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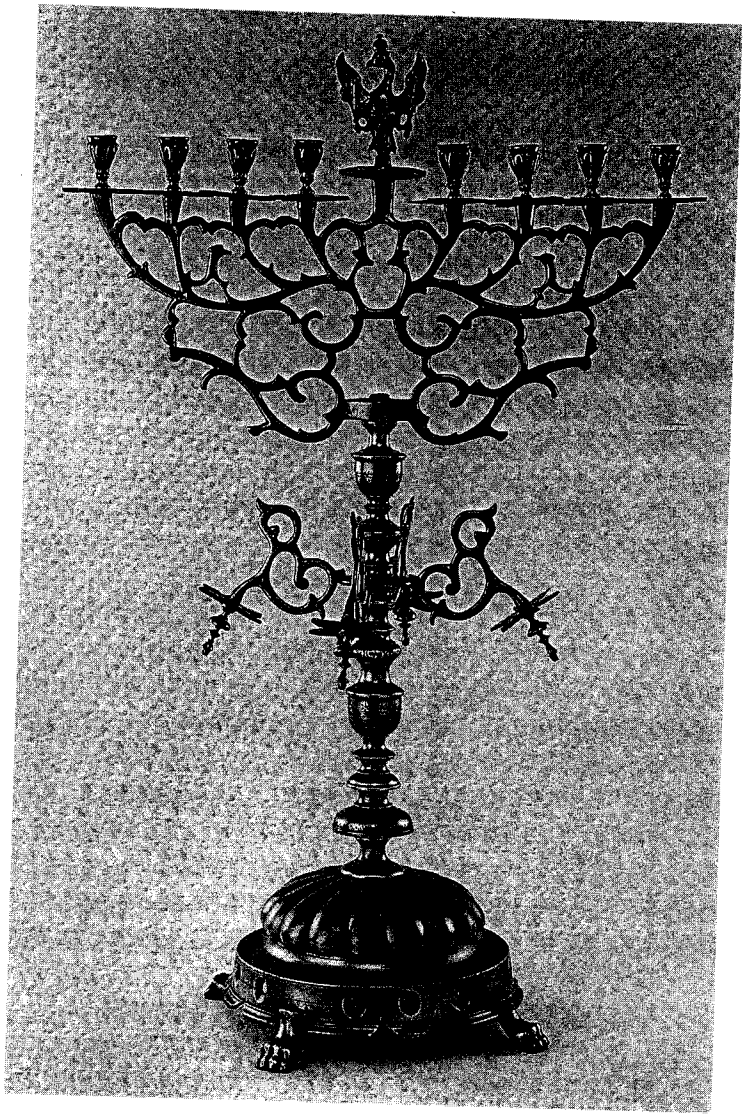


Hanukkah lamp, Poland, eighteenth century. Bronze, cast and engraved. The eagle at the top symbolizes Polish sovereignty. (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Stieglitz Collection of Judaica 118/868)

FOUR

# INNOVATIVE TRADITION:

## *Jewish Culture in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*

MOSHE ROSMAN

In 1655, as part of his attempt to convince Oliver Cromwell and the political and economic leadership of Revolutionary England to readmit the Jews, who had been expelled in 1290, the Dutch Sephardic rabbi Menasseh ben Israel published a small book called *The Humble Addresses.* In it he surveyed the state of Jewish communities in various parts of the world. In describing the Jews of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, he observed:

> [T]hey have the jurisdiction to judge amongst themselves all causes, both criminal and civil; and also great and famous academies of their own. . . . [T]here is a Iew, called Isaac Iecells, who built a synagogue, which stood him in one hundred thousand francs, and is worth many tons of gold. . . . There is in this place such infinite number of Iews; that although the Cosaques in the late warres have killed them above one hundred and fourscore thousand; yet it is sustained that they are yet at this day as innumerable as those were that came out of Egypt. In that Kingdome the whole Negotiation is in the hand of the Iews, the rest of the Christians are either all Noble-men, or Rustiques and kept as slaves.[1]

Menasseh emphasized four distinguishing features of Polish Jewry of his time: its ramified legal autonomy; outstanding institutions of Torah learning; commercial importance and consequent economic strength; and its large numbers. During the "classical" period of Jewish history in Poland (from around 1500 until the late eighteenth century partitions of Poland by its neighbors Russia, Prussia, and Austria), the Commonwealth was home to what became the largest Jewish settlement in the world, dominating Jewish culture of the period and serving as a linchpin in the European Jewish economy. Essential factors in the attainment of this status were the relative freedom granted the Jews in

Poland to practice their religion and the opportunity given them to engage in most occupations. This freedom and opportunity, greater than anywhere else in Europe, was one facet of the unique character of early modern Poland.

At its peak in 1634, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as it was known after 1569, stretched from the Oder River in the west to some 100 miles beyond the Dnieper River in the east, and from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Dniester River in the south. This was the largest geopolitical entity in Europe. Permanent Jewish settlement took root in the twelfth century and, as the Commonwealth developed, Jews flocked there in large numbers over the centuries: more than 250,000 by 1648 and approximately 750,000 by 1764, the largest Jewish community in the world and half of the Commonwealth's urban population.

Poland-Lithuania was superficially similar to the countries to the west whence the Jews had been expelled or, beginning in the sixteenth century, restricted to ghettos. A king, who was in constant negotiation with the nobility, headed the political system. The Catholic Church was the established religion, and its institutions played an official role in politics and a central role in the economy. That economy was based on feudally organized agriculture, with land ownership concentrated in the hands of the king, the Church, and the nobles. Serfs, bonded to the landowners, still carried out the work through the period under consideration here. Cities and towns were chartered by their royal, ecclesiastical, or noble owners and governed by a tripartite municipal council elected and run by taxpaying male residents. The Jews were a separate estate whose rights and obligations derived legally from charters granted them over the centuries by the kings and nobles.

Upon closer inspection, however, early modern Poland appears different from contemporary European nations, particularly with regard to its cultural foundations. The nobility in countries like England and France constituted 1 or 2 percent of the population and were coextensive with the upper class. Polish nobles constituted some 10 percent of the populace and might be rich or poor, great landowners, middling landlords, or landless. Regardless of economic standing, each nobleman enjoyed various privileges and the right to participate in the political process by electing representatives to the local councils, or dietines (*sejmiki*), which in turn chose delegates to the national diet (Sejm). The nobles also had the right to participate in the election of the king upon the demise of the reigning monarch. Thus, 10 percent of the Polish male population was enfranchised, which was unique in Europe.

This enfranchisement was but one expression of a general antiauthoritarian political ethos. The ideal of equality, at least among the nobility, though far from realization, was a standard political and social slogan. Polish noblemen of all



classes were passionately devoted to defending their "Golden Freedom" from any absolutist pretensions that the king might entertain. The king could not make appointments, raise an army for war, or levy new taxes without the approval of the Sejm. Moreover, on his or her own feudal estate, each noble landlord was a virtual king, unanswerable to any higher authority.

Although Catholic bishops had a defined political role to play as senators in the Sejm and the Polish primate served as Interrex when royal elections were pending, the Polish Church had less effective power than many of its sister national churches to the west. Poland was a multiethnic, multireligious country where only some 40 percent of the population was ethnic Polish. The Lithuanians, Belarusans, Ukrainians (Ruthenians), Latvians, Germans, Armenians, Italians, Scots, Turks, and Jews with their Calvinism, Arianism, Lutheranism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Uniate Greek Catholicism, Islam, Armenian Catholicism, and Judaism all enjoyed official sanction to practice their respective religions, more or less freely, most of the time. Even among the ethnic Poles were Protestants and a sprinkling of Orthodox. In this situation, religious toleration was the theoretical norm. As expressed in the declaration of the 1573 Confederation of Warsaw: "We who differ in matters of religion will keep the peace among ourselves, and neither shed blood on account of differences in faith or kinds of church, nor punish one another by confiscation of goods, deprivation of honor, imprisonment or exile." Poland has been described as "a state without stakes" and was never riven by a civil war based on religious differences.[2]

The Church's discriminatory requirements frequently had to bend before the necessity of toleration. Indeed, the economic interests of Church institutions often dictated tolerance on their part. For example, the fact that Jews were forbidden to occupy positions of authority over Christians did not prevent some Church institutions from leasing their holdings to Jews, who in their administrative capacity would of necessity be superior to serfs and other Christians.[3]

To be sure, Polish religious tolerance, rooted more in utility than in a systematic, philosophically sophisticated, noble-minded ideology, was ambivalent. It was an imperfect, sloppy toleration, with many examples of backsliding into discrimination and persecution. Orthodox, Protestants, and even the small Muslim population were variably subject to such actions as administrative limitations on office-holding and other privileges, forced participation in Catholic worship services, violence, and conversionary pressures. In 1667 the Arians were expelled from the country, and in the eighteenth century mob actions against Protestants became fairly common.

Nowhere is the ambivalence of Polish policy toward a minority group—its religion and culture—more evident than in relation to the Jews. Their relatively fe-

licitous status in Poland was not achieved without resistance. Churchmen were officially committed to the traditional policy of maintaining the Jews in an inferior position. A host of Church-inspired restrictions mandated a large measure of physical segregation and limited commerce and daily intercourse with them. Townspeople were opposed to a more benign policy primarily because of the commercial competition Jews posed to Christian businesses. As the Jarosław burghers put it in 1571:

> We have come to the opinion that a large number of Jews living in a city never bodes well for Christian people. On the contrary, it causes them much damage and loss. Their plots bring catastrophe to Christians and encourage people to abandon dignified work. As a result many have reached their last piece of bread.[4]

Polish ambivalence toward the Jews was given a concrete form that could be altered through negotiations and payments. This codification took the shape of two classes of documents: privileges and pacts. Privileges were granted to Jewish communities by kings and nobles. These charters, usually formulated in consultation with Jews, assumed that they were a vulnerable minority group, requiring defense from various hostile forces in society. Their physical security, religious freedom, and potential livelihoods needed to be safeguarded; their culture required a supportive infrastructure. The assumption was that if Jewish life were allowed to flourish, the royal or seignorial interests would be served.[5]

The counterpoint to privilege was the pact. Pacts were agreements negotiated between the Jewish communities and the Christian municipalities when the aim of the city fathers was opposite to that of the privilege-givers. They were intended to serve as a tool of containment, both geographic and economic. One of the earliest was the 1485 agreement that the Jews of Cracow would refrain from any commercial activity except the sale of forfeit pawns and the products of poor Jewish women who made hats and collars. Another example is the 1645 agreement in Przemyśl that the Jewish community would pay an annual fee in exchange for limited commercial privileges: Jews would be allowed to sell most types of textiles wholesale, but not retail; Jewish barbers, tailors, and bakers could service Jewish customers only. Frequently, pacts set quotas on the number of Jews who could settle in a town. In some cases, Christian townspeople were not satisfied with a pact and pressed the king to grant their town a "privilegium de non tolerandis Iudaeis" (privilege not to tolerate Jews in their midst).[6]

Pacts and privileges delimited the parameters of a process of negotiation that



hinged upon a complex calculus of economic considerations, cultural and sociological factors, political maneuvering, and personal relationships. Consequently, Poland was a place where, as Rabbi David ben Samuel Halevi, known as the Taz, averred, "most of the time the gentiles do no harm; on the contrary they do right by Israel." However, some of the time, it was a place where Jews were disproportionately victims of crime and casual violence, where blood and desecration-of-the-Host libels occurred with some frequency, and where there were anti-Jewish mob attacks.[7]

Privileges promised Jews the right to live by their traditions and protection from hostile treatment. Pacts demonstrated that the gentile population wanted the Jews in its midst to impinge on their lives as little as possible. Ironically, these two apparently contradictory tendencies converged, creating a space where all agreed that the Jews should continue to articulate the medieval institutions of an autonomous Jewish community. Jewish circumstances in Poland might be characterized, then, as a consequence of the permutations of various tendencies in Polish culture. To what extent did Polish Jews share this culture?

## JEWS AND POLISH CULTURE

Traditionally, a dichotomy has been drawn between "authentic" Jewish culture that grew out of the Jewish past and alien "influences" from Polish culture that might divert or blur the authentic vector. Both Polish and Jewish scholars, until very recently, have emphasized how little Polish culture influenced Jewish society. For Poles this was a sign of the Jews' alienation from Polish society—and by implication a partial explanation for whatever bad treatment they suffered. For Jews, cultural isolation was an indicator of the genuineness of Jewish culture in Poland and an excuse for some scholars to downplay the importance of the Polish context. Certainly, in discourse about Jewish assimilation, Polish Jewry in all ages is usually held up as one of the most "Jewish" of Jewries, only minimally affected by its surroundings.

The view that Jews were alienated from Poland culturally certainly has evidence to marshal in its support. Economic behavior is a good example. The main criticism of Jews by townspeople was that they did not honor the conventions of commerce. At a time in Europe when competition was a dirty word and merchants were expected to respect each other's divinely apportioned market share, Jews engaged in competitive, capitalistic commercial tactics. Jewish merchants traveled to distant suppliers at source, rather than purchase from middlemen. Jews organized syndicates to buy in volume and sometimes even cornered the market on certain commodities. They exploited Jewish solidarity to gain

commercial credit, avoided and evaded paying staple duties that towns had the right to impose on all doing business within their confines, lowered profit margins, and advertised and promoted their products.

Endorsing these capitalist practices in commerce conducted with non-Jews, Jewish communal authorities sought—even if they were usually unsuccessful—to circumscribe their application within the community. There staple rights were to apply; local merchants were to be preferred to outside Jews; established retailers were to be protected from incursions by upstarts. Dealings within the Jewish zone were supposed to follow accepted European norms of limited competition; only business with gentiles was open to competitive methods. This double standard might well indicate that the Jews' mentality was one of alienation. It might also imply that they felt themselves *in* their towns but not *of* them.

Another illustration is language. The vernacular of Polish Jewry was Yiddish, a language that had grown out of Middle High German and accompanied the Jews to Poland when they came to settle. No Judeo-Polish language developed (though Yiddish in Poland did come to incorporate many Polish and other Slavic terms). As a rule, Jewish knowledge and use of Polish was not a standard cultural accoutrement but a function of one's contacts with non-Jews. Merchants could speak it with some fluency, whereas rabbis could not express themselves adequately. There were some Jews who could read Polish for commercial purposes and even some who could sign their names on legal documents in Latin letters, but full literacy in Polish was rare. Even fewer non-Jewish Poles knew any Yiddish. With no real common language, it would seem that Jews and Christians were operating in separate cultural universes.

Both in fact and in consciousness, the Polish Jews were Jews in a Christian land. They often did feel alienation and even fear. Privileges and judicial records provide ample proof that such feelings were not mere paranoia. There is little question that Jewish culture in Poland was leavened by an underlying perception of insecurity and powerlessness. Gentiles in general were viewed as potential persecutors, and salutary Jewish circumstances were regarded as fragile and contingent. This perception prompted Jews to adopt a political strategy of accommodation to the primary loci of power in the country: the king and the high nobility.[8] It also led to Jewish culture encoding a stance of *kabdehu ve-ḥashdehu* ("respect, but suspect") with regard to their Christian neighbors. This attitude was expressed by rabbinic laws and communal ordinances restricting contact with non-Jews and by Jewish folklore that often assigned a demonic role to its gentile characters.

