the new meaning of the title *maggid* may be found as early as the 1820s. The fictional zaddik, whose accession to leadership is portrayed with sarcastic realism by the maskil Isaac Ber Levinsohn, says:

After that, I traveled frequently to other big towns and I made efforts (besides that of collecting *pidyonot* from individuals) for them to give me an annuity, and I would be a *maggid* for them. And several towns granted me a concession that I should be a *maggid*, to come once a year and to pray there. I was to be involved in all the township matters, their expenses and income, et cetera, and every dispute or quarrel came to me for my decision. With all that, I became a *maggid* in all the towns, and in some, I became a rabbi by the same method, till I controlled about forty towns, smaller and bigger . . . and it was out of the question that another righteous individual besides me would dare to invade my territory, or that one of my men would travel to him for Sabbath and Rosh Hashanah, or to apply for help.<sup>92</sup>

A generation later, in 1867, Alexander Tzederbaum described how these real zaddikim had divided up the control of the communities among themselves and pointed out the social and economic implications of their rule:

They divided up the land among themselves as an inheritance, not as secular rulers do, according to geographical borders, but according to cities in each province and district; they did not [divide up the territory] by lot, but when they or their delegates went on their journeys, the local residents joined their ranks, tempted by the counsel of a few enthusiasts, [and] they crowned them [i.e., the zaddikim] as leaders and granted them contracts of rabbinate or *maggidut*, to serve them as protection and refuge. . . . Without them, no one is to lift hand or foot, and in all communal matters, their instruction is awaited, and they send them rabbis, judges, slaughterers, cantors, teachers, beadles, and even bathhouse attendants. As pay-

ment, the communities send them an annual head-tax per family, called *ma'amadot*, in addition to gifts in every case, whether good or bad, [this is also] in addition to the tax they [the *zaddikim*] receive when visited in their sanctuaries or when the *zaddik* comes once a year (or more often) to travel from city to city in his realm.<sup>93</sup>

This brief description lists all the major financial characteristics of the process through which the hasidic courts built up their economic power or consolidated their control over the communities: the fund-raising visits of the *zaddik* himself; his "enthronement" in a contract of rabbinate or *maggidut*; the *zaddik's* control of communal appointments; the *ma'amadot* taxes and *pidyonot*. The use of communal appointments as a tool in the service of the *zaddikim*, whether for purposes of propaganda and the dissemination of Hasidism or for economic reasons.<sup>94</sup> Here, attention will be focused on the question of economic monopolies.

A prototype for the later *maggidut* contracts is an agreement concluded in 1797 between the Besht's grandson Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sudilkov and a group of fourteen leaseholders in the surrounding villages. The latter undertook "to do his bidding in everything he should say" and to grant him a percentage of their earnings ("six gold pieces from each thousand"). In return, the *zaddik* promised to provide them with "protection and refuge . . . to help with his learning and prayer, which benefit all those who cluster in his shade." An interesting comment of the leaseholders is that they are doing so "as in all the places [where people] come to take refuge under his wings," indicating that they were by no means exceptional.<sup>95</sup> Rabbi Menahem Mendel Hager, Israel of Ruzhin's son-in-law and the founder of the Vizhnitz dynasty, also had such an agreement. He had a partnership with some cattle merchants, who in return for his advice, gave him "a certain percentage of the business. Whenever they had to travel to Vienna with the bulls, they first secured our master's permission." The *zaddik* did not trust his partners but thoroughly checked their accounts.<sup>96</sup>

Care for the *zaddik's* economic standing may be discerned in a detailed *maggidut* contract from 1846, which awarded Aaron of Chernobyl a varied range of privileges, monopolies, and sources of income. The document was signed by more than one hundred and twenty Jews, representing "all the residents of our holy community together with its environs," who granted the *zaddik*, his descendants, and their representatives "for ever and ever" a monopoly over the income from the sale of candles, soap, and related commodities (such as tallow, wicks, cotton wool, and felt) in Chernobyl and the neighboring communities, and "no one shall offer any kind of protest." All the residents of the community undertook not to purchase these commodities from anyone other than the *zaddik* and his representatives—whether gentiles or Jews from other communities, not even the minutest quantity. It was forbidden for any person to manufacture these



commodities independently, to import them from outside the community, or to trade in them anywhere, not even with visitors to the community, whether wholesale or retail. Although the document is a rare example, there were undoubtedly many others like it, and it aptly illustrates the ties forged between a community and a renowned zaddik living in their midst.<sup>97</sup>

A particularly interesting clause of the agreement indicates that the community also required the leaseholders of the meat tax not to stand aloof from the general public but to siphon off part of their income for the zaddik's court. Moreover, they even undertook to compensate leaseholders not belonging to the community—and therefore less amenable to persuasion—for any loss, provided only that the zaddik's income did not suffer:

The tax holder himself is forbidden to sell tallow to any man in the world, save to the admor Rabbi Aaron or his representative, and similarly all Jews are forbidden to buy tallow from the tax holder, save only the admor and his representatives alone. And if the meat tax holder should hire any other tax collector from another place, the townspeople must compensate the tax collector until he, too, agrees to all these measures for the good of the aforementioned holy admor Rabbi Aaron with his representatives, as stated.

This agreement was concluded, as we have indicated, in 1846, only two years after the kahal was officially abolished in Russia and its authority restricted. The meat tax was supposed to be taken out of the kahal's hands and made the sole responsibility of the leaseholders. Although the latter were required to set aside part of their income for various officially recognized communal needs (such as salaries of government-appointed rabbis or funds for state schools), in actual fact the communities continued to control the meat tax budgets and to divert part of the income for purposes not sanctioned by the government. Thus, for example, some communities leased the meat tax themselves; after ensuring that there was no competition, they leased the tax cheaply and secretly subleased it at a profit, thus financing their own activities. This may be seen as one of the devices adopted by Jewish communities in the Pale of Settlement to finance expenses not recognized as necessary by the Russian government.<sup>98</sup>

Although meat and candles were necessities of Jewish life—whether on weekdays or, in particular, on Sabbaths and at festivals—we may suppose that, as most communities were quite poor, the zaddik's total income by virtue of this agreement could not have been very high. This may be one more reason that the Jews of this particular community and its vicinity preferred to grant the zaddik various benefits, through subleasing, rather than directly pay him a regular salary (even if the subleasing had to be done covertly).

The zaddik's power to intervene in the internal communal government was not confined merely to the acquisition of various monopolies; he was also able to revoke old monopolies and institute more equitable arrangements. An interesting example may be found in a letter from Mordekhai of Chernobyl to the Jewish community of Talne (the letter is undated, but an obvious terminus ad quem is 1837, the year of the zaddik's death). Rabbi Mordekhai declared that "owing to the treacherous and distressful times, it being difficult to make a livelihood, the poor have multiplied and the money allocated in the past is decreasing every day." He had therefore decided, with the agreement of the local rabbinical judges, to take over the right to lease yeast from a certain person (who would be compensated weekly from the kahal's coffers), and the income would be transferred to the benefit of the community poor, "and not left, Heaven forbid, to the *skarb* [government treasury]."<sup>99</sup> This interesting information, which is supported by other sources,<sup>100</sup> attests not only to a certain social-moralistic orientation in the public activities of the zaddikim but also to a shift in the distorted, negative image of the zaddikim as guided above all by their own financial interests.

## VII. *The Decline of the Hasidic Royal Court*

During the 1880s, Samuel Kaufmann of Balta, a young hasid who had begun to be plagued by doubts, paid a visit to the court of the Chernobyl zaddik Jacob Leib of Trisk. He spent the Sabbath with the rebbe, admired his worship of God, his Torah teachings, and his magnetic influence upon the hasidim. On Friday night, the zaddik performed his weekly tish, and hundreds of hasidim who gathered in the court watched him and his family members—his wife and children—"who dressed in costly clothes, adorned themselves with gold and jewelry, like the kings used to wear." Everything was normal, as it had been in the past, but one incident became impressed on Kaufmann's memory:

When we recited kiddush at the rebbe's wife's dwelling, her two sons were there, sitting on the couch. One was eight years old and the other was six. I asked the older one: "Are you doing well in your studies?" He answered: "Yes!" I asked him again: "Will you also be a zaddik like your father?" He answered: "No! I don't like this sort of livelihood, you have to deal with so many hasidim." I then asked the little son: "Will you be a zaddik?" And he replied: "Yes!" His brother asked him: "Do you know how to be a zaddik?" The little child replied: "Ho! ho! What is so difficult about it? All you have to do is to receive the notes and the rubles from the hasidim, to lift your eyes upward, to bless them with good health and a living, and there you are—a zaddik." You can imagine, my dear readers, how this scene and all I saw there affected me.<sup>101</sup>

The disintegration process of the royal court was barely visible to the naïve observer. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century, as the winds of change and modernity began to blow through the hasidic townlets and villages of Eastern Europe, the impact of the social pressures created by the hasidic milieu upon the faithful lessened. New challenges and ideas ignited the hearts and souls of Jewish youth in the Pale of Settlement. Radical Haskalah, socialism, nationalism, and Zionism became the most actual and relevant revival trends of the Jewish people, while Hasidism came to be perceived as part of the “old” world, of the generation of the fathers, whose time had passed.

Now the ma’amadot tax was levied from far smaller numbers, mainly from a few wealthy hasidim, and the visits of zaddikim to their flocks scattered around the countryside no longer made such a profound impression: “The hasidim came to the outskirts of the city to welcome their rebbe, but without the fervor that had seized the previous generation. . . . Shtetl life did not become one big festival. Life continued as usual; the tailor was busy with his needle and the cobbler with his awl.”<sup>102</sup>

But the decline of the royal court was not only a by-product of an external process. It was caused by a serious and deep internal crisis. Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam of Zanz, who, since 1869, had led an adamant struggle against the regal way of the zaddikim of Sadgora, revealed an internal ideological and social rent in hasidic society. He questioned the legitimacy of the regal phenomena and began to question this kind of hasidic approach. The absence of prominent scholarly and charismatic leaders in the ranks of the royal dynasties and the penetration of maskilic critical values inside the hasidic camp—together, these factors had brought the regal way and its manifestations to the brink of extinction.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, the burgeoning running costs of the royal courts, the increased number of yoshevim directly dependent for their livings on the court, and, in particular, the continuous expansion of the zaddik’s family through ramified marriage ties and the settlement of all his descendants and their relatives at court—all these factors in time contributed to financial crises that sometimes brought the courts to the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>104</sup>

This situation had long-range implications for the historical development of Hasidism in the twentieth century. Insufficient attention has been paid hitherto to the economic aspects of the phenomenon of well-established hasidic courts that moved to other places; such moves have been attributed mainly to external events such as wars. We may presume, however, that a desire to shed the tremendous financial burden of maintaining their courts in their original localities was one of the reasons why most of the zaddikim of the Ruzhin dynasty (from Sadgora, Chortkov, Husiatin, Boian, Buhush, and other places) remained in Vienna after World War I

and made no effort to reestablish their courts in their previous homes.<sup>105</sup> Needless to say, such an uprooting also had tremendous impact upon the economic life in the court's original hometown.<sup>106</sup>

The horrors of World War I, the ravaging of the hasidic centers in the Ukraine, Galicia, and Bukovina, and the terrible poverty in which most Jews lived in Soviet Russia and in Poland between the two world wars marked the final decline of the royal hasidic court, which was never to be replicated.



## *“Under One Tent”: The Hasidim and Their Zaddik*

### *I. The Pilgrimage to the Zaddik*

Although zaddikim did at times go on trips to visit their hasidim, it was more common for hasidim to travel to “their” zaddik in his court. For hasidim who lived far away from the court, such trips, and the attendant preparations, assumed a ritual significance, becoming a kind of rite of passage, which came to be associated with numerous concepts of hasidic theory. In time, the trip, the shared experience of what was often a dangerous, tiring, but emotionally uplifting journey, created a social ethos with its own romantic modes of behavior and symbols. It constituted the most conspicuous expression, in both symbolic and actual senses, of the ceremonial act of the hasid’s association with the zaddik.<sup>1</sup> The following typical account describes the preparations made by Rabbi Simeon of Jaroslaw (d. 1849), a prominent disciple of Jacob Isaac the “Seer” of Lublin and himself the founder of a dynasty of zaddikim; there is also a description of the presentation of pidyonot and kvitlekh:

A few days before his departure, he notified his friends who were close to this zaddik, his rebbe, and each of them sent with him a pidyon and a note of his name and the names of his family members. Such was his custom always. So he brought with him a certain sum of money to his rebbe and his rebbe derived some joy from that. And then he read out to him the names of the senders, and he [the “Seer”] blessed each one while the names were being read. . . . And since then, each year, when we traveled for Rosh Hashanah, we also collected from all the comrades a certain sum

from everyone who could not travel himself—[such a person] sent a pidyon, and we also noted down his name and the names of his family members. And when we arrived there, we read out the names to him and put down the pidyonot, and he in his holiness blessed each one. And we saw that he approved of this.<sup>2</sup>

A group of hasidim who traveled to Rabbi Israel at Sadgora gave a similar account: "It was formerly the custom among the Jews that, if one of the comrades was traveling to a zaddik, all the comrades would write their names on one piece of paper so that he would mention them before the zaddik."<sup>3</sup>

Maskilim criticized and ridiculed these trips by the hasidim to visit the rebbe, thus unintentionally inspiring the hasidim to emphasize the practice even more. In the nineteenth century, many of the hasidic dynasties raised the exhausting journey itself to the level of a religious commitment, practically a touchstone for the "genuine" hasid's loyalty and his readiness not only to endanger his physical self and his possessions but also to become the butt of ridicule. Thus, the zaddik Asher Isaiah Rubin, son-in-law and successor to Naphtali of Ropshits, exhorted his followers:

I have seen many people saying, there is no salvation in our trips to the zaddikim. That salvation [i.e., benefit] existed only in the first generations, the people of which were learned and intelligent enough to understand the point of their journey. . . . Not so ourselves, who do not understand the point of it. Why should we travel to the zaddikim? Surely it behooves us to stay home and study Torah! But those who argue thus speak falsely, for our many sins, *in these generations, whosoever does not travel to the zaddikim is not one of the hasidim* but is included among the mockers who scoff at the zaddikim. . . . Believe me, my brethren, were it not for the company of hasidim, who knows what would happen to us. It is a sign that God's kindness has not abandoned us that he has established for us real zaddikim, who gather to them flocks of holy sheep, may the Lord lengthen their days and years in comfort and delight, the zaddikim and those who accompany them.<sup>4</sup>

The journeys of hasidim, young and old, to the rebbe's court had implications in several further respects, in particular, for the cohesion of the family unit. Not infrequently, they created tensions between husbands and wives, or between fathers and sons.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the hasid's attraction to the zaddik and the court might sometimes serve as a covert substitute for regular family life and a way of evading his responsibility to provide a livelihood for his family.<sup>6</sup> Zaddikim were aware of these implications, but nevertheless saw no need to institute changes; as Rabbi Israel once said to the father of David Ortenberg (later a celebrated rabbi in Berdichev), who objected to his son's frequent trips to the rebbe's court: "If they had any sense, [parents] would bind up their children and bring them to the zaddik. I say that whoever prevents his children from traveling to the zaddikim—it is as if he were throwing them into the fire."<sup>7</sup>

Theoretically speaking, Rabbi Israel did not believe that journeys to his court, or the number of hasidim coming to visit him, in any way expressed or proved the extent of his influence and status in the hasidic world. The hasidic ideal does indeed set a high value on the continued, living link with the zaddik; regular trips to the rebbe are favored, and when hasidim congregate around a specific zaddik, they are essentially creating an identifying social framework that sets them apart from other hasidic dynasties.

As far as Rabbi Israel was concerned, however, all the hasidim in the world “belonged” to him in any case, and the fact that they did not travel to his court meant nothing. A Ruzhin hasid who covered his head in his *tallit* in a foreign, faraway place, was actually standing in the *kloiz* in Rabbi Israel’s court; he was always in his rebbe’s presence. As he answered two of his hasidim who complained that there was no special *kloiz* in their home town, Trisk, for the Ruzhin hasidim: “When a Jew of mine prays and puts the tallit over his head, it is as if he were in my *kloiz*.”<sup>8</sup> Once, when a huge crowd was milling around in his court, he said to them, “Why are you crowding yourselves so much? Is it not enough for you that you are with me under one tent?! . . . Is it not enough for you that you are with me under one heaven?”<sup>9</sup> In other words, it was the hasid’s consciousness that established his link with the zaddik, not necessarily the fortuitous physical framework in which he found himself, sometimes willy-nilly. Rabbi Israel placed the link with the zaddik in the universal, spiritual context of a “mass religion,” not in the confined context of territory and eye contact.

Not that Rabbi Israel had given up the idea of his hasidim actually traveling to his court and made do with the theoretical aspect alone. On the contrary, he considered such trips a social and spiritual factor of primary importance in shaping his own way of Hasidism and reinforcing the links between him and his flock.

Journeys to Israel’s court took on added significance in the Sadgora period, in view of the problems facing hasidim of the old court at Ruzhin, who had to come from Russia. The need to cross a border into a foreign country, whether legally, with a passport, or illegally, by bribing the border guards or hiring the services of smugglers, was only one of the difficulties awaiting Russian hasidim who set out on the long, costly journey to Sadgora. The roads were unpaved and the usual means of transport horse-drawn carts;<sup>10</sup> the weather might be treacherous; travelers had to lodge at uncomfortable foreign inns, and the financial expenses were considerable. The journeys thus had their own special atmosphere and problems. Such problems did not, however, deter the hasidim from traveling to see Rabbi Israel (and later his sons); but they presented a problem that the zaddik and the people who ran his court had to address, to propose spiritual and practical ways of lightening the burden.

Once, it was told, Rabbi Israel was requested to pray that a certain group of hasidim should be able to come to see him "without affliction." He answered: "Whoever is pure of soul, although the distance is great, nevertheless the way will not be long. For everything depends on a person's will. If he really desires, the blessed Lord will help him so he will be able to travel."<sup>11</sup> For Ruzhin Hasidism, traveling to the zaddik became a religious imperative. As an authoritative interpreter of Sadgora Hasidism wrote: "The journey was declared to be obligatory and a first, indispensable step along the paths of Hasidism."<sup>12</sup> And Rabbi Israel himself said: "A Jew who does not travel [to the zaddik] each year is an apostate."<sup>13</sup>

The sensation of uniqueness and comradeship that imbued Ruzhin hasidim on the way to see the rebbe was once expressed, somewhat humorously, in a dialog between a rather outspoken hasid and Rabbi Israel. The conversation touched upon the seemingly unfair relationship between the effort invested by the hasidim in the difficult trip to see him and the "return" on that investment, compared with the analogous relationship in other hasidic dynasties:

Once a certain hasid said to him: "Rebbe, those who travel to a certain rebbe have this world and will also have the World to Come. While we, who travel to you, do not have this world, neither will we have the World to Come." Rabbi Israel asked him, "Why?" And he answered him: "He who travels to that certain rebbe has an easy journey, and when he arrives at the rebbe's house, he does not have to push through a great crowd but can reach him immediately and speak to him as much as he likes, and he will hear from him many words of Torah and Hasidism; so that they have this world and will also have the World to Come! In our case, everything is the other way round!" And the saintly rebbe of Ruzhin replied: "One should not exchange even my Gehenna for somebody else's Paradise."<sup>14</sup>

The hasid's complaint clearly reflects the special atmosphere of Ruzhin hasidim, setting them apart from others: The physical difficulty involved in the long journey, the crowded conditions in the court, the improbability of any intimate contact with the zaddik, the dearth of "words of Torah" and the feeling of intellectual emptiness. Nevertheless, they preferred their rebbe's "Gehenna" to the "Paradise" of other zaddikim. The internal cohesion of Ruzhin and Sadgora hasidim was a matter of common knowledge, particularly in the 1870s, when the great controversy with Zanz Hasidism was at its peak.

On one occasion, Rabbi Israel came into his study house and asked the hasidim: "As to traveling to the zaddik, what is the more important thing—cleaving to the zaddik or attaching oneself to his hasidim who flock to his banner? One of those present jumped up and said that attachment to the hasidim was the most important." When the others asked the hasid to explain himself, he told them of something that had happened to him



when he was about to commit a grave sin: "I had almost decided to commit the sin. Then it occurred to me: It is true that I will easily find another rebbe, who will be quite unaware of what I have done; but such beloved and pleasant hasidim as I have in the house of my teacher [Rabbi Israel] I shall not find in the company of another rebbe. And this thought prevented me from sinning."<sup>15</sup>

Rabbi Israel's son David Moses of Chortkov regarded the journey to the zaddik even more highly, comparing it with every other religious precept. Just as the observance of any precept requires intention, so the journey to the zaddik (which, for the purposes of comparison, had become a religious duty) requires preparation, intention, and mystical contemplation:

The main point of the journey to the zaddik is the preparation, for the journey to the zaddik resembles all the precepts, and just as in all the precepts a person must engage beforehand in preparation and contemplation, so it is with the journey to the zaddik. . . . And this matter is immeasurable—the more one travels to the zaddik, the more one gains, for it is a thing without end. And when a person travels to the zaddik with such preparation, he may achieve the level of a zaddik, even when he is on the way, and with each mile that he approaches the place of the zaddik, he achieves more.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the physical distance is not necessarily a disadvantage, for it lengthens the time required for preparation; the more a person suffers, the greater the reward. The greater the distance to the zaddik, the more the hasid will achieve. According to Rabbi David Moses, such preparation was beneficial even if, at the end of his journey, the hasid only saw the zaddik, without hearing a thing from him. However, traveling to the zaddik without preparation would be useless and might even have sacrilegious results, for "people think"—this was an allusion to criticism leveled by maskilim and people in general—"that the main point of the journey is to rejoice and take pleasure in imbibing liquor and music and dances."<sup>17</sup>

The religious duty of visiting the zaddik was elevated to such an extent that it was even considered "proper," religiously and ethically speaking, to bribe border guards, customs officials, and smugglers in order to get across the border. Rabbi Menahem Nahum of Stefanesti did not mince his words: "No bribe is of avail in the Supernal World, only the bribe that one gives the border guards between countries to let one pass so as to come to the zaddik. Such bribery is of avail in the Supernal World."<sup>18</sup>

Similar sentiments, surely in relation to the hasidim traveling to Rabbi Israel's court, were expressed by his eldest son Shalom Joseph. Rabbi Shalom Joseph in fact added a radical dimension, suggesting that the journey to the zaddik could in itself atone for one's sins: "If a person transgresses the law of the land, he can redeem himself by giving money for

bribery. Similarly, if a person has erred, Heaven forbid, in some unintentional transgression and then travels to my father, that is just like bribery."<sup>19</sup>

Masses of hasidim traveling from southwestern Russia to Galicia and Bukovina, mainly to Rabbi Israel's sons, could not but attract the attention of the Russian authorities. In 1862, a government inquiry was conducted into the matter after an eccentric Jew named Simeon Leib Osternik demanded that the leading zaddikim be summoned to a public debate with him in the Russian "senate" (perhaps he meant "synod") concerning the legality of these trips. His request was rejected, although the authorities were certainly well aware that the hasidim, officially traveling for commercial purposes, really intended to visit Rabbi Israel's sons. "I do not believe that one can prevent such contacts with foreign Jews by police means," wrote the deputy minister in charge of the spiritual affairs of foreign religions in the Russian Interior Ministry. Although, as he claimed, the trips contributed to the dissemination of various prejudices and religious extremes, also reinforcing the influence of the Galician zaddikim on the Jews of Russia, he admitted that the solution should be sought in the area of education and cultivation of alternative local Jewish spiritual leadership.<sup>20</sup>

How many times was a hasid "obligated" to visit the zaddik? There does not seem to be a definite answer to this question, for the journeys to the zaddik's court were never regulated by normative criteria: everything depended on the customs of the particular court, the desire of the zaddik, and the ability of the hasid. For example, Shneur Zalman of Lyady forbade "veteran" hasidim to come to him more than once a year, for he found the burden too heavy and wished to avert any imbalance between his devotion to his public duties and his personal well-being.<sup>21</sup> Nahman of Bratslav permitted his hasidim to visit him only on six stipulated days of the year.<sup>22</sup> Other zaddikim were willing to devote all their time to their hasidim, obviously implying that "the more, the better." Abraham Jacob of Sadgora declared that "once a year one must travel to the zaddik. I am jealous of whoever travels twice. As to three times—there is no one superior."<sup>23</sup> In this respect, he presumably also represented the views of his father Rabbi Israel.

## *II. Access to the Zaddik*

As far as Rabbi Israel's attitude to his hasidim is concerned, his "career" as a zaddik may, as already intimated, be divided into two main periods. During his early leadership at Ruzhin, he generally maintained intensive contacts with his hasidim and other visitors, but at Sadgora, he devoted fewer and fewer hours to receiving the public. Rabbi Israel, a squeamish person, kept a deliberate distance between himself and his followers; rarely

did he engage in friendly, immediate contact with his admirers, not to speak of physical contact, even shaking hands. Even on trips, away from the court, whether to visit other zaddikim, to participate in family life-cycle events, or to seek medical advice, when forced to stay in a foreign town, he never changed his ways, despite the large numbers of admirers and would-be visitors who flocked to his door.<sup>24</sup>

In Sadgora, Rabbi Israel confined reception of hasidim to a few specially designated hours a day, jealously preserving his privacy. He prayed alone rather than with the hasidim; generally ate together with his family, even on Sabbaths and at festivals, only rarely joining his hasidim in communal meals; and did not joke with the hasidim or otherwise seek their companionship.<sup>25</sup> One source reports that “every Sabbath he sat at the table with visitors,”<sup>26</sup> but this does not seem to have been a regular practice, for to the disappointment of hasidim and visitors alike, he habitually ate the “Third Meal” of the Sabbath (*se’udah shelishit*)—the major social-spiritual focus of hasidic sermonizing and communal cohesion—alone.<sup>27</sup> To the extent that he preached “words of Torah,” he did so mainly on festivals, at the *praven* (that is, the Ruzhin ceremony of receiving greetings and “saying Torah”) held for his hasidim. Sometimes, when expected to speak, “he sat at the table and said no Torah, not uttering even one word, only weeping copiously.”<sup>28</sup>

There were three principal channels of communication between the zaddik and his hasidim: (a) writing—the “bonding letter” and the brief written note, known in Yiddish as a *kvitl*; (b) seeing and touching—the mass ceremonies of “receiving greetings” or “giving greetings,” intended mainly for new hasidim and occasionally visitors; and (c) conversation—the intimate meeting of an individual hasid and the zaddik.

# I. THE KVITL

From the time of Rabbi Shalom Shakhna till that of Rabbi Israel’s sons, it was customary for a hasid coming to the zaddik for the first time to present him with a “bonding letter.” This was a more or less fixed text in which the writer declared that he wished to link his soul with that of the zaddik.<sup>29</sup> We have no evidence for the existence of such letters in Rabbi Israel’s time, but the practice almost certainly existed at his court too. In time, as the Hasidic movement grew and extended its range, coming to comprise hundreds of thousands of people, the custom declined and eventually disappeared.

Every hasid who came to the court would present the zaddik, apart from the monetary contribution of the pidyon, with a brief written note, the *kvitl*, in which he listed his requests from the rebbe. It was in this way that written communication took place between the individual hasid and the

zaddik. In time, the personal, intimate element of the kvitl all but disappeared, owing to stagnant, unimaginative stylistic conventions, as well as to the mystical meanings ascribed to such fixed texts. As the use of kvitlekh increased, it became merely a technical ritual, practiced routinely by the zaddik and the hasid, only negligibly creating direct communication between the two. A zaddik who received dozens of formal kvitlekh daily, identical in almost all but the name of the hasid and his mother, could hardly be expected to assume any sort of personal relationship with the bearer of the kvitl and his specific needs. Nevertheless, the kvitl was considered an exclusive channel of communication, expressive of the hasid's absolute loyalty to "his" zaddik and his conviction that only his rebbe could help him. In his memoirs, Samuel Kaufmann of Balta relates how his father, one of David of Talne's hasidim, could not bring himself to present a kvitl to another zaddik. The father recalled how his brother had warned him as follows:

Brother! I hear that you are an associate of the rebbe of Talne. Beware, then, of giving a kvitl to another zaddik, for I have heard from the saintly mouth of my rebbe, the zaddik of Kertshinev, who said: "Any Jew associated and bonded with me, or to any rebbe whatsoever, who gives a kvitl to another rebbe too, is guilty of a serious transgression, just like that of a woman committing adultery."<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, hasidim who did not think of themselves as totally committed to a specific zaddik thought nothing of bringing pidyonot and kvitlekh to any zaddik they happened to meet.<sup>31</sup>

The origins of the kvitl are unclear, possibly dating back to the earliest days of Hasidism.<sup>32</sup> Beginning from the nineteenth century, no hasidic court was conceivable without the practice. The hasid presented the zaddik with his kvitl in private, possibly also in the presence of the gabbai. In it, he wrote down his various requests, his name, and the names of his parents (but, usually, for mystical reasons, only his mother's name) and of the other members of his family. The usual requests were for a successful match, the birth of a child, success in business, recovery from a serious illness, and the like.<sup>33</sup> At times, the requests touched on purely spiritual matters, such as confession of sin, a crisis of faith, aid in overcoming various vices, success in Torah study, and so on.<sup>34</sup>

The zaddik would read the kvitl and generally offered only a general, noncommittal comment, such as "God will help you,"<sup>35</sup> which might be understood in different ways. Such responses were customary both because of lack of time and because the zaddik had no desire to make promises that could not be kept. Sometimes, for some reason, the zaddik would only refer the applicant to some other zaddik, noting that the latter would be better able to solve the problem.<sup>36</sup> There were gabbai'im in every court who

specialized in writing kvitlekh for illiterate hasidim, for payment, of course.<sup>37</sup> But this service was not required by illiterates only: many hasidim were afraid of being struck dumb by awe in a face-to-face encounter with the zaddik.<sup>38</sup> Fearful of missing the opportunity of presenting their appeals to the zaddik as a result, they therefore got a gabbai to phrase their requests in writing in advance.

The abovementioned Samuel Kaufmann has left us an account of the experience of presenting pidyon and kvitlekh to the zaddik Moses of Chechelnik (d. 1876):

The gabbai wrote kvitlekh to the zaddik for us, requesting that he beg for mercy in respect of children, health, and sustenance and in respect of corporeality and spirituality. And all the in-laws . . . added to these requests money in cash, each according to his ability. . . . The rebbe accepted our requests from us, almost ignoring the money, just pushing it to the edge of the table, where the gabbai was sitting to take the money and arrange it. The rebbe read every man's request, lifted his eyes to heaven and blessed each and every one so that the Lord, blessed be He, should help him; he also distributed gifts: to one a coin as a *shmirah*; to another, an amulet; and to another, medicinal charms, which he instructed the gabbai to write, just as a physician might write his prescriptions. In a word, everyone left the zaddik's presence full of hope and faith. . . . For what Jew could there be that would write a request to the zaddik, also giving him money, but fail to believe in his promises?<sup>39</sup>

After such an encounter, the hasid would leave in a state of great excitement and spiritual uplift. The pidyon money was deposited with the gabbai'im, while the kvitlekh presented to the zaddik were locked in a special chest and presumably collected or burned later.<sup>40</sup> Sometimes, particularly at festivals, when great numbers of hasidim thronged to the court, there would be a tremendous accumulation of kvitlekh demanding the zaddik's attention. It was told of Israel of Ruzhin that he used to glance hurriedly at the kvitlekh he received.<sup>41</sup> Once, in fact, he lost patience at the flood of requests, rebuked his followers, and complained that he did not even have time to eat.<sup>42</sup> David Moses of Chortkov reported a more "sophisticated" technique. Once his personal valet complained of the plethora of kvitlekh and begged the rebbe to allot him more time to read them before him. The zaddik's response was:

Now we will have to follow the advice of the saintly zaddik, the rebbe of Apta. . . . For once there were before him many kvitlekh, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and he did not have time to read them all. But he had . . . large pockets in his clothes. So he took all the kvitlekh and put them in his pockets, then placed both of his holy hands on the pockets and said in his holy tongue: "I bless all the people of the kvitlekh that are lying here in my pockets with children, long life and plentiful sustenance, and a good year." And after the admor . . . had told this holy deed . . . he proceeded to do the same himself.<sup>43</sup>

## 2. THE GREETING CEREMONY

The ceremony of "receiving greetings" or "taking greetings" by the rebbe was considered highly significant by the hasidim. It symbolized the rebbe's special regard and love for his flock, for all to see, while at the same time expressing the respect and etiquette that were de rigueur in hasidic society. The public ceremony of receiving greetings, known at Ruzhin as *praven*, was held at set times in a special chamber named for the purpose. It was meant for all the hasidim but mainly for newcomers and occasional visitors who had come to the court for the first time. The encounter satisfied the burning curiosity of all comers, who were eager to see the zaddik with their own eyes. The hasidim were quite convinced that the zaddik's face and body radiated spirituality, nobility, power, and faith; the zaddikim, for their part, who were aware of such feelings, had to provide the faithful with suitable opportunities for seeing them. The hasidim, however, were not content with this common, shared encounter, always trying to procure a personal, individualized blessing, usually when the time had come to depart the court and return home.

In Ruzhin, it was already customary for the hasidim to enter the zaddik's inner sanctum to greet him and receive his blessing. They would crowd into the room, generally after Sabbath or festival prayers, each receiving a blessing in turn.<sup>44</sup> In Ruzhin Hasidism, the ceremony of "giving greetings" was rather unique, for Rabbi Israel, who was very fastidious, refrained from any physical contact with his followers and would therefore just lightly brush their outstretched fingers with his own. A hasid lucky enough to touch Rabbi Israel considered this a great privilege; Rabbi Zevi Hirsch of Litzka "would boast that he had managed to stand so close to the saintly rebbe . . . that his knees touched those of the zaddik."<sup>45</sup> By the time the court had moved to Sadgora, Rabbi Israel spent many fewer hours receiving the hasidim, and most visitors to the court, particularly if they were common or poor people, had to make do with "receiving greetings" together with the people congregated in the kloiz on Sabbath eve.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes, the door between the zaddik's room and the kloiz was merely opened, and all the hasidim could see was the remote figure of their leader. As Rabbi Israel himself once said: "Whoever has opened my door and seen me once will not die without repenting."<sup>47</sup>

Rabbi Israel's sons conducted themselves similarly. Asher Ginsberg, better known as Ahad Ha-Am, described the "receiving of greetings" ceremony at the court of Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, in the presence of crowds of hasidim clamoring to see the zaddik in person and shake his hand:

On the day of our arrival at Sadgora, I went with my father *le-kabel shalom* (which in hasidic parlance meant going to greet the rebbe, who stood on such occasions at

the threshold of his room with outstretched hands, while all the new visitors approached him and shook his hand). When my father's turn came, we both approached the rebbe and shook his hand, like all the other visitors, and as my father was one of the more important hasidim, the zaddik spoke with him for a few minutes. Many years later, after I had "left the camp," some of the hasidim who were present at the time reported that after I had shaken the zaddik's hand, he wiped it on his belt.<sup>48</sup>

The zaddik behaved in similar fashion when staying with his hasidim away from the court. Naturally, the zaddik's arrival would attract throngs of admirers and curious onlookers from all around, and it was on such occasions that he went through the brief ritual of extending his hand to the audience and touching their fingertips. On one occasion, two of Rabbi Israel's sons, David Moses of Chortkov and Mordekhai Shraga of Husyatin, visited a little village near Sadgora:

One can readily understand that on such an evening many of the hasidim in Zaleshchik rushed to the local inn. And although everyone has known, long since, that while on a journey . . . the rebbe does not accept kvitlekh, and no one is allowed into his room, nevertheless he will appear standing, silent, for a quarter of an hour at the threshold of his special room, and he extends his right hand to each of those assembled to let each one touch his fingertips, and this is known as "giving greetings."<sup>49</sup>

Ordinarily, when the zaddik was at home, visitors to the court would stand each morning on either side of the road from the zaddik's house to the kloiz, awaiting his greetings; the rebbe would walk to the kloiz, wrapped in his prayer shawl and wearing his phylacteries, and extend his fingertips to each of the visitors.<sup>50</sup>

### 3. THE INTIMATE MEETING

The most intensive possible contact between the hasid and the zaddik was, of course, the personal audience, known in certain hasidic dynasties (such as Habad) as *yehidut* (privacy). Such audiences, which generally took a few minutes (but might also extend to several hours, depending on the gravity of the issue or the importance of the visitor), might be granted to anyone. Particular attention, however, was devoted to veteran hasidim who had met the zaddik in the past. The hasid, or other visitor, would enter the room respectfully, greet the zaddik, give him the kvitel, and deposit the pidyon in a special box. He could importune the zaddik in any connection, asking for his advice and blessing. The zaddik would glance at the kvitel, bless the hasid, and offer advice as requested. The zaddik and hasid were never alone together in the room; such audiences with Israel of Ruzhin, for example, always took place in the presence of two attendants, members of

his group of "intimates." The senior attendant was actually a kind of intermediary between the zaddik and the hasidim. It was his task to provide a practical interpretation of the zaddik's instructions and announce them in public. The second attendant was the chief gabbai. Both carried out the zaddik's instructions, read out letters or kvitlekh to him, and, in his presence, wrote down notes and letters in his name.<sup>51</sup>

Hasidim who requested an audience with the zaddik were first screened by the attendants, who decided whom to admit and determined the schedule. They generally gave preference to rich and famous visitors—who also left behind sizable monetary contributions<sup>52</sup>—as well as to veteran hasidim, with whom it was important to maintain personal contact. Rabbi Israel always demanded advance knowledge of his prospective audience so that he could prepare himself. One winter, when there were few travelers on the roads to Ruzhin, the attendants admitted a man who had made them a generous gift of money, unbeknownst to the zaddik. Rabbi Israel was furious, saying that "before people come in to me I need to prepare myself!"<sup>53</sup>

Hasidim not infrequently had to wait a very long time until Rabbi Israel agreed to receive them. A certain hasid, it was told, had to wait for a full year in Sadgora (apparently in 1848), being received by the zaddik only after disguising himself as the attendant of Rabbi Hayyim of Zanz; the truth of this story, however, is dubious.<sup>54</sup> People who came to meet the zaddik, whatever their standing, were never allowed to sit in his presence; anyone who saw him was expected to rise. The occasion, coupled with the special conventions of dress required of those received by the rebbe,<sup>55</sup> created a sensation of humility and dependence upon the zaddik.<sup>56</sup> Only famous zaddikim or very special guests had the privilege of seating themselves in his presence.<sup>57</sup> Such zaddikim might also receive a kiss from Rabbi Israel, who normally, as noted, refrained from any physical contact with other people.<sup>58</sup>

### III. Around the Zaddik's Grave

An important focus of social cohesion in the life of a hasidic community, whether the hasidim who lived permanently at the court or those who came on special occasions, was the annual "wake" (Hebrew *hillula*) in memory of the founding zaddik or an ancestor of one of the zaddikim, held on the anniversary of his death (Yiddish *yahrzeit*). Such celebrations took place wherever there were hasidic kloizn named for the court, but the main hillula was held at the court itself, close by the zaddik's grave.

