TALES OF THE HASIDIM: MARTIN BUBER'S UNIVERSAL VISION OF ECSTATIC JOY AND SPIRITUAL WHOLENESS

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CHARLES DAVID HANNA

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Student: Charles David Hanna

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Dr. Dorothee Ostmeier	Chairperson
Dr. Carol Silverman	Member
Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Charles David Hanna

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I will examine Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, and the limits of his concepts of "ecstatic joy" and "spiritual wholeness." To Buber, Hasidic legends present the possibility of overcoming tensions between the quotidian present and the messianic future, divisions of sacred and profane, divine and self. I argue that Buber does not present clear instructions on how to achieve this unity, so I turn to his other writings on Hasidism in order to trace his definition of "ecstatic joy" and "spiritual wholeness." While Buber accurately depicts the Zaddik-Hasidim relationship, he downplays the importance of Jewish Law (*Halacha*) in facilitating the goal of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness which he posits as the essence of Hasidism. Ultimately, I conclude that while Buber ignores "authentic" aspects of Hasidic life, he indeed uses the Hasidic tale to effectively present a message of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness to a universal audience.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Charles David Hanna

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of Miami, Coral Gables

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Folklore, 2017, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2009, University of Miami

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Folklore
Fairy Tales
Hasidic Legends
Mythology
Judaic Studies
Architecture
Architectural History

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Credit Banker, Bank of America, January 2016 - Present

Client Liaison, First Freedom Preservation, October 2015 – January 2016

Middle School Language Arts Teacher, Torah Academy, 2013 - 2015

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“Live life with the life you love” (Kohelet 9:9)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I will examine Martin Buber's collection of Hasidic stories, *Tales of the Hasidim* (first published in 1947). Martin Buber (1878 – 1965) was a German Jewish theologian best known for his philosophy of the "I-Thou" dialogue, but he also compiled several anthologies of Hasidic legends and wrote extensively on Hasidism. I will examine the limits of Buber's concepts of "ecstatic joy," "spiritual wholeness," and their universal applicability, which he discusses in his introduction to the anthology. Buber writes that the Hasidic legend presents the possibility of overcoming the tensions between the quotidian present and the messianic future, divisions of sacred and profane, and the divine and the self. I argue that Buber does not present clear instructions about how to achieve these goals, so I turn to his other writings on Hasidism in order to trace his definition of "ecstatic joy" and "spiritual wholeness" with all their subcategories. I am led to believe that while Buber accurately depicts the relationship between zaddik and hasid, he downplays the importance of Jewish Law (*Halacha*) in facilitating the goal of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness which he posits as the essence of Hasidism. To fortify my questions, I present ethnographic research, examine several essays that take a critical look at the authenticity of Buber's depiction of Hasidism, and conclude with a discussion of personal experience. Ultimately, I come to the conclusion that while Buber may downplay "authentic" aspects of Hasidic life (for example, religious observance as dictated by Halacha) he does indeed use the Hasidic tale to effectively present a message of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness to a universal audience.

Buber's depiction of Hasidism was criticized by Gershom Scholem and others[1] as inaccurate and romanticized. As a practicing Hasidic Jew, I too had reservations about Buber's anthology, because I had experienced Hasidic storytelling in my own life and seen how it fit into the greater framework of Hasidism. Actually, "inauthentic" and "romanticized" are not terms I would used to describe Buber's work; I was not bothered by Buber's decision to remain a secular Jew despite his immersion in Hasidic texts, and I did not disagree with his depiction of Hasidic philosophy and the Hasidic masters—in fact, I believe he clearly communicated many of the main tenets of the Hasidic movement. I took issue with the fact that Buber's definition of Hasidism seemed to be missing the key element of strict religious observance. Buber wrote about the feeling of "ecstatic joy" which was the goal of Hasidism, and the role of the zaddik figure as a facilitator of "spiritual wholeness," but despite the beauty and poetry of his introduction to the *Tales of the Hasidim*, there were no suggestions about how the reader could implement this reality into their own life.

For clarity on how Buber's legendary Hasidic reality could become tangible, I looked beyond his introduction and turned to his writings on Hasidism, especially those found in *Hasidism* (1946) and *Hasidism and Modern Man* (1958). I did not find the full elaboration I was seeking on how Hasidic storytelling and life interfaced, so to develop a clearer picture of real-life Hasidism, I turned toward ethnographic research on Hasidism by Jerome Mintz in *Legends of the Hasidim* (1968) and Ayala Fader in *Mitzvah Girls* (2009). I will also compare Buber's description of the zaddik figure to that of Gedalyah Nigal's assessment in *The Hasidic Tale* (2002), where she analyzes the history of the

[1] Such as Steven Katz and Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer; see Ran HaCohen's article "The Hay Wagon Moves to the West: on Martin Ruber's Adaptation of Hassidic Legends" (1).

Hasidic tale in depth, from its oral origins to its printed anthologizing. As a practicing Hasidic Jew, I believe that a major component of Hasidism is the strict observance of Jewish Law (*halacha*), which Buber does not discuss beyond some passing references. To supplement my view in this matter, I will take articles by Hayyim Nahman Bialik ("Halachah and Aggadah," reprinted in 2000) and Robert Covers ("Nomos and Narrative," 1998) which describe the weaving together of narrative and legal discussion in Jewish texts. In these segments, I will note where fieldwork, ethnographies, and scholarly research confirm Buber's definition of Hasidism, and where they differ.

I will then turn to several articles that discuss whether or not Buber's storytelling remains true to the ideas of Hasidic philosophy (for example, elevation of the mundane into the spiritual) by examining criticism of Buber's work in several essays: "The Haywagon Moves West: on Martin Buber's Adaptation of Hasidic Legends," by Ran HaCohen (2008), "On Myth, History, the Study of Hasidism: Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem," by Claire Sufrin (2012), and "But I Will Tell of their Deeds: Retelling a Hasidic Tale about the Power of Storytelling," by Levi Cooper (2014). Using these articles, I will seek to reframe the critical expectation of Buber to authentically portray Hasidic life in his storytelling, and illustrate that despite the perceived inaccuracies (be they linguistic, historical, or theological) in Buber's re-crafting of Hasidic lore, he remains true to the Hasidic ideal of elevating the mundane into the spiritual, a process with potentially universal applicability that is not necessarily confined to the Hasidic world of strict religious observance, which I had personally demanded of Buber. Moreover, by moving his focus away from religious observance, Martin Buber takes the Hasidic legend, and through *Tales of the Hasidism*, transforms it into a universal vision of

ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness which is accessible for all people. I will then turn to a summary of Martin Buber's journey to Hasidism, and some accounts of Hasidic storytelling I experienced firsthand, along with an interview with a Hasidic Rabbi who regularly features a Hasidic story in his weekly *Shabbos drasha* [Sabbath sermon], in order to examine the limits of Buber's universal vision of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness.

CHAPTER II

BUBER'S INTRODUCTION TO *TALES OF THE HASIDIM*: TRANSLATING HASIDISM AND ITS TERMINOLOGY

Martin Buber grew up on the estate of his grandfather, Solomon Buber, who was renowned translator of Midrashic literature. Buber was home-schooled, bookish, imaginative, and absorbed many languages. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* tells us that already at a young age, his "literary voice may be best understood as probingly personal while seeking communication with others, forging a path between East and West, Judaism and Humanism, national particularity and universal spirit" (Braiterman and Zank). Entering the urban sphere of Vienna, Buber was exposed to a climate where "radical new approaches to psychology and philosophy were being developed" and "the burning social and political issues" of the era were discussed in terms of solutions like socialism, fascism, existentialism, and psychoanalysis (ibid.). The various intellectual currents of the age were creative fuel for Buber, whose writing covered areas as diverse as Zionism and Hasidism. His seminal philosophical work *I and Thou* focuses on the mutual experience of "encounter" that occurs in the connected space between parties of an interpersonal relationship, a theme that would be featured prominently in his anthology of Hasidic legends, with its focus on the Zaddik-Hasid relationship.

Buber lived through a dynamic time; in his life he saw two world wars, the Holocaust, the onset of Modernism, and the foundation of the State of Israel. The greater context of Buber's life, and his connection with a diverse range of literary, philosophical,

and political personages facilitated his blending philosophy, politics, literature, and religious studies. While I will not dwell on a discussion of the greater context of Martin Buber's philosophical work, I touch upon the milieu of Modernism in which he lived and worked in order to illustrate that for Buber, the "hybridity" of his writing meant that the Hasidic legend was not a genre locked into a particular place or people (namely, the Eastern European movement of Hasdism) but rather, it could be connected to the wider world. For Buber, Hasidism posed a spiritual solution not just for the Jews (searching for their place culturally and geographically in the 20th century), but for all humankind.

Chaim Potok, author of many Jewish-themed novels (most popular among them *The Chosen*) questions Buber's portrayal of Hasidism in the foreword to the 1991 edition of *Tales of the Hasidism*. Potok suggests that Buber's interest in Hasidism may have developed during the years he spent with his grandfather, who prayed in a Hasidic synagogue.[2] Childhood memories of religious Judaism fused with a renewed interest in mysticism among European scholarly elite and Buber's own existential questions to form an interest in exploring Hasidism. The general milieu of Buber's time was one in which Zionism, the Haskalah, and Orthodoxy competed for the heart of European Jewry. Many Jews left the fold of traditional Judaism completely, while others left behind the halacha (Jewish Law), and sought to integrate other components of Judaism into a more westernized, modern lifestyle. For many years, Buber himself was unsure of his Judaism and lived "in a world of confusion" (Potok, viii). The searching nature of his personal journey, which in large part involved a textual exploration of Hasidim, reflects a general

[2] Buber himself provides us with further details of his early exposure to Hasidim in his essay "My Way to Hasidism."

necessity of the modern, twentieth-century European Jew to address their place in the world and in history, poised between Judaism and secular life, between past and present.

In the twenty-sixth year of his life, Buber opened a biography of Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (the Baal Shem Tov) entitled *Zevaat Ribesh*, and the following words flashed out at him: "He takes onto himself the quality of fervor…he is hallowed…and worthy to create and is become like the Holy One, blessed be He" (Potok, viii). At this moment, Buber experienced a spark of inspiration: the realization of the "Hasidic soul." Buber withdrew from the Zionist activity with which he was previously involved, and turned to gathering Hasidic legends. According to Potok we have no clear picture of the Baal Shem Tov, only the fragments of legends, and these legends are what Buber pieced together in order to understand the Hasidic way, culminating in his first books on Hasidism, *The Stories of Rabbi Nahman* (1906) and *The Legends of the Baal Shem* (1908). These anthologies are categorized by *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as part of Buber's early phase of writing, accompanying essays on religion, art, and dance, with a "preoccupation with shape (Gestalt), movement, color, language, and gesture as the means of a "realized" or "perfected" particular human existence that represents life beyond the limits of spatio-temporal duration," for the human body and its natural motion were the fundamental building blocks of human experience (Braiterman and Zank). Here we see that for Buber, lofty philosophical realities could be traced to tangible physicality, a theme which would carry over into his writings on Hasidism as well. This unity (whereby everything could be traced back to a simple source) transcends time, and would become a fundamental core tenet of Buber's Hasidism, where he dwells on the idea of

rejecting the search for a messianic endpoint, and finding ecstatic joy and divine connection in the present moment.

Potok sees the ruination of the Jewish community as affected through various wars, pogroms, the elitist, abstruse learning of the Torah, and rigid ritual combined, forming a nearly impossible barrier against connection to G-d for the average water carrier, shoemaker, and wagon driver of European Jewry. If learning was the only way to find G-dliness, how could the common, ignorant Jew break free from the suffering of exile? The Baal Shem Tov provided a solution: learning is not the only way; connection to G-d is also possible to connect through fervor, exaltation, prayer, and joy. Potok writes that this democratic strain was seized upon by Buber not only as the essence of Hasidism, but also as the soul-force of Judaism.

And yet, Potok reminds us, that Buber has also been criticized for his "unhistorical and somewhat romanticized view of Hasidism," for ignoring elements of charlatanism, obscurantism, quarreling, superstition, and most severely, ignoring the importance of Torah Law in Hasidism (Potok, xii). Buber himself admitted that he was not interested in historical accuracy, and as we will see in our exploration of his essays on the subject, was fairly open about finding a more universal message in the tales unbound by time, place, and ritual. In elaboration of Buber's poetic license, Potok gives us a summary of Buber's early struggles in translating the tales of Rabbi Nachman, and how Buber dealt with his difficulties in translation by a self-described process of fusing his spirit with Rabbi Nachman himself, in order to complete the tales and render them more faithful to their original meaning. Buber repeated this process to write *The Legends of the Baal Shem*, but by the time he had arrived at *Tales of the Hasidism*, his methodology was

admittedly too free, and he attempted to relate the legends in a less embellished way, only closing the gaps in the fragmented material.

The issue of translation needed to be addressed by those who conveyed Jewish texts outside of the Hebrew language such as Buber and his Jewish-German contemporaries, among them Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, and Franz Rosenzweig. For clarification on this topic, I will turn to Claire Sauter's article, "Hebrew, Jewishness, and Love: Translation in Gershom Scholem's Early Work" (2015), which examines Scholem and Benjamin's differing views on the translation of Jewish concepts (initially expressed in Hebrew) into a different language (namely, German). Sauter writes that Gershom Scholem took issue with a translation by his contemporary, Dr. Alexander Eliasberg, of three works, among them *Sagen polnischer Juden* (Tales of Polish Jews) from Yiddish into German.[3] For Scholem, Yiddish was already a translation of Hebrew, and so a translation into German from Yiddish was essentially a translation of a translation, distilling the subject matter of "Jewishness" beyond the clarity it had achieved in the original Hebrew. Moreover, because Yiddish had already absorbed Hebrew terminology without translation, Scholem was infuriated with Eliasberg's translation of Hebrew terms such as *Torah* into *Gelehrsamkeit* and *zaddik* into *Wunderrabbi*. Sauter writes that for Scholem, "religious Jewish terms are not translatable into any language other than Hebrew" and the words used to express the translated concept are drawn from an inferior sphere, because Hebrew and "Jewishness" are inseparable (164). Sauter believes that for Eliasberg, the concept (such as Torah or zaddik) must be "*transposed* into another language without adding explanations" while

[3] Eliasberg also translated *Jüdische Geschichten* (Jewish Stories) and *Ostjüdische Erzähler* (Jewish Storytellers from Eastern Europe) by J.L. Perez (1916)

for Scholem, the Jewishness must be *preserved* through use of the original word (166). Sauter pithily summarizes the translation debate with one question: what should be given more priority, the source or the target language?

Sauter also cites Benjamin's theory of translation, proposing that through a meta-language of love and respect, translation unites the source language and the target language into a mode of communication that transcends linguistic boundaries. She summarizes Benjamin's view as follows: the translated word must leave its own mother language and "live fully in the other language" (170). In Sauter's reading of Benjamin, translation is about creating one meta-language of love and reverence for the concept, by respecting the original word, and making the concept accessible after its transposition. Benjamin critiqued Scholem's translation of the biblical poem attributed to King Solomon, *The Song of Songs*, from Hebrew into German, for Benjamin perceived that Scholem favored the Hebrew over the German, whereas the task of the translator requires him to have love, reverence, and respect for both languages. In Sauter's reading, Benjamin is interested in the issue of language to express concepts through the powerful tool of translation, while Scholem is more interested in the communication of Jewish concepts—and therefore he favors retaining the terminology in the original Hebrew, believing it to lose clarity and meaning in translation.

Franz Rosenzweig was another Jewish-German intellectual who grappled with the issues of translation. In her article "Franz Rosenzweig on Translation and Exile," Leora Batnitzky analyzes the connection of language and national Jewish identity for Rosenzweig, who worked with Buber to translate the Hebrew Bible into German. "The task of the translation for Rosenzweig is to move the reader towards the author"

(Batnitzky, 134). The degree to which the recipient understands the translated word determines the success of translation; therefore, it is not only acceptable, but preferential to translate words from the original Hebrew into German, in order to allow the reader understanding of the concept. For Rosenzweig, the twentieth-century Jew was doubly exiled: exiled not only in the Diaspora, but also from Judaism itself. In commenting on his translation of the Grace-After-Meals prayer, he writes "we cannot avoid this detour that again and again leads us the hard way from what is alien back to our own" (Batnitzky, 135). Ironically then, translation helps the reader arrive back to an understanding of the Jewish concept they have lost touch with, for the modern Jew exists in "an inescapable state of translation" (ibid.). However, Rosenzweig is unequivocally clear that the destination of this linguistic detour must be a return to Hebrew. Rosenzweig, unlike Buber, is not interested in establishing a Jewish community through Zionism, but rather through Hebrew language that solidifies the Jewish community regardless of whatever host country they live in, for the natural state of a Jew is one of wandering, and his identity is stronger when he yearns for the homeland than when he is actually in it (ibid., 138). Here he certainly differs from Buber, who was openly Zionist, and emigrated to Israel, where he lived until his death in 1965.

Although he lived out the last years of his life in Israel, Buber's Zionism was not purely geo-political, but rather "a conception of Jewish identity being neither a religious nor a national form, but a unique hybrid" (Braiterman and Zank). While the creation of a "Jewish homeland" and revitalization of Hebrew into a modern language could facilitate the expression of Jewish identity, these changes alone would not lead to a full Jewish renaissance: cultural rebirth was needed as well. To this end, Buber immersed himself in

Jewish texts, one genre of which was the Hasidic legend, which he saw as an expression of the fundamental tenets which had always been part of Judaism, namely, the aforementioned spiritual wholeness and ecstatic joy of the messianic present.

In the following paragraphs we will consider how Martin Buber introduces his anthology of Hasidic Folklore, *Tales of the Hasidim*, by working through his introduction to the text. The terms *zaddik, hasid,* and *Hasidism* will be defined and discussed from Buber's point of view, based on his writing. He introduces his work by explaining that "the purpose of this book is to introduce the reader to a world of legendary reality" (1). He views the tales as comprising a legendary reality because they recollect what the Hasidim experienced (or thought they had experienced), and they are not necessarily "authentic in the sense that a chronicle is authentic" (ibid.). Buber writes that the legends of the Hasidim depict a life perceived through the lens of religious fervor, described by men who found themselves touched by something sublime; they expressed a feeling of connection to the divine by communicating the effects of such a spiritual awakening upon their daily lives.

The main subject of these tales are the Hasidic masters, who Buber refers to as *zaddikim.*[4] In his introduction to the *Tales of the Hasidim*, Buber tells us that the word "zaddik" is usually translated as "the righteous," but that it "actually means those who stood the test" or "the proven" (ibid.). While Buber's second interpretation of "zaddik" is poetic, his embellishment beyond the simple translation indicates that he may take license in the definition of his terms in order to define the legendary reality. For example, Buber next translates *Hasidim* (the followers of the zaddik) as "the devout," or "more

[4] In this paper the Hebrew term צדיק [zaddik] will be spelled with some variety, such as *tsadiq* or *tzadik*, since it is transliterated differently by each writer

accurately, those who keep faith with the covenant" (2). By using the phrase "more accurately," and "which actually means," Buber has indicated (as he states openly in his 1946 preface to the *Tales*) that a mere literal translation was not sufficient to communicate the essence of the tales; Buber would have to supply the "missing links" in the translation through poetic embellishment. If Buber had wished, for instance, to provide a definition of Hasid more grounded in classical Jewish texts, he could have turned to the definition of Hasid which is first outlined in the Talmud (500 CE), as someone who goes above and beyond the letter the law, illustrated by the example of one who burns nail clippings instead of merely discarding them.[5] However, Buber's main goal in the introduction is not to provide us with the dictionary definitions and etymologies of his terminology, but rather to introduce us to the two main characters of the tales, the *zaddik* and his *hasidism*, who form the I-thou relationship that Buber perceives as crucial to the Hasidic narrative.

