

## ABSTRACT

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MUSSAR AND POLEMICS IN THE  
HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRILOGY OF  
RABBI YA'AKOV HALEVI LIFSHITZ.

Rachael Charlsie Rose, Masters of the Arts, 2015

Directed By:

Dr. Bernard Cooperman, Jewish Studies

This thesis explains how *Zikhron Ya'akov* by Rabbi Ya'akov Halevi Lifshitz (1838 -1921) represents not simply a memoir of a deceased Rabbi, but *avant-garde* counter-history as well as *mussar* literature. Defining *Zikhron Ya'akov* as a counter-history involves accepting that Lifshitz himself wrote extensively, but not as a demure marginal autobiographer recounting his story in a modest memoir. Rather, it involves accepting that Lifshitz wrote as a radical historiographer, attempting to focus on his own self and effectively identifying as a creator of a controversial new system of thinking. Writing under rapidly changing historical circumstances, Lifshitz neither writes a history, nor does he identify as a historian. As a polemicist and a rhetorical writer whose work is now classed in the complex system of *mussar* literature, Lifshitz creates a historiography for posterity linked closely with his own legacy. The translations included in the appendix help guide the reader through material covered by the thesis.

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RABBI YA'AKOV HALEVI LIFSHITZ

By

Ms. Rachael Charlsie Rose

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Advisory Committee:  
Professor Bernard Cooperman, Chair  
Professor Charles Manekin  
Professor Maxine Grossman



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## Preface

*Zikhron Ya'akov*, a historiographical trilogy covering four time periods, serves as a narrative of eighteenth and nineteenth century Jewish history. The trilogy, written by Rabbi Ya'akov Halevi Lifshitz (1838-1921), a Jewish Rabbinical leader who served as secretary to Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor, was published by the son of the author, Nota Lifshitz. This historiography, seldom mentioned alongside the historiography of other nineteenth century writers of Jewish history such as Markus Jost (1793-1860) and Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891) poses interesting questions for scholars. One wonders why this literature remains significant, and also, from the perspective of a complete outsider, why this book seems largely unexamined. The answer to such questions might explain the dearth of Jewish history students studying *Zikhron Ya'akov*. Therefore, defining the place of *Zikhron Ya'akov* in the politics of Jewish historiography necessitates further inquiry. Upon further investigation such inquiry yields that Lifshitz wrote a counter-historical narrative of sorts in the sense that by explicitly separating his historiography from history written by historians, he forfeited his academic standing. In *Zikhron Ya'akov*, Lifshitz tries to bridge the gap between the *Maskilim* and the Hasidim by criticizing both their systems of thinking and in place of those, promoting his own. In the text he imagines this larger conversation as a *makhloket l'shem shamayim*, meaning a scholarly argument unadulterated by any ulterior motives. This paper seeks to explain how *Zikhron Ya'akov* in fact represents *mussar* literature, a radical counter-history, and a memoir of a deceased Rabbi.

If *Zikhron Ya'akov* constitutes *mussar* literature, then *mussar* literature merits a definition. The genre of *mussar* literature, often translated as ethical literature, can theoretically serve as one of the major modes of the transmission of Jewish memory and culture.<sup>1</sup> In this sense *Zikhron Ya'akov* could be legitimately included in a survey for Israeli or American academic studies of *mussar*. Such surveys pose problems for researchers because of the undefined nature of *mussar* literature. In their 1970 study, Isaiah Tishby and Joseph Dan define *mussar* literature by four essential categories and seven subcategories. As a general rule, they claim that:

...Mussar Literature is the survey literature, in the widest sense and in the most restricted, for the essential rules of the ethical behavior of man, and those upon which every holy book depends, widens chapter by chapter, for each one of them is dedicated to one of these essential rules. Mussar literature, as it is understood in the restricted senses does not exist except as one of the types of mussar literature in the widest senses.<sup>2</sup>

The four larger categories (anthologies, Jewish exegesis, polemics, and inquiry) substantiate major types of *mussar* literature, each of which includes the seven subcategories within itself. The seven smaller categories consist of: discussions of normative practice, monographs addressing particular issues, ethical wills, tracts on ethical behavior, treatises and compositions, responsa literature or opinion, and literary tropes centering on ethics.<sup>3</sup> If *Zikhron Ya'akov* falls under the umbrella of *mussar* literature, it falls in the widest sense into category ten in the Tishby and Dan survey, polemical literature. While this book serves as more than merely polemics,

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<sup>1</sup> See Lester Samuel Eckman, *The History of the Musar Movement, 1840-1945* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah Tishby and Joseph Dan. *Mivhar sifrut ha-musar: peraḳim nivḥarim be-tseruf tsiyunim, be'yurim u-mavu'ot*. (Yerushalayim: M. Niueman, 1970. page 12). Hereafter "Tishby & Dan"

<sup>3</sup> Tishby & Dan, page 12.

overlap with the other categories simply substantiates the Tishby and Dan definition, expressed above.<sup>4</sup>

*Zikhron Ya'akov* appears in print for the first time in 1924. This printing only encompasses the first volume of the trilogy. The second and third volumes appear in 1927 and 1930 respectively. The memoir as a whole, comes to light in three waves of publication, the 1924-30 editions, the 1967-68 editions, and the 2008-2009 editions. The original 1920s copyright, renewed in 2008, falls under Israeli copyright protections. One edition, distributed in the late 1960s in Israel under the auspices of the grandchildren of Rabbi Ya'akov Halevi Lifshitz, includes the first names of two of these grandchildren respectively, each named Ya'akov, probably named after their grandfather. This particular edition includes a few extra additions such as a preface written by the publisher and a note about the Lifshitz family history.<sup>5</sup> The first volume covers two periods, the period encompassing the years 1760-1840 and the period ranging from the year 1840 to the year 1860. The second volume, covering the period of the 1860s and 70s includes copyright information from 1927 by Nota Lifshitz. This volume in part, polemicizes the works of Hebrew literary figures of those decades. The first section in the third volume covers the so-called "beginning of the reactionary period." This section lays out a historical outline covering the lives of Prussian Jews in the 1870s during the reign of Bismark and later Tsar Alexander II

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<sup>4</sup> Tishby & Dan, pages 12 - 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Zikhron Yaakov, Jewish History in Russia and Poland, 1760-1896*, in three volumes, by the Wise Rabbi, the author, an elder of those who occupy themselves in communal affairs, Rabbi Yaakov Halevi Lifshitz of blessed memory, second edition, as was published in the years 1924-1930... Bnei Brak 1968. Published by the grandsons of the author.

along with the spectrum of Jewish responses to pogroms, scholarly revisionism, exile, and changes to religious practice and education, among other things.<sup>6</sup>

The different volumes appear in print under different printing presses with cover pages in different languages hinting to the state of political flux that the readers of these volumes in the interwar period endured. The first and second volumes appear in print in Kaunas-Slabada according to the text, as the inhabitants of the adjacent Lithuanian cities of Kovno (Kaunas) and Slobodka (Slabada) shared a joint printing press. At this time they lived in a yet newly demarcated area and neither city owned the printing press exclusively. The location of the city of Slobodka existed on the borderline of Lithuania and Latvia. The city of Kovno, which during the printing of the second volume served as the capital of Lithuania, existed under arms on the border of Lithuania and Poland as attested to by newspaper reports from 1927 and a map demarcating the locations of both cities.<sup>7</sup> In the third volume, copyrighted in 1930 by Nota Lifshitz, the printing presses of Kovno and Slobodka seem to have shifted ownership again, as the regional spelling on the copyright page, Kaunas 3. (Vilijampole), no longer mentions Slobodka. Additionally, this 1960s edition of volume III includes a Hebrew inscription stating that Y. Kuzinsky distributed this literature in Kovno.<sup>8</sup> This same 1960s Hebrew edition includes a note explaining that the trilogy was distributed in some circles after Nota Lifshitz perished in the Kovno

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<sup>6</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov* III, "The Beginning of the Reactionary Period," pages 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 15, 1927, archived online: (<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1927/12/15/page/21/article/kovno-troops-on-polish-line-demobilizing>), For the locations of Kovno and Slobodka, each located near national borders, see: "People's Atlas 1920, Poland and the new Baltic States," ([http://www.lithuanianmaps.com/images/1920\\_London-geographical-institute\\_the-peoples-atlas\\_1920\\_poland-and-the-new-baltic-statesDETAIL.jpg](http://www.lithuanianmaps.com/images/1920_London-geographical-institute_the-peoples-atlas_1920_poland-and-the-new-baltic-statesDETAIL.jpg)).

<sup>8</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov* (1968), cover page.



Ghetto (demarcated in 1941), which paradoxically was located in Slobodka (Vilijampole region) as the Jews had been deported there at that time.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Hidden Histories of the Holocaust Exhibit, slide four "Ghettoization" (<http://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/kovno/ghetto/ghetto.htm>).

## **Foreword: Biographical Information on Lifshitz**

Rabbi Ya'akov Halevi Lifshitz was born in Volkheimer region of Russia (present-day Germany) on the second of January 1838 to Eliezer Lipman Halevi and to Esther Ittel, his father's second wife. Esther-Ittel had three children from a previous marriage at the time of her marriage to Eliezer Lipman Halevi, two sons and a daughter. She had four sons with Eliezer Lipman; Yehuda Halevi Lifshitz, Menachem Mendel Halevi, Tzvi Hirsch, and Ya'akov. Ya'akov lost his father at the age of five and his mother was left to support the family. There was nobody in the community able to care for the orphans so they arranged a marriage for the fourteen year old Yehuda, to a daughter of a wealthy family who ran a butcher shop. Yehudah left his betrothed and in-laws to move to Vilna and study. The second brother, married at the age of seventeen. Meanwhile, Tzvi Hirsch and Ya'akov lived with their mother. When Tzvi Hirsch was twelve he went away to study in another city and Ya'akov was left under the tutelage of his older half-brother. Ya'akov did not have a good relationship with his half-brother, and hence Ya'akov felt deprived of a decent education. Ya'akov studied in the neighboring city of Kaidan for some time, but returned home where he stayed through the Crimean War.<sup>10</sup> On Sunday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1858 Ya'akov married Leah, his first wife (she lived until 1892).<sup>11</sup> In 1871, Germany declared itself a nation,

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<sup>10</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov II*, "Days of my Youth" page 39.

<sup>11</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov II*, "Days of my Youth" page 40.

consolidating a number of smaller states. Much later in his life, in fact eight years before his death in the city of Kaunas in 1921,<sup>12</sup> Ya'akov Lifshitz spent several years in Ukraine where he collaborated with other Jewish leaders in providing aid to pogrom victims there during the First World War. During this period, in 1918, the Council of Lithuania declared Lithuanian independence claiming Kaunas (Kovne, Kovno, Kowno) as its capital.<sup>13</sup> During his life Ya'akov Lifshitz fathered at least three children, a son Nota, a daughter Dora,<sup>14</sup> and another daughter.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov II*, introductory letter by rabbi Brodowsky, pages V-VI.

<sup>13</sup> Israel Bartal. *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772-1881* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, page 154). See also prefatory remarks from Isaac Tzvi Borodowski and Nota Lifshitz to *Zikhron Ya'akov II*, pages IV-VI, and I-III respectively.

<sup>14</sup> Kimmy Caplan, "Friederman, Zalman Jacob", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (2007): "...In 1890 Friederman married Dora, daughter of Jacob Halevi Lifshitz, who was the secretary of Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Spector and Judah Lifshitz's brother."

<sup>15</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov II*, "Days of my Youth" page 46.



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## **The Identity of Rabbi Ya'akov Halevi Lifshitz:**

## Counter History

In his article, “Absolutely Intellectually Honest: A Case-Study of American Jewish Modern Orthodox Historiography,” Kimmy Caplan points out a salient element in *Zikhron Ya’akov*, the fact that Lifshitz consciously writes a religious counter-history.<sup>16</sup> In the article, Caplan writes that recognizing the personally realized identity of Lifshitz in *Zikhron Ya’akov* plays an important role in understanding the book, writing that Lifshitz, clearly conscious of his charismatic personality, played a role as author of a counter-historical narrative.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of defining the meaning of *counter-history*, a person might keep in mind that the focus on the self as a creator of a radical and controversial new system of thinking, in vogue at the turn-of-the century, comes into play in *Zikhron Ya’akov*. Rabbi Ya’akov Halevi Lifshitz, a polemicist and rhetorician, championed an educational philosophy which involved a type of *mussar*. While his educational ideology and agenda serve the needs of his intended audience for a narrative history explaining the past insofar as this narrative contains tools to teach of present day constructs and issues, Lifshitz places himself as the arbiter of his own memoirs, conflating history with autobiography.<sup>18</sup> David Biale provides us with examples of other radical turn-of-the-century writers who championed similar philosophies,

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<sup>16</sup> Kimmy Caplan, “‘Absolutely Intellectually Honest’: A Case-Study of American Jewish Modern Orthodox Historiography,” *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* edited by Rachel Elijor and Peter Schafer, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, page 360).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Caplan, page 360.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. page 343.

substantiating either messianic or Jewish nationalist claims, specifically. Examples of such writers include Shai Ish Hurwitz (1861-1922), a defender of positive elements in Sabateanism,<sup>19</sup> Martin Buber (1878-1965), an existentialist philosopher and a Zionist, and in a different sense, the father of modern Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem (1897-1982). Biale claims that the apocalyptic Sabatean mystical tradition rebelled against the traditional gravitas and weight attributed to history. He writes: “Messianic adventurers such as Shabbatai Tzvi became heroes as did other heretics and rebels. There was hope for a different future because, despite the passive mentality they had acquired during the diaspora, the Jews retained a more aggressive spirit, hidden away like a recessive gene.”<sup>20</sup> Even in the present day Jewish mystics, historiographers, and historians write drastically different narratives of Jewish history. What might serve as an authoritative narrative in one tradition, could very well create an environment of anathema in another tradition.

## Rhetoric

Through his myriad uses of rhetorical tactics, exemplified by such a broad range of devices as biblical idioms, Talmudic references, and vitriolic *ad hominem* attacks, Rabbi Yaakov Halevi Lifshitz makes a case for *Zikhron Yaakov* as religious counter-history. The sensationalism and the vivid forms of rhetoric he used to oppose his contemporaries in *Zikhron Ya'akov* figure prominently in the expression of his identity. Furthermore, the fact that Lifshitz sets his following in opposition to the

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<sup>19</sup> See also Stephan Nash “Hurwitz, Sha’ul Yisra’el” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews of Eastern Europe* [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hurwitz\\_Shaul\\_Yisrael](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hurwitz_Shaul_Yisrael).