To say that Jews in Poland felt and acted alienated to a significant degree



is not, however, the same as saying that they did not share in Polish culture. Despite cultural distancing, there is reason to consider them as part of the Commonwealth in the cultural sense. From medieval times, Jews defined their circumstances in Poland as qualitatively different from the rest of Ashkenaz—that realm of Jewish culture, marked by Yiddish speech, stretching from the Loire to the Dnieper. One of the earliest sources for Jewish history in Poland is a letter (ca. 1200) from Rabbi Eliezer of Prague to Rabbi Judah Hasid in Regensburg in the Rhineland. Eliezer urged the German rabbi to understand that the frontier conditions of eastern Europe called for a para-rabbinic religious leadership that would not be paid a regular salary by the Jewish community as Judah mandated for religious functionaries in the west.[9] In the rough state of the new communities of the east, providers of religious services had to subsist on contributions. This was but an early stage in the development of Polish variants of standard Ashkenazic institutions and customs relating to liturgy, ritual, education, and communal organization. While still recognizable as Ashkenazic, the Polish versions were sufficiently differentiated from the originals that in Jewish legal and exegetical discourse it became necessary to change the accepted term "Ashkenaz" to the formulaic expression "Ashkenaz and Polin," in which Ashkenaz denoted the Ashkenazic Jewish communities west of Poland. Rabbinic literature contains a number of observations on the differences between Jewish life in Poland and in Ashkenaz, particularly with regard to the more hospitable legal and social environment in the former.[10]

For Jews, Poland was different, and some of them demonstrated a rather sophisticated knowledge of the realities that made Poland what it was. For example, Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, writing in Gniezno in 1580, chose to interpret the story of the Tower of Babel not as a challenge to divine power to which God responded by dividing the human race linguistically, but as an attempt to establish a universal religious regime which God "was obliged to separate . . . since the proliferation of doctrines aids and stimulates the investigator to attain the desired truths." That is, unanimity in religion is undesirable because religious pluralism, as the Italian-born Eliezer witnessed in Poland, is conducive to the exploration of truth.[11] It does not seem coincidental that it was in religiously pluralistic Poland that this well-traveled rabbi gave expression to such sentiments.

Seventy years later, Nathan Hannover, analyzing the background to the Chmielnicki Uprising, understood that the Jews of Ukraine, in principle a disdained minority, had gained power over the Ruthenian serfs as a result of the pro–Roman Catholic discriminatory policies of Zygmunt III and his appreciation for the Jews' administrative capabilities:

> The King . . . loved justice and loved Israel. In his days the religion of the Pope gained strength in the Kingdom of Poland. . . . King Zygmunt raised the status of the Catholic dukes and princes above those of the Greek Orthodox so that most of the latter abandoned their faith and embraced Catholicism. The masses that followed the Greek Orthodox Church became gradually impoverished. They were looked upon as lowly and inferior beings and became the serfs of the Polish people and the Jews . . . [and thus] the lowliest among the nations became their overlords.[12]

Note that, to Hannover, "loving justice" was equally compatible with loving Israel and with enserfing Ruthenian peasants. This strong identification with the ruler was shared by many Jews.

The eighteenth-century Jewish wine merchant Ber of Bolechów wrote a memoir in which various Polish political and economic developments figure prominently. Observe Ber's admiration for the Commonwealth's High Tribunal at Lublin:

> This Tribunal was the supreme court over all the courts which existed in each *starostwo* [an administrative unit]. Each province and district used to elect a number of wealthy noblemen, learned in the law, who assembled at Warsaw . . . and there the Diet chose from among them men known for their high character, fear of God, love of truth and incorruptibility.[13]

In outward behavior, Jews were differentiated from Christian inhabitants of the Commonwealth. Religious rituals, especially food restrictions, were vivid boundary markers that had the potential for limiting social contacts. The Jewish calendar guaranteed different evaluations of time, dates, and seasons as well as a contrasting rhythm to life. Based on their respective theologies, Jews and Christians shared an assessment of the Jews' fundamental Otherness within the dominant society. Yet, an expression of Polish values such as Eliezer Ashkenazi's, the identification with the rulers implied by Hannover, and the respect for Polish institutions expressed by Ber, all bespeak a profound Jewish engagement with Polish cultural categories. There was a Polish-Jewish mentality that drew upon the Polish experience.

Both Poles and Jews recorded legends of a woman named Esterka who was the queen (in the Jewish version) or the mistress (in the Polish version) of King Casimir the Great (fourteenth century). Notably, the two traditions were independent of each other. Even on a topic of such obvious popular and mutual interest, Poles and Jews referred to disparate sources of knowledge and seemed



unaware of one another's ideas on the subject. This is another example implying that Jewish and Polish cultural creativity had different sources of inspiration and parallel lines of development.

Nevertheless, what is striking is the trend within Polish-Jewish tradition that the Esterka legend represents. This is but one of the stories in which Jews—who could not be official participants in Polish political institutions and could not put up a candidate for king—exert a decisive influence on the kingship. There was the tale of Abraham Prochownik, who in the days of Poland inchoate was offered the crown by the bickering lords of Great Poland, but he refused it, engineering instead the choice of the founder of the Polish state, Piast. Or the story of Saul Wahl, who, upon the death of Stefan Batory in 1586 and subsequent deadlock in the succession process, was chosen regent; serving for one day only, he instituted legislation favorable to the Jews, ruled justly over the Poles, and finished that super day by effecting the election of Zygmunt III Wasa as king of the Commonwealth. And then there was the Hasidic leader Dov Ber of Mezhirech; in 1764 it was he, in consultation with another rabbi, who decided that Stanisław August Poniatowski should be king. Approved by God, his choice was ratified, unwittingly, by the noble Polish electorate.[14]

These fantasies are typical of subordinate minorities. A form of what sociologists call "expressive hostility," they express a frustration with powerlessness and a hunger for empowerment. They say, in effect: our weakness is only apparent; we exercise a fateful influence on the key institutions of the country. All appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, we count! (Ironically, antisemites said the same thing about Jews, based on different fantasies and for different purposes.)

Jews *wanted* to count in Poland. They conceived of meaningful power and the trappings that accompanied it in exquisitely Polish terms. These people were not dreaming about the army of the ten lost tribes south of the Sahara about to organize and sweep through Europe, carrying them off to the Land of Israel. They did not prepare for the messianic Shabbtai Zevi to return after his conversion to Islam and show the Polish monarch what a king with true divine rights could do.

They also did not look to some alternative or competing non-Jewish political-cultural system as a source of comfort. There was no praise or longing for the Ottoman Empire, which had taken in so many Iberian Jewish exiles and allowed some of them to attain riches and prominence. There were no invidious comparisons made between Poland, on the one hand, and Muscovy or countries to the west, on the other—except to praise Poland. For a Polish Jew to feel empowered, empowerment had to be legitimated and recognized in a specifically Polish context.

Although incidents of forced baptism did occur, the Poles had no systematic program of Jewish polonization analogous to their attempts with other minority ethnic and religious groups. Yet, despite their lack of assimilation to Polish culture, Jews saw themselves functioning as part of the system. They were concerned about demonstrating the depth of their roots in Polish soil and the legitimacy of their rights, without trying to escape their Jewishness. Given the range of responses to domination available to subordinated minority groups, they chose accommodation, eschewing the extremes of revolt and assimilation.

But Polish and Jewish culture had more in common than collective identification of the dominated people with the dominators. Both cultures—and the cultures of most of the other minority groups in the Commonwealth—were part of a larger European heritage, and thus many of the unexamined axioms that shaped daily life were common property. This was not a question of "influence," for Jews did not divide their culture into "native" and "borrowed" categories; to the bearers of this culture all of it was authentic. The inherent authority of both the rabbi, whose status evolved from talmudic precedents, and the *parnasim* (communal elders), who closely resembled the medieval German *burgomeister* and Polish *burmiśtrzowie,* were taken for granted, endowed with religious significance, and regarded as "Jewish."

Jews and Christians agreed on such fundamental political concepts as the function of local political leadership: not to represent the people, but to serve as guardians or conservators whose job it was to determine the public interest and then act upon it without explicit consideration of the popular will. With regard to economic life, both Jews and Christians believed in the regnant notion of a regulated market within stable conditions and restricted competition, and they applied it, as noted above, within their communities. For Christians, one way to restrict competition was to reduce the number of competitors, and a convenient way to do this was to exclude or impede Jews. For Jews, who could not block Christian competition by law, the combative tactic of choice was, as we have seen, aggressive commercial practices.

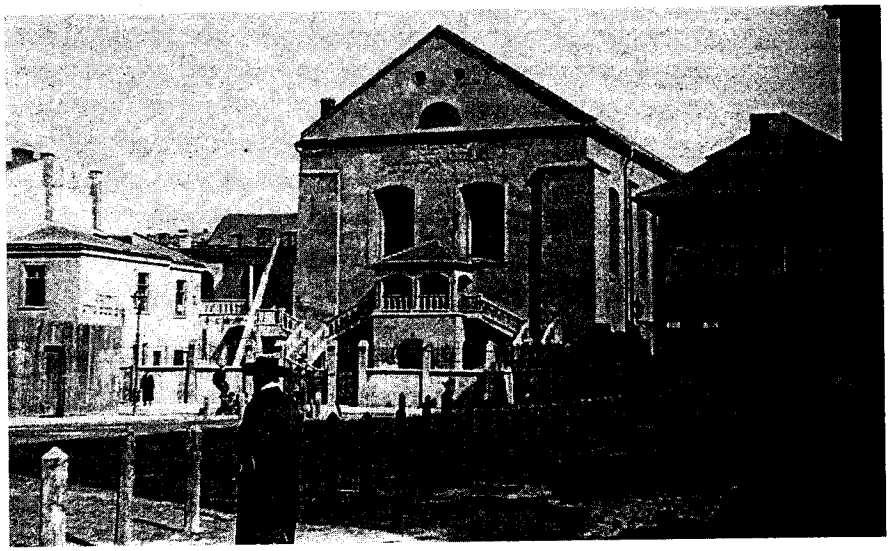
Another example of shared cultural axioms is the sphere of what is usually called popular religion. We might define this, in the present context, as popular understanding of causation. For all peoples of the Commonwealth, the world was a dangerous place. Life was fragile, threatened at every turn by human violence and natural calamities. Such disasters when experienced on the public level—floods, famine, fires—were usually attributed directly to God as divine punishment for sin. On the personal level, however, intermediate agents—demons—were often blamed for bringing on disease, infertility, stillbirth, injury, and other misfortunes. Frequently, the response to trouble was mystical magic. As the Polish-Jewish expatriate physician Tobias Kohn wrote about Poland in 1707:



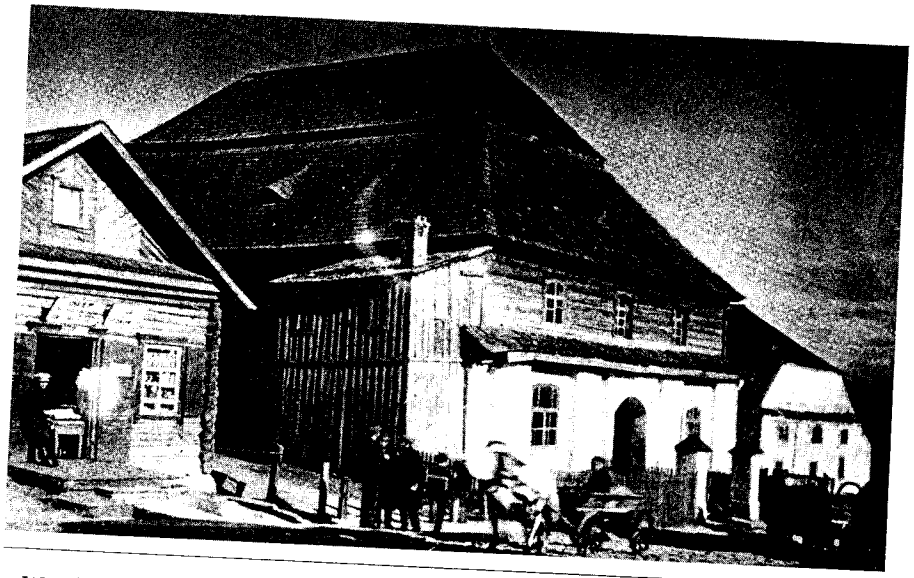
"Even if demons had never been created, they would have had to be created for the people of this country; for there is no land where they are more occupied with demons, amulets, oath formulas, mystical names, and dreams."[15]

These tools of theurgy had to be wielded by experts, shamans who specialized in supernatural defense. Christians had their exorcising priests and other mystical experts; Jews had *ba'alei shem* (masters of the divine name). Significantly, in some contexts each group believed the holy men of the other to possess genuine theurgic power. Poles and others, for example, addressed the most famous Jewish ba'al shem, Israel ben Eliezer (ca. 1700–1760), as "Doktor," and in some Ukrainian folktales Christians consult Jewish wonder workers. Conversely, Jewish stories about Israel ben Eliezer, who was known as the Ba'al Shem Tov, assert that he credited the powers of certain Christian holy men. In one tale, concerning a particular priest, the Ba'al Shem Tov declares: "I do not want to provoke him because he is a great sorcerer; he will sense it the moment that I begin to deal with him."[16] These crossover beliefs, encompassing the vicissitudes of life and the magic that could deal with them effectively, created a shared band of discourse among all the Commonwealth's groups. People understood reality in a common way and showed a grudging respect for the magical rituals of others.

Concrete material evidence exists for a core shared culture among majority



Masonry Izaaka Synagogue built in 1644 in Cracow. The photograph was taken in 1936. (Photo: Archiwum Panstwowe w Rzeszow; courtesy United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives, Washington, D.C.)



Wooden synagogue built in the mid-eighteenth century in Glebokie (today in Belarus). The photograph was taken in 1924. (Photo: Jack Kagan; courtesy United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives, Washington, D.C.)

and minority groups. The northern Renaissance and Baroque style of urban masonry synagogues built in the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries fit well into the architectural fabric of Polish cities. Wooden synagogues, in vogue in smaller cities and towns in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were distinctive buildings yet obviously shared the architectural and artistic vocabulary of local wooden churches, manor houses, and other structures. Jewish clothing, ritual and household objects, food, and music were typically variations on conventional Polish styles.[17] For Polish Jews, the aesthetic standard was Polish.