Buber presents a compromise between the extremities of these viewpoints on translation—on the one hand, Eliasberg's predilection for total transposition from Hebrew into a new language, and on the other, Scholem's preference for maintaining the original Hebrew. Buber leaves certain terms such as *zaddik* and *hasidim* un-translated, but he elaborates on their meaning in his introduction, and extensively in his other writings. Many other terms Buber chooses to carry out of the Hebrew realm and transpose into German (and subsequently English, or any other languages into which the *Tales* have been translated), with examples such as *ba'al ha'bos* into "house-father," *mikveh* into "bath of immersion," and *Succos* into "The Festival of Tabernacles." I would

[5] In fact, the passage in Tractate Niddah (page 17A) also defines a Tzadik as one who buries the nail clippings.

say that Buber, seeking to make the tales more accessible, generally leaned toward the stance of Eliasberg in favor of transposition. Buber translates the terms zaddik and hasid as well, but he does so not with an equivalent word or phrase in German, but rather with an anthology of legends called *Tales of the Hasidim*. The very anthology itself is Buber's definition of zaddik and hasid, as he says openly in his introduction, that "this book…purports to express and document the association between zaddikim and hasidim" (Buber, 2).

While I understand Buber's decision to transpose words out of the Hebrew into German (and subsequently English) in order to increase their accessibility for a general readership, his translation of these terms moved the tales out of the context of the Hasidism I had come to experience in my own life. From my own observations, I would say that Hasidic Jews use Hebrew and/or Yiddish nouns almost exclusively to communicate tangible "Jewish" items (people, places, and things such as a *schochet* [ritual slaughterer] *shul* [synagogue], *siddur* [prayer book]), a little less frequently for concepts (for example, *emunah* [faith], and *parnassah* [livelihood]), and that the remaining communication occurs in English—for example "please pass me that siddur, I need to daven [pray] mincha [the afternoon service]." For Scholem, Yiddish is able to communicate Jewish concepts because it preserved Hebrew vocabulary, however, I find that my daily experience challenges the Hebrew purism of Scholem's translational theory, because many of the words used for religious concepts are actually in Yiddish. The reason I do not translate certain words into English during my conversation with fellow Hasidic (and/or Orthodox) Jews is because there is no need to do so—both parties are privy to the definition and connotations. If I need to translate a word for someone, I

will still use the original word and explain its meaning, because theologically (here I agree with Scholem) that the concept is most clearly expressed in the original language. Moreover, use of Hebrew/Yiddish terminology invites the listener into a deeper understanding of the concept through the accompanying explanation, and also because use of the English equivalent will sound "funny" or "off" in conversation.

I see Buber's translation of Jewish concepts by their transposition out of the Hebrew and into the various world's languages as an inclusive gesture; despite the fact that for an initiated reader such as a practicing Hasidic Jew, the terminology may become "watered down" and divested of significance, for the general readership the proverbial door is opened, allowing a glimpse into the Hasidic life that would otherwise be obscured by foreign terms. Furthermore, while Buber does not directly transpose terms like *zaddik* and *hasid* into German, as we have mentioned, one could argue that he defines these words with *Tales of the Hasidim*, using the anthology itself as translation.

To return to our survey of Buber's introduction to *Tales of the Hasidim*, we find that after defining the zaddik, he then defines Hasidism, writing that "the core of Hasidic teachings is the concept of a life of fervor, of exalted joy" (2). In the first six generations of the movement, Buber sees that this life of fervor and joy was authentically lived by the zaddikim and their hasidim. According to Buber, a relationship with the Eternal is the main purpose of religious experience, but the mundane nature of earthly life precludes this exalted possibility, so that man must often look to some afterlife or messianic-utopian future for a fulfilling, pure relationship with the divine. However, even the

possibility of participation in a messianic future[6] could not endow the immediate *here and now* with the utopian spark of life.

According to Buber, prior to Hasidism, the only time this joy and fervor could break into the present-day life of despair in the prolonged exile was through the "messianic movements" which appeared periodically. The messianic movement of Shabbetai Tzvi, a charismatic self-proclaimed messiah who drew much of Mediterranean Jewry to his cause, and then converted to Islam while imprisoned by the Turkish Sultan, was a disaster that ended in "renegacy and despair" (Buber, 3). The faith of the masses was sorely tested by Tzvi's conversion to Islam, and in the wake of these disparaging events, only a life of fervent joy could help a Jew survive such tests of faith. The development of Hasidism created the possibility of finding the messianic future in the present, without a need to hurry toward the "end of days."

However, Hasidism did not totally remove the messianic, utopian end-goal from Judaism, but it helped its followers experience "joy in the world as it is" (Buber, 3). Unlike Shabbetai Tzvi, who threw off the yoke of the Torah commandments, Hasidism did not cast aside the religious obligation of the Jew to follow the code of Jewish law, but it infused every law with new joy. Sabbatianism, culminating in the wild ecstasies of Jacob Frank[7], encouraged its followers to treat the forbidden as holy. Hasidism, on the other hand, did not embrace the forbidden, but encouraged its followers to find the sacred in the mundane. It did not encourage the Hasid to deny his loves, desires, and personal nature, but rather, to "seize them and bind them to G-d," for finding the joy in every

[6] Messianic redemption is an integral belief of Judaism according to the Thirteen Articles of [Jewish] Faith articulated by Maimonides (R. Moses ben Maimon, 1135 -1204 CE). See "Articles of Faith" in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2007).

[7] Born in 1726, died in 1791; Jacob Frank claimed to be a reincarnation of Shabbetai Tzvi

moment is not enough; the ultimate goal must be finding the joy in connection with the divine (Buber, 4). Buber then poses a question raised by his description of Hasidism: in practicality, how is the common man to achieve this "life in fervent joy?" In order to experience this joy, it is necessary to have a united soul directed toward a divine goal, but how can this lofty status can be achieved in a world of peril, pressure, delusions, and challenges? Man needs a zaddik to show him the way.

He needs a guide to lift his soul, and since his soul is intertwined with mundane concerns, "the big and little cares," he needs a guide who will compassionately address the practical points of life: "a helper for both body and soul" (Buber, 5). This guide is the *zaddik* who can heal the great rifts in life which cause man pain, and in the process of healing, binds together man and G-d, body and soul; the zaddik is the unifier of worlds. He does not do the spiritual "task" for his Hasidim, but rather, he shows them the way, helping them in their time of need, but never relieving the of them of the work they must do on their own, for "one man can take the place of another only as far as the threshold of the inner sanctum" (Buber, 6). Buber emphasizes that this role of the zaddik as a *facilitator* of man's connection to the divine (without replacing the divine) is integral to "true" Hasidism, and exemplified in the first few generations—what followed in the succeeding generations was a distortion of the true essence of the movement.

The zaddik has a great influence on his hasidim, but, according to Buber, not so much through his teachings as much as by his mere presence. Buber quotes a hasid as saying: "I learned Torah from all the limbs of my teacher" (6). Under the tutelage of the zaddik, eating, sleeping, and earning a living all become activities invested with holiness, achieved by bodily proximity to his holy example. In order to facilitate this spiritual

elevation of the mundane lives of his followers, the zaddik must be close to his hasidim. In fact, one of the fundamental principles of Hasidism (according to Buber) is the connection between the hasid and the zaddik.

Just as much as the hasidim rely on the zaddik, the zaddik relies on his hasidim—and here Buber cites a story of the hasidim dancing around their master, the Baal Shem Tov, who had fallen into a state of depression because the clouds occluded the new moon and prevented his recital of the New Moon Blessing. Surrounding the master with their joy, they pulled him into the dance. The clouds broke, the moon appeared, and the Baal Shem Tov was able to recite the blessing; in that moment the simple folk were able to achieve with their joy what zaddik could not do with his kabbalistic devotions. This example illustrates that union with the simple folk is not a descent on the spiritual ladder for the zaddikim, but rather, a mutual ascent for both.

The zaddik and his hasidim form a "holy community," with the zaddik as the central point and spiritual guide for the hasidim that surround him. Buber cites Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, who said before his death that spiritual strength could flow from the zaddik into all the simple men, and (according to Buber's interpretation) not just the simple men of Israel, but all mankind (Buber, 7). Here, in the opening comments of introduction to *Tales of the Hasidim*, we see an inclination toward universality in Buber's writing, where he seeks to take the Hasidic tales and bring them into a larger, worldwide context. To summarize, what Buber sees as the essence of Hasidism is the union between the zaddik and the simple folk. "The teacher kindles the souls of his disciples, and they surround him and light his life with the flame he has kindled" (Buber, 8). Together they form a community, and the zaddik is at the center, unifying his close-knit circle of

disciples, who, under his tutelage, live lives of ecstatic joy in frequent union with G-d even during the mundane moments of life.

Buber does not discuss any particular Hasidic context of storytelling thoroughly (that is, when and where are these stories told), but he briefly references the third meal of the Sabbath. The third meal is conducted as the Sabbath afternoon transitions into evening, when the Sabbath draws to a close. At this meal, the zaddik expounds the Holy Scriptures, revealing what is hidden, and directs his thoughts towards his followers, who are like ripples around the dynamic energy of his words. In this ritual meal, we see how the Hasidim are a united as "an elated whole, such as can only be formed around an elated center" (Buber, 8). However, even beyond this ritual, in all areas the life, the hasidim are bound together in brotherhood, drinking to one another's health, telling each other stories, dancing and singing together, and helping one another in times of need.

Buber concludes his general outline of Hasidism by stating that as the movement went on, certain aspects became distorted, such as the fervent love for the zaddik becoming a reverence for a great magician who relieves his hasidim of all spiritual work, assumes the burden for them, and secures them a place in the afterlife. According to Buber, the movement became punctuated with superstition, fraud, and fantasy, but Buber excuses these foibles by saying such drawbacks are common to all populist religious movements, and he also cites the "pathological premises of life in exile" that makes a fulfilling and authentic religious life so difficult for the Jews (Buber 10). Buber believes beyond the sixth generation, Hasidism fell into decay, but even so, he believes that a "germ of the kingdom of G-d" still exists within the movement, and a spiritual radiance

from the spiritual pioneers of early Hasidism still shines on the forehead of the Hasidic Rebbes—the zaddikim—of Buber's time (11).

Buber then turns to outline the historical-biographical course of first few generations of Hasidism, starting with Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (c. 1700 – 1760), known as the *Baal Shem Tov* (Master of the Good Name). According to Buber, Rabbi Israel was a man who drew his life force from the union of heaven and earth, and the "life of such a man is the constant receiving of fire and turning it into light," the effect of which Buber sees as twofold: returning to earth those who have risen too high up in lofty spiritual heights, and raising to spiritual heights those who have fallen too far down in the earth (11). In other words, the zaddik (specifically here the Baal Shem Tov) brings balance to the universe and connects heaven and earth. Buber believes that Rabbi Israel is one such rabbi in a long tradition of miracle workers called the *Baalei Shem* (Masters of the name), but that the edition of Tov (good) to his name differentiates the Baal Shem Tov from his magic-working predecessors, as one who is good, reliable, and in particular, close to the people.

The Baal Shem Tov, according to Buber, won over initially antagonistic visitors and turned them into devoted disciples by telling them stories "which stir the hearer just because of their primitive character and apparent lack of intellectual quality, and finally make him see and accept them as a reference to his own secret needs" (14). By healing his visitors with stories and perhaps putting them in touch with their own inner sense of self, the Baal Shem Tov illustrates the connection between nature and spirit and physical and spiritual. This revelation of spiritual wholeness, brought to a world of men who have forgotten the union between heaven and earth, "evokes ecstatic joy, for true ecstasy hails

neither from spirit nor from nature, but from the union of these two" (Buber, 14). Buber then goes on to illustrate a general biography of the Baal Shem Tov's successor, the Maggid of Mezritch, and the generation after the Maggid, which divided into different Hasidic branches. While I will not summarize his words about the Maggid, nor the succeeding generations, I did choose to include a few of Buber's words about the Baal Shem Tov, because they help illustrate what the zaddik is to Buber: a connector. The zaddik connects seemingly opposite components by revealing their hidden unity, such as heaven and earth, or spirit and nature. Furthermore, Buber's words on the Besht (an acronym for the Baal Shem Tov) reiterate Buber's central message about Hasidim: the core of Hasidism is joy, and this joy is achieved through the spiritual wholeness of union, such as that between man and G-d.

Buber's introduction, while poetic and ambitious, still leaves some ambiguity about the particulars regarding the theme of ecstatic joy, and Hasidism in general. Despite the voluminous nature of his anthology (the two volumes amount to over 670 pages), one could argue that the stories are still missing the richness and experience of Hasidic life itself, for the text of the printed page is missing the elements of music, food, community, clothing, and atmosphere that the Hasidim experience along with the storytelling. Furthermore, despite his embellished translations of zaddik and hasid, Buber's use of literal translations like "house-father," "ritual bath," or "festival of the rejoicing of the law" [8] to describe the Hasidic life can leave an un-initiated reader uninformed about the nature and importance of these terms. For example, the *mikveh* (ritual bath) is constructed with specific dimensions to hold (at minimum) a specific amount of water with kabbalistic implications. Hasidic men often immerse in the mikveh

[8] Respectively "baal habos," "mikveh," and "Simchas Toireh," to name a few examples.

everyday to facilitate divine assistance in areas such as mental clarity during prayer, increased intellectual reception in the learning of Torah, livelihood, sexual purity, and the destruction of evil forces generated by sinful acts. This information is conveyed by the Hebrew term *mikveh*, but not necessarily "ritual bath." Buber translates these terms literally, but he does not provide the rich background information about Hasidic life in order to illustrate the *Tales* more vivaciously. By eliminating potent terminology, I feel that Buber does not show how Hasidim actually work towards these goals of "ecstatic joy" and "spiritual wholeness" by fulfilling religious obligations implied by these terms, and as for the religious obligations themselves, Buber does not elaborate on them at all.

In conclusion, Buber's introduction presents Hasidism as a life of fervent, ecstatic joy that is achieved through the spiritual wholeness facilitated by a zaddik. As a practicing Hasidic Jew, I agreed with Buber's presentation, but my initiation in the subject matter and familiarity with the (translated) terminology led me to feel that his introduction was missing any tangible instruction other than the import to find a zaddik who can teach by the example of his life, and facilitate spiritual wholeness by uniting opposites such as heaven and earth. Buber does not elaborate on the particulars of how this ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness is achieved by the zaddik and practiced by the hasidim. I decided to look deeper into Buber's writing on Hasidim to see if he would elaborate on these instructions.

CHAPTER III

BUBER'S RETROSPECTIVES: HASIDISM AS A HEALING FOR THE CRISIS OF MODERN MAN

In order to explore the context that Buber perhaps conceived for his *Tales of the Hasidism*, and to elaborate on the principles of joy and unification outlined in his introduction, I turned outward from his compilation of legendary anecdotes to examine Buber's writings on Hasidic philosophy itself. By reviewing these texts, perhaps we will also answer the question of why Buber was compelled to share the legends of a mostly insular culture with so wide and un-initiated an audience, and further explore the theme of universality expressed in his comments about Rabbi Nahman pouring his spirit out into all people. Perhaps we will find the "missing piece" I sought in Buber's introduction, namely tangible instruction for achieving the Hasidic life of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness through fulfillment of ritual law.

"Hasidism and Modern Man" is actually one of Buber's last essays on the topic of Hasidism (written in 1957), but it is a convenient starting point for exploring Buber's thoughts, because he makes a self-reflective examination of the changes in his writing over the years, and provides a universal application for the message of the Hasidic tale. Buber muses about what impelled him to write about Hasidism and bring knowledge of this Jewish mystical movement into the larger world. This impetus for osmosis into a universal context certainly did not originate within the Hasidic philosophy itself, which, according to Buber, is quite insular.[9] Buber wonders if his personal familiarity with

[9] We will see this assessment of Hasidism as insular simultaneously confirmed and challenged by researchers such as Mintz and Fader. For example, Fader's study found that while Hasidic men lead insular lives of religious study and disengagement from the wider secular world, Hasidic women earn college degrees, work, and engage in the larger context of secular New York.

Hasidism (seen in the vignettes of childhood memory) combined with what he describes as a "spirit of the times" to bring foreign religions to curious readers, and inspired multiple projects of translation and presentation of the Hasidic philosophy. Buber asserts that he differed from other Jewish writers of his time (who he does not name) who saw in Hasidism only wild superstition. And yet, because he wished to communicate the purity and loftiness of Hasidism, Buber admits that he ignored the populist element in his earliest writings on the movement, which left him unsatisfied with their authenticity.

It was about a decade after his first writings on Hasidism (1906 - 1908) that Buber's relationship with Hasidism went through a self-described transformation. Buber became more aware that Hasidism was not so much a teaching as much as it was a way of life, which is perhaps reflected in the transition of his focus in writing. *The Tales of Rabbi Nahman*, Buber's first compilation of stories (1906), were not legends of actual zaddikim or hasidim, but rather narratives, that is, complex allegories communicating Hasidic philosophy, composed by the Hasidic master Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. Published around forty years later, *Tales of Hasidim* was a book of anthologized vignettes of the lives of the Hasidic masters and their students; this trend from narrative allegories to biographical anecdotes perhaps reflects Buber's paradigm shift from understanding the essence of Hasidism no longer as teaching, but as lifestyle.

Despite Buber's realization of the Hasidic lifestyle, he decided that he himself could not live a Hasidic life, and that to masquerade as a Hasid would be farcical. Yet he still felt called to a task. "I believed that one might relate to [Hasidic literature] merely as an observer. Since then I have realized that the teaching is there that one may learn it and the way that one may walk on it" (Buber, 4). With this line, Buber indicates that there

was some internal tension about his immersion the Hasidic folklore, without fully immersing in the Hasidic lifestyle. However he does not further elaborate this biographical aspect.[10] Despite his own choice not to adopt the Hasidic lifestyle, and despite what Buber refers to as the decay of the Hasidic movement after the fifth generation, he writes that Hasidism still provides "an answer to the crisis of Western man that has become fully manifest in our age" (ibid., 5). A movement which arose from the ashes of the false messianic Sabbatian catastrophe created a spiritual awakening which hallowed everyday life by making the mundane sacred; according to Buber, a movement born from crisis can provide an answer for the crisis of today, which stems from the illness of separation between body and spirit, sacred and profane.

Generally, Buber writes, a separation between sacred and profane is a founding tenet of religion. Indeed, it would seem that Judaism is also built on this principle of separation, and Buber draws proof for this by citing the benediction recited at the end of the Sabbath, which speaks of separating the Sabbath from the rest of the week, the sacred from the profane. However, Buber tells us that one only needs to look at the ubiquitous presence of blessings in Judaism, recited over such acts as eating food, donning a new shirt, building a new house, and many other daily activities, to realize that Judaism does not forever separate the sacred from the profane, but rather allows the sacred to permeate all aspects of life; furthermore, Hasidism takes this permeation of the holy within the mundane to new level of devotion and intensity. "G-d dwells wherever one lets him in," Buber quotes a Hasidic saying, and tells us that in the Hasidic view, the profane is really the not-yet-hallowed (7).

[10] Mintz and Fader also discuss this internal tension as Jews researching Hasidism and elaborate on it further.