<sup>20</sup> David Biale, *Modern Jewish Ideologies and the Historiography of Jewish Politics*, [Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate Theological Union, Berkley] in Jonathan Frankel, *Reshaping the Past: Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 10, page 7 (1994).



followers of the “tyrannical government” (not to mention the Reformers and Hassidim) reflects a counter-historical theme in his memoirs in the sense that his version of history stands in opposition to any government-approved version of history.<sup>21</sup>

One example of Lifshitz using Biblical language to support his persuasive tactics appears in several passages in the introduction. His usages of “I” and “I am the man” reflect both a personalized style and a biblical metaphor found in the Book of Lamentations in the Hebrew Scriptures. Using the same Biblical phrase repeated numerous times in Lamentations, “I am the man,” Lifshitz makes several unsubstantiated *ad hominem* attacks on the *Maskilim*.<sup>22</sup> In this paragraph, he also claims that the *Maskilim* sought to establish the Reform movement as the people had followed them and become loose and pigeonholed.

I am the man who saw the impoverishment of our nation in the new period from the year 5620 – 1860, when the first of the Maskilim prevailed even more, whether from the aspect of their coming close to the authorities, or from that of the multitude of the innocent, who were greatly influenced by their freethinking doctrines, and whose devotion to the way of Torah and mitzvah was cooled by them.<sup>23</sup>

Lifshitz goes on to set up his group, the *Haredim*, in opposition to the group of *Maskilim* whom he derides. He claims that the hands of his group were tied, making

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<sup>21</sup> “I say- I am the man who saw the affliction of our nation under the rod of His [God’s] doubled wrath: their awful miseries from the frequent decrees of the tyrannical government, the pain and pressure of the times, stemming from the poverty and awful affliction which reigned then in the land, and the spiritual miseries of our nation caused by those who surrounded our beneficiaries while at home, by trodding on the heads of the nation of Israel, like at the time of the “Hellenisers,” in order to profane the sanctity of the Holy Torah, to uproot its foundations, and to turn over all the sacred vessels of our spiritual nation under the grip of the draconian and tyrannical government, so that with its might and with its decisiveness, they would be able to achieve their goals, God forbid.” *Zikhron Ya’akov I*, “Introduction”, page XXXIII.

<sup>22</sup> *Maskilim* means ‘enlighteners.’

<sup>23</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov I*, “Introduction,” page XXXIV.

them unable to reveal the complete truth because of their fears of both the *Maskilim* and of change.<sup>24</sup>

Even though his scholarship, based on sensationalist tactics, hardly falls under the category of precise academic writing, it furthers both philosophical ideas and religious causes which Lifshitz identifies as incumbent for the Jews of his generation (such as respect for Rabbis and the importance of prayer).<sup>25</sup> Even though he opposes the *Maskilim* with embittered sensationalism, Lifshitz supports the idea of relating to the *Maskilim*, if only with the purpose of ultimately deriding their system. Directly after creating a description painting the *Maskilim* with colorful insults and ending with calling their opinions “heretical” and an “insidious poison”, Lifshitz writes:

It may be because such opinions are built upon the foundations of distinction and logic, as that which characterizes my master the researcher. Many days hence, and upon recurrent times, many other sages will come and research and awaken their foundations. Such the test will prove – that many disgusting “Greek” philosophical opinions will be proven null and void. They will pass from the world by the power of the truly wise, by the test and findings which will reveal forthcoming strength.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, Lifshitz recognizes that the *Maskilim* actually possess reason and intellect. He humanizes them with this recognition. However, Lifshitz claims that his followers must “uproot ‘active intellect’ which is the paradigm of the wise men of Greece.”<sup>27</sup>

Although the concept of “active intellect” remains undefined here, a person might

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<sup>24</sup> “We, the *Haredim*, our hands were constrained from revealing the truth as is proper and appropriate, out of fear of the government of the time which then was on the side of the *Maskilim*. We were afraid of our own enlighteners, who never ceased to frighten us through the threat of informing. *Zikhron Ya’akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXIV.”

<sup>25</sup> See *Zikhron Ya’akov* I, “The Opposition” page 12, footnote one on Rabbi Hayim Ben Attar. (On this issue, see also: David Assaf. “‘A Heretic Who has No Faith in the Great Ones of the Age’: The Clash Over the Honor of Or Ha-Hayyim,” (*Modern Judaism* 29: 2, 2009, pages 194-225). For a similar controversy, see *Zikhron Ya’akov* I, “Hassidism” page 5 regarding Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto. On Luzzatto see: Jonathan Garb. *Meḳubal be-lev ha-se’arah: R. Mosheh Hayim Lutsaṭo*. (Tel-Aviv: Universitat Tel-Aviv, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov* I, “Introduction” page XXXV.

<sup>27</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov* I, “Introduction” page XXXV.

infer that here Lifshitz wishes to destroy a certain element of the intellectual life and spirit, a zeitgeist, which the *Maskilim* possessed and utilized in their scholarly pursuits, perhaps the same Active Intellect described in the first Chapter of the *Kuzari* by Rabbi Judah Halevi.

The counter-historical nature of the text expressed in the tactics utilized in *Zikhron Ya'akov* figures prominently in the construction of identity Lifshitz promulgates. He broadcasts this persona through his usages of language, his conflation of confessionary memoir and history, and the polemical nature of this *mussar* text. With his language, he invokes the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and the ethos of subsequent Rabbinic authority figures. Throughout the trilogy, he even invokes the memories of his forebears using grandiose characterizations and descriptions, attributing to them titles such as these, roughly translated as ‘the genius,’ ‘the righteous,’ ‘bright stars,’ ‘the luminary,’ ‘the sun,’ etc... Lifshitz also references Kabbalists to lend authority to his narrative. References to Kabbalists include the Ari (Rabbi Isaac Luria), Rabbi Moses Cordovero, Moses Hayim Luzzato [and maybe the Padua school],<sup>28</sup> and Rabbi Jonathan Eybschutz.<sup>29</sup>

## Strategy

Lifshitz uses rhetorical tactics to substantiate his two stated purposes. The first of his statements of purpose cements the idea of the significance and importance of a substantial historiography of considerable value for “Israelite history.”<sup>30</sup> He claims

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<sup>28</sup> For more on this interpretation, see Isaiah Tishby, *Messianic Mysticism: Moses Hayim Luzzatto and the Padua School* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008). See also Ḥayyim ben Isaac Volozhiner, *Nefesh hachaim*. (Brooklyn, NY: Judaica Press, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, I, “Introduction,” page 2 and throughout the book.

<sup>30</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXVIII

that his “superior memoirs” do not merely pay tribute to the elite, for if they had, his memoirs would remain buried forever. This statement, followed by a comparison of elitism to “a giant sin and a great inequity” serves the purposes of promoting the spirit of honesty that Lifshitz wishes to keep as his legacy.<sup>31</sup> The second purpose Lifshitz argues for is the cause of defending his polemics against the *Maskilim* and their literature.<sup>32</sup> Yaakov Lifshitz employs charisma, emphasizing his own character, in the forms of ethos, pathos, and logos; elements of persuasive writing.

Ethos – Lifshitz seeks to convince the reader of his credibility by stressing his own character. In order to impress this goal upon the readers, he appeals to the audience, basing his mastery of historiography on personal experience and framing the historiography as a memoir, writing:

I who lived close to twenty years in the days of the old regime – in the period before the Crimean War – will be able to say that I was ensconced in familiarity with and knowledge of the old world situation overall and also in its connection to our nation in particular.<sup>33</sup>

Appearing to come from a place of familiarity with the Jewish situation and of personal experience, he expresses solidarity with the Jewish people in the above passage. For this reason, he feels entitled to speak not only for himself, but for his predecessors as well, he writes: “Therefore, at the time at which I am compiling my memories in written form, I am permitted to speak...”<sup>34</sup> The usage of ethos connects him as a part of the greater educational and rabbinic tradition, to his past, and to the past of the Jewish community as well.

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<sup>31</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXVIII.

<sup>32</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXVIII.

<sup>33</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXIII.

<sup>34</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXIII.

Pathos- the appeal to the emotions of his audience exemplifies the introduction as Lifshitz presents the world in polar binaries. *Maskilim* represent the side of ‘evil’, and he represents ‘good.’ This stance creates a pathos-inducing façade. He applies pathos as a tool throughout the preface, mocking the *Maskilim* and the so-called ‘evil idolatry of their literature.’<sup>35</sup> In so doing, he exposes the humanity of the *Maskilim*- their flaws and weaknesses, but also their strengths and peculiarities, tempting curiosity.

Employing elements of rebuke and chastisement, Lifshitz appeals to the empathy of the readers. He writes that he has “seen the affliction of our nation under the wrath of a multiple floggings.”<sup>36</sup> Though unspecified, these might refer to the wrath of poverty and affliction. Thus, having frightened the readers he builds a proverbial effigy, lampooning the “Hellenisers” who “seek to profane the sanctity of the Holy Torah, to uproot its foundations, and to turn over all the sacred ones of our spiritual nation to the grip of the draconian and tyrannical government...heaven forfend.”<sup>37</sup> The “Hellenisers” here are equated with the ‘informers’ who receive direct financial support from the government, i.e. the *Maskilim*. Lifshitz also lampoons the Reform movement because these Hellenizing *Maskilim* sought “to establish the idolatry of the Reform even in the land of Russia, as in the lands of Europe.”<sup>38</sup> The Reform movement, spread by the publishing of periodical magazines, posed a threat to the ethos of the weakened Orthodox establishment. *Maskilim* in

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<sup>35</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXVIII.

<sup>36</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXIII.

<sup>37</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXIII.

<sup>38</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXIIV.

general published youth and counter-culture literature such as short stories, confessions, poetry, and the like.

Logos- logic compels Lifshitz to combat the perceived pathetic misery and confusion caused by the ‘evil literature’ of the past one hundred years and to create religious Orthodox periodical publications, which he intends to sell as “crowning elements to guard our holy religion before the obstacles of those who have broken away.”<sup>39</sup> Lifshitz appeals to elements of both logos and pathos, calling upon the readers to refine and winnow the husks of spiritual imperfection away from the sparks of holiness so that those truly persuaded by his words can achieve inner beauty and persevere. The elucidated goal of this strategy encourages the readers to act in a respectful way towards themselves and towards others. This motivates Lifshitz to teach the discipline of the fathers, setting himself up as an example of character for his students. Given his circumstances, Lifshitz reasonably admits that he does not identify as a historian, and thus his historiography cannot serve as history in the academic sense of the word, (which currently would refer to a historical volume published by a University press), Lifshitz writes:

I am not a historian, and for more than half my life it never occurred to me to be a historian. For truthfully it is a loss, alas it had not occurred to me in the days of my youth to glean even an iota of fact. For at that point, I had a number of honorable and lofty opportunities to gather historical data with greater developmental aptitude.<sup>40</sup>

The idea he expresses here, that his polemical tract serves as a sort of history, follows from the above quoted passage. He effectively admits that his historiography

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<sup>39</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXIV.

<sup>40</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXIII.

represents academically ahistorical data. Nevertheless, it represents a small segment within a sort of history of intellectual trends (such as mussar) in Jewish literature.

As a mussar historiographer, Lifshitz reaches the educational part of his argument meant as the epitome of his dedication to his legacy at the end of the introduction to *Zikhron Yaakov*, writing:

And the primary cause and value of most importance in my memoirs is as I said - that the children of the coming generations will have no jealousies and no competition at all, like the competition of the heirs of the Haskalah now; behold these, who desire to know the clear and complete truth and to set it into history, they will find treasure and many materials in my memoirs, in order to bring truth to justice, and to return to our fathers and teachers their honor which was stolen from them for many days, and the upright will rejoice.<sup>41</sup>

From this passage, one can see that Rabbi Lifshitz wrote his memoirs for the benefit of parents, teachers, and students alike within the Orthodox community. While the idea of “having no competition at all” may or may not have relevance for his students, it promotes confidence in their ranks. Thus, the logistic quality of his persuasive writing remains salient, even in this passage. Despite his lack of published historical data, his descriptions of certain intellectual conflicts and the emotions expressed within them often still resonate with Jews today. His intended audience, consisting of Rabbis and traditional educators, retains interest in using his book for educational purposes. In fact, Nota returns to the educational theme within the memoir, writing: “the youth of the children of Israel will read from the hope of the generation of the upright and will find the treasure of every sanctified circle, the merits of light and the fire of religion, which are ensconced within the heart of the Israelite man.”<sup>42</sup> In the

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<sup>41</sup> *Zikhron Yaakov*, I, “Introduction” page XXXIX.

<sup>42</sup> *Zikhron Yaakov*, II, “Introduction” page III.

spirit of remembrance, other communal leaders offer their own testimonies supporting Lifshitz in their approbatory letters introducing the second volume.

Yitzchack Tzvi Brodowsky of Irkutsk testifies to the strengths which, to his mind, most characterized Yaakov Lifshitz. Based on the letters Brodowsky exchanged with Lifshitz in the final eight years of his life, Brodowsky judged that even though Ya'akov Lifshitz wrote to him during his darkest years, the words Lifshitz penned proved mighty and exacting, not wanting. He describes Lifshitz as a true Jew, given to his nation and its spiritualism. Not only this, but to Brodowsky, Lifshitz, a scholarly giant, possessed leadership capabilities akin to those of an Israelite king. He compares Lifshitz to a flag-bearer, leading an army in scholarly battle. Brodowsky testifies; "Truthfully, all of Israel has a portion in his memoirs, Haredi or free, all of Israel merit in history." Thus, the Lifshitz historiographical trilogy constituted the "refracting device for everything which passed over us for a duration of sixty years."<sup>43</sup> By "us," Brodowsky refers to the members of his generation who used his historiography as a tool to help transmit memory.

Other writers of approbatory letters introducing the second volume focus on the status Lifshitz held as a famous Rabbi and on his character. This theme holds a prominent place in the introductory letters by Jacob Rosenheim and Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung to the second volume and also to the one by Nota Lifshitz in the first volume. The fact that Rabbi Yaakov Lifshitz served as a close advisor to Rabbi Isaac Elchanan of Kovno (the namesake of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Rabbinic Seminary at Yeshiva University) retains a prominent position in these letters.<sup>44</sup> Hillel Zeitlin, focusing on

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<sup>43</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, II, pages V-VI.

<sup>44</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, II, pages XIII-XVI.



character, portrays Lifshitz as a fighter and a scholar, yet Zeitlin also raises political questions with refracting history through one organ alone (the historiography of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries).<sup>45</sup> He questions how this type of historiography would impact the status of Jews in the emerging intellectual politics of the twentieth century. As a critic of Jewish insularity, he mentions how segregated racial politics could serve as a factor that could change the political structure of society. Thus, from the modern perspective *Zikhron Yaakov* represents a counter-cultural rabbinic historiography distributed in the Ghetto at the end of the life of Nota Lifshitz. Nevertheless, it also serves as an educational tool used for the transmission of memory hidden within Jewish culture.

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<sup>45</sup> Hillel Zeitlin "The Last Period from Our History in a New Light" *Zikhron Ya'akov*, II, page IX (Yiddish).

