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HASIDISM: UKRAINIAN ORIGIN AND THE WORLD CONTEXT

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Abstract

The article represents an overview of the history and specificity of the teachings of the Jewish religious movement called Hasidism. In the introductory part, the foundations of the teachings and social organization of this community are considered. The main consideration is given to the most numerous and influential Hasidic groups of the modern world. Particular attention is paid to the Ukrainian origin of Hasidism in the European context of its development. The historical originality of this movement is determined, first of all, by the specificity of its creed. The Hasidic ethos is focused on the person's inner world. Relations with God, as a rule, are determined not by the objective reality of the existing world order, but by the peculiarity of the believer's intellectual and psychological experience. The complex teaching of the Talmudic course of study and Cabbala is continually reconsidered and transformed through its interpretation by believers in every moment. At the same time, the Lord willingly supports the human's point of view. Accordingly, the best of people, called *zaddiks*, have a decisive influence on events taking place in this world, and followers unconditionally obey them. This state of affairs allows the Hasidim to respond to the challenges of our time vividly, inventively, and variably. The prevailing tradition can be substantially revised in accordance with the interests and preferences of the ruling *zaddik*. The variability of this is demonstrated by comparing different Hasidic sects. For example, the Hasidic group Habad successfully combines medieval mysticism with a perfect mastery of consulting, coaching, advertising, and marketing technologies. The paradoxical philosophy and musical culture of Bratslav Hasidim is popular among informal youth. The ideology of the Satmar Hasidim is close to the concepts of modern pacifists. The leader of the Chernobyl Hasidim, a group who are famous for their negative attitude towards science, became a professor at one of the leading US universities. In the modern Hasidic environment, the culture characteristic of their places of residence in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 20th century is still preserved. The successful development of a tolerant multicultural European society requires further efforts in the field of knowledge of this branch of the

Jewish civilization, which will undoubtedly contribute to the development of a dialogue with it.

Keywords: Hasidism, Cabbala, mysticism, religion, Ukraine, Europe.

Introduction

One of the most remarkable movements in Orthodox Judaism, both from historical and anthropological points of view, is Hasidism. Its followers are distinguished by the originality of their way of life and thinking, which often surprises not only modern secular people, but also many religious Jews. A much more interesting picture is uncovered to those who familiarize themselves with the history and culture of this community.

Hasidism,¹ the Jewish religious and mystical movement, originated in the Ukrainian lands in the middle of the 18th century. Its founder was Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (BeShT) who was born, lived, and died in Ukraine. He preached his teachings in the Ukrainian lands (mainly in Podolia, which at that time was part of Poland, and is now part of modern Ukraine). In the 18th and 19th centuries, the movement created by BeShT and his followers successfully spread to the territories now affiliated with Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. The movement was supported, according to average estimates, by a third of the Jewish population of these regions. Hasidism significantly contributed to the elevation of the role of the Jewish communities in the Ukrainian lands and in the history of the East European Jewry. Before its appearance, the main centers of rabbinical scholarship were located on the territory of present-day Poland and the Czech Republic. As a result of the spread of Hasidism, a significant part of the followers of Judaism began to venerate the religious teachers living in Ukraine as the highest spiritual authorities. Due to the tragic events of European history in the first half of the 20th century, namely the socialist revolution in the Russian Empire (1917), the Holocaust (1933-1945), the socialist revolution in Eastern Europe, and other upheavals, most of the surviving Hasidim were forced to leave their homeland.

¹ In the rabbinical works of the Talmudic period, people who became famous for their exceptional piety and marked by the special love of the Lord were called the Hasidim. This state of affairs obliged them to serve the Creator unlike everyone else. Subsequently, many medieval associations of believers who chose a special way of worship, different from the generally accepted one, called themselves the Hasidim. But these phenomena are known only to a closed circle of specialists. Only the movement that arose in Ukraine has become truly massive and influential. Each of them was distinguished by a peculiar teaching and form of social organization. They are different communities of believers, similar only in name. The movement founded by BeShT is the most massive and significant among them. All others are known only to a narrow circle of specialists. Therefore, when the term 'Hasidism' is used without special reservations, it means precisely the movement that arose in Ukrainian lands in the middle of the 18th century.