Buber posits that the crisis of modern man has been explained by many different philosophers; for example, Marx attributes the crisis to alienation caused by economic factors, and psychoanalysts to personal neurosis. Buber sees all these ideas as solutions addressing the symptoms, but not the true illness. Buber posits that the true problem is the separation of the sacred and the profane, but Hasidism offers the solution. "Man cannot approach the divine by reaching beyond the human; he can approach Him through becoming human. To become human is what he, this individual man, has been created for" (15). To be human is to be whole, living in a state of unity—as opposed to the fragmented existence of modern man. Buber sees this human wholeness as the eternal core of the Hasidic philosophy, and the Hasidic legend is the vehicle for carrying this concept into the larger world, a palliative that can be ingested by a broken and suffering world, disillusioned by the holocaust and two world wars. What the Hasidic legend offers then, is a message of human wholeness, and that wholeness facilitates the ecstatic joy Buber writes about in his introduction. Indeed, ecstatic joy bursting into the quotidian present through the realization of wholeness is but a momentary cure. Yet, by illustrating for us thousands of anecdotes in the biographies of the Hasidic masters—who experience this realization in many different vignettes from real life—Buber shows us that it is possible to achieve a life-long cure, and emerge into a utopian, hallowed life[11]. However,

[11] Interestingly, Buber does not address the Holocaust, neither in *Tales of the Hasidism* nor in these essays that we explore. I cannot propose to speak for Buber's gross omission of this topic (even in his later, more self-reflective writings), but I will present three possibilities. (1) Buber did not experience the horror of the death camps personally, unlike other authors (such as Elie Wiesel) who did, and incorporated those memories into their Hasidic storytelling (see Cooper's article "But I Will Tell of Their Deeds," which we will discuss later). (2) Alternatively, perhaps Buber did not feel equipped to address this topic, much in the style of Adorno's comment "There can be no poetry after Auschwitz." (3) Our own reflection of the Holocaust is magnified because of its closeness to this generation. We should consider that the Sabbatian messianic disillusionment which Buber discusses was a spiritual crisis of disastrous enormity, especially when we regard the frustration engendered by the failure of this "messianic" figure to release European Jewry from one and half millennia of persecution. When Buber posits Hasidism as a solution to

after reading this essay, I still felt that Buber did not provide tangible instruction for achieving that unity between opposites in order to facilitate "becoming human," and so I continued to work through his work through his writing.

The spiritual solution of Hasidism as a cure for the general ills of modern day life is a theme further explored by Buber in his work *Hasidism*, especially in the chapter "The Beginnings of Hasidism," wherein Buber focuses on the genesis of the Hasidic movement as a response to the catastrophe of Shabbetai Tzvi, the false messiah, and how a movement born as a response to spiritual crisis can be the curative response to the spiritual crisis of today. In the scholarly sense, Buber sees nothing new about Hasidism; it only took selections from the Kabbalah and reworked them. The true genius and originality in the movement is that it created a teaching based on a way of life, and not a way of life based on a teaching. It is a theology that can be carried out not only by the esoteric and segregated holy hermits, but the everyday common people, who can emulate the life of the master by their proximity to his daily example. Within this community arises an inner circle around the master-zaddik, and the members of this inner circle carry on the teaching of the zaddik through their own lives.

Buber is referring here to the circle of disciples that developed around the Baal Shem Tov, and then again around his main disciple, the Maggid of Mezritch, from which many diverse streams of Hasidic philosophy would emerge. This "spiritual flowering" of

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Sabbatianism, he implies that the Hasidic ideals of the first six generations are also applicable to the ills of the present day, which means, that in Buber's time, the message of utopian hope, human wholeness, and ecstatic joy can be found even in the wake of the Holocaust. Buber was unable to illustrate this connection directly, because in his view, the spiritual flame of Hasidism had already burned out before the twentieth century, so there are no Hasidic anecdotes linked to the horrors of the death camps (we will find this challenged in our ethnographic exploration of Hasidic lore). What Hasidism offered, we would have to apply in our own lives by taking from the examples it provided in the first six generations. Therefore, Buber omits the Holocaust. Hasidism was a response to Sabbatianism, but it can be applied as a cure to the ills of any generation.

master, community, and inner circle continued for five generations, before (according to Buber) it degenerated into factionist strife and the very elitism Hasidism initially rejected[12]. According to Buber, the *zaddik*, or master, of each community is not a human paragon (although in Hebrew word *zaddik* implies a perfectly righteous individual; perhaps Buber is trying to highlight the humanism of the zaddikim, their accessibility, and love for the common man). The true spiritual contribution of the zaddik towards the spiritual growth of his followers, or his *Hasidim*, is not his own spiritual perfection, but rather that he draws men together in a brotherly connection by drawing them all closer to that which they believe.

According to Buber, because Hasidism is not so much a philosophy as it is a way of living, the Hasidic legend is the main way of communicating the teaching, for in the legend, we read about the actions of the zaddik. The theological writings are merely footnotes for the main text, which is the legend. According to Buber, although the legends have become embellished and corrupted over the centuries, he asserts that for one who knows how to read the legends, they offer a glimpse of the heartbeat of Hasidic life: the relationship between the master and his students. Even if the miracles transcribed did not occur exactly the way they are phrased, it contained the core of the magic spell that the zaddik had woven over his disciples, who communicated their wonderment in the language of miracles.

Of utmost importance for Buber is how Hasidism developed in the wake of the Sabbatian crisis. The disillusionment of a false messiah and his empty promises left the Jewish community of Europe in a state of shock and despair. And yet, it would be a

[12] One of the foundational appeals of Hasidim was its rejection of the necessity of scholarship as the only path to religious experience, in favor of the simple, enthusiastic devotion of the common folk.

mistake to say that Hasidism was a total reformation of Judaism, for it drew on many of same theological themes that had been perverted by Shabbatai Tzvi. In Sabbatianism, Gnostic ritual prevailed, and the messianic figure had to enter into the dirt and filth of the world in order to reveal that the unholy was indeed holy. The drawback to this system was that in the process of entering this filth, the idea of sin disappeared entirely, and the yoke of the Torah commandments was cast off and forgotten entirely: it could no longer be true to the ideals of Judaism.

The union of man with a God who dwells with man "in the midst of his uncleanliness," and the power of the redemption to overcome all barriers (including those between holy and profane) may have been carried to an extreme in Sabbateanism, which divested these themes of all connection to the Jewish faith; but these elements of connection to the divine and messianic redemption were actually central to Buber's understanding of Judaism, and found full revitalization in Hasidism. Buber posits Jacob Frank and the Baal Shem Tov as the two respondents to the Sabbatian crisis. Frank carried the post-Sabbatian climate to new levels of Gnostic perversion; the Baal Shem Tov reclaimed the themes of redemption, union, and divine service, and carried them to new levels of life. Sabbateanism left a rift between the Jews and G-d that needed to be healed, and the Baal Shem Tov stepped into the role of healer by repairing the rift between man and G-d, body and soul.

Buber sees it as no coincidence that both Jacob Frank and the Baal Shem Tov came to the fore in the region of Podolia, where Turkish Jews could still recall the tragedy of Shabbetai Tzvi. He relates a story about the interaction between the Baal Shem Tov and Shabbetai Tzvi to indicative the difference between them. When the Baal Shem

Tov decided to do some spiritual healing work on the soul of the deceased false messiah in order to elevate his tortured soul from gehennom, Shabbetai came to the Besht in a dream. He tempted the Besht (the story is unclear about the nature of the temptation), whereupon the Baal Shem Tov hurled the pretender back into the abyss. Buber believes that Tzvi was tempting the Besht to follow in his own path and claim the title of messiah. Therein lies the difference: Sabbateanism hurries the end, and Tzvi claims the eschatological title of messiah; the Besht rejects this rushing towards the final hour, and instead embraces the idea that "everything points to necessity of returning to the beginning" where G-d can be found in the here and now (Buber, 17). The zaddik does not attempt to be the messiah, but rather, he facilitates the discovery of a messianic light in the everyday acts of his Hasidim.

The zaddik figure, according to Buber, was drawn from precedents in Kabbalah and popular tradition, but received new meaning in the Hasidic context. The zaddik became a leader of his community and the greater community of Israel, an intermediary between man and G-d, and yet, he continued to foster the individual connection of each Hasid to the divine. However, Buber states that the development of this zaddik role can only be understood against the backdrop of crisis, namely, the decay of enthusiasm for the Torah, attributable to the cold, elitist, scholarly circle of Rabbis on the one hand, and the fervent, anti-climactic, false messianism of Shabbetai Tzvi on the other.

The zaddik steps into this milieu of disintegration and disillusionment, into a role which is no longer focused on scholarly achievement, but rather piety. Buber sees Polish Jewry after the Sabbatian crisis as a people craving a leader who could show them what to do in a time of indecision. And yet, while "the hasidic leaders undertook responsibility

for the souls entrusted to them...at the same time they kept alive in them the spark of responsibility" (Buber, 19). While Jacob Frank, the successor to Tzvi, wished to replace the Torah with his own perverted Gnosticism, the zaddik sought to become a living Torah, a life of teaching.

The zaddik is very involved in the mundane, everyday lives of his Hasidim, and sees to it that their practical needs are taken care of; it is an organic connection, and a mutual bond, in contradistinction to the earlier system, where the scholarly rabbi sat learning separated from the mass of uneducated people by great oceans of text. To facilitate this connection, there were many types of zaddikim, each who attracted a particular type of follower (there were thirty-six hidden, and thirty six revealed zaddikim, according to the Besht). The plurality of Hasidism made it very appealing to the masses, because they could gravitate towards the zaddik with whose personality, deeds, or teaching the felt the most affinity. Whereas for Jacob Frank, ignorance was celebrated as an excuse to forgo the Torah, the average Hasid acknowledged his own ignorance, but did not relinquish the effort. He said the psalms, said the prayers, and did the simple work he could, until the moment came, when, by virtue of his simplicity, he saved the world. Perhaps his simple, heartfelt prayer pierced the heavens and carried all the other prayers to G-d; perhaps his joyous dance raised the spirits of a burdened zaddik; the emphasis moved from scholarly achievement, to achievements of honest, simple piety fueled by the passionate heart. The simple folk would not attempt to hurry the end and enter into the messianic future, but rather "to serve G-d with the strength given to him in each hour of life" (Buber, 24). This is the philosophy of Hasidism that Buber outlines in "The Beginnings of Hasidism," a movement that seeks to find the messianic future in the

present, in response to the epic failure of a movement that sought to end the present and usher in the messianic future. Of utmost importance in facilitating the Hasidic lifestyle is attachment to a zaddik, whose living example and guidance provide the Hasidim with the path to spiritual wholeness and ecstatic joy; this zaddik is in contradistinction to a charlatan such as Shabbetai Tzvi, or Jacob Frank. In this essay, which Buber began by defining Hasidism as a response to messianic catastrophe, I felt that Buber drew one step closer to tangible instruction regarding how one could enter into a Hasidic existence by explaining the necessity of learning from the actions of a zaddik, but in comparison to the Hasidic life I had observed, I still felt that his material was lacking direction because of his omission of reference to Jewish Law. And if Buber did not believe that Jewish Law was an integral component of Hasidism, what exactly did the zaddik do in order to show his hasidim the way to becoming human? I continued to look through Buber's writing.

In his essay "The Foundation Stone," Buber outlines the driving forces of the Hasidic movement's initial development. Buber classifies Hasidism as a revolt of the common, ignorant man, or *amei-haaretz* (literally people of the land) against the scale of values that placed the erudite and scholarly rabbi at the top. According to Buber, in order to understand the tremendous influence of this eastern-European spiritual movement, one must understand the democratic strain it contained. The disparity of inequality in life is so prevalent and heartbreaking, that it cannot, Buber asserts, be allowed to penetrate into the heart of spirituality, and so, Hasidism as a revolution validates the fundamental nature of religion as a place of universal equality, where all men can come into contact with G-d.

Such a revolution in spirituality can only take place if it has been preceded by a similar revolution in society at large, but Buber does not want us to overestimate the

contribution of outside influences over spiritual rebirth. Buber sees mysticism as a historical trend, a response to an inner crisis of religion (for example, the false messiah Shabbetai Tzvi), and not as a response to greater historical factors. Mysticism "endows this religion with a wealth of new vital power…and renews them from within, it restores to religion its binding power (Buber, 37). Mysticism does not come from greater societal changes without, but is made from the very material that the religion is made from; it is a renewal, drawn from the deep roots that perhaps became lost through time and space. This mysticism, or this renewal, is what Hasidism is to Judaism, and all humankind.

Shabbatai Tzvi converted to Islam, and his successor Jacob Frank to Christianity, but this apostasy was only a symptom of the illness that had permeated Judaism, and "the poison can only be overcome by a powerful anecdote" (Buber, 38). Even the common man, far removed from the catastrophe, was feeling the illness in the struggle of his connection to G-d. The poison was "the lust for overrunning reality" the rushing through life towards an illusory messianic end, a dream that could only be shattered with the catastrophe of a false messiah (Buber, 39). Hasidism was the palliative that restored the health of religion, not by consciously trying to be the cure, but rather, by just existing. It was not a life led by teaching, but rather, a teaching led by life, which led men back to union with G-d. This existence of union cannot be "reflexive" and philosophical, but rather, vital, in direct contact with simple reality.

The common man is attracted to such a movement, and lays the foundation for new leadership, such as the Baal Shem Tov, whose appearance is "the fundamental act of Hasidism" (41). He was not a leader who led with complex mystical philosophies, but rather, captured his followers with honest simplicity of his words. "Whoever has heard

him feels that the speech is directed at him," Buber writes (44). Buber explains that the pithy aphorisms of the Baal Shem Tov captured his own heart, for even though the concepts had been repeated before, it was as if, in the words of the Besht, they had been said for the first time. The Besht is a leader who does not live in the proverbial ivory tower[13], engrossed in works of mysticism for the benefit of his own spiritual journey, but rather, is engaged in a real relationship with G-d and his fellow man; he is a real person, in a real life, whose real words connect to the real people, and help them find G-d in the reality of their own lives.

Buber sees Judaism as inherently dualistic, and the Torah expresses this duality of light and dark, day and night, good and evil, urging man to reject the bad and live by the good. And yet, the concept of the "end of days" poses a problem, a third area, a "grey space," a future where the holy fills the earth, and there is no room for the profane. Sabbateanism takes this disappearance of duality as the starting point, and assumes that the messianic future has arrived. And yet, rather than pushing away the choice for evil, Sabbateanism asks its followers to grab hold of it and "transform" it into holiness. The evil is shattered by the holy man (and all men are holy) descending into it and redeeming it. The assumption here is that man has already reached a state of perfection, and is capable of transforming the evil into good. This is a tendency of Gnosticism that appears throughout history in various religions, but for the Jews, it culminated in the disappointment of Shabbetai Tzvi, who ultimately rejected the Torah altogether. The messianic movement went from the embrace of evil in order to elevate it into good, to the total embrace of evil itself, fully rejecting the good and holy. In face of this

[13] However, it is interesting to note that for many years the Besht practiced extended periods of seclusion in the mountains.

disappointment, the common people returned to their mundane lives, their religious enthusiasm cooled.

Into this climate of spiritual illness stepped the bearer of the cure: the Baal Shem Tov. Whereas Shabbetai Tzvi had encouraged the embrace of the forbidden, the Baal Shem Tov encouraged man to throw off the disguise of the mundane world, to seek the godliness within, without embracing the forbidden. The Hasidic philosophy was that everything permissible could be elevated by bringing it into the service of G-d, and it was a philosophy that could redeem the common man from a reality seemingly devoid of meaning and filled only with struggle. The Baal Shem Tov encouraged his followers to do everything with spiritual intent, so that body and soul could be united, and thereby, G-d and the world. "In every movement that he performs, in every word that he utters, man must direct his being towards union," Buber writes, and then cites the example that a businessman, according the Hasidic philosophy, should conduct his financial affairs with a mind devoted to the love and friendship of all people (57).

In every hour, man is called to perform some spiritual task, and thereby renews a spiritual relationship with G-d and reality. "Only by way of true intercourse with things and beings that man achieves true life…he can take an active part in the redemption of the world," Buber summarizes (58). Whereas previous messianic revolts, such as Christianity and Sabbateanism, separated themselves from Judaism, Hasidism stayed within the boundaries of the Torah. Instead of demanding that man regard the holy messianic future as having arrived, Hasidism accepted reality, and suggested that man hallow what he can in his everyday life, and thereby find the messianic present.

In summary, Buber's essay "The Foundation Stone" explores the causes of the Hasidic movement. In his opinion, a general spiritual illness stemming from the disparagement of the common man in favor of scholarly rabbinic elitism, was exacerbated by the messianic catastrophe of Shabbetai Tzvi. The Baal Shem Tov stepped in to affect a spiritual cure for the common masses, by creating a movement where body and soul could be united, and instead of rushing towards the messianic end, man could discover the messianic future.

In "The Spirit and Body of the Hasidic Movement," Buber further examines the revolutionary theme of Hasidism, and defines what he perceives to be the essence of the movement. Whereas revolutions in society often attack their own roots, revolutions in religion are more geared toward reformation than severance; therefore, Hasidism did not reject Judaism, but rather, rediscovered and disseminated what had always been part of the tradition. Hasidism took over and united two traditions, one being the system of commandments and laws (Torah), and the other being the mystical science of the kabbalah. The union of Torah and Kabbalah had occurred before with the educated and spiritually privileged kabbalists, but until Hasidism, it had yet to join with the reality of "life" and "community."

In this essay, Buber posits that the "central idea" of Hasidism was the kabbalistic notion of discovering G-dliness hidden in the material world, and "the principle of man's responsibility for G-d's fate in the world" (64). That is, to the degree of sanctity that man brings to his everyday actions, G-d is revealed in the world. For whatever reason, G-d desired that man would find Him, so he disguised Himself within in his creation, and left it up to man to connect through spiritual efforts. "The shells of the world exist that he

break through them, to the core" (Buber, 68). Previously, mysticism was eschatological, schematized, and ascetic. Hasidism brought this mystical concept of discovering G-d to the common man, so that the realization of his daily labor as the "shell" would lead him to understand that "the issue is to do the one appointed task, the common, obvious tasks of daily life, according to their truth and according to their meaning" (Buber, 72). This kabbalstic notion of discovering G-dliness in the mundane in no way rejected the Law (of the Torah), and by notifying us of this fact, Buber implies that the Torah Law does play a role in Hasidism.

In order to translate the "how" of the movement as opposed to the "what," it would be necessary for a chain of teachers and disciples to pass along the instruction, for the written word would not suffice. The goal of the Hasidic life is not just to follow the Law, but to become a living embodiment thereof. "The men who are truly a Torah called zaddiks, the righteous, the right ones. They are the bearers of the hasidic teaching, not only as its apostles, but more as its effective reality. They are the teaching" (Buber 74). This definition of *zaddik* is more specific than the definition in Buber's introduction to *Tales of the Hasidim*, where he defines the zaddik as one who has passed some undefined spiritual test. And furthermore, by specifying that Hasidism did not throw off the yoke of the Torah, but rather encouraged its followers to embody the law in their daily lives, especially by following the example of the zaddikim, Buber here comes closest to providing tangible instruction regarding the Hasidic path: the zaddikim embody the law of the Torah; the hasidim live by their example, achieve wholeness, and thereby ecstatic joy, which is the messianic future—found in the present.

Buber asserts that we must understand the difference between Christianity and Judaism; whereas the former has a fixed calendar point for the messianic arrival, in Judaism, since that time has not yet arrived, it is always on the horizon, and always able to permeate the present. Therefore, unlike a priest or a monk, who ritualistically renews a finished act of salvation, the zaddik puts his hand to the ongoing task of life. "He is the man who has truly become human," Buber concludes (76). He brings blessing from heaven down to earth, and from earth to the heavens; he is the unifier of worlds, and of G-d and man; "constant renewal is the guiding principal of the zaddik's life" (77). Buber thereby again links the encounter with a messianic future within the present to the idea of unification, and further highlights the nature of Hasidism to facilitate "becoming human."

Despite the zaddik's knowledge of mystical letter combinations and theurigic powers[14], there is no secret formula for achieving holiness according to the Hasidic philosophy, but only the hallowing of everyday life, and "this hallowing of the everyday stands above all magic[15]" (Buber, 81). He writes further that he "central desire of the zaddik is to hallow that which is worldly" (ibid.). In addition to their kabbalistic prowess, prayer is one of the services that leads to rapturous connection with G-d, but the zaddik is not content, according to Buber, to live just with this. He must mix and mingle with the common man and address his concerns, and that human love is the vehicle for unification, "for the unity of love of all people is the chariot of [divine presence]" (86). The zaddik's mundane conversations contain mystical secrets; his meals are like the sacrificial services of the ancient temple. Thus, Buber sees the zaddik as an exemplary

[14] Manipulations of sacred names of G-d in order to achieve desired effects in reality

[15] By "magic" Buber here perhaps means kabbalistic ritual

figure who leads this life of spiritual meaning, wholeness, and unity, so that as he mixes and mingles with the *amei ha'aretz* (the common man) they may learn from his example.