## PRINTING AND THE EVOLUTION OF POLISH-JEWISH CULTURE

Like Europeans in general, Jews were profoundly affected by the spread of printing. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the technology came into its own, and it had a democratizing effect. With books so much cheaper than they had been in the days of manuscript, many more sectors of society, in addition to the professionally learned and the wealthy, could find their way to knowledge. Groups formerly unassociated with book culture, such as artisans, merchants, women, and children, constituted new audiences. Rather than acquire only such knowledge as the clergy or the teachers decided to impart, they could now study on their own and believed that they had the right to do so.



Detail of the ceiling of the synagogue in Chodorow, near Lvov, Poland. The synagogue was built in 1652; the ceiling was painted by Israel Ben Mordekhai Lisnicki, of Jaryczow, in 1714. Some of the twelve signs of the zodiac can be seen in this detail. (Photo [b/w print of color original] © Beth Hatefutsoth Photo Archive, Tel Aviv; no. 228, Permanent Exhibition)

This new state of affairs altered the relationship between knowledge and authority. Formerly, the transmitter of knowledge had nearly complete control over it. Only he had the book; he conveyed its contents by way of an oral interpretation that was automatically authoritative to his listeners. He even decided which knowledge was appropriate to transmit and which was to remain esoteric. Yet once people could read the books for themselves, they could listen to interpretation critically. The authority of the teacher was no longer guaranteed. In fact, the necessity for a teacher was reduced. A person's encounter with the wisdom of the past could be direct, without an intermediary. Knowledge could not be reserved by an elite for itself. People could choose whether to learn, what they wanted to learn, and how they wanted to learn it.[18]

They also had the potential for comparing different views and traditions. There was a new cross-fertilization of knowledge across geography and between fields. French, German, and Italian interpretations of the Bible, for example, could all be read by the same person. The implications of new theology and language studies for the understanding of the Bible became apparent much more quickly and to a wider audience. Printing also led to the dissemination of many more types of knowledge. It was no longer only the most weighty of classical tomes and learned dissertations that were published, but now also less serious and less lasting works such as abridgments, story collections, chapbooks, practical guides, even humorous tracts.

In addition to creating new audiences for new kinds of knowledge, printing opened the field to new authors. With a broad-based commercial market for books, people who were not part of the learned elite could be convinced that what they had to say might attract a paying audience and financially justify the expense of publication. Members of the secondary intelligentsia—popular preachers, ba'alei shem, and scribes, for example—now tried their hand at writing and publishing for profit.

All of these changes affected Polish Jews as much and—because of the relatively higher rates of literacy among Jews than among Christians—probably even more than they did the population in general. The presence of these changes in Jewish culture is epitomized by the figure of David ben Menashe Darshan.

David was born in Cracow circa 1527. He studied for a time at one of the premier yeshivot of his era, that of the Rabbi Moses Isserles in his native city. But, as he noted bitterly, for reasons he could not explicate, David could not complete the course of study:

> The light of my intellect was progressively dimmed, for I was barred, against my will, from the academies of Torah. In several provinces, those great in learning and in wealth turned against me, and prevented me from studying Torah in the proper time, because I was considered a pariah among them . . . "and David's place was empty" [1 Samuel 20:25] in the academy.[19]



David was an outsider to the world of the Torah elite. Though apparently ordained a rabbi, he never served in any formal rabbinic capacity or as a teacher in a yeshivah. He earned his meager living as an itinerant popular preacher, yearning for a permanent position and a decent livelihood. There were doubtless many semi-intellectual figures like him throughout the ages whose failure to excel meant that their voices were never heard. Thanks to printing, David's fate was different.

Unable to become a complete scholar within the elitist institutions, David pursued a novel path to advanced Jewish education that would have been impossible before the advent of print. He collected 400 books and built a personal library. If he could not sit at the feet of his generation's leading scholars, he would still be able to learn from the greatest scholars of all the ages by studying their books. The knowledge denied him by institutions he would acquire through self-study. Moreover, his library would serve as the basis not only of his personal knowledge but also of his status in the community and his work. David proposed establishing a new type of *bet midrash* (study academy), with his library as its foundation.

To appreciate his proposal and its ramifications, it is first necessary to understand the institutional structure of Jewish education in Ashkenazic communities, including Poland, in this period. Following the traditional model, Jewish education was organized on three levels. The first was elementary, where boys from the age of three or four were educated in a series of schools (*ḥadarim;* sing. *ḥeder*), moving from learning to read and write, through Bible and basic commentaries, to Talmud and halakhah. A ḥeder could be either public, sponsored by the community, or private, financed by the parents of the boys. As a rule, in the public ḥeder the classes were large and the quality of instruction inferior. In a private ḥeder, the wealthier the parents, the more they could afford to pay the teacher (*melamed*), the better trained he would be, and the smaller the class would be. The class was heterogeneous in terms of the students' ages and ability, and the teacher spent most of the eight-to-ten-hour day moving from small group to small group, instructing each according to its level. Often he had an assistant (*behelfer*) who tended to the physical needs of the younger children and dealt with disciplinary and other problems.

At around the age of puberty, most boys completed their education and entered the world of work, mainly as assistants in their parents' businesses or trades, but also as workers for others and apprentices. Some, however, continued

on to the next level of education, the yeshivah. A yeshivah could also be either public, supported by a local Jewish community, or private, sponsored by a wealthy family, usually the parents or parents-in-law of the *rosh yeshivah* (head of the yeshivah). Two prominent rabbis of the seventeenth century described the circumstances leading to the establishment of the yeshivot they headed, one public, the other private. David ben Samuel Halevi (the Taz) described his institution in Ostróg:

> Three years ago the holy community council of the holy community of Ostróg engaged me to teach Torah among them. They established a great bet midrash for me, a place of meeting for the gathering of scholars. All good and favor to said council, who pour money from their pocket to give me enough to support myself and my large and important yeshivah.[20]

Yehoshua Falk recalled how his dream of heading a large yeshivah was fulfilled:

> And [God] placed in the heart of my father-in-law, the noble and generous head and leader of the community of Lvov and its vicinity, the famous Rabbi Yisrael bar Yosef, of blessed memory, [who] spoke with me heart to heart and said: "I have the opportunity of performing a *mitzvah,* hold on to it and I will stand at your side. I will supply you with worthy students as you desire." He decided, declared, and did it. He was my guide, giving me his stone house, beautifully built with three floors and attics, so that flocks [of students] could gather there and on it would be "hung the shields of the heroes" [Song of Songs 4:4].[21]

The curriculum of the yeshivah consisted primarily of two subjects: Talmud and its associated classical commentaries, Rashi and the Tosafists; and halakhah as explicated in several canonical works, most notably the *Arba'ah Turim,* the *Mordekhai,* the *Sha'arei Dura,* the *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol,* and the *Sefer Mitzvot Katan.* The main objective of yeshivah learning was to train a rabbi who could determine what the law should be in any given circumstances. To do this he had to be versed in the Talmud, the relevant canonical halakhic texts, and the branch of Ashkenazic custom represented by his own community. The measure of a scholar was his ability to make a halakhic ruling that took all of these sources of authority into account.

There were teachers (*alufei ha-yeshivah*) who taught Talmud and halakhah to formal classes in the yeshivah, but most of the time was devoted to tutorial-style study, with advanced students coaching those who had not reached their own level. The rosh yeshivah, in addition to teaching text to a regular class, offered a daily lesson for all students and teachers in the yeshivah. Here he engaged all present in a dialectical analysis of the section of the Talmud they had learned, challenging their understanding of the text and trying to get them to see its multiplicity of levels.



Support for a yeshivah meant providing a space, paying its head and other teachers, providing stipends for advanced students, and making provision for feeding and housing the single students, who usually numbered in the dozens and mostly came from out of town. Their accommodations were modest, typically consisting of meals taken with a local family and sleeping in that family's or another's home or in the study hall.

The single students were divided into two groups: beginners (*na'arim*) and advanced (*baḥurim*), with the latter serving as tutors to the former. At any point during their years in the yeshivah, students might leave it and enter the market and workplace. At around the age of 18, a baḥur would likely marry and receive the title *ḥaver.* This signified that he was no longer a student, learning the techniques and basic texts of Torah, but an independent scholar who could study on his own and even teach others.

Most ḥaverim left the yeshivah when they married, utilizing the dowries their brides brought to set up households and invest in commerce or income-producing concession leases, such as on inns, mills, or tax collection, which could provide a livelihood. Some went to work as religious functionaries (*kelei kodesh*): preachers, teachers, scribes, rabbis' assistants, or even rabbis in small, outlying communities. Constituting a secondary intelligentsia in Jewish society, they did not write the learned books nor teach the future leaders. They were, however, a group that could read the books and serve as a constituency for ideas set forth by the intellectual leadership. They could also popularize ideas through their contacts with the public. David Darshan was a typical member of this class.

Ḥaverim who remained in the yeshivah, supported usually by their (wives') families, belonged to the group called *lomdim* or *ḥakhamim* and represented the third level of traditional Jewish education. They did not require instruction but studied for the most part independently, though they would normally attend the rosh yeshivah's general lesson. After several years spent perfecting their skills and knowledge, the rosh yeshivah would grant them the title *moreinu,* which signified advanced rabbinic ordination. This qualified them to be communal rabbis, halakhic judges, and even yeshivah headmasters (*rashei yeshivah*) themselves.

From the seventeenth century in Poland, it became common to separate the married lomdim, institutionally, from the single students. Lomdim who continued their studies past marriage and the acquisition of the title of ḥaver attended

post-graduate institutions that were also divided into public and private. Those under the aegis of the community were called bet midrash, whereas those supported by a wealthy patron were called kloyz. The bet midrash was open to all lomdim, whereas the kloyz, being private, was selective. For several years a student would have to support himself, usually with funds provided by his wife's family. After gaining the title moreinu, he was considered a permanent member of the bet midrash or kloyz and was granted a stipend by either the bet midrash's sponsoring community or the wealthy kloyz founder. Young lomdim fresh out of a yeshivah would typically try to be accepted into a kloyz where there was a prominent scholar so as to be able to learn from him.[22]

The yeshivah, bet midrash, and kloyz were elitist institutions. As students progressed from ḥeder through yeshivah to bet midrash and kloyz, their number was constantly being reduced. Those who managed to stay the course were progressively mastering a body of knowledge that was universally respected but unfamiliar to most people. The great authority and honor accorded this knowledge lent its masters high social status. Attendance at institutions of advanced Jewish learning was one sign of a person's membership in the elite.

David's proposed bet midrash was not aimed at such people. His institution of learning was to be completely different from the traditional schools. Rather than attract the highly educated few, it was to be open to all. As David described it:

> Blessed be the Lord of the universe, Who has motivated me to establish a place of study in honor of the God of Israel in whatever place God will prepare for me. I shall bring into it, for the honor, glory and splendor of the God of heaven and earth, more than four hundred choice books. . . . And these books will be ready and available for all who desire knowledge and understanding of God from them. God willing that among them there will be found some new kinds of books that have been hidden away for some years. And though modest my worth, I will not leave the place except on Sabbath eves to prepare for the Sabbath, always being on hand for anyone seeking to know or to delve into God's Torah, to the best of the ability of my modest intelligence and limited understanding. This is why Divine Providence saw fit to enable me to come by these books, and established me in this study, despite my lowly status, in order that attachment to God might be strengthened and the life-line not ruptured completely, heaven forbid, by the excessive weight of the anxieties of subsistence and taxes and imposts, and the troubles and the uprooting and the hardships that we endure in our exile because of our many sins.
>
> And there is no time [for a person] to be engaged in the study of Torah, in order to know the commandments thoroughly. On some occasions he has the time but no book; on others he has the book, but no understanding. Thus, when he enters the bet midrash his deficiency, whatever it may be, will be supplied. And if he understands better than I do, I shall not be ashamed to learn from him. And if there be something too difficult both for the one who asks and for me, I shall take the trouble to consult the great scholars.
>
> . . . And I also undertake to be prepared every day, regularly, for at least an hour, to instruct the simple folk about some commentator or some decisor or about the Bible, in accordance with their desires and at such time as they choose, which will be of great benefit to the children of the indigent. In addition I shall outline the fine points of a book for the teachers of children, and this will be of tremendous benefit for schoolchildren who learn from them.
>
> In general, I shall not be too lazy to undertake whatever my appointed duty may be. And from this will flow many advantages for the educated and uneducated alike. The advantages to the totally uneducated have already been made clear; as to the advantages for those who have a little learning, when they come home tired and worn out from their effort to make a living, each one can take a book home with him and read it, and if he is baffled by the meaning of some text, or by some difficult word, he can jot it down on paper, even in [Yiddish], and he may send it to the bet midrash, and the messenger need not reveal the name of the person involved. And I shall explain it if I know it, and if I don't I shall make inquiry about it. . . . And sometimes even a sharp-witted and expert scholar who needs to find a saying or law or a verse, or needs to look up something in the books of wisdom or Kabbalah or the like, and he does not happen to be in possession of these books, may write it on paper, send it to the bet midrash and I shall take the trouble to look for it and find it.[23]



The study material was David's 400 books, which went far beyond the standard yeshivah curriculum of Talmud, classic commentaries, and halakhic codes. The students were not to attend classes or study in groups in the bet midrash full-time, but rather study at their leisure, on their own, from books of their choosing from the library's collection, either learning at the bet midrash or at home. If they had questions, David was to be available to answer them, and anything he could not answer he offered to forward to the local rosh yeshivah. Those with the least education, who might not feel comfortable confronting the content of the books on their own, could benefit from popular lessons that David would offer on their level. Overworked and undereducated teachers could obtain summaries of books they felt they should know about without having to read them themselves. Accomplished scholars could use the new bet midrash as a reference library, looking up verses, laws, and citations.

What David wanted to establish was a popular learning resource center, similar in concept to a modern community public library, where the printed book, rather than the teacher, was at the heart of the educational process. In principle, the student was independent of a teacher, learning by himself from books. The teacher was to enter the educational process only when the student decided to call for him in response to some difficulty. In this bet midrash, the relationship between the student and the book was to replace, to a large extent, the relationship between the student and the teacher. The role envisioned for the teacher was supplementary. There was no need for an erudite master teacher; a middling scholar like David was sufficient as tutor and manager of studies. Since the books, not the teacher, were the arbiters of knowledge, David did not need to establish his intellectual authority and was perfectly willing to entertain the possibility that the users of the books would have something to teach him. In this way, those, like him, who were low in the scholarly hierarchy could find an intellectual and educational role in a community that promised them a permanent position and a livelihood. The proposed bet midrash offered knowledge to all comers, not just to those who had advanced through the hierarchy of institutions and proven themselves worthy members of the learned elite—though these latter, too, could find the library useful. The curriculum was to include a much broader selection of texts than those routinely studied in established institutions.

David's bet midrash was evidently never established, but his proposal demonstrates new trends in learning that printing and the general accessibility of new knowledge facilitated in all sectors of education: the growing importance of books; new contexts of learning outside of children's schools and elitist institutions; new types of people seeking instruction, not just the young and the elite; the increasing popularity of independent study without benefit of a teacher; the enlarging of the canon of books to be studied and the curriculum based on it and the need for even members of the learned elite to be aware of new genres and knowledge outside of their own particular stream of tradition; and the activities of new disseminators of knowledge who required neither the credentials nor the institutions of the elite.

