

## A Spiritual Awakening

The Hasidic movement, which originated during the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe, in Podolia, Volhynia, and Eastern Galicia, is viewed as a decisive turning point in the history of Jewish society. It brought about substantial changes in Jewry's traditional structures, its religious world-view, and its organizational unity. From a small circle during the 1740s and 1750s Hasidism developed into a true force among the Jews of Eastern Europe, making a deep impression on their spiritual and social life during the last decades of the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century Hasidism became a popular movement that encompassed a significant portion of the Jewish community in the Ukraine, Galicia, Poland, and Russia.

This unprecedented expansion has led historians to seek an explanation in the historical circumstances and social structure of the period, and indeed detailed accounts have been offered, linking the rise of Hasidism to the economic and social conditions of the times and to a historical crisis. Among the various explanations for the expansion of Hasidism proposed, those of Simeon Dubnow and Benzion Dinur are prominent.<sup>1</sup> Both of these scholars argued that the causes for the growth of Hasidism must be sought in the social life of the Jewish community of Poland during the first half of the eighteenth century. Dubnow and Dinur view this period as one of grave crisis and regard the growth of Hasidism as a reaction to this crisis. However they differ in their interpretation of the significance of this crisis.

Dubnow held that the economic and social distress of the Jews of Poland and the collapse of communal organization in the wake of the persecutions of 1648–1649 provided the background for the growth of Hasidism. This interpretation maintains that the poor performance of

the religious leadership, the gap between the learned class and the masses, and the general spiritual decline created a vacuum that was filled by Hasidism.

Dinur, however, believed that Hasidism arose and spread following a leadership crisis in communal organization and social discontent directed against leaders who had failed to fulfill their duties. He saw in it an "oppositional" movement with clear social tendencies. At the same time, Dinur stated that the organizational ideology of the Hasidic movement was not social but rather messianic in character, and it partook of a reaction to the spiritual crisis following disappointment with the Sabbatean movement and its promise for forthcoming redemption.

However, these explanations do not withstand the test of criticism, as has been shown by Jacob Katz, Israel Halperin, and Shmuel Ettinger: although Hasidism was a unique phenomenon, unprecedented in its scope, there was nothing distinctive about the economic and social conditions attending the origins of Hasidism in comparison to similar circumstances elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the Hasidic movement came of age after two critical crises had left their mark upon Eastern European Jewish society, and it arose and developed within the framework of the religious and social changes and processes that preceded it; however, it does not seem that one ought to identify its essence with these crises.

The grave after-effect of the Sabbatean movement and its offshoots, on the one hand, and the decline in the power of the institutions of communal leadership and the collapse of Jewish autonomy, on the other, did provide the background for the rise of Hasidism. However, these circumstances do not provide a sufficient explanation for the extent of its influence, nor do they constitute a necessary foundation that would have allowed its growth. Whereas the collapse of the spiritual and social authority of the communities indeed did facilitate the rise of new forces and the vitiation of the traditional frameworks certainly created conditions for the formation of new social and ideological relations, these processes were insufficient either to determine the essence of the new phenomenon that arose in their wake or to delineate its unique character.

The birth of Hasidism was marked with religious awakening and took place within the spiritual realm of pietist circles which were widespread in Eastern Europe during the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> This awakening, which took shape both among ascetic Kabbalists, who lived in isolation as recluses and in sacred societies, was marked by an outburst of charismatic religiosity, the power and authority of

which derived from consciousness of close contact with the divine.<sup>4</sup> This outburst of spirituality brought about a movement of religious rebirth that subjected the basic values of the traditional world to reappraisal. It brought forth charismatic figures whose authority was nourished from new sources, authority by which they instituted far-reaching changes in their religious world-view and in spiritual and social relations and bonds.<sup>5</sup> The connection between charisma, which draws upon contact with higher worlds, and mystical theology, in which the world is permeated with God, typifies the first stirrings of Hasidism and explains the transition from the individual, spiritual experience of esoterics to a transmittable mystical theory, which comes to be significant in the structure of the religious experience of ever expanding groups.<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly, the origins of Hasidism were stamped with the imprint of the charismatic personality, whereas the later development and dissemination were marked by a combination between a personality graced with the holy spirit and a mystical renewal that created a new world of thought and consolidated a doctrine significant to a wide audience.

The creators of Hasidism combined mystical experience and a new perception of reality acquired from ecstatic exaltation and spiritual inspiration (in the spirit of "The whole earth is full of His glory, and no place is devoid of Him"). Significantly, they turned to the community and individuals (in the spirit of "In all your ways shall you know him")<sup>7</sup> They offered a daring formulation of theosophical expression for their esoteric experience, constructing a mystical theory in word and deed. Their religious inspiration, came from close contact with exalted realms, but was expressed in a language that enabled it to transcend the bounds of the chosen few. This was combined with a spiritual openness attributing significance to the religiosity of every individual. To these was added an undeniable social sensitivity and awareness—thus making this religious awakening a social phenomenon.

The development of Hasidism was anchored in an immanent religious process, within the Kabbalistic tradition, the details of which and the stages of whose evolution were bound up with charismatic authority and religious inspiration. The founders of the Hasidic groups claimed the right to develop original conceptions of God, divine service, and patterns of leadership. This right was based essentially on their immediate sense of connection with the experience of God, and on the critical influence of this connection on vital areas of human existence.<sup>8</sup> The transition from religious renewal under the aegis of the charismatic inspiration of individuals, into a social reli-

gious organization based on mystical elements, one that offers the experience of belonging on a spiritual and social basis to broad circles, is what characterized Hasidism and determined its tone.

The sense of the nearness of God and the inspiration of the holy spirit, which typified the founders of Hasidism, was translated by the disseminators of the movement through many levels: to the language of the tradition, to the formulation of a mystical theology, and to renewed religious consciousness; to new social conventions, to contemplation of God, to charismatic patterns of authority, and to a public responsibility; to detailed guidance in the worship of God and to a spiritual awakening connected with the formation of new social bonds; and, finally, to a feeling of guardianship for the individual and the whole Jewish people—all of which brought about the formation of new social affinities.

The social significance inherent in this spiritual-religious phenomenon was gradually revealed with the expansion of the movement and became decisive in its formation. We know of the movement's social uniqueness and the separatist barriers it erected. These were manifest in forming distinct prayer quorums, in establishing the relationship between the zaddik and the congregation of his Hasidim, in inspirational assemblies at meals, in the delivery of sermons and the holding of prayers in unique fashion, in journeys to zaddikim, in the giving of *pydyon-nefesh* (redemption fees), in the establishment of special little synagogues (*shtiblakh*), in separate ritual slaughter, in original song and dance, and in other religious social activities that created undeniable social and spiritual patterns of adhesion.<sup>9</sup> However, we must emphasize that the rise of Hasidism and its development and expansion did not derive from a given historical event, nor were they conditioned by exceptional social circumstances. They were rather the result of an immanent religious process that took place within traditional Jewish society and was decisively influenced by mystical inspiration and by a very powerful religious enthusiasm, marked by new and effective forms of communication.



## The Influence of the Kabbalah

Along with the spiritual renewal and charismatic awakening that marked the birth of Hasidism, the ideological tendencies deriving from Kabbalistic literature and the exegetical and moral tradition that preceded Hasidism also exerted a great influence on it. To a degree Hasidic thought constitutes an extension of ideas formed within the Kabbalistic tradition, and its varied ideological developments represent links in a historical continuum of mystical thought.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, knowledge of the Kabbalistic key is insufficient to elucidate the uniqueness of Hasidism or to decipher the innovation it introduced. One must not conclude, on the basis of the continuity of ideas brought forward by the teachers of Hasidism, that there was an identity of interests between the world of the Kabbalah and that of Hasidism.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, many of the principal innovations of Hasidic thought contradict the basic conceptions of Kabbalistic thought. One must not be misled by the common terminology and mistake it for identity in meaning or conceptual unity. The Hasidic movement made extensive use of the framework of the Kabbalistic tradition as a basis for the legitimization of its freedom to innovate in religious thought and as grounds for permission to formulate new spiritual priorities. A decisive change in religious consciousness was made, based on the sanctity of the Kabbalistic tradition; however, Hasidism does not extend the tendencies of Kabbalistic thought in unbroken fashion, but rather it uses its traditional terminology and concepts to institute a new spiritual world, with its own values, interests, and orientation.<sup>3</sup> The cultural background and traditional terminology did not shape the new mystical and contemplative spiritual experience itself—but

rather the ways in which it is expressed. The deep change in patterns of mystical thought in the light of the charismatic reawakening gave rise to new religious creativity occasionally disguised in the language of older prevailing Kabbalistic concepts. The connection of Hasidism with Kabbalistic sources is not one of simple continuity or merely of shared terminology. Their complex relationship includes changes in principle with regard to the Kabbalistic tradition and the power of a new religious interest. Hence, along with the need to take note of the Kabbalistic sources of Hasidic terms, there is a vital need to distinguish between what may be a Kabbalistic phrase or a common, traditional locution, and the new meaning cast into it in its Hasidic usage. The new trend in thought embodied by the familiar Kabbalistic terms must be recognized and pursued when reading Hasidic texts.<sup>4</sup>

As noted, knowledge of the key taken from the Kabbalah is not sufficient to examine Hasidic thought in depth. The movement's ability to present new values and to institute transformations of far-reaching significance is not influenced uniquely by the continuity of the Kabbalistic tradition. In fact, Hasidism strove to establish a complementary relationship between spiritual awakening, social renewal, mystical theology revealed to individuals, and renewed religious consciousness—which together determined the quality of divine worship. This reciprocal relationship, which derives from charismatic authority, effected a combination of spiritual and social values and served to consolidate mystical values with ethical and practical instruction. It influenced the formation of a social and organizational structure to implement these values, and it also brought about the establishment of new centers of authority and leadership, which were influenced by the new spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

## The Historical Background

The Hasidic movement is one of the most fascinating spiritual and social phenomena in modern Jewish history. Its vitality, its continuity, and its diversity are reflected in the spiritual creativity and in the complex social form it has assumed during its multifaceted history in the past 250 years.<sup>1</sup>

Hasidism began to be active during the 1740s and 1750s within the divided and fragmented framework of a few small congregations. These were connected with each other by a new shared religious consciousness that drew upon mystical experience and on charismatic authority.<sup>2</sup> The groups among which Hasidism originated were the pietistic circles of the Kabbalistic type that preceded the Hasidic movement. Their members were known by the Aramaic term *hasida ufrisha* (pious and recluses), or, in Hebrew, as *tsadikim* (righteous) and *hasidim* (pious). The members of these holy societies, which were common from the early part of the century, delved into the esoteric study of Lurianic Kabbalah and prayed in ecstatic fashion. They adopted the "custom of the righteous" and practiced special devotion. They studied moralistic works and meditated on the unity of God. They tended to impose a secluded and ascetic way of life upon their members by ordering them to keep apart from the entire community so as to "strip away corporeality" and achieve the spirit of sanctity. Isolation and separation from the community forged bonds and created mutual friendship among these pious Kabbalists, as they formed special fraternities, seeking to devote all their time to the service of God and striving to live with "additional sanctity" and purity. They imposed isolation and mystical seclusion upon their members, instructing them in "righteous behavior" or "the ways of the pious,"

and these customs deviated considerably from the order practiced by the community at large.<sup>3</sup> These Kabbalistic pietists even changed the accepted orders of study according to their new order of spiritual priorities. Their societies set extreme standards for the service of God and demanded a way of life secluded from the community. They encouraged ecstatic and mystical phenomena and even fostered the emergence of charismatic figures. Members of the circle of Rabbi Israel the Baal Shem Tov (known as the BESHT, 1700–1760), the founder of Hasidism, and his first associates came from these societies of ascetic Kabbalists and drew their authority from heavenly revelations and mystical spiritual awakening.<sup>4</sup> Alongside him a number of other charismatic figures were active. Leaders with an independent and influential spirituality such as Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka, Rabbi Nachman of Kosov, Rabbi Isaac of Drohobycz, Rabbi Pinchas of Korycz, the Maggid of Bar, and others practiced the “Custom of Righteousness” and also brought people from various other circles closer to the new path of Hasidism.<sup>5</sup>

The difference between the pre-Hasidic Kabbalistic fellowships and the Hasidic fraternities lay in the great degree to which the BESHT’s circle was open to the community at large, as opposed to the closed seclusion of the earlier Kabbalistic groups. The groups differed fundamentally in the effort made in Hasidic circles to translate the fruits of individual religious inspiration into concepts with social and religious significance and a comprehensive world-view that would be made available to a wide audience. This new view was formulated as the principle of “interconnection,” which refers to organic unity among the various parts of the community, deriving from a metaphysical view of the roles of the different segments of the community. Most likely this openness drew upon the new Hasidic doctrine, to be discussed later, that regarded contemplation of divine law and contemplation of the human world as a single system. Hasidism saw the divine presence as *all encompassing* and viewed the breadth of human responsiveness to divine experience as a single continuum. It presented a doctrine that established a parallel between “the *whole* earth is full of His glory” and “*every* man,” “*every* place,” and “*every* path.” By definition this attitude negates any esoteric assumption and social reclusiveness.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1750s Hasidism gradually expanded its ideological sphere by means of circles of initiates and disciples who responded to the spiritual message and disseminated the religious renewal, which had arisen among various groups, in new social organizations around various foci of leadership.