Buber defines three circles on which "the love of the zaddik stands the test" (87). This "love" is his aforementioned connection to the common man, and his facilitation of brotherhood between men, which unifies people and makes a vehicle for the divine presence. Furthermore, this reference to a "test" sheds light on Buber's description of the zaddik in the introduction of *Tales of the Hasidim*, since there he mentions that the zaddik is "the proven" or "one who stands the test." The love of the zaddik holds up in these three circles despite the challenges of everyday life, which make spiritual immersion and realization difficult to readily achieve, and these three circles are: the transient crowd that seeks his help, the local community that shares common living conditions, and his disciples.

The "transient folk" are those who might come to the zaddik on a festival, carrying a letter filled with petitions, which are more often than not, petitions for everyday things such as livelihood, children, health. These transient folk seek advice or a blessing from the spiritual giant, and the zaddik effects a healing whereby the one cured will find the inner strength to carry out the completion of his task with his own efforts. As for the "community members," these may be followers of the zaddik, or they may non-Hasidic *misnagdim* (opponents) who live in the same region. According to Buber, the leader of this opposing force is the "Rav," who obtains his prestige through knowledge of the *halacha* and his ability to address questions and concerns in Jewish law[16] (Buber, 89). Although the zaddik became a leader primarily through his piety, fear of G-d, and fervor, there were instances where the Rav was also familiar with the Kabbalah, and the Rebbe

[16] Mintz informs us that Hasidim will also appoint a Rav for addressing halachic inquiries in the community

was also knowledgeable in Jewish law. Here, Buber cites the example of the Gaon of Vilna[17], a staunch opponent of Hasidism (yet also a master of the Kabbalah), and Shneur Zalman of Liaidi[18], author of the mystical work "Tanya," who wrote a code of Jewish Law. Thus, even while Buber seems to oversimplify the opposition of Hasidism to non-Hasidic Jewry, he acknowledges that the misnagdim and hasidim may mingle, both on the common and scholarly level.

The third circle, and that which is most apropos to *Tales of the Hasidim*, is that of the disciples, who grow close to the zaddik, and may even live in his household. This circle is where the tradition is passed down through the generations. To cite the connection between the zaddik and his Hasidim, Buber brings a story of Rabbi Nahum of Chernobyl. One Shabbos afternoon, at the holy third meal of the Sabbath, his disciples were sitting around the table and lamenting the days they had wasted in trivial pursuits, and feeling as if their spiritual work had amounted to nothing; only their connection to the zaddik Rabbi Nahum could give them comfort, and immediately they set out to Chernobyl to see him. At this very moment, Rabbi Nahum was sitting at his own table, feeling a similar despondency over the squandered days of his life; it was only the fact that his Hasidism were joined to him that provided him with solace. He rose to the door, and saw his disciples approaching. "In that moment did the circle close," Buber writes, highlighting the connection of this inner circle to the master (91).

[17] Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman (1720-1791) regarded as the foremost Torah authority by non-Hasidic orthodox Jewry in the last several centuries.

[18] Referred to as the "Alter Rebbe" (the Old Rebbe) by Chabad Hasidim; the first Rebbe of Chabad. 1745 - 1812.

These three circles (the transient, the community, and the disciples) "indicate the various moving forces of which the vitality of the hasidic movement was built up" (Buber, 93). While Hasidism was founded on the chain of transmission from disciple to student, it was a movement open to Jews of all types, classes, and intellects: rich and poor, uneducated and learned, pious ones and sinners alike. As long as the teaching was pure, the transmission straightforward, and the character populist, Hasidism was "great and fruitful" (Buber, 94). Unfortunately, Buber does not elaborate in this essay on the particulars of how the movement degenerated, although by now we have noticed a general trend of Buber's whereby he concludes his essay by asserting that the spiritual power of Hasidism is no longer apparent in the movement itself (due to what Buber perceives as its decay), but that the spiritual germ of brilliance is available to address the problems of the current day, for both Jews and non-Jews alike.

In summary (if we were to these four essays into one message "The Beginnings of Hasidism," "The Foundation Stone," "Spirit and Body of the Hasidic Movement" and "Hasidism and Modern Man" we could say that) Martin Buber perceives Hasidism historically as a response to the spiritual ills which had engendered and culminated in the Sabbatian crisis. Hasidism was a mystical movement that helped the common man find the messianic future in his own mundane present. Finally, beyond the historical community of Hasidic Jewry which existed and thrived in the first six generations of the movement, Hasidism offers a message of wholeness, peace, and unity, while addressing the general ills of the modern man, who suffers from the separation of body and spirit. In Buber's earlier writing he may have been referring to the "modern man" of the early twentieth century, caught in the confusion of diverse streams of thought vying for his

loyalty. However, the dates of Buber's later essays, wherein he still posits Hasidism as a cure, indicate that despite the horrors of the Second World War and a Holocaust, he still holds onto the utopian ideal of human wholeness and ecstatic joy. In his foreword to the 1948 edition of *Hasidism*, Buber again reflects on over four decades of his involvement in Hasidic writings and stories, and his desire for communicating to the greater world the fundamental core that he perceives as the essence of Hasidic truth, which is of vital importance to all mankind, "at this particular hour more important than ever before...when we are in danger of forgetting for what purpose we are on earth" (foreword). So important is that which Hasidism has to offer, that he will "carry it into the world against its will," implying that Buber's task is to take Hasidism beyond its historical boundaries (which may be isolationist and insular), and offer the Hasidic message to the larger world (ibid.). In his essays, Buber takes Hasidism beyond the status of a cure for healing the spiritual illness culminating in Sabbatianism (which he directly states) and wholesale destruction of European Jewry (which is implied by the dates of his later essays), and presents it as a palliative for all mankind.

Thus, applying Buber's perspective of Hasidism as explained in these four essays to the stories in *Tales of the Hasidim*, we can understand that the Hasidic legends are sacred anecdotes of men who unified body and spirit, and found the messianic future in their present reality. Indeed, if Buber's introduction to the anthology leaves some gaps in the instructions of how to achieve the Hasidic goal, these four essays provide more information: the zaddik embodies the Law to the point of becoming a living Torah; the hasidim learn how to live from their zaddik, and in this process of learning, they achieve human wholeness and ecstatic joy. Buber's essays on Hasidism addressed my question

about the particulars of how to achieve the Hasidic reality described in his anthology of legends. But why was Buber not more explicit about these instructions in his introduction? Why did he not elaborate on what exactly was implied by the zaddik becoming an embodiment of the Law? Furthermore, Buber's translation of almost every Hebrew word into German (other than *zaddik* and *hasid*), which obscured the clarity of the concepts he wished to communicate, and his omission of any discussion of the importance of Jewish Law (Halacha) in Hasidism, left me questioning if Buber painted an accurate portrait of Hasidism in his *Tales of The Hasidim*.

CHAPTER IV

HASIDISM TODAY: BUBER'S FORGOTTEN DEMOGRAPHIC, STORYTELLING CONTEXTS, AND THE REBBE

Ayala Fader in *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn* (2009) reflects on time she spent researching Hasidic women in Hasidic girl's schools and Hasidic homes in the New York urban area. This study was particularly interesting in relation to my reading of Buber, because not only did it describe real life, modern day Hasidim, but it also specifically focused on a demographic that was entirely missing from Buber's work: women[19]. In seven chapters, Fader (a self-described secular Israeli Jew) discusses several issues in the life of today's Hasidic women of New York, including how girls are raised to fit in with expectations about their roles as mothers, wives, and members of the community, how they navigate the bilingual realm of Yiddish and English, and their daily transitions between the insular religious Hasidic world, and the modern American world in which they work. Fader interviews Bobov, Satmyr, Viznitz, Chabad[20], and "unaffiliated" Hasidic women, drawing the conclusion that

[19] Fader writes that the purpose of her study is to understand how "Hasidic women teach their daughters to take on their responsibilities and become observant Jewish women" (1). While she does examines gender roles in the greater context of present day Hasidic life in New York City through interviews and fieldwork, in an interview with the *Forward* (1/21/2010) she stated that her decision to pursue this project was motivated by her personal fascination with Hasidic Jews, the dearth of research on Hasidism's use of Yiddish, and the topic of childrearing. However, despite her personal research objectives, we can view her study as part of the ongoing, growing tradition of gender-related scholarship regarding subcultures (such as Hasidism in America). Third wave feminism has acknowledged that categories like class, ethnicity, religion, etc. may complicate the study of women as a monolithic cross-cultural group, and has raised awareness that theories can be influenced by context, calling into question the relationship between the anthropologist and their informants. Many recent studies have examined gender segregated societies, such as studies of the "veil" and "seclusion" in Islam and Hinduism. Fader's research can be seen as part of these examinations of "traditional" gender-segregated societies. Furthermore, as a woman researcher, she was able to capture a study of a demographic (Hasidic women) that could not have been easily research by men, because of the gender-segregated nature of Hasidic culture.

[20] These are names for different Hasidic Courts, often named for the European town of their origin. Chabad is an exception to this rule; it is an acronym for the combination of intellectual faculties of

today's generation of Hasidim in New York are more religiously stringent than the generation before, necessitating "new forms of femininity, which include their participation in the secular city around them" (Fader, 1). They must learn to navigate between the religious stringencies of their home and community life, and the American culture which in many ways carries values opposite to the ones they have at home.

The book does not touch on Hasidic storytelling so much, but in the chapter where Fader discusses what is done with girls who defy behavioral expectations, she cites an example to show that girls are not encouraged to ask too many questions about information that is not necessary for Hasidic women to know in the role of mothers and wives. A teacher is telling a story about a sage who was studying the Mishna[21] at a very young age, when a student asks what the Mishna is; the teacher replies "when you become a boy, you'll understand" (Fader, 74). The anecdote is meant to illustrate lack of access to certain areas of men's learning, and how questions are deflected with humor or invalidation, but additionally we can glean that even if the girls are not privy to the study of the religious texts themselves, storytelling about sages or Tzadikim is for everyone, including women[22] and children. However, women are not present at male gatherings

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chochma-bina-daas (wisdom-knowledge-understanding). However, Chabad is also referred to as Lubavitch, the town of its origin.

[21] The Mishna is comprised of six orders of "oral Torah" which explains many details relevant to halachic fulfillment of the Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch)

[22]Hasidic stories told by and/or featuring women is a topic that would benefit from scholarly expansion. In his article "The Great Holy Woman Malka of Beltz: Women as Heroes and Storytellers in Hasidic Tales," Justin Jaron Lewis contrasts what he perceives as the dearth of woman-related storytelling in Jewish biblical texts (Torah) to woman related storytelling in Hasidism. Despite the fact Hasidic stories are generally about (male) Hasidic Rebbes, women are occasionally featured in the Hasidic tale. Often they are enablers who strengthen the spiritual resolve of their husbands (such as encouraging them to rise early and learn or pray) but occasionally they are featured as the protagonist in the role of healer, guide, or spiritual advisor, such as Malka of Beltz, the wife of Rebbe Sholom of Beltz. Lewis attributes the greater (although still marginalized) presence of female storytelling in Hasidism to the Hasidic emphasis on storytelling in general, which is accessible to everyone—unlike normative Jewish textual study, where

where storytelling may be featured, such as the Tisch[23], and Fader does not elaborate on how Hasidic storytelling is incorporated into the lives of Hasidic women. She does mention a genre of "Jewish" books published for Hasidic children, some of which are modeled on secular literature, but these books are primarily for entertainment woven together with moral instruction; they are not stories of the Hasidic Rebbes (Fader, 114).

From my own experience, I know there are indeed contexts where women can participate in Hasidic storytelling. For example, the Rabbi in *shul* (synagogue) may tell a story about a Rebbe as part of his *Shabbos Drasha* (Sabbath sermon). A *baal habos* (head of the household) may share a Hasidic story at a *Shabbos* or *Yuntiff* (holiday) meal; I have been to meals where women also shared a story about a Rebbe, such as the Lubavitcher Rebbe. There are also a number of books from religious publishers such as Artscroll that contain Hasidic stories, both anthologies of stories specifically, and books about other topics (*mussar* [ethics] *halacha* [law] or *chumash* [Torah]) that are sprinkled with Hasidic lore. In fact, storytelling about Rabbinic luminaries is common even in the non-Hasidic orthodox world, where stories of the Vilna Gaon and other non-Hasidic rabbis are shared verbally and in print. The fact that Hasidic stories are retold in familial settings (such as the home or in books) underscores the nature of the Hasidic legend to communicate

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male-centered narratives are studied by a male audience. I would challenge Lewis's assessment of classical Jewish texts (Torah) since there are indeed many narratives featuring women, such as the narratives with the matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel) in Genesis, and other books (such as the *Megillat Esther*) where the protagonist is actually a woman. However, Lewis does acknowledge that due to the influence of Hasidic storytelling and feminism, woman-centered storytelling is on the rise in Judaism. He cites the example of digitized contexts where women share stories online about acts of Chesed (kindness/charity) they have experienced, heard, or participated in, since charitable activities are a social outlet for religious women and a source of storytelling.

[23] Literally "table," the Tisch is a gathering of Hasidim at the table of the Rebbe, who may share a Torah-related thought, possibly accompanied by Hasidic storytelling. The Hasidim often join him in the singing of wordless melodies (niggunim), and in some circles, he may hand out portions of food from his plate (shirayim).

Hasidic philosophy through the accessible illustration of how the Rebbe actually lives out the Hasidic lifestyle, a theme that Buber writes about in his introduction when he mentions that Hasidim learn from the actions of the zaddik (Buber, 6).

In the chapter "Making English Jewish" Fader also touches on a theme that Buber describes, the elevation of the mundane into the spiritual. Fader cites the practice of Chabad Hasidim to appropriate secular music for spiritual purposes, such as when the Lubavitcher Rebbe took a jingle from a Pepsi commercial and used it as a melody for prayer and meditation (89). Fader discusses in particular how "the modern world and its language [English] can be civilized through syncreticism with the Jewish languages of Yiddish and loshn-koydesh[24]" (89). Fader describes language use as somewhat of a struggle for the Hasidim. Because the older generation of New York Hasidim speaks mainly English, and yet they want their children to speak Yiddish, a mixture of Hasidic English and Hasidic Yiddish has developed as the lingua franca, but "religious concepts, holidays, and aspects of ritual or Hasidic life are not translated into English" (104). Since Buber frequently translates these religious terms from the original Hebrew (or as Fader would describe it, loshn-koydesh) his rendition of the tales differs from the more authentic form of their oral retelling as they would be told by actual Hasidim. Hasidim would not use terms like "house-father" or "bath of immersion" or "Feast of Tabernacles." [25] Rather Hasidim would use terms like *baal habos*, *mikveh*, and *Succos* instead of translating the terms into English.

[24] "Loshn koydesh" literally means "holy tongue/speech" a word to describe biblical Hebrew, believed to have a sacred quality lacking in modern Hebrew

[25] These examples are taken from *Tales of the Hasidim*, where Buber quotes Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polnoye as saying: "On the Sabbath, I act like any house-father" (101). He relates how the Baal Shem Tov

In addition to its association with holiness, another reason for the imposed revitalization of Yiddish in younger generations is the nostalgic association of life in the *alte heim* (the old home, or the old country). "This evocation...when Yiddish-speaking grandmothers...were less materialistic and vain than girls are today is essential to Hasidic nostalgia for an idealized lost Judaism that is defined today by poverty, hardship, and isolation" from outside influences (Fader, 130). Life in America may be more bountiful, but the character traits of the hardened women in the European generations were more refined and closer to the principles outlined in the Torah, according to this nostalgic view. Interestingly, Hasidim themselves have created a nostalgic, romanticized version of life in the old country, much like that which Buber has been accused of creating by his critics.

Fader describes a tension in the Hasidic spectrum of being "modern" and "with it" versus being "too Hasidish." On the one hand, extremely Hasidic women (those who speak only Yiddish, cover their heads with scarves instead of wigs[26], and have little to no secular education or awareness of the outside world) are admired for their piety, but their total disengagement from the outside leads to an "inability to transform the secular world in order to strengthen their communities" (Fader 172). Fader discovered that Hasidic femininity is about being modest and yet fashionable, religious and yet knowledgeable about the outside world. Because many of the men in the Hasidic culture learn Torah part time or full time, the women must engage in work in order to provide an income, which necessitates having a foot in both worlds, the Hasidish and the American. Hasidic women

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attributed his spiritual greatness to the "bath of immersion" (52), and how Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz expounded upon the scriptures during the "intermediate days of the Feast of Tabernacles" (128).

[26] According to Jewish law, married women must cover their hair. Many women will cover their hair with a *sheitl* (wig). There is an ongoing debate among Rabbinic scholars and the Jewish Orthodox public about which type of head covering is more modest, but the subjects of Fader's work seem to believe that it is the scarf.

gauge femininity by how effectively they can "negotiate the contemporary secular world to effectively transform it through a Jewish civilizing project" (Fader, 134). Hasidic femininity is defined by how effectively women achieve grace and poise in this delicate balance. While this elevation of the secular world indeed echoes a major tenet of Buber's perception of Hasidic life in elevating the mundane, this navigation between secular and religious realms and the topic of women in general is one which is not so clearly present in Buber's text.

In her research about the Hasidic marriage-related rites of passage, Fader attended a class for Orthodox soon-to-be brides, which contained many Hasidic students.[27] Such a class is conducted to teach women about the laws of "ritual purity" which regulate intimacy between man and wife, along with many other general points about marriage for young women who have heretofore had limited interaction with the opposite gender. Fader found that physicality was described as a means of spiritual adornment and religious duty. "Combining aesthetics, religiosity, and consumption, Hasidic women explode the perceived limitations in the secular distinctions between the material and the spiritual, the secular and religious, asceticism and sensuality" (Fader, 206). The women are taught about the beauty and spirituality of intimacy between man and wife, and the elevated spiritual status of a beautiful home. Modesty and good appearances are supposed to be complementary, not contradictory. This synthesis between religious values and material appearances (for example, a beautiful table with silver cutlery and fine china in celebration of the Sabbath) echoes Buber's writing about the Hasidic ideal of elevating the mundane into the spiritual. Fader's research confirms that among actual Hasidim, this

[27] Fader was unable to secure a seat in Hasidic-women-only course, because some of the parents of the young women were concerned about the presence of someone from outside the community in the class. See pages 197 – 208 of *Mitzvah Girls*.

unification of seeming opposites (spiritual and physical) is really an essential part of the philosophy and lifestyle of Hasidism.

In summary, Fader validates Buber's extensive discussion of the elevation of the mundane, which Buber more specifically discusses as finding the holy or messianic future in the present. However, Fader's linguistic findings about the use of exclusively Hebrew-Yiddish terminology to communicate concepts and items moves Buber's work quite clearly into the role of a translation meant for an outside audience, since he frequently translates almost every word into German (sparing "zaddik" and "hasid" of transposition). Furthermore, Buber ignores the topic of religious stringency, navigation between secular and religious realms, and women in general, especially since almost every story (with a few exceptions[28]) is about men. By focusing on male engagement with religious service, learning, and prayer, Buber marginalizes the role that women play in Hasidic life, which Fader discusses extensively in her research. Do these omissions indicate that Buber has made a selective presentation of Hasidism which communicates only the message of ecstatic joy and human wholeness that he wishes to bring to the reader, while ignoring some of the realities of Hasidic life?

Jerome Mintz also conducted research in the Hasidic world, focusing in particular on storytelling in his work *Legends of the Hasidim: An Introduction to Hasidic Culture and Oral Tradition in the New World* (1968). In the opening pages, Mintz discusses the challenge of analyzing a culture through its oral literature, especially when that literature has been appropriated by "well-meaning but misguided editors" such as Buber (see footnotes on page 2 of Mintz's work). Mintz draws his study from real-life Hasidim,

[28] For example, see the story "They Tell," in the section about Rabbi Abraham the Angel (113). Buber relates how the wife of the Maggid of Mezritch travels through a snow storm to immerse in the mikveh.

gathering the tales in their "natural state" with paper, pen, and tape recorder to capture stories in homes, stores, and ritual ceremonies (3).