**Case Study – *Hassidim & Mithnagdim:***

## Categorical *Mussar* in the Text

Regardless of the educational rhetoric of his polemical style, Lifshitz eventually makes a *mussar* based argument in his first few chapters, that the *Hasidic-Mithnagdic* conflict itself exemplifies a dispute like that of the famous Tannaitic sages Hillel and Shammai, a dispute for the sake of heaven whose end has yet to come. Lifshitz makes his argument that the sources of contention, even between the Haredim and the *Maskilim*, were only for the sake of eternalizing the heavenly teachings. Doing this, Lifshitz draws from the seven principle aspects of *mussar* literature (normative practice, discussions of particular issues, the spirit of the ethical will, understandings of ethical behavior, references to authoritative treatises and compositions, the personal opinion of a Rabbi, and literary tropes centering on ethics). All of these characteristics of *mussar* literature surface meshed in the garb of anti-Hassidic polemics.

In a polemical argument about the validity of Hassidic practice Lifshitz questions the system of Hassidism, asking: “Will the system of Hassidism, claiming to cleave to Him, not weaken Him the most? This system lays out matters of prayer in strange ways and celebrates the imaginary cleaving with happiness and spiritual activity, for these are more wanted than Torah which is not for the sake of eternalizing his system of Torah.”<sup>46</sup> His rhetoric not only emphasizes Hasidic ignorance, but also questions the authenticity of Hassidic practice. He argues that the system of Hassidism has passed the test of time and nearly failed, writing:

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<sup>46</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, “The Opposition” page 11.

As the text has told, that which the first Hassidim in the year 5530 [1769-70], passed over - a particular impetus, almost like all the concerns articulated, came very close to the opinions of the “Provençals” who were in France in the year 5200, [the impetus being] to minimize and also to nullify the essence of the fulfillment of the commandments, to exalt every form of praise, essentially only the thought, idea, and intention.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the fact that Lifshitz fails to use what in the contemporary world would qualify as properly cited historical sources, his philosophy expressed in this passage emphasizes that the spirit of the Torah without its corpus, amounts to nothing. Not withholding from attacking Hassidic practice based on popular Orthodox synagogue politics, Lifshitz writes: “Similarly, there was a great reason for opposing them. They had chosen the Lurianic prayer rite and made changes to the recitation of pietistic poetry and to the prayers. As such they caused divisions within the nation and they were offensive.”<sup>48</sup> By focusing on popular opposition to small changes in prayer rites, Lifshitz draws a parallel between opposition to change and Orthodoxy, if he does not equate the two. Even so, Lifshitz raises the issue of his fear of the destruction of the Torah and attacks Hassidic Rabbis as “mediocre people.”<sup>49</sup> Nonwithstanding, he concludes that “at the end of the matter, the foundations and principles of the dispute from both perspectives, were only for the sake of heaven. Therefore, its end has yet to come – for really the root of this dispute engendered abundant results for each side.”<sup>50</sup>

In the “*Hassidism*” section, Lifshitz discusses the normative practices of the ‘*Hassidim*’ and how these practices, despite the good intentions behind them, most often fell short of the ideal of Pietist practice. Lifshitz continuously raises issues with his contemporaries, the *Hassidim*. He characterizes the *Hassidim* in a manner far from

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<sup>47</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov I*, “The Opposition” page 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov I*, “The Opposition” page 14.

<sup>49</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov I*, “The Opposition” page 14.

<sup>50</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov I*, “The Opposition” page 14.

idealized, but despite this, his vision of that group does not lack redeeming qualities. Lifshitz argues against adherence to the idea of Hasidism itself because he claims that its esoteric concepts remain poorly understood by most people. He claims that out of their lack of fear of heaven and fear of sin, the *Hassidim* amplified Torah learning, adding to it and misinterpreting it through the invention of new ridiculous normative laws based on misunderstandings. He reduces *Hasidic* arguments to those of rote piety, close-mindedness, and unreasonable emptiness. He attacks the system of *Hassidism*, claiming that their thinking only leads to “renouncing the existent” rather than anything more constructive.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, he claims that out of their unthinking attachment to their mediocre *Rebbs*, the *Hassidim* sought to widen the learning of the esoteric knowledge so that it reaches the masses. He writes “In order to make serving God with cleaving and fear of the supernal along with learning the Torah central, they classify it as learning for its own sake specifically. For according to *Hassidism*, learning the Torah without love and cleaving has no sanctifying qualities for exalting the soul.”<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps some of the most compelling evidence substantiating the final *mussar* literature quality of the ethical will in the trilogy come from examples of personal testimony of others supporting the late Ya’akov Lifshitz. Nota Lifshitz authored several testimonials in memory of his father and the publication of each volume of the book. In the beginning of the second volume, he describes his father with words of adulation and praise. Nota Lifshitz does not withhold from using *pathos* as a persuasive tool. He describes his father as "a man whose heart was given to the entire

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<sup>51</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov I*, “The Opposition” page 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov I*, “The Opposition” page 12.

community and felt in pain the hurt of every individual, with his spiritual pain, which was ethical and corporeal in each and every part.” In addition to describing his father as a spiritual man, Nota describes him as “a giant warrior who brought bread forth from the battlefield to protect the congregation” and also as “a secretive man and a man of advice for the good of the congregation...” In this passage, the modesty of Ya’akov Lifshitz, noted by his son, adds to his charisma, as does his persistent attitude and his constant work on behalf of others in his congregation. Both his time and his pen are sanctified in this passage by his son.<sup>53</sup>

## Style

The particular rhetorical style that Lifshitz uses in the *Hassidism* section, involves consistently inflicting the Hassidim with invective, while utilizing his own esoteric ideology in the very same breath. Reading Lifshitz as an ecotericist makes sense if one applies the P.A.R.D.E.S. structure to his literature. P.A.R.D.E.S., most often used to interpret the Hebrew Bible itself by medieval exegetes may also serve as a methodology for reading Lifshitz. P.A.R.D.E.S. an acronym, stands for *Pshat* (the literal meaning of a word or set of words), *Remez* (denotes what the phrase in question alludes to or hints at), *Drash* (the inquiry substantiating and reifying the allusion in a concrete sense), and *Sod* (the hidden or secret meaning behind a textual reference). Lifshitz alludes to quite a few different references throughout his trilogy. His esoteric teachings in the broadest sense include *mussar* themes such as his understanding of ethical behavior, references to authoritative treatises and compositions such as the Talmud, his personal opinion (as opposed to scholarly

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<sup>53</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov*, II, pages I-III.

consensus),<sup>54</sup> and literary tropes centering on ethics described in the Tishby and Dan survey definition of *Mussar* literature and expressed by the liturgical and sometimes florid word choices Lifshitz uses.<sup>55</sup> In short, Lifshitz can only be deconstructed using the P.A.R.D.E.S. structure in order to reconstruct a system of knowledge based on the definitions of mussar discussed above.

In a claim about the nature of normative practices (a subcategory of *mussar* literature), Lifshitz touches on the issue of philosophy and upon the issue of the co-existence of opposing ways of thinking. He compares conflicts he witnessed in his generation to the ancient conflicts of the schools Hillel and Shammai written about in the Mishna. The readers at this point, have noted that Lifshitz does not identify as a historian, in fact he does not write as a philosopher either, rather he identifies as a Rabbi if anything. Referring to authoritative treatises (in this case, the Mishna) and perhaps overstating his own personal opinions, he makes a *mussar* based claim about the victory of ethical behavior over bias. Lifshitz effectively claims that the conflict of interests between the followers of “French” customs and the followers of Maimonides represents not normative practice, but foolishness. He writes: “The party “Rambamistim” [Maimonideans] does not survive, not does the party “Sarfatistim,” [Francophiles] everyone loves everyone clearly and distinctively, as with the dispute of Hillel and Shammai- it has yet to end.”<sup>56</sup> Why the philosophies of the Francophiles and Maimonideans would have conflicted seems to have its basis in

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<sup>54</sup> For the Talmudic definition of personal opinion and its relationship to scholarly consensus in rabbinic decision making, see Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 90b, referenced in, Jacob Katz. “Da’at Torah: The Unqualified Authority Claimed for Halakhists,” *Jewish History*. 11: 1, pages 41-50: 41 (1997).

<sup>55</sup> Tishby, & Dan, pages 12-13.

<sup>56</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov*, I, pages 3-4.

external claims or ideologies as opposed to philosophical claims reified directly in the text (*pshat* level analysis). If a person was to try to construct a new argument with this in mind however, perhaps an example of “French” or “Provençal” philosophy could be directly linked to the Ibn Tibon translation of the Guide to the Perplexed by Maimonides into Judeo Arabic and the controversy it caused in Medieval France when it was publicized. The Rabbi of Montpellier, the Talmudist Solomon Ben Abraham ben Samuel led an anti-Maimonidean movement as a consequence of the political upset the vernacular publication caused.<sup>57</sup> So perhaps, the “Provincals” or “Francophiles” allude to this past dispute (*remez*). The fact that Lifshitz historicizes this dispute through a Mishnaic metaphor of an argument for the sake of eternalizing the Torah only substantiates the claims Lifshitz makes about a full analysis as opposed to partial understandings of the issues he values (*drash*). The hidden meaning here however (*sod*), is that Lifshitz was expressing his personal opinion this whole time as opposed to a complete majority consensus. Lifshitz may have had backing from his supporters, but he had his critics as well as attested to by the supporting letter written by Hillel Zietlin.

### **Dichotomies and Parallels in the Text**

Perhaps the most interesting dichotomy Lifshitz draws upon in his memoirs draws a parallel between the spirituality of the *Maskilim* and the spirit of the *Haskala* literature itself.<sup>58</sup> To capture this dichotomy, he takes a maximalist approach, trying to sharply mimic *Haskalah* literature through usages of casuistry, sophistry, and

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<sup>57</sup> “SOLOMON BEN ABRAHAM BEN SAMUEL” 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia (online, url: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13852-solomon-ben-abraham-ben-samuel> ).

<sup>58</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov* I, “Introduction” page XXXVIII.



specious reasoning. The three groups that Lifshitz initially attacks using these tactics; the government informers, the *Hassidim*, and the Reformers represent three different segments of Russian-Jewish nineteenth century society as he experienced it. An example of this polemical rhetoric comes from the “Days of my Youth”<sup>59</sup> section where he expounds upon his experiences in the Russian society where he was raised. This section might appear to the reader as a parody of “Sins of My Youth”<sup>60</sup> by Moses Leib Lilienblum because of its title, the confessional autobiographical nature that both articles share, and the fact that Lifshitz mocks Lilienblum, Y.L. Gordon, and other *Maskilim* in his earlier chapters.<sup>61</sup> Upon further examination of the “Days of My Youth” passage, Ya’akov Lifshitz only shows his paradoxical sense of humor in this passage when he uses expressions such as *haphonographim mizamrim maskil*<sup>62</sup> playing off of both a liturgical trope from the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service<sup>63</sup> and the idea of a modern epicurean culture and thoughtless reactionaries cutting off a *maskil* (lamented in a different sense by Moses Leib Lilienblum in “Sins of My Youth.”) However, the fact that Lifshitz mocks Gordon, a major poet of the early Zionist movement and other *Maskilim* does not negate the fact that Lifshitz wrote as a man of his times and not ours. Lifshitz writes:

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<sup>59</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov II*, “Days of my Youth” pages 37-46.

<sup>60</sup> For a translation, see: Moses Leib Lilienblum, “The Sins of My Youth” within *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe*, by Lucy S. Dawidowicz, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, page 120, 1996).

<sup>61</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov I*, “Introduction” page XXXVIII. Lilienblum and other *Maskilim* are mentioned in the introduction section and Judah Leib Gordon is mentioned by name on page XXXVIII.

<sup>62</sup> *Zikhron Ya’akov II*, “Days of My Youth” page 40, “The phonographs cut off an enlightened one” or alternatively “The phonographs sing, enlightened one.”

<sup>63</sup> For example, Psalms 92, found in Orthodox *Kabbalat Shabbat* Friday night services, plays on this theme. The readers accept Shabbat despite understanding that in ancient times, Shabbat had a different meaning for the Levites in the Temple in Jerusalem. See: Psalms 92 in *The Complete Artscroll Siddur* (Artscroll Mesora Series, 1984-2001, page 320).

They grafted a strange shoot into the vineyard of the house of Israel, false and corrupt opinions, open heresy poured with the oil of the holy anointment, for the love of the holy tongue and to find favor in the eyes of the nations, such are their ways, under the guise of the enlightenment; and thus they permitted this to themselves- all the means which are the most obscene and dangerous. Lies, sharpness, and curses, attributing our fathers of previous generations names: “shrewd ones, burning ones, those who rebel against light, perverters of tradition and quality characteristics.”<sup>64</sup>

At least one of these so called names, “Mordei Or,” (“those who rebel against light”) serves as a reference to Solomon Rubin (1823-1910) and his literature. Jonatan Meir investigates sources for this literary reference in his review of “A Murder in Lemberg” by Michael Stanislavski.<sup>65</sup> The above quoted paragraph represents but one example of the vitriol Lifshitz inflicts upon the so-called *Maskilim*.

Despite his overtly critical attitude, Yaakov Lifshitz uses homiletics in order to achieve a sort of objectivism, placing himself as the judge and sole arbiter of right and wrong. This might lead one to think that Lifshitz opposes “true knowledge” and understanding.<sup>66</sup> Epistemological arguments aside, this conception of Lifshitz as an anti-*maskil* follows from the idea that that the “objectivism” of Lifshitz represents only his partial and subjective opinions. In his writing, Lifshitz consolidates the views of very different historiographers, creating partial truths, based on faith, as opposed to a single impartial truth. He justifies these partial opinions with apologetic reasoning.<sup>67</sup> By simultaneously disrespecting his opponents and trying to bridge the

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<sup>64</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov*, vol. I, “Introduction” page XXXV.

<sup>65</sup> Jonatan Meir, 'Review [Michael Stanislavski, *A Murder in Lemberg: Politics, Religion, and Violence in Modern Jewish History*, Jerusalem 2010]', (GAL-ED 24 (2015), pp. 173-176, page 1).

<sup>66</sup> For a definition of this concept, see Israel Bartal. “True Knowledge and Wisdom: On Orthodox Historiography”, pages 178-179 in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry: Volume X: Reshaping the Past: Jewish History and the Historians*. By Jonathan Frankel for the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, (Oxford University Press, Dec. 13, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> Israel Bartal. “*Zikhron Yaakov L'rabbi Yaakov Lifshitz, Historiographia Orthodoxit?*” (Mel'eat, Tel-Aviv, 1984, page 410).

gap between them, Lifshitz tries to elevate his own writings, rebuking both his opponents and his own following in favor of his conception of a purer truth.