In the 1760s and 1770s the prominent disciples of the BESHT formulated the main principles of his doctrine in writing and orally, and they promulgated his Hasidic world-view, which established an unbroken interrelationship between interest in the divine domain and in the human world. A central role in the spread of the Hasidic movement was played by Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhibezh (1704–1772), one of the principal exponents of Hasidic mysticism, who created a school that produced the greatest teachers of the movement. However, Hasidism was not consolidated in one place, around a single teacher, or in one version, rather it remained fragmented in the fashion that had characterized it from the first and throughout all the manifestations of its historical existence.<sup>7</sup> That is to say, various figures with charismatic inspiration and spiritual awakening gathered small circles of disciples around them and taught them the principles of the Hasidic world-view as well as the sense of religious mission and communal obligation that led to the formation of new social settings to implement these ideas. These efforts bore fruit and provoked strong reactions throughout the Jewish community of Eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup> In accounts from the 1780s from among the opponents of Hasidism, who certainly had no interest in exaggerating the success of the movement, we hear that houses of study were emptied of Torah scholars who went over to Hasidic prayer quorums, and in many sources, both in Hasidic literature and in that of its opponents, we find testimony that many scholars were swept away by the waves of Hasidic influence.<sup>9</sup>

These developments and the social processes bound up with them took place within a closed Jewish society organized along traditional lines. Along with positive responses among certain circles and in addition to spiritual and social responsiveness, and actually because of these, they also aroused opposition and criticism. Hasidism entailed a new scale of values, a challenge to traditional authorities, as well as a threat of divisiveness and separatism, and it constituted a constant source of tension and friction regarding matters both spiritual and mundane.<sup>10</sup> In the last third of the eighteenth century the Hasidic movement was persecuted, at the instigation of the Gaon of Vilna; it was banned and expelled from Judaism. In 1772 a concerted campaign of persecution began in Vilna that spread throughout the areas of Hasidic influence. The persecutions were prosecuted in fanatical spirit and demanded the absolute rejection of Hasidism and of the Hasidim, removing them entirely from the community both in life and after death. The controversy found expression in excommunication, ostracism, trials before rabbinical courts, economic and social persecu-

tion, in polemical literature, in civil suits brought before gentile courts, and even went so far as informing to the authorities, which led to arrests and the involvement of the Russian government in an internal Jewish dispute.<sup>11</sup> This extremist position was influenced by religious fanaticism, by dread of any change in the status of Torah study or in that of those who studied it, and also by social criticism of leaders who advocated separatism and division, implying a challenge to the existing order. However, the impetus and the determination behind the persecution was derived from a sense that Hasidism intended to introduce a change in the religious and social scale of values and that it was willing to act on the religious and social level and to struggle for religious renewal and leadership authority.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, opposition to the movement was influenced by the mistaken view that Hasidism represented a return to the Sabbatean ferment and the Frankist heresy and that it had an antinomian intent that would lead it to break down barriers and upset the existing order.<sup>13</sup> In the recent past these two crises had left their mark on the spiritual and social life of the Jewish community of Eastern Europe, and the fear of any spiritual innovation and separatist social organization connected with a religious view was affected by their close and traumatic presence.

Hasidism indeed brought with it religious revival that subjected the basic issues of religion to reappraisal, and this reappraisal did have new aspects, though these were not antinomian, nor was the inspiration Sabbatean or Frankist. Rather this was a spiritual awakening with mystical inspiration. The essence of spiritualism is that it gives preference to the spiritual value implied in any religious action, and it is unique in that it assumes the freedom to examine the figure of God, unbound by traditional guise. Spiritualism has the audacity to reinterpret the goals of divine worship, while drawing its authority from an immediate relation with upper realms. Indeed, the preference for spirituality, mystical freedom, and pneumatic authority all contain an element that implies a challenge to accepted norms and even a considerable anarchical factor, which casts doubt on the existing order. Hence, the suspicion of the rabbinical leadership was not groundless, although in fact Hasidism proposed its spiritual innovations within a conservative framework. It sought to change religious consciousness but not the social order and the existing religious structures.

The opposition to Hasidism has received wide historiographical attention and detailed analysis on the part of Simeon Dubnow and Mordecai Wilensky, and this is not the place to discuss these matters again. However, one must note that the opponents of Hasidism gradually realized that their suspicion of heresy was baseless and that the



anarchical elements inherent in the religious renewal in fact were held in check. Gradually they began to come to terms with the presence of Hasidim in the community. Though they did not acknowledge this shift, they did begin to grapple with Hasidim's spiritual views and not merely with their social manifestations.



## The Hasidic World-View

The Hasidic world-view derives from two sources: it combines mystical experience, which views concrete reality as transparent and sees through into “upper” worlds, with an adaption, interpretation, and internalization of Kabbalistic concepts in the light of that immediate perception. It then seeks to apply this combined perception to various areas of religious life. Underlying Hasidic belief is the basic assumption which holds that everything in the world is imbued with divine vitality and that this is the foundation of its existence. The assumption of the omnipresence of God in all things and the belief in the constant reality of divine vitality in all dimensions of existence—the divine element permeates every object, every act, and every thought—becomes a criterion for reevaluating the whole of human experience.<sup>1</sup>

When seen in the light of the infinite, physical reality is grasped as a garment or as a vessel of the divine presence.<sup>2</sup> Hence, a world-view emerges that detects a dual meaning in all existence—reality is grasped simultaneously as a divine essence and a physical manifestation, as a spiritual interior and a material exterior, as a divine unity and a corporeal multiplicity, as nothingness *Ayin* and as existence *yesh*, or else as having opposite visages that condition each other and are united within each other.

The matrix of all Hasidic worship is the assumption that a divine essence is at the root of every physical and spiritual phenomenon and that beyond its external reality lies its hidden truth. Therefore the essence of that service is the realization of the new consciousness of the divine presence that shines upon man. It seeks to establish a connection with the hidden divine element that gives life to manifest,

concrete reality, and with consciousness of the divine presence beyond the material garment.<sup>3</sup>

Study and contemplation of the incongruity between the divine essence and the physical manifestation and the lining of consciousness with the spiritual innerness of material reality in all its manifestations is called *devekut*, attachment or devotion (from the Hebrew verb, "to cleave"). The contemplation of divine reality through its corporeal garments is called *bittul hayesh*, the nullification of existence, or *hitpashtut hagashmiut*, the stripping away of corporeality, and the daily obligation of illuminating manifest physical experience with its hidden divine essence is called *avodah begashmiut*, service in corporeality or the raising of the sparks.<sup>4</sup>

In Hasidic terminology, these efforts, in the realm of the contemplative consciousness, attempt at undoing the blindness of sensory experience, are called *the domination of the eyes of the intellect over the eyes of the flesh*. Their goal is to achieve consciousness of the fact that material reality, as a separate realm of existence, is not ultimately real, but rather that its existence is merely apparent, whereas the only true reality is the all-pervasive divine presence. The relativisation of consciousness and recognition that one's angle of vision changes the sense of reality and illusion gave rise to the central Hasidic awareness that existence and nothingness are determined by the contemplating consciousness and not by the usual empirical criteria.

The change in consciousness that derives from the assumption of the immanent element of the divine presence in all existence implies a human obligation to lay bare the divine element in all things and gain knowledge of the unity of existence despite the multiplicity that greets the eye and to nullify the distinct and separate existence of things in one's thought. The purpose of religious life becomes spiritual consciousness that places proximity to God as its highest aspiration. The efforts to remove the barriers that prevent this awareness lead to the consolidation of a complex Hasidic ethos based on *hish-tavut* (equanimity), removal from the concerns of this world, "worship in corporeality," and *bittul ha-Yesh* (nullification of existence).<sup>5</sup>

Human thought is placed at the focus of the spiritual struggle, for indeed it is identified with the divine element and its unity of opposites. Thought is grasped as a multifarious, divine power that can penetrate to the truth of things beyond their illusory externality, illuminate consciousness imprisoned in the mere appearance of physical reality, remove the barriers dividing the divine presence from human contact, turn *Yesh* (being) into *Ayin* (nothingness), and to cleave to God:

And the matter is that man is obligated to believe that the whole earth is full of His glory, may He be praised, and there is no place devoid of Him, and that all a man's thoughts contain His presence, may He be praised, and every thought is a whole structure. (*Ben Porat Yosef*, 50b)

Let his thought be high in the upper world in the service of the Name, may He be praised.... Let him place himself as one who is not...and the meaning is that he should think as if he is not in this world...and when he thinks upon the upper world, he is in the upper worlds, for every place about which a person thinks is where he is. (*Tsavaat ha-RIBASH*, pp. 1-11)

Man's contemplative consciousness and the concentration of his thought on upper worlds, which removes him from realms of concrete reality, were central to the Hasidic ethos. Founding spiritual impetus on transformative thought and the unrestricted power of its connection to the divine, brought about a renewed appraisal of the meaning of religious action and a change in the evaluation of the spiritual act and the limits of its application. One of the innovations that was highly significant from the social point of view was that Hasidism did not continue the tradition of a mystical ladder of ascension that demanded high spiritual and moral virtue, repentance, and mortification as a condition for spiritual ascension.<sup>6</sup> Rather it demanded only that consciousness be directed toward devotion to God and toward a path of contemplative thought that perceive the dual visage of existence, without subjecting this demand to any esoteric restrictions whatsoever.<sup>7</sup>

Hasidism brought with it a high degree of spiritual internalization of religious life, though its basic assumptions made this religious renewal into a public concern; because God is present in *every* place, and human thought is present in *every* place about which one thinks, therefore *every* act, *every* time, and *every* place can serve as the point of departure for *every* man's contemplation of the divine innerness of reality beyond its physical garments. In the Hasidic idiom, this claim is defined by a radical slogan, "in all your ways, know Him." Its earliest and most basic formulae refer frequently to "every man":

And *every man* must serve the Name, may He be praised, *in all His aspects*, for *everything* is a high need, because God, may He be praised, wants us to worship Him *in all ways*...and *in every* thing that a person does, let him think that he is gratifying his Creator.... For *in every* thing he can serve God. (*Tsavaat ha-RIBASH*, pp. 1-4)

Let one consider that *in all* your ways you shall know Him, and this is a marvelous thing, for one must consider *every* material thing and raise it and link it and join it to God, to be one. (*Keter Shem Tov*, par. 102)

The new tendency visible in the Hasidic world allows for worship of God even by means of seemingly "secular" acts, by virtue of the thought that illuminates them and the subjective intention that accompanies them. Hasidic enthusiasm for the value of intention is expressed in its innovation regarding "worship through the corporeal." That is to say, any mundane act may be considered divine service if only the appropriate intention is joined to it. The sanctification of the mundane realm and its conversion to divine service through the power of thought became one of the distinctive external characteristics of the Hasidic movement, though in fact these reflect Hasidic emphasis on the centrality of thought and the inward direction of consciousness. Prominent in this view is an expansion of the scope of divine worship into areas of human life far beyond the realm of the common tradition and its Kabbalistic interpretations, and even far beyond the traditional esoteric restrictions. Indeed, it is clear that a new criterion was set for evaluating the meaning of religious action—the act and its traditional content are no longer decisive but rather the intention and consciousness of the agent.<sup>8</sup>

The essential expansion of the domain of divine worship derives from the assumption of God's presence in every place, every thing, every word, and every thought. In response to this omnipresence, Hasidism proposes the obligation of attachment to God at all times and in every way. Unification with the divine life-flow that sustains all existence by means of "equanimity" (*hishtavut*), "nullification of being," "devotion," "stripping away corporeality," "self-annihilation," and "worship in corporeality" is the matrix for the new path of Hasidic divine worship.