Currently, the main centers of the BeShT followers' community are in Israel, the USA, Canada, and the UK. However, as conservative people, the Hasidim preserve Eastern European traditions in their current locations. This applies both to historical memory and the characteristic features of theology, as well as to more mundane aspects: clothing, cuisine, songs, etc. In fact, the communities of BeShT followers to this day are a kind of preservation of the culture of the East European Jewry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This community of believers also preserves many aspects of the culture of those peoples among whom the Hasidim lived at that time. For example, many of them to this day during religious holidays sing the Ukrainian song: "Oh, you fool, Mark, why are you going to the market at all? Not buying, not selling only making a brawl." This text is filled with a deep spiritual meaning for them, although, for the most part, the original meaning and context of the words is somewhat lost.

After the fall of socialist regimes in the 1990s, the Hasidim partially recreated their communities in the territories of their former residence. Many places in those parts became pilgrimage centers. But in view of the relatively small size of the Jewish population in the above-mentioned territories, as well as due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of local Jews were atheists, it was not possible to restore the former glory. Nevertheless, even to this day, Hasidism has remained a significant phenomenon in the history and culture of Eastern Europe.

The modern Hasidim are supporters of the Orthodox branch in Judaism. They strongly reject the desire of reformist and liberal movements to bring the lifestyle of believers closer to the needs and aspirations of the changed world. In spite of that, they respond to the challenges of our time much more vividly, inventively, and variably than the followers of the traditional rabbinical Judaism. They are very conservative, yet at the same time are often surprisingly modernized. This paradox is rooted in the originality of the teachings and principles of the social organization of Hasidim.² Their foundations were formed in the first hundred years of the existence of this movement. Therefore, speaking of the present situation, attention should be paid to these foundations, which remain unshakable.

Ethos of Hasidism

At the time of the emergence of Hasidism in the Jewish society of Eastern Europe, two versions of the doctrine dominated. One, based on the texts of the Talmudic course of

² D. Biale, *Hasidism: A New History*. (Princeton University Press, 2018), 11.

study and its medieval commentaries, was publicly available. In accordance with it, the Lord is the king of the world, and all His creations are his subjects. The relationship between the human and God is built in accordance with the principles of interpersonal communication. Every act of the believer is considered as either the fulfillment or violation of the will of the Heavenly Lord. Another approach was based on the mystical teachings of Cabbalists, accessible only to a narrow circle of believers who were distinguished by a high level of spiritual education and piety. According to the Cabbalists, the true nature of the deity is not anthropomorphic. In its purest pristine form, God is a perfect infinity called *Ein Sof* (literally ‘there is no end’). Limited creatures cannot comprehend God’s nature. Figuratively, the deity appears as the immense ocean of eternal light. From this supreme source, like rays of the sun, essences called *Sefirot* come forth. They form a divine world that manifests itself in creation and maintains communication with people. In the scholarly literature, this polysyllabic world of the manifested deity is called the *pleroma*. The term was borrowed from the theology of the Gnostics. In accordance with the teachings of the Cabbalists, the actions prescribed by the sacred law, as well as special meditative practices, allow the ascetics to influence the *pleroma*, which ensures the enlightenment of their souls and the well-being of the earthly world.

An important innovation introduced by the founders of Hasidism in Jewish religious life was the initiation of the masses of believers into the foundations of the theoretical and practical teachings of the Cabbalists. This, of course, led to some radical changes in their worldview and lifestyle. A thorough explanation of the essence of these ramifications would take thousands of pages. But one essential way in which it influenced the Hasidic ethos is in its focus on the inner world of the human being. Relations with God, as a rule, are determined not by the objective reality of the existing world order, but by the peculiarity of the believer’s intellectual and psychological experience.

This state of affairs makes it possible to use metaphysically incompatible principles in teaching. It allows peaceful cohabitation of conflicting beliefs about how the world works in one consciousness. Thus, for example, Hasidic leaders, as a rule, were not concerned about the contradictions of the prevailing versions of the Jewish doctrine. They viewed their relations with the Creator as both a variant of interpersonal communication and an interaction with complex, incomprehensible essences of the divine *pleroma*. The followers of BeShT praised as a supreme spiritual achievement the dialogue of the ascetic with the Creator, who

appeared to the human eye as the almighty king or loving father.³ At the same time, they urged believers to dissolve themselves in the deity through meditation, like a drop in the ocean, and completely renounce their own identity.⁴ Each of these options for spiritual practice is essentially recognized as equal. The choice of any of them depends on the specifics of the person's experiences at one time or another.⁵ In the same way, in Hasidic sermons, the concept that the Creator is present in every phenomenon of the world observed by us coexists with another that would seemingly contradict, which claims that the world is an illusion, since there is only one God.⁶

BeShT's followers teach that pious people, at the time of prayerful ecstasy, should renounce their bodily needs in the name of a spiritual enlightenment.⁷ At the same time, the founders of Hasidism consider prayer as a means of ensuring an increase in our world of the flow of divine light of blessing, which satisfies all the possible material needs a person could have.⁸ Extreme mysticism is practiced alongside quite robust everyday practicality. Hasidic preachers demand that all spiritual inclinations of a person must be used to serve the Creator. But the contradictions between these inclinations are not considered a problem. For each of them there is a proper moment of successful self-realization.