Despite his sometimes paradoxical tactics, the case against Hassidism that Lifshitz argues, holds that the Hassidim selfishly learn Torah to gain respect for their Rabbis and not for the sake of the Torah itself. Lifshitz writes: "...the wise men of blessed memory said: a person will forever learn Torah- even that which is not for its own sake, for even if his learning was not initially sanctified, the person becomes sanctified..."<sup>68</sup> According to Lifshitz, the ideology of the wise necessitates a hierarchical system and a causational philosophy studied along with the Talmud. He argues that the Hassidim, "out of their lack of understanding of the Torah and its complete sway over the ability to understand and discern in depth the intentions of Chazal – with the complete inclusion of the two Talmuds – will not come to a clear understanding which is the basic structure of Torah study." In this section, Lifshitz refers to the Talmudic example of Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair, from whom Talmud students learn that such knowledge must be acquired gradually as opposed to all at one time, a maximalist approach to study in the sense that knowledge synthesized over a period of years amounts to much more than an overwhelming deluge of words and opinions.<sup>69</sup>

In "The Opposition" section, Lifshitz presents a decidedly negative portrayal of *Hassidim*. He writes that the *Mithnagdim* of old saw through the system of the new

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<sup>68</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, "The Opposition" page 12.

<sup>69</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, "The Opposition" page 9. For more on Pinchas ben Yair and his philosophy, see: The Jewish Encyclopedia.com "PHINEHAS BEN JAIR": (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12121-phinehas-ben-jair>), see also: Jeffrey L. Rubenstein. *An Eschatological Drama: Bavli Avodah Zarah 2a-3b* (Cambridge: AJS Review, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1996).

*Hassidim*. They revealed that the new *Hassidim* with their simplified concepts of religion effectively overemphasized serving G-d through joy and as such they studied the esoteric aspects of Jewish theology without learning how such concepts relate to community and hierarchical structures within. As such, the new *Hassidim* misappropriated their power as leaders and brought the Torah way of life very close to a saccharine, sweet, and sticky death.<sup>70</sup> Lifshitz saw the system of the new *Hassidim* as a malicious threat because it oversimplifies foundational concepts of Jewish spiritualism such as loving and fearing God and cleaving to Him. Not only this but Lifshitz claims that, at the same time, *Hassidism* neglected more advanced forms of religious life such as graduated Talmud study based on an understanding of multiple texts. He claims that the system of *Hassidism* lacks caution because the Torah can only transmit itself gradually to the student and because he does not approve of Hassidic Rabbis or teachers, he holds that *Hassidism* lacks what it takes to sustain itself as a movement.<sup>71</sup>

The reader might conclude that even though Lifshitz proceeds with his polemical *mussar* treatise, his book also encompasses elements of memoir and counter-history. The identity Lifshitz projects even mirrors that of a reverent student, of a child of Torah perpetuated in legacy by the spirit of the ethical will perpetuated in the dedications and the supporting letters. Overall, the rhetorical union of ethos, logos and pathos makes the historiographical trilogy compelling, the Tishby and Dan survey confirms that this treatise represents *mussar* literature, and the identity Lifshitz himself promulgates substantiates this memoir as a counter-cultural historiography.

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<sup>70</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, "the Opposition" page 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, "the Opposition" page 9.

Appendix  
**Translations**  
*Rachael Rose*

# **Zikhron Ya'akov**

## **Volume One**

Encompassing two periods:

The First from the year 5520 (1760) until 5600 (1840)

The Second from the year 5600 (1840) until 5620 (1860)

**From**

**The Rabbi and Universal Sage, the Elder of the Community  
Operators**

**RABBI YA'AKOV HALEVI LIFSHITZ *of blessed memory***

From Kovne

Son of the Righteous Gaon, our teacher the Rabbi, Rabbi Eliezer Lipman,  
may the memory of the righteous be remembered for a blessing, Preacher  
of the holy community of Wilkomier.

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**Printed**

**By his son Nota HaLevi Lifshitz**

**Kovne-Slabodka.**

----- ... -----

And now printed anew

With an Addition of Detailed Legends

In the publishing House of Shin. Lamed.

Bnei Brak, 769 (2008)

**Material Not Translated or Included:**

-Copyright pages

-Signed photograph of Lifshitz

-*THE SON OF THE AUTHOR SPEAKS IN HONOR OF THE FATHER AND THE BOOK* pages *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, pages III-V.

-Handwritten letter signed and sealed by Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spector, *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, pages VI – VII.

-*The Words of the Sages. The Discourses and the Letters from the Highest Exponents of Torah and Wisdoms, listed alphabetically*, (16 letters corresponding to 16 articles), *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, pages VIII- XXIX.

-15:2, *THE POEM I EXPOUNDED ON THE PUBLICATION OF THE FIRST VOLUME OF ZIKHRON YA'AKOV*, *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, pages XXX-XXXII

-*Acknowledgements*, *Zikhron Ya'akov I*, page XXXII

-All other text printed after the “The Opposition” section ends on page fifteen in the Hebrew originals.

## **Introduction**

[XXXIII]

As God has enabled me to fill my tremendous desire- to order my memoirs, organized into Four Periods, I find it correct to preface a short introduction [explaining why I have seen fit [to write] such [a work]]. I am not a historian, and for more than half my life it never occurred to me to be a historian. Truly, it is a shame that occasions were lost, for would that it had occurred to me in the days of my youth to glean even an iota of fact. For then I had a number of worthy and lofty opportunities to gather historical data with greater strength. These opportunities would have truly enriched the history of the recent periods with a great abundance, but what is past is nonexistent.

Nevertheless, what has motivated me to organize these memoirs of mine after all, is this. Inside this book I hereby explain, that until the Crimean War – in the year 5616 (1856), the land of Russia stood in one position, with one political character for several generations. The difference between the previous “regime” and the new ones, which were renewed – is really like the difference between night and day!

I who lived close to twenty years in the days of the old regime – in the period before the Crimean War – will be able to say that I was ensconced in familiarity with and knowledge of the old world situation overall and also in its connection to our nation in particular. For they had stood for a period of several half-centuries at a time



when they remained in the same situation characterized by a state of stability without fundamental differences separating them.

I do not say that behold, I am the one refugee who combined both the old world and the new. There are, thank God, very elderly people much greater than myself in years and stature, but behold, not all of them are writers, or desirous of occupying themselves with writing. Therefore, at the time at which I am compiling my memories in book form, I am permitted to speak as one who speaks on my behalf.

I say- I am the man who saw the affliction of our nation under the rod of His [God's] doubled wrath: their awful miseries from the frequent decrees of the tyrannical government, the pain and pressure of the times, stemming from the poverty and awful affliction which reigned then in the land, and the spiritual miseries of our nation caused by those who surrounded our beneficiaries while at home, by trodding on the heads of the nation of Israel, like at the time of the "Hellenisers," in order to profane the sanctity of the Holy Torah, to uproot its foundations, and to turn over all the sacred vessels of our spiritual nation under the grip of the draconian and tyrannical government, so that with its might and with its decisiveness, they would be able to achieve their goals, God forbid.

It has been close to a hundred years since those who sought to destroy us from within our own ranks have arisen as our beneficiaries against the will of Israel. With the force and support of the government, they wanted to enlighten the nation of Israel according to their spirit and logic. They grafted a strange shoot into the vineyard of the house of Israel, false and corrupt opinions, open heresy poured with

the oil of the holy anointment, for the love of the holy tongue and to find favor in the eyes of the nations, such are their ways, under the guise of the enlightenment; and towards this end they permitted themselves all the means which are the most disgraceful and dangerous: lies, insults, and curses, labeling our fathers of previous generations with names: “ignorant, fools, rebels against the light, perverters of ethics and virtues.” They justified the judgment of our enemies from the outside upon us by saying “We are guilty for our own souls,” as if they were the righteous ones and the Israelite people the wicked ones, heaven forbid. For they came upon us with threats that they would inform against us and terrorize in the land of the living. These our “benefiters” ruled over the God fearing Torah scholars, persecuting them with the authority of the government. And the latter were like a confounded lamb who could not bleat, taking consolation in the innocence of the Children of Israel, who sense the desire of the hearts of these “benefiters,” and the innocence of the upright consoles, warning [them] lest they stumble. In that hour, when there no longer remained for the fearful an opportunity to fight back, the influence of the wicked literature took root, paced and widened, and acquired for itself many souls, among them, many of the innocent. Thus it proceeded apace until it became absorbed, its propositions accepted by the new generation. And there is no measure to the catastrophe that these false and fabricated propositions will have the coming generations.

[XXXIV]

I am the man who saw the impoverishment of our nation in the new period from the year 5620 – 1860, when the first of the Maskilim prevailed even more,

whether from the aspect of their coming close to the authorities, or from that of the multitude of the innocent, who were greatly influenced by their freethinking doctrines, and whose devotion to the way of Torah and mitzvah was cooled by them. And with that, our Maskilim found the audacity within themselves afterwards , to removed their disguise, and they dared openly strove to cut off the sprigs of religion with a mighty hand, and to establish the idolatry of the Reform even in the land of Russia, as in the lands of Europe. And they demanded in their writings with strength they sought from the Great Rabbis power to make “religious emendations” like those that are written in their books from the period of the sixties, titled “The Period of Religious Emendations” and to found a new “Shulchan Aruch!”

Behold in the seventies, some of the greatest of our excellent Rabbis, who saw and understood the necessity and obligation, required also Orthodoxy to establish Orthodox periodical publications, which will be the crowning elements to guard our holy religion before the calamities of the rebels.

During the same period, I was able to join with the great Rabbis of the generation, who accepted my proposal to found the periodical “The Lebanon” an Orthodox periodical (as will be told, God-willing, in greater depth in “the second part”). From that moment on I have not laid aside my scribal inkstand. For, together with the honorable great Rabbi I wage literary battles against the Maskilim, who rose up to undermine the foundations of religion, God have mercy. What enlarged at that time our sorrow and despair? That when the freethinking Maskilim held forth with their literature in the public sphere, and without any hindrance and with all force,

poured out ridicule like water on the holy Torah, on the Rabbis and upon all of those who occupy themselves with Torah, with all sorts of lies and intimidation wielded by informers to their great satisfaction. We, the *Haredim*, our hands were constrained from revealing the truth as is proper and appropriate, out of fear of the government of the time which then was on the side of the Maskilim. We were afraid of our own enlighteners, who never ceased to frighten us through the threat of informing.

[XXXV]

The bad and dangerous results of the open literature of those periods is known. The fact that many strove to also sully the hearts of some of the innocent masses, who without having noticed had been infected by the poison somewhat, to chill the hot flame of the innermost [embers of] Judaism, yet they did not impact their children with their Judaism. Some of the younger generation, upon reading their heretical opinions in their literature, their distorted and poisonous statements; and especially the varied ridicule and the embarrassment of our people from past generations, describing them with colors and ugly epithets “the ignorant of the people,” “low and contemptible”, “belittlers of wisdom”, “haters of knowledge”, “corrupters and perverters of morality and virtues,” turned because of this literature, against their own wills and inadvertently became filled with poison – as bitter experience showed that not a few of them were shamed and made to deny the rock of their foundation, and become completely assimilated. Many of those same Maskilim themselves admitted, in the beginning of the third period, starting in the year 5601 – (1881), when “the period of the pogroms” began, heaven have mercy,

that many of our Maskilim then published articles and confessed about their “enlightenment” saying, “We erred in our “enlightenment,” etc., etc. (like these very confessions which will be brought to light in this book).

In the final analysis, however, their extensive literature, a literature of close to one hundred years, survives with all of its dark and poisonous portrayals. There are two evils that they have perpetrated and continue to perpetuate against our nation; the first consists of muddled, heretical, and poisonous opinions; the second is the disgraceful and ugly insults with which they insult our fathers from past generations, describing them as wild people, scarcely civilized, haters of wisdom, corrupters of ethics and character. Such persons blacken our fathers together with the great Rabbis of Israel from the same period, with spite and invective and eternal calumny. One cannot imagine the great damage that literature like this causes the youth and the coming generations at this time, for from the side of orthodoxy, for reasons clarified inside of this book- nothing is said. Silence like this can be considered heaven forfend, as the most faithful assent to their ugly words. If so, those truly who love our nation and its Torah, who claim to honor it, and who know what the essence and nature of this silence is, have the obligation to relate to the most recent generation why our fathers decided to remain silent without answering the words of those who ridicule them and their teachings.

The heretical opinions, are an insidious poison that have no limit to exacerbation, danger and tragedy – and similar results they issue. Nevertheless, these are not permanent or eternal, for they are based on foundations of research, on

discernment, and logic. In the future and in times to come, other sages will investigate and undermine their foundations, as experience shows: Thus many of the false doctrines of the Greek philosophers were annulled and rendered void by means of the proofs of the true sages, based on reality and experience, which proved them false and uprooted them, such as the “Active Intellect” propounded by the Greek sages and accepted by some of the *Gedolim* of Israel.

But this is not the case with the denials of deeds and events that are founded not on logic and reason but rather on “facts” and actual deeds and reality, concerning which the common adage states: “One does not raise an objection to something that happened!” For if an event is not refuted through clear, believable, and true testimony, as is the case with plotting witnesses, the dark and ugly stains, the lies, and the low, disgraceful slander will continue to exist forever. For they cannot be removed through reason and logic but only through true investigations, that will give their testimony and will corroborate.

[XXXVI]

Hence, one cannot completely prove the falsity and the deceit of the smug contempt and scorn for our fathers from the past generations except through the knowledge and true information of past times and former days, and the entire order of life in those days: the political situation in general, and its relation to the situation of the children of Israel in particular, in all their cavalcades, with true portrayals, faithfully and clearly perceived by virtue of the acknowledgements of the litigants themselves, i.e., the writers from those generations, themselves – and everything will

be clearly described by one who lived and was active in those very days, for in that the testimony will not be too late, and one will truly say,: ‘If I am not for myself, who will be for me?’

I am ready to present an example of this. We know that the Egyptians worked the children of Israel with hard labor, with mortar, and with bricks. Hence, there are those who think that because our fathers were, heaven forbid, low and contemptible, coarse and heavy, crude and clumsy, when they were bound hand and foot as slaves to the Egyptians.

Now were it imagined that an ancient record book belonging to an old man who lived in that same period, the political situation of the Egyptians in general, as well as the spiritual situation of our brothers, the house of Israel in that generation, and in particular, the great sages of that generation, the pious ones ‘Kahat’ and ‘Amram’ (according to the Targum Jonathan on the Torah, who specifically named them), and the holy academies that these children of Levi founded (Maimonides, Laws Concerning Idolatry: Ch.1) and their many students, as our wise men of blessed memory (Chazal) opine in Tractate Yoma, 28b. As Rav Chama Bar Chanina says: ‘From the days of our ancestors, they never ceased to have a yeshiva with them; they had a yeshiva with them in Egypt’ as it says (Exodus, Chapter Ten) ‘Go and gather the Elders of Israel’ and so on – without a doubt Joshua, Caleb, and Nachshon ben Aminadav etc., were among their choice students.