The substantial expansion of the social circles for which service of this kind was intended also derived from the assumption of the divine presence in all, for the inclusiveness of the religious worldview was accompanied by inclusiveness in the conception of the social order.<sup>9</sup> The doctrine that "the meaning of 'He fills all the worlds and there is no place devoid of Him' is truly literal" (*Iggrot Ba'al ha-Tanya u-Benei Doro*, 97–98), or in other words, appreciation of the centrality of the Hasidic doctrine of immanence, was the focus of the ideological controversy and the principled reservations of the opponents of Hasidism. Indeed, these ideas were key to Hasidic doctrine, and they provided the point of departure for the transformation of the view of the essence of divinity, for the shift in the meaning of divine worship, and for the expansion of the circles addressed.<sup>10</sup> The opponents of Hasidism were well aware of the centrality of the claim of immanence and the conclusions it entailed regarding divine worship;



Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi describes the criticism of his opponents in this matter:

Especially in the matter of faith, according to what is heard in our districts from the students [of the Gaon of Vilna], that this is the understanding of the pious Gaon regarding the book *Likkutei Amarim* and those like it, that they interpret "He fills all the worlds and there is no place devoid of Him" absolutely literally. And in the eyes of his honor this is utter sacrilege, to say that He, blessed be He, is truly and actually found in low and nether things, and according to the edict of their excellency for that reason the aforementioned book [*Tsavaat Ha-RIB-ASH*] was burned. (*Iggrot Ba'al ha-Tanya u-Benei Doro*, p. 97)

The development of Hasidic thought is imprinted with the argument of unrestricted immanence and with its ramifications regarding human thought, worship, and the denial of the value of esoteric criteria in marking the bounds of spiritual attainment:

And in truth, whatever one thinks about, that is where one is, and in truth the whole earth is full of His glory, and there is no place devoid of Him, and wherever one is, there he will find devotion to the Creator, may His name be praised, from the place where he is, because there is no place devoid of Him...and in every place there is divinity. (Dov Baer of Mezhirech, *Likkutei Amarim*, Korets 1781, Fol. 26b)

These remarks and similar ones, which are reiterated countless times throughout Hasidic literature, advance the claim of divine immanence and emphasize the equal presence of God in every place. These positions lead to the conclusion that man has an unlimited obligation to attain divine immanence. Thus they conflict with the basic view of Kabbalistic thought, for they deny the meaning of the Kabbalistic hierarchy and the transcendental view on which it is based. Likewise, the Hasidim also deny the boundaries between heavenly and earthly areas of existence. Furthermore, they change the distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric, making the attainment of divinity a matter for everyone and no longer a matter restricted to an elite.

The change in principle in the relation to the Kabbalistic tradition that took place in Hasidism on the strength of an important new religious interest will be discussed again in the following chapters which analyze the mystical concepts of Hasidism. Here the connection is emphasized between the all-encompassing application of the doctrine of immanence and the expansion of the public to which a religious appeal was addressed. Corresponding to "in every place is divinity," Hasidism argued, "every person must serve the Name, may He be praised, in all his aspects," and "Now, therefore, each individual Jew,

whoever he may be, when he ponders...how the Holy One, blessed be He, is truly omnipresent in the higher and lower [worlds], and in reality that *the whole* world is truly full of His glory" (*Tanya*, p. 120). That is to say, the wide dissemination of Hasidic doctrine and its acceptance also are anchored primarily in its religious essence, for the divine "fullness" or the inclusiveness of the divine presence provided the background for the social "fullness" and the inclusiveness of its appeal.

Certainly there was a considerable distance between the normative formulation of the Hasidic world-view and its implementation in reality. Doubtless the religious and social "inclusiveness" that marked it at the start were limited by realistic restrictions at various stages of the development of Hasidism.<sup>11</sup> However, it would seem that the spiritual momentum, the renewed consciousness, and the social expansion all to a great extent drew on the world-view according to which God is present in everything, "truly literally," and according to which everyone becomes an interlocutor in a spiritual dialogue. In this view, traditional restrictions fell away from the regions of the spirit and comprehension, and the social dichotomy was annulled in the presence of this divine fullness. Religious leadership and its social boundaries also were reevaluated in response to the penetrating call, "divinity is everywhere" or, as Habad put it, "*ales iz Got*."<sup>12</sup>

Views regarding the essence of God and His connection with the world, the nature of divine worship, and the connection between man and God were crystallized in large part from the 1740s to the 1780s. The concepts were created in several circles, starting with those of the BESHT and his contemporaries, extending through the circle of the Maggid, that of Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, and the school of Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec, and ending with the disciples of the Maggid who spread Hasidism throughout Eastern Europe after his death in 1772. The various schools, the multiplicity of teachers, and the amplitude of its geographical expansion led to the growth of various currents that emphasized different aspects of Hasidic thought and created new connections between the spiritual creation and the social structure.

## Habad-Hasidism

*Habad* is an acronym for three Hebrew words, *hokhmah*, *bina*, *da'at* (wisdom, insight, and knowledge). The Habad movement is one of the most important, singular, and influential components of the Hasidic world.<sup>1</sup> This movement was founded by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745–1813), the outstanding disciple of Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirech, a highly inspired Hasidic thinker who was active during the 1760s and 1770s. Rabbi Shneur Zalman consolidated his doctrine under the influence of the Maggid and formulated a dialectical development of his teaching, while at the same time he founded a Hasidic circle in White Russia and the Ukraine during the 1780s.<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi Shneur Zalman's book, *Likkutei Amarim*, popularly known as the *Tanya*, was first published in 1796. The teachings included in it were found in manuscripts that circulated among an audience long before they were printed, as we see clearly from the introduction to the *Tanya*, and this holds true of many other Habad books. The book is regarded as the ideological manifesto of this Hasidic system, presenting a comprehensive conception of spiritual and practical life according to a dialectical principle constituted simultaneously of a relationship to God, to the world, and to man.<sup>3</sup>

The major assumptions of Habad, its principal doctrines, and its conduct in a large complex of areas were consolidated during the first three generations of the movement's existence.<sup>4</sup> The principles of Habad doctrine as well as its interpretations of Hasidism and the Kabbala were set out in the works of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, his son Rabbi Dov Baer (1773–1827), his outstanding disciple Rabbi Aharon Halevi Horowitz of Staroselye (1766–1828), and his grandson

Rabbi Menachem Mendel "ha-Tsemach Tsedek" (the Plant of Righteousness) (1789–1866).<sup>5</sup> During those years the movement took shape, and a profound and varied religious creation was composed, showing the complexity of the problems with which the leaders of Habad had to cope in the spiritual realm and that of leadership. This body of writing also testifies to the disputes that Habad aroused, for these abstract doctrines were submitted to the test of religious principle as well as to that of religious practice in the social struggle that ensued soon after their composition.<sup>6</sup>

Habad literature shows two dominant concerns:

- The consolidation of a systematic mystical theosophy based on Kabbalistic thought and its Hasidic interpretations, along with the definition of comprehensive mystical and dialectical axioms that form a bridge between God and man.
- The dissemination of Hasidism and the propagation of detailed guidance in the Habad path of *Avodat Ha-Shem* (divine worship), which relates simultaneously to contemplative and mystical elevation, on the one hand, and to a reevaluation of the respective positions of corporeality and religious worship as expressed in the Torah and the commandments, on the other hand.

The struggle concerning the role of spiritual values and the mystical spirit in the daily worship of God in the community and the clarification of the consequences of a theosophical way of thinking for a comprehensive world-view, are characteristic of the path taken by Habad Hasidism and are expressed in all its theoretical and social manifestations.

The principal Habad doctrines were formulated from the late 1770s to the mid-nineteenth century. During most of this period, Habad was the subject of fierce controversy both within the Hasidic camp and from without. The opponents of Hasidism, acting at the instigation of the Gaon of Vilna, frequently attacked Habad Hasidism for its interpretation of the doctrine of divinity, for its instructions in the worship of God, for its changes in the customs of prayer, and for its social tendencies.<sup>7</sup> The main arguments are found in the polemical literature and writs of excommunication, but the most important intellectual attempt at refutation is found in the book by Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin, *Nefesh ha-Hayim*.<sup>8</sup> In similar spirit, various Hasidic groups, headed by Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin, Rabbi Asher of Stolin, Rabbi Baruch of Meziboz, Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk, and Rabbi Zvi

Hirsch of Zydaczow, leveled penetrating criticism against the leadership of Rabbi Shneur Zalman and his interpretations of the teaching of Hasidism and the concepts of the Kabbalah.<sup>9</sup> The primary Hasidic argument against him was that he had changed the Lurianic Kabbalah, including its initial interpretation by the Maggid of Mezhirech, from an esoteric doctrine to an open teaching and an ethos that obligated the entire Hasidic community. Moreover, he had disseminated his teachings in print and transformed esoteric Kabbalistic theories into a matter to be discussed by broad circles of readers, without any elitistic impediments. The objection in principle was that he had "clothed" the teachings of the ARI (Rabbi Isaac Luria), which, by their nature, had been written in an arcane and allusive manner, in Hasidic interpretations that shed intellectual and systematic light upon them, depriving them of their appropriate esoteric nature.<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk expressed sharp discontent with Rabbi Shneur Zalman's teachings and methods:

Whereas I myself found no contentment in that your honor has... garbed the words of the holy Rabbi of Mezhirech, which are the words of the Holy Rabbi, the BESHT in the words of the holy ARI of blessed memory. Although everything leads to a single place, "the language of the Torah is one thing and the words of the Sages is something else and must be kept separate," especially because of the danger that, for our many sins, corporeality is descending and penetrating and the generation is not worthy. (*Iggrot Ba'al ha-Tanya*, p. 105)

Habad's path in religious creativity and social leadership was viewed both in the eyes of the Hasidic camp and also in those of the Mitnaggdim as an innovation in principle that must be countered. To a large extent this was because Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi and the other spiritual leaders of Habad after him erected a complete doctrine that was clearly and systematically formulated and that dealt explicitly with mystical terms as the underpinning of the worship of God. They refrained from using the traditional disguise of interpretations and homilies based on the Torah, which blur the distinction between the traditional world-view and the new one. Moreover, the teachers of Habad attributed decisive significance to the widespread promulgation of their doctrines and abandonment of traditional esoterism. The zealous dissemination of Habad doctrine through epistles and emissaries and by encouraging the circulation of pamphlets and the copying of teachings from manuscripts is well known.<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Shneur Zalman stated explicitly: "I am strongly of the opinion that we must teach our way to *the many*" (the Minsk Controversy). Indeed, he was

successful in that endeavor, as we see from the account given by Rabbi Asher of Stolin, who disagreed with Rabbi Shneur Zalman. Rabbi Asher criticizes the Habad Hasidim, saying: "There are thousands and thousands of them, and almost an entire state, who speak of nothing but the mysteries of the Torah, of secrets, and of arcane wisdom. They cry aloud in the street and at the portals of the city" (*Iggrot Baal ha-Tanya*, 185). In the introduction written by Rabbi Shneur Zalman's sons to his edition of the *Shulhan Arukh*, printed in 1814, extensive social responsiveness is discernable: "And he was joined by the flocks, the flocks of holy sheep who sought to hear the law of Israel from his mouth, and every New Moon and every Sabbath he showed it to them in a mirror illuminated with the resplendent light." Other historical evidence corroborates this picture of the making of Kabbalistic esotericism accessible to a wide audience.<sup>12</sup>