Such pronounced anthropocentrism naturally reaches its climax in the concept of perfect leaders. According to the views of BeShT and his followers, the most perfect people, who are called *zaddiks*,⁹ play a decisive role in maintaining proper communication between the Heavenly Lord and people. Their soul and body is an ideal channel for transmitting all possible benefits, both spiritual and material, to the descendants of Adam. Thanks to their outstanding qualities and special mastery in spiritual practice, *zaddiks* are able to decisively

³ И. Туров, *Учение основоположников хасидизма о власти цадика: мистика и реалии мира сего*. (Киев: Друкарский двор Олега Федорова, 2019); Martin Buber. *Be-Pardes ha-hasidut*. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2001); Dov Ber mi-Mezhircz, *Magid dvarav le-Yaaqov*. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1976), 38-39,78.

⁴ M. Idel, *Qabbalah: hebetim hadashim*. (Jerusalem: Shoken, 1993), 86-88.

⁵ И. Туров, *Учение основоположников хасидизма о власти цадика: мистика и реалии мира сего*.

⁶ Ts. Koyfman, *Be Kol darkeha dahu: Tfisat ha-elohut ve-ha-avoda be-geshmiut be-reiya ha-hasidut*. (Ramat Gan: Hotsaat Universita Bar Ilan, 2008), 102-117.

⁷ R. Elijor, "Beyn 'hitpashtut ha-gashmiut' le-beyn 'hitpashtut ha-ahava gam be-gashmiuni': ha-qituv beyn ha-ffisa ha-ruhanit le-beyn ha-metsiut ha-hevratit be-havaya ha-hasidit." (Tsadik ve-eda. 2001), 463-496; Dov Ber mi-Mezhircz, *Magid dvarav le-Yaaqov*. 85-86; Yakob Yoseph mi-Polonnoye, *Toldot Yakov Yosef* (Koretz, 1780), 167b; Benyamin mi-Zalorzez, *Turey Zahav*. (Mahilev, 1816), 5d.

⁸ M. Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 149-171.

Eliezer Lipa mi-Lizensk, *Or le-Zadik*. (Jerusalem, 1975), 70; Levy Izhak mi-Berdichev, *Kdushat ha-Levy*. (Jerusalem, 1958), 76b-77a.

⁹ The Hebrew word 'zaddik' means a righteous man.

influence human destinies: to heal the sick, to bestow the poor with material well-being, to give children to infertile women, etc. In addition to individual problems, they successfully solve collective and state ones: they stop wars, prevent crop failures, epidemics, and famine, etc. Belief in such abilities of the *zaddiks* gave rise to a special form of relations with them.

The followers of BeShT regularly visit their *zaddiks* with requests to pray for the successful resolution of all kinds of everyday problems. The norm was to transfer to these perfect ascetics a note with a list of petitions called a *quittle*. Of course, they go to their *zaddiks* for more than the fulfillment of their worldly desires or the resolution of earthly crises. The spiritual instructions of such great righteous people play a decisive role in understanding the principles of theology and the tasks of holy service before believers. The respectable Hasid in all his/her affairs strictly obeys the instructions of his *zaddik*, regardless of whether it is a sphere of sacred or profane.