A small structure, known as a "tent" (Hebrew *ohel*) was usually built over the zaddik's tombstone (Hebrew *tsiyun*), to accommodate several



people—generally, a minyan of ten, at least—even on rainy days. The hallowed “tent” was fenced off from other graves in the cemetery. The day of the hillula was considered a festive occasion; the *Tahanun* prayer (a portion of the daily service devoted to supplication and requests for forgiveness) was omitted, and the hasidim would assemble in an atmosphere of rejoicing and spiritual ecstasy, partaking of food and drink as a means of “elevating” the departed zaddik’s soul. Older hasidim would reminisce, tell stories about the greatness of the zaddik and cite Torah and hasidic teachings in his name.

The consecration of the tombs of hasidic zaddikim has yet to receive adequate treatment in the scholarly literature. It should surely be associated with traditions relating to the rituals performed at holy sites and tombs of holy men in and around the Holy Land,<sup>59</sup> and it was undoubtedly influenced by these traditions, although in Eastern Europe, it had its own specific features. The scope of the phenomenon in Hasidism and the rituals linked with it go beyond the normative attitude of Ashkenazic-Jewish tradition to graves and tombs (visiting the grave of a relative, or, at most, visiting the cemetery on the eve of Rosh Hashanah and on communal fast days).<sup>60</sup> We have no information as to the veneration of tombs in Europe—even of the most distinguished luminaries of Torah scholarship and Kabbalah—prior to the second generation of Hasidism.<sup>61</sup>

The beginnings of the process may probably be linked to the veneration of the Besht’s tomb at Mezhibozh, a site that was a lodestone for his companions and disciples, as well as zaddikim of later times. They would visit the site regularly, perhaps with an eye to implementing the mystical technique known as “ascent of the soul” (*aliyat neshamah*). Nahman of Bratslav, who frequented the Besht’s grave in his youth “in order to request that he help him come closer to the Lord,”<sup>62</sup> noted that “all the zaddikim would come to Mezhibozh, as it was the place of the Besht, and almost all of them lodged in the house of his late father and he heard many stories about zaddikim.”<sup>63</sup> Before he set out on his abortive journey to the Holy Land (in 1798), when he visited his parents in Mezhibozh, Rabbi Nahman’s mother asked him, as a matter of course, “My son, when will you go to visit your grandfather the Besht, that is, to visit his holy grave?”<sup>64</sup> It was related of Nahman of Horodenka that, before immigrating to Palestine, “he visited the grave of the Besht” together with another zaddik.<sup>65</sup> Baruch of Tulchin, the Besht’s grandson, who settled in Mezhibozh, apparently took advantage of the fact in order to advance his own political goals. He tried to exercise control over the tomb, supervising all comers and even barring people from visiting it if he did not consider them worthy.<sup>66</sup>

Within a short time, many other tombs of renowned zaddikim came to be hallowed in this way. It was told of Nahman of Bratslav, for example,

that even after his marriage, "when he wished to speak to the Besht . . . and to make some request of him, he used to travel to the town of Smila . . . and he visited the tomb of the famous zaddik . . . Isaiah of Yanov . . . nominating that zaddik as an emissary to go and inform the Besht of his request."<sup>67</sup> Writing in 1816, Joseph Perl refers disparagingly to such rituals at the tombs of zaddikim in Zlochev, Sasov, Lyzhansk, and Rimanov, noting that visitors were requested to pay for the privilege,<sup>68</sup> and there is a similar account of the tomb of Levi Isaac of Berdichev.<sup>69</sup> The most cynical description of the cult may be found in an account of the last days of Mordekhai of Chernobyl. While he was still alive, on his deathbed, his son, Jacob Israel of Hornostopol, tried to ensure that his father would spend his last days with him, "so that his tomb would be there and that his hometown would become a fortress and main center for Chernobyl hasidim. But his saintly brothers, who perceived his intention, made haste with their father to Kiev."<sup>70</sup> The best-known example is, of course, the cult centering on the grave of Nahman of Bratslav himself at Uman. In the past generation, this cult has spread beyond the Bratslav hasidim, the site of the grave having become hallowed by other hasidic groups and even by some non-hasidic Orthodox Jewish circles.<sup>71</sup>

Mass pilgrimages to graves of zaddikim gradually developed over the first half of the nineteenth century. A by-product of the practice was a ramified chronographic literature, listing the death dates of various zaddikim (but not their birth dates). Various customs and practices regulating the hillula and the pilgrimage to the grave took shape; a fixed selection of psalms and prayers was prescribed for prayers at the graveside, for congregations and individuals, and so on. Nowadays, since the Iron Curtain has fallen and the gates of Eastern European countries have been thrown open to Jewish tourism, the ritual of visiting the graves of zaddikim has been revived, and there is a flourishing literature of guidebooks to help pilgrims locate such graves. This reemergence of interest is remarkable, particularly in view of most hasidim's lack of interest in other sites associated with the lives of zaddikim.

A special burial plot was prepared for Rabbi Israel's family at Sadgora. The first person to be interred there was the zaddik's mother, Chava. Then came Rabbi Israel himself, in a "tent" apart from that of the women. In time, the ground by his tomb received his sons Dov (Bernyu) of Leova and Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, his grandsons Solomon and Israel (sons of Abraham Jacob), and his great-grandson Aaron (son of the above mentioned Israel).<sup>72</sup> Also buried in the women's section were Sarah, Rabbi Israel's first wife, and Esther, daughter of his first grandson, Isaac of Buhush, who died when her father was still alive. Outside the "tent," but close by, lay two of Rabbi Israel's sons-in-law: David Heilperin and Joseph

Monzohn, as well as a great-grandson, Shalom Joseph (son of Nahum Dov of Sadgora), and Abraham Jacob's son-in-law Aviezer Zelig Shapira of Mogielnica.<sup>73</sup> The tomb immediately became a hallowed spot and a pilgrimage site, mainly at times of hillula for one of the deceased.<sup>74</sup> There were, however, no real mass pilgrimages to the site, as there were to the graves of Rabbi Elimelekh at Lyzhansk or Rabbi Nahman at Uman, who died without leaving dynastic successors, so that their graves became the sole palpable object of identification. At Sadgora, there was a living, active dynasty, so that the relationship between the hasidim and the burial ground was never allowed to reach such dimensions.



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## *Afterword: Dynamic Adaptation to a Changing World*

### *I. Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin as an Object of Biographical Research*

The Introduction to this volume describes the sorry state of scholarly research into the history of Hasidism in the nineteenth century and proposes several explanations for the situation. At this point, it may be worth reconsidering the roots of the neglect I have depicted, inquiring whether it is justified and examining its implications for future studies of Hasidism.

Before a scholar who is planning a biography of any personality can go to work, he or she must first ponder two main questions: (a) Is the supply of available sources adequate in scope and variety, and are they reliable? (b) Is the personality in question indeed worthy of the historian's attention? To what degree was he or she significant for his or her generation and the following generations? Does the reconstruction of his or her life help to understand broader phenomena or processes? And, finally, does the biography have implications beyond the particular subject concerned, on a more general plane? As to the question of sources, the answer is quite clear: we have an almost bottomless font of them. Indeed, when that pioneer of the study of Hasidism Simon Dubnow delineated the difficulties facing the student of nineteenth-century Hasidism, he rightly chose to emphasize the tremendous quantity of material available to the historian:

Students of the history of nineteenth-century Hasidism must collect many traditions about the development of dynasties of zaddikim and their explosion into hun-

dreds of “holy families” throughout the countries of Eastern Europe; on the other hand, they must also collect all the information scattered through Haskalah literature, particularly in journals, concerning the lives of hasidim and rebbes, their war against the “unbelieving” maskilim, the competitive controversies between zaddikim and between bands of hasidim, each promoting its own zaddik.<sup>1</sup>

I believe that one of the historiographic conclusions emerging from this reconstruction of Israel of Ruzhin’s life is that the expanse of ground lying before us is indeed almost unbroken. My attempt to depict Rabbi Israel’s personality shows the wealth of sources at hand and the considerable potential that they offer. Careful and critical perusal of hasidic sources of different types (not only the letters of zaddikim but also the hagiographic literature) yields valuable information, which may frequently be collated with and checked against nonhasidic sources—the various genres of rabbinical literature, anti-hasidic “war literature,” satirical writings by maskilim, memoirist literature, newspapers, and belles letters—as well as against general archival documents.

As to the question of the personality: there is no question that Israel Friedman was exceptional among contemporary zaddikim, not only because of his unusual charisma and native intelligence but because of the dramatic events in which he was involved and his colorful lifestyle. Not only did he leave his mark both on contemporary Ruzhin-Sadgora Hasidism and on its present-day offshoots and derivative dynasties; he also created a new lifestyle and expounded (although not systematically) new ideas that had an impact on other hasidic dynasties.<sup>2</sup>

When all is said and done, however, Rabbi Israel was not a lone figure, and the historical features of Hasidism as it gained ground were not shaped by him alone. Throughout the nineteenth century, the hasidic movement produced remarkable leaders, whether of smaller or larger groups, in an era of spiritual uncertainty and new forces and currents that threatened both to break up the unity of traditional Jewish society from within and to demolish it from without. Hasidism could register major quantitative and qualitative achievements in Russia and Poland, Galicia and Bukovina, Romania and Hungary; and these achievements are still operative today in the modern hasidic courts of Bnei Brak, Jerusalem, and Brooklyn. What seemed to be an exhausted, dying trunk, a few scattered remnants that had survived the terrors of the Holocaust, has regenerated itself, rebuilding a movement of major material and spiritual content, proof of considerable inner strength and vitality.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the credit for these developments is undoubtedly due to the outstanding personalities of the admorim who rallied the loyal remnants of Hasidism and led them to new achievements, whether in Israel or in the United States. Thus, for example, the spiritual, social, economic, and polit-

ical power of Habad (Lubavitch) Hasidism in the second half of the twentieth century would be inconceivable were it not for the unprecedented messianic veneration of Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, the last admor of the dynasty.

It would therefore be futile to attempt any account of this unique movement, which was not always as large and as wealthy as it is today, without resorting to the biographical element, thus necessarily consulting the thousands of literary (and, in the case of Lubavitch Hasidism, audio-visual) sources that await study. A synthetic understanding of Hasidism, in particular, of its place in the gradual disintegration of the “old” traditional society and the crystallization of modern Orthodoxy, is dependent on a reliable, detailed biographical depiction of the most prominent figures in the recent history of traditional Eastern European Jewish society. Among these figures are surely a good many of the zaddikim who led mass movements or otherwise influenced the shaping of Jewish Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe on the eve of the Holocaust.

## *II. Stagnation versus Innovation in Ruzhin Hasidism*

Toward the end of the 1860s, before reaching bar-mitzvah age, Asher Hirsch Ginsberg (later famous as Ahad Ha-Am) went with his father to visit the court of Rabbi Abraham Jacob at Sadgora. The formative experience was influential in shaping Ginsberg’s critical attitude to the hasidic context of his youth. His memories of the event (already quoted in a previous chapter) are typical of the esprit of Ruzhin Hasidism. He and his father spent the festival of Sukkot near the zaddik and his children (who were known as *di kinderlekh*). On the evening of one of the Intermediate Days of the festival, when the court was celebrating the ancient Water Drawing festivities, they went to the “children’s sukkah”:

We came to the sukkah, which was full of people, and an old man, a Galician, was standing by the table and entertaining the kinderlekh (the rebbe’s eldest son and his more famous son-in-law)<sup>4</sup> with obscene stories, full of coarse language. The stories were so explicit that even I, a boy of twelve, could understand almost everything. And all those present were laughing uproariously. All of a sudden, one of the kinderlekh shut his eyes in seeming devotion and called out, “Where’s Yehoshua’ke?” (a cantor of renown among the Sadgora hasidim, who had also come to the court for the festival). And when Yehoshua’ke was found, the abovementioned told him to sing *Yetzaveh tzur hasdo*. The cantor began to sing, and the youth closed his eyes and listened to the song, his religious ecstasy increasing so much that he grabbed the saltshaker, which stood not far from him, and began to bang the table with it, scattering salt all over the sukkah. This went on until the cantor had finished the song. This scene, particularly the sudden transition from levity and

obscenity to such religious devotion, made a negative impression upon me, an impression that made a great breach in my Hasidism.<sup>5</sup>

Ahad Ha-Am's description of this episode seems to embrace something of the peculiar nature of Hasidism: moods and actions could switch, naturally and rapidly, from one extreme to another. It was this ascent from the depths to the greatest heights that fascinated some and repelled others. Later on in his account, Ahad Ha-Am noted that the zaddik, as a matter of fact, had made a profound, positive impression upon him; what had disturbed him were the licentious atmosphere and the practices of the youngsters and the hasidim in general.

True, the thought and spiritual opus of Hasidism during this phase of growth were marked by duality: decadence and stagnation alongside creativity and innovation; and the same is true of the activities of the movement's leaders and groupings. Triumphant Hasidism, in contrast to the religious radicalism typical of the movement in its infancy, had assumed a conservative socioreligious nature, deliberately choosing self-isolation and the religious ancien régime and rejecting any manifestation of revolution, originality, or innovation. It is natural, then, to ask whether Israel of Ruzhin—and, later, Ruzhin-Sadgora Hasidism, which followed in his footsteps—could be perceived as an innovator or a conservative, whether in isolation or in comparison to other leaders of the time in that region.

By “stagnation” versus “innovation,” I do not mean to pose a question that has received copious treatment in the scholarly literature—whether Hasidism was an innovative or conservative socioreligious movement in relation to traditional society (i.e., Jewish society up to and including the mid eighteenth century); and whether Hasidism buttressed the traditional society, or undermined it and contributed to its disintegration.<sup>6</sup>

From the 1840s on, the followers of Hasidism, together with the other sectors of traditional Jewish society, found themselves in a completely different world, namely, the conservative world of the new Jewish Orthodox society that had emerged in Eastern Europe as part of the upheavals that had shaken Ashkenazic Jewish society.<sup>7</sup> Students of the phenomenon are generally agreed that the patterns of spiritual, social, and political organization adopted by traditionalists in the nineteenth century were not direct continuations, or even slight variations, of the analogous patterns in the past; rather, they were a radically new response to the completely new conditions for which historians usually use the catchword “modernity.”

Traditional Judaism was threatened by the upsurge of hitherto nonexistent social and cultural alternatives (Haskalah, religious reform, secular education, gradually increasing acculturation to the majority society, and, later, secularization, assimilation, Zionism, and nationalism); its represen-

tatives had to meet challenges quite distinct from those faced by their ancestors, who had lived in the old, uniform, traditional society. Modernity and its hazards imposed on the traditionalists new methods of organization and struggle, which had to be integrated into a religious and philosophical culture in which old and new were commingled. This new social and ideological order was informed by the talmudic dictum “*Hadash asur min ha-Torah*” (New grain is forbidden by the Torah), as polemically reinterpreted by Rabbi Moses Sofer (Hatam Sofer; 1762–1839) to mean that any innovation, even though unimportant from the point of view of *Halakhah*, is strictly forbidden, simply because it is an innovation.

Within this new order, known among scholars of traditional Jewish society as “Orthodoxy” or, today, “Ultra-Orthodoxy” (Hebrew *haredim*),<sup>8</sup> the originally marked differences between its different components (mainly *hasidim* and *mitnagdim*) were not infrequently blurred, although never completely erased. However, despite the uncompromising struggle of Orthodoxy against modernity, almost all Orthodox sectors to a greater or lesser degree absorbed and assimilated certain manifestations of modernism (in particular, those relating to organization and public action), utilizing them in their all-out war against its other manifestations (in particular, secularization and Zionism). From now on, any such manifestation must be examined separately and each group, circle, or *hasidic* dynasty considered on its own.<sup>9</sup>

Simon Dubnow defined Ruzhin-Sadgora Hasidism as “conservative,”<sup>10</sup> while Raphael Mahler saw it as “liberal.”<sup>11</sup> This seeming contradiction is simply an outcome of these scholars’ different points of departure in the attempt to embrace the multifaceted aspects of Orthodoxy in a single definition. If we were indeed justified in viewing Orthodoxy as a basically conservative phenomenon, it would be more accurate to ask: To what category of Orthodoxy does Ruzhin-Sadgora Hasidism belong? Is it an instance of the self-segregating Orthodoxy, or Ultra-Orthodoxy, after the fashion of the Hungarian *hasidic* sects (such as Satmar), reacting to the threat of modernism by ghettoization and violent defense; or could it be seen as an early, *hasidic* version of “adaptive” Orthodoxy, or Neo-Orthodoxy, in the style of post-Holocaust Lubavitch Hasidism, which unhesitatingly espouses modern mechanisms and patterns of expression and organization in order to reinforce Old World values?

A penetrating analysis of this question is beyond the scope of this Afterword. Nevertheless, I believe that an examination of these definitions from the standpoint and conceptual position of Orthodoxy itself (not from the ethical-maskilic standpoint of Dubnow or the secular-materialist position of Mahler) will show that the Ruzhin *zaddikim* internalized modern values more than any other *hasidic* dynasty. One might, therefore, easily



define Ruzhin-Sadgora Hasidism as “adaptive Orthodoxy” or, better, “dynamical conservatism.”<sup>12</sup>

An apt, if picturesque, expression of the ability of the leaders of Ruzhin to enlist elements of modernism in the service of their ideology is the following utterance of Rabbi Abraham Jacob of Sadgora:

“Everything can teach us something, and not only everything God has created. What man has made has also something to teach us.”

“What can we learn from a train?” One hasid asked dubiously.

“That because of one second, one can miss everything.”

“And from the telegraph?”

“That every word is counted and charged.”

“And the telephone?”

“That what we say here is heard there.”<sup>13</sup>

They took over certain material values stemming from the modern world and knew how to “convert” them for the benefit of hasidic reality, infusing them with “up-to-date” religious content and utilizing them to shore up the old values. Just as Rabbi Israel was not averse to cooperating with personalities outside the hasidic camp (such as Isaac Ber Levinsohn or Moses Montefiore) in the interests of Hasidism, or of the entire Jewish community, as he understood them, his descendants were among the first zaddikim to participate in modern Orthodox organizations such as Mahazikei ha-dat<sup>14</sup> and, later, Agudat Israel and the “Council of Torah Sages”; they also harbored sympathy, though with reservations, for nationalistic and Zionist activities.<sup>15</sup> Their policy was not denial and segregation, but dynamic adaptation to a changing world.

### *III. Decline of the Generations or the Power of Inferiority?*

An inseparable component of isolationist-conservative typology is a feeling of inferiority regarding the past and a gloomy, pessimistic outlook. The adaptive-conservative is typically optimistic and quite self-confident. Consideration of Rabbi Israel’s attitude to the authoritative past, on the one hand, and to his position and that of other contemporary zaddikim in the historical flow of Hasidism, on the other, may help us to define his standpoint. At first sight, a personality with his background might have looked at the brief history of Hasidism from a standpoint of inferiority, for his contemporaries were convinced that they could never achieve the level of earlier generations in Divine worship, study of Torah and Kabbalah, and religious devotion. The great revolutions of Hasidism had already taken place; the great works had been written; the marvelous personalities were no longer alive; while the present, so it seemed to Rabbi Israel’s contem-

poraries, was merely a barren, futile attempt to reconstruct past glory. Rabbi Israel himself had the same feeling upon comparing his stature to that of his ancestors, the Maggid of Mezhirech and Abraham the “Angel”—a feeling aptly expressed in his famous parable:

Once, there was a great danger to the life of a certain beloved and fine only son, etc. And the Besht instructed to make a wax candle; and he traveled to the forest, attached the candle to a tree and did further things, and made *yibudim*, etc., and brought salvation with God’s help. And later there was a similar act of his [Rabbi Israel’s] grandfather, the saintly Maggid, and he too proceeded as described, and said: I do not know the *yibudim* and intentions that the Besht made, but I shall act on the basis of the Besht’s intention. And that too was accepted. And later there was a similar act of the saintly Rabbi Moses Leib of Sasov, and he said: We do not even have the strength to do that; I shall only tell the story, and the Lord, blessed be He, will help. And thus it was.<sup>16</sup>

One can clearly interpret this parable as an explicit expression of decline and uncertainty.<sup>17</sup> In actual fact, however, it emphasizes that later generations are no less capable than the first. Although the techniques that the early luminaries used to achieve their goals are now unknown, one can nevertheless accomplish the same in the present, in fact with less effort. Thus, despite the seeming inferiority of Rabbi Israel’s generation, he found a way of converting that disadvantage into an advantage.

As a member of the elite establishment of zaddikim, Rabbi Israel believed that the term “decline of the generations” applied mainly to the hasidim. True, the zaddikim did not equal their predecessors in all respects, but their basic mystical essence was unchanged, and that was the root of their special position. The masses of hasidim, however, were different and, in fact, inferior. This distinction emerges from the following tale:

Once, on the night of the Shavuot festival, Rabbi Israel sat at the table and said no Torah, not uttering even one word, only weeping copiously. And on the second night [of the festival], he behaved as he had on the first night. Only after grace after meals did he say: “When the Maggid [of Mezhirech] spoke Torah at the table, later, when the disciples had gone home, they would go over the Torah among themselves. One would say, ‘Thus I heard,’ and another would say differently, for each and every one heard differently. And I say that this is nothing new, for the Torah has seventy aspects, and each and every person, depending on his aspect in the Torah, so he heard the Torah from the Maggid.” And then he said: “But when one looks carefully at the faces [of the hasidim], one should not speak Torah, for the expressions on their faces betray them.”<sup>18</sup>

The harsh reality behind this story is undeniable, even if it conveys despair and frustration. The hasidim partaking of the festive meal with the zaddik were not capable, as they had been in the past, of understanding the

zaddik's words. He could tell from their faces that any attempt to speak would be futile, that his Torah would be misunderstood. However, this deterioration in the "quality" of the hasidim not only did not alter the new social reality—Hasidism had become a broad mass movement—but the change itself was the outcome of the new reality, in which Rabbi Israel himself played an important part.

Put differently: the credit for making Hasidism a popular mass movement, firmly entrenched in all sectors of Jewish society in Eastern Europe, was due to Rabbi Israel and the other zaddikim of his generation. It was they who, in a period of upheaval and metamorphosis in Eastern European Jewry, undertook to disseminate the principles and practices of Hasidism among the masses and to shape the basic features of the hasidic community. Rabbi Israel, who was quite conscious of his historic task, said so quite explicitly:

We see instinctively that the zaddikim of these generations do not persevere in studying the Torah night and day, as did the first zaddikim, but nevertheless they have received the secrets and mysteries of the Torah, to teach the people who come to shelter in their shadow how to achieve the worship of the Lord, lest they fail in their leadership in imparting great words of Torah and sweet interpretations to their listeners, and they reveal proper interpretations of the Torah, teaching people to walk the straight ways of Divine worship, and all their speech is like a sharp sword and profound wisdom based on the deepest mysteries. Now, where did they get all that?

In answer to this rhetorical question, Rabbi Israel, drawing in his typically homespun manner on an analogy with the familiar everyday world of his listeners, proposed a distinction between two kinds of aristocrats:

One lord has received an inheritance from his fathers, for his father was a lord, and his father's father and so on. And now the great legacy has fallen into his hands. He surely finds everything ready for him . . . both a house for his greatness, and household utensils, and clothing as befits a lord—he finds everything, ready-made, in what he has inherited from his ancestors. Similarly, his wealth itself comes to him without labor and effort. For with just a little intelligence and understanding, he can enhance his lordship and implement all the needs of his kingdom. . . . Not so a lord who became great on his own account, who is not from a lordly lineage; but by dint of his wisdom and intelligence and understanding, through his prowess and greatness, his great power and the extent of his labor and effort, has achieved all this greatness. . . . And surely this lord found nothing ready for him, for whence would such things come to him? Hence, he is forced to prepare all his needs by himself.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the "decline of generations" is natural and in fact justified against the background of the normal phenomenon of inheritance. The early generations had no rich legacy from their progenitors but were compelled to

struggle with various challenges, distinct from the challenges facing their grandchildren, who have already received their legacies and enjoy superior starting conditions. That is why the later zaddikim, though certainly inferior to those of previous times, have received “the secrets and mysteries of the Torah.”

Such an outlook is essentially optimistic, for inferiority is thereby not a cause for weakness and despondency but a basis for a consciousness of power and self-confidence. A profound expression of this optimism is Rabbi Israel’s sermon on the verse “Let all that breathes praise the Lord” (Pss. 150: 6), which was interpreted by the Sages of the Talmud as implying that one should praise God with each breath, for the soul is striving to leave the body every minute of the day, but the Creator prevents it from so doing. Said Rabbi Israel:

It turns out that one becomes a new creature every minute, and man may find new strength in this idea. If distracting thoughts occur to him while he prays, saying, “You are full of sins and transgressions, so how can you open your mouth in song and praise?”—he can fortify himself, realizing that in that very minute he has become a new creature and has not committed any sin in that minute, so that he can praise and extol the Lord, blessed be He, in that minute.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that a person is reborn from moment to moment provides him or her with a constant point of departure in the continuum of historical time; one is always innocent and virtuous in comparison with the previous minute, all the more so in comparison with historical past. The fact of constant renewal imparts immeasurable power, enabling one to look optimistically toward the future rather than gloomily to ponder the past in despair and frustration.

The consciousness of generational differences, the context in which the shortcomings of the present become a merit, a source of spiritual strength and vigor, may also be linked with Rabbi Israel’s disapproval of asceticism and fasting:

For in the early generations, when the Evil One came to a person and told him to commit a certain sin, the person would overcome him by mortifying his body. And if the Evil One told him to commit another sin, he would inflict some other mortification on the body. But now, bodies being weak, things are different. And that accords with what was said by the prophet Jeremiah: “Why have You forgotten us forever, forsaken us for all time? Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself, and let us come back; renew our days as of old” [Lam. 5: 20–21]. That is to say: “Why . . . forever”? That is, what need do I have of victory [playing on the Hebrew word *la-nezah* (forever), whose root may also mean “to be victorious”], seeing that You have “forgotten us” [Hebrew *tishkabenu*]? That is, we are quite exhausted [Hebrew *tash kohenu*] and do not have the strength to defeat the Evil One and mortify ourselves. And for that reason You have “forsaken us for all time”? . . . But in our generation, “Take us

back, O Lord, to Yourself, and let us come back [Hebrew *nashuvah*]; renew our days as of old," that is, let our present efforts be equal [Hebrew *shaveh*] to the mortifications of olden days.<sup>21</sup>

Overcoming the evil inclination and defeating temptation cannot be achieved through asceticism and fasting. Those methods were appropriate in the heroic past, but in the real present, the human body now being weak and exhausted of all strength, they are no longer necessary. Rabbi Israel's exegesis is almost untranslatable, being based on rather forced wordplay: he splits the Hebrew word "forgotten us" into two other words, meaning "we are exhausted"; similarly, he explains "Take us back, etc." as derived from a different, similar-sounding root meaning "to be equal to." Our predecessors' asceticism is not a viable alternative for our weak generation, but this fact of physical inferiority in the present does not justify abandonment by God. Rather, our contemporaries are successful in accomplishing the same results as the ancients, in fact with less effort.

#### *IV. The Hasidic Court in an Era of Upheaval*

I have expanded at length in this book both on the typology of the "royal" hasidic court—the broad spectrum of its physical, economic, and organizational aspects—and on the typical features of its everyday life, as experienced by its inhabitants. The court was not only a well-defined physical area, but also a personal, familial, and geographic expression of the hasid's relationship with "his" zaddik and his identification with the zaddik's dynasty. The court shaped communal identity, created a unique environment, and had its effect on the speech, dress, prayer, thought, and behavior of the hasidim. The study of what is known as "private life" in Jewish history in general and in Hasidism in particular is only beginning, and I cannot offer more than a few pickings from a potential abundance of information here. After all, the people of the past, whether famous or anonymous, scholars or simpletons, rich or poor, men, women, or children, lived in the real context of a home and an environment, family and friends, food and clothing, social and class structures, livelihood and sustenance, climatic changes, and technological innovations. All these entities have affected the development of human history no less, and generally more, than ideas and beliefs, whatever their religious power. This area, which we might call mental history, has unfortunately been largely ignored in the past; it should receive due attention in future studies of Hasidism. A fresh study of the real contexts that informed and motivated a socioreligious movement as extensive and vital as Hasidism may better enable scholars to decipher its complex, multifaceted world.

At this point, one might justifiably question focusing on the specific details of the “royal” hasidic court to the exclusion of other types of courts. Should one not try to determine ideals and goals common to all the hasidic courts in the nineteenth century? Can one not combine the courts of the rebbes of Gur and Aleksander, Lubavitch and Satmar, Ruzhin and Zanz, Vizhnitz and Belz into a single general picture, despite their many differences?

To my mind, the fully developed hasidic courts of the nineteenth century, including those courts that did not adopt the “royal” style, or even opposed it, cannot be viewed as isolated, local phenomena, influenced solely by the random personalities of the rebbes who headed them. The similarities among the larger courts are more numerous than the differences—sufficiently numerous, in fact, to blur the different characters of the zaddikim. The large number of hasidic courts and their amazing success, throughout the Jewish Diaspora in Eastern Europe, reflect a process that was affecting Orthodoxy in general: the old patterns of activity of traditional society, whose institutions had largely disappeared, owing to the outside pressures of the authorities, and whose authority had been undermined by internal schismatic and disintegrative processes, now took on a new organizational guise, admittedly without prior design. The court, revolving around the charismatic zaddik and his descendants, functioned primarily as a nonestablishment substitute for the old autonomous community, which had taken responsibility for the totality of its members’ lives. But as it was by its very nature a voluntary, supercommunal, and superterritorial entity, which did not recognize political or geographical borders, it could also offer a replacement for the institutions of supercommunal Jewish autonomy.

Since the late eighteenth century, the absolutist empires had made every effort to undermine and abolish the various corporate frameworks that mediated between the government and its subjects. This centralizing process, which naturally attacked Jewish autonomous institutions as well, took place concurrently with the spread of Hasidism in all parts of Eastern Europe (from the abolition of the Council of the Four Lands in Poland in 1764 to the abolition of the kahal in Russia in 1844). In many respects, the large hasidic courts could be considered as taking over, under the new conditions, the tasks of the older corporate organizations, which had come under outside pressure and collapsed from within.

As a semi-corporate association, the court aimed to supply its members not only with a social and religious framework but also with support services, social welfare, and mutual aid. The “royal” court, with its particularly vivid colors, developed mechanisms that supplied a variety of services for the zaddik, the “residents,” and the hasidim as a body, wherever they were,

and assumed responsibilities that had previously been in the province of the community: such as religion and education, charity and welfare, *kashrut* and ritual slaughter, intercession with the gentile authorities, care for the Jewish community in the Holy Land, and so on.

The authority of the court, it seems, did not only extend over the hasidim who settled within its territory and identified with its aims, which centered on a belief in the spiritual and mystical preeminence of the zaddik and the subordination of all interests in constant confirmation of that superiority. In actual fact, particularly in the rural areas of Eastern Europe, the zaddikim ruled over much larger domains. Social pressures, typical mainly of smaller towns and villages, became a cohesive factor that enhanced Jews' feelings of belonging and identification with the local "regnant" zaddik. The zaddik controlled appointments to communal office in the community and its surroundings: rabbis and religious judges, ritual slaughterers, teachers and circumcisers. A relationship was thus established between the zaddik, on the one hand, and individuals or circles that, although not defining themselves as hasidim, availed themselves of the services supplied by the zaddik's appointees.

As a rule, the court did not try to exercise authority or influence over circles and groups outside it; the stronger the currents of secularization became, the stronger the tendency to promote schism and isolationism was, both within hasidic society and between it and the surrounding non-hasidic world. In this respect, the hasidic court was similar to other voluntary Orthodox Jewish associations that had grown up alongside it. Such associations could also be discerned in the large Lithuanian supercommunal yeshivot, mainly in Volozhin and Mir; in the *havarot* (societies), both the professional guilds of various artisans and the different types of societies that engaged in charity, social welfare (such as visiting the sick or helping poor brides), or in pursuing various spiritual goals (such as reciting psalms or studying the Mishnah); and in the kolelim of the Holy Land, whether of the nonhasidic immigrants (known as perushim) or of the various hasidic groups, as a distant branch of the "mother" community in the Diaspora. All these associations offered premodern religious, economic, and social substitutes for the traditional community, whose sun had set and whose power had waned.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike the other associations, which relied as a rule on a changing, collective leadership, the hasidic court resembled a pyramid, with a single leader at the apex: the zaddik, from whom and to whom everything flowed. The zaddik, by virtue of his charisma or his inheritance of the position, was the source of vitality, the justification and the *raison d'être* of the hasidic court; without him, it would have fallen apart, and its influence would have been dissipated. He was the channel through which spiritual

and material abundance flowed to the world in general and to his hasidim in particular; he was the intermediary between the hasidim and God and the Divine Will; he was the anchor to which the souls of his hasidim were moored. There could be no hasidic court without a zaddik, and no zaddik without hasidim.

The zaddik's court was frequented by hundreds or even thousands of hasidim and curious observers, who came from all ends of the Jewish world. The presence of the zaddik in the small village or hamlet in which he was active generally brought prosperity in its wake, the court becoming a major source of livelihood for dozens of families living in and around the community. Nevertheless, the court did not always exert as significant an influence on the inner life of the host community as might have been expected; and this influence in fact decreased as the winds of change, nationalism, and secularization gained strength. In public consciousness, the "royal" hasidic court functioned as a state within a state, or, perhaps more correctly, as a state on the periphery of a state. The zaddik was the supreme leader, enjoying the veneration of his hasidim and the curiosity of outside observers, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, whose charismatic leadership remained unchallenged, and who said of himself, "Never have I said something and retracted it,"<sup>23</sup> died toward the end of 1850, in the very middle of the nineteenth century. His stormy life thus concluded at the end of one period and the beginning of another. Born toward the end of the early, formative period of Hasidism, he was one of the most prominent leaders who led the movement to its sweeping victory in the struggle for religious and social legitimization in the Jewish world.

Although Ruzhin and Sadgora were remote from the centers of secularization and Haskalah in Western Europe, the first seeds of modernism were already percolating into the hasidic world during Israel's life, and their fruit was soon to ripen and make considerable inroads in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. The tragic story of Bernyu of Leova, Rabbi Israel's son, who abandoned the zaddik's throne with a great flourish and joined the circle of Chernovtsy maskilim, as well as the fierce controversy that broke out in consequence between the Zanz and Sadgora dynasties, creating a schism in hasidic Orthodoxy in Galicia that lasted till the eve of World War I, were perhaps the climax in the amazing saga of Sadgora Hasidism that began with the life, thought, and doings of Rabbi Israel Friedman of Ruzhin.