David also explored the new possibilities offered by print in his book, *Shir ha-Ma'alot le-David* (Cracow, 1571). This book was unique in the history of Jewish literature up to that time. It was essentially a prospectus, presenting samples of scholarly, religious, and social services that David was prepared to offer in his quest to secure a reliable livelihood. In it he gave examples of sermons, answers to legal questions (*responsa*), magical amulet inscriptions, form letters, and poems that he could write to help people get through their lives. His objective



was to showcase his talents with the hope that some influential readers would invite him to take up residence in their community, where he could offer the services demonstrated in the prospectus, for suitable remuneration.

*Shir ha-Ma'alot le-David* offers a glimpse into the areas of Jewish religion and learning, other than halakhah, that interested Polish Jews of the early modern period. David's writing, unsophisticated and aimed at a poorly educated audience, paralleled emphases in the intellectual activity of his elitist peers. With both types of writers adopting similar modes, we can be reasonably certain of the cultural trends they were attempting to address. For example, David's featuring his sermonic skills suggests the importance of oral sermons, homiletic books, and commentaries on nonhalakhic works during this period. Rabbis who were David's contemporaries showed intensive interest in Bible exegesis, producing a large number of supercommentaries on the classic medieval commentary of Rashi. By expatiating on the well-known explanations of the great medieval authority, they advanced their own interpretation of the biblical text. There was also direct exegesis of the Bible; best known is the homiletic commentary of Shlomo Ephraim Lunshitz, *Keli Yakar* (Lublin, 1602), even today one of the standard biblical commentaries printed in many Hebrew editions of the Bible. Interestingly, virtually all of these commentaries focused on the Pentateuch or the popular narrative books (*megillot*) of Ruth and Esther, implying thereby that both writers and readers were not concerned with Bible study per se but with rendering meaningful those parts of the Bible that were most closely connected to regular Jewish ritual life. By explaining the weekly Torah portion from the Pentateuch and the stories that were closely associated with the important festivals of Shavuot and Purim, the writers afforded their audiences fresh interpretations that could heighten the interest and significance of what was routine.

Another way of relating the Torah to life was through sermons. A class of religious functionary, the preacher (*darshan*), was not usually a full-fledged rabbi with the moreinu title but had a fixed role in the Polish communities. A sermon was not normally part of the worship service proper but an appendix at the end of the service or an event in its own right on a Friday evening, a Saturday afternoon, or a special occasion during the week. Listening to sermons was a way to pass the day without being drawn to sinful pursuits or slothful waste of time. In some communities (*kehillot;* sing. *kehilla*), there was a permanent preacher on the communal payroll whose job it was to give weekly sermons loosely connected to the themes of the weekly Torah portion as well as discourses on public occasions (such as weddings, funerals, and communal meetings) as required. It was to such a position that David aspired. While waiting for fortune to

smile upon him, however, he worked as an itinerant preacher. Perusal of their budgets reveals that many *kehalim* (sing. *kahal*, governing councils of the kehillot) hired such men to spend a Sabbath or even several in their communities. Town rabbis—whose main duties were to serve as judge (the standard formal designation of a community rabbi was *av bet din*, or chairman of the court), halakhic decisor, and teacher—were not primarily responsible for giving sermons. Therefore, when the rabbi did speak in public, his appearance was a sign of the importance of the occasion. Customarily, he would give a sermon on the Sabbath before Yom Kippur (Shabbat Shuvah) and the one before Passover (Shabbat ha-Gadol) in order to introduce these upcoming holy days with their special halakhic requirements (particularly fasting on Yom Kippur and refraining from leaven on Passover) and profound religious messages in as serious and thoroughgoing a manner as possible. In addition, if the community was faced with some catastrophe or success, it was typically the rabbi who marked the event. Although the oral, Yiddish, topical, and occasional natures of the genre were obstacles to transferring sermons to print, there were famous preachers and some important collections or adaptations, most notably, the books of Rabbi Lunshitz mentioned above.

Sermons usually involved moral exhortation. This was a main motif in Jewish literature of the age in both Hebrew and Yiddish. (Many of the books were printed in dual-language editions.) Whether in the form of ethical wills, text interpretations, monographs (or their abridgments) on the moral life, codes of ethical behavior, or manuals of ritual behavior, moral and conduct literature flourished in Poland. Examples are *Yesh Nohalin* (Prague, 1615), Avraham Horowitz's famous ethical will distilling the wisdom of his life experience for his descendants; Isaac ben Elyakum's *Lev Tov* (Prague, 1620), detailing the proper attitudes and behavior that a person should display in family and social life; and *Kav ha-Yashar* (Frankfurt am Main, 1705) by Tzvi Hirsh Kaidanover, a passionate exhortation to live a life full of the fear of God.

## A NEW CANON

*Shir ha-Ma'alot le-David* is a significant cultural document, however, not only for what it presents but also for what it represents. A book such as this would be inconceivable in manuscript form. It has no content in the sense of a thesis to be explicated or a classic text to be elucidated. It was not written with the intention that its wisdom would take on permanent form and be available to future generations. This is a book providing information about erudition, not erudition itself, and presumes that there is an audience seeking such information. *Shir ha-*



*Ma'alot le-David* could only be justified economically because printing made publication relatively inexpensive and because the outlay that was required was an investment for David, akin to advertising or to sending a portfolio to a range of prospective employers. The book's contents would not enshrine David in the annals of scholarship but would attract attention to his talents and, he hoped, secure him a lucrative position in a community.

David's activities show that, in Poland by the sixteenth century, both the form and the function of the traditional Ashkenazic canonical texts had changed. In the late medieval period, such texts were utilized as the basis for the lessons of the teachers in the yeshivah. Each teaching scholar transmitted the text to his students along with his own interpretations, explanations, and excursuses. It was this teaching that was the real text. This explication, called *hagahot* (glosses), was recorded by disciples in the margins of the manuscript page. When the text was later re-copied, these comments were often incorporated into the main body of the text.[24] The individualization of canonical texts by those who taught them explains why the manuscript era produced multiple recensions of the same work, such as the Mordekhai of Rabbi Samuel, the Mordekhai of Rabbi Samson, the Rhenish Mordekhai, and the Austrian Mordekhai.

With the advent of print, the text as written by the author, or edited by the editor, was set permanently. The distinction between text and commentary could not be blurred. Once printed, the book stood on its own, detached from the rosh yeshivah. He was no longer the single authoritative agent of transmission nor, in effect, an editor or secondary author of the work. As David's proposal illustrates, the book was no longer a repository of tradition for the learned; it was now available to anyone to study and teach it. The very suggestion of the new, popular bet midrash with no bona fide scholar to act as central authority shows how printed books had the potential to threaten the authority of inherited traditions, established institutions, and vested leaders.

In addition to broadening the audience for learning and enabling students to become independent of teachers, printed books also introduced new subjects and new information to all, both the learned and the half-learned. In Jewish terms this meant that, thanks to the intensive activity of the printing houses of Italy, the yeshivot of Ashkenaz and Poland of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries became awash in books by medieval Sephardic scholars who had previously been only names or occasional citations. Maimonides, Naḥmanides, Saadiah Gaon, Don Isaac Abravanel, Rabbi Isaac Arama, Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, Rabbi David Kimḥi, Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret, Rabbi Baḥya ibn Paquda, and many others could now be studied directly and in depth. Ashkenazic readers now had access to books of philosophy, biblical and midrashic interpretation,

medieval science, Kabbalah, homiletics and morality, Hebrew grammar, Talmud study, and halakhah that broadened the range of subjects and introduced new approaches to studying them. Some of these books emphasized rationalism; others promoted mysticism.[25]

Moreover, scholars would now have to consider many more authorities of the past when producing new knowledge. In effect, a new library of canonical texts was created, much larger in scope and variegated in terms of the traditions it drew upon than the medieval Ashkenazic works that had served as the basis of the traditional Ashkenazic intellectual endeavor. This new canon had far-reaching ramifications for Polish-Jewish culture. It had the potential to alter the study curriculum, the methods of study, the process by which Jewish law was determined, and the practice of Judaism itself.

Sometime in the third quarter of the sixteenth century, Rabbi Solomon Luria (ca. 1510–1573), who was known as the Maharshal and who served as rabbi in several important Polish-Lithuanian communities, wrote a letter to Rabbi Moses Isserles in response to his mention in passing of an Aristotelian concept. What Luria wrote may strike the outsider as an overreaction:

> I received your message. . . . I saw in it piercing words and I felt as if a razor were in my flesh, for I was surrounded by clusters of wisdoms, most of them foreign in strange vessels, while the native wisdoms are deserted. . . . I said, "Woe is me, that my eyes have seen in addition to what my ears have heard, that the main delight and fragrance are the words of the unclean one, and it has become like a perfume to the holy Torah in the mouths of the sages of Israel, may Heaven save us from this great sin." . . . And now I have seen written in the prayers and prayerbooks of the students the prayer of Aristotle and this is the fault of the leader like you who encourages them since you mix Aristotle with the words of the living God.[26]

The intensity of this outburst is probably due to its being part of a major controversy that originated in the sixteenth-century yeshivot of Poland and Ashkenaz but soon went public. It is usually referred to as the polemic over "philosophy." However, another vehement expression of this argument makes it clear that the dispute was not over the question of the legitimacy of philosophic study but over the legitimacy of the newly developing canon.

In April 1559, the rabbi of Poznan, Aaron Land, in a sermon delivered on Shabbat ha-Gadol, launched an attack on this new canon. The original sermon has not survived, but it was paraphrased by Abraham Horowitz in his bitter diatribe against Land and his like-minded son-in-law, Joseph Ashkenazi:



> And not as was preached by the great ass, the father-in-law of the said fool, on the Shabbat ha-Gadol of the year [1559], who said in his impudence that no Jew should study anything but the Talmud alone, and that all other books are books of Homer. Why he even said that no Jew should study the Twenty-four [books of the Bible] frequently or closely.[27]

Land was proposing a departure from the accepted new trend of broadening the legitimate Jewish canon with books on new subjects. Branding anything nontalmudic as "Homer" or "philosophy"—and hence illegitimate—he advocated that Polish Jews narrow their field of study to the Talmud only. He even sought to deflate the newfound interest in Bible study. As often happens, his conservative response to the perceived danger of a new intellectual trend was no less radical than the innovation; even non-Talmud books that were traditionally studied in the yeshivot, such as Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed,* were to be jettisoned.

Notably, for cultural conservatives like Land and Luria, the books that represented the greatest threat to the traditional cultural constellation were not "philosophical" at all, but halakhic—namely, the new halakhic codes of the Sephardic Rabbi Joseph Karo. The problem with these books was not the introduction of alien ideas but something more ominous: a fundamental change in the way halakhah was decided and in how the practice based on those decisions would look.

The basic book of Jewish law, the Talmud, is a dense text that is not organized according to a strictly logical order but consists of complicated discussions between authorities attempting to determine what the law in any given situation should be. It includes arguments, logical exercises, anecdotes, legal and historical precedents, legends, exegesis, and homiletics. It is often difficult to follow the discussions, and the final determination of the law is not readily apparent. It is understandable, then, that throughout the Middle Ages there had been attempts to codify Jewish law in part or in whole. Typically, an author would organize the laws by topic in logical categories, summarize the laws in each category, and present them in straightforward form with little or no discussion. However, since manuscript books were intended as instructional tools for the yeshivah teachers and their students, and as research aids for rabbis deciding legal questions, they were not really the "final" version of the texts. The text was what was *taught* and not what was originally *written.* With regard to determining contemporary halakhah, these books were part of an array of resources, including individual decisions by noted authorities in responsum form, in manuscript, that rabbis used to resolve legal problems on an ad hoc basis. The leading early-

sixteenth-century Polish rabbis, Jacob Polak and Shalom Shakhna, consciously refrained from writing general halakhic summaries so as not to displace the medieval works and short-circuit the traditional decision-making process. They believed that rabbis should continue to consult the Talmud and all subsequent sources regarded as canonical in the Ashkenazic tradition.

With the popularization of print in the sixteenth century, new attempts were made to codify all of halakhah. The most successful were those of Karo, who as a child was one of the Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal. He lived in various places in the Ottoman Empire and by 1538 was in Safed. In 1555, Karo published the *Bet Yosef.* Ostensibly a gloss on the canonical *Arba'a Turim* code, this was really an attempt to trace the origin of each rule, present alternative opinions, and decide what the final law should be. Ten years later, Karo produced his most influential work, the *Shulḥan Arukh* (lit., prepared table). Much briefer than the *Bet Yosef,* presenting the bare law without sources and without alternative opinions, Karo insisted that this book was to serve as a practical guide to proper religious behavior for untutored students and a convenient review tool for the learned. Its outstanding feature was that it presented "the fixed, final law, without speech and without words."[28]

To those who objected to the new canon that printing was helping to impose, Karo's books were anathema. They were not, in fact, mere study or legal aids intended to serve a supplementary role in helping teachers and legal authorities perform their duties. They set the text, admitting of no modification through oral transmission, and emphasized Sephardic legal traditions. Moreover, they put the law into the hands of all comers. Anyone who could read might think that he knew what the law should be. This implied the possibility of a "cookbook" approach to deciding halakhah; look up the law by topic in the code and then apply it by deduction to the situation at hand.

To this Luria protested:

> From the days of Ravina and Rav Ashi [the editors of the Talmud] there is no tradition to decide according to one of the geonim or later sages; rather according to he whose words prove to be clearly based on the Talmud.[29]

In other words, there can be no one rabbi and no one code that should be regarded as *a priori* authoritative in every situation. An authority must be judged on his fidelity to the original talmudic sources and the cogency of his reasoning. Sometimes it is one sage who succeeds in arriving at the best result and sometimes another. The law cannot be determined by facile deductions and analogies made on the basis of putatively archetypal rules. Every situation must be carefully weighed on its own merits in the light of talmudic law and its authoritative interpretation throughout the ages.



Therefore, rather than summarize or codify the laws, Luria composed his *Yam shel Shlomo,* going through the Talmud section by section (he did not complete the entire work) and adducing what every canonical authority had to say about each section. In this way he hoped to refocus attention on the Talmud, reinforce loyalty to the Ashkenazic halakhic tradition, and assert the principle that halakhah should be decided by a process of painstaking erudition with the Talmud always at its foundation.