Likewise the book would portray for us, with correct and faithful portrayals, the ways of the corrupt Egyptians and all their delusions; erroneous deeds; and on the contrary, the character of our Israelite brethren there, their ethical character, the

heritage of our fathers: merciful, modest, gracious, boasting achievements in every righteous good deed. Now, there is no doubt that all those portrayals would provide us with concepts that are completely opposed to the way we mistakenly judged until now. From the books' portrayals, we would recognize and understand, that these slaves who endured hard labor with mortar and bricks were superior in their spirituality, their morals, their character traits and the uplifting of the spirit a thousand times than the cruel vagabonds who tormented and afflicted them. We would have known that from the forefathers and Joseph the righteous there was no end to the spirit of holiness coming from them. The prophecy would distinguish the singular individuals until the time of their exodus from the land of Egypt.<sup>72\*</sup>

[XXXVII]

We would likewise know [from such a book] that a good number of people there included the destroyers and demolishers that came from amongst us, from the party of "Datan and Aviram" who sowed destruction in the land of the living with the power of informing [against the Jewish leaders]. Rashi explains that according to the Midrash they saw Israel as informers and said that from here on out such are not fit to be redeemed. For it was the informers who came out from within our ranks who caused the terrible woes and hardship of bondage at all times. They also cause it then, for a great portion of the nation of Israel came to assimilate completely, as with their

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<sup>72</sup> \* Maimonides, Laws Concerning King: Ch. 9; "Six things the first man was commanded; added to Noah was the prohibition of eating a limb removed a living animal. Avraham was commanded the covenant of circumcision, Yaakov the commandment regarding the sciatic nerve, and in Egypt Amram was commanded to follow the Mitzvot and Torah, until Moses our teacher came and completed the Torah."



statement (of blessed memory) that explains the verse ‘And the Children of Israel rose up armed’ etc.\*<sup>73</sup>

The holy Torah did not see the need to illustrate for us all the details except with brief allusions, few in quantity and great in quality – for it is the Holy Torah.

Behold, in these days of ours, when the vision of the printing press is widespread, and for close to one hundred years our Maskilim have poured out upon the generations before them refuse and thick muck, and has labeled them with all sort of disdainful and scornful names, describing them as wild men, bereft of ethics and character traits; and have called our generations’ great Rabbis and teachers, whom from their waters we drink, “fatted calves” and in their stories described them as types of murderers, lacking the feelings of mercy and compassion, etc., like “The Tip of the Yud” and “Fattened Calves” by Y.L. Gordon etc. And on our side, that of orthodoxy there is no a single book that denies their reasoning and judgements. Behold, there is no greater acknowledgement than this silence.

Now to enter into debate and criticism with them is not worth the effort. For this purpose so many of the leaders of our people have urged and aroused me, since I have combined, thank God, the old generation and since for around fifty years, I have been occupied with communal matters, directed by the top Rabbis and communal

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<sup>73</sup> \* We certainly would have learned [from such a book] of the institutions of righteous and charitable deeds are, that the leaders of our people founded there, which gave to them the fortitude and the strength to stand up in the face of the harsh decrees- as they of blessed memory said in tractate Sotah, 18b – “and kept the children alive”. It is taught: It was not enough that they did not kill them rather [it is taught] that they provided them with water and food. And it is clear that in order to provide enough water and food for all the nursing mothers, these righteous women had other righteous women who formed many groups to help them with this- and as it is said in the Midrash Rabbah, Exodus, chapter one “and they kept the children alive, ” there were among them those who were poor, and they would walk and trowel water and food from the houses of the Jews and the Jewesses would give such to the poor – and as such with every deed of righteousness and charity.

operatives, saying that I have the moral obligation to order the recollections of those days, relying on facts and deeds, testimonies and proofs based on the recorded communications of those involved themselves. I must describe and portray faithfully and astutely the situations of those times in general, and their relationship to the situation of our people in particular. [I describe] the lives of the nations and the order of our nation's life. I describe the facts and the actual events that were corroborated and whose truth is not to be doubted; facts such as the wickedness of the students of 'Datan and Aviram,' their reasoning, their thoughts, and their advice about the matter of our people, which are scattered within their scholarly writings – such that one who reads them not according to order pays little attention to them, and doesn't sense correctly where such things incline a person to look and where they aim at. I account for everything under one ruling; according to chronological order, sections, and facts. I do this to encourage the reader to examine well the nature and essence of these things. In this manner, my historic memoirs will not raise any dispute. The greater and more energetic the criticism, the greater the comprehension and the more stable the knowledge will be for the upright reader. These things will stand completely opposite to the propositions of the free literature, and we will justify this separately.

[XXXVIII]

Before you are my memoirs. They have two goals, each of which is an end in itself. The first is that the recollections and the stories in their own right have a considerable value for Israelite history. They consist of superior memories, for had I not recorded them in the book, these would have remained hidden and covered for eternity. For lovers of history, this would be a giant sin and a great inequity, like one

who hoards produce, and who withholds his opinions from the many who yearn to know all of the facts that have befallen his people.

The second purpose is, that these memoirs will provide a defense for our fathers; the past generations of our people were nursed from the filth of the false judgments that defamed them in the trifling literature written in the spirit of Reformers, filling their hearts and books. These memoirs will also show that the freethinking Maskilim in their books then were themselves “Archetypes of Damages” for our own generations as well – God have mercy.

Since the second purpose is the most important and most central one in my opinion, I must therefore awaken the honorable readers, lest they panic and their mission becomes a burden. When I comment in almost every chapter about the dark soul and the thought processes of the Maskilim, and point to the wickedness in their literature, for this little resembles historical style. I intend this purpose to be the most important and most valuable. If the freethinking and unbridled literature was not lazy to repeat constantly its categories ad nauseum, is it possible to constrict our defense without widening the scope of the literature and explaining it properly?

Likewise, the reader should know, that the man who recounts occasionally the sorrows and troubles and afflictions he has undergone, even when he considers them in his mind’s eye on his good days, with respect to every story he groans at the cracking of his loins, and his eyes weep without ceasing. Likewise, I, for all sorrows and troubles sent by the Maskilim in spirit and matter during my youth, they are before my eyes in all their terrible colors. How will I gather strength without groaning

at the cracking of my loins on all the nasty things they have done of the entire arisen deed that they brought about, and of everything that Judaism suffered from them, both in matter and in spirit.

When I was still a little boy sitting in Cheder, suddenly the teacher gasped and stuttered and said: “Boys, be quick and look into your Gemara volumes (tractate Bava Kamma- even though this tractate was forbidden to study at Cheder.\*<sup>74</sup>)” Here the reviser, D. L. is visiting to evaluate us, etc., and there was fear in the Cheder. When I returned home, my friend called me from afar: “Yankele! Turn away from the second street, for on that street the cruel Antanke the Satnik prowls; he will cut of your side-curls and your earlobe at once...” All these tribulations were brought upon us only by those who wished to “improve” us from amongst us, as it is expounded upon later within the pages of this book.

[XXXIX]

From the period when I became a writer the year 5628, the maskilic writers surrounded me with insults and abuse, lies and folly, and with threats of informers against me – because I justified our Sages, and the tradition of our fathers! (The well-known writer, Moses Leib Lilienblum jumped upon me “in the nineties” with his well-known article “Protesting the evil beast!” about my opposition to his free opinions... without allowing him and his friends of his age to trample the heads of a sacred people... (Hamelitz, 5657).

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<sup>74</sup> \*Our Maskilim tried mightily to forbid the Talmud by virtue of governmental authority, they only allowed those in the Chedarim to learn four tractates: Shabat, Pesachim, Beitzah, and Bava Metziah.

Have such a thing been heard of? He that demanded with audacity and boldness from the Rabbis to make changes to the religion, to found a “new Shulchan Aruch,” and in his essay “The Sin of Youth,” he admitted to denying everything the Jews hold holy. He is not an evil beast! I who fought and fight literature for the sake of the Holy Torah, I am an evil beast? These sorts of things have been done by our writers and our Maskilim in general to all those who fought against them. My only consolation is that God has enabled me to write all these points in a book. And I have yet as such to hope, that many whose knowledge is pure, and whose hearts are full of the wounds of the wickedness of those who wish to “benefit” us, for them my memoirs should serve also them for the healing of pain and consolation for all the troubles that our nation has suffered from them, and peace be upon Israel.

And the most important fundamental aim and benefit in my memoirs is as I said - that the children of the coming generations will have no jealousies and no competition at all, like the competition of the heirs of the Haskalah now; behold these, who desire to know the clear and complete truth and to determine it within history, they will find delight and many materials in my memoirs, in order to bring out the truth of judgment, to restore to our fathers and teachers their honor that as stolen from them for many days, and the upright will rejoice.

*Signed: The Author*

[One]

### **Zikhron Ya'akov in Four Periods: The First Period until the Year 5600-1840**

As I approach to arrange my memoirs, which begin in the year 5600 (1840), I realize that explaining the course of the unfolding events requires a type of “short overview” of the previous century according to our numbering (i.e., the sixth century, from the year 1740, (5500) approximately). I was privileged in my youth, to know the elderly and aged, tremendous in both years and wisdom, experts and thoroughly versed in the events of those days, seventy and eighty year olds. The conversations they had about the period of the century mentioned above were constantly replayed in their memories, some of which still remain engraved in my memory. I saw that it was worthwhile to use their accounts as cornerstones for my own memoirs, [which begin] in the present century, according to our enumeration.

Although the previous century in the lives of the nation of Israel was rich in Torah Knowledge (Da'as Torah), revered “Geonim,” and also great events; most of the writers of our history have minimized its value greatly. For example, the writer Dr. Simon Bernfeld <sup>75</sup> in his article “The Predominant Thing” printed in the periodical “Hamelitz” 5647 (1887): 4, states:

“The testimonies of every generation are its history; let us see if our own history did not decline from year to year. Let's take out the history book and see that from the time of the generation of Mendelssohn onward, every activity in the lives of our people was of no value. Graetz filled the eleventh volume of his *History* with idle

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<sup>75</sup> “Simon Bernfeld”. 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia online (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3123-bernfeld-simon>).

stories (anecdotes) entirely unrelated to conventional history. Mendelssohn's daughter converted and strayed for love of the wicked and reckless Friedrich Schlegel who escaped to Catholicism to atone for all of his sins. When because of his excesses, the priests of that faith sanctified him, they weren't able to conceal that he was a scoundrel. A fellow scoundrel was Henriette Hertz, who made love with the 'pious' priest, Schleiermacher. Rahel Levin (Varnhagen), a procuress, offered one of the members of the royalty the love of his life, and other such contemptible stories. But Graetz is not guilty in this; the history of the Jews had become impoverished, the inheritance of the stupid and the wicked."

This is the outlook of our Jewish History writers, they write according to their moods, as we shall clarify in the continuation of our words. Experience and reality show us that the complete opposite is true. It is known from the saying of the wise Rabbi Eliezer Atlas of blessed memory that: "Where story-tellers babble on, that's where theories vanish like shadows." With all due respect to the sage Graetz -- what he saw about this I have spoken about at length in a different place, and it will also be explained further in this book. But here I speak only about well-known things, which will prove the absolute opposite.-

The period of the last century was distinguished with the cedars of God, the mighty ones versed in Torah. Every one of them was like a luminary of righteousness who brightened the earth and those who dwell upon it. They raised up many students who were like stars shining in the heavens of Judaism, and like the sun who gives light to everything in existence. So too, these Rabbis enlightened our nation with the light of their Torah and breathed a spirit of life with Torah knowledge and the fear of

heaven. From their lips, Israel lived the lives of a righteous nation according to its faith. Also now, there does not exist a Beit Midrash without a novel insight from the teachings of these Rabbis. I will mention only a few of them. For example, the Great Rabbis: Rabbi Leib author of *Ha-Shaagat Aryeh*<sup>76</sup>, Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschuetz author of the *Urim viTumim*; HaGaon Rabbeinu Eliyahu from Vilna and his students, and at their head: our Rabbi the Gaon, Rabbeinu Hayim from Voloyshin; the author of the *Noda' Bi-Yehuda*<sup>77</sup>, the *Pnei Yehoshua*<sup>78</sup>, and the *Hafla'ah*.<sup>79</sup> The righteous and noble who expanded Hasidism are: the righteous and excellent Gaon, Rabbi Shneur Zalman from Ladi<sup>80</sup>, called the 'elder Rabbi' and his companions; Rabbi Akiva Eger,<sup>81</sup> the Hatam Sofer,<sup>82</sup> the authors of the *Ketzot*<sup>83</sup> and the *Netivot*<sup>84</sup> and so on and so forth in such that it will take too long to list them all. For, in the opinion of the learned, the able, and the great, the value of these Rabbis in that generation respecting their levels of Torah learning, were a portrait in miniature of our Rabbis, the first arbiters of their time.

And as that period was exceedingly wealthy and honorable in respecting its marvelous great scholars, so too was it rich and distinguished for its historical events, concerning some of which books have been written. It is self-evident that our history did not become impoverished because of its wealth or of its *gedolim* and true sages,

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<sup>76</sup> Aryeh Leib ben Asher Gunzberg

<sup>77</sup> Ezekiel Landau

<sup>78</sup> Jacob Joshua Falk

<sup>79</sup> Pinkus Horowitz

<sup>80</sup> Founder of Chabad

<sup>81</sup> Akiva Eger (Eisenstadt, 1761 – Poznań, 1837)

<sup>82</sup> Moses Schreiber (1762–1839)

<sup>83</sup> Aryeh Leib HaCohen Heller

<sup>84</sup> *Netivot Hamishpat*, Yitzchok Elchanan Spektor on *Choshen Mishpat* (Shulchan Aruch)



nor was it necessary to fill its void with the scandalous stories of the daughter of Ben Menahem [i.e., Moses Mendelssohn], Henriette Herz, or Rahel Levin.

The history of nations in general revolve around the poles of manners and political developments, the history of kings, and the proceedings of the wars – and the changes in world politics that result from them; [also] the activity of the greatest of the wise in every branch of the Arts and Sciences.