This status of the head of the community of believers is radically different from that of the traditional rabbis. The authority of the latter is based on the deep knowledge of the sacred texts, primarily the Talmudic course of study. This qualification allows the rabbi to instruct the faithful and judge them in accordance with the norms of the sacred law. All his actions are determined by the established legal practice and custom. A *zaddik*, on the contrary, is considered to be the owner of a unique perfection, which cannot be explained by any formal criteria. He is able not only to entreat the Almighty, but also to force the heavenly court to radically affect situations on earth. Many of the *zaddiks* in the past and today are prominent rabbis who know the sacred texts. But often these leaders are people who are not distinguished by a high level of spiritual education. For one and a half thousand years preceding the emergence of Hasidism, there had been no cases where numerous communities of Orthodox Jews were led by such authorities. This state of affairs spurred on the development of a number of scientific hypotheses about the possible impact of the Orthodox doctrine of the elders and the concepts of Christian sectarians common in the Ukrainian lands on Hasidism.¹⁰ “The day-to-day interactions between Hasidim—as well as other Jews of the time and place—and Christians were marked not only by antagonism but also by symbiosis.”¹¹

The emergence of the *zaddiks* as an institution radically changed the geography and principles of the organization of the sacred centers of Judaism. If, prior to this, in each town

¹⁰ Biale, *Hasidism: A New History*. 6; I. Turov, “Hasidism and Christianity of the Eastern Territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Possibility of Contacts and Mutual Influences.” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*. Vol. 10, (2004): 73-107.

¹¹ Biale, *Hasidism: A New History*. 6.

there was a rabbi to whom the believers turned for help and advice in matters of worship, then with the advent of Hasidism, the permanent residences of the *zaddiks* began to play this role. Thousands of Jews living sometimes hundreds of kilometers from these settlements had to travel to visit their leaders several times a year. The tasks of managing large numbers of people from different communities and serving numerous pilgrims led to the creation of new type residences of spiritual leaders called *zaddiks'* courts. Near the *zaddik's* house, hotels were erected to receive visitors, and large houses of worship, kitchens, and premises were built for servants who maintained that economy. Some courtyards struck everyone with royal luxury. Others, on the contrary, were distinguished by their modest size and moderation of expenses in all areas of their activity. This state of affairs was determined both by the number of Hasidic followers, and by the personal preferences of the *zaddiks*.¹² It should be noted that today the leadership of Hasidic communities is still carried out from the centers arranged in the same way.

Leaders and Groups of Hasidim

In the first half of the century of the history of the BeShT followers' movement, the club of *zaddiks* was easily replenished with the closest associates of the founders of Hasidism. Later, the community of leaders turned into a kind of tribal aristocracy. The custom was established to elect the *zaddik's* sons and sons-in-law as his successors. The community of the Hasidim following a certain family began to be called the *zaddik's* court. The name of each of these basic groups was most often determined by the name of the locality where the main residence of a particular *zaddik* dynasty was located at an early stage of its history. Most often, several of his relatives simultaneously became heirs to the *zaddik's* crown. Therefore, today, each of the large courts is divided into branches, the number of which can be significant. Each *zaddik's* court adheres to its own traditions of theology, the order of the liturgy, the style of fulfillment of the commandments, cuisine, clothing, songs, etc. Differences in traditions between branches of one court can also be significant.¹³ Although the tradition obliges, the *zaddik* is free to substantially revise it. At the same time, the Hasidim, as a rule, obediently follow the innovations of their leader. Due to this, in the

¹² M. Wodzinski, *Historical Atlas of Hasidism*. (Princeton University Press, 2018), 90–106; Biale, *Hasidism: A New History*, 403–429. D. Asaf, *Derekh ha-Malkhut* (Jerusalem: Mirkaz Zalman Shazar, 2001), 204–237.

¹³ Biale, *Hasidism: A New History*, 677–770; M. Wodzinski, *Historical Atlas of Hasidism*, 188–209.

community of BeShT's followers, extreme conservatism coexists with the ability to easily and swiftly accept radical changes.

A striking example of this state of affairs is the history of the Hasid group of Habad¹⁴ Lyubavichi. The village of Lyubavichi is located in Russia. In the first decades of the existence of this trend of BeShT followers, it was successfully dispersed in the territories of Belarus and Lithuania. Soon, Habad became one of the most influential Hasidic groups in these regions. However, the founder of this court, Rebbe Shneur Zalman from Liadi, died at the end of 1812 in the Ukrainian city of Gadyach, where he was buried. His successor, Rebbe Dovber from Lyubavichi died on his way home after visiting his father's grave and was buried in the Ukrainian city of Nizhyn in 1827. The *zaddiks'* graves became places of pilgrimage, due to which this practice of Hasidism was widespread in Ukraine.