Luria's approach countered the new code by rejecting it and the methodological assumptions that underlay it. Other Polish rabbis also thought Karo's work problematic but considered codification in the age of print unavoidable and even desirable. Isserles objected to Karo's privileging of Sephardic halakhic tradition, realizing that, because of the nature of print, inexperienced students would read the *Shulḥan Arukh* on their own and assume that its rulings were normative "without controversy."[30] However, Isserles did agree that a new code was necessary. He had already made his view clear in a previous book, *Torat haḤatat,* an attempt to synthesize ritual law that was to replace the medieval *Sha'arei Dura:*

> One says this and another says that . . . one prohibits and one permits . . . whoever has not the palate to taste their sweet but largely obscure words cannot reach conclusions from these numerous glosses [on *Sha'arei Dura*]. . . . Time comes to an end, but their words are endless, for they have composed for that book commentaries and appendices and many students have jumped up and attributed nonsensical things to it.[31]

The problem with *Sha'arei Dura,* and with the entire medieval Ashkenazic halakhic corpus, was centuries of accumulated confusing glosses and commentaries. From this jumble it was next to impossible to learn the law in a systematic manner. Isserles' solution was to coopt the *Shulḥan Arukh.* He wrote a companion work, called the *Mappa* (lit., tablecloth), which introduced Ashkenazic traditions and took into account customary practice. He did not publish this as a separate book. Instead, he created a post-printing version of a traditional medieval annotated manuscript. Beginning with the Cracow edition of the *Shulḥan Arukh* that appeared in the 1570s, Isserles' glosses were printed as a natural continuation of Karo's text, paragraph by paragraph. Isserles took advantage of the *Shulḥan Arukh* to create a new Ashkenazic law book that would replace the confusion of medieval codes and commentaries, presenting "the proper order of all

the laws . . . in a manner easily comprehensible to every man be he small or great."[32] This new canon would not be merely a manual to guide everyday practice, as Karo had proposed, but would serve as the textbook of halakhah in the yeshivot. The success of the *Shulḥan Arukh* cum *Mappa* (i.e., set table plus tablecloth) in becoming the standard source for Jewish law in Ashkenaz and Poland is evident in the appearance over the next two centuries of new editions of the *Shulḥan Arukh–Mappa* that included the glosses of various rabbis adjacent to the main text.

With this new compendium of halakhic sources available for study, the nature of Talmud study in the yeshivah now changed. Traditionally, the lesson was directed toward deriving the law. With the *Shulḥan Arukh–Mappa* and attendant commentaries now the main source for determining practical law, this function became secondary. Those who needed to know the law so as to be able to serve as communal rabbis concentrated on the new code with its accumulating glosses.

Talmud study in the yeshivah was now directed at explicating the text from every conceivable angle. The objective was no longer to understand how the text formed the foundation for a particular area of halakhah; instead, it was to uncover the subtleties of the text itself: its logic, its internal consistency, the relationship between various passages even if they were ostensibly unconnected, and the contradictions entailed by competing interpretations of the text. This analysis was accomplished by means of *pilpul* (casuistry). Although it had always been a component of the yeshivah curriculum, used to sharpen students' thinking skills, pilpul now became the central mode of study and the focus of bitter dispute.

Earlier I mentioned that the rosh yeshivah customarily gave a daily lesson in which he probed and challenged students' understanding of the text and tried to get them to think about it more profoundly. By the mid-seventeenth century, this central lesson consisted of a lecture by the rosh yeshivah during which, in the manner of pilpul, he posed numerous difficulties inherent in the passage under study and then proposed an interpretation that would resolve the logical, textual, and interpretive problems. Often such resolution entailed far-fetched assumptions and hairsplitting reasoning; it did not necessarily bear a connection to the practical legal implications of the passage. With pilpul at its core, the main track of yeshivah study—Talmud—became a quintessentially intellectual endeavor, study for study's sake. Study for the practical purpose of knowing or deciding the halakhah, based on the code literature, was secondary.

This innovation met with opposition. As the chronicler David Gans of Prague noted, this style of pilpul study "was not acceptable to all the scholars and men of integrity. Many of the heads of the exile, the great men of the world, the elders and paragons of our generations do not agree with it." The two most prominent opponents were Luria in Poland and Rabbi Judah Loew (the Maharal) in Prague. In their institutions they retained both the traditional medieval halakhic canon and the nexus between Talmud study and determination of the halakhah. For them, pilpul continued to be an ancillary tool, and the objective of learning the Talmud text was to derive the law.[33]



The tremendous energy expended in the Polish institutions of learning of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on controversies over the canon of study, the proper means for learning the law, and the objective of yeshivah study bespeaks the central place of rabbinic texts in Polish-Jewish society. The denizens of the yeshivot were an elite, relatively small in number, but the primary cultural message to all Jews was that obedience to God's commands was the central task of life, in theory at least, for everyone. The general consensus was that the sacred texts constituted the articulation of God's commands and that the accepted method of studying these texts was the way to comprehend their import. Even those who did not study were convinced that "the tiny letters" (referring to the print of the holy books) were the map to the path of righteousness and holiness. Not all of the holy books were, however, part and parcel of the normal yeshivah curriculum.

## JEWISH MYSTICISM IN POLAND

In 1598 in Cracow a boy named Abraham Rapoport (destined to become one of the leading rabbinic lights of seventeenth-century Polish Jewry) delivered his bar mitzvah homily (*derasha*). At the climax of the sermon, when he sought to drive home the point that a person is obligated to struggle with his evil inclination and purify his soul, this thirteen-year-old quoted a prooftext from the *Zohar*, the chief text of Jewish mysticism—Kabbalah.[34]

Kabbalah (lit., reception) was traditionally the most elitist area of Jewish study. Hoary teachers who had received the mystical tradition from their own mentors would carefully select from among the most advanced students those who were to be instructed out of manuscripts that had been copied by trusted initiates. Mystical adepts who were both ascetic and punctilious in their ritual observance were viewed as the spiritual avant-garde of the Jewish community. By the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, conventicles of such ascetic, mystical pietists were to be found in many larger communities. Supported by the official kehillot, these small groups of men bore an aura of holiness and engaged in Kabbalah-inspired study and ritual practice that was believed to redound to the credit of all of the Jews of their locale. They were the spiritual elite of their

communities; even rabbis sought their insights. How, then, did a bar mitzvah boy gain casual familiarity with the *Zohar*?

Rapoport's bar mitzvah speech is a minor expression of an important cultural phenomenon in Jewish communities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the popularization of mysticism.[35] We can recall that David Darshan, a good indicator of nonelite interests, had singled out Kabbalah both as a discipline for which his library could serve as a resource and as an area in which he had expertise. For the Jewish elite, the fact that members of the secondary intelligentsia like David could claim familiarity with Kabbalah was an issue equal in rank to the dispute over "philosophy." It became a perennial topic of debate for Ashkenazic Jewry as a whole. In the mid-seventeenth century, the official preacher of the Cracow Jewish community, Berekhia Berakh, in his book *Zera Berakh* deplored

> . . . the scandal of Kabbalah study . . . for thus it was called "Kabbalah," its name shows its nature, that it was transmitted from person to person going back to Moses who received it from Sinai and there is no warrant to reveal it except to "one in a city and two from a family" [Jeremiah 3:14] and no one may innovate in Kabbalah on his own but rather must hint at [new ideas] by way of allusion from scripture or rabbinic sayings. But now a few people who are famous in their own eyes use the crown of Torah as a tool to earn a living and compose books about Kabbalah and they get permission to print these books and go around the towns distributing them . . . and they reveal the hidden and the mysterious before the great and the small. Moreover they mix their own words that they invent from their heart with the words of the Kabbalah to the point where one cannot tell which are the words of the true sages and which the words that were added.[36]

Berekhia was bemoaning a phenomenon that had begun in 1558, when the *Zohar* first began to roll off the press in Mantua. This "hidden midrash" was the fundamental text of Kabbalah; its appearance in print removed it from the sphere of the elite initiates and threw it into the public domain. In addition, the recrudescence of mystical activity, centering on the figures of Rabbi Moses Cordovero and Rabbi Isaac Luria in the sixteenth century in Palestine, radiated to Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There had always been a tacit assumption that Kabbalah was the key to the divine secrets. Now anyone could achieve esoteric access; especially since, as Berekhia complained, a whole secondary literature—in print—developed. Study aids in the form of lexicons, introductions, summaries, and indexes lowered the threshold of preparation needed to embark upon the study of Kabbalah. Works of interpretation, explanation, commentary, and even Yiddish paraphrase of the *Zohar* and other works put the kabbalistic message in more comprehensible form. In addition, manuscripts were both widely copied and printed. All of this literary activity testifies to widespread and intense demand for Kabbalah knowledge. As Mordekhai Yaffe, rabbi of Poznan, explained in defending his decision to write a commentary on the works of the fourteenth-century Italian kabbalist Menaḥem Recanati:



> What can I do in the face of the insistence of wise and understanding ones, who say to me every day "Why do you hide them [kabbalistic teachings] like pearls? Is not the entire people supreme holy beings, perfect in faith, and God, the master of masters, resides among them? Bring out [the teachings] to us that we may know those revelations."[37]

A plethora of specifically kabbalistic books was published; moreover, kabbalistic doctrines, terms, references, and interpretations began appearing in conventional homiletic and halakhic rabbinic works. By the early seventeenth century, Rabbi Joel Sirkes could assert that the Kabbalah was "the source of all the Torah and its essence." Rabbi Sheftel Horowitz, in his ethical will to his children, declared, "I order you to learn the wisdom of Kabbalah because a man who does not learn this wisdom is not God-fearing. . . . *Sefer ha-Pardes* should be for you like the *Shulḥan Arukh*."[38]

The popularization of Kabbalah reached its peak in the second half of the seventeenth century, in the wake of the Sabbatian messianic episode—which, notwithstanding its failure, did much to spread Lurianic kabbalistic doctrines—with the publication of religious manuals prescribing both ethical and ritual behavior based to a large extent on kabbalistic lore. The flourishing of this conduct literature in both Hebrew and Yiddish is proof that not only scholars and semi-scholars like David Darshan but also the rank-and-file members of the community wanted a share in the Kabbalah. These people were not about to study Kabbalah, but they did believe in its importance and its authority and therefore wanted their ritual practice to reflect its doctrine. It is the adoption of Kabbalah-based practices that is the true measure of the integration of kabbalistic modes into the culture of Polish Jewry.[39]

The desire of most people to behave in accordance with requirements set forth in kabbalistic books explains the great popularity of abridgments of Kabbalah-inspired works. For example, the *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit* (popularly known by the Hebrew acronym *SheLaH*), written by Isaiah Horowitz and first printed in Amsterdam in 1649, is a collection of moral instructions, homilies, interpretations, theology, and customs based on kabbalistic sources that was

widely studied in Poland and elsewhere in Ashkenaz until the modern period. Itself a popular reworking of kabbalistic ideas, the *SheLaH* was later made even more accessible to the poorly educated by means of several abridgments published in both Hebrew and Yiddish. The most popular Yiddish one was reprinted more than 40 times. Abridgments left out the theory and kept in the practice. Common people did not need to understand the philosophy of the doctrine; they trusted the rabbis and intellectuals to do that. They needed to know the ramifications of the theory for everyday life: what prayer to say for a sick person, how to guarantee a safe birth, what mourning ritual to observe, how to arrange one's estate prior to death, what the proper meditation was to intone before performing a particular mitzvah—in short, what the Kabbalah had to add to every halakhic category that appears in the *Shulḥan Arukh*.[40] People wanted to feel that they were doing the right thing in accordance with the most authoritative (i.e., kabbalistic) approach to Judaism.

They also believed that, as the key to divine secrets, Kabbalah could be applied in a practical manner to solve life's problems. It was the demand for so-called practical Kabbalah that underlay the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century proliferation of ba'alei shem. These Jewish shamans used practical Kabbalah to establish contact with the divine spheres and affect the course of life here on earth. Ba'alei shem were specialists in magical defense, knowing how to wield kabbalistic knowledge and rituals to protect people from the machinations of the demons who lurked everywhere. Whether it was healing disease, exorcising dybbuks, inducing fertility, guaranteeing material success, or preventing stillbirth, ba'alei shem offered men and women a means for dealing with the exigencies of life.

For example, Hillel Ba'al Shem, who traveled around communities in Volhynia and Poland in the 1730s and 1740s, detailed the various names of God (and even illustrations of supernatural beings) that must be written into different types of amulets in order to gain protection in dangerous situations, such as sickness, birth, or travel. In a different vein, Hillel offered the following means of dealing with epilepsy: the person with the problem should take a mixture of certain herbs "and smoke it all together until the smoke goes into his mouth and nose and into his entire body. In this way we weaken the alien powers and all the demons; and the magical spells and evil spirits and the forces of defilement are made to flee and driven away from a person's body." With regard to love, his advice to a woman seeking to gain a certain man's affections was: "If you wash your breasts in wine and give it to him to drink, he will love you with a great love." To a man: "If you smear your genitals with goose or wolf bile mixed with oil and have relations with the woman, she will love you."[41] The Ba'al Shem Tov (Israel ben Eliezer), the putative founder of Hasidism, went beyond helping individuals, employing his connections with the divine to try to avert or attenuate plagues and persecutions facing the Jewish community as a whole. This was apparently one of the features of his activity that singled him out as a ba'al shem par excellence.[42]



Ba'alei shem were either itinerants like Hillel or they settled in one town, as the Ba'al Shem Tov did in Międzybóż in Podolia, and people spent a considerable amount of time consulting them and following their instructions in an attempt to keep life on an even keel. In *Shir ha-Ma'alot le-David,* David Darshan, ostensibly a preacher, gave sample amulet inscriptions (*kameot*) that he had written as a further qualification for being granted a position in a community. His easy mixing of homiletics and magic and his presumption that expertise in practical Kabbalah was a recommendation for public employment are indications of how much a part of normal life Kabbalah and the magical theurgy it entailed had become. In the yeshivot, the rabbis were integrating kabbalistic considerations into their textual interpretations. In synagogues, marketplaces, and homes, ordinary people were integrating Kabbalah not only into their prayers and ceremonial observances but also into their dealings with other people and with the forces of nature and the Divine. Life was lived in a kabbalistic idiom.

## GENDER DISTINCTIONS

In consonance with traditional Jewish culture, gender distinctions were omnipresent in the culture of the Polish Jews. Each sex had a sphere in which it was dominant: men were in charge of the public arena, both the synagogue and the communal institutions, and women managed the home and family life. Both appeared in the marketplace but, taking the family as the typical economic unit, usually the husband was the senior partner and the wife the junior one. For example, if the family leased a tavern, the woman would be primarily responsible for preparing the food and sleeping quarters and serving the customers, while her husband would handle the supplies and finances. Perhaps they would supplement their income with side occupations such as petty moneylending, typically a woman's responsibility, and some kind of mercantile activity, usually conducted by a man. If the couple were storekeepers, it was common for the wife to manage the store in the marketplace while the husband secured credit and went on buying trips. If he were a tradesman, a baker or a tailor, for example, his wife was often his chief assistant without benefit of title.