In this literature we find a combination of religious fervor and mystical ecstasy with broad erudition in the deepest recesses of Jewish literature and intellectual depth. Along with these we find creative daring, a challenge to common opinion, wide-ranging innovation in the ways of worshiping God, and absolute confidence in the significance of the Hasidic world-view. All of these led to rich creativity and the coining of new expressive idioms to represent ideas that were daring in their innovation and areas of application. The authors of Habad literature created a wealth of expressions and concepts such as *hitpa'alut* (ecstasy), *hazazah* (transformation), *hipukh* (reversal), *shlemut ha-el* (the wholeness of divinity), *ehapkha* (overturning, an Aramaic word), *etkafya* (submission, an Aramaic word), *shney hafakhim benose ehad* (paradox), *ha'atakah* (transference), *bittul hayesh* (annihilation of materiality), *hitbonenut* (contemplation), *pele* (wonder), *hashvaah* (equation), and others, which demonstrate the creative enthusiasm and the enormous, powerful spiritual drive.<sup>13</sup>

The various doctrines represent the theological interpretations of the Habad teachers of the Kabbalistic and Hasidic tradition, along with the new interpretation of the contents of the traditional religious phenomena. Some of them were written in a fundamental theosophical inquiry to clarify the mystical and contemplative principles pertaining to Kabbalistic thought. A significant part of them, however, were written to build up a unique Hasidic congregation that sought practical instruction in the worship of God along with mystical abstractions and contemplative principles.<sup>14</sup> The doctrines differ from each other in the degree of their radicalism, in the clarity of their expression, and in the daring with which they were formulated in concepts that deviated from the norm. However, it must be pointed



out that *all* of these doctrines, both the moderate and the radical ones, the practical and the theoretical, were written within the framework of absolute obedience to the Halakhic tradition, and they all express great conservatism regarding all things connected to religious practice and the traditional ethos. This sense of obligation to a structure of concepts and values that were bequeathed from past tradition is what gave Habad Hasidism the legitimization for the speculative, mystic daring, both contemplative and spiritual, that it adopted in forming its religious consciousness and consolidating the elements of the Hasidic worship of God. However, this is not a conservative doctrine in any simple sense but rather the intentional clothing of a new conception of God in traditional garb and the draping of a new feeling of the world in the veil of a conservative position. Alongside the sanctity of the Torah, the centrality of its commandments and their observance, the importance of the Halakhah, and the absolute obligation to traditional values Habad offers a new insight into the basic questions of religious thought and reinterprets the most basic content of historical Jewish religion. The relation between God and the world, the connection between man and God, between the hidden and the revealed, the meaning of divine will, the purpose of creation, the relation between being and nothingness, the meaning of the worship of God, the significance of the mystical tradition, and the examination of the limitations of human understanding in contrast to the divine point of view—all these are illuminated with a new light, reappraised according to new values, and examined according to new criteria within the world of the tradition.



## The Dual Meaning of Existence

Underlying Habad thought is a world-view that perceives a dual reality of existence and a dialectical relationship between its two components. The significance of this duality is that everything simultaneously manifests itself and its converse. This means that a true and infinite essence is found beyond all appearance of finite, manifest reality. That is, all things embody the unity of their opposites.

This duality of meaning, which applies to every dimension of reality and human experience, is inferred from the twofoldedness of the divine being, which is composed of alternating opposites.<sup>1</sup> Divinity is conceived as a dialectical *process* comprising an entity and its opposite simultaneously: "divine emanation" (*shefa ve-atsilut*) and "contraction" (*tzimtzum*); "ascending" (*ratso*) and "descending" (*vashov*); the expanded state (*gadlut*) and the ordinary state (*katnut*); infinity and finity; expanding vitality (*hitpashtut*) and limitation and envelopment (*hitlabshut*); annihilation and embodiment; concealment and revelation; "unity" and "plurality"; "being" (*yesh*) and "nothingness" (*ayin*). This duality is a mystical abstraction of the duality of God that combines the dimension of creation and that of chaos and also of the archetypal duality embodied in nature and in the twofoldedness of reality as spirit and matter.<sup>2</sup>

The principle emerging from these concepts states that divinity possesses two opposing aspects that condition one another. One of these aspects is embodied in the infinite thought that encompasses "limitless expansion," unity, and infinitude. Perception of it reaches beyond what is conceivable; it is the dimension that transcends all limitation, boundary, or form, termed, in short, *Ayin* (transcendence or literally: "nothingness") or *hitpashtut* (expansion). The second

aspect embodies the limited existence revealed within the bounds of a form, a pattern, allowing for differentiation in the experience of being and of boundary, which is termed, in short, *Yesh* (existence) or *tzimtzum*. (contraction).<sup>3</sup>

Each of these two aspects conditions the other, for at their root, the phenomena visible to man, the *Yesh*, or corporeality, are dependent on the divine *Ayin*, from which they draw their vitality and substance. In contrast, the divine *Ayin* is dependent on the modification that limits the corporeal *Yesh* for its discerned manifestation: *Yesh*, as a form, a limitation, or a conceivable contraction (*tzimtzum*), is the revealed expression of the divine *Ayin*.<sup>4</sup>

This conceptual world draws upon Kabbalistic thought and takes much of its terminology from the heritage of Lurianic mystical thought based on the Zohar. However, in Kabbalistic thought these concepts relate exclusively to the heavenly realm, the world of the *sefirot*, and the stages of emanation. Conversely, in Habad thought, these pairs of opposites and the dialectical principle they embody apply to the earthly, the heavenly, and the human realms. They are applied in every dimension that defines and distinguishes religious creativity—in the conception of God, in divine worship, and in the vantage point from which reality is interpreted.

The two aspects of divine being, realization and annihilation, symbolized by *Yesh* and *Ayin*, represent the unity of opposites and the dialectical dynamic that determines all of reality. These two aspects express the poles of the divine process based on a dynamic unity of opposites—emanation and flow represent the transformation of *Ayin* into *Yesh*, the transition from the infinite to the finite, and from unity to variety and complexity, whereas *tzimtzum* and withdrawal are bound up with the transformation of *Yesh* into *Ayin*, the return of the finite to the infinite, and the restoration of the limited to its abstract source, which necessitates the transition from plurality to unity.<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Shneur Zalman expressed this complex process in clear terms: “for this is the purpose of the creation of worlds from *Ayin* to *Yesh*, to overturn it from the aspect of *Yesh* into the aspect of *Ayin*.” (*Torah Or, Va-Yetse*, p. 44).

These pairs of opposites, which express the dynamic duality of divinity, were previously known to us from the Lurianic Kabbalistic tradition which discusses expansion and withdrawal, grace and judgment, ascending and descending, direct light and reflected light, and the like.<sup>6</sup> However, only in Hasidic thought did this dual aspect of realization and annihilation become simultaneously the essential meaning of reality, the rhythm of human consciousness, a pattern stamped on all of existence, and the principle by which it is interpret-

ed.<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Shneur Zalman wrote: "For this is the purpose of the descent, that the Higher *descend* below, and there be an 'abode for Him among the lowly,' in order to *elevate* them to become one in One" (*Tanya*, p. 317). He called the dual aspect of realization and annihilation "the ascending and descending which is withdrawal and expansion" (*Torah Or*, p. 4), and he even stated that reversal was essential to that process: "At every moment when the divine force flows, it contains self-removal to on high and return here below, and it removes itself again and returns and rests" (*Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken*, 1802, p. 20).<sup>8</sup> His son, Rabbi Dov Baer, clarified the alternating dialectic of the divine forces: "Every thing or substance which derives from the aspect of expansion certainly has a force contrary to it which also comes from that substance, therefore also the expansion of the light has the power of its contradicting opposite" (*Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, Sha'ar ha-Yihud*, fol. 57a).<sup>9</sup>

In the light of the new relationship between God and the world, which is based on the assumption that everything embodies at the same time both itself and its opposite, and in the wake of the relation between the *Yesh* and the *Ayin*, which is interpreted as a unity of opposites, all the components of divine worship are reappraised. Religious life, which has been given a new dialectical perspective, combining the substance of divine processes and that of human experience and the worship of God, henceforth is directed at the realization of the contradictory divine tendencies of "expansion" and "withdrawal" and at the revelation of the dual meaning of existence with regard to *Yesh* and *Ayin* in the various dimensions of human experience. The twofold nature of divine being becomes the matrix of the twofold nature of divine worship demanded from man in the form of *bittul ha-Yesh* (the annihilation of being) and *hamshakha el ha-Yesh* (drawing down the Divine influx).<sup>10</sup>

Habad developed a complex dialectical theosophy that is meant to decipher the laws of the divine intention in creating and ruling the world. It erected a systematic religious conception centered on a bidimensional divinity with ascent and descent, expansion and withdrawal, *Yesh* and *Ayin*, and that serves as a source of inspiration for the structure of religious worship. It also offered a comprehensive view of spiritual and practical life in the light of that divine intention. Habad views the examination of the essence of divinity in the stages of its manifestations, in its opposing wills, in its contradictory process, in its existence as a unity of opposites, in its relation to the world and as manifest in the laws of its activities, to be the essence of divine worship. Such worship is called *yihud* (unity or unification) or *hitbonenut*

(contemplation).<sup>11</sup> Habad distinguishes between a dual unification: upper unity (*yihud ha-elyon*) and lower unity (*yihud ha-tahton*). The higher unification is the focus of spiritual worship, and it means *the annihilation of the world* and its inclusion within the godhead by the deliberate effort to transcend the boundaries of existence and break through the confinement of the *Yesh*, time and place. This unification is called the “transformation of *Yesh* into *Ayin*,” “annihilation of the *Yesh*,” the “stripping away of corporeality,” “communion with God,” and “ecstasy,” and it refers to the divine will to annihilate itself.<sup>12</sup> The lower unification means the *influx of divinity* from upper realms to lower ones, from *Ayin* to *Yesh*, and its infusion into the world, in the “details of the *Yesh*,” in the material and corporeal dimension by means of Torah and the commandments. The purpose of the lower unification is to impart the essential meaning to divine worship in reality as an expression of the divine will to be realized and revealed in the opposite of its essence.<sup>13</sup> The upper unity is parallel to “ascent” or abstraction in the divine existence, and the lower unity is parallel to the “descent” or tangibility.

The dialectic concern of the upper unity is expressed in the words of Rabbi Dov Baer, Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s son, who explains the abstraction of consciousness demanded from a person as the opposite of the concretization of the divine work:

It is known that the purpose of the whole of creation from *Ayin* to *Yesh* is for the *Yesh* to be negated into the *Ayin*, and in each world the annihilation of the *Yesh* proceeds according to its own stage. The essence of the annihilation is in being negated and included truly in the blessed Light of Infinity, and united with Him in an entire and true union, in the very essence of union, as the limbs of the body are united in the divine soul, which permeates them and is clothed in them. (*Shnei ha-Meorot*, p. 29)

Behold this is the entire person in the *contemplation* of all the minute details, down to the finest specifics, from the beginning to the end, to join everything to a general unity.... And just as Scripture says, “I am truly I” and also, “I the Lord have not changed,” this is precisely the essence of the basic foundation for the contemplation of the details, so that everything is drawn to the whole (*Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or*, fol. 7a)

In the *Tanya*, Rabbi Shneur Zalman defines the dialectical principle at the basis of the upper unity: “Comprehension of existence is to strip away corporeality” (*Tanya*, p. 312), which encapsulates the basic axiom of Habad:

The worlds are annihilated in utter annihilation to Him, may He be praised...and this is the upper unity where the absolute *Ayin*



resides...and all of it is esteemed as naught before Him, and everything is like the foregoing...for the whole corporeal world and all the corporeal things in it are complete nullity and nothing at all... Therefore, this is the true worship, to divest one's mind, one's heart from all corporeality. (*Boneh Yerushalayim*, p. 15)

Rabbi Shneur Zalman explains the matter of the *lower unification* as a reflection of the divine will to be revealed in the opposite of its essence. This divine yearning requires the concretization of consciousness, as the opposite of the divine abstraction:

The essence of the unification is to draw down the influx of the blessed Light of the Infinite by study of Torah and performance of the commandments for it is for the unification of the Blessed Holy One and His Divine Presence...that is to draw down the influx through the Torah and the commandments so that divinity will be revealed in this world. (*Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken; Ethalekh-Loznia*, p. 26)

And the unity of the Blessed Holy One and the Divine Presence is...that He is Holy and separated and is [nevertheless] drawn to reveal Himself in the lower worlds, and this is the matter of "abode for Him among the lowly," which is the reason for the creation of all the worlds. (*Likkutei Torah, Shir ha-Shirim*, fol. 41a)

The "abode for Him among the lowly" or "lower indwelling" (*dira batahtonim*) refers to the manifestations of the light of the infinity in the lower reality as in the upper worlds. It reflects the divine will to reveal itself by reversing its essence to illuminate the dark reality. The meaning of the lower unity is that it assists in fulfilling the divine will to be revealed in its opposite; religious worship is directed toward establishing the conditions making possible the "lower indwelling" and the revealing of the influx of the light of infinity below, "to light up the darkness in particular." (*Likkutei Torah, Va-Yikra, Pikudei*, fol. 3a).