Mintz tells us that for more than two hundred years, storytelling has flourished among the Hasidim, first in Europe, and now in Israel and the United States. The Baal Shem Tov disseminated his teachings through tales and parables, which set a precedent of oral storytelling in Hasidism. "Like their teacher [before them], each Rebbe[29] attracted a store of wonder tales testifying to his profound powers" (4). Storytelling became part of the Shabbos ritual, as men gathered for the third meal, at which the Rebbe would tell stories of Hasidic Tzadikim (these are the zaddikim that Buber writes of). On the yahrzeit[30] of a Rebbe, the Hasidim would relate stories about the deceased Tzadik, along with engaging in song, dance, and drink. Mintz found that storytelling has a ritual and casual significance to Hasidism, as stories are told casually "in the moment" and also as part of rituals, such as the Sabbath Third-Meal or a *Melevah Malka*,[31] a fourth meal after the close of the Sabbath. Mintz describes a more ritualized scene: "As in the past the hasidim partake of a simple meal of rye bread, herring and onions, salt, fruit, potatoes, and tea. Brandy, often homemade, is offered, and blessings are exchanged. The singing is strong. The association with the Shabbes strengthens the sacred character of the stortytelling" (4). Mintz sees a contrast between the literature of the Sabbath liturgy,

[29] A Rebbe is the leader of a Hasidic court; many of the zaddikim that Buber wrote about were Rebbes, and the terms are often used interchangeably

[30] The anniversary of a person's death is an important personal calendrical day in Judaism.

[31] Literally "Escorting the Queen"

which discusses prophets and kings[32], and the oral literature of the *Melevah Malka*, where "merchants, peasants, Rebbes, and secret tsaddikim rub shoiulders" (5). Whereas the narratives of the synagogue and religious texts are austere, the narratives of the Hasidic story may contain a more common and varied cast of characters that is more relatable to the common man. The fellowship described by Mintz which circles around Hasidic storytelling certainly echoes Buber's writing about Hasidic emphasis on sacred community, while his discovery of tales told in casual conversational validates the possibility that Buber posits of finding ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness in everyday life through the illustration of a Hasidic legend that relates to what is happening "in the moment."

Mintz believes there are several reasons why oral storytelling is still vibrantly alive in Hasidic life: (1) oral tradition was a primary means of Talmudic, kabbalistic, and Hasidic transmission of texts and ideas; (2) storytelling is entertainment in a culture without theater or secular books; (3) Hasidim (according to Mintz) have a suspicion of the printed word due to the interference of author's personal whims and the breaking of confidentiality. In fact, Mintz writes that there are even some Rebbes who discourage their Hasidim from reading legends in printed books, in order to avoid interacting with corrupted versions of a tale which had been carefully persevered in oral transmission. Frequently the authenticity of a tale is fortified by reference to living witnesses (Mintz, 6).

Mintz sees twelve functions in the Hasidic Tale: (1) they serve as historical record of Hasidic courts, (2) they record personal and family history, (3) they emphasize

[32] Here Mintz is most likely referring to the weekly Torah reading (from the Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses), which is accompanied by a "Haftorah" drawn from the Prophets.

appropriate social conduct, (4) validate a Rebbe's power and righteousness, and the special mission of the Jews, (5) portray the Rebbe as a spiritual protector, (6) help individuals situate themselves in Hasidic society (7) emphasize the storyteller's connection to the Rebbe, (8) serve as guides of conduct, (9) provide entertainment (10) ease the tension generated from rigors of ritualized religious life, (11) provide mystical experience (12) and can actually even be spiritual vehicles for changing physical reality. "Storytelling has been used to shape desired ends, and therefore can be conceived of as the powerful, even magical, equivalent off action," Mintz writes (8). Buber does not touch on the transformational capacity of the tales to affect a new reality. For Buber, the main function of the Hasidic tale is to communicate the Hasidic teaching of ecstatic joy and the possibility for spiritual wholeness, which aligns with point eight on Mintz's list (that the legends serve as guides of conduct).

The tales therefore preserve a record of thoughts and attitudes of the time, which are usually recorded in diaries and letters. For example, the tales may record a reaction of the Hasidim to governmental decrees in Tzarist Russia, such as restrictions on living space, military conscription, and discriminatory laws (Mintz, 11). The tales provide "insights into the Hasidic worldview and into specific social attitudes" (Mintz, 13). While some of the tales borrow from non-Jewish European storytelling tradition[33] "the overwhelming majority…appear to be new Hasidic creations based on actual experience and observation" (ibid.). The storytelling tradition did not die out with the mass exodus of Hasidim from Europe to New York. It is alive and well today, flowering with new stories of miracles in diverse locations all over the world, and continuing to serve as a record of the Hasidic worldview.

[33] Mintz refers specifically to the "grateful dead" character type as an example.

A brief word about Mintz's methodology would help us have some contrast to Buber's primarily textual assembly of his anthology. Mintz collected the tales through interviews and by attending religious events. By analyzing the trends in the tales, he was able to make inferences about the philosophy and culture, and develop a set of questions to prompt interviewees to reveal more information. Mintz also turned to Dubnow, Scholem, Buber, Shechter, and other scholars for textual background research on Hasidism. Mintz's interviews with Hasidim ranged from "highly structured" to "quite casual" (19). He interviewed 150 Hasidim, although only fifty extensively, and a self-admitted shortcoming to the study was the absence of women and the opportunity to view childcare (two areas that Fader focused on specifically). Mintz also interviewed several Rebbes, among them, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, with whom he met for several hours.

Mintz comments on how his own Jewishness played into the research project. "I did not pretend to be an orthodox Jew," he asserts, because feigning orthodoxy would have posed some problems in the interview processes, especially regarding points of observance he would be expected to know (19). The Hasidim he met with were eager to extol the virtues of orthodoxy, attributing Mintz's lack of awareness regarding religious law to his secular upbringing. However, despite their discussion and debate, "it would be an obvious deceit to pretend to commit oneself to a new and consuming way of life" (19). Mintz writes that he was never wholly convinced to adopt the Hasidic lifestyle, and his resistance yielded more discussion and material in the interviews. The Hasidim were generally friendly and willing to talk to Mintz, and connect him with other Hasidim. Mintz believes that this was in part due to their curiosity about his status as an outsider, and yet, also as a fellow Jew. Mintz says that his collection of tales falls short of

informing the reader about Hasidic philosophy and culture, which is far beyond the scope of his research: "I am acutely aware of the limitations of a single investigator," he concludes (21). Mintz's self described reluctance to adopt the Hasidic lifestyle despite his close engagement with Hasidim echoes Buber's own aversion to "masquerading" as a Hasidic Jew which he discusses in his personal essay "My Way to Hasidism."

Mintz's study also helps us understand the physical contexts of Hasidic life. In the introduction to his book, Mintz discusses the origin of Hasidism, its migration to America from Europe because of World War II, and its subsequent flowering in the New York metropolitan area. His historical summary is punctuated with firsthand accounts from the generation of Hasidim that grew up in Europe. One Hasid recounts the horrors of the death camps, and how after the war (World War II) he met up with his Rebbe in Italy. The Rebbe said he would be going to America, and offered to send the Hasid papers for immigration, so that he could join the Rebbe in New York. "Somebody who cares about me…not only spiritual, but physical," the Hasid said of his Rebbe (Mintz, 36). Mintz's interviews found that the Rebbe is a caretaker of the Hasidim, not only spiritually, but physically as well, which echoes Buber's description of the zaddik figure as one who cares for the hasidim and attends to their "big" and "little" concerns.

Mintz describes Hasidic life in some detail, which is useful for developing a more rounded-out picture of what Buber describes, albeit what Mintz describes is in New York[34] instead of old-world Europe[35]. However, Mintz's descriptions are punctuated with

[34] Mintz's studies were conducted in the 1960s, and his book was published in 1968. For a more updated depiction of Hasidic New York, we can turn to Fader's descriptions (2009).

[35] While Buber's anthologies of Hasidic folklore were published in different decades and read in different contexts (for example, before and after WWII), his storytelling still depict a particular group, place, and time (namely, the first six generations of Hasidic Jewry in Eastern Europe).

narratives by Hasidim who testify that the social structure of New York has many similar features to the way life was in Europe. The *Besmedresh* (a building for the three daily prayer services and a Talmudic study hall) is still "the hub of Hasidic social life…a place of rest, meditation, conversation politicizing, children's play, and storytelling" (Mintz, 48). The Rebbe is in charge of the Hasidic besmedrish, and designates authority to *gaboyim* (beadles) and a *rav* (a rabbi for answering halachic questions). The *Shabbes,* or the Sabbath, is a time set aside from the remaining workweek for prayer, study, and various religious/social activities, among which are "sitting at the Rebbe's table…elaborate family meals…and storytelling" (Mintz 50). Businesses are closed, and any activity bearing any semblance to work is restricted. Many of the men wear long black silk kaftans (today many are made from polyester), some wear white stockings, and married men may wear round fur hats (streimel). The men have prepared for the Sabbath by immersing in a *mikveh* (which Buber refers to as the "ritual bath"), although many Hasidic men immerse in the mikveh ever morning. "Until the close of the Shabbes, when there is a sense of physical release from the special obligations and the special joys, the courts are sacred communities" (Mintz, 51). The "Shabbes" is regarded as a pleasure that surpasses all pleasures enjoyed by "alien society" (ibid). The elaborate meals, storytelling, learning, and sacred atmosphere are blended together to create an intense and spiritual experience. The "spiritual wholeness" and "ecstatic joy" of the Sabbath experience is expected and permanent in nature (since the *Shabbes* occurs on a weekly basis), and communal (such as the elaborate meals and public gatherings of prayer), but Hasidic storytelling on the Sabbath—both casual and ritualized—provides inspiration for the individual Hasidim to find this ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness during the week,

through illustrations that imbue life moments with sacred meaning. When their lives are constantly punctuated by the discovery the holy within the mundane, then the entire week can become as sacred in nature as the Sabbath day, and they are able to live out the Hasidic reality that Buber proposes: a life of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness.

Mintz discusses several other facets of Hasidic life, such as the importance placed on learning. While in the early days of the movement, the simple man was cherished, and his worthiness and ability to connect to G-d upheld despite his ignorance, today Talmudic study is held in high regard. In fact, "the preconditions for status in the Hasidic community are piety and Talmudic learning" (Mintz, 52). Mathematics, astronomy, geometry, medicine, ethics, and even humorous anecdotes are all found within the Talmud, and "penetrating the meanings of Talmudic and kabbalistic writings is closely associated with imaginative life," that is, higher levels of learning can reshape events, much in the same way as storytelling is believed to do so (Mintz, 52). However, even though most men learn Torah-related texts for several hours a day, erudition still does not supplant piety in importance in the Hasidic schema. Other factors of status include *Yihus* (lineage), and *tzedakah*, or charity (especially charity accompanied by financial success). Most noticeably occupation does not play a particular role in social standing. "A Hasid does not have a career; he is concerned simply with earning a living in a way which will not interfere with his religious duties" (Mintz, 57). At the time of Mintz's writing, many of his interviewees were skilled workers in industry, such as diamond-cutters, machinists, watchmakers, carpenters, and other skilled trades. Mintz writes that like many ethnic immigrant groups, the occupations of Hasidim have shifted over time. Secular education is not held in high regard, and career advancement is not particularly regarded as

important. This finding about the lack of career-related emphasis for men meshes well with Fader's research, where many Hasidic women engaged with the secular workforce world, at times even obtaining advanced degrees, so that their sons and husbands could be devoted full time to religious pursuits such as Talmudic study.

Because religious life is so costly and the standard of living is so much higher than that in Europe, many Hasidim have reduced their time learning and praying in favor of the necessity of work. For example, due to dietary restrictions against mixing dairy and meat products, two sets of dishes and cutlery are required, and two sets of kitchen appliances are preferred; in another example, Hasidim will only send their children to private religious schools. The "New World's demand for continual effort and for a higher standard of living" have negatively impacted religious life along with the temptations of secular life in the city (Mintz, 62). The bounteous and free nature of America is double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has allowed the Hasidim to pursue and live their way of life, free of the persecution they faced in Europe. On the other hand, as one Hasid attests, "the freedom is very hard on us" (Mintz, 61). There is less time for learning and praying, and more demands for money to support large, religious families, under the pressures of low pay and little secular education. This tension between the Hasidic way and the demands of modern life, gender related stressors (sexuality, marriage, divorce) inter-court strife (especially over the political issue of the state of Israel) are not discussed in Buber's work, whereas Mintz uncovers these concerns through interviews with Hasidism, relating how they are key issues in today's (American) Hasidic world.

Whereas Buber describes Hasidism in philosophical terms, Mintz's approach is more anthropological in that he discusses court life, marriage, weddings, learning, youth

and childhood, and other various features of the Hasidic life as it is actually lived in New York. Storytelling is an integral part of the Hasidic life, according to Mintz, which echoes Buber's assertion that the Hasidic way is best communicated through the tale; however, Buber's anthology is someone static, since it is locked in the 18th and 19th centuries. Mintz's research helps us understand how Hasidism (and Hasidic storytelling) continued to develop through the 1960s, and also the role that storytelling plays in Hasidic society through his description of the context (for example, the Sabbath day meals, the Rebbe's table, and the Besmedresh).[36]

Mintz also clarifies the role of the Rebbe figure. He directs the affairs of the Hasidic court, and "also serves as a mediator between his followers and G-d," which validates Buber's writing on the zaddik (Mintz, 89). His prayer, piety, and public speeches are directed towards connecting his followers to G-d; "his power and authority have their roots in his intense piety, in his special relationship to G-d, and his yihus [lineage]," unlike a normative Orthodox Rabbi, who is primarily qualified to answer questions of halacha based on ordination. The Rebbe "functions in the uncertain areas of life rather than in the clearly defined domain of the law" (Mintz 89). This assessment would agree with Buber's introduction, which says nothing about the Rebbe's guidance in terms of fulfilling Torah law, but rather as a spiritual guide—in fact, Buber likewise stresses the importance of the Rebbe in making decisions through uncertain areas of life. The Hasidim, according to Mintz, would describe the Rebbe as "the perfect righteous man" and that he fulfills the dictates of the Torah with "zeal and insight" (90). Moreover, Mintz quotes one Hasid as explaining that the essence of a Rebbe is that "he worships G-

[36] Later in the paper, we will examine Hasidic storytelling today through an interview, my own personal experience, and digital contexts such as the internet and video.

d every second of the day with all his heart and soul" (90). This superhuman nature will be echoed in the writings of Gedalyah Nigal which we will turn to after Mintz's work, but it conflicts with the humanist emphasis of Buber's introduction, which emphasizes that the zaddik is one who has perfected the process of becoming human—in fact, Buber de-emphasizes their righteous nature.

The Rebbe's charisma and spiritual guidance protects the Hasidim from infertility, poverty, sickness, and other ills. Furthermore, "the tales preserve not only the wonders performed but also the Rebbe's distinguishing personal characteristics and his philosophical point of view" (ibid). Some examples of different distinguished personality traits include the intellectualism of the Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Shneur Zalman) the loving humanism of the Berdichever (Rabbi Levi Yitzchok), the court splendor of the Rizhyner (Rabbi Israel Friedman), and the piety of the Breslever (Rabbi Nachman), to name a few. However, despite the centrality of the Rebbe figure, the tales are also filled with a whole spectrum of socio-economic and spiritual standing, such as rabbis, ritual slaughterers, coachmen, wealthy businessmen, peasants, widows, secret saints, open sinners, Talmudic scholars, Emperors, government officials, priests, skeptical *misnagdim* (opponents to Hasidism) and many others. The tales are usually told from the perspective of the common man (Mintz, 10). This substantiates Buber's claim that a large component of Hasidism is the interaction between the zaddik and his hasidim, and the zaddik and the common man.

Mintz describes four occasions on the Sabbath when the Rebbe is with his Hasidism for communal meal and drink: the Friday night meal, the Saturday lunch meal, the third meal at dusk, and the *Melevah Malka* (escorting of the queen), a fourth meal

held after the Sabbath. “The meals are always enlivened by song and often by dance as well” (Mintz, 96). The Rebbe may give over a kabbalistic discourse on the weekly Torah reading, and following the meal, casual discussion around the table can range from the affairs of the day to Talmudic debate. At the third meal, the Rebbe may deliver a lengthier mystical discourse, “an intricate pattern of thoughts which unites the sayings of the past with the problems of the present” (Mintz, 98). Often the kabbalistic explanation transitions into words which strengthen the resolve of the Hasidim, his followers, to continue living the Hasidic lifestyle, and will conclude with fervent prayers for the arrival of the Messiah. Each Hasid would say that the Rebbe is speaking directly to him, and there are innumerable accounts that testify to this perception of direct personal connection in the midst of a larger group, “and that was because he [the Rebbe] understood the people” one Hasid explains (99). Customs vary among the Hasidic courts as to the number of meals the Rebbe participates in publically, and if he shares a teaching at those meals.

Mintz explains the relationship between the Rebbbe and his Hasidim. Many times a Hasid will follow the Rebbe of his parents, although sometimes a Hasid will seek a new Rebbe. Many people are drawn to Hasidism because of the intimate relationship between the Rebbe and his disciples. While the Rebbe takes care of his Hasidim, in moments of need, the Hasidim will take care of the Rebbe (here Mintz cites the example of the Hasidim taking care of the elderly Stoliner Rebbe in the last years of his life). Many stories discuss the strong bond between the Hasidim and their Rebbe, who, when it is called for, will live with enormous self sacrifice in order to protect his Hasidim. The Rebbe figure is known to appear in the dreams of the Hasidim, and guide and protect

them in moments of physical and/or spiritual danger. During the Sabbath and holidays the Hasidim will make a special point to visit the Rebbe and hear his teachings, and occasionally the Rebbe will travel to see his Hasidim in a distant place. "In general, the Rebbe is called on to give advice when the issue is uncertain" Mintz explains, highlighting the Rebbe's role not so much as an arbitrator in Jewish law, but as a personal guide for the Hasidim through many of life's challenges (114).

Buber had asserted that Hasidim was a rejection of the messianic actualization as found in one individual, in favor of the democratic seizure of the messianic present, available for all mankind. However, Mintz's findings seem to contradict this conclusion, since he writes that the arrival of a messianic era, facilitated by one individual, is indeed an integral part of Hasidic belief. In "The Rebbe's Role in History" (92-95) Mintz discusses the Hasidim's equation of the Rebbe to the Messiah figure. The Rebbe may be a reincarnation of a previous Tzadik or biblical figure. "To the Rebbe falls the guardianship of all Israel" (Mintz, 93). The Rebbe may have an active role in history, such as setting aside decrees from the Tsar; above all he spearheads the ongoing spiritual battle of the Jewish people to bring the era of the messiah. The Lubliner and the Rimanover Rebbe took opposing sides over the Napoleonic war, each one attempting to guide the course of history through kabbalistic means in hope that this was the final great battle before the arrival of the Messiah; Israeli military success in the Sinai war is attributed to the spiritual efforts of the Belzer Rebbe; the halting of Rommel's advance through North Africa is attributed to the Hushatner Rebbe. The Rebbe so fervently hopes for the arrival of the Messiah that he may keep a walking stick handy, or refuse to enter paradise until the messiah arrives. Perhaps the Rebbe himself may even be the Messiah,

and if the generation is worthy, he will reveal himself (this has been said about the Stoliner Rebbe and the Lubavitcher Rebbe). Contrary to Buber's interpretation, the expectation of the messianic era, and the arrival of a singular messianic figure, is very much a part of Hasidic Judaism according to Mintz, and a topic of storytelling.

For additional insight into how the Rebbe-zaddik figure interfaces with Hasidic folklore, I found it helpful to turn to the writing of Israeli scholar Gedalyah Nigal, who highlights some of the traits of the *tsadik* character in Hasidic folklore. "In the Hasidic story, the tsadik is gifted with superhuman qualities that raise him to the level of prophet" (Nigal, 77). Nigal writes that the Tsadik had spiritual vision unbound by space and time, out-of-body experiences of ascending to upper worlds (*aliyot neshamot*), and a miraculous shortening of vast geographic distances during travel (*kafitzas haderech*). The Baal Shem Tov was gifted with such abilities, but the succeeding generations did not have the power of *kafitzas haderech* attributed to them as often, which echoes Buber's assertion that the spiritual prowess in succeeding generations went on decline.