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## Notes

### Introduction

1. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 5–6.
2. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 337.
3. Here and below, “Orthodoxy” should be understood in the sense of what is today called the Ultra-Orthodox, or Haredim, a sectorial camp, which split off from traditional Jewish society at the end of the eighteenth century.
4. Konfino, *Masot*, 171 (see also *ibid.*, 336).
5. A great deal of literature is available on the question of the historical value of hagiographic literature (mainly of Christian saints); see, e.g., Gurevich, *Popular Culture*, 17–21, 39–77. On Jewish hagiographic literature, see Dan, *Shevahim*. Useful discussions regarding the historical value of hasidic hagiography (mainly with regard to the creditability of *Shivhei ha-Besht*), see Shmeruk, *Yiddish*, 201ff.; Rapoport-Albert, *Hagiography*; Rosman, *Shivhei* (and see the bibliography *ibid.*, 177); Etkes, *Besht*, 217–65.
6. Rosman, *Founder*; Etkes, *Besht*.
7. The relatively good biographies of Shneur Zalman and his successors, such as Heilman, *Beit Rabbi*, and Teitelbaum, *Lyady*, are outdated (both were written at the beginning of the twentieth century) and not critical enough. New biographies of the Habad founders are needed in light of the extensive sources that have been uncovered since then and advances in research into Habad teachings.
8. Referring especially to Green, *Tormented Master*, and detailed books and articles by Weiss, Pickarz, and many others. For a full survey on Bratslav research, see Assaf, *Bratslav*, introduction.
9. Brim, *Atara*, 71.
10. Mahler, *Hasidut*, 538–46. Mahler was one of few scholars who devoted

much of his research to late Hasidism, but his historical perspective was totally enslaved by his Marxist theories.

11. Dubnow, *Hasidut*, 316 (on p. 215 Dubnow contradicts himself and suggests the year 1813).

12. Ibid., introduction, ii (n.p.).

13. Ibid., 37. For more on the problem of periodization of Hasidism, see Assaf, *Hebetim*.

14. Horodezky, *Chernobyl*, foreword; id., *Hasidut*, III, 88, 97.

15. See also Dan, *Third Century*; Assaf, *Hebetim*.

16. For example, the poor state of research of Hasidism in Poland from the nineteenth century onward (see Assaf, *Polin*); or the disproportionate amount of research into early Bratslav Hasidism (Rabbi Nahman's time and life) as opposed to the later era of his disciples (see Assaf, *Bratslav*, introduction).

17. For a selected list of such biographies written from the hasidic perspective, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 24, n. 20.

18. On the nature of the "Orthodox historiography" and its various manifestations and faces, see, e.g., Rapoport-Albert, *Hagiography*; Bartal, *True Knowledge*; Schacter, *Facing the Truths*.

19. For example, Bromberg's monograph, *Ruzhin*, contains no references, so that each source must first be located in the vast expanses of hasidic literature before being studied in its own right. Bromberg, whose writing leans heavily in the national-religious direction (see, e.g., *ibid.*, 147, 159), draws not only on hasidic sources but also on sources from the scholarly literature, which he quotes, sometimes verbatim, without bothering to give chapter and verse (for example, *ibid.*, 42–43 is copied directly from Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 103–4).

20. Aaron Marcus (1843–1916) was a German-born Orthodox Jew who became an admirer of Polish Hasidism. His book is filled with data, yet one must be suspicious of its basis in fact. See Scholem, *Marcus*, 3–8. However, Marcus is the only source to mention details of Rabbi Israel's attempts to intercede with Montefiore (Marcus, *Hasidut*, 213), verified in recently found sources.

21. Cf. Rabbi Judah Leib Maimon's objections to the reprinting of a polemic against Maimonides: "Is it a mitzvah to redistribute the accusations against Maimonides, which have already been forgotten and their influence already abolished. Should we wonder why this book was almost sentenced to concealment—it is a right verdict" (quoted in *Simai* 72 [1973]: 283).

22. For more on Bernyu and the controversy, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 26–27, nn. 30–31, and 457–59.

23. Marcus, *Hasidut*, 7.

24. Ibid., rev. ed., v (n.p.).

25. Pages 262–77 of the 1954 edition were omitted. For similar interventions for the sake of "Dignity of the Lord," see Assaf, *Historyografya*.

26. Abramowitz, *Dover mesharim*, 7.

27. Weisberg, *Zanz*, I, 7; cf. Wunder, *Galicia*, II, 418, who left only four lines about the controversy.

28. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 42. These issues are discussed later in detail.

29. Ki-Tov, *Keter*, 27. The motif of "shoes without soles" (first mentioned,

probably, in *Sipurei zaddikim*, III, 11–12) is widely used in hasidic writing; see also ch. 10, n. 1.

30. Frankel, *Sgulah*, 88.

31. On this book and Rabbi Israel's involvement in its publication, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 56–58.

32. Lieberman, *Ohel*, III, 468.

33. Marcus, *Hasidut*, 207–8 (p. 329 in the German original edition).

34. Branicki, *Brama pokuty*, ii.

35. Kliger, *Dorot*, 294–95. For more sources which quote this “testimony,” see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 32, n. 48.

36. Hilberg, *Rabbi*, 471–75.

37. Kahana, *Le-tivah shel ha-hasidut*, 13–14.

38. The original story was published in *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 29.

39. Zilberbusch, *Pinkas*, 86.

40. Bonar and M'Cheyne, *Mission*, 402.

41. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 142.

42. Wertheim, *Law*, 142–43.

43. Zevin, *Hasidim*, I, 180–81.

44. Ansky, *Hurban*, IV, 416.

45. Bonar and M'Cheyne, *Mission*, 462.

46. Of this sort we may also mention Nisenzohn's *Malkhus*, which was published in interwar Warsaw in thirteen installments; the part about Rabbi Israel in Roker's *Zanz*; Ya'akov, *Ruzhin*; and Friedman, *Golden Dynasty*, inter alia. The chapter devoted to Rabbi Israel in Wiesel's *Souls on Fire*, 140–63, is also noteworthy. Wiesel's romantic longing for the hasidic past provides many stimulating insights, some errors and clichés aside.

47. His article on the Sadgora dynasty was first published in *Yevreiskaia starina* 2 (1909): 30–54, 161–95 (cf. Dubnow's comment on this article, *He-avar* 8 [1961]: 129). Later, a longer revised version of the article was translated into Hebrew (idem, *Hasidut*, 3: 101–54; 4: 154–61).

48. Dubnow, *Self-Judgment* (published in Hebrew translation in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 467–76).

49. Gessen, *Ruzhin* (the Russian documents included in this article were published in Hebrew in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 476–81).

50. Mahler, *Divrei*, VI, 19–27, 273–76; id., *Enlightenment*, 129–34, 367–68 (the German documents were published only in the Hebrew edition [idem, *Haskalah*, 432–51]. Perl's German memorandum and the correspondence it engendered were also published in Hebrew translation in Assaf, *ibid.*, 481–88).

51. Mahler, *Mahloket* (short version, id., *Shitot*).

52. Ginsburg, *Ruzhin*; id., *Ushits*.

53. Gelber, *Aus zwei Jahrhunderten*; id., *Dokumente*.

54. Aside from general chronographic books on hasidic genealogy, such as Margaliot, *Hilulah*; Grosman, *Shem*; and Alfassi, *Hasidut*, there is specific literature on the Ruzhin dynasty, such as *Sefer ha-yahas*; *Geza tarshishim*; *Kerem Israel*; *Ateret tiferet* (considered the semi-official chronology according to Ruzhin hasidim); *Mate Aharon*; Wunder, *Galicia*, IV, 145ff.

55. An annotated collection of thirty-four letters and approbations was published in Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 285–305. Since this publication, four more letters have been located. On Israel's letters that have not survived, see *ibid.*, 302–3.

56. His awareness of his legacy is reflected in the support he granted his attendant Yossi Rath to record the story of his flight from Russia in *Yeshu'ot Israel* (see ch. 6).

57. The printing of fragmentary teachings, missing their endings or other sections, may point to their origin in provisional writings of hasidim. Several dated manuscripts of Ruzhin teachings, from which Walden obviously copied (though not in their original order), are extant. The earliest dated manuscript of which I am aware dates to 1876 (Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, Heb. 8° 4359), in which some teachings are dated to 1824–27 (the dates were omitted in *Irin kadishin*). Another old manuscript, compiled ca. 1866, is Heb. 8° 5301, extracts from which were published in *Tiferet Israel* 27: 5–8.

58. See Shmeruk, *Yiddish*, 20–21, n. 16, and 198.

59. Such as “Here it is known to whom who knows, and that is the truth,” or the introduction pattern “Say I.” Both are typical of Rabbi Israel and repeated many times in *Irin kadishin* and other books. Sadgora hasidim used to believe that while their rabbi said, “Say I,” the Holy Divine spoke out of his mouth (Maimon, *Zion*, I, 197).

60. *Kovets siftei zaddikim*, I, 74.

61. A brief selection of teachings and stories was printed, some from a manuscript, in Lerman, *Mikhtevei Eliyahu* (1894) and *Imrei zaddikim* (1896). They were published in 1907 in a book entitled *Irin kadishin tinyana* (A Second *Irin kadishin*), which called itself “Additions and Supplements to the First *Irin kadishin*”; a third book, *Irin kadishin telita'a*, also purporting to be a sequel, was published in 1914.

62. Shmeruk, *Yiddish*, 201ff.

63. *Divrei David*, 59.

64. One can find such historical awareness in other hasidic branches as well, and beside the “natural” didactic motivation there is also a polemical motivation, the perceived need to produce an “alternative” or “authentic” history to combat “secular” academic research into Hasidism.

65. Special attention should be paid to the hasidic journals *Tiferet Israel* (of the Boian branch in Jerusalem) and *Mesilot* (of the Sadgora branch at Bnei Brak); both comprise large bodies of documentary and archival material, but are faulty regarding their critical methods. Important sources have also been recently republished by hasidim, either in light of new manuscripts (such as *Yeshu'ot Israel*, under the title *Magdil yeshu'ot*), or as new, comprehensive editions of already published books, along with references and efficient indexes.

66. Agnon, *Guest*, 257.

67. *Divrei Torah*, II, 11b. The book in question, published in Piotrkov in 1914, deals with the zaddik Hayyim Meir Jehiel of Mogielnica.

68. Weisberg, *Zanz*, I, 362–64.

69. *Zikaron tov*, 18. This is simply the reverse of the popular saying “He who doesn’t believe the zaddikim’s stories is a heretic, and he who does is a fool.”

70. Statements on the role of hasidic stories in the struggle against modernity’s

temptations are scattered through the prefaces and approbations of many books. In a way this was the principal motivation behind the hagiographic literature project produced by the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, Joseph Isaac Schneersohn; see Rapoport-Albert, *Hagiography*; Bartal, *Simeon*; Assaf, *Mumar*.

71. On these writers, see Dan, *Sipur*, 195–220; id., *Frumkinian*; Nigal, *Siporet* (according to the index). For a useful lexicon on most of the editors and publishers of the hasidic anthologies, see Nigal, *Melaktei*.

72. Special methodological attention recently had been paid to the stories in *Shivhei ha-Besht* (in praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov), especially by Rosman, *Founder* (who minimizes the historical value of the stories), and Etkes, *Besht* (who intensifies it). For excellent examples of the abovementioned method of distinguishing between history and hagiography by using external independent sources, see Halpern, *Yehudim*, 277–88; Bartal, *Galut*, 23–40; Teller, *Sluck*, 15–38.

73. For more on these writers, see the notes to Assaf, *Malkhut*, 44–46.

## Chapter 1

1. *Kol nehi*, 22a.

2. This is the date preserved by the Ruzhin tradition, see references and other opinions in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 79, n. 3.

3. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 32.

4. *Kitvei zaddikim*, 24–25.

5. *Kneset Israel*, 123. This saying probably reflects popular ridicule of the name Feibish (Sadan, *Tsimukim*, # 718); however, Rabbi Israel was to name his youngest son Mordekhai Shraga (Feibish in Yiddish).

6. *Kneset Israel*, 123, 132–33; however, note an Orthodox reservation of this acronym: “But in this way the same can be said for hundreds and thousands of zaddikim” (*Eden Zion*, 91). This acronym is also interpreted in other places with no mention of Rabbi Israel (*Divrei Shalom*, 40).

7. On this town, see *Słownik*, VIII, 522–8; *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, IV, 71; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 63, n. 20.

8. For a detailed description of Abraham the “Angel” and Shalom Shakhna, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 49–76.

9. *Siftei kodesh*, 90.

10. *Ibid.*, 90–91; cf. *Kitvei reb Yoshe*, 238.

11. *Sipurvei nifla'ot*, 134. On his childhood games, see *ibid.*, 122.

12. *Nifla'ot ha-Rabbi*, 127; other version: *Sipurim hadashim*, 17b.

13. *Derekh mitzvotekha*, 277; Heilman, *Beit Rabbi*, I, 123. For other sources claiming that this meeting took place in Pohorbishch, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 81, n. 13.

14. *Eser orot*, 126; *Kerem Israel*, 58–59. Isaac Moses of Jaasy, a prominent leader of Habad in Moldavia, who claimed to have heard this from Shneur Zalman himself, told this anecdote.

15. See, e.g., Klapholtz, *Dawn of Greatness*.

16. Cohen-Schechter, *Sofrim*, 80b; *Ateret tiferet*, 7. The date of his death is verified by an Austrian document from 1842; see Gelber, *Aus zwei Jahrhunderten*, 118–21 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 487).



17. *Tiferet Israel*, 1: 12–14, 30; 21: 40. A few stories about Abraham were compiled in *Beit Israel*, 7–9; *Da'at Moshe*, 313. Regarding the *yemuka*, cf. Perl, *Chassidim*, 94.

18. *Kerem Israel*, 57.

19. *Beit Israel*, 7–8.

20. *Ibid.*, 7.

21. Abraham's uncle, Aryeh Leib, was astonished to hear of his accession. On two of Shalom Shakhna's hasidim who became followers of the "Seer" of Lublin after his death, see *Ohel ha-Rabbi: or ha-nifla'ot*, 10.

22. For a letter of recommendation that he gave to one of his followers who was travelling to collect funds, see *Tiferet Israel* 21: 40–41.

23. *Beit Israel*, 7. His sermon for Rosh Hashanah 1810 was published in *Irin kadishin*, 85–90.

24. *Ohalei Ya'akov*, 11.

25. *Siftei kodesh*, 90–91 (cf. *Kitvei reb Yoshe*, 238).

26. *Beit Israel*, 8. We have no more details of this event. Arrests occurred, however, in almost every generation of the family, from Shalom Shakhna to Israel of Ruzhin, culminating with Abraham Jacob of Sadgora.

27. On the contradictory dates of his birth and death see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 83, n. 26. Regarding the *halitzah*, see an undated letter of Isaiah Schor of Jassy to one of Rabbi Israel's cousins, in which he asks him to convince someone afraid to perform *halitzah* on his brother's widow because he fears that he will never have children. Rabbi Isaiah explains that this is nonsense as Israel of Ruzhin "performed *halitzah* on his brother's widow when he was very young and all his sons and daughters were born to him after that and he deserved all that was good" (Gutman, *Beit Israel*, n.p.). For more details on Abraham's family situation, see Assaf, *ibid.*, 83, n. 27.

28. For more details about the brother and sister, see Assaf, *ibid.*, 84, nn. 28–29.

29. Assaf, *ibid.*, n. 30.

30. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 36; Even, *Hoyf*, 20.

31. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 85, nn. 32–34.

32. *Kneset Israel*, 139; Even, *Hoyf*, 20.

33. *Ohalei shem*, 17–18; *Tiferet Israel* 11: 52; *Devarim arevim*, I, 23b; *Kneset Israel*, 118; *Eser orot*, 52. Another version: *Even shtiyah*, 82.

34. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 36. The traveler Bonaventura Mayer also mentions that Israel was married at the age of fourteen (Mayer, *Juden*, 7–9).

35. The promissory note was published in *Tiferet Israel* 37: 38–39.

36. The source for this tradition is a letter sent in 1869 by the zaddik Elimelekh of Grodzisk to Hayyim of Zanz (Wunder, *Grodzisk*, 165–66; cf. *Kneset Israel*, 18; *Likutim yekarim*, 11; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 36). It should be mentioned that such a stereotyped story was also told of many members of Rabbi Israel's family including his great-grandfather the Maggid of Mezhibezh (Migdal oz, 248), his grandfather Abraham the "Angel" (*Shivhei ha-Besht*, 145; *Seder ha-dorot*, 21; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 52, n. 13), and his brother Abraham (*Likutim yekarim*, 11–12).

37. Perl, *Chassidim*, 94. Perl refers to "Rwjemie," which could be a misinterpretation of the name Abraham. At that time Abraham had been dead for three years. We can assume, therefore, that Perl was referring to Israel.

38. *Ibid.* (Perl's handwritten note in the margin of Israel Loebel's *Sefer vikua'h*,

an anti-hasidic polemical tractate, which Perl was preparing for republication; Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, 4<sup>1153</sup>, file 93, n. 3).

39. Gottlober, *Zikbronot*, I, 188.

40. *Ohalei Ya'akov*, II.

41. Censor, *Wunderrabbi*, 683–85. It is worth noting that in the collection of autographs housed in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, under the entry Israel of Ruzhin, the following is mentioned (by the collector Abraham Schwadron): “He almost never wrote. We know only of his signature on letters that were written for him by others. Once when he was in Tarnopol, Joseph Perl exhibited Rabbi Israel’s writings at the window of his school to show his meager skills. Mr. Lipa Schwager from Husyatín-Tel Aviv informed me that he heard from Rabbi Mordekhai Feibish, Rabbi Israel’s son, that the *gabbai* of Rabbi Israel learned, with the rabbi’s permission, to imitate his signature and signed for him.” His meager writing skills are also ridiculed in Israel Aksenfeld’s anti-hasidic work *Dos shternikhil* (The Headband), ch. 13; see Erik, *Aksenfeld*, 132–33.

42. For the emphasis maskilim put on calligraphy, such as in Joseph Perl’s school, see Friedman, *Perl*, 152–60.

43. Perl himself knew this phenomenon but claims that behind it you can find simple ignorance: “For, everyone who knows our group well knows that the tsadikim don’t write anything in their very own handwriting. Rather, every single tsadik has scribes, or at least one scribe. And the tsadikim themselves only sign very important things in their very own handwriting, and things that are not important the scribe himself signs by order of the tsadik. I also know that because of this the scoffers say that the tsadik can’t write.” Perl, *Megaleh temirin*, 20b; id., *Revealer*, 96. Also the zaddik portrayed in Isaac Ber Levinsohn’s satirical work *Emek refa’im* (135–36), whom we can identify with Rabbi Israel, doesn’t know how to write and asks his servant to do it in his stead. He also advises a woman who comes to him that her son will not study “to write even not in Yiddish, only to sign occasionally, like me and my dear sons.” He also prays daily “May I never be able to write and to sign properly.” It is noteworthy that Rabbi Israel is not the only example. There is evidence to suggest that the zaddik Moses of Kobrin did not know how to write either (Yehalel, *Zikbronot*, 46), and that Rabbi Samuel of Salant “could barely sign his name” (Sokolow, *Zikaron*, 183; Ben-Menahem, *Sefer*, 138–40; Agnon, *Takbrikkh*, 187).

44. Rosman, *Lords’ Jews*, 176.

45. *Raza de-urda*, II, 8. Cf. “The holy Rabbi of Ruzhin did not write much. . . . When it was necessary for him to sign, he would do it in large letters. Once he said: when does one study how to write? While he is a boy. But I was never a boy” (*Tiferet Israel* 24: 4); Hitrik, *Reshimot*, I, 224. From a cursory study of his signature, one can easily see that each letter is individually inscribed.

46. For a general review of these phenomena, see, e.g., Sattler, *Children’s Intelligence*, 391–403.

47. According to Job 29:3. This saying is attributed to the zaddik Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta; see references in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 90, n. 54.

48. *Beit Israel*, 8, 19; *Kerem Israel*, 58. Later, Israel’s nickname was either “Srultshe” or “Srulenyu.”

49. Zaddikim used this gesture especially during the “third meal” in order to be inspired by the Holy Spirit; see Maimon, *Secret Society*, 18, 20; Wilensky, *Hasidim u-mitnagdim*, II, 165–66. Perl ridicules this custom: “last *Shabbes Koydesh* our holy rebbe didn’t say any *toyre* at the *shaleshudes*, he just rested his head on his right hand and laid it on the table. This went on for about half an hour and after that he raised his head once suddenly” (Perl, *Megaleh temirin*, 13a; id., *Revealer*, 65).

50. *Beit Israel*, 8.

51. Orthodox writers also share this view, cf. Kliger, *Dorot*, 295. Martin Buber writes: “Modern Western civilization would have called the Rabbi of Rizhyn a brilliant improviser, and weighed in the scale of values of that civilization, he was certainly a genius” (Buber, *Tales*, II, 16). One should not conclude from that, however, that Rabbi Israel was not occupied with the study of Torah. We have a good deal of information describing his Torah studies, as well as his admiration for the teachings of Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, and others. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 92, n. 58.

52. Lerman, *Mikhtevei Eliyahu*, 25; *Beit Israel*, 12.

53. *Beit Israel*, 14. The unwillingness to teach Torah, frequently occurring from an inability, is a well-known phenomenon of other zaddikim, such as the sons of Mordekhai of Chernobyl, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 92, n. 60.

54. *Beit Israel*, *ibid.*

55. Weiss, *Talmud Torah*, 151–69; Scholem, *Devarim be-go*, 325–50; Schatz, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, 310–25.

56. The hasidic writer Israel Berger, attempting to prove how well-versed the zaddikim were in the study of the Torah, relates the following story: Rabbi Meir Eisenstadt of Ungwar told the zaddik Judah Zevi of Rozdol: “If all the hasidic rabbis were geniuses in Torah like you, I would be happy, but I heard of one of the famous (I shall not mention his holy name, because he was a Divine person), to whom thousands of hasidim flocked, and it is said of him that he is not well-versed in his Torah study at all.” The Rozdol rabbi answered: “But nevertheless he is the Greatest of our generation . . . because the level of zaddikim is not dependent on their Torah knowledge” (*Eser orot*, 13). It is almost obvious that he is referring to Rabbi Israel, whom Berger does not include in his list of scholarly zaddikim (*ibid.*, 14).

57. *Beit Israel*, 10; *Ohalei Ya’akov*, 11.

58. Cf. “While the “Seer” saw the *kvitl* coming from Rabbi Zevi Elimelekh of Dinov and from Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, he wondered if they were leaders of a community” (*Nifla’ot ha-Rabbi*, 79).

59. See midrash *Agadat bereshit*, 84, # 1.

60. *Razin de-oraytah*, 36; *Eser orot*, 126. We can assume that Isaac Meir of Zinkov, the son of the zaddik of Apta, was one of the main opponents of the adoration of Rabbi Israel. He considered his father’s submission to a young zaddik to be a great dishonor (*Sipurim hadashim*, 17b–18a). This is reflected in a well-known tradition relating to the famous wedding at Ustila (1814), in which many zaddikim participated (including the seventeen-year-old Israel): “During the wedding dances, it happened that Israel’s belt [*gartel*] fell off . . . and the holy zaddik of Apta picked it up . . . and his son [Isaac Meir] was very upset that such a holy old man as he would perform such a service. So his father replied: in this act it was as if I

bound a Torah Scroll" (*Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 5a). We know of many meetings between the two, and in time there was also a family relationship between the two houses. For more references, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 94, n. 66.

61. *Kneset Israel*, 33.

62. *Ibid.*, 15. On the astonishment this statement provoked among the hasidim, see *Kovets siftei zaddikim*, III, 24. There is a similarity between *grobyan* and another Yiddish term *prostak*. The latter means a vulgar and crude individual. Jacob Frank and Nahman of Bratslav used to define themselves thus (see Rapoport-Albert, *Nahman*, 27, n. 3; Liebes, *Jewish Myth*, 134). The similarity is not in the literal meaning but in the self-image of the zaddik.

63. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 18–19; *Beit Israel*, 12.

64. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 3–4.

65. Weiss, *Talmud Torah*, 151; cf. *id.*, *Studies*, 56–68; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 334.

66. Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, 209.

67. See especially Ettinger, *Hasidic Movement*.

68. Maimon, *Secret Society*, 17.

69. Weiss, *Talmud Torah*; Etkes, *Tahid*, 164–222.

70. See Israel Berger's introduction to *Eser orot*, 13–14.

71. Cf. Ettinger, *Historya*, 66–67.

72. "Orthodoxization" is used here to describe the process of acceptance and appeasement among the traditional groups within Jewish society, which were willing to cooperate despite their differing views and patterns of religious and social organization. This kind of cooperation, which sought to combat the threat of the Haskalah, secularization, and modernization, also had the effect of blurring real differences between hasidim and mitnagdim, as well as creating mutual influences.

73. See Stampfer, *Yishivot*.

74. Menahem Mendel of Kotsk was another famous hasidic leader who wrote almost nothing. The need arose to compile a large collection of teachings and sayings attributed to him (about 1,200 sayings). See Levinger, *Kotsk*.

## Chapter 2

1. Weiss, *Bratslav*, 5–6; Etkes, *Havurah*, 21–23.

2. Even Nahman of Bratslav, about whom Weiss wrote, did not fulfill this pattern completely, since "his accession to the status of zaddik was as if without notice" (*ibid.*, 6). As we shall see, this definition—"without notice"—seems to fit Rabbi Israel as well.

3. A good example is the mystic Rabbi Isaac the *shohet* from Zurawica, a small village near Pshemyshl (d. 1783), who is described in hasidic tales as a concealed zaddik and came to be identified with Hasidism even though he was not; see Assaf and Reiner, *Zurawica*.

4. For example, Abraham Dov of Ovruch, who had no family connection to the oligarchy of zaddikim, would not have been able to reach the high level of a "famous" zaddik in his homeland. Only when he left Volhynia and immigrated to Palestine in 1834 did he become an important hasidic leader. See Assaf, *Ovruch*.

5. The example of the Zevi Hirsch of Rimanov (known as "the Servant") is an

exception to the rule and will be discussed later, but one should bear in mind that in this case, the former zaddik, Menahem Mendel, specifically nominated him as his successor. On his accession to leadership, see Obadiah, *Rimanov*; Steinman, *Hasidut*, 211–83.

6. The term “famous,” as it appears in the hasidic sources, refers to a zaddik who belongs to the small group of hasidic leaders, whose name is recognized everywhere, and whose attainment of the highest level of worship of God is well known by all his fellow zaddikim.

7. See Grossman, *Yerusha*, 189–220.

8. See Stampfer, *Inheritance of the Rabbinate*, 35–57.

9. I rely here on Max Weber’s discussion and conclusions regarding charisma; see Weber, *Charisma*. Weber’s theory and its implementation have been treated in a wide perspective; see the bibliography listed in Reinharz, *Charisma*, 275–77. On charisma in Hasidism, see the bibliography in Elior, *Temurah*, 31–33.

10. One of the first inheritance struggles in Hasidism between kin and disciple of the late zaddik was in Habad, after the death of the founder Shneur Zalman (1812). The controversy between those who claimed the throne, the son Dov Ber, and the disciple Aaron of Starosielce, combined personal and ideological polemics. Obviously, this struggle was decided in favor of genetic precedence. See Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite*, 100–138.

11. Examples are the conflict over the throne of Mordekhai of Chernobyl and the struggle between his son Jacob Israel of Hornostopol and his other brothers (see Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 85–97) and the conflict between the hasidim of Noah Naphthali of Kobrin and the hasidim of Abraham of Slonim over the throne of the late zaddik Moses of Kobrin (see Kotik, *Zikhronot*, I, 217–18).

12. This process is typical not only of Hasidism in the southern parts of the Jewish Pale of Settlement but of Hasidism in Lithuania and Byelorussia (such as Habad, Karlin, and its offshoots) as well, and thereafter also of Hasidism in Poland. Regarding Rabbi Israel’s family, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 449–66.

13. Perl, *Chassidim*, 93–94. In his satiric work, Perl quotes an apparently hasidic teaching regarding the biblical verse “The sons of God saw that the daughters of the land were pleasing and they took for themselves whomever they chose” (Gen. 6:2): “The sons of God are the sons of the zaddikim, who are called ‘God,’ and the daughters of the land are the daughters of the common people” (*Megaleh temirin*, 42b; *Revealer*, 194). The most absurd appearance of this phenomenon was in the hasidic school of Karlin when a five-year-old *yenuka* stood at the head of the community. See Yehalel, *Yenuka*; Rabinowitsch, *Lithuanian Hasidism*, 100–106; Ben-Ezra, *Yenuka*.

14. *No’am Elimelekh*, 5a (Nigal, 26).

15. *Ibid.*, 63b–64a (Nigal, 340); cf. *ibid.*, 69a (Nigal, 370), and more. One can find similar expressions in the writings of other zaddikim as well; cf. Nigal, *Mehkarim*, I, 292–93.

16. Shmuel Ettinger has pointed out the problem of the sons of zaddikim in the early days of Hasidism (*id.*, *Hasidic Movement*, 239–40), but it is still not clear to whom Rabbi Elimelekh was referring in his polemic. Ettinger goes too far in deducing from this source that among the Maggid’s disciples—in contrast to the

Besht's progeny—the intellectual-charismatic pattern of transferring leadership from a teacher to his best student was common. However, Ettinger himself notes the complexity of this phenomenon: while the Besht had almost no genetic descendants, and his lineage ended with his daughter's children, the Maggid's progeny (with the exception of Abraham the “Angel”) created a genetic dynasty that eventually split up into many courts and is still in existence today. Ettinger called this development, which does not fit his theory, “historical irony.” For a discussion of some of the ideological-social issues regarding the principle of genetic heritage in Hasidism, see Rapoport-Albert, *Hasidism after 1772*, 10ff.

17. *Shut divrei Hayyim*, II, Hoshen Mishpat, # 32; cf. Pickarz, *Polin*, 193–95.

18. *Devash ha-sadeh*, 10.

19. *Sabab kadishin*, I, 85.

20. *Ohel Yitzhak*, 99.

21. *Ohev Israel*, 215–16; cf. Israel of Ruzhin's saying: “And therefore I ordered all my people not to ascend further than the level [which is appropriate for them], in order that one will not fall, heaven forbid, either if he is a hasid or a repentant” (*Irin kadishin*, II).

22. *Kneset Israel*, 124; cf. Shochat, *Zaddik*, 303–6.

23. Cf. *Sibot Hayyim*, 23. It was also customary among other zaddikim to mention their own pedigree, cf. *Ohel ha-Rabbi: or ha-nifla'ot*, 23.

24. For the letter of invitation to this wedding, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 286, # 3. An interesting account of Rabbi Israel's visit to Pinsk describes how he first visited the learned local head of the rabbinical court, Aaron of Krotingen, to hear some Torah teachings from him. Rabbi Israel's respectful manners, “according to the law of the pupil who must pay tribute to his teacher,” were witnessed by thousands of hasidim (Singer, *Zikaron*, 133).

25. *Beit Israel*, 16, 30–31; *Eser Orot*, 140; *Nahalat Zevi*, I, 6. On Abraham Jacob and Miriam, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 455–57. Aaron of Karlin (d. 1872) was highly influenced by the regal ways of the Ruzhin court, see Assaf, *ibid.*, III, n. 24.

26. *Beit Israel*, 18; *Sefer ha-yahas*, 174–75. On Leah and her husband, see Assaf, *ibid.*, 464–65.

27. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 30–31 (for more references, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 58, n. 24).

28. The second *tena'im* were signed under much more modest circumstances, obviously to avoid “bad luck” but also because the groom, born in 1844, was one year old, and the bride was only two or three. The actual wedding took place in 1858. See Assaf, *ibid.*, 304; Marcus, *Hasidut*, 204, 242; *Tiferet Israel* 22: 17.

29. Horodezky, *Zikhronot*, 16.

30. See, e.g., Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 140–41 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 477); *Prince of the Chassidim*.

31. *Kol me-beikhal*, 2–3.

32. *Irin kadishin*, 47–48. The origin of this parable is medieval, see Pickarz, *Bratslav*, 226–27.

33. Cf. *Irin kadishin*, 127; *Kneset Israel*, 112.

34. *Irin kadishin*, 93.

35. *Beit Israel*, 18. Gitl, Israel's daughter, told her son that during the Maggid's time, “one person of our family came with a record of the lineage of our family up

to King David. He wanted my great-grandfather the Maggid to sign it for the generations to come. But he refused and said: until now we had need of a record of lineage, but from now onward, our origin and source will be known from my sons and the sons of my sons" (*Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 59).

36. *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 59; cf. Shmeruk, *Polin*, 132–39. For the Besht, as Chone Shmeruk and other scholars have noted, the “writings” symbolized a source for authority and legitimization, showing that his own authority had been handed down to him from the mythical Adam *ba'al shem*. Mythical descent from the biblical kings of Israel is also the Maggid’s source of authority, but Rabbi Israel doesn’t need it.

37. For some manifestations of the degeneracy and vulgarity with regard to the institution of zaddik in Poland during the second half of the nineteenth century, see Piekarz, *Polin*, 157–202.

38. See Assaf, *Ovruch*.

39. See Harif, *Hasidut*. The Bahur’s conflict with Isaac Meir of Zinkov is further discussed in Chapter 9, II.

40. *Kerem Israel*, 94.

41. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 193; cf. Ansky, *Hurban*. IV, 380; id., *Mikhtavim*, 211.

42. Such as one of the grandchildren of Aryeh Leib of Shpolá, a “totally criminal” individual who took control of the graveyard of his famous grandfather and collected money from naïve hasidim, who even gave him *kvitlekh* to read. See Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 111–12; Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 287, # 5.

### Chapter 3

1. *Kneset Israel*, 139–40.

2. *Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 49a.

3. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 38–39.

4. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 102.

5. Statistical data as to the exact number of visitors to the various hasidic courts are few. About three thousand hasidim evidently visited the court of Meir of Premyslan in 1839 (Bonar and M’Cheyne, *Mission*, 462); the traveler Bonaventura Mayer reported a thousand people at the court of Ruzhin in 1826 (Mayer, *Juden*, 7–9); and more than three thousand people are said to have come to the court of Sadgora for Yom Kippur in 1844 (*Tiferet Israel* 14: 39–40). Although these figures may be a bit exaggerated, they are probably not far from the truth.

6. On this institution of “secondary zaddik,” see Assaf, *Ovruch*, 224–30; id., *Bychawa*, 295–97. Habad Hasidism also established specific institutions, namely the *bozer* (repeater) and the *mashpi’a* (influencer), in order to overcome the broad geographical scattering of its followers. These were prominent disciples of the zaddik, who would be sent on his behalf to distant settlements in order to bring his teachings to those hasidim who could not see the zaddik in person.

7. *Eretz ha-Hayyim*, 82; Margaliot, *Tiferet adam*, 11. Zaddikim used to wear white clothes on the Sabbath and festivals; see Maimon, *Secret Society*, 20; Wilensky, *Hasidim u-mitnagdim*, I, 37, 47–48.

8. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 156.

9. Rubinstein, *Mahut*, 130–31; Perl, *Chassidim*, 46.

10. Names of those hasidic leaders who were in contact with Israel, along with references, are listed in *Ner Israel*, IV. It is however easier to list the names of those zaddikim who didn't visit his court, since they were the minority.

11. The town acquired its name from a noble family called Ruzhinsky, who purchased it in the sixteenth century. It seems that Jews settled there only from the eighteenth century. In the 1764 census, a minimal number of Jews, 230 to be exact, were counted there. For more references on the town, see *Słownik*, X, 47–50; *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, IV, 481; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 124, n. 12.

12. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 64; *Tiferet Israel* 5: 48; *Ateret tiferet*, 8; Ya'akov, *Ruzhin*, 80; Rabinowicz, *Hasidism*, 15.

13. Gelber, *Dokumente*, 118–21; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 487.

14. Cf. Dubnow, *Hasidut*, 215, 316; id., *Russia*, II, 120.

15. *Zekher zaddikim*, 34a. This book was published by Samuel Posnański in Warsaw 1920, but this testimony is missing and preserved only in the manuscript.

16. Gottlober, *Zikhronot*, I, 189–90.

17. The ma'amad tax is discussed in detail in Chapter 13.

18. Israel's letter to the community of Murachawa was published in *Kovets siftei zaddikim*, VI, 29–32. The letter addressed to the seven communities was published in *Tiferet Israel* 35: 34 (and is discussed in Chapter 13). For his letters to Konstantin and Wolodarka, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 285, # 1–2.

19. Evidence of Israel's enrollment in the guild includes his own application to ensure a passport to Bessarabia; his wife's application to enroll her sons in the merchants' guild; the sons' joint application to enter Russia. See Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 141–42, 144–46 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 478–81). Perl also notes that Israel had enrolled in the first [*sic*] merchants' guild and claims that he obtained membership through fraud, by which he obviously means that the zaddik did not function as a merchant. See Mahler, *Haskalah*, 432 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 482).