However, the history of Israel is different from the history of many nations, even when Israel dwelled in its land and led with a political government. Even then the foundation of its existence was only its religion and Torah. For, whenever Israel was walking purely with God and His Torah, they persevered and were victorious. And whenever they turned away from the path of G-d, then despite all of their might and power, they descended abysmally. As the sage Hayyim Zelig Slonimsky (“HZ”S) copies them in the “Sphira” (issue 49, year 5654) these are the words of the universal sage, the political operative, Gabriel Reisser:

The Jews endure the fury of the persecutor in silence, as if they do not feel -- but when the hand of the enemy draws near to their sacred and cherished things, then they are bestirred from their rest and they become courageous like lions. Loss of life, the indignity of their situation, and their lowered political status is easy for them. Yet the profanation of their teachings and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden of religion cannot be endured in quiet by them, without their being aroused. The proof of this is that the great catastrophe that befell them, the loss of their freedom, and their decline from the degree of a political nation in the battle with the armies of Rome, is called by them “the destruction of the Holy Temple” – *that* is what they refer to and

memorialize in their chronicles, and they count [their years] from its destruction. The political downfall was not upon their lips, nor did they memorialize it with their language. Only the destruction of the Holy Temple remains in their memories from all that terrible war in which they were totally defeated. This is the end of his words, “and the words of a sage’s mouth are gracious” (Eccl. 10:12)

Who will speak of the great and long duration of two-thousand years, from the time Israel was exiled from its land, and ceased to be a kingdom and a worldly government? Even with all of these exiles, experience has proven that in the duration of this long period of time, several nations and high courts were lost and their memories forgotten, and the glory of Israel lives and exists. Why all of this? The answer- because Israel exists only through G-d’s Torah and religion. Before the destruction of the first Temple, the decree of G-d, which stands for eternity, exiled the “workers and the artisans” before the other exiles were deported in order for them to further the planting of the tree Torah in Babylonia, as is known.- So before the second destruction, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was successful in saving “Yavneh and its Sages and the dynasty of Rabban Gamaliel” – and at the end of the days of the first Geonim, as the Yeshivot in Babylon were destroyed, Providence preceded that with “Our Rabbis, the Captives” and so the existence of the nation of Israel remained upon the foundations and pillars of the Torah and the commandments, which every evil enemy is not able to defeat them and destroy them, as our long history will attest. The great Yeshivot “Nahardea,” “Sura,” and “Pumbedita,” and so on. These were the very kingdom of Israel and so our wise men of blessed memory, called the leadership of the Yeshivot with the titles of kingship, “Rabbah ruled twenty two years,” “Rav

Yosef ruled two years (Brachot 64a).” The writers of the chronicles decide: that just as the storm winds bring changes in the atmosphere for bad and for good, so too the events of wars and the conflicts of states bring great changes and deep alterations in the ways of political life for bad and for good. Behold, in place of the tempests and storms of political wars, there was also with our nation in every generation and every period, spiritual tempests and storms. Some caused many fatalities; others brought a breath of life brought great goodness. For example, the spread of “Karaites” in our nation caused many fatalities and they led to tears that could no longer be mended. Despite all this, they also brought blessing to the house of Israel, because by virtue of debating with them, the literature of Israel was enriched with marvelous books, which are until this very day like the crown jewels in the wisdom of Israel and citadels in the wall of religion serving to protect our nation and the sacred Torah from dangerous sects, such as the book of “Beliefs and Opinions” of our Rabbi Saadia Gaon, “the Kuzari,” the first and the second<sup>85</sup> and more books of great value used in the profession of strengthening the Oral Torah.

The sects of Shabbatai Tzvi, the name of the wicked will rot, and the Frankists, who caused many fatalities to our nation, and despite this, brought to our nation a great caution against new challenges of sects and dangerous opinions, such as should not rise in times of sorrow from deceiving teachers. –

In contrast to them there were tempests and storms of great weight surrounding the Geonim, Tzadikim, and Hasidim of the generations that enriched the world of Judaism. Because their foundation was in the realm of sanctity “a dispute for the sake of heaven,” then it is destined to continue. The two warring factions which

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<sup>85</sup> the first is by Judah Halevy, the second is by David Nieto

fight with one another, remained in the nation, they and their sacred and accepted teachings. The teachings of both are living teachings for the community of Israel. For example: the dispute of our Rabbis “the wise men of France” with our Rabbi the Rambam mentioned previously- for at that time they scraped a scratch in the flesh of our nation to mock the light of the eyes of Israel, etc. Still, many expert critics decided that this dispute also yielded a benefit to prove clearly that with respect to our Holy Religion, it does not matter who you are, etc. However it may be, the dispute was only for the sake of heaven, for it is not like the wicked congregation of Korach who were swallowed up. We say it is like the dispute of Hillel and Shammai which is destined to continue, for like the wise men of France, also are the wise men of Spain. These two factions remain – they and their teachings exist and are sacred in the midst of all of Israel. The party “Rambamistim” does not survive, not does the party “Sarfatistim,” everyone is loved, everyone is selected and holy, as with the dispute of Hillel and Shammai, which is destined to remain.

Prophecies about the period of the last century, events like lightening with flashes, were many at that time within the assembly of Israel.

The great conflict recalled in the histories of our nation bears the name “the divorce from Klieva.” This is a description of the incident in short: the great and excellent Rabbi of his generation, Rabbi Israel Lifshitz, of blessed memory (the grandfather of the Gaon “Ba’al Tiferet Israel” on the Mishnayot) ordered a divorce for one woman whose husband was sometimes sick and sometimes an imbecile. Those of the school of Frankfort am Main who knew and recognized the divorced husband- according to their knowledge and estimation he was a complete imbecile,

therefore they annulled the marriage. Because of this, we have a great conflict among the Geonim of the generation – some nullify and some permit. This deep conflict draws forth all of the great Geonim of the lands of the world, for the specifics of these arguments are written about in the book “The Straight Light.”

This conflict is likened in Judaism to the winds of war. Yet also, this was a “dispute for the sake of heaven which is destined to remain,” and there does not remain of it any records that may be used for evil, heaven forbid, in our nation. The teachings of those who permit and of those who forbid remain permanent and sacred in our nation for the sake of its honor and glory. However, for the writers of our histories it was easy not to speak about [the dispute] properly for they do not find in this event a matter of interest for them, according to their spirit and reasoning, because its foundation is in the sacred, a matter of Halacha, and not of doctrine or enlightenment.-

Another event of even greater import and magnitude, which was for Judaism at that time “like a boiling cauldron” [Jeremiah], was the ugly suspicion raised by the great Rabbi, master among his people, Rabbi Yaakov Emden of blessed memory, against his honor, the great Rabbi, the teacher of Israel in his generation, Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschuetz<sup>86</sup> of blessed memory, author of the “Urim and Thumim,” also against his honor, the great Hasid the Holy Father Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto of blessed memory, that they incline to the sect of Shabbatai Tzvi, the name of the wicket will rot. This great conflict, which encompassed all the great Rabbis of that generation cannot be termed “fight” or “dispute.” This is because the

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<sup>86</sup> Lifshitz uses the Biblical Hebrew name Yehonatan in place of Yonatan. This usage mirrors David’s Lament over Jonathan (Yehonatan) in Samuel II, Chapter One (<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt08b01.htm>).

suspected Rabbis, for their part, did not request a thing, but rather exonerated themselves of the ugly suspicion brought against them.

The great Rabbi Yaakov Emden of blessed memory, because he was the son of his honor, the Rabbi of all those in the Diaspora and of his generation, the leader of his people, our Rabbi “The Hacham Tzvi” who purified our nation from the remnant of the sect of Shabbatai Tzvi, and “the son, the leg of the father’ walked in the ways of his father, the memory of the righteous is for a blessing, to root out this cursed sect. With the fire of his zealotry, and the zealotry of some additional zealots for the honor of the Geonim referred to above, and with speculations absorbed from the air, he brought a terrible suspicion upon them, that they are from the practitioners of the sect of Shabbatai Tzvi, the name of the wicked should rot. The tidings of this conflict are hereby written in the book of “Tablets of the Testimony,” and a few other books from both sides.

Concerning this controversy our history writers were extraordinarily interested, and they went on at length about these subjects and details, to an extent greater than necessary. For they found within it a very fat portion with which those who tyrannize the people of God could steal from the Jews two holy stones, more precious than gold or pearls; the great Rabbi Jonathan, and the most Pious of the Pietists, the great Rabbi of the Kabbalists, Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto of blessed memory- in order to bring them under the wings of Shabbatai Tzvi, the name of the wicked should rot. Yet the feeling of the nation and their natural inclination – as in the saying of our sages, of blessed memory: “If they are not prophets, they are sons

of prophets” – recognized the lofty value of the persecuted and suspected, who were even more sanctified, they and their Torah, in the midst of Israel.

On the one hand, also this conflict yielded great benefit for our nation to stand guard and to be wary of new sects (like the incident involving Reb Berach which will be told further on, and more like these). So too, this is also thought of as a type of dispute for the sake of heaven which is destined to remain. For there our Rabbi Jonathan, and there the Hasid Rabbi Moses Hayim of blessed memory were sanctified and admired in the midst of the community of Israel, without this great suspicion creating the slightest defect in them, and the teachings of Rabbi Jonathan of blessed memory were really like the words of the Urim and Thumim to all who sought after the words of G-d in practical Halacha.

The nectar of his sermons are as “forests of honey” to all who delight in the wine of the homiletical section of the Torah. The books of the Hasid Luzzatto were also sanctified before the entire congregation of the children of Israel. His book “Mesillat Yesharim” stands on the first rank of the books of ethics and character, and his Kabbalistic book “The 138 Gates of Wisdom” are the straight gates in the Torah [of] the esoteric part and the Kabbalah, which are like a “Shulchan Aruch” for learners of mysticism. Were it not for the few books that tell the recent generation of these controversies and suspicions, not the slightest shade of suspicion about these Rabbis would be noticed. The love of Israel for these Rabbis of ours is like the love of David and Jonathan which will never be cancelled. The ethics and teachings of the Hasid Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto (“Moses is true and his teachings true”) live on for all who find knowledge. Also, the honor of the lofty Rabbi who strove with the

zeal of G-d for the sake of heaven, Rabbi Yaakov Emden of righteous memory, has not diminished an iota. All of them are loved, here and for these, for all of them did the will of their maker for the sake of heaven.-

[Five]

### **B. Hassidism**

Another storm of an even greater and mightier proportion occurred in the same period among our brethren, following the foundation of Hassidism, the fruit of the heart of the Tzadik, the foundation of our world, the holy one of Israel, the one known by the name of Rabbi Israel Besht [Ba'al Shem Tov]. These are remembered through his holy students, of which the leader and primary one among them was the great Gaon, the famous Tzadik, Rabbi Berish of blessed and true memory from Mezeritch [Polish – Międzyrzec]. Behold, I see a great need to expand upon the matters facing us here which were not yet made clear to the extent necessary, according to the reasoning of our God-fearing elders, lovers of truth from their sources. Even as many have spoken about Hassidism, and much has been written about this matter, this approach has not been clarified as necessary, and thus the writings of naysayers and buffoons have multiplied against it, for from these writings it is impossible to induce or discern anything at all as to what Hassidism is; why they argued with it; who its opponents were, and what they quarreled about. We would find matters ordered properly, appropriate for satiating the soul, but still leaving us longing to know every matter correctly. In these matters, I will even compete with them, explaining how my heart has resounded with enough understanding of the



correct books, and internalized the reasoning of the expert and trustworthy elders from whom I have learned.

The expansion of religious philosophy among the many perfect people in our nation, as expressed through the works of our Rabbis, Rabbi Sadia Gaon, the Kuzari, the Rambam, etc., on the one hand. On the other hand, the revelation of the wisdom of the Kabbalah and its transmission to the hearts of many of our brethren through the holy Rabbis: the Rokeach,<sup>87</sup> the Ramban,<sup>88</sup> the Ramak,<sup>89</sup> the Ari, and his bright student Rabbi Hayim Vital, may his virtue stand us in good stead. Each of these two types of wisdom and divine knowledge and every one of these according to the spirit and the reasoning of its elders, were truly two great lights in the sky of Judaism that enlightened the hearts and awakened the emotions to learn, to do, and to uphold the Torah and the command with appropriate discernment, spiritual uplifting, and the ascent of the soul in lofty holiness.

Unfortunately, two “eclipses” passed over these two great luminaries, who together had enlightened hearts. The religious philosophy, on one hand, ruined the proverbial dish and “nauseated” (Numbers 11:20) the wise and knowledgeable of our people in Provence as it is known. The Provençals became lenient in performing commandments yet began to venerate the idea that there were logical reasons behind the commandments. The Rashba was forced to go against them with full force and great outcry, as it is known. Ever since then because of this, even the philosophy itself appears very suspect in the eyes of those who grasp the Torah and even among the perfectly faithful of Israel.

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<sup>87</sup> Eleazar Ben Judah Ben Kolonymus of Worms

<sup>88</sup> Nachmanides

<sup>89</sup> Moses Ben Jacob Cordevero

On the other hand, the wisdom of the Kabbalah was feared after the sect of Shabbatai Tzvi and the Frankists, may the name of the wicked rot, putrefied its scent, drowned out its eminence. As a result, every fearful and tender-hearted person ‘set aside his hands and closed his eyes’ from grasping philosophy. These also refrained from holding on to the wisdom of the Kabbalah, since extra caution is required of all those who meditate upon it, because [philosophy and kabbalah] are of the secret of God to those who fear Him.

This was the case except for the select individuals in every generation whose pure faith was prior to their wisdom and their Torah, who learned and occupied themselves with them for their own sake, in order to become enlightened with their truths, in order to learn how to guard and keep each commandment correctly, until the Torah itself opened for them streams of salvations, wisdoms, and knowledge with the highest love. Except for these superior individuals who were few in every generation, it really seemed for many of those devoted to Torah and observing the Mitzvah, who did not taste “the wine of Torah,” neither of philosophy or of Kabbalah that, as a result, one sensed for many of them as if, God forbid, the spring of the knowledge of the fear of the true God had dried up from the study of the Torah which was in their hands. The performance of the commanded actions appeared as the commands that people do by rote, devoid of all the moistness of internal feeling, love and fear, and the knowledge of the true God [devoid of] the emotion of the soul – as if all the four cubits of Halacha and Torah to which they were given were full of coarse corporeality, without the breath of life in their countenances, without a discerning heart, without the feeling of the soul’s emotion from exalting God in all their

thoughts; until it appeared as if all their good deeds were without any joy of the commandment – i.e., without any joy from the commandment itself – concerning which it is stated “in place of your worshipping, etc., in joy” Hence this allowed people to think and to determine that those who only studied the revealed Torah, were as those who belittle and embody their Torah, because they were devoid of the moistness of the richness of the true fear of God, and superior fear, and the fear of haughtiness.

As a result, the ones separated for the Almighty, like the Besht and his students of blessed memory who dedicated their own souls to the loving of God fearing Him, attaching to Him, may He be blessed just as the Torah and command attach themselves to a person. They yielded and justified the righteous nation with the ways of piety until they could say to their maker “All of your nation is righteous.” They considered how to best breathe a fresh spirit of life into the nation, which will give their hearts might and joy for the worship of God with His Torah and Mitzvoth until the nation will be awakened and will rejoice out of the happiness of the mitzvah, and they will despise and loathe the coarse soul and the material and corporeal ego. There were those who wished, in their teachings and in the practical commandments that they performed, only to glorify themselves in this world and to receive a prize for this in the world to come. All these were like the ones who serve themselves, even those who also intended for the sake of the mitzvah, but without any discernment and inner emotion and spiritual life, and *deveykut* [cleaving] to God through learning and busying themselves with Torah and Mitzvoth with sanctified emotions, with actions, in purity, and for its own sake.