The overall cultural goal was for people of both sexes to subscribe to the same

beliefs and values, to understand and practice the basic halakhic obligations incumbent on all Jews, and to perpetuate these in the family setting. One of the consequences of the spread of printing was the creation of new tools to enable both men and women to arrive at this goal, albeit via different paths. For women, especially, the religious library, largely produced in Poland and fully available there, signified a new sense among communal leaders of the importance of cultivating female participation in religious life, and it signified their concerted effort to do so.

Different tools for religious expression were placed at the disposal of men and women, respectively. A boy went to a ḥeder, where the curriculum prepared him to participate in the public religious life of the community. Literacy in Hebrew enabled him to take an active part in worship services, follow the Torah reading, understand learned discourse, and perhaps belong to a study group. If he continued on to yeshivah study, he might gain the facility for independent study of rabbinic texts. His basic religious books were the *Siddur* (prayer book), *Ḥumash* (Pentateuch) with Rashi's commentary, Mishnah, Talmud, and, from the late sixteenth century on, the various Kabbalah-based manuals of devotional practices, alluded to in the previous section of this chapter.[43]

For a girl, the basic religious vehicle was Yiddish. She learned to read through informal instruction by a family member, the efforts of a private tutor, or, on occasion, short-term enrollment in a ḥeder—just long enough for her to master phonetic Hebrew reading that she could apply to the already familiar Yiddish language, written in Hebrew characters. Women (and uneducated men) could concentrate on the message of the Bible thanks to the Bible-inspired printed Yiddish books that began to appear in the sixteenth century.

The very first of these, *Mirkeves ha-Mishne* (Cracow, 1534), was a dictionary and concordance of the Bible. There were also translations and epic poems, like the *Melokhim Bukh* (Augsburg, 1543) and *Shmuel Bukh* (Augsburg, 1544), that retold biblical stories in a contemporary language and style. Other books purported to be translations but were actually reworkings of the biblical text with midrashic interpretations, legends, and explanations woven into the narrative. The most famous of these, *Tzeno u-Reno* (Lublin, before 1622), was specifically aimed at women. It is one of the Jewish bestsellers of all time, having gone through more than 200 editions from its initial publication, around the turn of the seventeenth century, through the twentieth.[44]

In addition, books like *Azhoras Noshim* (Cracow, 1535), *Seder Noshim* (Cracow, 1541), and *Seder Mitzvos Noshim* (Cracow, 1577) were devoted to analysis and explication of commandments (*mitzvot*) especially incumbent upon women. Morality anthologies and manuals, such as the *Brantspiegel* (Cracow, 1596) and



*Menekes Rivka* (Prague, 1609), contained moral admonitions, instructions for daily conduct, and illustrative didactic anecdotes. The collections of prayers called *tehines* contained occasional prayers to be said at times of religious significance. Pious story anthologies like the *Mayseh Bukh* (Basel, 1602) provided entertainment with a message.[45]

These two corpora, the Hebrew one written exclusively by men and the Yiddish one primarily by them, were calculated to convey to those who studied them fundamentally similar religious knowledge and values. A male who learned *Ḥumash* with Rashi and a female who read the *Tzeno u-Reno* would both be familiar with the rabbinic interpretation of Scripture that formed the foundation of the Jewish religion. The famous dicta of *Pirkei Avot,* learned by males directly from the text, were translated and transmitted to females in the Yiddish books. The *Mayseh Bukh* included many of the famous rabbinic tales. The *Brantspiegel,* an encyclopedic handbook aimed to guide Jewish women's thought and action in daily life and through the seasons of the year, presented much halakhically derived material. Some teḥines contained passages, based on the *Zohar* and other classic kabbalistic works, that were adapted from the Yiddish paraphrases of kabbalistic sources.[46]

The texts aimed at women, and popular among them, display a virtually complete internalization of the fundamentals of religious faith and categories, including those that are male-oriented. Women's prayers display a highly developed concept of a personal, immanent God who is accessible and merciful. Judging from women's liturgy and religious literature, they were familiar with biblical cosmogony and cosmology. Women understood the Jewish system of divine reward and punishment and the connection between proper ritual observance and Redemption. Morality books addressed to women urged them to find vicarious fulfillment by supporting the religious activities of their husbands and sons.

If, to the conceptual knowledge that could be gained from books, we add the practical knowledge of ritual observance—such as *kashrut,* the Sabbath, and holidays—that was learned mostly by example or through oral instruction, we can assert that Polish-Jewish women and men in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries started off with a common body of knowledge, commitments, and practices. They were members of the same religion, willing to accept the same basic obligations and believing in the same theology.

However, as they acquired their religious edification differently, they also expressed their religious commitment differently. Take prayer. Men prayed mainly in public as part of a thrice-daily quorum in the synagogue, according to a fixed liturgy, composed by anonymous ancient authors, with variety in the service

governed by a predetermined ritual calendar. The whole point was to pray as one's fathers had, to perpetuate the liturgical tradition. Changing the formula of the prayers would disqualify them, and even the introduction of cantorial melodies that necessitated the repetition of certain words could be an issue of controversy.

Women, however, typically attended the synagogue only on the Sabbath and holidays. Mostly they prayed individually at home, in the ritual bath (*mikveh*), or at the cemetery. Even when they did come to the synagogue, women did not usually join in the Hebrew liturgy with the men. They responded aloud to prayers led by a female leader (*zogerke*) or recited newly composed, individual prayers in Yiddish, the teḥines. Originally popular in western Ashkenaz and later also published in Poland, collections of teḥines began appearing in the late sixteenth century. Teḥines of Polish origin, some of them written by women, date from the eighteenth century. These tend to concentrate on women's ritual obligations and customs (the three female mitzvot: *ḥallah,* separating a portion of baking dough; *hadlakah,* Sabbath and festival candle-lighting; and *niddah,* ritual purification after menstruation), on such female customs as *kneytlakh legn* (measuring graves with candlewick), and on events in the synagogue and the liturgical calendar. Central to Polish teḥines were the themes of penitence and redemption, especially in connection with the penitential season preceding the High Holy Days in the autumn.[47]

Teḥines offered women a means of religious expression that paralleled men's but was much more directly reflective of eighteenth-century beliefs and women's particular consciousness and concerns than were the texts of the classical prayers said primarily by men. Although they contain no overt feminist protest against the male monopoly of the prestigious roles in Judaism (priest, prophet, sage), teḥines do at times imagine women in more powerful and honored roles than was their experience in real life. Thus, while retaining the custom of supplicating God in the name of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the teḥines often add the matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah and beseech them to play an active role in turning God's favorable attention to the supplicant. Some teḥines make comparisons between the woman engaged in the feminine religious activities of ḥallah and hadlakah and the high priest offering sacrifices or lighting the Temple menorah.[48] For example, the very popular cycle of prayers called *Teḥine Shloyshe She'orim* contains passages like the following:

> [From teḥine to be said when lighting Sabbath candles:]
> Master of the Universe, may the mitzvah of my lighting candles be accepted as equivalent to the mitzvah of the High Priest when he lit the candles in the precious Temple. As his observance was accepted so may mine be accepted. "Your words are a candle at my feet and a light for my path" means that Your words are a candle at my feet so that all my children may walk in God's path, and may the mitzvah of my candlelighting be accepted so that my children's eyes may be illumined by the precious holy Torah.
>
> May the merit of the beloved Sabbath lights protect me, just as the beloved Sabbath protected Adam and kept him from premature death. So may we merit, by lighting the candles, to protect our children, that they may be enlightened by the study of Torah, and may their planets shine in the heavens so that they may be able to earn a decent living for their wives and children.
>
> [From teḥine to be said when preparing candles for Yom Kippur:]
> Through the merit of preparing a wick for the sake of our mother Rachel, and because of her merit, may You fulfill the verse "And the children will return to their borders," which means, through the merit of Rachel, God—praised be He—will return us to our land. Amen.
>
> [From teḥine for the monthly new moon:]
> Upon me, so-and-so, rests the responsibility to praise Your Holy Name with fear and awe, so that I may benefit from Your mercy. I am filled with sins, with our many sins, and You are called the Lord of Mercy and You teach us the way of penitence, for You are compassionate and You have taught us the way of repentance. So I, so-and-so, come before Your venerable Name to pray for myself and my husband and children. . . . May this be a favorable time before the throne of Your glory for You to forgive our sins as You promised Moses our Teacher at that holy moment: "I have forgiven as you requested." Forgive our sins as we confess them and receive our prayers as You received the prayer of Hannah when she said: "I am a woman bitter of soul. A woman of bitter spirit am I." . . .
>
> May God grant that in our days and in the days of our children, we may live to see the Temple built and the High Priest perform the service there.
>
> May I, so-and-so, and all the righteous women live to pray there through the merit of our matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah.[49]

The difference between the male and female religious spheres is also expressed in the key domain of study, a primary activity. Men usually studied in a public bet midrash in the company of peers. Their Hebrew or Aramaic study texts, many composed centuries earlier, required a hefty investment of time and effort just to be read with comprehension. The women's Yiddish texts posed no

such linguistic problem; women could study them on their own and often read them aloud to their children on Saturday afternoons. These texts provided a good foundation for the knowledge and practice of Judaism, but women's study, which consisted only of Yiddish reading, was not considered to be study at all; it was an act of piety, akin to prayer. In the social configuration of the time, men studied, women prayed. This, reciprocally, both expressed and perpetuated men's greater social prestige.

A further expression of the difference between male and female religious life is the ideal image of the sexes proffered by prescriptive texts and eulogies. A man was supposed to be a tireless scholar, or at least an honest—and successful—businessman, and, in either case, a rigorous performer of the commandments. A woman was expected to live up to the 20 or so ideal characteristics sketched out in chapter 31 of the Book of Proverbs, known by its opening words, *Eishet Ḥayil* (A Woman of Valor). In the period under discussion, however, several of these traits were typically emphasized. The ideal woman was to be clever, wise, energetic, of good family pedigree (meaning she was related to scholars), beautiful, modest, pious, and charitable. The last attribute probably reflected the charity customs of the time, which consisted primarily of providing meals for poor people who were sent to one's home by communal officials.

A sense of the differences in religious life for men and women can be gleaned from some autobiographical writings dating from the late eighteenth century. The Polish-Jewish wine merchant Ber of Bolechów (1723–1805) described his religious behavior when he was in his early twenties thus: "[I] conducted myself as a God-fearing man, attending every morning and evening the service of the synagogue and praying with great devotion. I was deeply engaged in studying the Bible, the Mishnah, the *Gemara,* and the laws of the *Shulḥan Arukh,* besides other, ethical works."[50]

Compare this brief profile, with its emphasis on public ritual and the study of canonical texts, to what another eighteenth-century figure, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, the Gaon of Vilna, mandated for his daughters in a letter to his wife. From his words, it is clear that the ideal female would concentrate on her character and morals, with a minimum concern for the classic study texts, and would prefer private rather than public ritual behavior. He wrote:

> I also make an especial and emphatic request that you train your daughters to the avoidance of objurgations, oaths, lies, or contention. Let their whole conversation be conducted in peace, love, affability, and gentleness. I possess many moral books with Yiddish [translations]; let them read these regularly; above all on the Sabbath—the holy of holies—they should occupy themselves with these ethical books exclusively. For a curse, an oath, or a lie, strike them; show no softness in the matter. . . . [U]se your utmost rigor in their moral training, and may Heaven help you to success! So with other matters as the avoidance of slander and gossip; the regular recital of grace before and after meals, the reading of the Shema, all with true devotion. The fundamental rule, however, is that they not gad about in the streets, but incline their ear to your words and honor you and my mother and all their elders. Urge them to obey all that is written in the moral books. . . .
>
> It is also better for your daughter not to go to synagogue for there she would see garments of embroidery and similar finery. She would grow envious and speak of it at home, and out of this would come scandal and other ills. Let her seek her glory in her home, cleaving ever to discipline, and showing no jealousy for worldly gauds, vain and delusive as they are.[51]



While the Vilna Gaon's instructions to his wife project a clear ideal image of women's proper religious tasks, there was a gap between this and what actual, normatively religious women practiced and believed. For example, though the Gaon railed against the potentially negative effects of synagogue attendance, it is obvious that women did go to the synagogue. Few shared his jaundiced view, though others did point out the possible pitfalls. Similarly, the Gaon's horror at the prospect of his daughters strolling in the street could not be a guide for the many women who spent their days pursuing their family's livelihood in the marketplace.

Beyond the sphere of ritual behavior, a woman was expected to fulfill a religious role analogous to her social function and reflecting her status in society—that is, woman as religious facilitator. As succinctly put by Isserles, the sixteenth-century Polish halakhic authority, "a woman is not obligated to teach her son Torah, but in any case if she helps her son or her husband study Torah she gets part of their reward."[52] This ideal was put into practice by women like Miriam Ashkenazi, daughter of the famous Ḥakham Tzvi Ashkenazi, sister to Rabbi Jacob Emden, and wife of Rabbi Aryeh Leib ben Shaul. Emden, writing in the mid-eighteenth century, noted that his brother-in-law could concentrate on his studies because "he had a wife [Miriam] who was very good in the precious attributes of love, morality, fear of heaven, and modesty. She was a great, pious person with strong love for her husband, with submission and modesty; in addition to her beauty and great pleasantness and cleverness in woman's work, in managing the household in cleanliness."[53] Women were expected quietly to create the atmosphere that would enable their menfolk to reach the religious summit.

In the early modern period, however, men realized that women ought not to be relegated to a facilitating role and taken for granted. There was at least tacit recognition that, in cultural terms, women needed to be actively nurtured and reinforced. The Yiddish religious literary genres mentioned earlier that were aimed, in the words of the *Brantspiegel,* at "women, and men who are like women"—that is, the unlearned nonelites—all flourished beginning in the sixteenth century. The production of this literature was an admission by the scholarly class (still the dominant, though no longer exclusive, authors) that, religiously speaking, women and other nonelites should not be dismissed lightly. Their spiritual concerns and religious life were significant and it was important that they be informed; otherwise there was a risk that they would be led astray by new, radical ideas and social movements that arose among Jews as well as Christians (for example, Sabbatianism and Frankism) in Reformation and post-Reformation Europe. The gap between the educated elite and the common people must not grow too big.

The profound shift in attitudes implied by the appearance of Yiddish religious literature was captured by the printer of the Yiddish translation and midrashic paraphrase of the Book of Esther, *Di Lange Megilla* (Cracow, 1589). This man, Isaac ben Aaron of Prostitz, noted that "the way of the world is that women especially are considered nothing at all and regarded as good for nothing. Whether they are young or old they are done much injustice and violence. This is contrary to God's will that one should mock and play with his creation." Thus, in contrast to the conventional approach, Isaac declared that "Women are also obligated to learn. This includes the Pentateuch and the 24 [books of the Bible], and all of the laws of ritual purity and what is prohibited and what is permitted—just like the men."[54] It is no accident, then, that most of these books in Yiddish were addressed to women, either exclusively or in tandem with nonlearned men. They represented a new consciousness of the cultural status of women. Women's particular mitzvot were newly codified, analyzed, and explicated.