20. The merchants of the first and second guilds generally enjoyed the right of unrestricted travel across all of Russia, while Jews were permitted to travel only within the Pale, and sometimes, under special limited passports, to the eastern provinces and big cities (Moscow and Saint Petersburg). If necessary, these merchants were interrogated in a special court under favorable conditions. Israel of Ruzhin exploited this to his benefit when he was accused in the Ushits case (see Chapter 4). Eligibility for membership in the first guild was reserved for those who had more than ten thousand rubles in capital; for the second guild, more than a thousand rubles was needed; for the third, more than five hundred rubles. See Ettinger, *Polin*, 217–33; Pipes, *Catherine*, 8; cf. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 144.

21. On the real estate Israel owned in Ruzhin, see Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 145–46 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 480).

22. See *Megila afa*, 23; Gottlober, *Zikhronot*, I, 156, 205; II, 108. Cf. Shochat, *Kahal*, 153, n. 22.

23. Shneur Zalman of Lyady enrolled in the third guild (*Kerem Habad*, IV, 42), as did his grandson, Menahem Mendel Schneersohn (known as the Tsemah tsedek). It was reported that despite his status, the latter was not active as a mer-



chant (Ginsburg, *Historishe verk*, I, 70; id., *Ktavim*, 61). It is noteworthy that the number of merchants in the first and second guilds was very small, and that most of them were Jews; see Mahler, *Divrei*, V, 27–29; Bartal, *Mekorot*, 19; Stanislawski, *Nicholas*, 166–67.

24. Ettinger, *Polin*, 222.

25. Orenstein, *Orot me-ofel*, 195.

26. Assaf, *Ovruch*, 227.

27. Short sidecurls were especially popular among Ruzhin hasidim, obviously because the Rabbi himself was beardless. Many traditions recall the elegant dress of Israel's followers, as well as his personal objection to long sidecurls. This contradicts the image of the "dirty and neglected hasid" usually promoted by the maskilim. Cf. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 129–30, n. 37.

28. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 109–11.

29. See, e.g., Rubinstein, *Mahut*, 129–30; Werses, *Megamot*, 103–7.

30. We do not know when the well-known phenomenon of separate hasidic minyanim, where each sect has its own shtibl, began. It is quite clear that for a long time, especially in villages and small towns, hasidim from a variety of branches used to pray together in one hasidic prayer house. Separate prayer houses for the Ruzhin hasidim were instituted during the time of Rabbi Israel. This trend intensified during his sons' time and was considered by the hasidim themselves an efficient tool for the expansion of their community; see Even, *Hoyf*, 109–10; id., *Mahloket*, 12. On the Ruzhin kloiz in Buchach, and its offshoots after Israel's death, see Agnon, *Guest*, 194–98.

31. He would reside there at times for as long as three months. On Nehemiah's life and his relationship with Rabbi Israel, see Assaf, *Bychawa*.

32. An interesting expression of the intimacy among the famous zaddikim is found in the letter sent ca. 1806 by the "Seer" of Lublin to Levi Isaac of Berdichev: "When I heard that the famous zaddik, Our Master Rabbi Baruch [of Mezhibozh] is anxious to see me, I told to myself: is it possible that I shall not welcome him . . . because I am familiar with all the other zaddikim. He is the only one I do not know" (*Tseror ha-Hayyin*, 88; Hillman, *Igrot*, 187). This phenomenon is significant from the standpoint of the social history of Hasidism: The very fact that most of the nineteenth-century zaddikim knew each other personally, or at least through correspondence or emissaries, contributed to the consolidation of the political-social ethos of hasidic leadership, to their self-confidence and sense of unity, and to their awareness of their influence and power.

33. Wunder, *Grodzisk*, 165–67.

34. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, preface, i (n.p.).

35. *Eser tsahsahot*, 95. Cf. *Ohel Naphtali*, 26; *Kerem Israel*, 71; *Devarim arevim*, II, 46a.

36. *Kneset Israel*, 11; *Kerem Habad*, II, 19–20, 89.

37. For some examples, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 134, nn. 51–52.

38. *Ohalei shem*, 70–71.

39. *Beit Israel*, 31; *Da'at zkenim*, 21; *Ohalei Ya'akov*, 245, 289; 30; *Eser tsahsahot*, 77–78; *Kitvei zaddikim*, 25. Most Strelisk hasidim became followers of Rabbi Uri's prominent disciple Judah Zevi of Stratyn (d. 1844). The Stratyn branch was con-

sidered to be “a reaction and protest against [the] Ruzhin court” (Raphael, *Hasidut*, 246).

40. *Eretz ha-Hayyim*, 36. It is not clear whether Rabbi Uri ever met Rabbi Israel, but he definitely found his way of worship of interest. See, e.g., *Kerem Israel*, 62.

41. *Likutim yekarim*, 40.

42. Ibid.; cf. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 21–22; Even, *Hoyf*, 52; *Sipurei Slonim*, 231. We can assume that those “fine hasidim” who came to the Ruzhin court after their rebbe’s death but could not easily adapt themselves to the customs of their new rebbe (*Sipurim hadashim*, 25b–26a) were also hasidim of Strelisk.

43. *Beit Israel*, 31.

44. *Tiferet Israel* 12: 24; Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 298, # 25. Cf. Orenstein, *Ha-tsofeh*, 34b (Orenstein’s father was one of these hasidim).

45. From ms. Leningrad 93, comprising most of Rabbi Nathan’s letters included in *Alim li-terufa*. In most editions, this letter is printed as # 188, but the above passage was omitted for unknown reasons.

46. *Alim li-terufa*, 82b. Cf. Weiss, *Bratslav*, 71–72; Rapoport-Albert, *Hasidism after 1772*, 137; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 66.

47. On Mayer, see Chapter 5 and *Biographisches lexicon*, XVIII, 90.

48. I.e., At the time of this book’s publication, namely, 1842.

49. Field Marshal Peter Wittgenstein (d. 1842 or 1843) took command of the Russian Second Army in Ukraine in 1818 (*Wielka encyklopedia*, XII, 522; *Soviet Encyclopedia*, V, 522); he probably became acquainted with Rabbi Israel sometime afterward.

50. Additional evidence confirms Rabbi Israel’s small appetite. It is noteworthy that other contemporary zaddikim enjoyed a similar reputation. This certainly reflects a hagiographic pattern aimed at denying the possibility that such pious persons had any sensual enjoyment of their food. At the same time, it attempts to explain the contradiction between the extreme materialism of the zaddikim and their “appropriate” pious image. Maskilim were never convinced and claimed that the zaddikim were pretending not to eat while, in truth, they ate well when no one was watching them. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 137–38, n. 68.

51. I.e., 1834; but the correct timing is “six years ago,” i.e., 1836.

52. Mayer, *Juden*, 7–9.

53. Rabbi Israel’s habit of devoting many hours to his adherents was indeed unusual and provoked much wonder. According to a late, but interesting, hasidic tradition, he was asked once why “he wastes so much time for nothing, with conversations and reception of his intimates. With a schedule like that we could also become a rebbe.” He replied: “Every day when I wake up in the morning and drink coffee, I concentrate all my attention as if I were eating and sitting in the sukkah; later, while I pray, my prayer is like *malkhuyot*, *zikbronot*, and *shofarot* [a special prayer recited on Rosh Hashanah]; later, while I eat, my meal is like the feast on the eve of Yom Kippur. If you too can be intent like that—you would also be called rebbe” (*Migdol yeshu’ot*, 48).

54. In a letter sent by Rabbi Israel in 1827 to the community of Wolodarka, he informs the two quarreling parties that he is sending a mediator on his behalf

(Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 285, # 2). On the zaddik as a substitute for the declining authority of the kahal, see Shmeruk, *Hakhirot*, 182–92. From documents regarding the arrest of Shneur Zalman of Lyady, one is also made aware of his status as an arbiter and mediator in legal conflicts (*Kerem Habad*, IV, 51, 94).

55. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 54, adapted and purposely distorted the account by Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 103, who wrote: “He slept only three hours . . . and the rest of his time is *not* devoted to Torah and worship but to various concerns of his many hasidim.”

56. David Moses told his son to buy a “working tool, such as a saw, and to exercise himself every day in movement and labor. Indeed, my father of Ruzhin . . . had the same tool, with which he would exercise his hands and practice every day” (*Divrei David*, 46). According to another noteworthy hasidic tradition, when Israel fled Russia he took some mason’s tools in his bag (*Even shtiyah*, 84).

57. Branicki, *Brama pokuty*, ii. See Introduction for the full source.

58. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 144 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 479). According to a hasidic tradition, Rabbi Israel was red-headed (*Be’er Yitzhak*, 19).

59. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 26b; *Kneset Israel*, III.

60. *She’erit Israel*, 147. It is hard to believe that the witness was able to see Rabbi Israel in Ruzhin. He died in 1938 when he was ninety-one years old (*ibid.*, 9), so he must have been born around 1847.

61. Heschel, *Dokumentn*, 134–35. Israel’s involvement in intercessory attempts to abolish the “clothing decree” is discussed in Chapter 9.

62. Bonar and M’Cheyne, *Mission*, 402. This testimony confuses two different cases: the accusations raised by maskilim that zaddikim were involved in the transfer of money out of the country and the imprisonment of Rabbi Israel in connection with the assassination of two informers (discussed in Chapter 4).

63. For additional sources on the “Messiah’s room,” see Chapter 12.

64. *Beit Israel*, 34–35.

65. Goldman, *Dagestan*, 13. Cf. Altshuler, *Kavkaz*, 321, 323; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 142, n. 83.

66. This is, probably, how the Karaite Sultansky of Crimea heard of Rabbi Israel, see above, n. 15.

67. Cf. “His hasidim whispered in each other’s ears that the zaddik rebbe Israel himself will be the Messiah” (Orenstein, *Ha-tsofeh*, 12b).

68. The simple opening up or leafing through this book was considered a mystical practice, cf. *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 85.

69. His son David Moses testified to the golden skullcap he wore; see *Divrei David*, 37.

70. Many sources report his fondness for pipe smoking, see, e.g., *Shalsholet*, 5; *Sipurei nifla’ot*, 133; *Raza de-uvdah*, II, 46. Many zaddikim smoked pipes, and hasidim attributed holy intentions to this custom.

71. In the original, Rubin used the seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *zayin*, followed by three dots, an abbreviation for *zanav*, meaning not only “tail” but also both “stupid” and “penis.” See Assaf and Bartal, *Zanav*.

72. *Reshumot*, I, 466–70; Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 109–13.

73. Bonar and M'Cheyne, *Mission*, 462. For more on Rabbi Meir and his relationship with Rabbi Israel, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 145, n. 92.

74. He was not the only zaddik who did not “say Torah.” The list includes Baruch of Mezhibozh, Moses Zevi of Savran, and some of the Twersky dynasty of Chernobyl, who were also reported to behave similarly. This was probably a typical pattern of the “regal” zaddikim.

75. “[Rabbi Israel] spoke with a Lithuanian accent and he spoke in a whisper,” it is reported (*Meir enei ha-golah*, I, 117).

76. We have much evidence for this. “The greater one is, the more private and concealed his worship and prayers,” Rabbi Israel is moreover reported to have said (*Toldot Yosef*, 22).

77. As Mahler phrases it in his *Divrei*, VI, 21.

78. *Kvod ha-Torah*, portion *vayetse* (n.p.).

79. On the concept of “holy fraud” by tales, see Pickarz, *Bratslav*, 102–4, 121; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 72, n. 62. For detailed research on Rabbi Israel’s stories, see Goldberg, *Sipur*.

80. *Irin kadishin*, 106; *Razin de-oraytah*, 19b; *Yeshu’ot Israel*, II, 3.

81. Following is an interesting expression of Rabbi Israel’s on this matter: “Once, in the morning prior to the prayers, he proceeded to tell his tales and stories in praise of zaddikim and saints, till the time of prayer grew very late. Then he stopped and said: lo, the time of prayer has passed and I have not yet prayed. Anyway, is there any difference between ‘Give praise, O servants of the Lord’ and ‘Praise the name of the Lord’ [Pss. 113:1]? . . . [they are] equal” (*Kneset Israel*, 32). The first part of the verse was interpreted by Israel as a command to speak in praise of the righteous (“servants of the Lord”), and hence, from the religious point of view, stories are equal—and even preferable (see the version in *Ohel Yitzhak*, 103)—to prayer (“name of the Lord”). For another example of how a story was used by Israel to explain his digression from the halakhic norm regarding the prayer time, see *Kneset Israel*, 19.

82. *Sifran shel zaddikim*, 14.

83. *Kneset Israel*, 11; *Beit ha-yayin*, 11b.

84. On the spread of this concept in Hasidism, see Pickarz, *Polin*, 122–53.

85. *Kneset Israel*, 32–33. *Deitshen* usually means maskilim, who dress in Western clothes. Elsewhere, Rabbi Israel evidently expressed different ideas about the relationship between the zaddik and his hasidim (cf., e.g., Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 27). There is no sense in trying to harmonize all these traditions, because they are typical of Israel’s unsystematic way of thinking.

86. *Toldat adam*, 77. It is reported that Joseph of Radvill, who used to torment himself in a cold mikveh, went to Rabbi Israel, and the latter told him: “If you have a high and great soul, you should keep up your body as well, because there is no soul without body. . . . I order you to minimize your penance and fasts and keep your body healthy” (*Sharsheret zahav*, 69).

87. I discuss the problem of “hasidic geography” in Assaf, *Bychawa*; id., *Geografya*.

88. The most famous case is Baruch of Mezhibozh’s rage against Shneur

Zalman of Lyady who “dared” to invade his region for purposes of fundraising, see Gottlober, *Zikhlronot*, I, 166–72; Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 14–15; Haran, *Igrot*. Later hasidic “border conflicts” are described in Assaf, *Ma'avak*.

89. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 135.

90. There is little hard evidence attesting to the tension, and what exists is late. Rabbi Mordekhai apparently went insane about ten years before he died in 1837 (Tzederbaum, *Dubim*, 169), but his six sons, who were aggressively active as zaddikim in their father's lifetime, were too young to “threaten” Israel. Nevertheless some echoes of the tension between the two dynasties, even during the Ruzhin period, have been preserved, see Even, *Hoyf*, 137–39; Mekler, *Hoyf*, I, 173–79; Assaf, *Ovruch*, 235–37. For its reflection in fiction, see Schneersohn, *Gravitser*, 106, 131, 156, 169–70.

91. See Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 136–38; Gottlober, *Zikhlronot*, I, 189–90, 271–8. On his struggle against Bratslav hasidim, see Assaf, *Ma'avak*, 466–67, n. 3. For a hasidic perspective, see *Kerem ha-hasidut*, III, 199–234.

92. See further Chapter 9 and Assaf, *Ovruch*, 251, 258. It should be mentioned that both were also distant relatives (Moshe Zevi's brother, the zaddik Aryeh Leib of Bendery, married Rabbi Israel's aunt).

93. Even, *Hoyf*, 22–23, 84; Wunder, *Grodzisk*, 166.

94. On their encounters and the tensions which also reached the hasidim, see *Divrei David*, 25–27, 38, 42; *Beit Israel*, 156; Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 20–21; *Siftei kodesh*, 90; Margaliot, *Tiferet adam*, 35–36; *Kitvei reb Yoshe*, 234–35, 268–69; *Sipurai Slonim*, 237; *Likutei shoshanim*, 38. One episode is worth noting, although it is presented by the naïve hasidic writer as “controversy for the sake of heaven” (Bodek, *Sipurim*, 89): when Rabbi Israel once saw Moshe Zevi riding in his carriage, he scornfully said that “from his riding it is clear that he is a *na'ar* [Hebrew youth].” In Yiddish, however, *nar* means fool.

95. Ish-Naomi, *Tehom*, 169–70.

96. *Kneset Israel*, 117.

97. Braver, *Zevi la-zaddik*, 93; Braver, *Zikhlronot*, 17.

98. For references on Rapoport (ca. 1775–1855), see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 153, n. 122.

99. Braver, *Galicia*, 205. Rapoport married the daughter of the well-known wine merchant and memoirist Dov Birkenthal of Bolechow; they are both classified by Braver as “proto-maskilim.”

100. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 153, n. 124.

101. *Kneset Israel*, 10; *Ma'aseh Nehemiah*, 37. On his physician's orders, Israel also went to Odessa to bathe in the healing waters of the Black Sea (*Kneset Israel*, 13); cf. Eilboim, *Eretz ha-zevi*, 113.

102. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 16.

103. Marcus, *Hasidut*, 218, 223.

104. Based on Perl's memorandum to the Galician authorities. Perl claimed that Rabbi Israel obtained his passport to enter Galicia because of his enrollment in the merchant's guild and that he had engaged in illegal activities while in Lemberg. On June 15, 1835, the local police, aware of his activity, ordered Israel to leave town within three days. See Mahler, *Enlightenment*, 133, 367 n. 35; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 482.

On this visit, see also Bonar and M'Cheyne, *Mission*, 462, and Shadal's letter discussed later in this chapter. We also have a letter that Israel wrote on June 7 from Lemberg, where he came "to seek the advice of physicians" (Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 289, # 10).

105. He appreciated very few zaddikim, among them Uri of Strelisk and Zevi Hirsch of Zhidachov, and even met with them. On the attitude of the Ornstein rabbis to Hasidism and Haskalah, see Balaban, *Ornstein*, 30–32; Bernfeld, *Zikhronot*, 172–74; Wunder, *Galicia*, I, 64–72.

106. Gottlober, who knew Reuben personally from their common hometown Konstantin Yashan, also claimed that Reuben "just pretended to be a hasid . . . and therefore he subjected himself to the rabbi of Ruzhin who could not reach his ankles" (*Zikhronot*, I, 232). For more on Rabbi Reuben (d. 1835), see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 154, nn. 131–32.

107. *Beit Israel*, 13; *Ohalei Ya'akov*, 12–13.

108. Bernfeld, *Zikhronot*, 173; Geshuri, *Lvov*, 482–83.

109. *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 81–82. The head of the local police saw it differently, and according to his report, Ornstein warmly welcomed Israel and treated him with great respect; see Mahler, *Enlightenment*, 102.

110. It is clearly stated in the official police report; see Mahler, *ibid.*, 133; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 486; cf. Bernfeld, *Zikhronot*, 173.

111. *Bekha yevarekh Israel*, preface; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 50–51.

112. *Kneset Israel*, 10–11; cf. the adaptations in Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 117; Buber, *Tales*, II, 54–55; Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 31; Zevin, *Hasidim*, II, 314; Barash, *Kitzei*, 305–6 ("Ahava zara"). The same saying (with slight alterations) exists in Habad tradition about Menahem Mendel of Lubavitch ("Tsemah tsedek"); see *Kerem Habad*, II, 19.

113. Buber, *Anshei shem*, III–12, 151.

114. The numerical value of the Hebrew letter *reish* is 200, which was commonly used as an abbreviation of the title rabbi.

115. Bernfeld, *Zikhronot*, 173–74. Bernfeld, an anti-hasid by nature, stressed that he was not responsible for the authenticity of the story, since he was not an expert in the history of Hasidism. However, the same story is also preserved in both maskilic and hasidic sources, such as Gottlober, *Mikhtav*, 855; *Kneset Israel*, 20–21; *Devarim arevim*, II, 49; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 99–100.

116. The postponement was granted on the basis of documents signed by Rapoport, Israel's physician, who confirmed his illness (Mahler, *Enlightenment*, 133; *id.*, *Haskalah*, 445–47; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 486).

117. Rubinstein, *Mahut*, 266–67.

118. This work, written in 1823, was first published in 1868, after Ribal's death. It was, however, known to maskilim from numerous manuscript copies long before the author's demise. See Nathanson, *Zikhronot*, 27–28; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 158, n. 142.

119. For example, "because they know me as a complete ignoramus, doing bad deeds and originating from a contemptible family. In my youth I was also a servant and sometimes I was a coachman" (Levinsohn, *Emek refa'im*, 121).

120. For example, his negative attitude to medicine did not prevent him from

seeking the advice of physicians when it was a personal necessity (ibid., 125, 135); cf. Zevi Hirsch's epistle to his followers in Munkatsh during the 1831 epidemic (*Eser kedushot*, 38–40).

121. The zaddik who sent his visitors to buy olive oil from his daughter (ibid., 135) probably refers to Israel the Maggid of Kozhenits who was accused of the same misdeed (Perl, *Chassidim*, 106). On the possible identification of Mordekhai of Kremenets, see Ettinger, *Polin*, 354–55, n. 135.

122. Levinsohn, *Emek refa'im*, 135–36.

123. Ibid., 138–39. All the references to Rabbi Israel are included in the second part of the work. Interestingly, in the ms. of *Emek refa'im*, which survives from Joseph Perl's library and is dated to 1823 (Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, Heb. 8° 2557), the initial "S" is consistently used in place of the name of the zaddik. The "S" probably refers to Srulsthe (of Ruzhin).

124. This is a figurative number, based on a biblical verse. See 1 Kings 1:5.

125. *Kerem hemed* 2 (1836): 149–51.

126. On this zaddik, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 161, n. 152.

127. Weinryb, *Ribal*, 204. Cf. Gottlober, *Zikhronot*, II, 167–68. In fact, Perl's *Megaleh temirin*, the most brilliant anti-hasidic satire, also exposes the unity of the hasidic camp, which became even stronger in the face of threats to its existence.

128. Levinsohn, *Emek refa'im*, 118.

129. Nathanson, *Zikhronot*, 28.

## Chapter 4

1. The document was published in *Evreiskaia starina* 4 (1911): 590; see also Assaf, *Malkhut*, 467. All Russian dates in this chapter are according to the Julian (Old Style) calendar, which in the nineteenth century was twelve days behind the Gregorian.

2. Ginsburg, *Ushits*, 180–81.

3. *Ha-shahar* 5 (1874): 393–404; the publisher's note: ibid., 393–4. For more about this affair, which has many features of similarity to the Ushits affair, see Klausner, *Sifrut*, V, 228–34; Shochat, *Kahal*, 211–12.

4. On Binyaminke and other Jewish informers during the reign of Czar Nicholas I, see Ginsburg, *Historische verk*, I, 238–65 (*Ktavim*, 152–78). See also Dubnow, *History*, V, 86–187; id., *Russia*, II, 84–87; Ginsburg, *Slavuta*; Shochat, *Kahal*, 153.

5. In Nicholas's private chancery, there were five departments dealing with issues he wanted to attend to personally. Count Alexander Benkendorf managed the Third Department. It was closed in August 1880 during the reign of Alexander II. See Monas, *Third Section*; Squire, *Third Department*.

6. For example, on the basis of informers' false reports, Rabbi David Luria of Bykhov Yashan was imprisoned for four months in the same years. See Ginsburg, *Historische verk*, I, 35–47 (id., *Ktavim*, 28–39).

7. Lipschitz, *Dor*, 98.

8. Kotik, *Zikhronot*, I, 127.

9. See Ginsburg, *Ushits*, 178–79; Assaf, *Onashin*, 19–20 and index, s.v. *malshinim*; Baer, *Spain*, I, 322–25; Elon, *Jewish Law*, II, 801–3.

10. *Mayse* in Yiddish means “deed.” Nova Ushytsia was the Russian name of the former Polish town Letniowce, thus the Ushits case is sometimes called the *Letniowce mayse*. See Dubnow, *Self-Judgment*; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 475.

11. The case was first mentioned in 1876 by Hilberg, *Rabbi*, 473, and also in hasidic sources, in 1905, in *Devarim arevim*, II, 155b–59b, and in 1907 in Heilman, *Beit Israel*, and Even, *Hoyf*, 25–31; however, all these sources are fragmented and unreliable. Comprehensive and critical depictions, based on Russian documents, are given in Ginsburg, *Ushits*. For short accounts of the case, see Dubnow, *History*, V, 186; id., *Russia*, II, 84–85; Levin, *Kantonistn*, 128–34; Tsherikover, *Mahapekhal*, 114; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 119–28; Levitats, *Community*, I, 216–17; Stanislawski, *Nicholas*, 129–30.

12. The verdict of the military court was published in 1908 in Dubnow, *Self-Judgment*. Gessen also described the case in short, based on Dubnow’s publication (Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 139ff. ; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 467–76). Ginsburg, *Ushits*, used some new documents from the Third Department’s archive in addition to the verdict, but did not publish them; instead, he made his reconstruction based on a compilation of the sources. Mahler published Perl’s memorandum from the archive of the Galician governor in Lemberg, regarding the money appeal in Galicia for Rabbi Israel, in which he reported that the real murderers were being hidden among hasidim in Galicia. Mahler also published some of the Galician authorities’ correspondence regarding this case (id., *Enlightenment*, 129–34; id., *Haskalah*, 432–51; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 481–86).

13. Grigory Lashkarov was appointed governor-general of Kiev province at the beginning of 1833, and to the civilian governorship of Podolia province in October of the same year. After a year’s hiatus, he resumed the governorship of Podolia from 1835 to 1839. In 1838, he received a copy of Perl’s memorandum (Mahler, *Haskalah*, 432–51; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 485). In *Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 4–6, Lashkarov is mentioned as the main figure in charge of Israel’s imprisonment and the one who had decided to exile him and his family from the Pale.

14. Count Alexander Dimitri Guriev (1786–1865) was governor-general of the southwestern region between 1835 and 1837.

15. According to Heilman, *Beit Israel*, 6–7, the entire case broke because of the informers’ wives, who complained to the governor in Kamenets about their husbands’ disappearance. He referred them to Governor-General Dimitri Gabrilovich Bibikov. However, the governor-general was then Guriev and not Bibikov. The hasidic sources were never strict in recounting the names of the Russian governors involved in this case or in its chronology.

16. None of the various accounts of the events are reliable. Hilberg, *Rabbi*, 473, recounts that when visiting his followers in nearby towns, Rabbi Israel always went to the local bathhouse, and that a heretic approached him there one day and aggressively attacked Hasidism. Shocked by the man’s audacity, the zaddik ordered him thrown into the boiling water, which was immediately done. The heretic was then pushed with pitchforks into the furnace until he was cremated. Rabbi Israel, who



witnessed the murder, returned to Ruzhin the same day. According to another tradition, recounted by Even (*Hoyf*, 26), the informer killed himself in the bathhouse by mistakenly dousing himself with boiling water instead of cold. This naïve story was transformed into a tale of malice in contemporary hasidic historiography, which blamed the affair on the “dark powers of the maskilim”; see *Ha-mahane ha-haredi*, Sukkot 5752 (1991), 34–35. Based on rumor, rather than fact, the maskil Moses Orenstein, who confuses this case with the imprisonment of the Shapira brothers (see n. 27 below), describes these informers as young merchant maskilim and says that one of them was hanged in the Slavuta study house and the other was burned in the bathhouse at Ruzhin (Orenstein, *Ha-tsofeh*, 12–13).

17. New documents regarding Kenigsberg’s informant activity against Rabbi Israel (from August 1838) were recently published in *Olam ha-hasidut* 61 (Heshvan 5760 [1999]): 42 (no archival reference given).

18. Rabbi Michel (1785–1856) was also known as Jehiel Michel of Korima. For more references on his involvement in the Ushits case, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 170, n. 19.

19. Hilberg, *Rabbi*, 474, brings up a story he heard from the hasidim of Sadgora, that Israel disappeared from the Kiev prison and was smuggled to Bukovina. The hasidim claimed that the zaddik had been freed by angels, but Hilberg says that they were probably made of gold and silver.

20. According to *Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 4–5, Lashkarev was in charge of Israel’s imprisonment, but we have to defer to the documentary evidence that Guriev was responsible. According to other hasidic sources, the zaddik Moses Zevi of Savran was also involved in the Ushits case but the accusations against him were miraculously dropped; see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 171, n. 21.

21. Bibikov (1792–1870) was governor-general until 1851. Between 1852 and 1855, he was the Russian interior minister.

22. Until 1867, the *general auditoriat* was one of the five highest military courts of the Russian military land forces. It is worth noting that because of the well-known fact of Rabbi Israel’s interrogation, Jewish informers used this information to tie Rabbi Israel to other crimes, which never happened. In May 1838, Bibikov received copies of forged letters purportedly written by David Luria of Bykhov, in which Israel was mentioned (see n. 6 above).

23. Perl refers to Rabbi Israel’s journey to Lemberg in 1835, discussed in Chapter 3.

24. Based on Nahman of Bratslav’s *Sefer ha-midot*, Perl had already asserted that the hasidim saw themselves as free to kill informers (Perl, *Chasidim*, 37, 131).

25. Mahler, *Enlightenment*, 129–34; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 482–84. Perl says that the murderer was hiding in the house of a hasid in Borshchev and extorted money from him. Perl’s claim is confirmed by the military court’s verdict, which states that three of the assassins escaped at the beginning of the inquiry (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 475). Perl strongly objected to hasidic monetary appeals, as he considered their transferring money outside the country to be deceptive and disloyal to the state. Mahler considered Perl’s memorandum to be “the most remarkable of all the documents of his activity against Hasidism” (*Enlightenment*, 131) and presents Perl’s report as an act of betrayal of his people. Abraham Rubinstein likewise sees Perl’s anti-hasidic

report as a type of “informing” influenced by anti-Semitic literature (Perl, *Chassidim*, 46–49). For a more balanced view of Perl’s memorandum, reflecting the maskilic trust in the good intentions of the enlightened absolutist regime, see Michael, *Perl*, 164.

26. All citations here and below have been taken from the military court verdict, see above, n. 12.

27. This punishment, called *kostry*, was performed while the accused was forced to run between two lines of soldiers, 250 on each side, who administered lashings with wet sprigs. Such punishment is depicted in I. L. Peretz’s short story “Three Gifts,” which is based on the verdict in the case of the Shapira brothers, the famous hasidic printers of Slavuta, who were imprisoned for three years in Kiev in 1836. Hasidic traditions tell about an encounter between the brothers and Rabbi Israel in prison, but there is no documentary evidence to support this. For reference, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 174, n. 32.

28. See Assaf, *ibid.*, 170, n. 19. It is difficult to verify this story, in which truth and imagination are intermingled. Shaul Ginsburg (*Ushits*, 187), who also tells this story, does not cite his sources, so we are left with only the hasidic sources. For other incidents of liberation by force of Jewish prisoners, see Tsherikover, *Mahapekhhah*, 110–15.

29. See Shochat, *Kahal*, 155–56, who assumes that the emphasized words refer to the Ushits case; see also Bibikov’s circular, above, n. 1.

30. *Beit Israel*, 11. About Rabbi Leibush (d. 1836), see *Ner Israel*, IV, 349.

31. See Tzedebaum, *Keter kehunah*, 110. The famous writer Shalom Avramovitsh (Mendele Mokher Sforim), who was living in the same region in the 1850s and was personally acquainted with the son of one of the informers, told Dubnow that the Ushits case was still fresh in the memory of the Podolian Jews, and that from their point of view what the government called “a brutal crime” was nothing less than justified self-defense, which was why the thirty Jews who died by flogging were called “martyrs.” See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 476.

## Chapter 5

1. *Kneset Israel*, 142. The number of months during which he was incarcerated is based on his own words: “I sat in Kiev prison for twenty-two months, and just as they jailed me without any investigation, so they freed me without any investigation” (*Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 5; II, 21). If this is accurate, then he was in Kiev from May–June 1838 until February 1840. However, there are other traditions suggesting different calculations: Rosenfeld, *Ha-tsofeh*, 57 (twenty-six months); *Even shtiyah*, 83 (twenty-one months); Marcus, *Hasidut*, 211 (fifteen months).

2. I presume that he was jailed in a prison that was part of a defense complex built during Nicholas I’s reign. This region is called Pechersk and included some fortresses surrounding and protecting an ancient monastery called Kiev-pecherskaia laura. During the nineteenth century, these fortresses were used as military administration centers and headquarters for local garrisons. In 1844, the czarist prison Kosoj kaponir was built on the same site, probably on the ruins of the military prison in which the zaddik was held. See *Encyclopediia of Ukraine*, II, 540–41;

Hamm, *Kiev*, 11–12. For a hasidic description of the prison and its various sections, see Heilman, *Beit Israel*, 10.

3. We learn about his interrogation there from the maskil Hayyim Malaga. There are also hasidic sources (*Yeshu'ot Israel*, II, 21–22; *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 80–81) that mention Israel's subpoena to appear at Berdichev before a committee of investigation; however, they connect it with another event prior to 1825 about which we have no information whatsoever.

4. Ahad Ha-Am, *Zikhronot*, 482. These memoirs, the only source for the interrogation at Zhitomir, probably reflect other hasidic traditions unconnected with the Ushits case, such as a story about some kind of “informing” that led to the imprisonment of Israel of Ruzhin, Mordekhai of Chernobyl and Isaac of Radvill (d. 1835) and their interrogation in Zhitomir (*Ohalei zaddikim*, 78–79; *Eser orot*, 64–65).

5. A letter Israel sent from Dunayevtsy dated January 29, 1837, does not convey the distress of a prisoner but the attitude of someone under interrogation. In this letter he mentions sending two of his faithful (including his brother-in-law Samuel of Botosani) on a secret mission to Naphtali Kaufman, a wealthy man from Jassy. We can assume that this mission was connected with the appeal for his freedom. See Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 290, # 12. For hasidic sources that mention Israel's interrogation at Dunayevtsy, see *Emunat zaddikim*, # 70; Hillman, *Beit Israel*, 8–9.

6. For hasidic sources relating to his stay in Kamenets, see *Kerem Israel*, 60, 67; *Beit Israel*, 18 (from this source it is obvious that he was not in a real prison and that his stay at Kamenets was just for the purpose of interrogation), 27.

7. Even though his movements were restricted, he was permitted to go to the *mikveh* in Zinkov, a suburb of Kamenets, “as often as he wished.” Women of his family were also permitted to join him (*Sipurei zaddikim*, III, 12), so one can conclude that he had the ability to maintain a normal matrimonial relationship.

8. In November 1837, Rabbi Israel wrote a letter from Kamenets (see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 293, # 16). Rabbi Abraham Isaac Soibelman of Zinkov, who preserved reliable Sadgorian traditions, wrote that the zaddik was in Kamenets for about a year, prior to Passover until after Purim, but he had forgotten whether it was 1836 or 1837 (*Sipurei zaddikim*, *ibid.*)

9. *Beit Israel*, 18.

10. The town of Kamenets Podolsk had the legal right to prevent Jews from residing within its boundaries (*Privilegium de non tolerandis Iudaeis*). From 1832 on, Kamenets Jews were permitted to live in two neighborhoods only, the Polish and the Russian suburbs. On Rabbi Israel's stay in the Polish suburb, see *Sipurei zaddikim*, III, 12.

11. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 22b. One can interpret “Israel” as referring to both the people of Israel and to the individual person Rabbi Israel.

12. *Beit Israel*, 27–28. Such a harsh statement could not be the product of hasidic imagination or later writers; it seems to be authentic and to reflect Israel's emotional state of mind, expressing his fear of the future. We can probably relate the following story to this period of time: “Once, on the eve of Yom Kippur he entered with fear and dread . . . forcefully threw the charity box [away from him] and said, ‘Sovereign of the Universe, save us amongst the beast and fowl!’ The hasidim sitting there trembled with fear” (*ibid.*).

13. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 17b; *Sia'h sarfei kodesh*, II, 72, 119.
14. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 17b; *Seder ha-dorot*, 22; *Kerem Israel*, 59, and more.
15. *Kneset Israel*, 142; Bodek, *Sipurim*, 224–25; cf. Heilman, *Beit Israel*, 12–13.
16. Such as assisting him in his personal hygiene and dressing and undressing him. Shmulik had been Israel's attendant since the zaddik's youth, and they never parted, even when the zaddik fled from Russia. See Heilman, *Beit Israel*, 12–13; 4; *Beit Israel*, 15; *Even shtiyah*, 83; Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 40–41; Eilboim, *Eretz ha-zevi*, 112; *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 9–10, 19; II, 4–9, 21.
17. *Sabah kadishah*, I, 125; *Ner Israel*, IV, 229–30.
18. *Even shtiyah*, 83. A similar tradition is also told in connection with his son Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, who also had been imprisoned (Marcus, *Hasidut*, 241; Even, *Hoyf*, 101–2). Many traditions are mixed because of these two imprisonments, probably stemming from the desire to grant the son some of his father's glory.
19. *Beit Israel*, 15; Heilman, *Beit Israel*, 14.
20. *Darkhei ha-yashar*, 9b; Heilman, *Beit Israel*, 12–13; Tellingator, *Even Israel*, 20–21.
21. *Kneset Israel*, 142.
22. *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 79–80; and see the censored version in *Yeshu'ot Israel*, II, 21.
23. *Beit Israel*, 11.
24. *Shem mi-Shmuel*, 212, 221; Erten, *Emet ve-emunah*, 14. Piekarz, *Polin*, 159, suggests that the Kotsker saying is a form of criticism, but it would be more precise to understand it as a remark signifying astonishment and appreciation of the “heavy burden” that Rabbi Israel apparently took upon himself. I also assume that Rabbi Samuel of Sochachev's teaching about the handsome Joseph who sat in the Pharaoh's jail (*Shem mi-Shmuel*, 221) hints at Israel. One can learn of Israel's self-image as the biblical Joseph from a hasidic tradition quoting an enigmatic saying of his, which later was interpreted as a prophecy of his imprisonment. About ten years before he was arrested, he met with Mordekhai of Chernobyl and said to him: “This week we are reading in the Torah ‘And Joseph was brought down to Egypt’ [Gen. 39:1], and the meaning is to Kiev” (*Beit Israel*, 15).
25. *Sia'h sarfei kodesh*, III, 110.
26. *Lahav esh*, 228, 236. This zaddik (d. 1879) although not considered a famous Polish zaddik, did lead a fascinating life. From the above-mentioned biography, one learns of his admiration of Rabbi Israel. He was aware of Israel's fame through the agitation activities of Nehemiah Jehiel of Bychawa (ibid., 135–8, 244–47). From the time he had heard of Israel, he made efforts to travel to Sadgora but failed, see Assaf, *Bychawa*, 286–87.
27. Schwartz, *Zikaron le-Moshe*, 135; Bromberg, *Ruzhin* 135. According to this version, the Hatam Sofer had been asked to intercede with authorities in Vienna in order to prevent Rabbi Israel's extradition from Austria to Russia. However, this would have been impossible, because Rabbi Sofer died in 1839, before Israel was even released from prison. We can assume that the two cases were confused, which may reflect an intention to involve Sofer with the efforts to release Rabbi Israel from the Russian prison. See Kohen, *Hatam Sofer*, 188–89.
28. *Ohel shem*, 4; cf. *Sipurei Slonim*, 204.
29. *Tiferet Maharam*, 25; Margaliot, *Or ha-Meir*, 30

30. *Gdulat Mordekbai*, 4.
31. Deinard, *Kobelet America*, 79–80.
32. Katz, *Materyahn*, 565. Malaga was the author of the anti-hasidic Yiddish satire *Gdulat Rabbi Wolf mi-Charny-Ostra*, mistakenly attributed to Joseph Perl. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 183, n. 38.
33. See Ginsburg, *Historishe verk*, I, 37 (id., *Ktavim*, 29–30).
34. See Weinstein, *Bonaventura*, 353. Weinstein's theory that Bonaventura was the hidden name of Bezael Stern of Odessa has no basis. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 183–84, n. 40.
35. *Kerem Israel*, 67.
36. *Ibid.*, 17. Regarding a large amount of money collected in 1839 for this purpose we also have the testimony of both the Scottish missionaries (Bonar and M'Cheyne, *Mission*, 402), and hasidic sources (*Kerem Israel*, 60). Deinard, *Kobelet America*, 79–80, cites the exaggerated amount of 200,000 rubles collected for this purpose, but Ephraim Deinard's hatred of Hasidism makes him untrustworthy.
37. Rosenfeld, *Ha-tsofeh*, 58.
38. Mahler, *Enlightenment*, 131; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 483. According to Perl's memorandum, Fischler, who was a devoted hasid, used to travel frequently to Ruzhin; the murderer stayed at his home while extorting money from him for his silence. From the verdict of the trial, we know of three accused, named Shtrumwasser, Kreitman, and Shtroieman, who fled Russia at the beginning of the investigation (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 475).
39. *Beit Shelomo*, 16b; *Shut minbat Elazar*, V, # 12.
40. See *Tiferet Israel* 11: 34; Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 290, # 12.
41. Mahler, *Enlightenment*, 130–31; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 483.
42. *Sabah kadishah*, 59. Interestingly, according to this source, Issachar Dov of Radoshits, one of the famous miracle-working zaddikim in Poland, refused to contribute to the appeal since the collectors did not mention Rabbi Israel's name along with that of his mother following established hasidic practice when asking something from the zaddik.
43. See Mahler, *Enlightenment*, 99, 129–34.
44. *Even sh'tiyah*, 83.
45. *Kerem Israel*, 60.
46. Some maskilim and historians adopted this hasidic interpretation too. Alexander Tzederbaum, the first to write on Rabbi Israel's biography, doesn't even mention the murder case and suggests that the imprisonment was a result of informing that the rabbi pretended to be the king of Israel. In a search, which was made in his home, hasidic letters were found addressed to "Our Lord, Teacher, Fortress, and Redeemer," and this was enough to prove that the zaddik "ruled over the Jews as a kingdom within a kingdom" (Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 142). Even Simon Dubnow (*History*, V, 202–3), a careful historian, suggests that the Russians had been wanting to frame Israel for a long time because of his "kingly" behavior, and that the Ushits case was just a perfect excuse. Berl Repetor, a Ruzhin native (1902), mentions in his memoir that among the hasidim of his hometown, stories about the zaddik constantly received "new interpretations and formulations." One of these was that Israel was imprisoned because of the common knowledge of his

ambition, as a descendant of King David, to rule over all Russian Jewry (Repeter, *Le-lo heref*, 9).

47. A known story among Galician Jews reflects the popular messianic expectation connected with Rabbi Israel's imprisonment. When the zaddik was liberated, all his hasidim celebrated, and only one did not dance or sing. When asked why he was so depressed, "He cried and answered: I was sure our rabbi is the Messiah. When he was imprisoned, I was very happy, and I thought to myself, this is nothing but the beginning of the birth pangs of the coming of the Messiah, and I thought—well, now things will come to a head! But nothing happened. The rabbi was freed and everything returned to normal. Can I be happy?" See Ansky, *Shriftn*, VI, 56; id., *Hurban*, IV, 380–81; id., *Mikhtavim*, 212.

48. See Perl, *Chasidim*, 14. Abraham Mapu's attempt to publish his anti-hasidic book (now lost) *Hoze hezionot*, can serve as an example. The Russian authorities prohibited its publication because of the comparison the author made between Hasidism and Sabbateanism "is not fair and could cause grievances and resentment by such a respected part of the Jewish population [i.e., the hasidim], which even the teacher Mapu himself admits constitutes two-thirds of the Jewish population in Russia" (*Mikhtvei Mapu*, 288; Bartal, *Galut*, 302–3, n. 17).

49. Marcus, *Hasidut*, 210; see also Tenenbaum, *Malkhut*. For a critical and balanced judgment of Nicholas' treatment of the Jews, see Stanislawski, *Nicholas*.

50. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 187, nn. 56–58.

51. See Ansky, *Shriftn*, VI, 135–37; id., *Hurban*, IV, 423–24; id., *Writings*, 207–8. In fact, Nicholas was born in June 1796, three months before the birth of Rabbi Israel; however, this tradition reflects a widespread popular motif that attributes the metaphysical fate of a common date of birth or death to enemies representing mythical poles.

52. According to Ruzhin tradition, Rabbi Israel expressed his support of the Polish uprising of 1831, long before his imprisonment (*Beit Israel*, 37; *Magdil yesh'not*, 84). This is probably an anachronistic source, reflecting his later negative attitude toward the Russians. Another late fiction is a Yiddish dramatic poem *Gerangl* (Struggle), written by the poet (and Israel's descendant) Jacob Friedman (d. 1972), who describes a plan for rebellion shared by Israel's sons and Polish gentry in order to free the zaddik from prison, see Sela, *Mietar*, I, 76–84, II, 205–87.

53. See Ginsburg, *Historishe verk*, I, 256–58 (id., *Ktavim*, 168ff. ).

54. See the documents provided by Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 139–43; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 477–78, # 1, 5.

55. When Nicholas ascended the throne in 1825, there were over 2,800,000 open cases before the Ministry of Justice, and this had grown to over 33 million by 1842. See Kliuchevsky, *Russia*, III, 384.

56. Even so, Rabbi Israel and, especially, his sons are still mentioned in official Russian documents from the 1860s as "troublemakers." The suspicious attitude of the government toward zaddikim in the southwestern provinces continued into the reign of Alexander II, as did the government's methods of suppressing their activities. For important archival documents, mainly surveillance reports on the Chernobyl dynasty zaddikim and restrictions on their movement, see Galant, *Zaddikim*; Assaf, *Ma'avak*, 477–79.

57. Bonar and M'Cheyne, *Mission*, 430. Rabbi Israel is not mentioned specifically, but there is no doubt that he is the "Russian Rabbi of whom we have heard as suffering imprisonment," in 1839.

58. Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 33b.

59. *Kol nehi*, 22a; cf. the Ukrainian maskil Hayyim Malaga's mockery of Rabbi Israel (cited at n. 32).

60. *Irin kadishin*, 35–36.

61. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 4b.

62. *Ibid.*, 6a.

63. *Ibid.*, 25a.

64. See Ettinger, *Hasidic Movement*, 234–35; Etkes, *Shneur Zalman*; *id.*, *Havurah*, 75–86.

65. *Divrei Shalom*, 120; *Kneset Israel*, 28.

66. Yelin, *Derekh zaddikim*, 19; Even, *Hoyf*, 27–28.

67. *Beit Israel*, 16.

68. *Ohalei Ya'akov*, 261, 264; Stern, *Kitvey aggadah*, 57.

## Chapter 6

1. Yossi Rath's *Yeshu'ot Israel* was used by historians such as Saul Ginsburg (*Ktavim*, 80–81), N. M. Gelber (*Aus zwei Jahrhunderten*, 116–21), and S. A. Horodezky (*Hasidut*, III, 113–15), but none of them mentioned the book by name.

2. Two manuscript copies of *Yeshu'ot Israel* have recently been published under the title *Magdil yeshu'ot* and fill in some passages missing from the original edition. There are many compilations and adaptations based on Rath's book, such as Even, *Hoyf*, 23ff.; *Kerem Israel*, 60–74; Tenenbaum, *Malkhut*. Noteworthy is the booklet *Beit Israel*, compiled by H. M. Heilman, a Habad hasid and amateur historian. This is a short bilingual (Hebrew and Yiddish) account of Israel's travails from his interrogation until his flight, apparently based on the story of another hasid, who kept the memoirs of his grandfather, who claimed to have been Rabbi Israel's personal valet. This account suggests a slightly different version of the events, but it is not reliable. The hagiographic element is overly emphasized, and Heilman himself was aware of this; see his comment, *ibid.*, 31; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 192, n. 2.

3. Mentioned on the front page and in the foreword is the fact that the manuscript was kept by a disciple of Rabbi Israel who did not want to reveal his name, but further on (introduction, p. 4), the author unintentionally exposes his identity ("As the holy zaddik himself testified about me, while he said . . . when I am sending Yossi on a mission and he brings me an answer, I know clearly that he would never add or delete anything").

4. It seems that the book was compiled in a number of stages. The first section reflects contemporary notes taken during Rabbi Israel's lifetime (*Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 3), which were reedited after Rath emigrated to Palestine and settled in Safed (see, e.g., *ibid.* 23), probably after 1885. See *Magdil Yeshu'ot*, 13.

5. Heitner, *Yuhasin*; *Magdil Yeshu'ot*, 11–12, 125–26; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 193, n. 5. Yossi Rath was the great-grandfather of the famous Rabbi Meshullam Rath.

6. This influence is not only in the awareness of the importance of recording

history but also in the style of writing and the titles of the chapters (according to *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 16, the titles were added by the publisher).

7. "And I wrote everything in the book while he was still alive" (*Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 3–4). The fact that Rath is not certain about the exact years of Israel's imprisonment and release (see below)—without a doubt the most important events in the zaddik's life—calls his assertion into question and suggests that he did not document the events as they occurred. The book also includes some events that took place in the 1860s and even later. See *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 13.

8. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 3.

9. For example, "The year he was arrested was 1837 or 1838"; "In the year 1839 or 1840 he was released"; "I don't know if he first moved to Kishinev alone and his family joined him later or whether they all traveled to Kishinev together" (*ibid.*, 5–6).

10. *Ibid.*, 24.

11. *Ibid.*, 5, 10–11. Hasids of dual loyalty were not unusual at that time, and we can probably connect the phenomenon to that of "secondary zaddik" (see Assaf, *Ovruch*, 224–30). Kosov is closer to Kolomea, where Rath lived, and it would have been more convenient to visit a closer zaddik than a famous but distant one.

12. All dates mentioned here are according to the Julian calendar, as they appear in the Russian documents (see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 474, 476, # 1). According to a Ruzhin tradition (Even, *Hoyf*, 23), the rebbe was released on *Shushan Purim* (15th of Adar, the second day of the Purim festival), which fell on Friday, March 20. The contradiction between these dates can be explained by the fact that the year 1840 in the Hebrew calendar was a leap year (containing two months of Adar), thus accounting for Israel's release on the 15th of Adar I, known as "little" *Shushan Purim*, which indeed fell on Wednesday, February 6th. For attempts to harmonize between the contradictory dates, see *Mishkenot ha-ro'im*, 131–32; Tenenbaum, *Malkhut*, XI, 35; *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 28.

13. *Kneset Israel*, 25; cf. *Kerem Israel*, 60. These sources accord with the basic hasidic claim, mentioned above, that the real reason for Rabbi Israel's imprisonment was the authorities' fear of his messianic role and the Ushits case was only an excuse. See *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 4; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 129–30; Tenenbaum, *Malkhut*, VIII, 31.

14. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 139–40 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 477, # 1).

15. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 140–41 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 477, # 2).

16. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 141–42 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 478, # 4). The original decree regarding Israel's expulsion to Siberia has not been preserved. Gessen referred to a letter from the minister of the interior to Bibikov from October 3, 1841, which included the czar's instructions to expel the zaddik from Ruzhin and resettle him in one of the provinces outside the Pale. See Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 142–43 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 478, # 5).

17. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 141 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 477–78, # 3).

18. *Kerem Israel*, 60. According to Rath (*Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 5–6) the decision to leave Ruzhin and move to Kishinev was decided by the drawing of lots, however, since he was not an eyewitness, it is difficult to believe that such an important decision would have been made in such a manner. It is worth noting the semi-democ-



ratic form in which Israel's decisions were made. According to Rath, the rebbe consulted with his close associates on crucial issues "and after he heard all their advice he knew to choose the best and right one."

19. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 141–42 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 476–77, n. 29; 478, # 4).
20. Gessen, *Ruzhin* (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 478, # 4).
21. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 6.
22. Ibid. The expulsion decree was included in a letter from the interior minister to Bibikov. See Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 142–43 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 478, # 5).
23. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 6; Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 142.
24. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 145–46 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 480).
25. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 110.
26. Tzederbaum repeated this information: "And also the maskilim of Kishinev and Odessa, who deny the miracles of the zaddikim, stood by him (i.e., Israel) in order to help him to obtain a passport" (ibid., 142). On Efrati, see Gottlober, *Zikhronot*, II, 95; *Ha-melitz*, IV (1864), 690–91. He was probably Joachim Efrusi, one of the richest Jews in Odessa (see Zipperstein, *Odessa*, 171). He was originally from Berdichev, where we know there was a branch of Rabbi Israel's family named Efrati (see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 278). On Stern and his relationship with Vorontzov, see Gottlober, *Zikhronot*, II, 82–101; Weinstein, *Bonaventura*, 340–42 (but see Chapter 5, n. 34, above).
27. This relationship is discussed in Chapter 9.
28. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 14.
29. Ibid., 7; cf. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 480–81. There is no reason to doubt the achievements of the hasidic intelligence network, whose agents were scattered through all social and economic levels. The bitter ridicule of Perl's *Megaleh temirin* regarding hasidic efforts to obtain the dangerous *bukh* confirms the existence of a skilled hasidic "intelligence" network able to obtain information from government circles.
30. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 480.
31. This is according to a family tradition of Israel Gutman of Jassy; see *Ma'ayan ha-hasidut* 3 (1966): 13; 25–26 (1975): 21–22; Tenenbaum, *Malkhut*, XII, 28. There are other traditions regarding Rabbi Israel's destination after Jassy, including Leova in Bessarabia (*Or pnei zaddikim*, hayei ha-mehaber, 6) and Lipcani, north of Botosani (Heilman, *Beit Israel*, 22–24).
32. On Horowitz, see *Eser atarot*, 38–39; Even, *Hoyf*, 31–34; *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 8; II, 4–5, 14; *Or pnei zaddikim*, hayei ha-mehaber, 6; *Or ha-Meir*, 30–31.
33. This description is based on *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 9–10. On Shmulik, see Chapter 5 above. Landau was a Torah scholar and devoted hasid. According to maskilic sources, Landau was arrested along with Israel's son Abraham Jacob in 1856 but was left behind in prison when the zaddik was released. Only after he threatened the hasidim that he would reveal the truth if they did not do their best to get him out of prison was his release obtained by means of a forged document, after which he escaped to Palestine. He died in Jerusalem in 1886 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 199, n. 39).
34. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 8. Rath claimed to hear the story of the escape from Nathan Simeon himself. The latter's heroic deed—carrying the zaddik a few miles—gained great appreciation in Ruzhin tradition. When he asked Rabbi Israel

what his reward would be, the zaddik replied, “You will be invited to the world to come” (*Irin kadishin tinyana*, 22b; *Kerem Israel*, 61; *Eser atarot*, 39; Marcus, *Hasidut*, 211; Even, *Hoyf*, 33–34). A. J. Braver reports meeting Nathan Simeon’s grandchild in Istanbul (Braver, *Zikhronot*, 538).

35. *Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 9; *Kerem Israel*, 61–62. Rabbi Yekutieli (d. 1862) was active in the monetary appeal for Israel’s release from prison. After the zaddik’s escape he became one of his closest intimates. For more details, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 200–201, n. 43.

36. *Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 9–11; II, 4–5.

37. *Kerem ha-basidut*, V, 234. However, respected Torah scholars, such as the local *dayan* Gershon Ashkenazi, had met Israel in Kosov. See Hibner, *Ma’aseh Yehiel*, 16b; *Eser tsahitsahot*, 77.

38. *Ohalei zaddikim*, 66; *Sipurei Ya’akov*, 28; *Even shtiyah ha-hadash*, 216–17.

39. *Kerem Israel*, 63. Mustaza (Mustaṭā) belonged to a boyar family, originally from Albania or Greece, whose descendants served, first, the Ottoman government in the Romanian principalities and, later, the Austrian government. His exact identity is difficult to determine, but he was probably Toader, who became baron in 1821. See, Nistor, *Istoria*, 41; Gelber, *Bukovina*, 41; *Pinkas Romania*, II, 469–70.

40. The haste with which Rabbi Israel left Kosov is reflected by the fact that he did not permit Rath to return to his home in the nearby town of Kolomea to fetch his belongings and say good-bye to his family (*Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 12–3; *Magdil Yeshu’ot*, 37).

## Chapter 7

1. *Seder ha-dorot*, 22. One may learn of Rabbi Israel’s hope to return to Ruzhin from his and his sons’ attempts to obtain travel permits to Russia for the purpose of visiting the hasidim, collecting money, and even resettlement. All their requests were denied. Even the personal involvement of Count Adam Rzewuski, who owned the town of Pohorbishch, did not help. See Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 147–48.

2. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 5b.

3. *Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 6b.

4. *Beit Israel*, 31–32.

5. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 489.

6. *Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 14–15.

7. *Ibid.*, 15; *Magdil yeshu’ot*, 39. Rath, who claimed to have lost the original letter, wrote that he quoted the text, as if the letter was in front of his eyes, since he considered it an amulet that he had read “almost one hundred times.” Israel’s correspondence with his family at Kishinev was carried back and forth by two well-to-do hasidim, probably merchants (see *Magdil yeshu’ot*, II, 22). Sending letters this way was very popular among Russian Jews, because it was not merely faster but avoided the Third Department’s censors. See Ginsburg, *Historische verk*, I, 215–28 (*id.*, *Ktavim*, 139–51).

8. *Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 13.

9. *Ibid.*, 13–14, 18; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 487, 490.

10. *Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 16, 18.

11. Ibid., 18–19. Cf. Hielman, *Beit Israel*, 26, who tells also of twenty-four priests who swore that the person in question was Donenfeld, as well as an old Christian midwife who swore that she had helped to deliver him. Heilman's version is full of mistakes and cannot be trusted.

12. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 20.

13. Ibid., 20–21, and below, according to the Austrian documents.

14. Ibid., 16. Israel's intimates sent Rapoport "a hundred gold coins for the governor" (ibid., 17). On Krieg, see Gelber, *L'vov*, 370–71; id., *Galicia*, I, 44.

15. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 143; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 478, # 6, 489.

16. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 487, 490–91.

17. The 1842 documents were first published by Gelber, *Aus zwei Jahrhunderten*, 116–21 (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 487–88); the 1845 documents were published only in Hebrew translation (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 488–94).

18. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 491–94; *Yeshu'at Israel*, I, 20–21; cf. Dubnow, *Hasidut*, 361–62. The prohibition against Jews settling in Bukovina stemmed from Austria's official policy of encouraging German settlers in order to promote German culture and language. In fact, the authorities failed to prevent the infiltration of Jewish immigrants.

19. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 491. Noteworthy is the other explanation given there: "it is well-known that the Russian government is not ready to absorb additional Jewish refugees expelled to their territory, thus the Austrian authorities do not consider themselves as forced to provide any favors for the Russian authorities" (ibid., 490).

20. Marcus, *Hasidut*, 212; Nisenzohn, *Malkhms*, 78; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 134. One may doubt the authenticity of this tradition, as Meizlish's name is first mentioned by Marcus who did not like him (see Kamelhar, *Meisels*, 74–75).

21. Tenenbaum, *Malkhut*, XIV, 50–51, but see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 210, n. 26.

22. Marcus, *Hasidut*, 212.; Even, *Hoyf*, 40; Kamelhar, *Dor de'ah*, 304; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 133–34.

23. An example of the improbability of the hasidic traditions in this affair is the seeming involvement of Rabbi Moses Sofer, who died in 1839, long before Rabbi Israel even came to Austria. See Chapter 5 above.

24. The Austrian memorandum of 1845 (discussed later), which concluded the whole affair, mentions the intervention of Baron Rothschild (Assaf, *Malkhut*, 489).

25. Marcus, *Hasidut*, 211 tells of two Strelisk hasidim who were sent to Vienna (on the Sabbath!) to meet with Metternich. Even (*Hoyf*, 40) repeats this story, claiming that these hasidim were sent to Mannheimer to ask *him* to meet with Metternich; cf. *Yevreiskaya entsiklopediia*, XIII, 813; Ansky, *Hurban*, IV, 423.

26. According to Rath, as early as summer 1842, Rabbi Israel expressed his wish to ask Montefiore to intercede on his behalf to "the emperor or his minister . . . since I knew that the emperor's minister is highly respected in the eyes of the Russian czar" (*Yeshu'ot Israel*, II, 20). There is no doubt that this minister was Metternich; cf. *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 78. However, the first documentary evidence of connections with Montefiore date to 1844.

27. For more information and a list of the six intimates, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 211, n. 30.

28. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 16.
29. *Sipurei zaddikim*, II, 15, 42; Even, *Hoyf*, 115–17; *Sipurei nifla'ot*, 128; *Even shetiyah*, 84. For more references, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 211–12, n. 33.
30. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 143–44; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 479, # 7.
31. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 144; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 479, # 8 and 480; cf. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 21.
32. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 144; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 212, n. 37 and 479, # 9.
33. For different (but mistaken) dates suggested by other authors, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 212, n. 38.
34. See the full document, *ibid.*, 488–89.
35. On Rosenzweig, see Wunder, *Galicja*, IV, 801; Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 298, # 24.
36. For the document in its entirety, which is summarized later, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 489–94.
37. Nine Jews signed this long, detailed application in July 1845. It expresses deep hatred of Hasidism in general and Rabbi Israel in particular and is filled with anti-hasidic clichés. This memorandum contains little new information on this matter and is now housed in the Central Historical Archive in Lvov (146–85–2387B, ff. 105–8).
38. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 489–94.
39. *Yimale pi thilatekha*, 10–11; Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 297–8, # 23.
40. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 490.
41. A memorandum signed on November 5, 1845 by the Royal United Court's Office (Central Historical Archive in Lvov, 146–85–2387B, f. 95).
42. *Ibid.*, and see *Tiferet Israel* 32: 38. It is remarkable that the hasidic editor angrily condemns the maskilim for disgraceful actions against the zaddik, such as forging signatures. In his eyes, it is a “severe phenomenon,” forgetting for a moment that Rabbi Israel and his followers had done the same thing.
43. On this problem, see Gries, *Kalisk*, 145; Etkes, *Manhigut*, 432–38; Assaf, *Ovruch*, 237; Haran, *Shivhei ha-Rav*, 24.
44. Ahad Ha-Am, *Zikhronot*, 482. On Rabbi Isaac, see Assaf, *Ma'avak*, 485.
45. Ahad Ha-Am, *Zikhronot*, 491–92; cf. *Mishkenot Ya'akov*, I, 22, n. 13.
46. Ahad Ha-Am, *Zikhronot*, 493–94.
47. *Kerem Israel*, 63. An echo of the tension between the hasidim of Abraham, son of Mordekhai of Chernobyl, who settled in Trisk (Vollhynia), and the local hasidim who were affiliated with Israel of Ruzhin is found in *Sipurei nifla'ot*, 28. On conflicts between hasidim of Skvira and Sadgora in a small town in Podolia, see Zausmer, *Ikvei ha-dor*, 246–48. Cf. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 111–12; Geshuri, *Nigun*, III, 356–57. However, one should not overestimate the role of these conflicts in the political considerations of both sides, as Gessen does (*id.*, *Ruzhin*).
48. *Tarnopol*, 322. See more in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 218, n. 53.
49. *Mishkenot ha-ro'im*, 36, 38.
50. *Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 6b; *Pinkas Romania*, II, 470, 521. From an Austrian document, we know of four Jews from Chernovtsy, probably maskilim, who tried to prevent Rabbi Israel from settling in their town. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 493.
51. See references in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 218–19, n. 56.
52. Bonar and M'Cheyne, *Mission*, 402.

53. His travels to Jassy and other towns in Bukovina prior to his imprisonment are discussed in Chapter 9. His travels to Bessarabia in 1836 are reported in the Ushits trial verdict. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 472.

54. The “old” Romania was created only in 1859 by the unification of the principalities of Moldavia and Walachia, under the formal sovereignty of Turkey (until 1877). Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transylvania were annexed to Romania only in 1918.

55. On the Jews of Bukovina during this period, see Mahler, *Dirrei*, III, 47–49; Gelber, *Ha-yehudim be-Bukowina*; id., *Bukowina*, 26–44; *Pinkas Romania*, II, 419ff.

56. Dubnow, *Hasidut*, 441–42.

57. On the expansion of Hasidism in Bessarabia and the influence of the zaddikim mentioned above, see Huberman, *Bessarabia*, 9–16; *Bessarabia*, 80–84, 857–68; Alfassi, *Romania*. Cf. *Nifla’ot ha-Rabbi*, 23–24; Bonar and M’Cheyne, *Mission*, 429, 462; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 218–19, n. 56.

58. Gelber, *Ha-yehudim be-Bukowina*, 95, n. 5.

59. *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 8 (September 2, 1844): 511. The writer reported on Jewish cattle merchants who came from Bessarabia to be blessed by Rabbi Israel.

60. Statistical data on Jews in Sadgora date only from the 1770s (see Gelber, *Bukowina*, 12, 17, 24, n. 4). The Scottish missionaries who visited there in 1839 reported on many Jews who live in “Satagora” (Bonar and M’Cheyne, *Mission*, 431); cf. *Słownik*, X, 195. Very little is known of Moses b. Pinhas, a rabbi and dayan, who had lived in Sadgora prior to Rabbi Israel’s arrival, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 221, n. 73.

61. *Kneset Israel*, 58–59; cf. *Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 6b; Heilman, *Beit Israel*, 30; *Tiferet Israel* 14: 28.

62. *Raza de-uvdah*, 100.

63. *Yeshu’ot Israel*, I, 22–23. On a house purchase in 1843, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 491.

64. Isăcescul was nominated as *Kreishauptman* (district governor’s deputy) of Bukovina in 1837 and became the governor in 1841 (or 1844). See Nistor, *Istoria*, 52; Kann and David, *Habsburg*, 289. On Mustaza, see Chapter 6, n. 39, above.

65. As Mahler, *Enlightenment*, 69–73, points out, at that period, in contrast to the attitude of the local officials, the Austrian central government tended to be pro-Hasidic and more hostile to and suspicious of the maskilim. On the importance of the zaddikim to the prosperity of their region, see Dubnow, *Hasidut*, 361–62. A contemporary account reports on the prosperity in Sadgora after Rabbi Israel settled there, especially with regard to alcohol consumption (see *Allgemeine Zeitung*, cited n. 59 above), saying that this was why Christian landlords encouraged zaddikim to settle on their estates, promising them assistance and protection. The two Scottish missionaries also tell of the same phenomenon in Premyshlan: “only a short time ago it was a very significant town but prosperity came to it with a certain great rabbi [i.e., Meir]” (Bonar and M’Cheyne, *Mission*, 462). Cf. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 146–47; Orenstein, *Hagolem*, 370. This was typical also of other parts of Eastern Europe, such as the Polish town Góra Kalwaria, which began to enjoy great prosperity from the time the rabbis of the Alter dynasty (Gur) settled there. See Bergman, *Hasidic Cult*.

66. *Pinkas Romania*, II, 469 (and the bibliography, *ibid.*, 472). An 1853 report estimates the Jewish population in Bukovina at about 3,000 families. See Schwartzfeld, *Bukowina*, 87.

67. See Ansky, *Hurban*, 420–23.

68. On this place (known also as Potok Zloty), see *Pinkas Polin*, II, 415–16. On the purchase, see Gottlober, *Zikhronot*, I, 190; Rosenfeld, *Ha-tsofeh*, 63–64. Cf. Agnon, *Takhrikh*, 22–28.

69. *Shut u-vaharta ba-hayyim*, # 65.

70. *Ohel shem*, 9; cf. *Sipurvei Ya'akov*, 27; Maimon, *Hodesh*, IV, 42–43; Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 155; Tenenbaum, *Malkhut*, XIV, 51; Heilman, *Beit Israel*, 27–28.

71. On Rabbi Israel's purchase of land in Galicia prior to 1848, see Katz, *Goy*, 166–67. Rath, the author of *Yeshu'ot Israel* and the most credible recorder of Israel's resettlement in Sadgora, mentions nothing about Potik. The Austrian documents of 1845 are silent on this as well. The attempts of Hasidic sources to date the purchase to the end of 1842 (Marcus, *Hasidut*, 212; Even, *Hoyf*, 42) have no documentary basis. Moreover, Moses Orenstein specifies that the purchase took place in 1848 (*Ha-tsofeh*, 15a). Rabbi Israel's Austrian citizenship is in doubt because we have no evidence of his naturalization. According to an unconfirmed hasidic tradition, he never applied for Austrian citizenship and therefore never received it. Evidently, he preferred Ottoman citizenship (his passport identified him as a “citizen of Jerusalem”), and his sons took the same course in order to avoid conscription. See Even, *Hoyf*, 125, 177; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 137; Shalom, *Ba-metah*, 19. Rabbi Israel may have successfully applied for Turkish citizenship while he was in Jassy. Noteworthy here is the testimony of A. J. Braver, that during World War I, the Turks wanted, on that basis, to conscript Israel's descendants, who by then were living in Vienna. The latter were finally granted exemption after intensive intercessory activity (Braver, *Zikhronot*, 565–66).

72. See Braver, *Zikhronot*, 566; *Kneset Israel*, 17; *Tal Orot*, 201.

73. On Kluger (d. 1869) and his attitude toward Hasidism and to Rabbi Israel, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 225, n. 90.

74. *Shut u-vaharta ba-hayyim*, # 64. For discussion, see Katz, *Goy*, 159–80, especially 167–69.

75. *Shut u-vaharta ba-hayyim*, # 64. In fact, Kluger recited an old concept, already found, for example, in the sixteenth-century Hayyim b. Bezalel (brother of Maharal of Prague), *Sefer ba-hayyim*, ge'ulah vi-yeshu'ah, 31a.

76. Schorr, *Masa Rabanim*, 41–46. Except for slight changes, the responsum was meticulously copied; even the exact date—which had been omitted in print—was given.

77. Some letters which had been sent from Potik by Israel's sons Abraham Jacob and Bernyu are dated between late 1851 and late 1852, see *Tiferet Israel* 12: 25; 16: 26.

78. *Ohalei Ya'akov*, 387–89, 392; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 463.

79. Tzederbaum, *Dubim*, 167. When Bernyu lived with the maskilim of Chernovtsy, they persuaded him to claim his share in the profits of the estate (Raphael, *Ta'aluma*, 219). The authorities foreclosed on the estate when Rabbi

Abraham Jacob of Sadgora was imprisoned in 1856 (Even, *Hoyf*, 101). The estate was managed professionally as a business, and the manager was required to follow the instructions of the zaddikim and submit full reports of his activities. This is reflected in some letters from 1852–53 addressed by Abraham Jacob and his wife Miriam to Elyakim Urbach, the estate manager (Schwadron collection, file Friedman, Abraham Jacob, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem). On the seniority of David Moses, cf. *Ohel shem*, 9–11.

80. *Divrei David*, 37.

81. *Even sh'tiyah*, 46.

82. Ben-Saar, *Vatikan*. There was a popular joke among local Jews: “Why is Sadgora called Sadgora? Because the rebbe of Sadgora lives there” (see Raphaelowitz, *Tsiunim*, 11).

83. *Tiferet Israel* 14: 39–40.

84. On hasidim from Pohorbishch who came to Sadgora, see *Kitvei zaddikim*,

24. On cattle traders from Bessarabia who came to Sadgora, see above, n. 59.

85. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 190.

86. On an organized group of hasidim from Hertsa (Moldavia) who dealt with smuggling hasidim over borders, see *Pinkas Romania*, I, 118. A moving testimony about the arrival in Sadgora of two Jewish cantonists (children kidnapped for pre-army service in the Russian army) tells of how they crossed the Austrian-Russian border, offered Rabbi Israel a *pidyon* of seven rubles and related to him all the sins they were being forced to commit while serving in the army. The rebbe refused to take their money, blessed them, and promised that they would be the first to join the Messiah, even before all the zaddikim. See *Kneset Israel*, 34.

87. *Beit Israel*, 17. Sadgora is described as a pilgrimage center for Jews from Hungary and eastern Galicia in a government report from May 7, 1850. See Hungarian Archive: MOL, D55, 1850: 8802; Greenwald, *Hungary*, 275.

88. *Migdal David*, introduction. The messianic content of this letter is discussed in Chapter 11.

89. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 153.

90. *Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 5a. For another story of the disappointment of hasidim who heard no Torah teaching from Rabbi Israel, see *Ohalei Ya'akov*, 114–15.

91. Maimon, *Secret Society*, 20; cf. Wilensky, *Hasidim u-mitnagdim*, II, 165

92. *Kneset Israel*, 25. On the importance of the “third meal,” see Weiss, *Studies*, 31–34.

93. *Darkhei ha-yashar*, 8a. Finally he was able to go to Sadgora (*ibid.*), and kept traveling even after Rabbi Israel's death (*Eser orot*, 139).

94. For more details, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 233, nn. 114–18.

95. See Even, *Hoyf*, 56–57.

96. *Yagid tsedek*, 14 (n.p.).

97. Kamelhar, *Dor de'ah*, 291.

98. *Beit Shelomo*, 10, 16; *Melitzei esh*, II, # 213.

99. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 234, n. 123.

100. *Si'ah sarfei kodesh: milu'im*, # 29.

101. *Meir enei ha-golah*, mikhtavim, 4 (see also *ibid.*, I, 113–18); *Si'ah sarfei kodesh*, II, 133–34.

102. *Meir enei ha-golah*, I, 113; *Pinat yikrat*, 76.

103. *Si'ah sarfei kodesh*, III, 120; *Meir enei ha-golah*, I, 116. The term “to give a bench” means to treat someone with special respect, because most of those who approached the zaddik usually stood before him.

104. *Si'ah sarfei kodesh*, II, 32; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 102–3; *Ner Israel*, IV, 147–53.

105. *Si'ah sarfei kodesh*, III, 18; *Meir enei ha-golah*, I, 118. The few reliable traditions we have make it difficult to tell if there was in fact tension between these two zaddikim, who had never met each other. For a speculative explanation of the hostility between Kotsk and Ruzhin, see Steinman, *Parshiyot*, 377–85.

106. See above, n. 100. The custom of counting coins as a means for concentration or relief of tension has been related also to the twelfth-century sage Rabbi Jacob Tam. See *Shut Maharil*, likutim, 87; cf. Ben-Menahem, *Sefer*, 92.

107. See, in detail, Assaf and Bartal, *Shtadlanut*, 74–90, and Chapter 9.

108. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 235, n. 132.

109. *Imrei shefer*, 16a. It seems that this union did not take place.

110. Buber, *Tales*, II, 16.

## Chapter 8

1. During 1843–44, Israel's daughter Miriam and son David Moses married; his grandchildren Nahum Dov (son of Shalom Joseph), Solomon (son of Abraham Jacob) and Levi Isaac (son of Gitl) were born; his grandchild Asher (son of Abraham Jacob) became engaged (but died soon afterwards); his mother Chava died. In 1845 his grandchild Baruch (son of Miriam) was born. On the events of 1847, see below. In 1848, his grandchild Abraham Mathitiah (son of Menahem Nahum) was born. In 1849, his granddaughter Leah Rachel (daughter of Shalom Joseph) married. In 1850, his son Mordekhai Shraga married and his grandchildren Isaac (son of Abraham Jacob) and Hayyim David (son of Gitl) were born. For more details on each son, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 449–66.