All *zaddiks* in this area are distinguished by a high level of constructive creativity. Each of them carried down to their followers dozens of thick volumes of complex religious and philosophical teachings. The spiritual practice of Habad requires from believers to comprehend the Creator with the mind through a thorough study of the Talmud and the theological writings of the leaders of this movement. This activity should be combined with special mystical meditations during prayer, bringing the Hasid to a state of ecstasy, when he loses his own personality and merges with the eternal divine light.¹⁵ The founders of Habad urged their followers to self-improve, trying to limit how much they set their hopes upon the supernatural power of the *zaddik*.¹⁶

The situation radically changed during the reign of the 7th Lubavitcher,¹⁷ Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902, Nikolaev-1994, New York). His predecessor, Rebbe Yosef Yitzhak, who managed to escape from Nazi-occupied Poland, where he found himself because of religious persecution in the USSR, interpreted the great troubles that fell upon the Jewish people as signs of the beginning, predicted by the prophets of the Messianic era. He proclaimed that the 7th leader of the movement would be the last and during his life the kingdom of the heavenly messenger would come.¹⁸ Rebbe Menachem Mendel took these sermons seriously.

¹⁴ Habad is an acronym formed from three Hebrew words Chochmah, Binah, Da'at (דעה, בינה, חכמה): "Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge"—which represent the intellectual underpinnings of the movement.

¹⁵ R. Elior, "Habad: The Contemplative Ascent to God." *Jewish Spirituality from the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present*. Vol. 14, (1987): 157-205.

¹⁶ I. Etkes, "Darko shel R. Shneur Zalman mi-Liadi ke-manhig shel Hasidim." *Tsion*, № 50, (1986): 321–354.

¹⁷ Rebbe is a rabbi, and usually a dynastic leader of a Hasidic community in Eastern Europe. The Hasidim call him *zaddik*.

¹⁸ R. Elior, "The Lubavitch messianic resurgence: the historical and mystical background 1939–1996." *Toward the Millenium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*. 1998, 387–388.

Having become a *zaddik* in early 1951, he began a vigorous activity to prepare a worthy meeting for the King, the Messiah. One of his most important areas of work was the stubborn struggle for the souls of the broad masses of Jews leading a secular lifestyle. To return them to the faith of the ancestors of the Hasidim of Habad, they resorted to many different events which were unprecedented for Orthodox Jews in the middle of the 20th century: sending preachers to public places; organizing seminars for beginners of the fulfillment of the holy law; using of the media to propagate the teachings of Judaism, etc.¹⁹ These activities heartily contributed to the growth of religious communities.

The work of Rebbe Menachem Mendel was largely influenced by his European secular education. In his youth, he studied at the University of Friedrich Wilhelm at the faculties of philosophy and engineering (Berlin), and then in Paris he entered the Sorbonne's mathematical department. At the same time, the aforementioned course of action spawned a peculiar pop culture of Habad, which began to coexist actively with their tradition oriented towards the cult of high refined intelligence, sometimes putting it in a subordinate position. This situation was reflected in the popular joke of the late 20th century: "There are three things in any American city: a McDonald's restaurant, a Coca-Cola advertisement and a billboard with the image of the 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe."

During the reign of Menachem Mendel, the notion point of that he was the king, the messiah whose appearance was predicted by the Holy Scriptures, became increasingly popular among his followers. In the last decade of the rabbi's life, most of his Hasidim believed in this idea of him.²⁰ In messianic circles, it was believed that the essence of the innermost infinite deity (*Ein-Sof*) was embodied in Rebbe Menachem Mendel.²¹ A similar phenomenon is found in the Jewish Cabbala. It goes without saying that the Rebbe personality cult, historically uncharacteristic of Habad, has become incredibly strong even by the Hasidic standards. Some of his followers, remaining in the minority, condemned such views and called for adherence to the tradition.²² Though the Rebbe himself did not explicitly support his most ardent supporters, neither did he condemn them. After his death, the most ardent messianic Jews proclaimed that the Rebbe did not die, but only disappeared from the world and so the believers should wait for his return.²³ Many of them persist with these beliefs.

¹⁹ Ibid., 394-401.

²⁰ Ibid., 398 .

²¹ Ibid., 397.

²² Ibid., 400.

²³ Ibid., 401.

None of the Habad Lyubavichi groups elected the eighth Rebbe. Currently, they are led by reputable followers of Rebbe Menachem Mendel and their disciples. This movement remains the largest Hasidic group in the modern world. His followers number several hundred thousand people.

Although many adherents of Orthodox Judaism have not justifiably accused modern Habad of heresy, it should be noted that the activities of this Hasidic group led to a massive return of secular Jews to the religious tradition. The followers of the 7th Rebbe launched missionary activities all over the globe from the USA to Southeast Asia, and everywhere they achieved significant success. There are centers of this movement of Hasidism in all countries of Europe.