The essence of His intention, may He be praised, is that there should be an indwelling below in particular...and that there should be a manifestation below just as above and, the more so, even more intensely and an excess of light should be revealed in that which is actually more nether. (*Likkutei Torah, Ba-Midbar*, fol. 37a)

Although the ascending (*ratso*) is higher, nevertheless the purpose of creation is to have "an abode for Him among the lowly," so there should be divine manifestation below, and this is the meaning of "descending" (*shov*). (*Likkutei Torah, Devarim*, fol. 87b)

Each of these two aspects reflects a contradiction: the being of the spirit seeks to be embodied in matter, and matter seeks to be raised

up to the spirit. Both originate in the conscious intellectual effort that elucidates the essence of divine processes. They continue through the intellectual effort to grapple with the gap between the palpable and the abstract, which brings about a change in patterns of conception, and they culminate in deep internalization within the soul and in spiritual and emotional identification with the contents of contemplation. These two perspectives are dominant in the worship of God, and in the contemplative and ecstatic consciousness: "And let your eyes see as it were the illuminated mirror...that is to say *the conception of divinity as it really is and not as it is grasped and hidden in [common] perceptions*" (Rabbi Dov Baer, *Shnei ha-Meorot*, fol. 11b).<sup>14</sup>

The essential dialectical structure of Habad theosophy and of Habad worship derives from the perception of the dual essence of God, who longs to become both Nothingness and Being at the same time, or who wishes to have a transcendental essence, on the one hand, and an immanent essence, on the other.<sup>15</sup> These two tendencies of the divine will—the aspect of *ratso vashov*, the dynamic "ascent and descent," and the aspect of "revelation and concealment"—direct the worship of God in two opposite directions. One is the spiritual direction that yearns for the heavens and seeks the Naught, transcending the barriers of reality, known in Habad terminology as "love in the flames of fire," "beyond reason and knowledge." The second is the earthly and concrete direction that strives to bring God down into the domain of the *Yesh*, "to draw Him into vessels," "to reveal Him within reality," and "to make 'an abode for Him among the lowly.'" The first dimension generally is linked to prayer (*avodah*, "worship," in Habad vocabulary) and the striving for mystical elevation. The second dimension is bound up with the observance of the commandments and the study of Torah.

Behold there are two aspects in the worship of God. One is love in the flames of fire and the very strong desire to *leave the body* and separate from prayer, and this is the "great love" which the vessel of the heart cannot contain because the heart cannot contain such a mighty ecstatic inspiration. Therefore it cannot remain within the body and seeks to leave its encasement of bodily matter. And the second is the aspect of inspiration that *settles within the heart*, and its main concern is to draw divinity down from on high, specifically in the various vessels of Torah and commandments. And this is the matter of *ascent and descent*. (*Torah Or*, Va-Yishlakh, p. 49)

Worship is an aspect of ascent and annihilation, and Torah and commandments are an aspect of the passageways drawing the divine influx from above to below. (*Ethalekh*, 28)

The essence of the matter of Torah and prayer, as is known, is alluded to in the verse "and the living creatures darted to and fro" (Ezekiel 1:14), meaning the force of ascent and descent: the root and foundation of prayer are in *ascent* ("to") and the Torah is an aspect of *descent* ("fro"). (R. Dov Baer, *Derekh Hayim, Sha'ar ha-Tefila*, fol. 50b)

Habad combines the two contradictory tendencies of quietistic spiritualism that responds to the divine will to nullify and annihilate itself (*ascent*) and aspiritual activism, which responds to the divine will to materialize itself (*descent*).<sup>16</sup> Hence, along with the broad expression of the contemplative tendency that seeks the "nullification of being" and "stripping away corporeality" in mystic contemplation, in abandoning the matters of this world, in cleaving to God, there is also an active tendency that desires "to draw the divinity down from on high," which accords great value to religious and material life and requires involvement in the world of action from the point of view of practical commandments and the study of Torah, as well as through participation in social obligations of public service.



## The Dialectical Systems

The uniqueness of Habad thought lies in the complex formulation of dialectical systems possessing two foci. These systems accord great significance to each of the two dimensions that reflect the double meaning of existence, and they interpret the interdependent relationship between the two components of that meaning.

Six central dialectical systems reflect the dual meaning of reality and rest on the tension between the essence of existence and its various manifestations. However there is barely any concept in Habad thought that does not have its dialectical counterpart:

1. The two opposing divine wills—materialization and annihilation—that determine the rhythm of divine life and that, in Habad terminology, are called *ratso vashov* (ascent and descent), or expansion and withdrawal.<sup>1</sup>
2. The two fashions of divine presence—transcendence and immanence—that Habad calls “surrounding all the worlds” and “permeating all the worlds.”<sup>2</sup>
3. The two opposites—the revealed semblance of reality and its true infinite essence—that are defined as *Yesh* and *Ayin*, reflect the double meaning of existence in which everything embodies itself and its opposite.<sup>3</sup>
4. Two vantage points that interpret reality—“as for Him” and “as for us.” That is, the divine point of view that conceives the truth of reality, and the human point of view that perceives its semblance, its revealed image, which is illusory.<sup>4</sup>
5. The two souls that make up the human mind—the bestial soul and the divine soul. The first represents the earthly,

revealed tendency; and the second the tendency to rise up to the hidden, divine essence.<sup>5</sup>

6. The two dimensions in the worship of God, which respond to the divine will to annihilate itself, by means of ecstatic prayer, the divesting of corporeality and annihilation of being, on the one hand, and the divine will to become material, by means of worship in Torah and the observances of the commandments, and drawing the divine light into the details of the *Yesh* and the depths of matter, on the other.<sup>6</sup>

The link between any of these pairs of opposites is a constant relation. The first member is the source of vitality and coming into being that is related to the infinite divine expansion, and the second member is the limited manifestation that can be comprehended, that is gripped in matter, and that relates to finite material reality. However, each of these opposites changes its essence fundamentally and incessantly—the infinite yearns to be manifest in the finite, and the finite aspires to be enveloped again in the infinite. This posits a process of differentiation and manifestation within corporeality, on the one hand, and a process of unification and stripping away of corporeality, on the other. These are what determine the laws of all existence in all its manifestations.<sup>7</sup>

The essentially dialectical structure of the Habad theosophy can give rise to erroneous interpretations. It is concerned, on the one hand, with the spiritual transcendence of the world, whereas, on the other, it affirms the divine immanence in the world. Essentially it faces in both directions of the dual divine will, and it patterns religious worship in both directions. Hence, one may not draw inferences with regard to its appearance on the basis of a certain chapter or a specific paragraph or draw penetrating conclusions that address only one dimension of Habad thought, whereas in fact the spiritual dimension and the concrete dimension are intertwined, inseparably, as an expression of the dual meaning of existence and as a response to the dialectical character of divinity.<sup>8</sup>

Habad doctrine has varied and complex countenances as presented in scores of books. Its principal doctrines are expounded by way of scriptural commentary and by the clarification of basic concepts of Kabbalistic thought. Its various formulators chose original manners of expression alongside more conventional ones, for the dissemination of their religious world-view. As noted, no single narrow angle within the broad range of mutual interrelations among the various dimensions can reflect the essential dialectic underlying its doctrine. One

must attempt to decipher the uniqueness of the Habad theosophy on the basis of an examination of the teachings and writings within the broad perspective of Hasidic spirituality and within the tradition of the Kabbalah. Habad's dialectical principles provide the common denominator for all its various aspects. The ideology of the movement was constituted in the fervor of the discovery of a new world of ideas, encompassing all of reality. It gave powerful expression to the creative mystical renewal that interpreted the mutual relations among the various components of existence.





## The Books of Habad

The main teachings of Habad may be found in the books of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Rabbi Dov Baer his son, and Rabbi Aharon Halevi of Staroselye, his prominent student. Important insights are found in the works of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's disciples: Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh and Rabbi Yitshak Isaac of Homel, and clarifications and principles may be found in the works of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Shneurson, the *Tsemah-Tsedek*. Naturally there are differences of emphasis and concern and also editorial preferences among the various works, but the common features of their world-view, their underlying terminology, their world of concepts and religious meanings far outweigh the differences that separate the various works.

The principal tenets of Habad thought appear in the following works:

- Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya, Likkutei Amarim* (Slawita 1796), the standard edition being that of Vilna 1937.  
*Torah Or* (Kopys 1837), the standard edition being that of Vilna 1899; Brooklyn 1978.  
*Likkutei Torah* (Zhitomir 1848), the standard edition being that of Vilna 1904; Brooklyn 1979.  
*Boneh Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem 1926).  
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The volumes of the letters of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Rabbi Dov Baer, Rabbi Aharon Halevi, and their correspondence with associates in Russia and in the Land of Israel have preserved highly valuable historical and theological material. The most important items appear in *Iggrot Ba'al ha-Tanya u-Bnei Doro* (Jerusalem 1953), ed. D. Z. Hillman, and in *Iggrot Kodesh* (New York 1980), ed. S. D. Levine. Significant biographical material regarding the growth of the Habad movement is found in H. M. Hielmann, *Beit Rabi* (Berdichev, 1902), and in M. Teitelboim, *Ha-rav mi-Liadi u-Miflegat Habad* (Warsaw 1910) and in the introductions to the books of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Rabbi Aharon Halevi, and Rabbi Dov Baer.

Aside from the foregoing, hundreds of other volumes reflect the teachings of Habad and its development over two centuries and attempt to deal practically with the meaning of Hasidic and Kabbalistic concepts.<sup>2</sup> Any effort to present the main tenets of Habad doctrine must take into account that its vast scope prevents unequivocal determinations and that it is not possible to offer a uniform and exhaustive

presentation of views laid out in thousands of pages. The present study seeks to bring out the central structure of Habad doctrine, which has essential meaning for its world-view, and offers a broad and consecutive insight into the doctrine of divinity and divine worship in the light of the new spiritual reality.



## The Doctrine of the Soul

The basic assumption for the understanding of reality in Kabbalistic thought is that the upper and lower worlds are mingled and mutually related—everything is included within everything, and each aspect contains depths of reflected representations and infinite reciprocal relations.<sup>1</sup> The basis of this mutuality is language, for according to the Kabbalistic view, its source is divine and many faceted. The divine language is a manifestation of God's creative power and its concretization.<sup>2</sup> The emanation of divine abundance in the process of creation can be grasped as the process in which the divine language is detailed and elucidated. The foundations of the divine language appear as the letters of the Holy Scriptures, and in that aspect of them, which expresses an infinite variety of significances within formal limitation, they are also accessible to human intellect. Language is that which endows humans with the capacity to abstract their experience of reality and the means to interpret the totality of existence in concrete fashion. The divine utterance, which is creative in its form as the language of thought and speech, is the abstract and concrete pattern, by means of which experience, with its dual meaning, is interpreted. The upper worlds are related to everything in existence as a pattern and image—every dimension in the divine being, in the world, and in the human soul is related to the total pattern of the other dimensions, and every existence reflects other existences and is reflected in them.<sup>3</sup> Further, not only is everything reflected in everything, but also everything acts on everything—the upper worlds influence the human soul and human worship influences the upper worlds; divine thought emanates on human thought and human thoughts and intentions are interwoven in the dynamic of divine life.