Even if the majority of the new Hassidim were able and permitted to be joyful over the fruit of the great spiritual benefit that the spirit of the Besht and his students gave birth and grew within them -- for from this spirit they emanated over a great and worthy portion of the people, who were striving to become close to G-d, through the force of Hassidism – many of the souls were drawn to it because of its holy and worthy nature. What moved the masses most however, was the natural desire for novelty. For from the force of the desire and love for novelty many, even innocent ones, were drawn after every new thing. And many of the masses who were, until now, on a low level out of their lack of knowledge of Torah – because until that time, the importance of each individual and his importance in the community was considered and valued according to the value of his knowledge of the Torah -- Hassidism came and made great leaps, and said that through the force of love and the *deveykut* [cleaving] to Him (may His name be blessed), a man will rise upwards, even above the level of those who learn, for the main thing about their Torah is that it is not for its own sake. Therefore, the New Hassidism acquired the hearts of a great section of the nation.

In truth, the great saints of Israel, the founders of the new Hasidism, did not invent new things that would transgress the prohibitions of “Thou shalt not add” or “Thou shalt not subtract,” for the main points of their words were already known from our ancestors of blessed memory. For example, let us bring forth a few of the many words of piety that our forebears drew up for us, along with the commentaries of several instances from Tanakh, which shine with wondrous piety. As the pious king, peace be upon him said: “My heart and flesh will be joyous towards the Source

of life” (Psalms 64), “My soul starves for the Almighty” (Psalms 42), “With my soul I desire you at night (Isaiah 57)...” This is the language of the sage, the author of Duties of the Hearts – the gate of the love of God, chapter three -- “You should always be joyous with your God, happy with your creator, eager with his will, and desirous of encountering Him, as it is written (Psalms 64) “The righteous will be blissful with God and dependent upon Him.” The Prophet said (Habakuk 3) “I will be eager with God I will rejoice with the Lord of my salvation.” David said, peace be upon him “God is my light and salvation, from whom will I fear” (Psalms 27). This is what Chazal warned against “Do not be like servants who serve the Master on the condition that they will receive a reward etc...” One of the Hassidim said: “I am embarrassed because of my God that I will serve Him because of the reward and the punishment and I will be like the evil servant: if He is feared or if He is hoped for, then he will serve Him; if not, he will not. Rather he will serve him as is proper for Him. (ibid chapter six) It is appropriate for you, my brother to know that the merits of the believer even if he reaches the farthest goal in the correction of his soul for the Almighty, and even if he was close to angels in their good qualities, praiseworthy customs, perseverance in the service of the Creator, and love of the meritorious, these are not like the merits of those who guide human-kind on the good path, and straighten the wicked towards the service of the creator for His merits are folded into their merits, in all days and at all time.”

It says in the Kuzari, Article three: “The voluntary faculty will conduct all the limbs that serve it with promptness, diligence, and happiness,” etc. “The tongue will conform with thought and will not add to it, and will not express its prayer according

to custom and nature like the starling, but rather, in every word there will be thought and intention. And that time will be the choicest one, and the rest of his hours will be like paths leading toward this hour,” etc. The Ibn Ezra, Parshat Ki Tisa writes: “*And he will give to Moses-* The empty headed will come to wonder what Moses did on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. They will not know that if he will stand there with God another number of days like this, or four times this number, he would not be able to know a one thousandth part of God’s work, and the secret of all the Mitzvoth he commanded. For they will think that the deed is the main thing, but it is rather the heart, while the deed and the tongue are meant to habituate, as it is written, “*To fulfill it with your lips and your heart,*” as our Ancients said, “God wants the heart”. The root of all the commandments is that one should love God with all of his heart and he will cleave to Him etc...” – and other sayings like these from the ancient Rabbis that are known to all. –

Truthfully, well before the birth of Hassidism, we knew, and our elders told us, of the existence of Tzaddikim and Hassidim, who lived the lives of seclusion for the Torah and for the Service of the Heart, and they did not find contentment in the four cubits of Halacha alone but rather they also inquired about the wisdom of secrets and true wisdom. Not only this, but they devoted so much in this Divine wisdom, so that before themselves they prayed specifically according to the rite of the Holy Ari [Isaac Luria], and there were those among them who wore white on Sabbath and Holidays as is the custom of the Hassidic Rabbis of our own days. - Amazingly, in spite of all of this the Geonim of the times did not find anything wrong with the ways of these modest Hassidim. No trace of suspicion occurred to the Geonim that some of

this would be absorbed by the people, and that there would emerge the destruction of the world because of their ways and customs. On the contrary, they also looked upon them with a bright and good eye, as if they called these innocent Tzaddikim by the adage “The simplicity of the straight will console.”

A. Therefore, as the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge, Hassidism levied the cornerstone to strengthen the faith in God, may his name be blessed, and for His worship in purity, love, *deveykut* [cleaving], and the use of the soul through happiness. For to cleave to the holy name, may His be blessed, and to those who have the wisdom of His teaching, the righteous for the souls of the Hassidim are attached to their souls as the Smak accounts for in numeration of the Mitzvoth – the commandment of Talmud Torah “to be friendly with, to seclude one’s self with, and to regulate times with the True Torah scholars, as it says: *and with them you shall cleave.*”

B. A number of Mitzvoth that were weakened among the masses of our nation have been strengthened, and a number of customs of the early which have passed over them have been renewed, they have been polished until they shine like lightening. Halakhot that had been forgotten have returned, and many were formed with them and cleave to them.

C. A number of popular commandments that are time bound, such as tzitzith, *tefillin* [phylacteries], sukkah, and the four species have been made pleasant and beautified very much even in the hands of the perfectly faithful of Israel, who are called *Mithnagdim* “Opponents” from the influence of the Hassidim upon them, without the agents and those affected sensing this. A few practices of caution and

separating oneself from the permitted turned up in among the perfectly faithful of Israel, like hot springs [used as mikvaot] and those who purify themselves with them.

D. Regarding slaughtering with sharp and smooth knives, the Hassidim accomplished a great victory, for their rulings have already been extended to and accepted by all, and also the perfectly faithful of Israel, will eat and be satisfied without any hesitation.

E. Before Hassidism flowered, and the party of the Hassidim was established, the singular appointees, with the learners of Torah, were feisty with their teaching styles, and the arbiters of knowledge found deficiencies with this approach for their sharp focus was only used for recantation, and the masses of the nation wasted their ink in including such useless words.

How magnificent is the assembly of the pious [Hassidim]: unity rejoices them and makes them merry; the holy magnificence which encompasses the council and the prompt observers, religion and Judaism, lives as before in Israel. The masses of the nation as they gather together before the pious [Hassidim], will converse and speak with the magnitude of the upper worlds and the fear of the heavens. The Tzaddikim will be happy for their eyes will see visions. Words of piety, praise of the Tzaddikim, and the glorification of the sanctified and of the people of action is carried upon their lips. For all of these strengthen and add *Deveykut* [cleaving] to God, His Torah, and those who fear Him.



### C. The Opposition

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Many Rabbis of the period however, had an entirely different perspective, i.e. that of the great ones of their generation, those famous in the fields of Torah and piety: such as the great Rabbi Elijah from Vilna, the great and pious Rabbi Joel from Amstislav, the famous and the great [Ezekiel Landau] author of the Noda BiYehuda, and most of the regional Rabbis such as the Rabbis of Brisk and Slotsk, may their merit protect us. They saw with their sharp and deep gaze, the system of the new Hassidim and its excessive enthusiasm, its great and tremendous expansion, their taking for themselves the opinion and mannerisms of authority and power over all those whom they could dominate; [they saw that] this system will only bring great danger to Torah and commandment, strangling it from hugging and kissing and excessive love. Even though the foundations of this system are the very essence of Torah, for example cleaving to God, lofty love and fear, etc. Cases like this occur however, when these things are planted and sown in a cultivated field, and raised in the normal way in proper order, as our Godly Tanna Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair states: “Torah leads to caution” and so on and so forth, and as the pious sage Moses Hayim Luzzatto writes, (in Sefer Mesillat Yesharim, Chapter four<sup>90</sup>) “What leads a man to caution is study of the Torah, Torah leads to...” and so on, “caution leads to promptness, and promptness leads to cleanliness” and so on, “towards asceticism etc...”, and “purity leads to piety [Hassidism], and [piety] leads to humility and

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<sup>90</sup> See: Moses Hayim Luzzatto, (1707-1747), ethical literature, distributed by Pesah Lebenshon in Warsaw, Hebrew with Yiddish translation, contributed by the University of Chicago, microfilm collection online ([https://archive.org/stream/MN41837ucmf\\_0#page/n27/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/MN41837ucmf_0#page/n27/mode/2up)).

sanctity.” However, to reach piety [Hassidism] by means of learning the esoteric knowledge and its dissemination amidst the nation without knowledge of the revealed part in the Torah completely, and to jump over the preceding qualities behold such is like one who jumps over mountains and skips the distances between the valleys,<sup>91</sup> and his heart will wish to jump nigh to the heavens. And [the Sages] have already said, “The simpleton is not a Hassid”. Now “The beginning of knowledge is the fear of heaven,”<sup>92</sup> this is the Torah, for without knowledge of the Torah and Commandment in all its details completely, they would not know to be cautious in the fulfillment of every Mitzvah, and what more? Not to act like such pious people! \*<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Song of Songs 2:8 (<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/i/t/x/x3002.htm>) , also “The Besht and the Robbers” in *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* [Shibhei HaBesht], (translated and edited by Dan Ben-Amos & Jerome R. Mintz, Jason Aronson Inc. Northvale, New Jersey, London, 1993).

<sup>92</sup> Psalms 111:10 (<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/i/t/t26b1.htm>)

<sup>93</sup> \*) Similarly, the great Rabbis the opponents [of Hassidism] became wary of the system of Hassidism. But that which is “the Hassidism” expanded the learning of esoteric wisdom, for this is the hidden portion of the Torah, in the midst of the many, and they were concerned with this two-fold:

A) For they [the Hassidim] amplified what little knowledge they had of the hidden wisdom, equating it with their knowledge of the revealed portion, for this is the foundation of the learning of Torah and commandments:

B) The great kabbalists themselves were also surreptitious regarding the basis for the learning of the hidden portion, teaching it only to individuals of a circle who were likeminded and who are attached to this circle. However, in no way whatsoever did they expound upon it to the masses. The bitterness of these warnings is multiplicitous. I will copy down a few place-holders of this genre for example and it should be enough for those who understand.

Nachmanides our Rabbi of blessed memory, in his commentary to the book of Genesis on the paragraph ‘This is the book of the generations of man’: Our Rabbi Sharira Gaon wrote that the wise men passed down- one to another- by means of face to face encounters and technical drafts. A few of these pearls of wisdom are articulated within the verse “This is the book of the generations of man” and this element is also to be found in the next verse “Male and Female He created them”, and we do not pass down secrets of the Torah and hints, rather we pass them down to those who see the signs “as is appropriate, for these are the words of the great and we have not merited them.”

The great Kabbalist, the author of the honored book “Keeper of the Faithful” quotes the words of the holy Rabbi Isaac Luria of blessed memory on page thirty seven “Behold now I will copy the words of the holy Rabbi Isaac Luria to all those who come to learn the wisdom of esoteric knowledge, I quote, he who has heart to enter the halls of this wisdom will accept upon himself to finish and uphold that which was taught to those before him, and he will not be harmed in body or soul by this, lo, or by anything belonging to him, behold let us purify and draw others near, for the beginning of everything is fear of God, my will is inclined towards the fear of punishment, for the fear of exaltedness is an internal fear. For it is impossible to make a mistake simply by dreaming of wisdom. The principle cause in the knowledge of this wisdom will be to burn the thorns out of the vineyard etc... therefore those who busy themselves with the matters of the Lord are called “Archers in Part.” Surely they will awaken like those who are against him, and what more, also to cut him into pieces and cause him to

And how difficult is the idea that if people who did not fully master the Torah, only half learned or half partially expert, would draw conclusions from the system of the New Hassidism. For they would say that “the usual learning of Torah of the everyday scholars, is entirely not for its own sake, nor is it worth anything at all; the fear of punishment uncoupled to the fear of exaltation is not worth anything. The act of doing the mitzvot without [the proper mystical] intentions and without cleaving (Deveykut), has neither aim nor usefulness. Sadness is a bad trait that has no other comparable to it in its wickedness, as opposed to happiness, to which nothing is superior.” There may be many supports of these points from scripture and the writings of our sages, of blessed memory – but because of their lack of understanding of the Torah in its full extent, to understand and discern in depth the intentions of Chazal – in completely encompassing the two Talmuds – they will not come to a clear understanding that is the very essence of Torah study nor exert the effort to understand the depths of things as well as their simple meanings. This too represents

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sin, therefore he should be wary not to come to sin even by mistake, so that such will not be obligated to do anything therefore he must separate himself from meat and wine all the days of the week and he must hallucinate from the lightness, for the holy one blessed be He is exacting with his Hassidim and he must be wary of the warning ‘turn away from evil and do good, seek peace’ “turn away from evil”, that is to say: a) to be careful with all the specifics pertaining to the negative commandments and the words of our Rabbis of blessed memory, for they are all prohibitions for him, b) be wary of anger, even if you are allowed to be angry and so on and so forth – and with doing good: a) arise in the middle of the night and fulfil the abnegation prayer with sackcloth and ashes and great crying and the intention that will emanate from his lips, and afterwards he will busy himself with Torah and so on: b) to go to the synagogue before the rising of the sun and so on and so forth, and he must be careful that this wisdom does not slip from his lips, because he has not heard it from any man. It is fitting to rely on him as the warning of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai at the beginning of the Zohar stipulates. Thus ends the warning of Rabbi Isaac Luria of blessed memory.

- And everyone who reads correctly will look here in the honorable book “Keeper of the Faithful” which is based only on the study of the wisdom of the Kabbalah which brings forth many articles from the Vilna Gaon and from the book of the holy Zohar, and from the books of the Kabbalists. Keep this book very deeply, along with the extra precautions which are sought to learn the holy wisdom. And this – as it is understood how much the great ones have feared to see that Hassidism expands the learning of esotericism and the habits that accompany it, reaching within the multitudes of the nation etc... despite the great warnings of the heads of the wise kabbalists. -

learning Torah only for its own sake, and likewise, the fear of punishment at the beginning of such an endeavor leads to the fear of the exaltation, etc.

Similarly, the fulfilment of every mitzvah in its time and place, even without cleaving, leads to the goal of the fulfilment of a particular mitzvah. As our teacher the great Rabbi Chaim<sup>94</sup> explains in his book “The Soul of Life,<sup>95</sup>” that one who eats the minimum required amount of Matzah in proper time, even without cleaving [to God], has fulfilled the mitzvah. However, one who is careful about cleaving, but eats a portion of Matzah not in its time, does not fulfil anything. See section four of “The Soul of Life” [where] the topic is expounded upon at length. Therefore those who strive to ascend to the upper levels without positioning themselves properly according to the order of the levels (as in the Braitah of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair) will only cause the downfall of the world of Judaism, heaven forbid. For the humiliation that they heap upon the learning of the Torah for ulterior purposes, and fear of punishment and lack of cleaving, will cause them to treat scholars with contempt, to forget Torah, to weaken the observance of the commandments, and God forbid, to cause the disappearance of the Torah.