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Habad took up the task of reviving Judaism in the newly formed states on its territory much more actively than any other areas of the traditional Jewish religion. Today in Ukraine the vast majority of Orthodox Jewish communities belong to Habad. Noteworthy is the fact that Rebbe Menachem Mendel was preparing not only Jews for the coming of the Messiah, but all the peoples of the world. He wrote the code of laws of God for all based on the seven commandments of the sons of Noah, described by the sages of the Talmud. In general, the modern history of Habad is the clearest example of combining a lifestyle based on ancient traditions with a mastery of modern, even secular, skills, like consulting, coaching, advertising, and marketing technologies.

Among all Hasidic groups that exist in the modern world, Bratslav Hasidism steadily holds the place following Habad, according to the number of secular Jews who returned to the faith of their fathers. This state of affairs indicates that this group of BeShT followers is able, better than many others, to fit keys to the hearts of people who are far from religion today. In contrast to Habad, Bratslav Hasidism as a rule does not resort to a radical modernization of the methods of working with potential followers. The root of its success lies in the conformity of the teachings and principles of social organization that arose two hundred years ago with the needs and aspirations of modern people.

The founder of this movement, Rebbe Nachman from Bratslav²⁴ (1772, Medzhibozh - 1810, Uman) was the great-grandson of the female line to the ancestor of Hasidism, BeShT. During his lifetime, the group of his followers was small. However, they were distinguished by an exceptional devotion to their spiritual mentor. After the death of Rebbe Nachman, it was decided that they would not have another *zaddik*--the soul of the rabbi in heaven will

²⁴ Now Bratslav is an urban-type settlement in the Nemyriv district of the Vinnitsa region of Ukraine.

continue to take care of his Hasidim. The most important moment of the spiritual practice of these Hasidim was the annual meeting at the grave of the rabbi in Uman at the feast of Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year). The followers of Rebbe Nachman are, much more than other Hasidim, engaged in a thorough study and commentary on the works of their *zaddik*. Some of them today believe that the basis of spiritual education should be the study of the works of the *zaddik*, and not the leading authorities of the rabbinical writings.

It should be noted that Rebbe Nachman was a man of an original mindset and an extremely complex and controversial disposition. He urged all believers to be faithful to the tradition. He saw the greatest danger to the true faith in modern science and philosophy. At the same time, the rabbi himself was fond of these disciplines and maintained friendly relations with their thinkers.²⁵ Within a single day, Rebbe Nachman could repeatedly pass from a state of higher enthusiasm to a state of extreme depression. In his experiences, he saw the display of complex processes taking place in the divine *pleroma*. He presented the teaching not only in sermons and conversations with his followers, like other *zaddiks*, but also in the form of fairy tales.²⁶ The latter were distinguished by a complex design and composition. In their content, they were much closer to the symbolic European literature of modern times than to the traditional Talmudic parable that dominated in the works of Hasidim.

Rebbe Nachman assured his followers that the limited material world was the exact opposite of the perfect infinite Creator. Therefore, faced with the meanness, injustice, and cruelty of the phenomena surrounding us, we, reflecting on the fact that they are diametrically opposed, recognize the highest positive qualities of the Creator and become familiar with them.²⁷ Thus earthly sorrows give rise to great joy. According to Rebbe Nachman, all the wisdom of this world is powerless to comprehend the highest truths. Therefore, on the one hand, one should read the teachings of the Jewish spiritual mentors of the past, which are difficult to understand, and on the other hand, he should understand that all this is nothing more than a jester's acting in front of the throne of the Almighty King.²⁸ Accordingly, the most pious human wisdom should be treated with a certain amount of humor. Above all, the Bratslav *zaddik* valued the faith of a simpleton. He took seriously the possibility of serving

²⁵ А. Грин, *Страдающий наставник: Жизнь и учение рабби Нахмана из Брацлава* (Москва: Гешарим, 2007), 309-323.

²⁶ Nahman mi-Bratslav, *Sefer sipurey maasiyot* (Jerusalem, 1976).