Kabbalistic reciprocity and the relations of pattern and image between aspects of divinity and all existing things were expanded upon at the moment that Hasidic masters stated that every action and every thought are related to the structure of all the worlds when reflecting contemplative consciousness or concentration of thought that attempts to break through the boundaries of common sensory perception and strives to decipher successive continuity of the divine unity in existence.<sup>4</sup> The fundamental distinction is drawn between the spiritual world, which is constructed from divine and human speech and thought, and the corporeal world, which is composed of separate objects and sensory perception. The spiritual world is assumed to be a structure of concepts or a substantive, normative entity that interprets corporeal reality and circumscribes this reality in a unified and consolidated structure. Habad thought sharpened the Kabbalistic and Hasidic view and laid out a complex dialectical relationship between the various aspects of *divinity*, both abstract and tangible, creative and annihilating, and between the various dimensions of the *soul*: those inclining toward the abstract and comprehensive dimensions and those leaning toward the tangible and concrete elements. The Habad doctrine of the soul is based on a reciprocal relationship between the two dimensions of divinity, the two faces of existence, the two aspects of the human soul, and the two vantage points on reality. All of these join together in a complex dialectical structure in which each of the aforementioned aspects corresponds to the dynamic of concealment and manifestation, coming into being and self-annihilation, stripping away and concretization, emanation and withdrawal, infusing and removal, or to the dynamic of the unity of opposites.

The Habad doctrine of the soul is based on the Kabbalistic assumption which states that the structure of the soul and its essence reflect the various aspects of the divinity and that human consciousness reflects the dual ontology of the divine essence.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, these two aspects of the soul are contrasted to the two aspects of the mystic image of God, the concrete and the abstract, and to the dialectical structure of self-realization and self-annihilation within the godhead. A structure of self-realization and self-annihilation is posited within human consciousness. The aspect of the soul that relates to the process of coming into being, separation from the divine origin, concretization, and expansion within corporeal existence is called *nefesh behemit* (the bestial soul) in Habad literature, and that which relates to the tendency toward self-annihilation, the stripping away of corporeality, and inclusion within divinity is known as *nefesh elohit* (the divine soul). These are not two separate souls but rather two sorts of



consciousness or two separate types of interpretive apprehension and generalizing relation to surrounding reality, and two different levels of consciousness of the divine entity.<sup>6</sup> This argument regarding the dimensionality of the soul and the duality of consciousness derives from the assumption that the understanding of human consciousness demands its placement within a certain context, and that observation of the processes of consciousness requires that it be placed in a broad perspective. The context proposed by Habad doctrine is a dual context—the soul versus the world and sensory reality, on the one hand, and the soul versus divine being and metaphysical reality, on the other.

Apprehension through the divine soul is founded on a series of metaphysical truths and based on mystical awareness that experiences the clarification of corporeal existence and the conversion of material reality into a transparent being illuminated by the infinite light of the divinity. From this point of view the obscurity of consciousness is penetrated as if the walls of reality became clarified, and through their transparency, the infinite, divine light becomes visible, and the world reinterpreted. The boundaries of perception are transcended. This is called *behirut* (clarity) in the Habad lexicon. It means to penetrate beyond the screens of corporeality, matter, and sensory perception, and beyond the faint and limited vision of life. These lead one to acquire a divine point of view regarding reality, raising up the unified truth of divine life, or the expanding the boundaries of perception beyond the grasp of the senses: "And this is the meaning of 'They shall see eye to eye' (Isaiah 52:8)—the sight of the eye below will be equal and directed to the sight of the eye above" (*Likkutei Torah*, Bamidbar, 13b). That is to say, comprehension of the divine soul is to assume the vantage point from which God views the world. From that vantage point the acosmic truth is manifest:

Truly the essence of comprehension is through knowledge which joins the brain and the heart in a feeling of the *Ayin*...because in truth everything is nothing and naught...and the essence of worship is to detach oneself from one's place [and to transcend] the perception of human senses, *only to perceive the true thing which is not clothed*...that is, to accustom oneself to observe the spirituality which gives life...and the essence of perception is...that all of reality and every apprehension of it are nothingness and naught," (*Iggrot Kodesh, Kuntres Miluim*, Brooklyn 1981, letter 2)

The "bestial soul" conceives the world as though all that really exists were merely the realm of palpable things and founded on sensory consciousness, visual manifestation, and empirical experience. It

views reality as something separate from its divine source, clothed in a corporeal and material garment. This consciousness is anchored in the appearance of reality, its concrete limitations, and its separate manifestations. For this soul, reality is only a “separate entity,” barriers, screens, and limits, which completely obscure the divine essence. The bestial soul is related to the limited existence of reality and to its interpretation by means of the senses and its consolidation in separate objects or to its limited recognition and narrow, incomplete comprehension:<sup>7</sup> “Only because of the routine to which one has become habituated in this world does one look only on the gross corporeality and on the materiality of things, which hide and cover and deny the truth. Thus, because of the concealment of its divinity, the *Yesh* seems [real] to him” (*ibid.*).

The Habad doctrine of the soul assumes that the external world is only a reflection of the content of consciousness, and that only consciousness is what endows reality with meaning. Therefore, religious effort is concentrated on altering consciousness and understanding the inner dynamic of comprehension. The various parts of the soul are merely different levels of awareness of the divinity and reality, and their religious significance derives from the fact that they are changeable.

Thus, the parts of the soul are viewed as various levels of consciousness of the divine essence and as different ways of apprehending the dual meaning of all existence. This view is accompanied by accentuation of the metamorphic character of the parts of the soul. An analogy is drawn between the interrelationship of the two souls and the divine unification with the worlds, and the relations of ascent and descent of the *Yesh* and the *Ayin*. These pairs of contradictions that create unity—the infinite emanation defined in restricted form, the abundance metamorphosed into *tzimtzum*, the infinite manifest in the finite, and its finite opposite member divesting itself of corporeality and annihilating itself within the infinite—also apply to consciousness, which also apprehends the unity of opposites. Religious consciousness or awareness strives to interpret the concrete by the abstract, the material by the symbolic, and to present reality in its dual significance, that reaches far beyond the concrete level in the light of its metaphysical meaning. In Habad terms, consciousness seeks to transform the *Yesh* into *Ayin*, and to see the *Ayin* within the *Yesh*, because the meaning of the unity of opposites is that the world is both *Ayin* and *Yesh*.

Habad thought developed these two modes of apprehension, which are implied by the metamorphic view of existence, into a com-

plex dialectical system composed of annihilation and creation, which determine the changing dimensions of consciousness:

Just as in the divine processes the infinite light conceals and contracts itself, as it obscures its existence and emits a limited and dim light, thereby creating a reality in a process of delimitation and manifestation, that is, of occlusion and representation, in ascent and descent, so too in human consciousness the pattern of limitation, occlusion, and confinement prevails. This limited apprehension may be enhanced by illumination and clarification, by the divestment of corporeality, by contemplative meditation, or through ecstasy, then the meaningless totality of the *Yesh* is pierced and its boundaries become transparent; the Infinite is then visible through them. However, when limited and dim consciousness once again reigns, reality reverts to a passive existence, deprived of any life-giving spiritual element. Once more it becomes concrete, meaningless palpability, as if veiled by "barriers" or screens that obscure the divine essence, and it is subjected to the limitations of sensory perception.

The limited perception, which relates to a reality of false tangibility by means of its revealed visible image and which errs in seeing it as the *Yesh* in itself, is called the *bestial soul*; whereas abstract perception that relates to the divine essence of reality and its dual aspects, that proposes stripping away the material and deciphering the meaning of human experience is called the *divine soul*.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Habad doctrine of the soul, consciousness directly determines being and nothingness, and it gives meaning to concrete reality; for the clear consciousness, to which reality is transparent, only the divine is a true entity. With the apprehension of the divine soul, the finite becomes infinite, the corporeal becomes illuminated, the *Yesh* is annulled, reality becomes nothingness, and essential being is attributable only to the divine. For the dulled consciousness, which relates to the empirical level of human experience, only the corporeal exists. Beyond the closed barriers of existence, which are apprehended in the *bestial soul* as a separate entity and a distinct reality, the Infinite is absent and obscure, the *Ayin* has no significance, and only the *Yesh* is actually found and is grasped as an existent thing.

Habad thought, which draws on acosmic mysticism, tends to view nothingness and being as determined by religious consciousness, not as empirical experience. Therefore, the two modes of human consciousness, that called the *divine soul* and that which is called the *bestial soul*, interpret the truth of reality: from the viewpoint of the *bestial soul*, heaven and earth are "materiality that conceals," and a screen separates it from the divine reality. However, from the stand-

point of the divine soul, everything is null and void in contrast to the divine fullness, and they are nothing but imagination, for in truth everything is the divinity:

Earth and heaven are like a curtain that separates, for they do not see His blessed unity, and in truth they are merely fantasies for it is imagined that there is a world, but in truth there is only simple unity...and our seeing the existence of the world is only imagination. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Boneh Yerushalayim*, p. 54, sig. 50)

In another brief summation of the apprehension of the divine soul, Rabbi Shneur Zalman says: "Let him understand and know that in truth everything is fundamentally naught as before the world was created, without any change at all...and it would be entirely erroneous to take the world that appears to us as existing or something in itself" (*Likkutei Torah, Va-Yikra*, p. 70). That is to say, human contemplation, by stripping away the outer reality and by mystical illumination (the divine soul), is the true interpreter of being, rather than fallacious human sensory experience that draws on visible manifestation and sensory stimulation (the bestial soul), which perceives only corporeal reality.

The basic assumption of the Habad doctrine is founded on the Lurianic doctrine of the soul. The Lurianic theory maintains that man possesses two souls, which are connected to one another in an androgenous and bivalent connection. The divine soul and the bestial soul represent two parallel systems and express the relations between the concealed and the revealed, that which is unified in its divine source and that which is separate from it, in all of existence.<sup>9</sup> Further, the divine soul is "part of the upper divinity" or the divine element present in man. This soul represents true awareness of unified reality. It reflects the yearning of the spirit to return to the heavenly source and to cleave to its root. It symbolizes the propensity of the *Yesh* to return to the *Ayin*. The bestial soul derives from *kelipat-nogah* (the shell of radiance), which combines good and evil within it, representing the awareness of distinct reality, erroneously viewing itself as possessing autonomous and independent existence, reflecting a life that does not view itself as part of the divine unity. From another point of view, it expresses the yearning for an apparent reality and symbolizes the transformation of the *Ayin* into *Yesh*.

As noted, the divine soul reflects contemplative consciousness, and the bestial soul reflects empirical experience, and both of them embody the relations between the spiritual and the physical, the essential and the manifest, as they are reflected in all existence. The

relation between the two souls is interdependent; the divine soul is the source of the vitality of the bestial soul and a condition for its existence, and the bestial soul is the garment and disguise that conditions the manifestation of the divine soul and its distinct existence.

As we have seen, the Habad doctrine of the soul views the different parts of the soul as levels of awareness of the divine essence and as two ways of interpreting the meaning of reality. It also holds that the parts of the soul are a reflection of the relations between the spiritual and the corporeal and an expression of the two aspects of divine being. Hence this doctrine forms a bridge between the theological assumptions and the conclusions they imply in divine worship, while forming the stage upon which the reversals in consciousness take place, when the *Yesh* becomes *Ayin* and the *Ayin* becomes *Yesh*.

The structure of the soul and its essence reflect the various aspects of divinity and the reciprocal relations between the upper worlds and the human soul. The Habad doctrine of the soul postulates a parallel dualistic structure of spiritual forms that relate to the *Ayin* and to the unity of God, on the one hand, and to the *Yesh* and the division within corporeal reality, on the other hand. Habad maintains that these principles are unified in their common source, despite their separate manifestation. These principles are given various names, depending on the context in which they are discussed. At one pole is the *Ayin*, sanctity, unity, expansion and manifestation, knowledge and wisdom, and *Yetser ha-Tov* (the impulse for good), which are represented in the divine soul. At the opposite pole is the *Yesh*, the *sitra ahra* (satanical forces), the differentiation and the erroneous imagination, and *Yetser ha-R'a* (the impulse for evil), which are represented in the bestial soul. The dialectic between the *Yesh* and the *Ayin* is the dialectic between the bestial and divine souls, between *sitra ahra* and sanctity, as previously explained. Therefore, the true meaning of a metamorphosis in the one is a change in all the dimensions of the other.<sup>10</sup>

The relations among the different parts of the soul are not bounded by the borders of human psychology, but they are primarily a representation of the various dimensions in the divine being, and they are an expression of the various degrees of knowledge of the divine essence and its corporeal manifestations. Hence, these relations occupy a cardinal position in the Habad doctrine of the soul. Theogonic processes and the mystical-contemplative reversal are transferred into the human soul and its consciousness. Here they are represented by the dialectical pairs of revelation and concealment, clarification and obscurity, abstraction and concreteness, self-annihilation and manifestation, extension and removal. This dialectic regulates the relations

between the divine soul and the bestial soul, which together constitute the unity of opposites.