Conversely, in the early modern period it seems that stereotypes of women's sins developed as well. As the tehine author Sarah bas Tovim put it: "I, the woman Sore [= Sarah], beseech the young women not to converse in the beloved holy shul, for it is a great sin."[55] As we have seen, the Gaon of Vilna also took a dim view of purported female talking and ostentatious sartorial display in the synagogue. So did the eighteenth-century tehine author Leah Horowitz, who observed that "women are talkative, gabbing in the synagogue on the Sabbath . . . and talk in the synagogue makes women jealous of each other. . . . When she comes home she argues with her husband about finery, for she says, 'In the synagogue I should be like the woman dressed in attractive clothes.' "[56]



As we have seen, tehines (some of which may originally have been part of an oral tradition) were also codified and routinized beginning in the late sixteenth century. The advent of tehine books marks the institutionalization of women's prayer. Even the editing and publication of the didactic story collections indicated a new awareness of women's cultural importance. The stories they read should be "religiously correct" and dovetail with the messages preached by the elite texts and their propagators. Overall, the appearance of new Yiddish religious genres in the early modern period meant that the role of women was a prominent item on the Jewish cultural agenda. They had to be properly prepared to take their place in that culture.

This new emphasis on the potential contribution of women apparently also had a practical effect. There is at least a hint that the male stereotype of women as religious ignoramuses began to change as the opportunities grew for women to acquire knowledge. In the mid-sixteenth century, Isserles could note that women who eat with men must listen in to the ritual introduction to the grace after meals "even though they don't understand"; but about a century later, Rabbi Abraham Gombiner, citing an earlier source, insisted that "most women understand a little."[57] Moreover, there are some signs that women were beginning to enter the public religious field. Isserles, for example, pointed out that a series of medieval restrictions on menstruating women, excluding them from the synagogue and public worship, were not in accord with the letter of the halakhah. He also legitimized at least partial circumvention of these restrictions, thus making it easier for women to attend synagogue regularly—a practice that was apparently gaining popularity.[58]

Physically, beginning in the late sixteenth century in Ashkenaz and spreading to Poland, synagogues began to be remodeled and new ones constructed with women's sections (*ezrat nashim*) that were an integral part of the building. Thus, the women were brought into the synagogue rather than being excluded or relegated to adjacent annexes, cellars, or temporary designated areas.[59] This gave them a place, albeit a secondary one, within the synagogue itself and made their attendance there normative. It was an important early milestone in a subsequent four-centuries-long trend for women to become more and more part of synagogue and public ritual life. The emphasis of some eighteenth-century Polish tehines on aspects of the synagogue service and the liturgical calendar reflects more female prayer in the synagogue setting and is another sign of women's—very gradual—integration into the public domain.

The idea that women should be included in the main arena of Jewish religious life reached a new level in mid-eighteenth-century Poland when Leah Horowitz wrote the Hebrew introduction to her prayer compilation, *Tehine Imohos.* She believed that the well-known rabbinic maxim—that the crown of the priest-

hood belonged to Aaron and the crown of kingship belonged to David but the crown of Torah was obtainable by anyone—applied to women as well as men. Her own Talmud study and participation in halakhic dialectic was, in her opinion, a means of "bringing merit to the many." Moreover, all women had the power to offer redemptive prayer, but to do so they must attend the synagogue for the three daily services. Leah offered a twist on the conventional notion that a woman's relationship to Torah study should be as facilitator. The essence of a woman's duty in this regard was not passive support but, she held, was actively to prevent her husband and sons from neglecting their obligations.[60] Although Leah's was a lone and lonely voice, it was a harbinger of developments in the religious life of Jewish women over the next two centuries.

## A NEW TRADITION

By the eighteenth century, Polish-Jewish culture had undergone a significant transformation from the medieval Ashkenazic culture in which it originated. The canon of sacred books to be studied had been expanded. There were new genres and levels of books and a corresponding variety in the types of people who studied or read them. In particular, new provisions were made for including women in the circle of the religiously informed and involved. The emphasis of the yeshivah curriculum had shifted from determining the law to analyzing the text. There were now new tools for deciding halakhah, and life was suffused with the beliefs and practices of Kabbalah.

The popularity of Kabbalah partly explains the development of a new type of Hasidism by the late eighteenth century. As mentioned above, many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century communities hosted conventicles of ascetic, mystical pietists. The members of these elitist groups were called Hasidim (lit.: beloved [of God]), denoting their special relationship with things holy and spiritual. In the course of the eighteenth century, some of the leaders of these groups made significant changes in their beliefs, practices, and organization. A new type of Hasidism arose that eventually developed into a mass religious and social movement that caught the imagination and commanded the loyalty of a large proportion of Polish Jewry.

The man usually considered to be the founder of the new Hasidism, the Ba'al Shem Tov, lived in the town of Międzybóż, where he headed a small group of mystical virtuosos. He was a charismatic figure whose attraction and authority derived from his confident and intelligent personality, success at healing, and expertise in mystical communication with the Divine—not from prodigious talmudic erudition. He innovated by insisting that communion with God *(devekut)* could be achieved without asceticism and without mastery of the content of dense Talmud texts. The path to devekut, according to him, included the spiritualizing of Torah study through mystical contemplation of the letters of the texts, and the achieving of ecstasy in prayer. In contrast to the rabbis and mystics of his day, he provided an example of religious leadership that was not only aloft in the world of the spirit but also down-to-earth, involved in mundane problems. He took responsibility for both the physical and the spiritual needs of the members of his extended family and household, including grandchildren, stepson, in-laws, and some nonrelatives: the mystics in his intimate group as well as disciples who lived elsewhere and with whom he had only sporadic contact. Beyond his duty to them, the Ba'al Shem Tov felt responsible for the fate of all the Jewish people, and much of his communication with the Divine was aimed at averting collective disasters such as persecution and plague. Although he did not establish any new institutions, his ideas and behavior set precedents that his disciples and others developed into the new Hasidic movement after his death.[61]



The early stages in the crystallization of this movement are typified by the activities of one of the Ba'al Shem Tov's associates, Rabbi Dov Ber, the maggid of Mezhirech (d. 1772). Unlike the Ba'al Shem Tov, Dov Ber was an accomplished talmudist, but he was also a maggid, a popular preacher, involved with the life of the community. Dov Ber settled in the Volynian town of Mezhirech in the 1760s and established a group of new-style Hasidim. He made a concerted effort to attract followers to his court, where he preached the new doctrines and used his virtuosity in Torah to address people's spiritual needs. The philosopher and memoirist Salomon Maimon—who arrived in Mezhirech in the late 1760s, intrigued by emissaries whom Dov Ber had sent out to spread the word of his new approach—described how the latter connected with potential Hasidim:

> [O]n Sabbath I went to th[e] solemn meal, and there found a large number of respectable men who had gathered together from various quarters. At length the great man appeared, his awe-inspiring figure clothed in white satin. Even his shoes and snuff-box were white, this being among the kabbalists the color of grace. He greeted each newcomer with "Shalom." We sat down to table and during the meal a solemn silence reigned. After the meal was over, the superior struck up a solemn inspiriting melody, held his hand for some time upon his brow, and then began to call out, "Z. of H., M. of R., S.M. of N." and so on. Each newcomer was thus called by his own name and the name of his residence, which excited no little astonishment. Each as he was called recited some verse of the Holy Scriptures. Thereupon the superior began to deliver a sermon for which the verses recited served as a text, so that although they were

> disconnected verses taken from different parts of Scripture they were combined with as much skill as if they had formed a single whole. What was still more extraordinary, every one of the newcomers believed that he discovered in that part of the sermon which was founded on his verse something that had special reference to the facts of his own spiritual life. At this we were of course greatly astonished.[62]

As this passage demonstrates, Dov Ber's leadership was not limited to one geographic area. Attracting people—particularly Talmud students and established householders—from far and wide, he evinced a deep concern for the identity and needs of the individual. Torah, Kabbalah, and visual and aural devices (impressive appearance, silence, and music) were all utilized to pierce the veil of worldliness and bring the Hasidim close to God. Dov Ber's followers were distinguished by their obedience and devotion to him and by their joyous singing and dancing. Intensive Talmud study was neglected in favor of Kabbalah and ecstatic prayer. They adopted kabbalistic customs such as the donning of white on the Sabbath, the use of so-called polished knives to slaughter animals for consumption, and worship according to the Lurianic order of prayer, rather than the traditional Ashkenazic one.

In the 1770s and 1780s, similar Hasidic courts developed around leaders like Aaron of Karlin, Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, Levi-Yitzḥak of Berdichev, Menaḥem Mendel of Vitebsk, Abraham of Kalisk, Shneur Zalman of Ladi, Naḥum of Chernobyl, and Zusya of Annapol. Each developed a regional following and a particular style of leading and teaching his disciples. All, however, propagated the basic doctrines of Hasidism.[63]

The primary means of doing this was oral teaching; orality, rather than textuality, was a hallmark of Hasidism. However, certain Hasidic texts circulated in manuscript and in published form in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Jacob Joseph of Polonne, a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, published three books of biblical homiletics: *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* (Koretz, 1780), *Ben Porat Yosef* (Koretz, 1781), and *Tzofnat Pa'ane'ah* (Koretz, 1782). A fourth book by him, *Ketonet Passim,* was not published until 1866. Other important publications included *Noam Elimelekh* (Lvov, 1787) by Elimelekh of Lyzhansk; *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'akov* (Koretz, 1781) and *Zava'at ha-Rivash* (Ostrog, 1793), based on the teachings of Dov Ber; and *Keter Shem Tov* (n.p., 1794–95), a digest of the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings as found in the books of Jacob Joseph and elsewhere. From books such as these, it is possible to understand the essence of early Hasidism.

The early Hasidic teachers emphasized two main doctrines. The first is encapsulated in the oft-repeated slogan that combines the biblical verse "The whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3) and a saying of the *Zohar:* "There is



no place empty of Him" (*"Melo kol ha'aretz kevodo ve-let atar panui minei"*). God is immanent in everything in creation. Everything reflects the divine and expresses the divine. Everything can serve as a path to devekut. There is nothing profane; all is holy. The fact that many things appear divorced from holiness is only apparent. The task of the Hasid is to discover the divine root of every object and every act and thereby turn them into vehicles of communion. This can be accomplished through "nullification of the existent" (*bitul ha-yesh*) or "stripping away materiality" (*hafshatat ha-gashmiyut*)—viewing and understanding everything from the perspective of its connection to God, rather than from its physical appearance. Thus, not only study and prayer are religious acts but also commerce, artisanship, eating, and sex; all human behavior has the potential to reveal God to His people, and each person can aspire to that revelation.[64]

Crossing the divide between the corporeal and the spiritual is not easy; for many it is virtually impossible. This is where the second basic doctrine is crucial: the teaching of the *tzadik.* The tzadik was the leader of each Hasidic group. Also referred to as "Rebbe" or "Admor" (an acronym for the Hebrew phrase "Our master, teacher, and rabbi"), his role was to bring the individual Hasid to devekut. If the Hasid could not so easily cleave to God, he could cleave to his tzadik. By obeying him in all things, thirstily imbibing his teachings, concretizing his relationship to the tzadik by supporting him materially, and adopting his mode of dress and other customs, the Hasid expected to be carried along when the tzadik made contact with God. Since the holy must be discovered in all aspects of life, the tzadik must be involved in every facet of the life of his people. He must take responsibility for them both on earth and in heaven and ensure that each and every one will achieve his spiritual potential.[65]

The emergence of these Hasidic institutions and doctrines and the increasing loyalty of a significant number of people to various tzadikim elicited opposition to the new movement. The Vilna Gaon, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, is famous as one of the greatest rabbinic scholars in history. He was also an old-style, mystical-ascetic Hasid. He lived in an ivory tower of Talmud study, with no defined duties, supported by a stipend from the Vilna community. He was largely uninvolved with the rank-and-file members of the community, teaching only an elite circle of advanced scholars. His leadership was exerted through his overpowering mastery of all of rabbinic literature, as expressed through his teaching and writings, and his towering example of total devotion to learning and strict observance of the law. The only way to come closer to him was to become more like him. His style of communion with God was necessarily limited to the few who could devote themselves, mind and heart, to full-time, sophisticated study of the Torah.[66]

Early in 1772, the Gaon became aware of the teachings and practices of the

new Hasidism. He considered its appeal to the uninitiated as a vulgar perversion of the true mystical-ascetic Hasidism. He and others who agreed with him attempted to suppress the new movement with bans against its practices and persecution of its leaders. Eventually these opponents, the Mitnagdim, developed new institutions and doctrines of their own that competed with those of Hasidism. The conflict between Hasidism and Mitnagdism emerging in the late eighteenth century was a harbinger of the dislocations that were to wrack Polish-Jewish culture from the end of the eighteenth century until the Shoah.[67]

Traditional Jewish culture operated on the foundation of a God-oriented universe in which all of a person's deeds were done "for the sake of Heaven." In Poland-Lithuania in the early modern period, the means for individuals to prepare themselves to live in this spirit were greatly enhanced. This multicultural country offered the Jews sufficient toleration and freedom to allow for the emergence of new cultural ideas and forms directed toward the fulfillment of their divinely mandated obligations. With a new (and newly accessible) library, more people in Jewish society could feel closer to God and be confident that, personally, they had an intelligent grasp of what God demanded of them. With the popularized tools of Kabbalah, more people had the means to religiously calibrate their every action. Armed with their culture, Jews could be confident that life had divine meaning; they could face its different aspects—whether mundane, tragic, or triumphant—secure in the belief that they had the power to discern God's purpose. Ironically, however, where developments in the early modern period had fostered the rooting and spread of traditional culture throughout Jewish society, the ethos of modernity that was to explode over East European Jewry in the nineteenth century shook this self-confident culture, threatening it with obsolescence.

## NOTES

1. L. Wolf, ed., *Menasseh ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell* (n.p., 1901), 87. This characterization is not accurate in all details: Jewish courts did not have official jurisdiction in criminal matters, though sometimes they did deal with criminal cases; and the number of Jewish victims of the Chmielnicki Uprising in 1648–49 ("the Cosaques in the late warres") was probably less than a quarter of what Menasseh posited.

2. The quote appears in *Volumina Legum* (St. Petersburg-Cracow-Peznari, 1859–1952), II:124; on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its institutions, see J. Tazbir, *A State Without Stakes* (Warsaw, 1973), and J. K. Federowicz, *A Republic of Nobles* (Cambridge, Engl., 1982).



3. On the Polish Church and the Jews, see J. Goldberg, "Poles and Jews in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Acceptance or Rejection," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 22 (1974): 252–57; J. Kalik, "The Catholic Church and the Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 17–18th Centuries" (Hebrew), (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1998).

4. M. Steinberg, *Żydzi w Jarosławiu* (Jarosław, 1933), 6–7, translated into Hebrew in S. A. Cygielman, *Yehudei Polin Ve-Lita Ad Shenat Tah (1648)* (Jerusalem, 1991), 216–17.