²⁷ Ts. Mark, *Mistika ve-shigaon be-ezirat r. Nahman mi-Braslav*. (Tel Aviv: Vfhon Shalom Hartman, 2003), 378-383.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 370-372.

the Lord by imitating the behavior of a madman.²⁹ The rabbi believed that music played the most important role in maintaining the divine order in the world. He taught that the king, the messiah would be a child who would subjugate all earthly rulers to himself with the help of musical instruments invented by him.³⁰

Not being appreciated by the contemporaries, the teachings of Rebbe Nachman and the charm of his personality began to gain more popularity one and a half centuries after his death. Orthodox Jews found in his sermons a consolation so needed by people preoccupied with the tragic fate of believers, due to various world upheavals that have occurred over the past hundred years. Many secular people recognized Rebbe Nachman's arguments about the need to believe in God contrary to the arguments of common sense. The inner spiritual looseness of the Bratslav Hasidim appealed to the informal youth. In addition, the cult of the perfect leader, who lived in the past, seems to many Jews more attractive than the meek obedience of a now-living *zaddik*.

Today, the Bratslav Hasid community has tens of thousands of followers. Their main communities are in Israel, the USA, Canada, England, and France. In addition, Rebbe Nachman is the spiritual authority of many Orthodox Jewish communities, beyond the Hasidic persuasion. The Jewish intelligentsia and all kinds of bohemia are actively interested in him and his teachings. In Uman, the Ukrainian town where the rabbi was buried, 20-25,000 pilgrims regularly gather during the Jewish New Year. In addition to the Bratslav Hasidim, there also come representatives of other Jewish groups, for one reason or another, interested in the personality of Rebbe Nachman.

The most numerous and influential groups of BeShT followers also include Satmar Hasidim. The founder of this movement is Rebbe Yoel Teitelbaum (1887, Sighet, Austria-Hungary - 1979, New York, USA). He was born in a family of Sighet *zaddiks*.³¹ In 1928, he became a rabbi in the Transylvanian town of Satmar (Satu Mare). It subsequently gave name to a new direction in Hasidism. In the early period of their history, supporters of Rebbe Teitelbaum lived mainly in northern Romania, eastern Hungary, and Transcarpathia. However, this movement reached true fame and grandeur after the Second World War in places of mass emigration of Jews from continental Europe: the USA, Israel, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia. The outstanding talents of the preacher and organizer allowed the

²⁹ Ibid. 59-85.

³⁰ Z. Mark, *The Scroll of Secrets—The Hidden Messianic Vision of R. Nahman of Bratslav*. (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010).

³¹Sighet is a town in northern Romania, near the border with Ukraine.

Satmar Rebbe to gather around him a wide mass of believers, many of whom miraculously escaped from the horrors of the Holocaust.

The convincing, elegantly presented teachings of Rebbe Yoel Teitelbaum gave his followers clear answers to the essential questions: how should a pious Jew live in the modern world? What can they hope for, and what can they fear? The main impetus behind his sermons was the struggle against Zionism and the state of Israel. The Holocaust and other terrible troubles that fell on the Jews in the 20th century were explained by the rabbi as the machinations of the Zionists.³² It should be noted that the many Orthodox rabbis and almost all of the *zaddiks* were opponents of the creation of a secular state, an inappropriate replacement for the kingdom of the messiah that was promised by the prophets. But, beyond any doubt, it is the Satmar Rebbe who is one of the best known figures representing this direction of the Jewish religious thought.

Although Rebbe Teitelbaum was an ardent advocate of adherence to the consecrated by centuries tradition, his writings serve as an impressive sample of modern political thinking.³³ He blamed the creators of a secular Jewish state primarily in the unleashing of senseless wars that could have been avoided thanks to the UN intervention.³⁴ The Satmar Rebbe explained the victories of the Israeli army not as a miracle of the divine intervention, but as an accident possible in any military conflict.³⁵ Judgments of this kind are not typical of rabbinical writings. Rebbe Teitelbaum generally urged supporters not to believe in any miracles and under any circumstances to remain faithful to the unshakable establishments of the sacred law and customs of their ancestors.³⁶ He forbade his followers to trust the media since they are all captured by supporters of war and violence.³⁷ As an implacable enemy of Israel, the Satmar Rebbe remained faithful in his fight against the principles of humanity. He prayed that the state would cease to exist, but at the same time not a single Jew would die.³⁸

It should be noted that the personality of Rebbe Teitelbaum charmed even those who were his implacable ideological enemies. For example, one of the prominent activists of the Zionist movement, the follower of Zeev Jabotinsky, Isaac Ramba spoke of the Satmar *zaddik* in this way: “He spoke out against everything that I believed in, against everything that I

³² Y. Kraus, “Yahdut ve-zionut— shnaim she lo yelhu yahdav: mishnato ha-radikalit shel r. Yoel Teitelbaum — ha-admor mi-Satmar.” *Ha-Zionut*, № 22, (1961): 37-60.