2. Except Miriam, who moved away with her husband to Vizhnitz, see *ibid.*, 461–62.

3. *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 94–95.

4. In 1847, David Moses' wife applied for an entry permit to Russia for her husband—her application was denied; in 1849, all of Rabbi Israel's sons (except Mordekhai Shraga) applied for such permits and again they were refused. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 479–481, # 10–11. On the sons' attempts to enter Russia after Israel's death, see Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 147–48.

5. The special relationship between them is widely described in *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 25–32; Even, *Hoyf*, 46–55; Obadiah, *Rimanov*, 229–33; cf. *Sipurim hadashim*, 26–27.

6. Even, *ibid.*, 53–55.

7. See Chapter 2 above, following n. 27. On the bride's age, see *Or pnei zaddikim*, hayei ha-mehaber, 7; Obadiah, *Rimanov*, 225.

8. The letter's text was published in Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 298, # 25. Others of the remaining hasidim joined the Zanz court of Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam, see *Kol me-beikhal*, 4.



9. *Ohalei Ya'akov*, 245; *Kitvei zaddikim*, 24; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 161.

10. On Malkah's genealogy, see *Beit Shelomo*, 1–2. According to *Ateret tiferet*, 8, Israel remarried just as a response to the wishes of his hasidim, but this is definitely a late explanation.

11. *Menahem zion*, 38–39.

12. As she was described by Solomon Rubin (Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 112). Moses Orenstein, a bitter opponent of Sadgora zaddikim, also portrayed her as a pretty woman, see id., *Orot me-ofel*, 205; id., *Ha-tsofeh*, 34b.

13. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 162. Other sources named Rabbi Eleazar Shapira of Lancut, son of Zevi Elimelekh of Dinov (*Beit Shelomo*, 2a). On the wedding's date, see *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 31; Marcus, *Hasidut*, 206.

14. Moskovitch, *Otsar*, XV, 6. According to this tale the *minyān* that was required for the wedding was made up of randomly chosen laymen.

15. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 162.

16. For more on Rabbi Joseph Friedman of Rimanov (d. 1913), see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 239, n. 17.

17. From a letter sent in 1845 by Rabbi Zevi to Rabbi Israel we learn of Malkah's surprisingly unaccompanied journey to Sadgora, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 304.

18. Rubin's letter (Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 112). Some zaddikim did not hesitate to force husbands to divorce their wives, sometimes for petty reasons; see, e.g., Wilensky, *Hasidim u-mitnagdim*, II, 161; Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 243–49; Kotik, *Maine zikhroynes*, II, 26–28.

19. Alfassi, *Bi-sdeh ha-basidut*, 14–15. In his letter, Rubin himself noted that his story was based on a rumor he had only partially heard in his small town, and he himself had doubts about its truthfulness.

20. *Menahem zion*, 38–39. This hardcore version was censored in the next edition of *Menahem zion*, which was published in *Derekh zaddikim*, 66. In the later version, the woman approached Rabbi Zevi and complained that her deceased husband left her destitute. In another version, Malkah is described as a widow who approached Rabbi Zevi to help her find an appropriate match (Moskovitch, *Otsar*, XV, 3–5).

21. According to this dream story, Rabbi Israel answered his late wife Sarah: "I told her: Did not Abraham the patriarch take a wife, and her name was Keturah [Gen. 25:1] after the death of his wife Sarah? and I think that she understood." See *Kitvei zaddikim*, 24; cf. *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 145–47; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 60.

22. *Notser hesed*, 9b (ch. 3, # 4). There is no doubt that he refers to Rabbi Israel; cf. Moskovitch, *Otsar*, XV, 7. Among the scholars who condemned this marriage we can probably count Rabbi Joseph Saul Nathanson of Lemberg, who bitterly criticized the zaddik of Komarno's attitude in 1857; see *Shut sho'el u-meshiv*, III, # 87.

23. This epidemic probably started in Odessa and moved north to Lithuania and White Russia. It caused the deaths of more than 300,000 people in Russia, and about 42,000 in eastern Galicia and Bukovina (Baron, *Russian Jew*, 65; Pinkas Polin, II, ix; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 241, n. 26). Interesting evidence about the influence of the epidemic in Sadgora may be found in a booklet of prayers, *Tfilah le-ivot be-tsarah* (prayer for times of tribulation), printed in Chernovtsy in 1848 (rep. *Kerem ha-basidut*, I, 130–39). It comprises a few prayers for stopping an epidemic and Psalms

organized according to the letter order of the name Sadgora. We may assume that the publishing of this booklet received Rabbi Israel's blessing.

24. *Kitvei zaddikim*, 23–24. For more details on Malkah, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 240, n. 24.

25. The document was first published by Meir Balaban, *Yevreiskaya starina* 5 (1912): 432; cf. *Historische schriftn* 1 (1929): 637–38; Gelber, *Lvov*, 242.

26. These are the enigmatic words of Jacob Shapira in his letter to the historian S. Dubnow; see *Tagim* 2 (1971): 54–55. For additional sources on Rabbi Israel's interest in the Hungarian uprising, see *Even shtiyah*, 68; *Kneset Israel*, 23.

27. Even, *Velt*, 148.

28. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 15–16. According to another source (*Ohalei Ya'akov*, 382), Rabbi Israel told his hasidim after *Simhat Torah* of 1850 that they were allowed to forward their kvitlekh to Shalom Joseph. On the latter's status as a successor during his father's lifetime, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 452.

29. See his letters to Rabbi Solomon Kluger and Nehemiah Jehiel of Bychawa, Assaf, *Malkhut*, 452, n. 21.

30. *Zohar hai*, 215a; cf. Berle, *Komarno*, 196–97.

31. On the hasidic concept of “inner point,” see Pickarz, *Polin*, 122–53.

32. Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 145–46; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 480. On Rabbi Israel's rapid aging, see also, *Prince of the Chasidim*.

33. Cf. *Ma'aseh Nehemiah*, 23; Even, *Velt*, 144.

34. Even, *Velt*, 143–49. For more references, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 245, n. 42. Noteworthy is Rabbi Judah Leib Maimon's testimony that he had heard this story as early as 1883, and that it influenced him to become more devoted to Zionism (Maimon, *Zion*, I, 196–97).

35. Margaliot, *Or ha-Meir*, 39–41; cf. Maimon, *Zion*, I, 194–95; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 163; Zevin, *Hasidim*, II, 135–6; *Nahalat Zevi*, IV, 80.

36. *Tif'eret banim*, II, # 50; cf. Weinshtock, *Lelov*, 79–80, 242–44; Soraski, *Torah*, II, 30.

37. See Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 302, # 32; id., *Malkhut*, 56.

38. *Kneset Israel*, 16–17; Kleinman, *Or yesharim*, 63–64; Even, *Hoyf*, 58–59. Rabbi Moses frequently traveled to Rabbi Israel, when he was still in Ruzhin; see Kleinman, *Or yesharim*, 7, 51, 54, 57, 65, 112, 152.

39. See Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, ms. Bauminger 6, photostat 4509, # 4; *Divrei David*, 58.

40. *Even shtiyah*, 85.

41. *Ner Israel*, I–II, 151.

42. *Divrei David*, 50.

43. *Ateret Shelomo*, 6; Marcus, *Hasidut*, 223; Even, *Hoyf*, 62–64; Zevin, *Hasidim*, II, 84–85.

44. *Ohalei Ya'akov*, 18, 382.

45. This date is agreed by all sources; see references in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 247, nn. 54–55.

46. Lerman, *Mikhtevei Eliyahu*, 56; cf. *Kneset Israel*, 17; Marcus, *Hasidut*, 223; Even, *Hoyf*, 63; Wunder, *Grodzisk*, 165. The same phrase is related to Rabbi Judah the Prince: “At the time of his passing, he raised his ten fingers toward heaven and

said: Sovereign of the universe, it is revealed and known to you . . . that I did not enjoy any worldly benefits even with my little finger” (Babylonian Talmud, *Ketubot* 104a). Rabbi Judah was a descendent of King David and represented in the Talmud as a model for a combination of Torah and greatness. Obviously Rabbi Israel considered himself as Rabbi Judah’s successor.

47. Tellingator, *Toldot Aharon*, 59–60; id., *Even Israel*, 28–9.

48. *Evel gadol*. In the same year (1851) Teomim published another eulogy, that time on Rabbi Israel’s son, Shalom Joseph. See *Evel Kaved*.

49. *Kol nehi*, 24–25.

50. Tellingator, *Even Israel*, 28.

51. *Ma’aseh Nehemiah*, 37–38; cf. Assaf, *Bychawa*, 296.

52. For more details about this tough dispute, in which Torah scholars such as Joseph Landau of Jassy and Solomon Kluger of Brody were involved, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 248–50, n. 62. In his still unpublished responsa, Kluger condemned Israel’s sons who “went too far with their greed.”

53. Even, *Hoyf*, 97–98. This harmony, Even claimed, became tainted after Shalom Joseph’s illness and his journey to Germany. From then on, each son performed his own tish. On the confusion of the hasidim, as to which brother they should approach, see *Beit Israel*, 149–50, # 36, 39.

54. On this rare document, signed by about 150 hasidim from Jerusalem, Hebron, and Safed, see *Be’er Yitzhak*, 16–17.

55. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 145.

56. See, e.g., *Irin kadishin*, 126; *Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 5a; *Abir Ya’akov*, 11; Barash, *Kitvei*, 303–10; Maimon, *Zion*, I, 193–97.

## Chapter 9

1. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 105.

2. Benjamin of Balta, a disciple of Pinhas of Korets, immigrated to Palestine and died in Safed in 1825. We know nothing about his son Azriel.

3. The monopolies possessed by zaddikim will be discussed in Chapter 13, VI.

4. *Sipurei zaddikim*, III, 13. The authenticity of this story is confirmed by another source: an approbation written by Rabbi Abraham David Lavut to the book *Pelah ha-rimon* (Vilna 1887), where he referred to Rabbi Israel’s deed in the matter of the grandchildren of Zeev of Balta.

5. One cannot ignore the similarities, at least in terminology, to the well-known classification of the maskil Naphtali Herz Wessely in his *Divrei shalom ve-emet* (1782), who also distinguished between “law of people” (universal human ethics) and “law of God,” which is relevant only to the Jews. Wessely’s views fired up Orthodox circles against him.

6. Hasidism cleverly integrated itself into the social reality of Jewish communal daily life to obtain leverage for the movement’s expansion (see Shmeruk, *Hakhirot*, 187–88). In addition to supporting the Balta rabbi’s grandchildren, for example, Rabbi Israel joined with other distinguished zaddikim in reconfirming an old hasidic ban on troublemakers from Konstantin (Volhynia) who were infringing on a family’s copper production lease (see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 285, # 1). In fact, the letter in

which he confirmed the ban (written sometime between 1823 and 1825) is the earliest autograph document we have for Rabbi Israel, who was then at most aged twenty-eight.

7. *Kneset Israel*, 58.

8. Usually from a lenient perspective, see *Shut birkat Yosef*, even ha-ezer, # 29–35.

9. Among them, Joseph Saul Nathanson and Mordekhai Zeev Ettinger of Lemberg, and Solomon Kluger of Brody. See *Toldot Yosef*, 17; *Shut ha-elef lekha Shelomo*, # 90; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 259, n. 13.

10. The phrase “the eyes of Israel” clearly hints at Rabbi Israel himself. The letter, printed first in *Toldot Yosef*, 3 (see also Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 293, # 17), is not dated and was probably written at the end of 1842.

11. *Toldot Yosef*, 17–18.

12. For more details on Landau’s biography, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 260, nn. 17–19.

13. *Halitzah* is a halakhic procedure freeing the widow of a childless husband from the levirate tie, requiring her to marry her late husband’s brother.

14. *Shut birkat Yosef*, even ha-ezer, # 104; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 454–55.

15. For examples, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 261.

16. Landau’s eulogy, *Kol nehi*, was printed in 1851. On his involvement in the controversy over Rabbi Israel’s property, see *Toldot Yosef*, 20.

17. The word dayan is a confusion of his father’s name, Daniel. On this person, Jehiel Michel b. Daniel (d. 1847), a prominent and wealthy member of the hasidic community in Jassy, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 262, n. 28.

18. *Kneset Israel*, 21–22; Gutman, *Romania*, xxv–xxvi; cf. Agnon, *Ir u-melo’ah*, 532.

19. *Toldot Yosef*, 14–15; Gutman, *Romania*.

20. For the full text of the letter, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 262–3; id., *Ruzhin*, 299, # 26.

21. The maskil Joseph Perl was probably the first who stressed it in his writings, both in his satires and memorandums to the authorities. See Mahler, *Tazkir*; id., *Haskalah*, 176–77.

22. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 134–35. Cf. Rapoport, *Hasidism after 1772*, 78–79, and n. 5; Assaf, *Ovruch*, 235–36; id., *Bychawa*, 269–77.

23. Agnon, *Guest*, 197.

24. The pattern of hasidic takeover of a community is described in Assaf, *Ma’avak*, 475–84.

25. See Shmeruk, *Shebitab*; Kuperstein, *Inquiry*.

26. On the role of cantors in the expansion of Hasidism, see Gottlober, *Zikhronot*, I, 58–61.

27. Stampfer, *Sakinim*, has recently explained the background and reasons for the sudden disappearance of the controversy over the hasidic slaughterer’s knives.

28. For some examples of interhasidic controversies, see Assaf, *Ma’avak*, 485–93; id., *Gedolei ha-dor*; id., *Malkhut*, 265, n. 45.

29. For the text of the letter, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 285, # 2.

30. *Shut Enzil*, 51a. The whole case is described from Enzil’s point of view, *ibid.*, # 52–55 (the names of Berdichev and Kluger were erased). Kluger’s point of view is

presented in *Toldot Shelomo*, 72–87. For more on this case, see Geenwald, *Shohet*, 132–55; *Ner Israel*, IV, 397–402; Gartner, *Kluger*, 33–47; cf. Agnon, *Ir u-melo'ah*, 549–50. On Israel of Ruzhin's ramified contacts to Berdichev, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 266–67, n. 49.

31. This tension is discussed in Chapter 3, VI. It is noteworthy that Moses of Savran was briefly head of the rabbinical court in Berdichev.

32. *Toldot Yosef*, 18.

33. *Toldot Shelomo*, 74, 81.

34. *Toldot Yosef*, 18; *Shut birkat Yosef*, yoreh de'ah, # 4.

35. Ya'akov, *Chernobyl*, 256; *Nahalat Zevi*, VII, 85–86. Kashvatin (Khashchevatoye) is a small town in Podolia province, located between Bershad and Savran.

36. For the rabbinical contract, along with Rabbi Israel's approval, see *Kovets siftei zaddikim*, VI, 29–32.

37. For Kluger's letter, see *Kerem Shelomo* 4, no. 3 (1981): 16. For the background to Kluger's desire to leave Brody, see *Toldot Shelomo*, 87–96.

38. *Kerem Shelomo* 7–8 (1985): 43–45.

39. He was not related to Rabbi Joseph Landau of Jassy mentioned above. For more biographic details on Landau (1823–1900), see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 269, n. 61, 63.

40. Even, *Hoyf*, 62–64.

41. See details in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 269–70.

42. *Bahur* (Yiddish *bocher*) is a term for an unmarried young man.

43. Harif, *Hasidut*. There is no evidence of this affair in the writings of the Apta-Zinkov dynasty or in any other hasidic source.

44. Hayah Malka, daughter of Rabbi Israel, was married to Mendel, son of Isaac Meir of Zinkov, who died shortly afterwards. In 1849, Lea Rachel, Israel's granddaughter, married Isaac Meir's grandson. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 454–55.

45. In this interesting appeal, addressed to Sir Moses Montefiore, Abraham Jacob presents himself as his father's heir also in the tradition of intercessor. For the letter's text, see Gutman, *Romania*, xxvii–xxxi; *Tiferet Israel* 10: 30–35.

46. For a typology of the traditional intercessor, see Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, 71–72. On the transformation of Eastern European traditional intercession since the eighteenth century, see Assaf and Bartal, *Shtadlanut*.

47. Despite the fact that the total number of Jews recruited during the thirty years of the forced conscription (till its abolishment in 1856) was no more than sixty to seventy thousand people, i.e., an annual average number of two thousand recruits out of two and half million Russian Jews. See Dubnow, *History*, V, 153–61; Baron, *Russian Jew*, 37; Stanislawski, *Nicholas*, 16–34.

48. Lipschitz, *Zikhron Ya'akov*, I, 27–28. According to this source, his grandfather, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, sent Isaac Zeev to Ruzhin. However, Rabbi Hayyim died in 1821, long before the conscription decree was issued. For some attempts to correct the text, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 274, n. 83. The *mome* (aunt) Leah is a legendary figure. According to Lipschitz she was the Jewish wife of a Russian navy admiral who was close to Czar Nicholas I. She remained loyal to her hasidic roots and used to send donations to Rabbi Israel. The whole story, shaped in the pattern of the biblical queen Esther (and also Esterke, the Jewish mistress of King

Cazimir of Poland), has no other supporting evidence and it seems to be completely fictional.

49. Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem 8°5301; *Tiferet Israel* 27: 5–6.

50. Based on Babylonian Talmud, *Moed katan*, 16b, and introduction to the *Zohar*, 10b.

51. See Heilman, *Beit Rabbi*, 123; id., *Beit Israel*, 3; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 51–52.

52. On this trip and speculations over its aims, see Heilman, *Beit Rabbi*, 136; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 52, 109; Mondshine, *Migdal oz*, 233–34; *Toldot Yitzhak Isaac*, III–14.

53. The assembly convened secretly from May 6 until August 27, 1843. On this event and its background, see Philipson, *Lilienthal*, 12–45; Etkes, *Haskalah*, 297–99; Stanislawski, *Nicholas*, 77–82.

54. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 276, n. 93.

55. For bibliography on the clothing decree in Russia and later in Poland, see *ibid.*, 277, nn. 94–95.

56. For bibliography on Montefiore's 1846 journey, see Assaf and Bartal, *Shtadlanut*, 76, n. 24.

57. For a full account of this intercession project and its results, see *ibid.* Only aspects related to Rabbi Israel are discussed here.

58. Rivlin, *Zoref*, 71–83; cf. Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 281, # 9.

59. Rivlin, *ibid.*, 76.

60. *Ibid.*, 82. For the letter of appointment Rabbi Israel sent to Montefiore, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 295, # 21; cf. *ibid.*, 296–97, # 21a, 22a; 281, # 9. In the eyes of maskilim, who thought that the zaddikim were corrupt and took the *halukkah* money for themselves, the relationship of Rabbi Israel and his son Abraham Jacob with Montefiore was perceived as affected and hypocritical; see Orenstein, *Ha-satan*. The title *nasi* was probably derived from the seventeenth-century-title *Nesi Eretz Israel*; see Heilperin, *Yehudim*, 64–65.

61. These letters and other relevant material from the volumes of correspondence of the *pekidim ve-amarkalim* are published in Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 259–84. On this organization and the methodological problems of its research, see Bartal, *Galut*, 64–73; Morgenstern, *Geulah*, 389–409.

62. Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 281–82, # 10, 13.

63. Mahler, *Divrei*, VI, 274–75; cf. Bartal, *Galut*, 216, n. 18; Assaf, *Ovruch*, 259–60.

64. For more on Bak's activities in this regard, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 280, n. 105.

65. On Montefiore as an intercessor and his changing image in the eyes of different circles, see Zitron, *Shtadlanim*, 218–37; Etkes, *Haskalah*, 301–4; Bartal, *Galut*, 219–35.

66. For Lipschutz's letter, see *Tiferet Israel* 14: 32; for further references and discussion, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 281, n. 108. It should be noted that close to the time of Montefiore's visit to Russia, a rumor spread that he would meet Rabbi Israel in Sadgora, and this meeting—which indeed never happened—was the basis for some information submitted by informers to the Russian authorities. See Ginsburg, *Historische verk*, I, 256–58 (id., *Ktavim*, 168–78); Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 282, # 12.

67. When some hasidim cut a certain hasid's long sidelocks while he slept, Solomon, son of Rabbi Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, tried to encourage him by saying that his grandfather, Rabbi Israel, believed that the "Clothing Decree" had come about only because Jews disgraced the command of sidelocks by letting them grow too long (Heschel, *Dokumentn*, 134–35; cf. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 156). According to another tradition, Rabbi Israel made a special stipulation when his son Abraham Jacob became engaged that he was not to grow his sidelocks more than the minimum required by the Halakhah (Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 111–12).

68. *Beit Israel*, 39.

69. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 48.

70. For the text of the letter, see *Yimale pi thilatekha*, 6–7; *Tiferet Israel* 14: 33–34. We know almost nothing of Binenfeld, who served as a diplomatic emissary for the zaddikim's interests. According to uncertain sources he was killed during the 1849 uprising in Hungary (see Marcus, *Hasidut*, 213; Even, *Hoyf*, 109).

71. On the attitude of the zaddikim toward cooperation with the assimilated Jews in Warsaw, see Assaf and Bartal, *Shtadlanut*, 74–90.

72. *Yimale pi thilatekha*, 8–9; Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 296, # 22.

73. *Tiferet Israel*, 14, 32, 38; *Yimale pi tehilatekha*, 3.

74. *Yimale pi thilatekha*, 10–11; Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 297–8, # 23; cf. Bak's letter to Montefiore, *Tiferet Israel* 14: 41.

75. See Assaf and Bartal, *Shtadlanut*, 77–79.

76. *Ibid.*, 86–90.

77. See Mahler, *Divrei*, VI, 273–76; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 285.

78. An earlier noteworthy example was the relationship between Nahman of Bratslav and the maskilim of Uman, but Nahman's motives were totally different from those of Rabbi Israel.

79. *Beit Yehudah*, 354.

80. *Te'udah be-Israel* was first printed in Vilna in 1828. The second edition, with author's corrections, was printed in Vilna in 1856. The last sentence was printed as a footnote to the "Preface" to the second edition.

81. On the positive attitude of Lubavitch hasidim to this book, see Gottlober, *Zikbronot*, II, 124. See also Levinsohn, *Beit Yehudah*, xxix; Klausner, *Sifrut*, III, 74–75. Etkes (*Te'udah*, 5, 12–13, 19) preferred to stress the aid offered to Levinsohn from the non-hasidic circles, and the chilly reactions of the hasidim. This very fact influenced the general perspective of the book and turned it into a maskilic apologetic tractate addressed mainly to mitnagdim, in order to introduce them to moderate maskilic ideology.

82. Zinberg, *History*, XI, 21–94; Klausner, *Sifrut*, 70–75; Etkes, *Te'udah*, 3–19.

83. The only one who mentioned Rabbi Israel's support in that book was Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 43.

84. Katz, *Igrot*, 272; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 73.

85. See, e.g., *Te'udah be-Israel*, 58, 171, 193, 196; cf. Etkes, *Te'udah*, 17, n. 52. However, the small number of anti-hasidic polemics in such a programmatic book, from a thinker who considered Hasidism a disaster for the Jewish entity, reflects Levinsohn's relative restraint in writing it.

86. Zinberg, *History*, XI, 38–39; Klausner, *Sifrut*, III, 44.

87. Katz, *Igrot*, 270.
88. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 288, n. 139. On the background of the writing of *Efes damim*, see Zinberg, *History*, XI, 669; Klausner, *Sifrut*, III, 50–53, 93–99.
89. *Efes damim*, approbations at the beginning of the book (n.p.).
90. See the sources provided in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 289, n. 144.
91. For examples of his relationship with maskilim, see *ibid.*, 286, n. 124. Heilperin was a legendary person in his town, and many stories tell of his wealth and splendor. For more references to his character and his intercessory activity, see Assaf, *ibid.*, 285, n. 122–23; Khiterer, *Galperin*.
92. For further discussion, see Assaf and Bartal, *Shtadlanut*.
93. Etkes, *Te'udah*, 5.
94. For examples, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 290, n. 147.
95. On the origins of the hasidic kolel, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 291, nn. 148–49. On the kolel as a modern orthodox organization, which reflects the social changes developed in Eastern European Jewry during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Bartal, *Galut*, 301–6.
96. On the Volhynia kolel, see *Mishkenot ha-ro'im*, 102ff.; *Tiferet Israel* 21: 42–60; Assaf, *Orruch*; Karlinsky, *Tsfat*. Still there is no comprehensive research on this kolel, its transformation, splitting up, and relationship with other Palestinian kolelim.
97. See Assaf, *Ruzhin*, # 4, 10, 14–15, 19–21a, 22a, 27, and more references in *id.*, *Malkhut*, 292, n. 152.
98. Rabbi Israel probably “inherited” the title from the zaddik Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta (d. 1825); see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 293, n. 153.
99. An interesting polemic tractate on this issue is *Hok olam* (Jerusalem 1892), between Isaac of Boian, Rabbi Israel’s grandson, and Hayyim of Zinkov, the zaddik of Apta’s great-grandson.
100. Beit-Halevi, *Kalish*, 320. On this letter and its background, see Assaf, *Orruch*, 240, 252–53.
101. For the full text of this letter, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 292–93, # 15; cf. *id.*, *Malkhut*, 294, n. 157.
102. See *id.*, *Ruzhin*, 294, # 18; *Kovets sifte zaddikim*, VI, 35–36.
103. Gelber, *Aus zwei Jahrhunderten*, 103–4; *id.*, *Aliyat yehudim*, 246–47.
104. Eliav, *Austria*, 68–71.
105. Frankel, *Nach Jerusalem*, 42 (*Yerushalayma*, 177). The last words are surely related to Rabbi Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, who replaced his father in dealing with the kolel’s affairs.
106. Galant, *Zaddikim*, 320.
107. *Be'er Yitzhak*, 16–17.
108. For bibliography on the Bak family and its immigration to Palestine (ca. 1826), as well as on the founding of the hasidic kolel in Jerusalem, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 297, nn. 165–66.
109. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 298, n. 167.
110. He published a harsh ban in pamphlet form against Rabbi Hayyim (*Kol me-beikhal*), and under his instructions some other activities were carried out against Zanz supporters in Palestine.



111. On this case, see Morgenstern, *Geulah*, 307–26; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 298, n. 170.
112. On this case, see Eliav, *Austria*, 102–9.
113. Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 294–5, # 20.
114. For more references on this synagogue, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 299.
115. *Darkhei ha-yashar*, 9a.
116. *Irin kadishin*, 68.
117. *Kneset Israel*, 33.
118. *Yesu'ot Israel*, I, 23; *Beit Israel*, 28.
119. *Shut ha'elef lkha Shelomo*, # 118; cf. *Shut minbat Elazar*, V, # 12; Assaf, *Ovruch*, 237.

### Chapter 10

1. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 188.
2. *Be'erot ha-mayyim*, 21b; *Yesu'ot Israel*, I, 27; *Eser orot*, 126; *Beit Israel*, 10.
3. *Yesu'ot Israel*, I, 29–31; *Or pnei zaddikim*, 7; Even, *Hoyf*, 53–54; cf. *Beit Israel*, 30–31; and Chapter 2, III, above.
4. *Beit Israel*, 14.
5. Orenstein, *Orot me-ofel*, 204.
6. See Wilensky, *Hasidim u-mitnagdim*, index, s.v. pidyonot.
7. The maskil's description of Rabbi Mordekhai as the greediest rebbe (see Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 189) is not far from reality, but is corroborated by hasidic sources (see, e.g., *Sipurei Slonim*, 154; *Sefer ha-yahas*, 14–15; Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 87–88).
8. Horodezky, *Zikhronot*, 16. Horodezky and Mahler compare Rabbi Mordekhai and Rabbi Israel but exaggerate the level of competition and hostility between them (see Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 111–12; Mahler, *Divrei*, VI, 19).
9. See Wunder, *Grodzisk*, 167; cf. *Sipurei Nifla'ot*, 149.
10. Braver, *Pe'er Yitzhak*, 26a.
11. *Kerem Israel*, 53–54; cf. *Tseror ha-Hayyim*, 64; *Sefer ha-yahas*, 5, 102.
12. Ginsburg, *Historische verk*, I, 100–101; id., *Ktavim*, 77.
13. This matter is discussed mainly by genealogists; see references in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 307–8, n. 16.
14. *Beit Israel*, 37.
15. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 96.
16. *Beit Israel*, 12.
17. *Divrei David*, 58.
18. *Yesu'ot Israel*, I, 24.
19. Even, *Hoyf*, 13. On the groove in the skull, see also *Kitvei reb Yoshe*, 244. The comparison to the kings Saul and David was probably influenced by *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 291, which provides the same explanation for the tension between the Besht (who was the spirit of King David) and Nahman of Kosov (who derived from Saul's spirit). On Bernyu, see *Sefer ha-yahas*, 171; Tzederbaum, *Dubim*, 174.
20. *Divrei David*, 15.
21. *Hayyei Moharan*, II, 8.

22. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 65.
23. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 145; Even, *Hoyf*, 140; Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 80.
24. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 75; Yehalel, *Hitgalut ha-yenukah*, 33–34, 38; Tishby, *Kabbalah*, II, 544–45.
25. *Be'erot ha-mayyim*, 13a.
26. *Even shtiyah*, 29.
27. *Ibid.*, 30; cf. *Ahavat Shalom*, 4.
28. *Zikaron tov*, 19–20.
29. *Divrei David*, 54–55 (this story was probably influenced by *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 145–47).
30. For bibliographical references on the concept of worship in corporeality, and some typical relevant teachings of Ruzhin and Chernobyl zaddikim, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 310, nn. 36–37.
31. On Rabbi Baruch, his behavior and reputation, see *ibid.*, 311, nn. 39, 43.
32. *Butsina di-nehora*, 25; cf. Pickarz, *Tsemihat ha-hasidut*, 37–38.
33. *Butsina di-nehora*, 43, 51.
34. *Divrei David*, 15.
35. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 312–13, n. 44.
36. *No'am megadim*, 58a. On Rabbi Eliezer's teaching as a possible ideological basis for Rabbi Israel's way of life, see Pickarz, *Idiologia*, 214–15.
37. *Or Yitzhak*, 25. For an opposing view of Rabbi Michel as a “royal” zaddik, see the statement of the zaddik of Komarno, who praises zaddikim who behave with luxury and condemns those “fools” who believe the authentic zaddik should be deeply melancholic (*Netiv mitsvotekha*, introduction, 2a). On the moral double standard built into the doctrine of the zaddik, see Pickarz, *Polin*, 168.
38. *Kneset Israel*, 35; *Evel gadol*, 3a. On the role of Rabbi Hanina's model in the pre-hasidic and hasidic literature, see Pickarz, *Tsemihat ha-hasidut*, 16–17; *id.*, *Polin*, 162–63; *id.*, *Devekut*, 241–44; Green, *Leadership*, 131–33.
39. *Eser orot*, 129.
40. *Irin kadishin*, 91.
41. *Ibid.*, 102; cf. Mahler, *Divrei*, VI, 25.
42. *Ibid.*, 102–3.
43. *Irin kadishin*, 19–20; cf. *Sipurim hadashim*, 29–30; *Beit zaddikim*, 40–41.
44. For examples of different approaches towards worship in corporeality in the teachings of late zaddikim, see Pickarz, *Polin*, 161–80.
45. See for example, Yehalel, *Hitgalut ha-yenuka*, an anti-hasidic satire mocking the zaddikim of “the hidden aspect,” who are full of evil thoughts.
46. *Kneset Israel*, 23. On Rabbi Eliezer, see Pickarz, *Tsemihat ha-hasidut*, 50–51.
47. Even, *Hoyf*, 21–22. Israel actually ate very little and this was noted also in non-hasidic writings. However, this behavior was explained in hasidic hagiography as an expression of his efforts not to enjoy food. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 137–38, n. 68.
48. *Hanhagot yesharot*, 39, 17; cf. Mahler, *Divrei*, VI, 19–20. For a sample of repentance practices ordered by Rabbi Hayyim of Zanz, see *Shut divrei Hayyim*, orah hayyim, # 34; yoreh de'ah, # 70; even ha-ezer, # 21.
49. *Irin kadishin*, 37; cf. *Razin de-oraytah*, 19a.

50. *Beit zaddikim*, 50.
51. *Irin kadishin*, 37–38.
52. *Likutim yekarim*, 34, 38.
53. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 27.
54. Wunder, *Grodzisk*, 167.
55. Ruderman, *Hashkafa kelalit*, 94–96.
56. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 136–37. For more references, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 322, n. 71.
57. *Ner Israel*, II, 22–23; cf. below n. 63.
58. *Kneset Israel*, 140; *Irin kadishin*, 34; *Reshumot*, I, 396–97; cf. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 323, nn. 74–76.
59. *Likutim yekarim*, 50.
60. *Darkhei ha-yashar*, 8b.
61. Margaliot, *Or ha-Meir*, 20.
62. *Talkut ha-ro'im*, 8; cf. Mahler, *Shitot*, 224–25.
63. *Si'ah sarfei kodesh*, milu'im, # 29; Erten, *Emet ve-emunah*, 122; cf. above, n. 57.
64. *Darkhei ha-yashar*, 8b. Menahem Nahum, Rabbi Israel's son, said that his father “was an expert on [dogs] and on their breeds” (*Beit Israel*, 15).
65. *Ohalei Ya'akov*, 133.
66. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, II, 18.
67. *Even shtiyah*, 28.
68. *Hitgalut ha-yenuka*, 40, n. 16.
69. Perl, *Megaleh temirin*, 18b; id., *Revealer*, 87.
70. Perl's notes to Israel Loebel's *Sefer vikua'h*. Manuscript housed in Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, 4°1153 (file 91, n. 3); cf. Perl, *Chassidim*, 94.
71. *Irin kadishin*, 71; *Eser orot*, 132–3; Even, *Hoyf*, 64–66; id., *Velt*, 139–42.
72. On this jester, Joseph Baumel of Brody, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 326, n. 93.
73. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 188.
74. *Sipurim hadashim*, 10. According to another popular tradition he had twenty-four musicians in his band (Ansky, *Writings*, 6).
75. *Kerem Israel*, 62.
76. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 142.
77. *Kneset Israel*, 27–28. On the historical background of this affair, see Halpern, *Yehudim*, 348–54.
78. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 189.
79. Druyanow, *Bedihah ve-bidud*, III, 132. For more references, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 34, n. 57, 328, n. 102.
80. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 22.
81. *Irin kadishin*, 107.
82. Ansky, *Writings*, 7. For Maskilim's ridiculing the connection zaddikim drew between their carriage and Ezekiel's vision of the Chariot, see Tishby, *Kabbalah*, II, 550, n. 31.
83. Hilberg, *Rabbi*, 471.
84. Avituv, *Beit aba*, 45.

85. Even, *Hoyf*, 181; Yehalel, *Hitgalut ha-yenuka*, 32. During the controversy between Zanz and Sadgora, the Sadgora hasidim were accused for bowing to their zaddikim's carriage, see *Yalkut ha-ro'im*, 42–44. At first glance, these accusations look like polemical exaggeration, but cf. a Russian police report of 1865 describing the ecstatic reception hasidim gave Aaron of Chernobyl and Isaac of Skvira, which included kissing of their carriage's wheels (see Galant, *Zaddikim*, 340).

86. Hilberg, *Rabbi*, 471; Even, *Hoyf*, 21.

87. *Kerem Israel*, 64.

88. *Ma'aseh Nehemiah*, 8.

89. Bodek, *Sipurim*, 69; cf. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 331, n. 116.

90. *Kneset Israel*, 22–23; cf. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 57–58.

91. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 337.

92. Greenberg, *Ancareon*, 71. The origin of this image is probably found in *Sipurei zaddikim*, III, 11–12; cf. Marcus, *Hasidut*, 215; *Sipurei Slonim*, 234. Needless to say maskilim and other cynical onlookers vehemently denied the sincerity of this naïve picture; see Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 142.

93. *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 94; cf. *Kivei reb Yoshe*, 224.

94. *Kneset Israel*, 91.

95. *Ibid.*, 139.

96. *Beit Israel*, 20.

97. *Mikhtevei Eliyahu*, 56. Similar statements refer to his sons, who also never enjoyed anything of the earthly world, see Even, *Hoyf*, 160–62; *Beit Israel*, 143.

98. An interesting description of the influence the regal style of Sadgora Hasidism had upon the everyday life of a wealthy hasidic family is reflected in the memoir of Ahad Ha-Am's sister, Ginsberg-Shemkim, *Horav shel Ahad Ha-Am*; cf. Zipperstein, *Prophet*, 1–7.

99. Galant, *Zaddikim*, 338.

100. Agnon, *Takhrikh*, 92–93; cf. Gottlob, *Zikhronot*, I, 109–11; Even, *Hoyf*, 74–75. It was told of Rabbi Israel that once he sat next to a young man who was drinking some water, “and a drop of water fell on the Ruzhiner's cloth, and the Ruzhiner was as shocked as if he had been hit by a stone, and said: a blemish on a garment is also like a blemish on your soul” (*Sipurei Slonim*, 239).