According to Nigal, many stories discuss the giving of a *pidyon hanefesh* (redemption for the soul), money handed over to the Tsadik so that he will effect some healing or blessing, and *kvitlach* (letters of petition) asking for blessings, particularly in the areas of children, life, and income). Nigal views these exchanges (the presentation of pidyon hanefesh and kvitelach) as the primary means of connection between the Tsadik and his followers, highlighting the kabbalistic prowess of the Tsadik to effect changes in reality via supernatural means.

Stories often discuss the *misnagdim*, or opponents of Hasidism, who were particularly irked by halachic differences, such as the Hasidic choice of praying with the

Sephardic[37] rite, or the differences of opinion regarding *shechita* (ritual slaughter of livestock for consumption). Many stories recount how the opponents became adherents because of an interaction with the Tsadik, for example, the story of a misnagid teacher, who struggled to understand an interpretation by the Tosafists[38] of a particular Talmudic passage until it was explained to him in a dream by the Baal Shem Tov himself. The teacher dismissed the incident, until the Baal Shem Tov invited him to a third meal of the Sabbath and repeated the teaching in person, upon which the teacher became a devoted disciple. Initially the scholarly opponents believe the Tsadik to be an ignoramus, but subsequently they are captured and converted to the Hasidic way once the Tsadik reveals his scholarship and superhuman vision.

Nigal discusses how life topics such as marriage, death, birth, illness, and others are depicted in Hasidic folklore. He writes in her introduction that "no social or religious movement in the entire course of Jewish history has engaged so intensively in storytelling as hasidism" and that the Hasidic storytelling genre continues today (1). He believes the genre is a literary innovation in Jewish texts, because for the first time, the literature focused on exemplary individuals and their followers. The principal element of the story is the ability of the Tsadik to channel divine energy, mediate heavenly decrees, and help the simple folk who followed the Hasidic path; Nigal does not mention anything about "ecstatic joy" that Buber proposes as the core of Hasidic life (ibid). The tale has a "sanctified status" that has helped it survive through two centuries with little variation in content and form. Nigal believes the tale has seven typical features: (1) wondrous acts of the tsadikim are featured; (2) other Hasidim are usually secondary characters; (3) the

[37] As opposed to the Ashkenazi rite used by most European Jews

[38] Talmudic scholars of Medieval France

tsadik resolves the problem of an individual who has approached him for help; (4) landscape and nature are absent in these stores; (5) Jewish and non-Jewish motifs are used; (6) a focus on the simple person is prevalent (7) the hidden tsadik is a common theme. Through Nigal's writing we see that the Rebbe/Tsadik figure is the central character of the tales.

Nigal believes that there are five factors which contributed to the emergence of the Hasidic tale: (1) Hasidism used parables and stories as a means of communicating complex ideas to ordinary, non-scholarly people; (2) Hasidism promotes the idea that G-d can be worshiped through the mundane, such as normal conversation; (3) there is a universal human desire to relate past events and viewpoints; (4) a tradition of relating tales about miracle workers already existed in Judaism; (5) there is an influence of narrative material from Jewish and non-Jewish sources. However, Nigal concludes that the most important function in the emergence of the Hasidic tale was the imperative to defend and promote the Hasidic movement, especially because Hasidism was so heavily criticized during its nascent years. The wondrous acts of the Tsadik defend him from the criticism leveled by misnagdim (opponents) about his purported lack of scholarship. This defense was not directed only towards opponents, but also inwardly towards Hasidim, to strengthen their resolve and investment in the movement. Thus we see that for Nigal, both the content and function of Hasidic storytelling circle around the Tsadik figure.

However, Nigal does not believe that Hasidic storytelling merely served the apologetic function of defending the Hasidic movement and promoting the prowess of a particular Rebbe; it also communicated Hasidic ideals. The listeners did not receive "an orderly Hasidic teaching, such as those set out in the theoretical and exegetical Hasidic

literature; rather, [the Hasidic tale] teachers Hasidic ethical values by presenting exemplary behavior" (Nigal, 75). The poor, ignorant, and downtrodden could finally access the teachings of Judaism that were previously denied them due to illiteracy, because "the Hasidic storytelling genre translated the practical portion of hasidic teachings into the language of the simple folk" (ibid). Nigal concludes that on the whole, the stories are optimistic, providing hope that the problems of daily life could be solved by exemplary individuals. This echoes Buber's opinion that the Hasidic tale communicated values by describing the anecdotes of the zaddik's life, rather than communicating those same values through texts on Hasidic philosophy. Even though Nigal does not mirror Buber's exact language of "ecstatic joy," he nonetheless suggests that the Hasidic tale offers the common folk the possibility of transcending mundane life.

CHAPTER V

LAW AND STORYTELLING IN HASIDISM

I have noted that Buber does not focus on the fulfillment of Jewish Law in his introduction to the *Tales*, although he does address it in passing by referring to the zaddik as a living embodiment of the law. However, there is no elaboration on the "Law" or the "Torah" and what these concepts might imply on a daily basis. On the other hand, Mintz writes that "an intimate relationship exists between Hasidic tale and Hasidic law, ritual, social structure, and daily life," although he also validates Buber's poetic license by writing "most of the tales included here are the result of the interaction of imagination and experience" (9). We might ask: if the Hasidim themselves relate tales in a way that combines reality with personal worldview, how can we deny Buber the privilege of retelling the tales in his own style? And yet, at the same time, Mintz (and Fader) are very clear that religious stringency in the fulfillment of Jewish law is an important feature of the Hasidic landscape, which Buber does not dwell on more than in passing.

Mintz highlights the primacy of religious law in Hasidic life, or *Yiddishkeit* (Jewish practice). According to Mintz, the bare minimum level of observance in Orthodox Judaism is "keeping the Shabbes and holidays, attending prayer services, putting on tefillin[39], eating only kosher food, and maintaining the purity of the home" with attendance of women at the mikveh to reestablish marital intimacy following their monthly cycle (57). Outward signs include a head covering at all times, a fringed undershirt, and a mezuzah on the doorposts of the home. Among Hasidism, additional

[39] Small black boxes containing biblical passages, one worn on the left bicep, the other on the forehead, during the morning prayer service

physical identifiers often include a beard and payos[40], long coats, and black hats. To trade ritual observation for modern convenience (such as working on the Sabbath) is not negotiable, although the outward signs do fall along a spectrum (for example, Chabad Hasidim, dressed in a black fedora and suit jacket, may appear more modern than the long-coated, streimel wearing Hasid on the Sabbath).

The life of a Hasid is guided by the 613 mitzvoth (commandments) of the Torah and all their corollaries, as expressed in Jewish law. "To Orthodox Jewry the commandments and their exegesis represent the complete code of ethical and ritual conduct decreed by God and accepted by the Jews" (Mintz, 123). Mintz cites scholars[41] who actually place the emphasis of Hasidism not on mysticism, but on scrupulous observance of the commandments (ibid). Mintz believes that the "mitzvehs" have magical, mystical, and psychological components. Because the body, soul, cosmos, and Torah are all interconnected in Hasidic philosophy, many of the tales express "the potential of the mitzves for sustaining life, for healing, and for offering hope of eternal salvation" (Mintz, 124). On the other hand, failure to uphold the mitzvoth can result in misfortune and illness. However, Mintz urges us not to interpret the Hasidic worldview as one of magical causality, for in fact "Hasidic belief and tradition are multifaceted and there are countless explanatory avenues" to explain the circumstances of the world (131). The connection of mitzvehs to life and success, and a lack of observance to danger and failure, highlight the importance of Jewish law in Hasidic storytelling, and the importance of halacha among Hasidic Jewry—something that is not a central focus to Buber's text.

[40] Hair on the side of the head which is grown long, in contrast to the other head on the hair, which is cut short. This is done to magnify and beautify the commandment not to cut the corners of the beard, among other, more kabbalistic reasons.

[41] Lazar Gulkowitsch and Max Lohr

Many Jewish texts such as the Torah and the Talmud contain two threads, one narrative (aggadic) and the other legal (halachic). While I do not suggest that Buber's anthology of Hasidic legends conform to this formula, I would suggest that even the purely narrative texts read (or told over) within the context of Hasidism were digested by a society actively observing the religious statues of Orthodox Judaism—as in the examples provided by Mintz of Hasidic Jewish men sitting around the table of the Rebbe, observing one of the Sabbath rituals. Therefore, within the context of the Hasidic community, even stories of zaddikm serve a didactic purpose with a tangible directive to be fulfilled in the observance of halacha.[42] This has a precedent in classical Jewish texts: if one looks through the Talmud, one will find that stories are often used to illustrate the practical ramifications of some legal debate which has raged on through the previous pages.

I found in the writings of Haim Nahman Bialik (1873 -1934) an exploration of the interplay between these two threads (narrative and legal), and the nature of their mutual support in completing a Jewish text in his article "Halacha and Aggadah" (1944, reprinted in 2000). Buber had, in his introduction, mentioned joy, ecstasy, intensity, devotion, and connection to G-d, but where was any reference to fulfilling these generalities through something concrete? The *Tales* themselves gave no practical guidance in this matter, as they allow the reader a brief glimpse into the world of pious and righteous supermen, with no instruction on how to emulate their incredible fortitude and willpower for finding the messianic future in the present.

[42] As an example of this, later I will relate a story I heard of a Jew in the concentration camp, who exhibited enormous self-sacrifice to fulfill the commandment of lighting a chanukiah.

Halacha (from the Hebrew word *lalechet*, meaning to walk) refers to Jewish Law. It covers all areas of life, with categories diverse as diet, commerce, marriage, and medicine. Originating in the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), Jewish Law was expanding and clarified in the Talmud, and later by legal codifiers such as Maimonides[43] and Rabbi Yosef Caro[44]. *Aggadita* (or Agadah) are the narratives contained in the Talmud and its counterpart, the Midrash[45]. Aggadita contains a large spectrum of material, which includes stories that fill in gaps in the biblical narrative, wonder tales of traveling Rabbis (some reminiscent of the Arabian Nights), allegorical narratives, anecdotes germane to the legal discussion of the Talmud, jokes, astrology, and medicine—in short, a wide range of narrative topics.

According to Haim Bialik, Halacha and Agadah are like ice and water, two expressions of the same element, and yet, the relationship is more than one of symbiosis. "Halacha is the crystallization, the ultimate and inevitable quintessence of Agadah; Agadah is the context of Halacha" (Bialik, 46). The stories are needed to provide a contextual example for the law, but the meaning of the story is only fully expressed through the law itself. Halacha generates agadah, and agadah generates halacha; the two are not separate entities in a hierarchical order, but rather, are equal partners in an engaged, symbiotic relationship.

[43] Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon (1135-1204) wrote a full compendium of Jewish called the *Mishneh Torah*. See "Codification of the Law" (by M. Elon) from the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, cited in the bibliography.

[44] (1488-1575) Author of the Shulchan Aruch (literally "The Set Table") a definitive four-part text of Jewish Law. See "Shulhan Arukh" (by L. Rabinowitz) in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, cited in the bibliography.

[45] There are many Midrashic works throughout Jewish history, which are replete with multiple-layered narratives.

Bialik compares halacha to art, and writes that unlike other forms of artistic expression, which are proverbially "set in stone," Halacha is organic and ever evolving. The Mishna was built upon, expanded, and refined by the Talmud, which in turn was expanded and refined by the layers of commentary from Rashi, which was further expanded by the French Tosafists, which was further expanded the commentaries of the Shulchan Aruch (the Code of Jewish Law). I would add to Bialik's description and suggest that Halacha is almost like the process of breathing in its expansions and contractions; one could argue that Jewish ritual law is not "dead," "static," or "closed," but rather alive, moving, and open. The Talmud expanded the Mishna, but the Shulchan Aruch contracted the Talmud, only to be further expanded in the commentaries such as the *Magen Avraham* and *Turei Zahav*[46]. Without this living, breathing component of Halacha, I would argue that the Aggadic component ceases to lose its meaning and vitality, because the stories are separated from the living, organic thread of Jewish discussion and practical application.

Bialk uses the Sabbath as an example to illustrate how both Halacha and agadah are integral components in the formation of a Jewish concept (in this case, the day of rest). Liturgy of the Sabbath is replete with the poetic imagery of the bride (aggadic material), and yet there is also the immense volume of legal literature (314 pages of the Talmudic tractate *Shabbos*, and 210 pages of tractate *Eruvin*, both of which discuss the halachic observance of the Sabbath). Bialik's assessment is that "the result of all this tiresome work of halacha is a day which is wholly aggadah" (53). Thus, in this example of the interplay between aggadic and halachic material relating to Shabbos, Bialik reads

[46] Two commentaries that are standard features of printed editions of the Shulchan Aruch. See the "Shulhan Arukh" (by M. Elon) in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, cited in the bibliography.

the (aggadic) narrative liturgy as the culmination of the legal (halachic) foundation, without which it could not stand.

A kernel of halacha contains a whole tree of aggadic material. To illustrate, Bialik cites a halacha discussing which texts may be saved from a burning building on the Sabbath (generally it is prohibited to carry items from the private domain into the public domain on the Sabbath, but this law can be suspended if holy writings need to be saved from fire). The Mishnaic text references a debate as to whether only Hebrew scriptures may be saved from the fire, or if holy texts in the vernacular may be saved as well. Bialik portrays this halacha as a "seed" containing the whole "tree" of aggadic narrative alluding to the great language debate which runs throughout Jewish history, the struggle and tension to maintain national identity through diverse languages and exile. Bialik asks if we cannot picture the tragedy of the seventy sages imprisoned by King Ptolemy until they translated the sacred text from Hebrew into Greek; are we able to envision the Jewish nation rushing to save its literary treasure (the Oral Law/Mishnah/Talmud) from the fires of the Babylonian, Greek, and Roman oppressors, who destroyed the Temple and Razed Jerusalem to the ground? Cannot we not see in our mind's eye the struggle of the Rabbis to maintain transmission of the Oral law from one generation to the next; can we not visualize Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava blocking the mountain pass, as he is pierced by the spears of the Roman Legion until blood runs from his body like a sieve, while the five Rabbinic students he had just ordained in secret flee (including Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, to whom the Zohar is attributed according to Orthodox Judaism)? Cannot one picture all the dramas and debates that played out over

this great issue of language, so pithily summarized in a straightforward halacha regarding which texts may be saved from the flames on the Sabbath (Bialik, 56-63)?

Not only does the halacha contain the germ of aggadic material, but aggadah may also be used to form halachic conclusions. To illustrate this point, Bialik uses a halacha which discusses the nature and permissibility of carrying weapons on the Sabbath, and how the opinion of the sages against the permissibility of carrying weaponry is drawn from the verse in Isaiah that "they shall beat their swords into plowshares" (Isaiah 2:4) In this case, we see that a halachic conclusion is drawn from the poetry of the prophets (specifically, aggadic material regarding the messianic future).

Halacha itself is also literature, Bialik points out, citing several Mishnaic texts from a range of topics: "two men take hold of a shawl," "when the potter puts down his pots," and "when the man puts down his cask" (74). The halachic text is full of narrative illustrations in order to convey a practical illustration of the law. Halacha itself contains and depends on narrative. The halacha is a veritable "kaleidoscope of pictures" depicting the farms, markets, the Temple, and all aspects of life in ancient Israel. In the Talmud, when the chain of transmission did not fully carry down the fine points and clarifications of the subject matter, the halacha was often reconstructed from daily life, as the Rabbis would piece together an understanding of the law based on the long established customs of the people. Bialik wonders why we cannot do the inverse, and reconstruct life from halacha. He proposes that we are waiting for the "redeeming hand" to revitalize the mishnaic law into living poetry. The possibility of finding the messianic future (albeit in the present) which Buber expresses in aggadic material, Bialik proposes that we can find in halacha.

Each age has its own halacha and aggadah, and according to Bialik, the two strains are necessary components in Jewish literature. Aggadah without halacha means wandering aimlessly without a destination. "Aggadah that does not bring Halacha in its train is ineffective," Bialik concludes (81). He writes further that "such a man wants to pluck the flower, but cares nothing for the fruit" (82). According to Bialik's theory, one could ask: what is the "destination" of Buber's anthology, which is all aggadic, and contains no reference to halacha?

It would seem that Buber is not interested in the destination achieved through the union of halacha and aggadah; rather Buber is interested in the way his compilation of aggadic material can help the reader find the messianic, utopian joy in the present. I would suggest that Buber may have felt that halacha would confine the tales to the Hasidic realm and rendered them inaccessible to general readership; in order to universalize his storytelling, Buber has left behind the halachic element, and presented only the aggadic, which effectively removes the tales from their Hasidic soil. Hence, a Hasidic Jew such as myself who reads the tales, may feel as if they are "missing something," but a non Hasidic reader who approaches the text will find them more accessible, and that is presumably what Buber wishes to achieve by his very act of translation[47]—but we must ask if the cost of improved accessibility is a decrease in authenticity as it relates to the connection between Law and storytelling in Hasidic life.

Bialik's assessment is that the legal and narrative strains are components that complete and even create the other, and that one without the other creates a literature that is incomplete. Indeed, there are classical Jewish texts which are anthologies geared

[47] See Buber's comment in the Foreword to Hasidism: "I consider Hasidic truth vitally important for Jews, Christians, and others, and at this particular hour more important than ever before" (foreword).

towards aggadic material exclusively, (such as the *Ein Yaakov*, or the *Midrash Rabbah*) and there are also compilations of exclusively halachic material[48] (the *Mishneh Torah*, the *Arba Turim*, *Shulchan Aruch*, etc.). However, these anthologies would still draw on the other thread for illustration or clarification. Moreover, I would argue that either type of anthology (legal or narrative) would still be within the greater context of both halacha and aggadah, because until the Enlightenment (or Haskalah) it would be written for an observant audience that lived (or attempted to live) a life rounded out by both strains (legal and narrative), according to the Torah.

Admittedly, Buber's frequent reference to Jewish ritual obligations (such as the mikveh, the third meal of Shabbat, and daily prayers, just to name a few) could be construed as a type of halachic material. However, the quick references lack any kind of explanation, even more so because they are totally transposed out of Hebrew and into German, leaving uninformed readers with a hazy-at-best picture of the deeper meaning and/or practical ramifications of "The Festival of the Rejoicing of the Law," or "the Feast of Tabernacles," and so on. I believe that in Buber's unexplained references to Jewish rituals can obscure a clear understanding of the story instead of deepening our understanding of the Hasidic life, because they remove a key component of the content, namely, the halachic observance that is a critical component to Hasidic life.

Bialik's essay illustrated the complementary nature of halachic and aggadic strains in Jewish literature, and even asserted the necessity of both in providing guidance toward the national destiny. Samuel J. Levine takes the interplay of legal and storytelling threads beyond the page and explained how both are necessary for the formation of an accurate and complete cultural perception. In his article "Halacha and Aggada:

[48] See "Codification of Law" in *Encyclopedia Judaica*

Translating Robert Cover's Nomos and Narrative" (1998) Samuel J. Levine explores the concept of *Nomos* (legal framework that creates societal norms) and *Narrative* (legal storytelling) in American Law, and how the interplay between the two forms draws precedence from the interplay between aggadah and halacha in Judaism. Levine cites the opinion of David Stern, who writes that Aggadah does not mean just stories, but also "extra biblical legends and tales about the rabbis to snippets of pop folklore and fully elaborated homilies" (Levine, 486). In other words, the aggada is not so much a classification of narrative form, but rather about conveying national, cultural, societal attitudes. However, these cultural and societal norms cannot be conveyed by the aggadic narrative alone; nomos is also required.

According to Levine, the Torah as a whole provides a nomos for ancient Israel by laying out the laws and customs, while the aggadic element injects meaning into the commands. Even the narrative elements of Genesis are illustrations of the laws regarding primogeniture (i.e. the stories of Jacob and Esav, Isaac and Ishmael struggling for the birthright). However, while Genesis is almost entirely narrative, the other four books of the Torah (Exodus through Deuteronomy) are nomos; that is, they outline 613 principles by which the Jewish nation is commanded to live.