³³ I. Туров, “Сучасний хасидизм: трансформація ідеології і практики під впливом чинника протистояння сїонїзму.” *Розвиток і взаємодія єврейський громад на європейському просторі*. (ІПіЕНД, 2017), 312-353.

³⁴ J. Teitelbaum, *Al ha-Geulah ve-al ha-thmurah*. (New-York, 1967), 10.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 127-128.

³⁸ Я. Рабкин, *Еврей против еврея: иудейское сопротивление сионизму*. (Москва: Текст, 2009), 274.

devoted my youth, my energy and my life. But I was amazed that there was no disgust in my heart towards him. On the contrary, I really liked him. I was fascinated by him.”³⁹ After the death of Rebbe Yoel, the movement was led by his nephew Moshe Teitelbaum. By the time of the death of the latter in 2006, the number of Satmar Hasidim reached 120,000 people.⁴⁰ The main centers of this group in the United States are the New York areas of Williamsburg and Borough Park, as well as Kiryas Yoel, the city of Satmar Hasidim founded in 1977 by the order of Rebbe Yoel Teitelbaum. In 2006, the population of this city was 3,000 families (about 20,000 people). In Europe, the modern centers of this area of Hasidism are located in London, Manchester, and Antwerp.

At the end of this survey, *zaddik* Isidore Twersky (1930, Boston-1997, Jerusalem) should be mentioned. He belonged to a family of *zaddiks* originating from the Ukrainian town of Talne, which in turn is an offshoot of one of the most numerous and ancient dynasties, the Chernobyl Hasidim. Its founder, Rebbe Menachem Nokhum of Chernobyl, was a student of Rebbe Israel Baal Shem Tov. In the 19th century, the leaders of this movement became famous for their ability to live royally. Thanks to the offerings of the Hasidim, their residences turned into rich estates, not inferior in luxury to the noble estates of the nobility of the Russian empire. At the same time, the *zaddiks* of the Chernobyl dynasty did not have any distinct scholarship and intellectual sophistication in their sermons. Many of them did not set forth any doctrine at all. Nevertheless, they were revered by their followers as God’s people, each step and gesture of whom were extremely important.⁴¹ The life of Rebbe Isidore of Tver was strikingly different from that which his ancestors led. He studied at Harvard and the University of Jerusalem. Subsequently, he became a professor and a world-famous researcher of rabbinical writings and medieval Jewish philosophy. His most significant scientific work was the monograph “An Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)” (1982). At the same time, after the death of his father in 1972, he became a *zaddik* and regularly performed his pastoral duties.⁴² The combination of the position of a *zaddik* and professor is unique. Nevertheless, it eloquently testifies to the openness of Hasidism to the present. With all the conservatism, the BeShT movement recognizes the right of the leaders to decide, according to their inner conviction, how the pious ascetic should interact with the outside

³⁹ Alfasi I. *Entziklopedya le-Hasidut*. Vol. 10. (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kuk, 2000), 87.

⁴⁰ “Moses Teitelbaum, 91; Rabbi Was Spiritual Leader of Orthodox Sect.” <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-apr-25-me-teitelbaum25-story.html> Accessed 14.06.2020.

⁴¹ G. Sagiv, *Hasidut Chernobl: Toldoteha ve-Torateha mi-reshita ve-ad erev milkhemet ha-olam ha-rishona*. (Hibur le-shem kabalat ha-toar doktor le-pilosofiya: Universitet Tel-Aviv, 2009).

⁴² I. Alfasi, *Entziklopedya le-Hasidut*. Vol.3. (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kuk, 2000).

world. The personal interests and preferences of the *zaddik*, in turn, decisively affect the lifestyle of his followers.

Conclusion

Modern Hasidism is diverse and unpredictable in its development. Its research is one of the fastest growing areas of Jewish scholarship. But taking into account the large number of BeShT followers and the frequent changes in their way of life, theology, and politics associated with the change of power in the ruling dynasties, many interesting phenomena remain unexplored and unspecified. Hasidism continues to keep many secrets of how ancient Eastern mysticism and the worldview of a traditional Jewish town can fruitfully coexist with modernity. The successful development of a tolerant multicultural European society requires further efforts in the field of knowledge of this branch of the Jewish civilization, which will certainly contribute to the development of a dialogue with it.

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