[Page eleven]

The founders of the New Hassidism, because of the defects that they thought they saw with a number of Rabbis and Torah Scholars, whose Torah, according to the opinion of Hassidism, was for ulterior purposes, and whose fear of the Lord was like the commandments performed by those who simply memorize - did not see anything good outside of Hassidism. Only through the system of Hassidism, would one be

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<sup>94</sup> Chaim of Volozhin

<sup>95</sup> Volozhiner, Ḥayyim ben Isaac. *Nefesh hachaim* = [Nefesh ha-ḥayim]: Rav Chaim of Volozhin's classic exploration of the fundamentals of Jewish belief. Brooklyn, NY: Judaica Press, 2009.

refined and purified from all filth and slag, and brought and planted on the mountain of God. In order to bring about their goals, the founders of the Hassidic system produced artificial methods. For example: in order to distance themselves from haughtiness, it was not enough for them to read the books of the God-fearing about humility, rather they replaced the trait of humility with the two words “nullifying selfishness” (lit. ‘being’) When they saw any man who felt a sense of ‘self’ they would call him with a name that contains disdain – even if it exuded a rotting stench – in order that he would nullify his ‘self,’ and his feeling of it. They would say “sadness is a uniquely wicked character trait” and in their opinion it is spiritual decay and offensive and it will bring great evil to the soul of man. In order to distance themselves from this ugliness, and always to rejoice and be happy, they invented many commanded meals, holidays, “Yahrtzeits”, meals with friends, and proper drinking. All this in order to make the coarse matter rejoice, and in this way, also the soul would be filled and will rejoice with the fulfillment of the mitzvah out of happiness and the joy of the heart -- and a few other artificial means. These people made a great effort to enlarge and exalt the thoughts and intentions found in each and every commandment above the actual performance of the commandment itself; to exalt the learning of the Torah particularly for its own sake, so as not to forget even for one instant the love and awe of God, and cleaving to Him, and to nullify completely those who do not learn with cleaving and with this intention.

On the other hand, the Rabbis who opposed these Hassidim with full force would say: “Indeed; love and fear of God, cleaving to him, and learning Torah for its own sake are positive commandments explicit in the Torah, which the Haredim will

observe -- but the essence of the mitzvah of Torah learning is first of all, the effort, the labor and the insight to know of it. For we pray “and allow our hearts to be able to know and to understand, to hear, to learn and to teach, to guard, to do, and to uphold, etc...” However, imposing this stringency of [requiring that the study of Torah be learnt only for its own sake] through both love and cleaving, as an obligation from the start upon all the scholars and all those who study the Torah will cause, Heaven forfend, the weakening of the study of Torah. This will lead to, Heaven forfend, ignorance and unfamiliarity, and the forgetting of the Torah. For in order to arrive at these lofty levels, it is possible only if one follows them in order, gradually, as we have explained, according to order laid out in the words of Rabbi Pinkhas ben Yair. Without laboring to arrive at an understanding of Torah according to the depth of the plain meaning, it is not possible to derive a clear Halacha. Therefore the preparation of learning the Torah, specifically with love and cleaving would necessarily bring about a reduction of Torah knowledge and forgetting it in its entirety, God forbid. Upon this it was said that regarding Torah “Everyone who adds to it, lessens it.” Like a Tallit which is entirely blue [like that of Korach in the Bible], so too is Hassidism in its entirety for the multitudes. For if the masses will busy themselves with Hassidism, the inequities of all the preceding levels that the Godly Tanna Rabbi Pinkhas ben Yair thought of, would cause, God forbid, the complete opposite.

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The great scholars who opposed [Hassidism] were very concerned about the founders of Hassidism, specifically about those who substituted and changed terminologies; for example, from ‘haughtiness’ and ‘humility’ to “nullifying the

self”, as above, as well as their changing the mitzvah of “cleaving to Torah scholars,” to the term “connecting one’s self to the Tzaddik”- They were very concerned lest many of the simple multitude will make mistakes with the nature of connecting the self, for the real intention in this case is, that because of love of the Torah and cherishing it, and with their recognition of the great value of the learning and the righteousness of the Torah scholar, they will cleave through the love of his Torah, but this will only occur in proportion to the understanding of the Torah. However, regarding the simple connection of the masses of average people, one should fear lest they come to associate the Tzadik with divinity, banish the thought, especially since there are widespread stories and miracle reports concerning the actions of the Tzadikim, and their knowledge of the future and so on...). All such elements strengthened this tremendous suspicion.

The great rabbinical opponents [of Hasidism] examined carefully the trait of caution that the great and holy kabbalists adopted when they took care that the “true wisdom” [i.e., kabbalah] should be treated with the secret of God to those who fear him, so as not to give voice to it in the streets, and so they may not learn it before they are forty years of age and able to discern; and as long as they have not filled themselves with the Talmud and the [works of the halakhic] decisors, and their hearts and minds with the fear of heaven and fear of sin; and have they upheld and received the words of the prophet (Micha), “He told you...walk humbly.” On the contrary, Hassidism chose to widen the learning of the Kabbalah so that it reaches all the masses of the people, including laymen and youth, and so that it be a means to serve God with “cleaving” and with supreme devotion; and that Torah also will be “for its

own sake,” For according to Hassidism, learning the Torah without love and cleaving has no sanctifying qualities for exalting the soul, \*<sup>96</sup> unlike the opinion of their Rabbinical opponents who hold that there are many levels of quality regarding Torah learning. For “for its own sake” is understood by them as “for the sake of the Torah itself” in order to understand and to discern the depths of the Torah, in order to do it and fulfill it properly and also to derive from it new insights. For in this manner, even if some intention to receive compensation in the world to come is occasionally aroused, or one learns out of fear of punishment, etc. (only not to annoy, heaven forbid). It is impossible that the thought of learning for the sake of God’s commandment, for the sake of upholding the positive commandment of Torah learning, will not arise at some time in one’s study. This is the very reason we make the blessing: “for busying one’s self with Torah study,” and behold the entire Torah which we learned from the beginning that had not been for its own sake at all – with this very thought it becomes sanctified with the distinction of “for its own sake.” About this the sages of blessed memory said: “A person should forever learn Torah- even when not for its own sake, for through [learning it] not for its own sake, one

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<sup>96</sup> \* In the commentary of Ohr Hachayim on the Torah from the great Hasid the Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim ben Attar of blessed memory in the Torah portion *Behukotai*, chapter thirty three holds “It is written, the verse has yet to be explained regarding the reasons for the actual intentions behind the combination of the mitzvot.” For, on the one hand, a man might think that “the mitzvot have no principle matter and no result”, on the other hand, the person who knows their principle and reason, but completes the act of doing the mitzvah without knowing the reason, behold he is doing a deed which he does not have in himself at all, like one with a body but without a soul.” One finds that they also wrote in the name of Rav Isaac Luria about this: “For a deed without intention, is actually like an empty vessel, for the principal matter is the thought, and as such God’s name appears here, “for if you follow my unknowable laws” for it will say here, that if a man will do a particular commandment with this intention, God will justify it and realize it legally”, this intention will yield results for them as if they had upheld the mitzvah as God intended and did it, and He said, “And my Mitzvot you shall guard” naming the mitzvah which encompasses all their intentions and orders. A man might say: “God will accept this thing because man wills it, even if we do not intend it.” If so, also this – he will not do anything at all, but he will become opinionated, “and this thing will result in lack of doing: we learn in a biblical teaching “and you shall do them” - this is contingent on that which he will do with his own hands and that which God will complete.”



comes to [learning it] for its own sake. The honorable wise, and great Rabbeinu Chaim explains this in his book “The Soul of Life” part four according to the statements of our sages of blessed memory and upon the holy Zohar. “All the embellishments that Hasidism established for its members, whether through love and cleaving, or whether through embellishing and beautifying the Mitzvoth, through which embellishments those who joined found a new and bright world, lovely and pleasant – because of all these the opponents feared that the rays of the Torah would fall to dust, and that this system would bring about the minimization of learning the Torah and the denigration of Torah scholars and those who fear God. For instead of the difficulties endured by a man who wears himself for hours, sitting hunched over a Gemara, deepening his investigation and tiring his intellect understanding the depth of the simple text and its explanation of the Gemara, the commentary of Rashi, and the Tosafot, and the subsequent commentaries upon them, which require great mental and physical exertion together. Or instead of this, arising early in the morning in order to fulfill the verse, “They will fear you with the sun” – is it not easier for him with the system of Hassidism, to cleave to Him, to lengthen time for contemplation, and to enjoy celebrations of imaginary cleaving with happiness and spiritual activity, for these are more wanted than Torah which is not for its own sake. For by means of Torah which is not for its own sake, it is possible to come to exaltation and arrogance, which God hates. It is better, according to their line of thinking, to recite Psalms or to compose music for them. For all of these reasons, the Great Rabbis, the opponents of this were concerned, lest heaven forbid, the Torah be erased from Israel. For there is

no limit to the evil that heaven banish the thought, would result from this for Judaism. Therefore, they emerged with a bold opposition.

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Similarly, it is known to the experts [of hidden wisdom] that the great scholarly opponents such as the Vilna Gaon and his students found room to oppose the system of the Besht of blessed memory in the matter of [the divine light] “surrounding all the worlds and filling all the worlds.” Those who frequent the ancient Kabbalistic works (ספרי המקובלים) know of the matters of controversy among the kabbalists that preceded them. However it is understood, that the disputes in these matters that are the mysteries of the world never exited the school of these kabbalists, for they were most modest and not anything- even half a thing relating to this passed by them to the masses. However, the founders of Hasidism which made the study of the wisdom of the kabbalah a “thing of summaries (textbooks)” and widely studied by the masses of Israel. The masses do not have the power to discern or to digest lofty and supreme matters such as these and there remains great concern that damage will result from this. Our experience has shown that when the first Hassidim in the year 5530 [1769-70], went too far, perpetuating almost all the issues articulated, they came very close to the opinions of the “Provençals” who were in France in the year 5200 [1440—this probably should be 1340], minimizing and also nullifying the very performance of the commandments, exalting every form of praise, essentially appreciating only the readily apparent thoughts, ideas, and intentions. These are known as the Hassidim of “Telk,<sup>97</sup>” for most of these who delved into their Hassidism, fulfilled and accepted upon themselves the curse “Raise the low, and

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<sup>97</sup> A reference to the abbreviation of the Hebrew year 5530, i.e., 1770.

lower the lofty” until even the great Hassidic leader Rabbi Shneur Zalman, whose soul is hidden upon high, came out against them in a letter to the Hassidim of his circle against the Hassidim of “Telk” (which in this case refers to the year 1770) not to associate with them for he was concerned that all the parties of Hassidim would behave like the Hassidim of “Telk.”

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Similarly, there was a great reason for opposing them. They had chosen the Lurianic prayer rite and made changes to the recitation of pietistic poetry and to the prayers. As such they caused divisions within the nation and fragmented politics.

In short, the means that the leaders the Rabbis of the New Hassidim used in order to attract many half-learned people, masses of simpletons: namely calling for learning designated “for its own sake” specifically, and for “elevating fear” especially, and to expand the learning of the esoteric part [of Torah] and its connection to the Tzaddikim and more. This led them -- according to the view of their opponents – to the opposite result. [They caused] the demeaning of the Torah, the reduction rather than expansion of its learning, sectarianism and even nullifying completely the fear of punishment, etc. Therefore, a great many renowned scholars of the generation worried, lest heaven forbid, the Torah be erased, and lest the assembly of Israel suffer from Hassidism by the formation of a new sect that will destroy the Torah and Judaism in its entirety. Because of these reasons and considerations the great Rabbis emerged with vigorous declarations and also with excommunications, against the sect Hassidim, which was named, “A New and Dangerous Sect”, as is known. The fight between some of the hot-headed of both

sides, was not free of ugly and disgraceful deeds, which led to informing the government about the Hasidim and their Rabbis, as is well known, and to slandering with lies and cruel falsehoods their great scholarly opponents, and as it now appears, they permitted for them all the means for the sake of their goal.

However, in the end, the foundations and principles of the dispute from both perspectives, was only for the sake of heaven. Therefore, the dispute will be a lasting one, for really the root of this dispute engendered many useful results for each side. Hassidism had a great effect on its opponents, for it introduced within them a stream of spiritual life, a feeling of lightness and warmth to purify all thought, and cleaving to the performance of the commandments without being like those frozen and self-serving; specifically, to behave like those who seek for each action a share of the Leviathan; acting only to remove somewhat the sadness which dwells like a heavy cloud upon their faces, and to seek ways beautify the commandments. For neither Hassidim nor their opponents withdraw from, heaven forbid, both Talmuds, the Bavli and the Yerushalmi, and the [different] books of the Shulchan Aruch even a little bit.

On the other hand, the tremendous, energetic opposition of the great scholars, the opponents of Hasidism, the declarations and the awful excommunications which they published in public, stopped the excessive deluge on the heads of both the Hassidim and their opponents that was foreseen. For had the dispute about *Even Yisrael*<sup>98</sup> not been intensely sharpened or polished, and had they not employed harsh means, then enthusiasm of the “Talk” Hassidim would have been exceeded every gate

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<sup>98</sup> Israel Salanter (1810-1883). *Sefer Even Yiśra' el: kolel derushim ... ye-ḥidushim ba-Shas u-foskim; ye-nilyeh lo sefer Even boḥan : kolel shut u-derusim, ye-hadran le-Nazir*. [distributed by Israel Lipkin Jerusalem: 1954].

and boundary. The enthusiasm and stubbornness of the Hasidim was so near then to splintering into a wild cult like the “Telks” that even the great Rabbis among the Hassidim were forced to fight against them, until the cult was abolished completely. For willy nilly, through the enormous dispute, Hassidism blended into Judaism. For truly this dispute was obligatory, [belonging to] those upright works and wonders that overturn causes through cunning. For just as the a stormy wind sent by God is thought to wreck a ship, whereas in fact, the storm purifies the air and blows new life into the ship; so too the storm of arguments for the sake of heaven intended to arouse the sleeping and to merge together the ardent, until, ultimately, one association was created, the rents repaired; the Hassidim began to busy themselves with Torah, to teach Torah in public with the founding of Yeshivot for Torah and wisdom, and in several places they began to schedule earlier the times of the recitation of the Shema and the Amidah like the early risers recite and so on – until the previous hate had been suppressed. Behold all who now hear what happened there and listens to the words of “truth and peace”<sup>99</sup> which issue forth as of now like a heavenly voice from Mt. Horeb, will acknowledge explicitly that they fulfilled the verse, “The Truth and the Peace, you shall love”<sup>100</sup>- and peace be upon Israel.

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<sup>99</sup> Naphtali Hertz (Hartwig) Wessely, “Words of Peace and Truth,” in J. Reinhartz and P. Mendes-Flohr, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World*, second edition (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 70–74.

<sup>100</sup> Zechariah 8:19 (<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2308.htm>), (this quote is also found in the Jewish high holiday liturgy).

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