5. J. Goldberg, "The Privileges Granted to Jewish Communities of the Polish Commonwealth as a Stabilizing Factor in Jewish Support," in C. Abramsky et al., eds., *The Jews in Poland* (Oxford, 1986), 31–54.

6. Cygielman, *Yehudei Polin*, 193–223; J. Goldberg, "*De non tolerandis Iudaeis:* On the Introduction of Anti-Jewish Laws in Polish Towns and the Struggles Against Them," in S. Yeivin, ed., *Studies in Jewish History: Presented to Professor Raphael Mahler on His Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Merhavia, 1974), 39–52.

7. The quote is from *Divrei David* (1689; rpt. Jerusalem, 1978), on Deuteronomy 7:22, p. 525 (my translation). On the persecution of Jews in Poland, see B. D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland* (Philadelphia, 1972), 152–53; H. Węgrzynek, *"Czarna legenda Żydów": Procesy o rzekome mordy ritualne w dawnej Polsce* (Warsaw, 1995); and Z. Guldon and J. Wijacka, "The Accusation of Ritual Murder in Poland, 1500–1800," *Polin* 10 (1997): 99–140.

8. G. D. Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town: The Case of Opatów in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, Md., 1992), 39; M. J. Rosman, "Jewish Perceptions of Insecurity and Powerlessness in 16th–18th Century Poland," *Polin* 1 (1986): 19–27; Rosman, "A Minority Views the Majority: Jewish Attitudes Towards the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Interaction with Poles," *Polin* 4 (1989): 31–41 (reprinted in A. Polonsky, ed., *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from Polin* [London, 1993], 39–49).

9. Yitzhak ben Moshe of Vienna, *Sefer Or Zaru'a*, part 1 (Zhitomir, 1862), 113; Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland*, 24.

10. M. Rosman, "The Image of Poland as a Center of Torah Learning After the 1648 Persecutions" (Hebrew), *Zion* 51 (1986): 439–47; M. Rosman, *Polin: Perakim be-Toledot Yehudei Mizrah Eiropah ve-Tarbutum*, vols. 1–2 (Tel Aviv, 1991), 72.

11. Eliezer Ashkenazi, *Ma'ase Hashem*, (Venice, 1583), fol. 56v, quoted in H. H. Ben-Sasson, "The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 4 (1969–70): 258–59.

12. N. Hannover, *Abyss of Despair*, trans. and ed. A. Mesch (1950; rpt. New Brunswick, N.J., 1983), 27 (translation slightly modified). The book was originally published in Hebrew as *Yeven Metzulah* (Venice, 1653).

13. B. Birkenthal, *The Memoirs of Ber of Bolechow*, trans. and ed. M. Vishnitzer (1922; rpt. New York, 1973), 124; see Exodus 18:21.

14. C. Shmeruk, *The Esterke Story in Yiddish and Polish Literature* (Jerusalem, 1985); B. D. Weinryb, *The Beginnings of East European Jewry in Legend and Historiography* (Leiden,

1962), 1–11; G. Karpeles, "A Jewish King in Poland," in his *Jewish Literature and Other Essays* (Philadelphia, 1895), 272–92; A. J. Heschel, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov,* trans. and ed. S. Dresner (Chicago, 1985), 22.

15. T. Kohn, *Ma'ase Tuvia* (Venice, 1707), 110d (my translation).

16. The quote is from D. Ben-Amos and J. Mintz, trans. and eds., *Shivhei ha-Besht: In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov* (Bloomington, Ind., 1970), 149. See also M. Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996), 17–26, 56–62, and O. Pritsak, "Ukraine as the Setting for the Emergence of Hasidism," in S. Almog et al., eds., *Israel and the Nations: Essays Presented in Honor of Shmuel Ettinger* (Jerusalem, 1987), lxxxi–lxxxii.

17. M. i K. Piechotkowie, *Bramy Nieba: Bóżnice drewniane* (Warsaw, 1996); T. Hubka, "Jewish Art and Architecture in the East European Context: The Gwoździec-Chodorów Group of Wooden Synagogues," *Polin* 10 (1997): 141–82.

18. E. L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, Engl., 1980), and E. L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Engl., 1983).

19. David Darshan, *"Shir ha-Ma'alot le-David" (Song of the Steps)* and *"Ktav Hitnazzelut l'Darshanim" (In Defense of Preachers),* translation (with modifications) and annotation by Hayim Goren Perelmuter (Cincinnati, 1984), 138. See also E. Reiner, "Itinerant Ashkenazic Preachers in the Early Modern Period" (Hebrew), unpublished paper. I wish to offer my gratitude to Elḥanan Reiner for sharing his research and insights with me. As will be obvious to the reader, I am heavily indebted to his work, together with that of Jacob Elbaum and Zev Gries, in my discussion of rabbinic culture.

20. *Turei Zahav* (Lublin, 1646), intro., on *Shulḥan arukh* (my translation).

21. *Sefer Me'irat Einaim* (Prague, 1614), intro., on *Shulḥan arukh* (my translation).

22. For descriptions of the higher institutions of Jewish learning, see D. Assaf, *Olam ha-Torah be-Polin* (vols. 5–6 of *Polin* [Tel Aviv, 1990]); M. Breuer, "The rise of Pilpul and Hillukim in Ashkenazic Yeshivot" (Hebrew), in *Sefer zikaron le-Rabbi Ya'akov Yehiel Weinberg* (Jerusalem, 1970), 241–55; E. Reiner, "Wealth, Social Position and the Study of Torah: The Status of the Kloiz in Eastern European Jewish Society in the Early Modern Period" (Hebrew), *Zion* 58 (1993): 287–328; E. Reiner, "Changes in the Yeshivot of Poland and Ashkenaz in the 16th–17th Centuries and the Controversy over Pilpul" (Hebrew), in I. Bartal et al., eds., *Ke-Minhag Ashkenaz u-Polin: Sefer Yovel le-Chone Shmeruk* (Jerusalem, 1993), 9–80; E. Reiner, "The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript Versus the Printed Book," *Polin* 10 (1997): 85–98; and E. Reiner, "The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society to the New Science in the Sixteenth Century," *Science in Context* 10 (1997): 589–603. For a summary of the important personalities, issues, and achievements of rabbinic culture in early modern Poland, see M. Shulvass, *Jewish Culture in Eastern Europe: The Classical Period* (New York, 1975).

23. D. Darshan, *Shir ha-Ma'alot le-David* (Cracow, 1571), intro., translation (with modifications) from the Perelmuter edition (see n. 19 above), 39–41.

24. Reiner, "The Ashkenazi Elite," 91.



25. J. Elbaum, *Petiḥut ve-Histagrut* (Jerusalem, 1990); Reiner, "The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society," esp. 600–601.

26. Rama (Moses Isserles), *Responsa* no. 6 (my translation). For all of the texts reflecting this dispute between the two rabbis, see A. Siev, *Shut ha-Rama* (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 18–38, nos. 5–7.

27. Horowitz's polemic was published by P. Bloch, "The Controversy Over Maimonides' *Guide* in the Poznań Community in the Mid-16th Century" (German), *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 47 (1903): 153–69, 263–79, 346–56. The selection translated here is from Reiner, "The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society," 590 n. 7; in that work, Reiner was the first to recognize that what was in dispute was the content of the canon of study and not the subject of philosophy.

28. On the content and significance of the *Shulḥan Arukh,* see I. Twersky, "The *Shulḥan Áruk:* Enduring Code of Jewish Law," in J. Goldin, ed., *The Jewish Expression* (New York, 1970), 323–43 (originally appeared in *Judaism* 16 [1967]; the translated quote appears on p. 332).

29. Solomon Luria, *Yam Shel Shlomo,* vol. on *Ḥullin,* (Cracow, [1533–35]) second intro. (my translation).

30. Moses Isserles, *Mappa,* intro. in *Shulḥan Arukh,* (Cracow, 1579; rpt. Jerusalem, 1974).

31. Moses Isserles, *Torat ha-Hatat* (Cracow, 1569), intro.; this passage is translated in Reiner, "The Ashkenazi Elite," 94.

32. Ibid.

33. Reiner, "The Changes"; the quote from Gans appears on p. 48 (my translation).

34. Neki Kapaim, cited in Elbaum, *Petihut,* 151–52 and according to the index.

35. See, for example, F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago, 1971); R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World: A Study in Intellectual History, 1576–1612* (Oxford, 1973); and B. P. Copenhaver, *Symphorien Champier and the Reception of the Occultist Tradition in Renaissance France* (The Hague, 1978).

36. Berekhia Berakh, *Zera Berakh* (Cracow, 1662), part 2, intro.; quoted in Elbaum, *Petihut,* 217 (my translation).

37. Mordecai Yaffe, *Levushim* (Venice, 1620), intro.; quoted in Elbaum, *Petihut,* 215 (my translation).

38. Both quoted in Elbaum, *Petihut,* 218–19 (my translation); the *Sefer ha-Pardes* referred to is Moses Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim.*

39. Z. Gries, *Sifrut ha-Hanhagot* (Jerusalem, 1989), intro., chap. 2.

40. For discussion of the *Shelah,* see I. Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature* (Cincinnati, 1975), 6: 115–20; Gries, *Sifrut,* chap. 2.

41. Hillel Ba'al Shem detailed his remedies, incantations, inscriptions, exorcism, advice, criticism, and medicaments in his 300-page manuscript called *Sefer ha-Ḥeshek,* now in the Vernadsky Library, Kiev, Jewish Division, Or 178, and discovered there by Yohanan Petrovsky. The quotes are my translations from pp. 27a, 146a.

42. For a summary of the Ba'al Shem Tov's activities, see M. Rosman, *Founder of*

*Hasidism* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996), 173–86, and I. Etkes, *Ba'al Hashem* (Jerusalem, 2000), 266–74.

43. S. Stampfer, "Gender Differentiation and the Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe," in Polonsky, ed., *From Shtetl to Socialism*, 187–211.

44. On early Yiddish Literature, see Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, vol. 7; C. Shmeruk, *Sifrut Yiddish: Perakim le-Toledoteha* (Tel Aviv, 1978), 9–71; and C. Shmeruk, *Sifrut Yiddish be-Polin* (Jerusalem, 1981), 11–116.

45. D. Roskies, "Yiddish Popular Literature and the Female Reader," *Journal of Popular Culture* 13 (1979): 852–58; A. Segal, "Yiddish Works on Women's Commandments in the Sixteenth Century," in *Studies in Yiddish Literature and Folklore* (Jerusalem, 1986), 37–59; Shmeruk, *Polin*, 11–74, 147–64; C. Turniansky, "On Old Yiddish Biblical Epics," *International Folklore Review* 8 (1991): 26–33; Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, vol. 7. On women's prayers, see C. Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs* (Boston, 1998).

46. Stampfer, "Gender Differentiation," 194–95; Weissler, *Voices*, 36–44, 89–103.

47. Weissler, *Voices*, 23–28.

48. Ibid., 89–103.

49. Translations taken, with modification, from T. G. Klirs et al., trans. and eds., *The Merit of Our Mothers* (Cincinnati, 1992), 12–42.

50. Birkenthal, *Memoirs of Ber of Bolechow*, 79.

51. This letter was translated and published by I. Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills* (Philadelphia, 1976), 316–17, 321 (here slightly modified). In order to avoid the sin of slander, the Gaon also urged his sons to stay at home as much as possible and "even in synagogue make but a very short stay and depart. It is better to pray at home, for in synagogue it is impossible to escape envy and the hearing of idle talk" (321).

52. *Mappa* on *Shulḥan Arukh* Yoreh Dei'ah 246:6. For precedents to this position, see J. R. Baskin, "Some Parallels in the Education of Medieval Jewish and Christian Women," *Jewish History* 5 (1991): 43.

53. Y. Emden, *Megillat Sefer*, ed. Y. Bick (Jerusalem, 1979), 93.

54. The quotes are translated in Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, 7: 126; see also Shmeruk, *Polin*, 89.

55. Klirs et al., trans. and eds., *The Merit of Our Mothers*, 28 (see also 12); Weissler, *Voices*, 126–46.

56. Quoted from the rarely printed Hebrew introduction to her Aramaic-Yiddish *Tehine Imohos*. See Jewish National and University Library R8° 41A460 *Tehines*, vol. 6, no. 2. See also Weissler, *Voices*, 104–25. For more on Leah Horowitz, see H. Liberman, *Ohel Rahel* (Brooklyn, 1980), 432–34, 437.

57. *Mappa* and *Magen Avraham* on *Shulḥan Arukh* Oraḥ Ḥaim 199.7.

58. Mappa on *Shulḥan Arukh* Oraḥ Ḥaim 88:1. On the history, development, and halakhic status of these restrictions, see A. Grossman, *Ḥasidot u-Mordot: Nashim Yehudiyot be-Eiropah bi-Ymei ha-Beinayim* (Jerusalem, 2001), 47–51, 318–19, and esp. the literature cited p. 48 n. 106; see also J. R. Woolf, "Medieval Models of Purity and Sanctity: Ashkenazic Women in the Synagogue," in M. J. H. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz, eds., *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus* (Leiden, 2000), 263–80.



59. C. H. Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe* (Mineola, 1985), 28–31; R. Krautheimer, *Mittelalteriche Synagogen* (Hebrew edition: *Batei Kenesset bi-Ymei ha-Beinaim*, trans. A. Goren [Jerusalem, 1994], 84–93). For further studies of women and the synagogue, see S. Grossman and R. Haut, eds., *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue* (Philadelphia, 1992).

60. L. Horowitz, *Tehine Imohos*, intro.; see also Weissler, *Voices*, 110–16.

61. See note 42 above and I. Etkes, *Tenu'at ha-Ḥassidut be-Reishitah* (Tel Aviv, 1998), chaps. 2–5.

62. *Solomon Maimon: An Autobiography* (New York, 1967; based on translation by J. Clark Murray [London, 1888]), 54. For more on Dov Ber, see R. Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1993).

63. See A. Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772: Structural Continuity and Change," in A. Rapoport-Albert, ed., *Hasidism Reappraised* (London, 1996), 76–140, and Etkes, *Tenu'at ha-Ḥassidut*, chaps. 6–8.

64. R. Elior, *Ḥeirut al ha-Luḥot* (Tel Aviv, 1999), chaps. 6, 8, 9.

65. *Noam Elimelekh*, ed. G. Nigal (Jerusalem, 1978); Elior, *Ḥeirut*, chaps. 10, 11; Etkes, *Tenu'at ha-Ḥassidut*, chap. 7.

66. H. H. Ben-Sasson, "The Personality of the Vilna Gaon and His Historical Influence" (Hebrew), *Zion* 31 (1966): 39–86, 197–216.

67. Elior, *Ḥeirut*, chap. 7; Etkes, *Tenu'at ha-Ḥassidut*, chap. 10; A. Nadler, *The Faith of the Mithnagdim* (Baltimore, Md., 1997).

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