101. Ber of Bolechow, *Memoirs*, 144.

## Chapter 11

1. For some bibliographical references, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 337, n. 1.

2. Piekarz, *Devekut*, 226–27.

3. Mahler, *Divrei*, VI, 25. Rabbi Hillel of Parichi (d. 1864), a celebrated Lubavitch hasid who visited Rabbi Israel, said: “He is a supreme zaddik, not inferior, but he is not my rebbe” (Mondshine, *Migdal oz*, 272–73).

4. *Ben porat Yosef*, 22; cf. Scholem, *Pirkei yesod*, 248–49; Green, *Tormented Master*, 131–32, n. 64. The appearance in literature of the phrase “the zaddik of the generation,” with the claim for a systematic hierarchy in the world of the zaddikim, is related to Nahman of Bratslav (see Green, *ibid.*, 116–23; Rapoport-Albert, *Hasidism after 1772*, 109–19).

5. *Irin kadishin*, 35. Rabbi Israel's example of the previous generation's zaddik was Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk.

6. *Shemu'ot tovot*, 54; cf. Even, *Hoyf*, 43–44; *Sipurei Slonim*, 206.

7. Kleinman, *Or yesharim*, 7, 54; cf. *Sipurei Slonim*, 243.

8. Thus, for example, Rabbi Israel defined Menahem of Vitebsk as a zaddik of the generation (above, n. 5). Rabbi Jehiel Michel of Zlochev was also considered among Sadgora hasidim as “the zaddik of the generation” (*Gedolim ma'ase zaddikim*, 31). Only the Besht, the Maggid of Mezhibezh, and Rabbi Barukh of Mezhibozh were “really” regarded as zaddikim of the generation, according to Arthur Green, while Rabbi Nahman's claim to that title was considered a great impertinence by those familiar with him (*Tormented Master*, 116–17, 132, n. 65).

9. An interesting example is the “lineage scroll” of the hasidic writer Israel Berger (*Eser kedushot*, 107–18), which shows his relationship to almost every zaddik, from the early days of Hasidism until his time, and how they were interrelated through very tangled marriage ties.

10. *Ibid.*, 82.

11. Heilman, *Beit Rabbi*, 14; cf. *Hitgalut ha-zaddikim*, 13.

12. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 20–21; cf. *Divrei David*, 15–16.

13. *Divrei David*, 45.

14. *Kneset Israel*, 59–62. The potential for violation of law in this statement is far from concealed.

15. *Beit Israel*, 26.

16. *Kneset Israel*, 65.

17. *Irin kadishin*, 30–31.

18. *Beit Israel*, 26, # 9; cf. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, II, 19.

19. *Beit Israel*, 11; *Kerem Israel*, 62.

20. *Irin kadishin*, 31.

21. *Ibid.* For the concept of the Ancient Man (i.e., the biblical Adam) whose image is inscribed on the throne of the Lord and is the source for all souls, see *ibid.*, 41; Scholem, *Pirkei yesod*, index, s.v. *adam kadmon*.

22. This commentary is not found in Rashi but in Babylonian Talmud, *Menahot*, 84b.

23. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 13a; *Kneset Israel*, 104; cf. *Beit ha-yayin*, 19b; *Razin de-oraytah*, 19b. On the popular concept of the zaddik as a manifestation of a channel or a pathway, see Pickarz, *Tsemilhat ha-basidut*, 16–17, id., *Deveikut*, 241–44.

24. *Irin kadishin*, 92.

25. *Ibid.*, 32. On the comparison between the zaddik and the Lord and its implications, see Rapoport-Albert, *God and the Zaddik*; Green, *Leadership*, 127–56. Menahem Nahum of Stefanesti, son of Rabbi Israel, stated it radically but clearly: “Zaddikim and God are one single thing!” (*Kneset Israel*, 136; cf. Pickarz, *Polin*, 176–77).

26. *Kneset Israel*, 28; cf. *Beit zaddikim*, 10–11.

27. *Irin kadishin*, 67; *Razin de-oraytah*, 23a; Tellingator, *Even Israel*, 22. The wish to feel the pain of others was expressed also by other zaddikim (see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 344, n. 28).

28. *Irin kadishin*, 93–94. The logic of this homily is based on the mystical

assumption that the “great zaddik” consists of the fifty gates of *binah* (intelligence), fifty being the numerical value of the Hebrew word *yam*, which is “sea,” and this is why all the zaddikim (“the streams”) are subordinate to the great one (“the sea”).

29. *Kneset Israel*, 18. The transfer of the zaddik’s behavior onto “God’s playing field,” where the rules are inexplicable, is discussed mainly regarding Nahman of Bratslav’s teachings. See Weiss, *Bratslav*, 152–54; Pickarz, *Bratslav*, 112–13; Rapoport-Albert, *God and the Zaddik*, 323–25.

30. *Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 10b.

31. *Irin kadishin*, 105; *Mikhtevei Eliyahu*, 48, 56; *Eser orot*, 127; *Ner Israel*, IV, 32.

32. On this concept, see Elior, *Yesh and Ayin*; Pickarz, *Idiologia*, 21–23, and index, s.v. *ayin*.

33. *Kneset Israel*, 131; *Sipurim hadashim*, 31a.

34. For bibliographical references on delayed prayers in Hasidism, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 346, n. 35.

35. *Irin kadishin*, 99.

36. *Hitgalut ha-zaddikim*, 54–55; *Eser orot*, 127.

37. *Eser orot*, 128; cf. *Or ha-ner*, 21; *Kneset Israel*, 19. It was told of David Moses of Chortkov, Rabbi Israel’s son, that he also, based on his father’s tradition, was late in his prayer “and prayed the afternoon prayer late in the night” (*Likutim yekarim*, 7–8).

38. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 21b; cf. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 347, n. 41.

39. *Beit Israel*, 26–27; cf. *Kneset Israel*, 32–33.

40. Scholem, *Od davar*, 410; cf. id., *Devarim be-go*, 189.

41. A dramatic expression of his views on “natural” redemption rather than catastrophic apocalyptic redemption may be found in the homily he delivered at his last *seder*. See Chapter 8, I, above.

42. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 23b.

43. *Kneset Israel*, 19–20; cf. *Ohel ha-rabbi*, or *ha-nifla-ot*, 2, # 1. *Hoshana* (literally: Please save) is the seventh day of the Sukkot festival.

44. *Kneset Israel*, 34–35.

45. *Beit Israel*, 36; *Sipurin niflaim*, 14; Tellingator, *Tif'eret Israel*, 1–3; *Sipurei zaddikim*, I, 6.

46. *Sifran shel zaddikim*, 14.

47. Teitelbaum, *Geulah*, 136–37. The tendentious use of this tradition (the Baal prophets are equated with the heretical Zionists) is more than clear.

48. *Irin kadishin*, 23.

49. *Ibid.*, 37.

50. *Or ha-ner*, 24; cf. Buber, *Tales*, II, 67. The sentence “But now that redemption is near, no prayer that ascends on behalf of the sorrowful world is of avail” is not in the original source; it is Buber’s addition.

51. *Irin kadishin*, 34.

52. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 12a; cf. *Irin kadishin*, 100–101.

53. *Evel Mitzrayyim*, 9a.

54. On Rabbi Nahman, see Green, *Tormented Master*, 182–220. A similar attitude regarding the role of the zaddik of the generation in messianic efforts may be found in the teachings of Rabbi Zeev Wolf of Zhitomir; see Tishby, *Kabbalah*, II,

515–9. It is probably too early for a comprehensive and balanced research on the latest messianism among Habad.

55. Cf. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 119; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 150.

56. *Kneset Israel*, 33.

57. In the original Hebrew the word is *mehutanim* (fathers of son-in-law), which refers specifically to the heads of two families arranging a match between their children.

58. *Raza de-uvda*, II, 7.

59. *Mikhtevei Eliyahu*, 40–41. It was also reported that the zaddik Judah Zevi of Stratyń said that Rabbi Israel is the Messiah, see Marcus, *Hasidut*, 221.

60. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 111 (the emphasis is in the original).

61. On Hezekiah, see above, nn. 18–19. On a longing song for redemption wrongly attributed to Rabbi Israel, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 352, n. 63.

62. According the Bible (Gen. 9:28–9), the Flood happened when Noah was six hundred years old.

63. *Migdal David*, introduction; *Sfi'ah katzir*, 7a; *Tiferet Israel* 10: 19 (and more references listed there). On the possible meaning of “the cave,” see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 353, n. 65. On Rabbi Aaron Moses, see *ibid.*, 297, n. 166.

64. On the messianic hopes for the year 5600, mainly among perushim, see Morgenstern, *Meshihyut*, only two pages in which are devoted to the hasidim (55–56), despite the relatively large amount of material (see Pickarz, *Polin*, 261–64). Rabbi Israel's attitude to this ferment is not clear, and presumably he had some reservations, cf. *Beit Israel*, 35.

65. *Tiferet Israel* 10: 19; *Reshumot*, I, 468,

66. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 61–62; *Sipurei Slonim*, 193.

67. See Chapter 3, IV, above. There is no evidence to Morgenstern's assumption (*Meshihyut*, 63) that this room ever connected to the messianic hopes for 1840. The “Messiah's room” ritual had been established in Ruzhin long before, at latest in 1837, and probably much earlier, and it existed among Rabbi Israel's sons long after 1840, without any connection to an actual messianic tension.

68. For example, the project of building the synagogue in Jerusalem (*Tiferet Israel*) was never motivated by messianic hope (as the perushim perceived the rebuilding of their synagogue, *Hurvāt Rabbi Yehudah ha-basid*); the explanation was only the natural need of the hasidim to have their own place for prayer.

69. *Dirrei David*, 67; cf. Margaliot, *Tiferet adam*, 45; *Tiferet Menahem*, II, 8; *She'erit Israel*, 187.

70. For references, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 355, n. 73.

71. One of them was the zaddik Samuel Aba of Zychlin, Poland, see *Lahav esh*, 137.

72. *Beit Israel*, 34–35 (the breaking off [a, a, . . .], which appears in the original text, probably reflects a pause while the zaddik was engaged in deep thoughts); cf. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 12.

73. See Assaf, *Bychawa*.

74. Zevi Hirsch of Rimanov, another “popular” zaddik, likewise rejected wonder-working. See *Be'erot ha-mayyim*, 20b.

75. *Irin kadishin*, 21–22.

76. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 3a; cf. *Magdil yeshu'ot*, 91.
77. *Mish'enet Moshe*, 8.
78. Ms. Mosad Harav Kook 789 (Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, 22655), 99a; *Sipurei nifla'ot*, 129.
79. *Ner Israel*, II, 59.
80. On instructions from Rabbi Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, a hasid named Judah Leibush Rapoport of Brody published a series of Kabbalah books, including a book of charms. In the preface to the latter, he noted that Abraham Jacob "took the charms for himself, and his saintly father, the aforementioned zaddik [i.e., Rabbi Israel], also took the charms, and all his brothers the zaddikim took them from me." *Sh'ar ha-yihudim*, Lemberg 1855, introduction.
81. Cf. Even, *Hoyf*, 169–70.
82. Orenstein, *Orot me-ofel*, 206.
83. Even, *Hoyf*, 1.
84. Lerman, *Mikhtevei Eliyahu*, 53; cf. *Likutim yekarim*, 41.

## Chapter 12

1. Weiss, *Reshit*, 53.
2. Dubnow, *Hasidut*, 354–72, discusses some aspects of hasidic everyday life, based mainly on anti-hasidic sources. One might also cite the romanticizing essay "From the Life of the Hasidim," in Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 75–104. Wertheim, *Law*, relates to many aspects of hasidic everyday life, but is not critical enough. Etkes, *Shneur Zalman*, 334ff., analyzes the "Liozna by-laws," an extraordinary source for understanding the organization of the hasidic court of Habad in its early days. For an architectural study of the hasidic court of Gur and the mutual influence between the court and the surrounding town, see Bergman, *Hasidic Cult*. An important contribution to this discussion is Pedaya, *Havurah*, which attempts to explain the hasidic spiritual values according to social and economic developments in hasidic life.
3. See, e.g., Elias, *Court Society*, 1–34.
4. In 1876, a German journalist described the ruins of the "royal palace" of Israel's court, on a hilltop in Ruzhin, but he never actually saw it and was obviously repeating stories he had heard in Sadgora (see Hilberg, *Rabbi*, 471–75). Decades after the zaddik left Ruzhin (1841), the townspeople could still identify his synagogue on the riverbank and also a well in the forest called "Rabbi Israel's *krenitse*" (Repetor, *Le-lo heref*, I, 9), whose water was thought to perform miracles and became a local Christian pilgrimage site (see *Stownik*, X, 50). No traces of Jewish habitation remain in Ruzhin today.
5. Katz, *State within a State*, 47–76.
6. Katz, *Halakhah*, 7.
7. Minkowski, *Sefer hayay*, I, 113. For references to additional descriptions of other hasidic courts, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 366, n. 8.
8. This subject has been only cursorily researched. The court at Chortkov, for example, had in fact no real influence over town life (see *Chortkov*, 69–71; Gelber, *Galicia*, I, 90–91; *Pinkas Polin*, II, 444–45). On the other hand, during the second



half of the nineteenth century, the court at Sadgora exerted great influence over the town (see Teller, *Zikhronot*, 84).

9. Twersky, *Hatzar ha-zaddik*, 19.

10. *Ibid.*, 32.

11. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 54–55.

12. Buber, *Essential Papers*, 501–2 (Buber wrote this essay in 1918). On the poor exterior of the town of Sadgora, see also *Prince of the Chassidim*.

13. See description in Even, *Hoyf*, 82.

14. *Doresh toy*, 142. The kloiz at Chortkov was well known for its huge size (about 900 m<sup>2</sup>) and its beautiful wall and ceiling paintings. See *Chortkov*, 55–60; *Mesilot*, 8 (1985): 10.

15. In 1865, for example, Princess Hieronima Burkowska sold her castle and some of her estates in Chortkov to Rabbi David Moses (*Chortkov*, 31). In Husyatin, the half-ruined castle of Prince Adam Goluchowsky was acquired and repaired for the dwelling purposes of Rabbi Mordekhai Shraga (Backer, *Khilatayyim*, 34–35; *Pinkas Polin*, II, 182; *Tiferet Israel* 25: 19–21). A glorious house, surrounded by a big garden, which had once served a local noble, was acquired for Joseph Meir in Makhnovka (Twersky, *Hatzar ha-zaddik*, 31).

16. *Mishkenot Ya'akov*, III, 33–34 (refers to the court of Rabbi David of Skvira).

17. *Pinkas Romania*, II, 470; Ansky, *Hurban*, IV, 240; *id.*, *Mikhtavim*, 219–20.

18. For descriptions of such ceremonies, which were called *praven zich*, see Tellingator, *Even Israel*, 27; Even, *Hoyf*, 182–86; *Nishmat kol hay*, 7. The “reception of greetings” (Hebrew *kabalat shalom*) is discussed in Chapter 14.

19. The “new” kloiz, in Sadgora, which was built during the time of Rabbi Israel, held about 3,000 people (Even, *Hoyf*, 82). On the salash in Sadgora, see *ibid.*, 82–85, 157–66; in Chortkov: *Chortkov*, 58; in Talne: Minkowski, *Sefer hayay*, I, 113, 116.

20. On the pre-hasidic kloiz, see Reiner, *Kloiz*.

21. See Silber, *Rapprochement*. The transformation in the hasidic world with regard to yeshivah studies began only in the late nineteenth century, and since then there has been a yeshivah in almost every hasidic court. See Stampfer, *Yeshivot*. For references on the yeshivot of Ruzhin and their offshoots, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 371, n. 24.

22. *Shut divrei Hayyim*, II, *hoshen mishpat*, # 32.

23. Even, *Hoyf*, 82.

24. *Darchey ha-yashar*, 8b.

25. On the Maggid Dov Ber, see *Eser orot*, 89. On David Moses of Chortkov, see *Chortkov*, 58–59; cf. Meltzer, *Or zaru'a*, 130. On Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, see Even, *Hoyf*, 3.

26. Cf. *Yeshu'ot Israel*, I, 26–27.

27. Even, *Hoyf*, 83, 88–89 (the account refers to the 1880s).

28. Cf. *Bekha yevarekh Israel*, 5a.

29. On David Moses' wet nurse, see *Nishmat kol hay*, 4. On Russian, German, English, and French nannies in the court of Sadgora, see *Prince of the Chassidim*. On the charge of sexual promiscuity against the Sadgora wet nurse, see Orenstein, *Orot*, 204; *id.*, *Ha-tsofeh*, 15b.

30. According to Even, *Hoyf*, 118–20, Abraham Jacob of Sadgora's sons were looked after by nannies until they were three, when valets took over their care. A special melamed taught them Torah, morality, hasidic stories and teachings, and everyday manners. Later, other tutors instructed them in the Bible, with commentaries, Talmud, languages, and the like. Cf. the parallel, but hostile, account of Orenstien, *Orot me-ofel*, 204–5; id., *Ha-tsofeh*, 15b–16b.

31. *Private Life*, IV, 72, 366–69. There was a special house in the court of Stefanesti known as “the Children's House,” which would have been used for the accommodation of the zaddik's relatives. See Sperber, *Ahoti*, 8.

32. *Private Life*, IV, 232–39.

33. See, e.g., *Yalkut ha-ro'im*, 57–58.

34. *Prince of the Chassidim*.

35. Ibid.; *Kerem Israel*, 92.

36. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 156.

37. Bonar and M'Cheyne, *Mission*, 402; see Chapter 3 above.

38. *Emek refa'im*, 138–39. Orenstein (*Ha-golem*, 372) also refers to “a palace for the king Messiah” in Sadgora; cf. Erter, *Ha-tsofeh*, 49.

39. See Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 159; *Mesilot* 14–15 (1987): 37; Evron, *Stefanesti*, 118, 125; Sternberg, *Stefanesti*, 119; Bratulescu, *Messiah*.

40. On the “golden room” in Chortkov, see above, n. 25. For a note on the palace that Bernyu of Leova “built for the king Messiah,” see *Ha-meliz*, 1885, no. 30; cf. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 375, n. 45.

41. *Prince of the Chassidim*.

42. *Sabah kadisha*, I, 122.

43. Ibid. On inquisitive hasidim moving stealthily to the court of Sadgora, anxious to watch the secluded zaddik Bernyu, see Zilberbusch, *Pinkas*, 67–68.

44. *Darkhei ha-yashar*, 8b.

45. *Kitvei zaddikim*, 24; *Ner Israel*, II, 165.

46. On Husyatin, see Avituv, *Beit aba*, 21. On Chortkov, see *Chortkov*, 213–14. On Stefanesti, see Sperber, *Berdichev*, 15–16; Sternberg, *Stefanesti*, 119.

47. Evron, *Stefanesti*, 125.

48. Similar names (“the white room,” “the blue room”) were given to the halls at Isaac of Skvira's court. See Twersky, *Hatzar ha-zaddik*, 19.

49. Sperber, *Berdichev*, 15–17; cf. Sternberg, *Stefanesti*, 119.

50. Hamburger, *Buhush*, XI, 93, 96.

51. *Chortkov*, 213–14.

52. Ansky, *Hurban*, IV, 392–93.

53. On the orchestra, see Chapter 10, above. I did not find any evidence that orchestras continued to be kept in the courts of Rabbi Israel's descendents.

54. *Kneset Israel*, 24; cf. Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 80–81.

55. *Kerem Israel*, 74.

56. See Piekarz, *Polin*, 184–89, who discusses the expansion process of the hasidic periphery during the twentieth century.

57. *Kerem Israel*, 74.

58. Teller, *Zikhronot*, 82. An unusual and valuable description (from 1805) of the yoshvim in Menahem Mendel of Rimanov's court at Fristik was written by Rabbi

Ezekiel Panet, who was such a one (see *Shut mar'eh Yehezkel*, # 104). The differences between the scholarly and royal courts discussed above were great, and the basis for comparison is therefore limited. For detailed descriptions of the yoshvim at the Belz court, see Klapholtz, *Belz*, II.

59. See Even, *Hoyf*, 72–73. In contrast to the “young” image that Even presents of the yoshvim, we have other accounts describing the yoshvim at the Stefanesti court as old, lonely people, see Sperber, *Ahoti*, II.

60. For details, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 383–84, nn. 73–80.

61. Even, *Hoyf*, 86.

62. Sperber, *Berdichev*, 15–17; id., *Ahoti*, II.

63. Some gabba'im are known by name, and their activities are well documented. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 385, n. 83.

64. Even, *Hoyf*, 127. Cf. Assaf, *ibid.*, n. 84; Rapoport-Albert, *Ludmir*, 647–48.

65. Teller, *Zikhronot*, 82.

66. Even, *Hoyf*, 223.

67. *Ibid.*, 167.

68. On selling of the zaddik's belongings, see Hilberg, *Rabbi*, 474. On the gabba'im in Husyatín, see Avituv, *Beit aba*, 17. The life style of the gabba'im and yoshvim in a typical hasidic court in Galicia was well portrayed by Singer in *Yoshe Kalb*.

69. Jocularly paraphrasing a well-known saying: “Woe to the wicked, woe to his neighbor” (Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkah* 56b). See Even, *Hoyf*, 225.

70. Sternberg, *Stefanesti*, 119; cf. Agnon, *Ha-esh*, 130–37.

71. *Chortkov*, 66–69. For more references, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 464, n. 115.

72. Even, *Hoyf*, 265–66. Even considered this phenomenon—a gabbai who guides the zaddik's response—unbelievablechutzpa.

73. Asher Ginsberg's grandfather was one of Rabbi Israel's Russian translators (see Ahad Ha-Am, *Zikhronot*, 482). On a translator of German at the court of Abraham Jacob of Sadgora, see Even, *Hoyf*, 118.

74. On the manager in the Sadgora court, see Even, *Hoyf*, 223. On the Stefanesti court, see Sperber, *Berdichev*, 17.

75. Even, *Hoyf*, 224.

76. On Feige, David Moses of Chortkov's wife, see *Kerem Israel*, 92. On Miriam, Abraham Jacob of Sadgora's wife, see Agnon, *Ha-esh*, 133–35. On Sarah Zipporah, Abraham Mathitiah of Stefanesti's wife, see Sperber, *Berdichev*, 17–18.

77. On the four sorts of lodges offered to guests in Sadgora during the 1880s, see Even, *Hoyf*, 77–79. On Husyatín, see Avituv, *Beit aba*, 14.

78. Cf. *Kneset Israel*, 25; Braver, *Zevi la-zaddik*, 103–4.

79. Cf. *Me'ir enei ha-golah*, I, 117.

80. *Shut mar'eh Yehezkel*, # 104. On the zaddik's large expenses due to his many guests, see Perl, *Megaleh temirin*, 27b. “Our rebbe . . . has enormous expenses . . . because [of the] almost a thousand wagonloads of wood our rebbe needs for heating the rooms in his royal residence and for his kitchen, because the visitors become every day more numerous” (id., *Revealer*, 127).

81. Mayer, *Juden*, 7–9.

82. *Tiferet Israel* 14: 39–40.

83. Even, *Hoyf*, 155–56.
84. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 51–52.

### Chapter 13

1. *Hayyei Moharan*, I, 85.
2. For the expressions of decadence and vulgarity in the institution of the zaddik since the mid nineteenth century, see Pickarz, *Polin*, 157–202; id., *Idiologia*, 199–227.
3. See, in detail, Pedaya, *Havurah*. Pedaya persuasively describes the correlation between social developments in Hasidism (transition from a spontaneous group to a permanent court, the formation of the zaddik-hasidim relationship), and economic developments, mainly the functional concept of pidyon.
4. Reiner, *Kloiz*, 304.
5. Rosman, *Miedzyboz*.
6. *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 178, 246–47; and cf. David of Makov's testament: "It was his [the Besht's] custom, too, to travel to the noblemen and heal them for a fee" (Wilensky, *Hasidim u-mitnagdim*, II, 242); see also Scholem, *Devarim be-go*, 291–99. Scholem stated that the Besht maintained himself and his family solely through his professional activities as a Ba'al shem, rather than take advantage of the convenient doctrine that a distinguished person was entitled to support at the people's expense. He "knew that 'charisma' was not something to be exploited, as was frequently the case later" (ibid., 312–13). However, Rosman's findings (above, n. 5) refute this assumption.
7. *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 264; cf. Heschel, *Circle*, 118–19; Weiss, *Studies*, 27–42.
8. Rabbi David Heilperin of Ostra (d. 1765), made very significant bequests in his will to some of the most prominent members of the Besht's circle, among them Aryeh Leib of Polonnoye, the Maggid of Mezhirech, the Maggid of Zlochev, Pinhas of Korets, and Zeev Kitzes of Mezhibozh. The will, first published in 1798, is reprinted in Alfassi, *Bi-sdeh ha-hasidut*, 515–31.
9. Injunctions like that of Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye—"The Lord, praise be to Him, first admonished the masses to assist the learned scholar with their money, so that he should be free to seclude and sanctify himself" (*Tsafenat Pa'neah*, 192; and cf. Pickarz, *Devekut*, 231–32, 237)—are collected in Weiss, *Reshit*. Weiss interpreted these sources as testimony of the absolute economic dependence of the itinerant "secondary" intelligentsia (i.e., the sector of the spiritual elite, such as the maggidim, that was not economically favored by the establishment) on the common people. This dependence resulted in a crisis, contributing to the social and spiritual climate for the emergence of Hasidism. Many scholars have, however, rejected Weiss's conclusions; for example, Ettinger, *Hasidic Movement*, 229–30, points out that some of the early hasidic leaders were socially stable, and that they did not constitute a uniform social and economic group.
10. See, e.g., the oath taken by Isaac b. Pinhas of Polotsk: "That I shall not contribute charity as pidyon to their rebbe as is their custom, and that I shall not contribute charity of any amount or regular payment to their group" (Wilensky, *Hasidim u-mitnagdim*, I, 323); or the colorful accounts of economic and social

affairs at the court of Hayyim Haikel of Amdur (d. 1787) (*ibid.*, II, 171–75; cf. Pedaya, *Havurah*, 338–48).

11. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 342.

12. Ettinger, *Hasidic Movement*, 241. The above examples are also inconsistent with Benzion Dinur's views of the social-egalitarian character of early Hasidism; see *id.*, *Essential Papers*, 143ff. For a survey and critique of this view, see Etkes, *Havurah*, 105–8; *id.*, *Megamot*, 6–8.

13. The critical reactions of mitnagdim were collected by Wilensky, *Hasidim u-mitnagdim* (see, index, s.v. *pidyonot*). Censure of economic corruption among the zaddikim was the major theme of Haskalah attacks on Hasidism, and it may be found in almost any anti-hasidic work whether satirical or directly polemical and ethically motivated. In this respect, Haskalah attacks on Israel of Ruzhin and his sons were the most abusive, see Chapter 3, VII, above.

14. This is the common meaning of the hasidic term *asiyyat pidyon*. It is not my object here to investigate the literary evolution of the term, which may be found in pre-hasidic kabbalistic literature in a different sense: performance of a ritual involving use of the kabbalist's or zaddik's money itself (see Rubinstein, *Edut*, 92–94; Pedaya, *Havurah*, 329–45). For more on pidyon, see Dubnow, *Hasidut*, index, s.v. *pidyon nefesh*; Weiss, *Reshit*, 49–51; Wertheim, *Law*, 241–48.

15. *No'am Elimelekh*, 79 (Nigal, 422–23). Elimelekh's "zaddikism" doctrine is discussed at length by Nigal in his introduction (*ibid.*, 19ff.). An exceptional explanation for the pidyon was offered by Nahman of Bratslav, who held that it is intended primarily to promote the spiritual development of the zaddik and not of the hasid. See Liebes, *Jewish Myth*, 188–89, n. 15; cf. *Sefer ha-middot*, s.v. zaddik, # 20.

16. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 69–70. For the Talmudic sources of the partnership motif, see Beer, *Issachar ve-Zebulun*.

17. On the organism-like concept of hasidic writers, see Rapoport-Albert, *Hasidism after 1772*, 85–88.

18. *Degel mahaneh Ephraim*, 91.

19. Kahana, *Sefer ha-hasidut*, 307.

20. *Ibid.*, 304. The change in the economic status of this zaddik is also attested by a hasidic tradition that "he was at first poor and destitute . . . but then he began to behave like a rich man" (*Ma'asiyot u-ma'amarim*, 24; cf. *Tseror ha-Hayyin*, 62; Kahana, *ibid.*, 309).

21. *Sefer ha-middot*, 256; cf. Perl, *Chassidim*, 104. A Russian report on Israel of Ruzhin, written in 1840, states that "[The hasidim] are obliged to appear before him frequently, or at least once a year, in order to receive his blessing. . . . But no less, they are expected to bring gifts, which are considered as equivalent to the sacrifices that Israelites used to offer in the Temple at Jerusalem"; see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 477; cf. Even, *Hoyf*, 186.

22. *Be'erot ha-mayyim*, 8b; cf. Perl, *Megaleh temirin*, 6b (*id.*, *Revealer*, 36).

23. *Sipurei Slonim*, 154. The idea that riches amassed by the hasidim belonged to their zaddik evolved directly from the pre-hasidic notion that the riches of the ignoramus belong to the scholar (see Pickarz, *Parczew*, 291–92).

24. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 27a.

25. *No'am Elimelekh*, 601–2. Dubnow (*Hasidut*, 184–86) believed that this letter

was a response to accusations by maskilim, while Wilensky (*Hasidim u-mitnagdim*, I, 168–69) holds that it was issued in response to the mitnagdim. The letter, as has been proven by Halpern (*Yehudim*, 298–99), should be dated to the mid 1770s.

26. It had already been said of the Besht that “money never spent a night in his home,” and that whatever was left to him was given to charity immediately after his debts had been settled (*Shivhei ha-Besht*, 231–32).

27. *Eser kedusbot*, 61.

28. Collection of relevant sources compiled in Ya’akov, *Chernobyl*; cf. *Haggadah*, 20.

29. *Sipurim nifla’im*, 4. The zaddikim of the Chernobyl dynasty traveled particularly frequently to raise funds; it was said of Isaac of Skvira, who traveled relatively infrequently, that “he did not travel more than two or three Sabbaths each year” (*ibid.*, 6).

30. See, e.g., the unconcealed envy expressed by Menahem Nahum of Stefanesti when speaking of his brother-in-law, Menahem Mendel of Vizhnitz: “Judging from his great success in all his affairs and the multitude of people who heed his bidding . . . the measure of his income is like one of the Rothschilds” (*Even Shitiah*, 95).

31. For example, it was reported of Mordekhai of Chernobyl that he threw a one-ruble bill back into a person’s face “because he had given him only one silver ruble, whereas if he had given him the sum of twenty-five silver rubles he [i.e., the zaddik] would surely have sought some solution for him” (*Sefer ha-yahas*, 60). A late hasidic source relates that Rabbi Mordekhai once received a pidyon “and took the money in the middle of the Shmoneh esreh prayer and counted it” (*Likutim yekarim*, 28–29).

32. For the significance attached to this number of coins in the pre-hasidic period, see Rubinstein, *Edut*, 92–94; *Kerem Habad*, IV, 81, n. 1. Other sums, too, relied on a variety of acronyms and numerical valuations, such as the sum of numerical values of the letters in the hasid’s name.

33. Although rich hasidim enjoyed special favor, they had to pay heavily for the privilege. An interesting practice was reported of Rabbi Israel’s gabba’im: “Many a time, when wine was needed at the zaddik’s holy table and there was no worthy person there, the custom was that the gabba’im would spend [money] and place wine on the table at the expense of those rich Jews, although the rich Jews were not present at the time” (*Mazkeret Shem ha-gedolim*, 187; *Hitgalut ha-zaddikim*, 55–56).

34. *Raza de-uridab*, II, 119–20. Perhaps this is the origin of the popular legend that the floor of Rabbi Israel’s palace at Ruzhin was made of silver rubles; see Hilberg, *Rabbi*.

35. *Sihot Hayyim*, 24; cf. Chapter 10, VII, above. Some maskilim mocked the zaddik who urged his hasidim to bring him gifts while quoting such hasidic teachings, sometimes even using the same words: “The aspect of the zaddik is an aspect of dressing, and therefore the zaddik has to dress only in cloths of honor made of silver and gold. The zaddik’s children, his sons and daughters, are also dressed in expensive garments, jewelry, and pearls, and it is well known that this is an aspect of kingship and his sons are an aspect of splendor . . . and all the money of the world belongs to the zaddik” (Levinsohn, *Emek refa’im*, 132–33); “It is a major and

well-known article of faith that all the silver and gold in the world should go to the zaddik alone, just as all streams go to the sea" (Yehalel, *Hitgalut ha-yenuka*, 26).

36. *Kneset Israel*, 17.

37. *Menahem Zion*, 26–27; cf. *Be'erot ha-mayyim*, 11: "It was his holy practice to demand a large fixed sum from people who came to him . . . and for that reason many of the zaddikim of his time complained bitterly about him and wished to do certain things to him." Interesting evidence of the influence of this practice may be found in an account of a change instituted by the zaddik Isaac of Neskhez (d. 1868): "In addition to his pidyon of 18 [coins] and 160, he also fixed a 24. In previous years, he had not used to demand money, and when asked how much to give as pidyon for whatever purpose, he would say, It is not my practice, Heaven forbidding, to demand money, but whatever each person gives, that is what the Holy One, blessed be He, is giving me out of the goodness of the donor's heart. . . . And when he heard that [other zaddikim] were taking money, he frowned upon the practice and would boast, I do not command to give me. . . . But toward the end of his life we frequently saw that he knew what every person was giving him as pidyon, and the older he became, the more he was particular about receiving a large pidyon. It was his custom to treat whoever gave him a certain sum of pidyon with liquor and sweetmeats. . . . In old age, he was very strict that a woman should not enter his home without her husband, or unless she gave him a certain sum of pidyon. . . . And during his very last days, he was very strict about the large sum for pidyon, and would often say, If he gives me such-and-such a sum he may come in to me, but if not I do not wish to answer him" (*Zikaron tov*, 53–54).

38. *Sippurei anshei shem*, 9.

39. *Be'erot ha-mayyim*, 16b; cf. *ibid.*, 9a. Rabbi Zevi personally defended himself with homilies on such texts as "the priest shall assess him" (Lev. 27:8; Zevi was a priest), "Let them take me an offering" (and not "give me"; Exod. 25:2), "Blessed be He Who redeems [Hebrew *podah*] and delivers" (it is the pidyon that delivers), etc. See Obadiah, *Rimanov*, 216–19.

40. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 14–15; *Raza de-urda*, II, 5–6. The story of the letter sent up to heaven is not entirely foreign to Eastern European Jewish life; cf. Gottlob, *Zikbronot*, I, 156–58.

41. See above, n. 28; cf. Frumkin, *Sippurei zaddikim*, 7 (n.p.).

42. *Be'erot ha-mayyim*, 8b.

43. *Tseror ha-Hayyim*, 64. This argumentation, justifying *pidyonot* in terms of the special mental resources upon which the zaddik drew when listening to his visitors' pleas, is featured, in a satirically distorted vein, in a popular joke: A certain woman who came to Naphtali of Ropshits, gave him pidyon and "opened her mouth and poured out nine measures of talk." Naphtali's brother, who was present, could not contain himself and burst into laughter. After she had gone, the zaddik said to his brother: "The pidyon that I take is specifically for suppression of laughter" (Lipson, *Mi-dor dor*, II, # 1434; cf. Sadan, *Tsimukim*, # 114).

44. Sternberg, *Stefanesti*, 119.

45. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 157; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 92.

46. For examples, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 399, n. 47.

47. *Beit Yisra'el*, 18. In comparison, Menahem Mendel Urbach of Kremenets,

according to the rabbinic contract of 1821, was to receive an annual salary of one hundred rubles; see *Nahalat Zevi*, III, 101–3.

48. As reported by his disciple: “And we calculated exactly that what was given [to charity] each year came to approximately ten thousand silver rubles” (*Binyan Shelomo*, 60). According to another observer, the expenses of Abraham Jacob’s court (including various charities) were on the average some two thousand florins per week (Marcus, *Hasidut*, 261). These exaggerated data must be considered against the polemical background of the time, i.e., Hayyim of Zanz’s charge that the zaddikim of Sadgora were not giving enough to charity.

49. See Gessen, *Ruzhin*, 145–46; Assaf, *Malkhut*, 480.

50. For another example of a Russian zaddik who invested his money in real estate, see Assaf, *Ovruch*, 239–40.

51. Rabbi Israel’s partnership in the pickle factory is attested by an Austrian document of 1845, dealing with his request for a residence permit in Bukovina; see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 488. On the sugar factory, see *Beit Shelomo*, 5b.