Levine explains that even the aggadic-narrative material is meant to illustrate a nomos-halachic component. He cites the commentary of the Medieval Rabbi-Scholar Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchak Alfasi), whose commentary on the opening verse of the creation story explains the legal precedents set by the narrative.[49] The Ramban (Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, commonly known as Nachmanides) further develops this theme by

[49] One main point of Rashi's commentary on this verse is the rulership of G-d over the whole world, and His ability to assign ownership of the land of Israel to whoever He chooses, in this case, the Jews.

illustrating that the narrative material is meant to convey the concept of reward and punishment, a fundamental nomos for the Jewish nation[50]. Thus, Levine points out that Rashi and Ramban (and subsequent super-commentaries) show the reader how the narrative text (aggadic element) illustrates the importance of nomos (halachic element). Levine concludes that aggadic material can also inform us of the halacha, and the true task of the Rabbinic scholar is to discern the nomos behind the narrative, and become partner with G-d in transforming chaos into a beautiful, organized reality.

The Talmud is perhaps the best illustration of how nomos and narrative intertwine. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (author of many books on Jewish Chasidic-Chabad philosophy and translator of the Talmud), states that the Talmud is "a conglomerate of law, legend, and philosophy, a blend of unique logic and shrewd pragmatism, of history and science, logic and humor...the repository of thousands of years of Jewish wisdom" (Levine, 492). According to Rabbi Steinsaltz, around one quarter of the Talmud's sixty-three volumes is comprised of aggadic material. The Talmud shows us that extensive legal discussion comes with extensive use of aggadic narrative material, which is presented in order to make the legal component more digestible to those studying the texts. Levine cites the "Oven of Akhnai" narrative, a story of how Rabbi Eliezer's opinion of a legal matter is backed by a heavenly voice, only for the dissenting Rabbis to assert that the rendering of legal decisions is not left in heaven, but given over to the decision-making process of the rabbis. The story of rabbis debating a law teaches us that the application of nomos is left in the hands of the human court; it also shows us how a tangible halachic concept is communicated through aggadic/narrative material (namely,

[50] The narratives of the Tree of Good and Evil, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, etc, are all meant to communicate this concept of reward and punishment through their illustration of reward and punishment.

the legal precedent that a human court may interpret, explain, and apply the nomos of the Torah). Levine also cites the commandment of the New Moon[51] to illustrate how the implementation and development of the Torah's legal system is in human hands, since the lunar calendar could only be calculated by a complex system of witnesses, cross-examinations, and astronomical calculations made by the Jewish court.

The nomos-narrative thread in Jewish Literature continues with the *Mishneh Torah*. The Mishneh Torah[52] (written by the Rambam, or Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides) is a comprehensive voluminous work of legal conclusions for everyday life, but Levine shows how on occasion, aggadic material is used to emphasize the seriousness of the law, providing an example with G-d's biblical assertion to defend widows and orphans, meant to emphasize the gravity around the issue of legal guardianship (Levine, 497). What Levine is expressing here, is that law alone is not enough to carry the point: narrative is needed as well. Thus, according to Levine, aggadic material is a means of conveying halachic precedent, while according to Bialik, the two threads complement and inform each other. Despite the subtle difference, both unequivocally state the importance of both narrative and nomos in Jewish literature. According to the philosophy of Bialik and Levine, one could say that Buber's text is thus missing a crucial component common to many works of Jewish literature: it is all narrative, and no nomos. Furthermore, Bialik had communicated that both halacha and aggada were necessary for crafting literature with purpose and destiny. Despite his lengthy, poetic, and inspiring introduction about the connection between zaddik and Hasidim, about connection between heaven and earth, man and G-d, a life of ecstatic joy

[51] That is, to establish the new month based on the lunar cycle

[52] See "Codification of Law" in *Encyclopedia Judaica*

and finding the divine messianic future in everyday reality, Buber's anthology omits clear reference to Jewish Law, which Bialik seems as a necessary complement to the narrative in order to arrive at the destination (which for Buber is ecstatic joy and human wholeness).

However, we should note that Buber did not craft an anthology of stories for Hasidim living a life of halachic fulfillment; he was trying to convey what he construed as the inner moral of the Hasidic Legend (namely, a life of ecstatic joy) to people of all backgrounds[53], with no involvement in the halachic aspect of Jewish ritual law. Therefore, one could argue that the entwined legalistic and narrative components of Jewish religious literature that inform Hasidic life are not both necessary components of Buber's anthology, which has been printed in many different languages for the perusal of all types of people. In my reading of the *Tales,* I expected that storytelling and law would be blended to portray an "authentic" Hasidic legend, but that combination is not germane to what Buber was hoping to achieve: an expression of the relationship between the "the men who quicken" and the "quickened," a bond between heaven and earth that leads to pure and ecstatic joy, facilitated by studying the life of spiritual greats, the *zaddikim* (Buber, 1). In the next section of the paper, I will examine several articles that also call into question Buber's portrayal of Hasidism (be it linguistic, historical, or otherwise) where the author is then able to reframe our perspective and remove the demand for

[53] Here we can again refer to Buber's comment in the foreword to *Hasidim*: "I consider Hasidic truth vitally important for Jews, Christians, and others, and at this particular hour more important than ever before" (foreword). Furthermore, he writes in his introduction to *Tales of the Hasidim* that "the purpose of this book is to introduce the reader to a world of legendary reality" (1). Buber writes *reader*, and not specifically "Jews" or "Hasidim," implying that whoever picks up his book and reads the legends therein will find inspiration.

"authenticity," instead highlighting what Buber successfully brings out of the Hasidic legend.

CHAPTER VI

FINDING THE HASIDIC MESSAGE BY REFRAMING OUR PERSPECTIVE

In Hebrew, the word *parve* is used to signify a food item that contains neither dairy nor meat (according to laws of kashrus, one cannot mix dairy and meat food items, but the "grey space" of parve foods may be served in combination with either meat or dairy, for example, bread, vegetables, grains, and fruits). Colloquially, "parve" has also come to mean inoffensive, politically correct, and aware of other's sensibilities. In this section, we will learn from Ran HaCohen how Buber edited the language of his work to carry it out of the Hasidic context and into the broader, non-Hasidic world, by eliminating potentially offensive and exclusionary esoteric references, in favor of a more gentrified, universal rendition of the tales. Ultimately, we will see that while this editing may validate criticism of Buber's accuracy, the very act of editing allows the presentation of the legend to remain true to the Hasidic ideal of elevating the mundane and revealing the concealed divinity within creation.

In his article "The Haywagon Moves West: On Martin Buber's Adaption of Hasidic Legends" (2008) Ran HaCohen shows how Buber gentrified and embellished the language of the tales, using one specific narrative that moved from the anthology into Buber's novel *Gog and Magog*. HaCohen does credit Buber with bringing an awareness of Hasidism to the outside world, stating unequivocally that "it was Buber more than anyone else who introduced Hasidism to Western Culture" (HaCohen, 1). However, HaCohen qualifies this transmission, citing Mendes-Flohr, who writes that in the process of this introduction, Buber changed superstition and "oriental backwardness" into a "literarily presentable phenomenon," dressing it in "neo-romantic, expressionistic

language and style, and by association with other mystical traditions" (ibid). There are harsher critics, such as Scholem and Schatz-Uffen, who have "accused Buber of producing his own version of Hasidim" (ibid.). Whether Buber did create his own romanticized (and by implication inaccurate) version of Hasidism, or transformed un-presentable raw material into a literarily acceptable format, HaCohen shows us that Buber did indeed change the language of the tales.

Ran HaCohen cites Ernst Simon's division of Buber's portrayal of Hasidim into three periods. Phase one lasted from 1900-1910, and was "too free" in Buber's own words; during this time he wrote *The Tales of Rebbe Nachman* (1906) and *The Legends of the Baal Shem* (1908). The second phase, in the 1920's, was as faithful as possible to the original material; during this time Buber wrote *The Great Maggid and His Succession* (1921) and *The Hidden Light* (1924). The third period, lasting to the end of Buber's life, and during which Buber wrote his novel *Gog and Magog* (1949), combined the mythic tendency of Buber's Hasidic vision, and the objective standards of textually accurate transmission.

HaCohen cites Buber's opinion that the material was unfit for presentation the way he found it, with "hardly ever a clear thread of narrative to follow" (2). HaCohen points out that Buber's comment on the unformed nature of the original material highlights that narrative was a central focus for Buber, whereas, in the original telling of the tale, the focus was to convey some moral message, or speak to the greatness of a particular Tzadik. Buber claimed that he sought to reconstruct the tales in a form suited to the subject matter, without expanding or stylizing, however, HaCohen shows us that Buber was not entirely able to avoid a literary recrafting of the material in his attempt to

"supply the missing links in the narrative" (ibid). HaCohen compares a tale that was carried through the second and third periods to show that Buber did indeed change and stylize in order to craft a new version of a new tale that expressed his particular philosophy, in particular the I-thou dialogue. The tale, (published in 1927, 1933, and again in 1946) entitled "Can and Want to," is a story of Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak of Pshysha, who learns a kabbalistic lesson from a peasant and his overturned hay wagon:

Once when the Yehudi was walking cross-country, he happened on a hay wagon which had turned over. "Help me raise it up!" said the driver. The rabbi tried but he could not budge it. "I can't." he finally said. The peasant looked at him sternly. "You can all right," said he, "but you don't want to." On the evening of that day, the Yehudi went to his disciples. "I was told today: We can raise up the Name of G-d, but we don't want to."[54]

The story is clearly divided into two parts; one is the scene of anecdote, and the other is the explanation of the moral. HaCohen believes the story is "missing" a link between the two: a scene that illustrates the moral has been learned. Without that missing scene, HaCohen asks, how are we to connect what the Rabbi says (we *can*...but we don't *want* to) with the scene with the upturned wagon and the peasant's rebuke? There is no indication that the Rabbi could have physically lifted the wagon if he had tried, so how was the kabbalistic moral of elevating G-d's name extrapolated from his interaction with the peasant?

[54] Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, 228.

HaCohen then presents the version of the tale as Buber writes it in his novel "Gog and Magog." The story has become highly stylized, with a more complex dialogue between the Yehudi and the Peasant, which continues after an additional inserted scene where the two join forces to leverage the wagon up. As the peasant and the Rabbi walk side by side, the peasant explains "No one knows whether he can do a thing until he has tried it" (HaCohen, 4). The Rabbi in turn, relates the whole series of events to his fellow Hasidim in a frame story that surrounds the narrative of lifting the wagon. HaCohen is satisfied that Buber's presentation of the tale in frame story, with this additional scene of the peasant and rabbi joining forces to leverage the fallen wagon, connects the seemingly unrelated anecdotal and moral parts of the tale. The Rabbi is relating this moral tale to his fellows, and we know that he was able to draw a kabbalistic lesson from his interaction with the peasant, because Buber inserted a scene where indeed the wagon was lifted up—in turn teaching us that the divine name can be elevated—an element that was missing in the previous version of the tale.

HaCohen points out another effect of the editing and embellishing process: the novelized version of the tale makes the experience more egalitarian, reflected in the new title "How I Apprenticed Myself to a Peasant." Furthermore, gone is the kabbalistic lesson about elevating the name of G-d. Now the lesson of "can and want to" has become more universal. Most telling, HaCohen notes, is the changed dynamic between the Rabbi (now just "Yaakov Yitzchak" in the novel form) and the peasant. In the first version, the peasant's challenge was answered with a silence that abruptly transitioned into the moral. In the novel version, there is a lengthy conversation between comrades, after they have joined forces to lift the wagon. HaCohen reads this editing of the dynamic as an

expression of Buber's tendency to emphasize the hyphen between "I" and "thou." In other words, the original tale has become more egalitarian, in alignment with Buber's focus on the between space of a relationship. The Rabbi no longer takes the moral from a peasant he passes by; he learns the moral by interacting with the peasant.

HaCohen then turns our attention to an even earlier form of the tale, as written in the very source that Buber used, *Sichot Chayim*, written by Chaim Meir Yechiel of Mogelnitz (d. 1849). To summarize, a "Jew" (the Rabbi Yehuda Yitzhak) is walking with his disciples in the field, and a man described as "the uncircumcised" (the peasant) calls out for help. The Rabbi and his disciples attempt to lift the wagon with the peasant, but they cannot. The "uncircumcised" calls out in Polish "you can, but you do not want," upon which the Rabbi turns to his disciples and tells them that the uncircumcised is saying that they can indeed elevate the name of G-d, but they do not want to. HaCohen points out the many features of the tale that cannot be streamlined into a telling for a modern literary audience, among them the multilingual nature (Hebrew and Polish), the frequent repetition of phrases (i.e. "may his memory be for the afterlife"), and an extensive use of abbreviations and acronyms, which is very common in Hebrew texts, but totally lost in translation—not to mention use of the term "uncircumcised" to refer to the gentile.

While the plot of this original version seems more similar to Buber's first version of the tale, a quick look will reveal that in his adaptation, Buber split the tale into two parts, whereas in the version in *Sichot Chaim*, the moral is explained in the very scene of the anecdote, when the Rabbi turns to his Hasidim in the fields and translates the Polish wagon-driver's reprimand into a kabbalistic moral. Most noticeable is the use of the title

"uncircumcised" for the gentile, which connotes spiritual uncleanliness and sets up a hierarchy between the Rabbi and the peasant, by referring to the peasant by his genitals. HaCohen sees in Buber's change from "uncircumcised" to "[wagon] driver" a blurring of religious and ethnic identities that universalizes the tale, and thus "the Hasidic text is cleansed of its xenophobic, chauvinistic elements to facilitate its reception among modern, liberal, and/or non-Jewish readers in German, English, or Hebrew" (9). HaCohen emphasizes a theme we noticed earlier in Buber's philosophical writings on Hasidism and his introduction to the Tales: The universalization of Hasidism.

HaCohen turns to a second narrative in *Sichot Chaim*, about a Rabbi who attempts to buy a wagonload of wood from a gentile. The Rabbi will only give three gold coins, but the gentile demands four, calling out "should you improve, you will be able to buy." The Rabbi in turn interprets this as a calling to return home and do some soul searching. HaCohen points out that in both stories, while the Jew speaks Hebrew, the gentile speaks Polish and is referred to as "the uncircumcised," setting up a hierarchy between the protagonist, so that the moral delivered seems less universal, and in fact, according to HaCohen, "the moral is purely Hasidic...and has very little, in fact, nothing at all, to do with the original context in which those words were said" (9). In my opinion, the disconnect between the anecdote and the moral in the original tale implies that both the teller and the listener must have at least an introductory grasp of kabbalistic knowledge that can readily applied to seemingly mundane events, so that they can find spiritual instruction in everyday life. HaCohen summarizes the formula of these tales by saying about the tales of the Hasidim that "the lesson can be roughly formulated as: the true Zaddik can draw a holy, religious lesson even from the words of a non-Jew" (ibid). These

tales in their original setting cannot so readily provide moral for the non Hasidic reader unless, they are transformed into something more universal, which is what Buber does.

HaCohen concludes that Buber has gentrified the tales of their antipodal language, which indeed makes them more accessible to the non Hasidic reader, but also "took the legend out of its original context, revised it to some extent and reinterpreted it according to his aesthetic and hermeneutic principles," writing further that "as a consequence, the original meaning of the story has been all but lost" (10-11). Indeed, in the example HaCohen provides, Buber's process of reworking the tales ultimately removed the original kabbalistic moral. However, in the broader scheme, HaCohen sees that Buber's methodology of restructuring the tale for a new, broader audience is actually faithful to the Hasidic intention of finding the "divine spark" in the mundane world. Much like the Rabbi in the story drew a kabbalistic message from the words of the peasant, Buber drew a universal message from a Hasidic tale. Since Buber "insisted on his right to approach the sources as a living tradition" he was able to change them in such a way that actually emphasized the true moral (11). The seeming veneer of inauthenticy due to linguistic editing actually allowed Buber to remain authentically true in his translation of the tales to the message within.

Claire Sufrin also provides insightful guidance for understanding the context of Buber's translation of the Hasidic tales in her article "On Myth, History, and the Study of Hasidism: Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem" (2012). Sufrin addresses the accusations leveled at Buber from Scholem and other scholars that *Tales of the Hasidim* did not accurately portray the reality of Hasidism, and that Buber was guilty of crafting a romanticized fantasy. Sufrin challenges this accusation of inaccuracy and fantasy by

removing *Tales of the Hasidim* from the historical-accuracy dialogue, and placing it within the framework of Buber's non-linear conception of time. Understanding Buber's approach helps "understand the forces that drove his writings on Hasidism" (Sufrin, 130). In other words, Buber might not have painted an accurate portrait of Hasidism in historiographic reality, but he did create an anthology that reflected his approach to Jewish history.

To better understand the accusations of inaccuracy leveled by critics of Buber, Sufrin explains Gershom Scholem's conception of history. In Scholem's view, there are historical phases where mysticism takes the proverbial spotlight, and Hasidism is one of those phases. On the other hand, Buber notes that while there are boundaries between historical periods, what slips between the boundaries presents more importance. Rather than noting a trend and discussing its relevance to a specific time period (the approach of Scholem), Buber focuses on the meaning of the reoccurring theme and its significance to Judaism overall. Similarly, in his presentation of his "I-thou" relationship dynamic, rather than focus on the "I" or "thou," Buber focuses on the hyphen between: the relationship. This focus on the aspects of mysticism that slip between the time periods means that Buber is able to connect movements as historically and religiously disparate as Hasidism and Zionism. Buber's study of the Jewish past to solve the problems of the present (for example, in the early twentieth century, the place of a Jew in a modern, quickly-changing world with several currents of Jewish thought ranging from the socialist to the traditional) suggests that "history is porous," and according to Sufrin, Buber's writings on Hasidism served as an illustration of this belief that themes from the past are applicable as lessons for the issues of the present (regardless whatever time period that "present" refers to).

Scholem critiqued Buber's "poor scholarship" and asserted that Buber created a "neo-Hasidism." Sufrin points out that Buber would probably not deny this charge, considering that he openly admitted to distilling the stories he collected in order to find their "true spirit." One of Scholem's issues with Buber's presentation was his focus on the tales of the later Hasidism; by ignoring homiletic materials more characteristic of Hasidism's earlier days, he missed the true essence of the movement contained in the pithy one-liners of the first generation of Rebbes. According to Scholem, only a historical-critical approach with all sources accounted for could provide an accurate picture of Hasidism, and thus, according to Scholem's historiographic paradigm, Buber's work was incomplete and inaccurate. Buber, however, was an openly avowed *interpreter* of Hasidism, and not one to pass along the material untouched by some transformation. He wanted to convey the force of faith from those legendary days in order to renew the ruptured bonds between G-d and man. Unlike Scholem, Buber was not interested in exploring Hasidism in its full historically and textually accurate context; Buber preferred to find what he construed to be the "essence of its truth."

Sufrin explains that the practical significance of the Buber-Scholem debate relates to the purpose and methodology of Jewish studies, addressing the question of whether the lens through which texts are examined should be historical-critical (like Scholem), or in search of spiritual guidance for the present age (like Buber). Sufrin's explanation of the Scholem-Buber debate helped clarify that Buber sought to express something of his own philosophy through the tales, and he was not interested in the exacting approach of his colleague Scholem. Reading Sufrin's article helped me realize that like Scholem, I was expecting Buber to present the tales in their "true context," thereby missing what Buber's

intended to express: a legendary reality of ecstatic joy that was not tied down to a particular time, place, or people.