The principal claim regarding the division of the soul and its relationship to the alternating systems of perceptions is presented clearly by Rabbi Shneur Zalman:

For it is known that there are two souls in every man, a divine soul and a bestial soul. And every soul is divided in two. And they consist of intellect and attributes. The essence of the soul is intellect. For the essence of the divine soul is intellectual, and it is constantly contemplating and perceiving the light of the blessed Infinite; it has no other perception. The attributes of love and fear are born of the intellect and of that perception, and they are called the good impulse. Similarly, the essence of the bestial soul is that it applies its intellect to the perception of the corporeality of this world and its matter. This is the opposite of the divine soul, for the soul which is garbed in corporeal concerns is truly the opposite of the intellect of the divine soul, which is the equivalent of the higher wisdom.... The intellectual achievement in comprehending corporeality according to the human mind is a lie and truly the opposite of divine wisdom, which is true wisdom, and the faculties born of the corporeal soul are called the evil impulse. A person must dominate it so as not to behave according to the attributes born of the perception of the bestial soul. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Torah Or*, p. 75)

As noted, the two souls represent the two kinds of apprehension: that of the truth of things and that of things in their deceptive appearance. The former is abstract and based on the true divine vantage point, whereas corporeal knowledge is founded on the shortsightedness of human apprehension that derives from the direct experience of the senses. These two souls reflect the dialectic of self-annihilation and self-realization in the divine being and the distinction between the external appearance of things and their true essence. In his commentary on the first chapters of Genesis, Rabbi Shneur Zalman describes the contrasts between the two souls or between the two principles of perception—their differing apprehension and their contrasting relation to reality, as well as the dialectical connection between them:

Behold, there are two aspects of the heart, that is the interior of the heart and its exterior. The interior aspect is a blaze and a flame of love of God in joy and goodness of the heart, with great measures of everything which is the joy of *the divine soul*, which understands and contemplates the light of the blessed Infinity, the source from which it is quarried and the root in which it was included in His blessed



emanation before it descended to this world.... And he who is wise is one who sees...that the world does not conceal or hide the blessed infinite light, which is not in and of the world at all, and everything before Him is truly like nothing and naught. Therefore let the soul cleave to its root in the living God, let it be profoundly included and unified in the manner in which it was before its descent.... This will cause the soul to delight in the Lord...and there will be great joy for God, with flaming up and blazing of the soul because of its closeness to the Lord who is good to it.... This is the aspect of "oneness" in the soul, which is not garbed at all in the garments of the body and the bestial soul. Only let the soul be filled with the light and joy of the Lord alone." (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Torah Or*, p. 13)

The world that makes its mark on the soul or the "world" that the soul reflects is not made in the image and figure of the world that exists through sensory experience. That "inner" world is the effect of a complex of intellectual processes and abstract thought. It is these that endow external reality with spiritual meaning and point toward the unity of existence and its meaning. In contrast, Rabbi Shneur Zalman describes the outer world, which is known through sensory perception:

But the outwardness of the heart is the attribute of night and darkness, which has in it concealment and obscurity, the garbing of the body and *the bestial soul* in which the soul is garbed. And just as the attributes of the divine soul are love and fear, so they are "one versus the other" [the converse of each other], for this love is an aspect of the lower unity in which the world appears to be *Yesh*.... Although there are two hearts, the day attribute and the night attribute, *they are not separate in their substance*, perish the thought, only the night attribute is an aspect of the manifestation of the substance of the day attribute. Thus it can appear in true and real manifestation, out of concealment and out of what is hidden from the intellect of the heart to the true and actual manifestation of the heart, so that the heart becomes a vessel and sanctuary for the inspiration of that love.... But it is impossible for the higher love to be manifest. It could be revealed only by means of the night attribute and darkness, which is a contraction of the light and its garbing in descent by degree after degree...and it seems *as if* it is a separate thing. (*Torah Or*, p. 13)

The dialectical structure of relations between the two parts of the soul is based on the axiom that "they are not separate in their substance" but only seem to be separate. This structure is identical to the structure of relations between the two aspects of divinity, manifestation and concealment. This permits us to comprehend the complex of relations between the two souls as reflecting relations that take place



throughout all existence. The guiding principle is the duality of divine tendencies: the inclusion of the “manifested” within the essence and the conversion of the “bestial” to “divine,” on the one hand, and on the other hand, the enrobing of the essence within manifestation, or the garbing of the “divine” in the “bestial” as an expression of concretization of the divine will “to manifest His blessed divinity truly and actually.” Hence, a parallel is suggested between the unification of the divinity with the worlds and the unification of the divine soul with the bestial soul. On the one hand, “the main act of worship is to arouse the divine vitality in man’s divine soul in order *to reverse* the vitality of his bestial soul”; on the other hand, “it is known that the main purpose of the creation of the worlds in general and the descent of the soul into the body in particular is *to manifest* His blessed divinity truly in fact” (*Sha’arei ha-Avodah*, III, Chapter 16).

The reversal or transformation in consciousness from the bestial soul to the divine soul, or from perception of the *Yesh* to conception of the *Ayin*, stands in dialectical opposition to the reversal of the divine from concealment to revelation or from *Ayin* to *Yesh*: one’s recognition of the double meaning of reality, the dual countenance of the human soul and the reversals in consciousness that derive from it is the purpose of human creation. Because of the duality of human existence, one is endowed with the ability to apprehend the existence of other created things that are not oneself and to know entities that exist beyond one’s experience and limited existence and to reverse one’s angles of vision, whereas all other creatures can perceive only themselves and the boundaries of their own existence, and they gain a static conception of the structure of their world. This human ability to conceive of the creation beyond the confines of existence derives from being a nexus between upper and lower worlds, containing elements of each. For one has the divine element of abstract thought (the divine soul) and a corporeal element and sensory perception (the bestial soul), and therefore one can conceive both the upper and lower worlds. Because of the combination of the spiritual and corporeal within human experience one can comprehend what is like oneself and what is outside of oneself and can evoke a reversal within one’s consciousness. Habad doctrine emphasizes the dimension of infinity within the human soul and its essence, which reflects all existences, and it emphasizes the shifts within the parts of the soul and the reversals among them. This multidimensionality links human beings with both metaphysical and mundane components, and it reflects the dualistic Kabbalistic structure and the tension embodied within it:

Thus the two souls, the divine and the vitalizing animal soul that comes from the *kelipah* wage war against each other. (*Tanya*, p. 27)

The real truth, however, is that there are two souls, waging war one against the other in the person's mind, each one wishing and desiring to rule over him and to pervade his mind exclusively. Thus all thoughts of Torah and the fear of Heaven come from the divine soul, while all mundane matters come from the animal soul, except that *the divine soul is clothed in it*. (*Tanya*, p. 70)

In Habad thought the polarity and tension between the two souls are interpreted on various levels, for human consciousness mirrors the dynamic of divine life and the interpretation of the meaning of existence, and the two souls represent, as noted, the two opposite tendencies that determine the image of divinity as the unity of opposites.



## The Divine Soul

The teachers of Habad accepted the Kabbalistic doctrine of the soul, which views it or several parts of it as an entity whose source is divine. They stated explicitly, "indeed this [soul] is truly an aspect of the divinity, only it shines by means of man's comprehension of the divine perception. This divine perception is one from which every category of *Yesh* has been negated, for it is an aspect of the divine *Ayin*" (*Kuntres ha-Hitpa'alut*, 31).<sup>1</sup> Because of its divine source, the divine soul seeks to return to its origin in the upper regions: "The spirit of mankind is an aspect of the divine soul which rises up, and its root is taken from the upper dimensions, hence it always yearns to be incorporated and annihilated,...and it wants to rise up to its root" (Rabbi Aharon Halevi, *Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, III). Like any other spiritual element, its manifestation is dependent on "being garbed" and this concealment within another element enables it to be manifest. Therefore, the divine soul "clothes itself" in the bestial soul to become manifest:<sup>2</sup>

For the divine soul comes in the garment of the bestial soul and it is mingled with it so that only the bestial soul is revealed.... And all these aspects of the divine soul, the manifestation of all its aspects, is through its being garbed in the bestial soul. However, in the divine soul, in its substance and essence, they are included in one power, for its root and foundation are in His blessed power and are part of Him. (*Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, Introduction)

The connection of the divine soul with the bestial soul is dialectical, for being garbed is the condition for its manifestation, as noted. However, the reason for its being is to reverse the essence of the bestial soul and "disencumber" it or to transform the structure of perception

by which reality is interpreted: "The essential descent of the divine soul into the body is to disencumber [*levarer*] the bestial soul, which is from *nogah*, and reverse it to holiness and clarify all of its aspects" (*Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, Introduction). The background for the transformative function of the divine soul is found in Habad theosophy, which states that the purpose of the descent of the divine soul into this world is identical with the purpose of the creation of the worlds, that is, "the manifestation of His blessed glory in the nether realms."

The purpose of the creation of the worlds in Habad doctrine is interpreted as a stage toward achieving the divine goal of the full actualization of all its manifestations through its reversal.<sup>3</sup> The underlying assumption is that the Deity did not complete the realization of its intentions during creation, nor was its manifestation perfect, but that it left the completion of its manifestation and the fulfillment of its dual will to man. Man assists divinity in completing its manifestation through awareness of the double meaning of reality and by unveiling the divine essence of the *Yesh* beyond its visible appearance, by means of his divine soul.

As noted, the divine intention was manifestation through its opposite, and the rhythm of the divine life extends between the poles of concealment and manifestation and in the vacillations between them. But the essence of being lies in the claim that these two dialectical elements of manifestation and concealment are found within the human soul in the image of the divine and bestial souls. Thus the stage for the theogonic process passes over to man, to his apprehension and his worship:

But His very blessed intention was not manifest at the time of the Creation, for the essence of His intention was for an additional manifestation... For the essence of manifestation in this respect is by man's worship...but, since the essential point of the intention of Creation was that the power of His blessed perfection should be manifest from all dimensions, that is, precisely within a boundary and a distinction with regard to divided things and differentiated ones. Nevertheless He will be manifest in them in His unification. Moreover, the manifestation of His unification and blessed divinity should be seen particularly with regard to the *sitra ahra*...with regard to His blessed intention, that He should be revealed particularly in the reversal which is the *sitra ahra*, so that His glory should be revealed in the aspect of His unification actually through reversal, in the reversal of the *sitra ahra* and actually in the changing of darkness into light, which, in His blessed intention with regard to the breaking of the vessels is that the blessed divine revelation should, in particular, be through reversal in the aspect of overturn-

ing or inversion...and the intention is from Him, blessed be He, so that they will become disencumbered by means of the worship of those in the nether worlds. (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*, V, Chapter 15).

The daring view that emerges from the foregoing remarks—which views evil as necessitated by sanctity and interprets the *sitra ahra*, the total force of evil, as demanded by the Deity for the purpose of its revelation and as conditioning metamorphic reversals—set the boundaries of religious tension within this doctrine, and it shall be discussed in detail later. Here, in the context of the discussion of the doctrine of the soul, we seek to view the analogous relationship between the reversals of the divine dialectic and those within the soul, in accordance with the assumption that a single and common spiritual dynamic governs them all:

And all of this is with an enormous intention before Him, blessed be He, that the soul should descend and the divine soul whose root is in a very high and exalted place, should *garb itself* in the bestial soul, which is at the lowest degree, so that it may *reverse* all the powers in the body to an aspect of divinity, as overturning or inversion, and so that all the members and all the powers will be full only of it and it will be called of the *manifestation of His blessed glory in nether regions*, for this is the purpose of the creation of the worlds, as has been explained. (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, Introduction)

The essential dialectical assumption expressed here is that the perfection of every spiritual element can occur only through its manifestation in reversal. The confrontation with this situation of reversal, its stripping away and restoration to its source, is precisely what leads to the expression of the truth of reality. "Manifestation," "garbing," "inversion," and "reversal," which form the dialectical processes of the unity of opposites, are parallel in the two aspects of divinity, in the divine duality of wills and in the two human souls; just as the *sitra ahra* and the *kelipa* are vital for the manifestation of divinity in its tangible form through reversal, so too the bestial soul is vital for the distinct manifestation in inversion of the divine soul. However, the fulfillment of this process in both cases is through reversal of the reversal. That is to say, the divine soul seeks to invert its opposite, the bestial soul, and divinity seeks to invert its opposite, the *sitra ahra* and the *Yesh* and to restore them to their abstract form.