52. Joseph Perl, in a hostile tone bespeaking authenticity, describes a rich zaddik lending money gained from pidyonot at exorbitant interest, operating through the agency of hasidim among his close associates (*Megaleh temirin*, 27b; id., *Revealer*, 127). In his memoir, Menashe Margulith indicated that zaddikim in Volhynia used to deposit their funds in the bank of Jacob Joseph Heilperin of Berdichev (Israel of Ruzhin’s in-law) and even recommended that their hasidim do so; see Zitron, *Shtadlanim*, 282–84. For the phenomenon in general of the zaddik’s court as a “business” and a “bank,” see Bartal, *Kesef*, 375–85.

53. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 401, n. 54.

54. See *Prince of the Chassidim*; Even, *Hoyf*, 210–17.

55. See above, n. 36.

56. See Chapter 3, above, following n. 52.

57. This broad subject still awaits a proper account. Incidentally, the zaddik’s visit sometimes caused disputes over procedures within the community and in the synagogue. See, e.g., Kahana, *Teshuvot*, 413–14.

58. Particularly aggressive propaganda tactics were adopted by the gabba’im of the zaddik David of Talne. See Assaf, *Ma’avak*, 474–84.

59. Bonar and M’Cheyne, *Mission*, 462. It was apparently not unusual for crowds to cluster around the windows of the zaddik’s inn in order to catch a glimpse of his face. See, e.g., *Zikaron tov*, 62. A hasidic source rebukes “those foolish people who wish to feast their curious eyes on our rebbe [Israel of Ruzhin], to see what he is doing each night in his room, whether he sleeps like other people or is awake and worshipping the Lord” (*Sipurei zaddikim*, III, 11).

60. Ibid.

61. See Even, *Hoyf*, 21.

62. Bonar and M’Cheyne, *Mission*, 402.

63. See Gries, *Hanhagot*, 257–61.

64. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 75.

65. See Galant, *Zaddikim*; Assaf, *Ma’avak*, 477–79.

66. *Raza de-urvdah*, II, 23.

67. For the linguistic aspect of these terms, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 404, n. 73.



68. Thus, for example, in 1847, Israel of Ruzhin instructed the hasidim of Zevi Hirsch of Rimanov, who had died leaving many debts, “to travel from town to town holding a *ma’amad u-matsav* in each for the benefit of the deceased zaddik’s family” (Assaf, *Ruzhin*, 298, # 25).

69. It was told of Rabbi Pinhas that he “had a *ma’amad* in a good many towns and that he himself would record annually how much each person should give, and two of the best disciples would travel to collect the *ma’amad*” (*Emunat zaddikim*, 29); cf. Even, *Hoyf*, 193–95.

70. See Horodezky, *Chernobyl*, 31; id., *Hasidut*, III, 85; cf. Tishby, *Kabbalah*, II, 538–39, n. 76. In a letter written in 1826 to the communal leaders of Kashvatin (Podolia), Mordekhai of Chernobyl ordered them to hold “a regular weekly *ma’amad* in order to support him [i.e., the local rabbi] comfortably”; see Ya’akov, *Chernobyl*, 256–58.

71. It was told of Nahman of Bratslav that when he was living in Medweduwka (ca. 1790) “some village people got together and made him a permanent *ma’amad* to give him one gold coin each week” (*Hayyei Moharan*, I, 70). A Yiddish satirical work from the beginning of the nineteenth century refers to *ma’amadot* in connection with the zaddikim Zeev Wolf of Charny Ostra (who immigrated to Palestine in 1798) and Meshullam Feibish of Zbaraz (d. end of 1794), see *Perls yidishe ksvim*, 229. For *ma’amadot* in Habad, see a letter sent by the second admor, Dov Ber, to his hasidim in 1813: “That every man should send his *ma’amad* . . . and just as you, our associates, undertook this duty in writing before my father . . . let them arouse much mercy upon me, lest I be obliged to travel, Heaven forfend, in order to support my family” (*Iggerot kodesh*, 235; cf. Mondshine, *Migdal oz*, 326–35).

72. *Tiferet Israel* 35: 34. The letter was sent to the communities of Mezhibozh, Sieniawa, Latyczew, Wonkowce, Ploskirow (Podolia); and to Konstantin Hadash and Derazna (Volhynia). On Alter of Bar, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 406, n. 79.

73. Even, *Hoyf*, 191.

74. Tzederbaum, *Berditchov*, 17.

75. *Beit Israel*, 151; cf. *ibid.*, 161.

76. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 52; Bromberg, *Ruzhin*, 92.

77. *Sifran shel zaddikim*, 42.

78. *Kerem Shelomo* 3/4 (1980): 15–16. The letter is undated but is probably from the 1860s; cf. David of Talne’s letter complaining to his hasidim of the grave economic situation and urging them “to strengthen the matter of the *ma’amad* with large increments and new increments” (*ibid.* 9/10 [1987]: 14–15).

79. Even, *Hoyf*, 191.

80. Tishby, *Kabbalah*, II, 538–39.

81. See the picturesque account by Even, *Hoyf*, 191–215. For some descriptions of the hasidic tax collectors and their character, see Ahad Ha-Am, *Zikhronot*, 466; *Divrei David*, 52–53; Minkowski, *Sefer hayay*, I, 98, 114; Korekh, *Zikhronot*, 63–64.

82. *Beit Israel*, 162. For the zaddik as “the equivalent of the Sabbath,” cf. Tellingator, *Even Israel*, 39.

83. Even, *Hoyf*, 192.

84. *Divrei David*, 52–53. This coin was known as *shmirah*; see Golnitzky, *Matbe’ah segulah*.

85. For examples, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 409, n. 94; 411.

86. See *Tur*, Hoshen Mishpat, 156: "If a Torah scholar should bring goods to trade in the town, the townspeople must prevent any person from selling until he has sold his goods." Cf. *Shulhan Arukh*, Yoreh De'ah, 253, # 11.

87. This was indeed explicitly prohibited in the 1804 Statute of the Jews in Russia, article 52, which stipulated that rabbis were to receive no more than their salaries and were barred from collecting fees for their services (see Ettinger, *Historya*, 256). In actual fact, however, this prohibition was never enforced, as may be learned from rabbis' letters and other nineteenth-century sources, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 410, nn. 96–97.

88. Perl, *Chassidim*, 106, refers to the Maggid of Kozhenits's daughter, who sold amber oil to visitors to the court (for use in her father's charms); in *Emek refa'im*, 133, 135, the zaddik sends his guests to buy wine from his son and olive oil from his daughter. The devoted mitnaged David of Makov reports that Hayyim of Amdur's wife and father-in-law made a good living cooking for the hasidim (Wilensky, *Hasidim u-mitnagdim*, II, 174), but the idea of their getting rich by selling cheap *kрупнік* soup at Amdur's court is laughable.

89. The first member of this dynasty to be called maggid was Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl; the title was also borne by his son Mordekhai and some of his grandchildren, although none of them, except Menahem Nahum, was considered a preacher in the original sense of the word *maggid*. The title was almost unknown in the dynasty of Ruzhin-Sadgora and other hasidic sects, although Dov Ber of Mezhiroch (Rabbi Israel's great-grandfather) was known as "the Great Maggid." See Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 93.

90. Etkes, *Shneur Zalman*, 341–42.

91. For detailed discussion of maggidut contracts, see Assaf, *Ma'avak*, where David of Talne's efforts to secure such contracts from communities in the nearby area are described, as well as the dispute between Isaac of Skvira and the Bratslav hasidim who refused to observe his maggidut contract. Both zaddikim were sons of Mordekhai of Chernobyl. Moshe Nahum Yerushalimski, a hasidic rabbi, stressed in a responsa that maggidut contracts were a custom unique to the Ukrainian provinces, the center of the Chernobyl dynasty, see *Be'er Moshe*, # 26. This phenomenon is also described in several memoirs, such as Glubman, *Zikhronot*.

92. *Emek refa'im*, 122–23.

93. Tzederbaum, *Keter kehunah*, 134–35.

94. See Chapter 9, II.

95. Kahana, *Hasidut*, 304. Cf. Ettinger, *Hasidic Movement*, 194. The document, housed in Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, (ARC 4°1699, file 20), is one of a collection of hasidic maggidut contracts. Kahana was unable to read the name of the community with which the leaseholders were associated, but it seems to be "Leshnov" (Eastern Galicia).

96. *Even shtiyah*, 98.

97. For the text in its entirety, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 414–15.

98. See Shochat, *Kahal*, 195–97; id., *Rabanut mi-ta'am*, 15; cf. *Reshumot*, II, 448–53.

99. *Nahalat Zevi*, II, 90.

100. For Israel of Ruzhin's intervention in lease holding and monopoly matters, see Chapter 9, I, above. Such activities on the part of zaddikim also contributed to the spread of Hasidism, as has been proved by Shmeruk, *Hakbirot*.

101. Kaufmann, *Zikhrontot*, 136–37. The writer was the father of the prominent scholar Judah Even Shmuel.

102. Sharfstein, *Dunovits*, 40–41.

103. For Halberstam's critics, see Mahler, *Shitot*; id., *Mahloket*.

104. Echoes of the financial distress of the hasidic courts may be discerned in numerous sources. See, e.g., *Ha-melitz* 9 (1870): 257; *ibid.* 26 (1886): 1026. It was reported of David of Chortkov that "he needed . . . a large sum of money to spend for the relatives and grandees whom he was accustomed to support out of charity" (*Beit Israel*, 143); "Once [when] there was much distress in the admor's home, and the income was insufficient to cover expenses, the rebbe's wife went in to the admor with a complaint that she did not have enough to maintain the holy court" (*Kerem Israel*, 92).

105. Israel of Chortkov (d. 1933), grandson of Israel of Ruzhin, who was uprooted to Vienna even before World War I, refused the pleas of his hasidim to return to his original home town, for example. He never revealed his true reasons, not even to his most intimate companions, but gave many excuses for his refusal. Even when his followers complained to him that their stay in Vienna was causing nearly irreparable damage to his hasidic community, he would not reveal his reasons. See *Tiferet Ysrael* 34: 45–46.

106. On the disintegration of Chortkov after the court left the town, see Gottesfeld, *Galicia*, 59.

### *Chapter 14*

1. See *Mishkenot ha-ro'im*, 81–101; cf. Wertheim, *Law*, 236–41; Kahanah, *Teshuvot*, 412–13; Piekartz, *Polin*, 182–83. An interesting account of a pilgrimage to a zaddik in interwar Poland may be found in the memoir literature, such as Shmueli, *Polin*, 14–18.

2. *Devash ha-sadeh*, 10.

3. *Darkhei ha-yashar*, 8a.

4. *Or Yesha*, 14b; cf. *Eser orot*, 15–16 ("We see in a sense, that in our time, all those who travel to our generation's zaddikim obey and believe them, and are not, Heaven forbid, breaking the laws of our holy Torah").

5. This subject was already being stressed in the early anti-hasidic writings by both mitnagdim and maskilim. See references in Assaf, *Malkhut*, 420, n. 6.

6. Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, 211–12; Weiss, *Bratslav*, 66–67; Rapoport-Albert, *Ludmir*, 499–502.

7. *Beit Israel*, 33, # 44; *Sipurei nifla'ot*, 126–17. For another version, see Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 38–39.

8. Tellingator, *ibid.*, 32.

9. *Beit Israel*, 33, # 43.

10. One should bear in mind that until the beginning of the twentieth century, there were no railroads to Bukovina. On the difficulties of traveling to Sadgora, see

Even, *Hoyf*, 76–77; *Sipurei nifla'ot*, 126; Sperber, *Berdichev*, 11; *Mishkenot ha-ro'im*, 83.

11. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 22a.

12. *Mishkenot ha-ro'im*, 82.

13. Tellingator, *Tiferet Israel*, 15.

14. Yelin, *Derekh zaddikim*, 45; Even, *Velt*, 139–42; cf. Agnon, *Takhrikh*, 199–200.

15. *Kerem Israel*, 66–67.

16. *Divrei David*, 6–7; *Mikhtevei Eliyahu*, 66. On the important role of “preparation” in general among the zaddikim of Ruzhin, see *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 25; *Beit Israel*, 136, 140.

17. *Divrei David*, 7–8. Rabbi David Moses’ habit of long preparation is also reflected in the following humorous story: Once he participated in a wedding at the Sadgora court, and when he was late to the ceremony and everyone was waiting for him to show up, someone suggested that it might be a good idea to call the rebbe to hurry himself up. But his brother, Rabbi Abraham Jacob, who was one of those waiting, said, “Leave him alone; agility is a great virtue, so if you shall tell him to be agile, he will make preparations for agility and will be even later” (*Nahalat Zevi*, VII, 34).

18. *Beit Israel*, 154; cf. *Mishkenot ha-ro'im*, 87; *Ner Israel*, II, 165.

19. *Kneset Israel*, 39.

20. See Tsherikover, *disput*.

21. The so-called Lyozna by-laws of Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s circle attempted to control and regulate the arrival of the hasidim at the rebbe’s court, but it is not clear to what extent they were implemented. See Etkes, *Shneur Zalman*, 334–41.

22. *Hayyei Moharan*, I, 13.

23. *Beit Israel*, 138. The maskil Gottlob wrote to Bernyu of Leova that “I was among those who saw your late father [Rabbi Israel] three times a year” (Orenstein, *Orot me-ofel*, 195).

24. Cf. the account of Rabbi Israel’s visit to Glina in 1840. Hundreds of people flocked to him wishing to receive his blessing, but he refused them entry and allowed only three famous zaddikim and their intimates to approach him (*Nahalat Zevi*, II, 57).

25. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 156. Yossi Rath mentions in his memoir that only after a great amount of begging and pleading did Rabbi Israel agree to have breakfast with his intimates (*Teshuvot Israel*, II, 17). Other zaddikim behaved differently: Hayyim of Zanz, for example, spent hours with his hasidim and even ate the daily meals with them.

26. *Megilat yubasin*, 58–59.

27. “It is well known that since he came to Sadgora he used to sit alone in his chamber for the third meal of Shabbat and no one was allowed in his presence” (*Kneset Israel*, 25). This was also his custom in Ruzhin: “He did not sit with the hasidim for the [Shabbat] third meal, because that was his holy method, the company members sat by themselves and he sat by himself” (*ibid.*, 20). On the “third meal” in Sadgora, see Even, *Hoyf*, 90–94.

28. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 24b; cf. Idel, *Hasidism*, 239–44.

29. On such letters (Hebrew *mikhtav kishur*) submitted to Rabbi Shalom Shakhna by hasidim from Uman, see Tellingator, *Even Israel*, 7. On such letters in the time of Mordekhai Shragah of Husyatin, see Horodezky, *Zikhronot*, 58–60.

30. Kaufmann, *Zikhronot*, 17.

31. *Ibid.*, 135.

32. In a late hasidic source it was related of Rabbi Pinhas of Korets that he “read notes” of needy people, see Yelin, *Imrei shefer*, 8.

33. A typical kvitl submitted to Rabbi Israel read as follows: “Zevi son of Sarah for a livelihood” (*Darkhei ha-yashar*, 8b); cf. the detailed account of Even, *Hoyf*, 185. Ill hasidim forwarded their kvitekh through emissaries; see *Megilat yubasin*, 58–59.

34. *Kneset Israel*, 16.

35. Even, *Hoyf*, 187; *Beit Israel*, 13; Sharfstein, *Dunovits*, 42; *Sipurim nifla'im*, 6.

36. *Sifran shel zaddikim*, 13.

37. *Beit Israel*, 21; *Sifran shel zaddikim*, 41; *Megila afa*, 21.

38. Cf. Azar, *Schneersohn*, 176; Sharfstein, *Dunovits*, 41; *Kerem Habad*, I, 61; Mondshine, *Migdal oz*, 324–26.

39. Kaufmann, *Zikhronot*, 16.

40. *Irin kadishin*, 121. In Abraham Jacob of Sadgora’s chamber, there was a special locked drawer for storing the kvitekh (*Doresht tov*, 6). The maskil Solomon Isaiah Landsberg described a very different fate for these notes: “I swear that I saw these kvitekh in the zaddik’s outhouse, which he used for wiping” (*Megila afa*, 21).

41. *Sihot Hayyim*, 30.

42. *Ner Israel*, II, 195.

43. *Divrei David*, 42–43. Notwithstanding the mystical intentions that were requisite in the reading of kvitekh, there were zaddikim who used to read them while they immersed themselves in the mikveh (Tishby, *Kabbalah*, II, 563) or while they cooked fish for Sabbath meals (*Ma’aseh Nehemiah*, # 48).

44. Braver, *Pe'er Yitzhak*, 28; Mosad ha-rav Kook, ms. 789 (Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, 22655), 75b.

45. *Darkhei ha-yashar*, 8b.

46. Even, *Hoyf*, 83.

47. Lerman, *Mikhtevei Eliyahu*, 66.

48. Ahad Ha-Am, *Zikhronot*, 480; cf. Hacohen, *Alim*, 449–50.

49. Zilberbusch, *Pinkas*, 23–24. On the custom of touching on the fingertips, cf. Even, *Hoyf*, 168; Orenstein, *Ha-satan*, 488; *Talkut Shmuel*, 317; Kaufmann, *Zikhronot*, 70, 136; Agnon, *Takhrikh*, 200.

50. Raphaelowitz, *Tsiunim*, 11.

51. Cf. Zevin, *Hasidim*, II, 191.

52. Even, *Hoyf*, 83.

53. *Beit Israel*, 32.

54. Wiesberg, *Zanz*, I, 68.

55. In Husyatin, for example, the gabba'im did not allow a hasid who did not wear his *shtreimel* (a typical hasidic hat usually worn on Sabbaths and festivals) to enter the rebbe's chambers, see Kaufmann, *Zikhronot*, 70.

56. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, IV, 156.

57. Cf. “And [the zaddik Abraham Jacob of Sadgora] gave a seat to my father

to sit in front of him, for this was the custom there that this kind of privilege will honor only the greatest of the generation and famous zaddikim" (*Eser tsahsahot*, 14).

58. *Be'erot ha-mayyim*, 21b–22a.

59. For discussion, see Reiner, *Aliyah*, 217–320.

60. Thus, probably, the reaction of the mitnagdim was contradictory. There are several sources related to the harsh opposition to tomb visiting expressed by the Gaon of Vilna and his disciple Hayyim of Volozhin, see Wertheim, *Law*, 343–44, n. 127; Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 36.

61. Reiner, *Aliyah*, 221, points attention to a few sources from medieval Ashkenazic literature that condemned “illiterates and women” who vow to travel to graves of “righteous and holies.” He assumes that the main site for this popular cult was the grave of Rabbi Judah ha-hasid in Regensburg, but it is nonetheless hard to estimate the scope of this phenomenon.

62. *Shivhei Haran*, 14, # 19.

63. *Ibid.*, *Sibot Haran*, 93, # 138.

64. *Hayyei Moharan*, I, 80; cf. Perl, *Megaleh Temirin*, 52b.

65. *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 201; cf. Wertheim, *Law*, 344; *Nahalat Zevi*, IV, 30–42.

66. *Butsina di-nehora*, 47, 50–51.

67. *Shivhei Haran*, 14, # 20.

68. Perl, *Chassidim*, 93. On the pilgrimage to Menahem Mendel of Rimanov's grave, see *She'erit Baruch*, 8.

69. Mandelstam, *Hazon la-mo'ed*, II, 73–75.

70. *Sefer ha-yahas*, 13; cf. Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 92–93.

71. For full bibliography on the pilgrimage to Rabbi Nahman's grave, see Assaf, *Ma'avak*; *id.*, *Bratslav*, 221–31.

72. According to a tradition quoted by Horodezky, *Hasidut*, III, 153, Abraham Jacob's son Solomon made some efforts to bury his uncle Bernyu far away from the “tent,” but his father prevented him from doing so, fearing that this would be interpreted as recognition of Bernyu's negative behavior. He therefore explicitly instructed to have Bernyu buried next to Rabbi Israel.

73. See *Tiferet Israel* 19: 42; 23: 29–30.

74. Rabbi Israel's grave was destroyed during World War I. The tomb was opened and the bones scattered, since according to popular hearsay among the local inhabitants, the Jews had hidden money inside the grave. See Ansky, *Hurban*, IV, 423. Rabbi Israel's tombstone was reconstructed in 1989.

## Afterword

1. Dubnow, *Hasidut*, introduction, ii (n.p.).

2. The influence of Ruzhin could be seen not only upon closely related hasidic sects, such as the Chernobyl offshoots (especially Skvira), or those belonging to the Galician-Romanian branch, such as Vizhnitz, Belz, or Satmar, but also over distant hasidic sects, such as the Lithuanian Karlin; Polish hasidic sects, such as Pshishkha, Biala, or Radomsk; and even upon Lubavitch. See Assaf, *Malkhut*, 436, n. 2.

3. See Dan, *Third Century*; Assaf, *Hebetim*.

4. Referring to Isaac of Boian (1849–1917), son of Abraham Jacob, and Nahum Dov of Sadgora (1843–83), a grandchild of Israel of Ruzhin and son of Shalom Joseph, who married Perl, the daughter of his uncle Abraham Jacob.

5. Ahad Ha-Am, *Zikhronot*, 480; cf. Steinberg, *Kol kitvei*, 316–17; Zipperstein, *Prophet*, 6–7.

6. The basic opinions on this issue can be represented by the debate between Katz, who wrote that Hasidism was a main factor in the process of the collapse of traditional Jewish society, and Ettinger, who criticized this attitude, claiming that Hasidism contributed to the reinforcement of this already disintegrating society. For their writings, see *Zaddik ve-edah*; Etkes, *Megamot*, 18–21.

7. It is common to see the 1840s as the period of the emergence of organized Jewish Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe, as a reaction of traditional Jewish society against attempts by the Russian authorities (in cooperation with Jewish maskilim) to impose radical reforms on the traditional Jewish education system. See Etkes, *Haskalah*.

8. Chiefly in the past generation, the study of Jewish Orthodoxy and its challenge to modernity has become one of the major focal points of modern Jewish historians, especially in the writings of the late Jacob Katz and his students. For selective bibliographical references, see Assaf, *Malkhut*, 438–39, n. 9.

9. For some examples of the attitude of zaddikim to modern Jewish movements, see Pickarz, *Parczew*; id., *Hanhagah*, 336–62.

10. Dubnow, *History*, V, 203.

11. Mahler, *Shitot*; and, for more details, id., *Mahloket*.

12. For this term (versus “extreme and fossilized conservatism”), see Pickarz, *Polin*, 51; id., *Parczew*, 280; cf. Katz, *Leumiyut*, 156–57.

13. Buber, *Tales*, II, 70; cf. *Reshumot*, I, 406.

14. On this organization, founded in Lemberg in 1878 by Rabbi Simeon Sofer of Krakow and the zaddik Joshua of Belz, with massive support of the Ruzhin zaddikim, see Alfassi, *Zion*, 67–81; *Tiferet Israel* 30: 41–49.

15. Cf. Assaf, *Malkhut*, 464, n. 115.

16. *Kneset Israel*, 23 (based on *Shivhei ha-Besht*, 177); cf. the adaptations (rather different from the original story) of Agnon, *Zaddikim*, 48–49; id., *Me-atzmi*, 388–89; Buber, *Tales*, II, 92–93.

17. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 349–50, who interprets the story as symbolic of the decline of Hasidism and the transformation of all its values, whereby “in the end all that remained of the mystery was the tale”; cf. Pickarz, *Bratslav*, 102–3. For a contrary interpretation, see Elstein, *Sipur*, 34–35; Idel, *Kabbalah*, 271.

18. *Irin kadishin tinyana*, 24b; cf. Idel, *Hasidism*, 239–44.

19. *Irin kadishin*, 80.

20. *Eser orot*, 138.

21. *Irin kadishin*, 94.

22. Cf. Halpern, *Yehudim*, 331–32; Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, 132–40; Bartal, *Galut*, 301–6; id., *Moderna*, 22–23; Assaf and Bartal, *Shtadlanut*, 67–69.

23. A letter from 1847 published in *Nahalt Zevi* 14: 126–29.



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## Glossary

*Admor* (pl. *admorim*)—A Hebrew acronym for *adonenu, morenu ve-rabenu* (our master, teacher, and rabbi). The spiritual leader of a hasidic sect. Also *rebbe* or *zaddik*.

*Axis mundi*—Literally, “foundation of the world.” A translation of the Hebrew phrase *yesod olam*, a title granted to a famous *zaddik*.

*Ba'al shem*—Literally, “master of the divine name.” A name reserved for those who know how to use divine names of God and Angels for healing or to perform miracles.

*Beit midrash* (pl. *batei midrash*)—A Torah study house (see also *kloiz*).

*Besht*—Hebrew acronym for *ba'al shem tov*. The popular name used to refer to Israel b. Eliezer, the forerunner of Hasidism.

*Dayan* (pl. *dayanim*)—A rabbinical judge.

*Gabbai* (pl. *gabbai'im*)—A beadle; usually a trustee in charge of the management of synagogue affairs or money collection for charity. The intimate of the *zaddik* and administrator of his affairs is also known as *gabbai*.

*Ga'on*—Literally, “genius.” Informal title granted to an unusually great Torah scholar.

*Halukkah*—The money collected in the Jewish communities in the Diaspora for supporting the inhabitants of Palestine.

*Hasid* (pl. *hasidim*)—A follower of a hasidic *rebbe* (*zaddik*), affiliated with the hasidic movement.

*Haskalah*—Enlightenment. A sociocultural trend in Jewish society that had its inception in late eighteenth-century Berlin, aimed at spreading modern European culture and emancipation among Jews. Its leaders proposed radical reforms in many aspects of traditional Jewish society.



*Hazan* (pl. *hazanim*)—A cantor.

*Heder* (pl. *hadarim*)—Literally, “room.” A private elementary school in traditional Eastern European Jewish society, teaching Hebrew reading based on Jewish texts.

*Hillula*—An annual “wake” in memory of the founding zaddik or an ancestor of one of the zaddikim, held on the anniversary of his death.

*Kabbalah*—The Jewish mystical tradition.

*Kaddish*—An Aramaic prayer praising God, several times during the daily service. Primarily used to refer to the mourners’ prayer.

*Kahal* (pl. *kehalim*)—The Jewish communal board in Eastern Europe. Abolished in 1844 by the Russian authorities.

*Kloiz* (pl. *kloizn*)—A Torah study house (*beit midrash*) and prayer room.

*Kolel* (pl. *kolelim*)—The social and financial framework of the Jews who lived in Palestine, which organized the financial support (*halukkah*) received from their fellows in the Diaspora. The main hasidic kolel was called the Volhynia kolel.

*Kvitzl* (pl. *kvitlekh*)—A brief written note of request forwarded to the rebbe along with a donation.

*Lag ba-omer*—The 33rd day of the 50-day period between Passover and Shavu’ot; a semi-holiday.

*Ma’amad* (or *ma’amad u-matsav*; pl. *ma’amadot*)—Literally, “state and position.” A tax paid voluntarily by the hasidim to support the zaddik’s household expenses.

*Maggid* (pl. *maggidim*)—A preacher. Also a nickname for Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezhirech.

*Maggidut*—A signed formal contract, which declared that a certain community “belonged” to a specific zaddik, who “ruled” the region.

*Maskil* (pl. *maskilim*)—An adherent of the Haskalah movement, which was often critical of traditional Jewish society, and especially of Hasidism.

*Melamed* (pl. *melamidim*)—A teacher in the traditional elementary school (*heder*).

*Midrash* (pl. *midrashim*)—An anthology of homiletic biblical exegesis as well as a compendium of rabbinic stories, parables, and teachings, written and compiled in the talmudic period.

*Mikveh*—A ritual bathhouse.

*Minyan* (pl. *minyanim*)—Prayer quorum, the minimum required being ten adult men. Also a synonym for a hasidic prayer group.

*Mitnaged* (pl. *mitnagdim*)—An ardent opponent of Hasidism (generally a Lithuanian) who followed traditional rabbinical authority.

*Mohel* (pl. *mohalim*)—A ritual circumciser.

*Parnas* (pl. *parnasim*)—A member of the body of elders (*kahal*) that handled local Jewish communal administration.

*Perushim*—Nonhasidic immigrants to Palestine from the beginning of the eighteenth century who identified themselves as disciples of Rabbi Elijah, the ga’on of Vilna.

*Pidyon* (pl. *pidyonot*)—Money donations brought to the zaddik.

*Pilpul*—A casuistic method of Talmud study.

*Posek*—Halakhic scholar with authority to issue rulings.

*Rebbe* (pl. *rebbees*)—A hasidic leader (known also as *admor* or zaddik).

*Rosh Hashanah*—The Jewish New Year festival.

*Seder*—A ceremony consisting of reading the *haggadah* and feasting. Celebrated on the first eve of Passover in Israel, and the first and second eve in the Diaspora.

*Shavuot*—Pentecost; Festival of Weeks; second of the three annual pilgrim festivals, commemorating the receiving of the Torah.

*Shiv'ah*—The Jewish mourning period, lasting seven days.

*Shmoneh esreh*—The eighteen (in fact, nineteen) benedictions of the daily standing prayer.

*Shofar*—A horn.

*Shohet* (pl. *shohatim*)—A ritual slaughterer.

*Shtadlan* (pl. *shtadlanim*)—An emissary working for the public benefit.

*Shtibl* (pl. *shtiblekh*)—Literally, “room.” A small house where hasidim prayed.

*Simhat mitzvah*—Festivity connected with the performance of some religious commandment.

*Simhat Torah*—A festival marking the completion of the annual cycle of the Torah reading, celebrated immediately after the conclusion of the Sukkot festival.

*Sukkah*—Temporary booth used during the Sukkot festival.

*Sukkot*—Festival of Tabernacles; celebrated in the month of Tishri, after the Days of Awe.

*Tallit katan*—A *tzitzit*. A four-cornered vestlike garment with fringes, worn by males either under or on top of clothing.

*Tena'im*—Terms of betrothal, to be signed in a special ceremony.

*Tish*—Literally, “table.” The communal meal at the rebbe’s table.

*Treif*—Not kosher, not ritually acceptable.

*Yenuka*—A child officiating as a zaddik.

*Yeshiva* (pl. *yeshivot*)—Traditional academy for advanced Talmudic studies.

*Yibud* (pl. *yibudim*)—A mystical practice of praying with special intent.

*Yibush*—Lineage.

*Yishuv*—A term for the Jewish community in Palestine. The traditional Jews who benefited from the *halukkah* money were called *yishuv yashan* (old); the modern-Zionist immigrants were referred to as *yishuv hadash* (new).

*Yom Kippur*—The Day of Atonement.

*Yoshev* (pl. *yoshevim*)—A resident at a hasidic court.

*Zaddik* (pl. *zaddikim*)—Literally, “righteous man.” The spiritual leader of a hasidic sect. Also *rebbe* or *admor*.

*Zohar*—Literally, “shine.” The main book of Kabbalah lore, attributed to the mishnaic sage Simon b. Yochai. Probably written in Spain during the thirteenth century.

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## *Alternate Forms of Place-Names*

See 'A Note on Translation and Transliteration,' p. xiii.

Aleksander (Aleksandrów)	Campulung (Câmpulung-Moldovenesc)	Husyatín (Husiatyń)
Amdur (Indura)	Charny Ostra (Czarny Ostrów)	Jarosław (Jarosław)
Apta (Opatów, Apt)	Chechel'nik (Czeczelnik)	Jasło (Jasło)
Balta (Bałta)	Chernigov (Czernihów)	Jassy (Iași)
Barlád (Bârlad)	Chernobyl (Czarnobyl)	Jozefów (Józefów)
Belaya Tserkov (Biała Cerkiew, Bila Tserkva, Sdeh Lavan)	Chernovtsy (Czernowitz, Cernăuți)	Kalish (Kalisz)
Belz (Belz)	Chortkov (Czortków)	Kalush (Kałusz)
Bendery (Tighina)	Dinov (Dynów)	Kamenets Litovsk (Kamieniec Litewski)
Berdichev (Berdyeczów)	Disna (Dzisna)	Kamenets Podolsk (Kamieniec Podolski)
Bershad (Berszada)	Dunayevtsy (Dunajewzi)	Kaminka (Kamionka)
Biała (Biała Podlaska)	Dzikov (Dzików, Tarnobrzeg)	Kashvatín (Khashchevatoye)
Bilgorai (Biłgoraj)	Falticeni (Fálticeni)	Kertshinev (Karácsonfalva; Crăciunești)
Bolechov (Bolechów)	Fristik (Fryszak)	Kishinev (Chișinău)
Borshchev (Borszczów)	Glina (Gliniany)	Kobrin (Kobryń)
Botosani (Botoșani)	Grodno (Horodne)	Kolomea (Kołomyja)
Bratslav (Braclaw)	Grodzisk (Grodzisk Mazowiecki)	Konstantín Hadash (Nowy Konstantynów)
Brigal (Bryeł)	Grosswardein (Oradea, Nagy Várád)	Konstantín Yashan (Stary Konstantynów)
Brody (Brod)	Gur (Ger, Góra Kalwaria)	Korets (Korzec)
Buchach (Buczacz)	Hanipoli (Annapol)	Korima (Kurima)
Buhush (Buhuși)	Hertsá (Herța)	Koristyshev (Korostyszów)
Bukovina (Bukowina)	Homel (Gomel)	Kosov (Kosów)
Bykhov Yashan (Stary Bychów)	Hornostopol (Gornostaypol)	Kotsk (Kock)
Byelorussia (White Russia, Reisen)		

Kozhenits (Kozienice)	Piotrkov (Piotrków)	Sochachev (Sochaczew)
Krakov (Kraków)	Trybunalski)	Stefanesti (Stefănești)
Kremenets (Krzemieniec)	Płonsk (Płońsk)	Stratyn (Stratyń, Stretyn)
Kutow (Kuty, Kutev, Kitew)	Płoskirow (Płoskirów)	Strelisk (Strzeliska)
Lachovich (Lachowicze,	Podgorze (Podgórze)	Strikov (Stryków)
Lyakhovich)	Pohorbishch (Pohrebyszcze,	Stry (Stryj)
Lancut (Łańcut)	Pogrebishche)	Sudilkov (Sudyków)
Latyczew (Latyczów)	Polonnoye (Połonne)	Talne (Talnoye)
Lelov (Lelów)	Poznan (Poznań)	Tarnograd (Tarnogród)
Lemberg (Lvov, Lwów)	Potik Zloty (Potok Złoty,	Tarnov (Tarnów)
Lentshna (Łęczna)	Potik Złotyj, Potyk)	Tomashov (Tomaszów
Leova (Leovo)	Premyshlan (Przemysłany)	Lubelski)
Leshnov (Leszniów)	Pshemyshl (Przemysł)	Trisk (Turzysk)
Lodz (Łódź)	Pshishkha (Przysucha)	Tulchin (Tulczyn)
Lyady (Liady)	Pultusk (Pułtusk)	Uman (Umań)
Lyzhansk (Leżajsk)	Radomsk (Radomsko)	Ushits (Letniowce, Novaya
Makhnovka (Machnówka)	Radomyshl (Radomyśl)	Ushitsa, Nova Ushytsia)
Makov (Maków)	Radoshits (Radoszyce)	Ustila (Uściąg)
Mezhibozh (Międzybóże)	Radvill (Radziwillow)	Vilna (Vilnius, Wilno)
Mezhirech (Międzyrzecz)	Raisha (Rzeszów)	Vitebsk (Witebsk)
Mikolayev (Mikołajów)	Rimanov (Rymanów)	Vizhnitz (Vizhnitsa, Vijnița)
Mikulince (Mikulińce)	Ropshits (Ropczyce)	Volhynia (Volyn)
Mogilev (Mohylów)	Rotmistrivka (Rachmistrivka)	Volozhin (Wolożyn)
Moldavia (Moldova)	Rozdol (Rozdół, Rosle)	Warka (Vorko, Vurke)
Murachawa (Morachve	Romania (Rumania)	Warsaw (Warszawa)
hadasha)	Ruzhin (Rużyn, Rizhin)	Wolochisk (Wołoczysko)
Munkatsh (Munkács,	Sadgora (Sadegóra, Sadeger,	Wolodarka (Wołodarka)
Mukachevo)	Sadagura)	Wonkowce (Vinkovtsy)
Nemirov (Niemirów)	Safed (Tsfat)	Yanov (Janów)
Neskhiz (Niesuchojeze)	Sasov (Sasów)	Zablotov (Zabłotów)
Olik (Ołyka)	Satmar (Satu-Mare)	Zaleshchik (Zaleszczyki)
Ostra (Ostróg)	Savran (Sawrań)	Zanz (Nowy Sącz)
Ostrov (Ostrów)	Sharogrod (Szarogród)	Zbarazh (Zbaraż)
Ovruch (Owruć)	Shklov (Szkłów)	Zhidachov (Żydaczów)
Ozieran (Jezierzany)	Sighet (Máramarossziget)	Zhitomir (Żytomierz)
Palestine (Eretz Israel, The	Skala (Skala)	Zinkov (Zińków)
Holy Land, Land of	Skvira (Skwira)	Zlochev (Złoczów)
Israel)	Slavuta (Sławuta)	Zurawica (Żurawica)
Pinsk (Pińsk)	Smila (Smiła)	Zychlin (Żychlin)