These reversals take place when one achieves a conception of reality that is not the fruit of his sensory experience but rather a result of an essential manifestation of the world that is not manifest in mun-

dane experience. These reversals are the result of the realization of a system of principles that interprets reality. It then imposes these spiritual assumptions on the visual manifestation of concrete reality, as grasped through the senses. The reversal and restoration of things to their root take place by the "clarification" of consciousness, which achieves awareness of the divine essence of reality in that it is united with its divine source at all times, despite contradictory appearances.



## The Bestial Soul

Religious life focuses on the bestial soul because this soul remains undefined and incomplete, in contrast to the defined dimensions of divinity in its varied expressions. The bestial soul constantly undergoes changes in its essence, a spiritual metamorphosis, as well as a struggle between the corporeal inclinations and the opposing spiritual purposes that have been imposed upon it:

The bestial soul is that stage of perception at which the sensory becomes abstract, and it is that area in which the mundane is transformed into the sacred.<sup>1</sup> It represents the state of being that demands change; a state of division and partition, empirical reality grasped as an independent existence. It also stands for the fallacy of a consciousness that attributes separate and autonomous existence to itself, in contrast to a consciousness that perceives the abstract meaning of existence and conceives it as being embedded in a broader context, possessing a divine substance. The bestial soul represents the view of the “*Yesh* in itself,” as opposed to continuous, unified awareness, which is the purpose of all religious worship.

The bestial soul is identified with the world of *kelipot* and the *sitra ahra*, with tangible reality and unmodified perception. It is the soul that expresses reconciliation with irreconcilable and illusory reality, with existence that is unable to perceive itself as divine or to see itself as embedded in the divine unity. It is satisfied with concealment and withdrawal, with reality in its visible manifestation and in separateness and corporeality:

In the bestial soul there are seventy degrees of the *sitra depiruda* [the aspect of separation], which springs from the *kelipah* and the *sitra ahra*, which have set forth to divide, to love precisely that which is

separate, and its degrees are divided into infinite parts to love everything which its eyes behold and to hate the opposite. (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, Introduction)

The explanation for the erroneous perception of the bestial soul lies in its being devoid of wisdom, intelligence, and knowledge. It is deprived of spiritual presumptions and essential patterns for the comprehension of reality, and it lacks a comprehensive structure that lays bare the essence of existence. The bestial soul has no ability to abstract, generalize, or penetrate to the root of the separate things; and it is deprived of the ability to see beyond the corporeal exterior and to perceive divine truth and spiritual significance:

Therefore the attributes are called bestial because they have no intellect and knowledge and therefore they are drawn toward that which is manifest in its separateness. For according to wisdom, that is comprehension of the root and essence of all the worlds, they have no reality in themselves, and they have no existence even for a single moment. In truth the worlds are not a substance in themselves, because everything is His blessed power alone. In truth there is none besides Him, blessed be He, and there is nothing else except Him at all, and all aspects of the worlds are only in concealment, which enables them to be manifest as *Yesh to us*, but in truth everything is only His blessed power alone, without any change, because all of reality is found in the truth of His realness, and there is nothing real besides Him, blessed be He. (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, introduction, s.v. "vehineh kemo shehagimel behinot")

The acosmic view makes a sharp distinction between the truth of existence from the divine standpoint, and its appearance from the human vantage point. This view elevates the importance of contemplative apprehension to a critical degree. Being and nothingness, that is, truth and illusion, are determined in consciousness and decided in apprehension. Therefore, maximum effort is invested in the transformation of consciousness and the reversal of the bestial soul. Sensory perception, which sees the false exterior of things, is subdued by consciousness, which contemplates and achieves abstract perception of the veritable meaning of reality and its hidden truth. The two conceptions, that which views reality as part of the infinite divine system and seeks to raise it to the highest degree of spiritual abstraction and incorporate it in the divinity and that which sees manifest reality as possessing independent substance and an autonomous essence, and which ignores the fact that the existence of reality is conditioned on the divine vital force that sustains it, are reflected in the divine soul and the bestial soul:

And of this it is said, “and the spirit of the beast goes downwards” (Ecclesiastes 3:21), that it goes after that which is manifest, which is called downwards, but of the divine soul, which derives from wisdom, it is said, “the spirit of man goes upwards” (ibid.), that is, to raise it to the first and upper cause of the worlds. (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, Introduction)

Alongside these epistemological distinctions one must note that all the dimensions of the bestial soul are merely a manifestation of various aspects of the divinity: reflections of the divine manifestation by its concealment and an expression of the divine dialectic of reversals founded on the radical assumption that “every aspect of the clarification of holiness is actually by means of reversal—no manifestation of His blessed divinity can be revealed except by concealment” (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, II, Chapter 10).

The bestial soul is the concealment and the garbing, which are the necessary conditions for the manifestation of the divine substance, but only the reversal of its essence completes that manifestation. The “elevation of evil” is the principal transformative process of the consciousness. It transforms the essence of the bestial soul from evil to good, from erroneous perception to true conception, from perception based on limited sensory faculties to a concept based on abstract assumptions and spiritual significance. It incorporates the bestial soul within the divine soul; and by means of it, it is unified within the divinity. This introduces the bestial soul to the center of transformative religious worship, which engages the obligation to raise up evil and change it into good.<sup>2</sup>

The relations of alteration between the two parts of the soul and the processes of the transformation of consciousness, which are directed toward giving new essence to manifest reality, were defined by the Lurianic term *berurim* (disencumberments).<sup>3</sup> This can mean a transformation of consciousness or a change in the self-perception of any being or an act that relates to the present situation of reality in relation to its desired state in the future. Lurianic Kabbalah viewed all the worlds as mixtures of good and evil following the “breaking,” which caused their fall to a lower level than that at which they were intended to be. Hence, the purpose of worship is to raise the worlds to their true place by the separation between good and evil, or “disencumberment” of the good from within the evil, a process meant to restore the good to its source and to remove evil by destroying its vital force.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman explained this point of departure in *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*:

and especially this base world which, due to the sin of Adam, is mingled good and evil, and the evil rules over the good.... Therefore there will be no peace in the world until the time of the end, when the good shall be disencumbered from the evil to become attached to its root and source, the blessed Source of Life. For then all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered and the spirit of impurity shall pass from the earth, i.e. when the element of the good which sustains it shall be extracted from its midst. This disencumberment (*berur*) itself will also be through a manifestation of His Divinity below, with a great illumination and immense effulgence. (*Tanya*, 234–235)

At the same time in Habad thought disencumberment became a dialectical concept. From the divine point of view it is not only an elevation from concealment to manifestation and from a fragmented state to a unified condition, but also the opposite: “every aspect of the disencumberment of holiness is actually through reversal. The manifestation of His blessed divinity is only possible through concealment, for in His blessed substance there is no manifestation whatsoever” (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha’arei ha-’Avodah*, II, Chapter 10).

The Habad concept of disencumberment comprises several strata. One is related to the Lurianic concept of raising up the sparks and the historical significance of exile and redemption. The second is concerned with reversal, which is the manner in which the divinity is revealed by being garbed in its intrinsic opposite, concealment or withdrawal. The third stratum is concerned with various degrees of the human conception of the divine entity, as something separate and something unified, or the ability of separate reality to be incorporated and annihilated in the divine unification—in Habad terminology, ascent through various levels of nullification of the *Yesh* into divinity:

When the *Yesh* will be disencumbered even in manifestation, then the “spirit of pollution,” which is the concealment of His unity by manifestation as if it were *Yesh* and separate, will pass away. Then the manifestation of His blessed unity will not be like garbing at all, but rather absolute manifestation. That is, His blessed unity will be manifest in the *Yesh* without any concealment at all through His equal power. (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*, IV, Chapter 26)

The problem that the Habad doctrine of the soul confronts is the paradox of two dimensions of revelation and manifestation: one that can be made manifest only by means of the *Yesh*, its opposite; and one that is fully manifest only with the annihilation of that *Yesh*. Concealment, the *Yesh*, sensory perception, and the bestial soul are conditions for the manifestation of the divine substance in one dimension. The

termination of concealment, abstract incorporation, the perception of the *Ayin*, and the divine soul are the fulfillment and realization of the divine manifestation in the other dimension. The purpose of disencumberment is the inclusion of the separate *Yesh* within the divine entity, on the one hand, and fulfillment of the divine will to be manifest in the *Yesh*, on the other hand.

Disencumberment is when His blessed divinity is revealed even in the manifestation of the *Yesh*, which is concealment, which is the *kelipah*. That is, in manifestation He is actually revealed, as an aspect of the *Yesh*; and His blessed intention is that His divinity be revealed particularly in the aspect of manifestation, *that is, that it be manifest as Yesh and nevertheless that it be nullified in Him*. (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, II, Chapter 9)

The bestial soul represents the first reversal from *Ayin* to *Yesh*, and the divine soul represents the second reversal from *Yesh* to *Ayin*.<sup>4</sup> Both of them together reflect the paradox of the two contradictory aspects of the divinity that condition manifestation through inversion; that is, total manifestation of the Divine Unity through maximal separation, on the one hand, and complete "perfection" (*shlemut*) by the restoration of opposing beings to their source in complete annihilation, on the other. The manifestation of divine perfection is conditioned upon the creation of its opposite—the corporeal *Yesh*—but the manifestation of its true essence is conditioned on the annihilation of its external essence:

The main divine intention is to reveal the power of His equality, blessed be He, even with regard to us, that is to reveal His blessed will particularly in the *Yesh*, *but in order to reveal His blessed will in the Yesh, we must annihilate the Yesh which is manifest and separated and restore it to its source*. (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, III, Chapter 20)

The various aspects of divinity are reflected identically in the relations between the divine soul and the bestial soul: "but this is known, that the main purpose in the intention of creating the worlds in general and the descent of the soul into the body in particular is to make manifest His blessed divinity really and truly" (Rabbi Aharon, *Sha'arei ha-'Avodah*, III, Chapter 16).

The garbing of the divine soul in the bestial soul is the first step in the manifestation of divinity, in making the abstract concrete, which is parallel to the garbing of the *Ayin* in the *Yesh*. The second stage in fulfilling the divine will, making the concrete abstract, takes place with the nullification of the bestial soul within the divine soul, or in the annihilation of the manifest *Yesh* and its return to its divine source.

The possibility of a transition from the revealed *Yesh* to the annihilated *Yesh*, or from the concrete to the abstract, is found as a potential in all created things and throughout existence. However, the active power in all being, including the possibility for transformation within it, is given to the human soul alone. To it is given the ability to pass from speech to thought and from thought to speech, from sensory perception to abstract conception, and from spiritual generalization to its concrete manifestation. Only human beings fully actualize the transition from the divine to the corporeal and from the corporeal to the divine, responding to the ambivalent divine will according to a spiritual dynamic common to all existence.

Man's confrontation with the dual meaning of reality and with the reflection of that duality in divinity and in the human soul takes place in his consciousness. Consciousness is the point of contact between sacred spiritual existences and corporeal experiences of the opposite, in that it is involved with both. Here the metamorphosis takes place from one state of being to the other, and vice versa; here is a reflection of the complex of dialectical processes of creation and annihilation; and here the opposites are unified.

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## Part Four

# Divine Worship

Before Him, blessed be He, Who is all-powerful, *Yesh* and *Ayin* are in a single equation, for before Him, blessed be He, heaven and earth are called the same, since *Yesh* and *Ayin* are in absolute equality.

R. Aharon,  
'Avodat ha-Levi, I, p. 1.