Sufrin elaborates on her explanation of Scholem's "notched, timeline view" of history. Scholem believed that there were three phases in spiritual development: the mythic, the religious, and the mystical. Mysticism, according to Sufrin's explanation of Scholem, seeks to re-piece the shattered parts of religion destroyed by institutionalization, in order to re-facilitate the worshipper's lost connection to the divine. But mysticism thereby places itself in danger of turning into Gnosticism (a dramatic tendency toward self deification, the replacement of the divinity with the human, wrapped in layers of cultic mystery). According to Scholem, the mystical may be at odds with the institutional, and mysticism is a notch along the overall spiritual timeline, the phases of which play out again and again as history moves toward the messianic end-goal. Actually, this tension between the mystical and institutional seems to have played out in Buber's writings as well, most notably in his perception of the conflict between "legalistic"/rabbinic Judaism, and "spiritual"/hasidic Judaism. In his essays, Buber seems to view Hasidism as a balanced, spiritual response the "institutionalized" extreme of rabbinic Judaism on one hand, and the "mystical" overindulgences of Shabbetai Tzvi on the other.

According to Sufrin, Scholem views history as linear; myth turns to religion, which turns into mysticism, in the development of a spiritual idea along a timeline. These three phases may re-occur, but they are still part of a timeline that moves toward the messianic endpoint. Like Scholem, Buber acknowledged that spiritual development moves through phases, but he also believed that the boundaries between historical periods

are porous, and that mysticism is not a "stage" after religion, but rather a general theme that returns repeatedly, hovering between myth (the earlier, more personalized days of the I-thou relationship) and religion (the institutionalized relationship). Buber defined a separation between religion (the regulated observance of literature, ritual, and law) and religiosity (the desire for spiritual connection). For Buber, religion is necessary for preserving religious insights, but there is a danger of religion replacing religiosity, if the individual religious experience is consumed in heartless religious rote.

According to Buber, Hasidism was a cure for the illness of Gnostic excess found in Sabbatianism and Frankism. Accordingly, Hasidism is a near-rejection of actualizing the messianic future through a single human figure[55]. Buber talks extensively about the power of the zaddik and this holy leader's role in facilitating a connection to the divine, but much in the spirit of the I-thou philosophy, The "thou" is G-d, the "I" is everyman, and the hyphen is the zaddik; the focus is on the relationship, and not the individual.

Sufrin highlights of the difference between Scholem's linear approach to history, in which the Hasidic form of mysticism is one period of a timeline, and Buber's "porous" approach, in which Hasidism is a rejection of linear movement toward the messianic future, a democratic reaction against the false messianism of Shabbetai Tzvi, in favor of a messianic future revealed in the immediate present, with fully joyous, alive, and self-actualized participants. According to Sufrin, Buber was not interested in theology, but rather in applying the themes of self-worth and self-actualization found throughout Hasidic tales. In his treatises on Hasidism, Buber openly placed *Tales of the Hasidism*

[55] I believe that Sufrin understand Buber's democratic intentions, but if her reading is correct, I find some discrepancy between Buber's philosophy and the actual theology of Hasidism, which, after all, is a parallel type of Orthodoxy that also subscribes to the belief in a messianic end. Refer to our previous findings from Mintz about the Rebbe's connection to facilitating the arrival of the messiah.

between the historical disappointments associated with Shabbatei Tzvi and Jacob Frank, effectively positioning Hasidism as the transposition of messianic actualization from the singular messiah figure onto the everyday *am ha'aretz* (ignorant, common man), if such an individual could achieve the enlightened view that the messianic present that already exists around him. The false messiahs Tzvi and Frank had proved for Buber that messianic actualization needed to be democratized. He did not write *Tales of the Zaddikm*, but rather, *Tales of the Hasidim*, and in Buber's paradigm, everyone can be "Hasidic," if only they can find the ecstatic joy in union with the Divine.

In order to illustrate Buber's view of Jewish history, Sufrin turns to Buber's commentaries on the Bible. Buber finds in the Hebrew Scriptures a progression in the depiction of a relationship with G-d from the personal (the stories of Genesis) to national (the Exodus from Egypt and the stories of the Israelite Kings) to universal (the moral admonition of the prophets). Using his commentary on the story of Gideon (recounted in *Judges* 6-8), Sufrin reads Buber as separating the biblical narrative into two components, (1) historical moments and (2) saga (Buber chose to use the term *saga* instead of *myth*, because the later had connotations associated with Nazi ideology), developing a type of reading called "Tradition Criticism" which focused on the significance of the text, rather than the structural elements discussed by source criticism. Here Sufrin is pointing out that Buber is not so interested in historical accuracy, but that Buber sees the possibility for universally accessible value in the stories of the Hebrew Bible, a tendency toward universality which would later translate to his Hasidic storytelling.

For Buber, the "saga" is the aspect of the narrative which represents the memory of the believer, carried throughout time; the historical moments are the events that

occurred; they may relate the events of a particular time, but because they are repeated in different guises, they speak to some broader trend with a greater significance beyond the moment itself. Thus, in opposition to a paradigm of history versus myth, Buber develops a view of history versus eschatology; there is no focus on an endpoint, but rather, the history represents an ongoing theme of the "struggle to actualize life under G-d's rule" (Sufrin, 148). For Buber (according to Sufrin) history in Judaism is not the linear, "end-times" focused process described by Sholem, but rather an ongoing, organic development of a recurring theme to discover and realize divine theocracy.

In summary: for Scholem, Hasidism neutralized the Gnostic dangers of Sabbatianism, as it was one of many notches on the timeline where myth turned to religion, which turned to mysticism. Hasidism was a balancing force that prevented mysticism from spiraling out of control in the wild excesses of Shabbetai Tzvi, and if later on the timeline, a similar balancing was necessary, it could be repeated, again and again until the messianic culmination. For Buber, Hasidism brought the messianic reality into the present, and eliminated the need altogether for linear movement toward the messianic future. Scholem emphasizes the stages and timeline, while Buber emphasizes the characteristics that continually reappear. Scholem views Hasidism as a point along the timeline (a manifestation of the recurring pattern whereby there is an appearance of mysticism), whereas for Buber, Hasidism rejects the notion of the timeline. Hence, according to Sufrin's presentation of Buber's understanding, *Tales of the Hasidism* are not outside of an accurate historical context: rather, they represent Buber's general view of history, which is different from Scholem's view.

Sufrin helps reconcile some of the contradictions pointed out by critics of Buber's "legendary reality" by illustrating that if we consider his portrayal to be "out of context," it is best to reexamine our definition of "context." For Scholem, *Tales of the Hasidim* would indeed be inaccurate, but Buber is not interested in a complete, all-encompassing historically accurate portrayal of Hasidism; rather, his goal is to distill and refine the material until he is able to present what he perceives as its true essence, an essence that has been expressed periodically throughout Jewish history, but now, with greater urgency, must be clarified and presented again as a solution and cure for the fragmentation of modern man. Sufrin's article helped me assess my own personal bias in approaching Buber's work. As a practicing Hasidic Jew, I read them with an expectation of interplay between storytelling and law, and felt a dissonance between Buber's depiction and the Hasidic context I have experienced, mostly because Buber ignores (or, at best, downplays) the importance of religious stringency and halachic observance in Hasidism. Sufrin's article helped me to consider that perhaps by shedding my expectation for "accuracy," I would be open to experience the more universalized applicability of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness Buber wished to share with the world through his rendition of Hasidic storytelling.

I will now examine an article that tracks a Hasidic legend through several iterations, and shows us that despite the change in context, the Hasidic legend carries an innate power that is not confined to a particular time and place. In his essay "But I will Tell of Their Deeds: Retelling a Hasidic Tale about the Power of Storytelling" (2014) Levi Cooper tracks a Hasidic story through a period of over one hundred years, as it is retold by Martin Buber, Y.S. Agnon, Gerschom Scholem, Walter Kaufman, Elie Wiesel

and Abba Kovner. Cooper provides an illustration of how "the malleable Hasidic tale may be shaped in the image of the storyteller" (Cooper, 128). Highlighting differences in rendition of one particular story, he examines the question of whether or not the transmitters have a duty to refrain from changing the tale.

Cooper takes a story of the Baal Shem Tov, and examines its many manifestations through the years, beginning with a version published in 1906 by Reuven Zak[56] in his work *Keneset Yisrael*, a pamphlet about the Hasidic Rebbe, Israel Friedman of Ruzyn. The story is not about the Ruzyner Rebbe, but the Hasidic master is the narrator in a frame story of a tale about the Baal Shem Tov and the subsequent generations of Hasidim:

Our holy master [Rabbi Israel of Rużyn] told a story of the Besht [The Baal Shem Tov], blessed be his memory, that once there was a dire life-threatening matter where there was a certain only son, who was very good, etc. And [the Besht] ordered that a candle of wax be made and he traveled to the forest and attached the candle to a tree and did various other things and performed Yiḥudim [mystical unifications of the Divine name], etc., and brought salvation with the help of God, blessed be He. And afterwards there was such an incident involving [Rabbi Israel's] great-grandfather, the Holy Maggid, and he did likewise as described above, and he said: "The Yiḥudim and kawanot [mystical intentions, sing. kawanah] that the Besht performed I know not, but I shall act on the basis of the kawanah that the Besht intended." And that too was accepted. And afterwards there was a similar incident involving the holy rabbi R. Moses Leib of Sassów, blessed be his memory, and he said: "We do not even have the power to do that; I shall only tell the

[56] a follower of the Ruzyn Hasidic Dynasty

story, and it is up to G-d, blessed be He, to assist." And thus it was, with the help of G-d, blessed be He[57].

Cooper reads this story primarily as reference to the decline in mystical abilities through the succeeding generations. The kabbalistic power of the Besht to perform mystical unifications cannot be repeated by the Maggid of Mezritch, who can only imitate the acts of his teacher. One generation later, Reb Moses Leib cannot even mimic the actions, but he can tell the story of what happened. I would add that while there is a decline in mystical abilities, which are ultimately replaced by the act of storytelling, we are told that the storytelling is equally effective.

According to Cooper, for the generation of the Baal Shem Tov, mysticism was central to Hasidism, but by the generation of the Ruzyner, it had receded "to part of the collective memory of the Hasidic movement," to be replaced by the mysticism-substitute of storytelling, although this substitute is also effective in "mystically shaping the course of events" (132). What the Baal Shem Tov could do with incantations, we can no longer do, but we can relate his actions and thereby bring about the same effect. While Cooper concludes that the main function of the above-cited tale is to illustrate the movement of mysticism into the collective Hasidic memory, I would point out that it also reveals the ascent of storytelling as a working spiritual practice.

Cooper examines how a series of authors successively reworked the tale, beginning with Martin Buber. Buber took his version of the story from Reuven Zak, and shifted the focus of the narration from the Besht to Rabbi Moshe Leib, as indicated by

[57] Reuben Zak, *Keneset Yisrael* (Warsaw: Y. Edelstein, 1906), 23, translation by Levi Cooper; this tale was printed in Levi Cooper's article.

Buber's placement of the tale in the section of *Tales of the Hasidim* which discussed Rabbi Moshe Leib (*Tales of the Hasidim* are divided into chapters, and each chapter is devoted to stories of a particular zaddik). Furthermore, in a later edition, he emphasized that the Ruzyner is only the narrator to the story by titling it "The Three Generations" (that is, the Baal Shem Tov, the Maggid, and Reb Moshe Leib). While only three generations are needed to show the transition from mysticism to storytelling, I would argue that the Ruzyner, who relates the tale, is the one who breaks the "fourth wall" and brings the play into the audience, showing us that even a story about a story is effective as the story itself. For comparison to the previous version of the tale in Zak's *Knesset Yisrael*, I have included Buber's version of the tale below:

The Rabbi of Rizhyn related:

Once when the holy Baal Shem Tov wanted to save the life of a sick boy he was very much attached to, he ordered a candle made of pure wax, carried it to the woods, fastened it to a tree, and lit it. Then he pronounced a long prayer. The candle burned all night. When morning came, the boy was well.

When my grandfather, the Great Maggid, who was the holy Baal Shem's disciple, wanted to work a like cure, he no longer knew the secret meaning of the words on which he had to concentrate. He did as his master had done and called on his name. And his efforts met with success.

When Rabbi Moshe Leib, the disciple of the disciple of the Great Maggid, wanted to work a cure of this kind, he said: 'We have no longer the power even to do what was

done. But I shall relate the story of how it was done, and G-d will help.' And his efforts met with success[58].

Cooper notes that in Zak's version of the tale, we do not learn so much about the boy who the Baal Shem Tov attempts to heal; he is almost a part of the landscape, like the tree or the candle the Baal Shem Tov carries, and the focus of the tale's first scene is the mystical power of the Baal Shem Tov. In contrast, Buber provides us with more details about the sick child, and the boy almost becomes the main figure of the first scene. The Baal Shem Tov is "very much attached to" the child, and in the morning, we find that "the boy was well." Unlike Zak's version of the tale, in Buber's version there is a relationship between the Besht and the boy.

Cooper reads this added dynamic as emphasizing Buber's philosophy of the I-thou dialogue; the Besht can only cure the boy if he has a relationship with him, whereas, in Zak's tale, the boywas is almost a prop in the story to show the great mystical ability of the Besht. Buber expresses this I-thou dynamic through emphasis on the zaddik-hasid relationship which he especially labors in his introduction to *Tales of the Hasidim*, where he goes to great length of illustration to show that the zaddik depends on his Hasidim, and the Hasidim depend on their zaddik to effect connection between the upper and lower worlds. In his essay "The Holy Way," Buber pithily summarizes this dynamic by writing: "realization of the Divine on earth is fulfilled not within man but between man and man" (Buber, 113). Thus, Cooper implies that an understanding of the I-thou mentality is crucial to understanding the way Buber translated the Hasidic tales, and Buber confirms

[58] Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, vol. 2, pages 92–93

this perception in his writings on Hasidic philosophy with his emphasis on the relationship between zaddik and hasid.

Cooper also sees Buber's reworking of the tale as reflective of his view on religiousness. According to Cooper, the anthology in Jewish literature provided Jewish cultural renewal for Zionists, and since what Buber saw in Hasidism was the religious essence of Judaism, he proceeded to anthologize many of the Hasidic tales as part of the literary facet of this cultural revival, beginning with *The Stories of Rebbe Nachman* and *The Legends of the Baal Shem*. "Hasidism according to Buber demonstrated that individual religious experience was not dependent on law, dogmas, or creeds, or Kabbalistic mysticism; it was a message that transcended a specific personality or historical context" (Cooper, 135). Thus, according to Cooper's understanding, the decline in mystical abilities (replaced by storytelling) which is expressed in the tale mirrors Buber's own personal belief of shifting religious focus away from set rituals, to be replaced by a more personalized experience. Cooper's opinion thus echoes what HaCohen wrote in "The Haywagon," that Buber universalized the tales in his rendition, by deleting the kabbalistic meditations of the Besht which were referenced in the earlier version of the tale from *Keneset Yisrael* and replacing them with a more general description of prayer and candle-lighting. In conclusion, Cooper sees Buber's reworking of the tale as reflective of his belief in the I-thou dynamic, and his preference for personalized religious experience over institutionalized religion.

Cooper explains that Buber's retelling set a trend as the tale "left the Hasidic community" for a wider readership. While this paper does focus on Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, I believe it would be helpful to follow Cooper's article to the end, as it will help

us understand the challenges in translation that arise out of Hasidic tales removed from their original context, and much like HaCohen's article, show us that the tales can still express something of the essence of Hasidic philosophy even through their translation.

According to Cooper, the most significant change in this tale came with S.Y. Agnon's retelling, originally in a 1960 edition of *Haaretz* newspaper. Agnon changes the Ruziner from the narrator of a frame story (as in Buber and Zak's tale) to the very hero who is called upon to save a sick boy's life. The Ruziner relates that once the Baal Shem Tov was faced with the exact same case, and he saved a boy's life with kabbalistic ritual. The Maggid, faced with a similar situation, could only imitate the actions of his teacher the Besht, and Reb Moshe Leib could only tell of their deeds while standing in the same place in the woods where their predecessors stood. The Ruziner relates that not even that could be done, but that by retelling the deeds of the Tzadikim, we can bring salvation.

By making the Ruziner the main character, Agnon's version thus shifts the focus of the tale from the theurgic ritual of the Besht and the subsequent decline in mystical abilities, to the storytelling of the Ruziner. Agnon further highlights this shift by juxtaposing his next addition of the tale (in 1961) with a statement attributed to the Ruziner: "Alas, now that the world is in a state of smallness, when the Tzadik needs to benefit the world, he does so only through telling stories and ordinary conversation" (Cooper, 141). Thus, unlike Zak's version (which Cooper reads as emphasizing the decline in mystical ability), and unlike Buber's version (which Cooper reads as an expression of Buber's preference for personalized religious experience and I-thou

philosophy), Cooper reads Agnon's version as the one that most (thus far) emphasizes the power of a Hasidic tale to transform reality through storytelling[59].

A further development in the translation of the tale occurred when Agnon reprinted his version (again in the Israeli newspaper *HaAretz*) ten days later, writing that he had found its antecedent from the Midrash, specifically the medieval work *Yalkut Shimoni*: a four part tale about the Davidic Kings. King David pursued and overcame his enemy with divine assistance. King Asa knew he could not overcome his foe, but relied on divine assistance to pursue and conquer. King Jehoshaphat knew he could not pursue, but sang praises to G-d, and G-d took care of the enemy. King Hezekiah could not even sing praise; he just relied on G-d and the enemy was vanquished. Cooper initially questions why Agnon would juxtapose this midrashic tale with the tale of Ruziner, seeing no ostensible similarity other than the four-part structure, and a reference to a decline in spiritual or kabbalistic abilities.

Cooper suggests this juxtaposition as Agnon's addition of a new dimension to the Hasidic tale, which was formerly focused on the storytelling abilities of the Ruziner. Since the midrashic tale of David Kings emphasizes that, despite a decline in spiritual levels, G-d was and is the hero of the story, effecting salvation in all four parts despite the spiritual strength of the king, we can also (by the connection of contrast between the tales) view G-d as the hero of the Ruziner story. Whether the boy's healing is achieved through the means of the Besht's kabbalistic incantations, or the Ruziner's storytelling, G-d is the one who affects healing. Thus, Cooper posits that "Agnon told the same story

[59] Cooper brings another example of the power of the Hasidic story to effect changes in reality, specifically stories of the Besht. It is said that the Besht advised one of his disciples that hemorrhaging after circumcision could be stemmed with the ashes of a frog. When Joshua of Belz (the second Belzer Rebbe) was unable to obtain a frog in a similar emergency, due to the lack of frogs in the autumn season, he told the story of the Besht, with the same curative result.

in two different ways: first as a story about storytelling, and then as a story about faith" (145). As proof that Agnon viewed this faith component as crucial to the moral of the story, Cooper cites the fact that Agnon would never again publish the tale without the midrashic precedent.

Gershom Scholem provides the next iteration of the tale in his lecture "Hasidism: the Last Phase," part of a series of lectures that would be later published as *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*; Scholem specifically states that he used Agnon's version of the tale. Cooper wonders why Scholem went against his own orientation towards textual accuracy and chose to use Agnon's retelling of the tale, instead of Zak's earlier version. Cooper answers that Agnon's version contains something that Zak's does not, namely the addition of the Ruziner saying "and for us, we have the power not even to do that; all we can do is to tell the deeds of the *tsadiqim*, and G-d, may He be blessed, will act." However, Scholem amends this ending slightly, omitted any reference to G-d, and has the Ruziner say "we cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done" (Cooper, 147). Scholem adds that the storyteller (Agnon) concludes that telling the story had the same effect as the theurgic prayers. While Agnon's version highlights the decline of mystical abilities (and their replacement by storytelling power) it still attributes the role of hero to G-d. Scholem chooses to remove the spiritual reference made by Agnon. Furthermore, the boy is entirely missing from Scholem's version, removing the element of the I-thou dialogue that Buber had emphasized in his version.

For Scholem, the tale symbolizes the decay of a great movement, and he selects this story in particular because it provides a solid end to his lectures by emphasizing that

point. Furthermore, according to Cooper, Scholem wishes to illustrate the shortcomings of academia in understanding mysticism. The professor expounding the history of Hasidism can do nothing more than talk about Jewish mysticism, just as the Ruziner can do no more than relate the story of the Besht. However, Cooper sees an additional message in Scholem's retelling, which Scholem himself expresses. "You can say that it reflects the transformation of all its values...all that remained of the mystery was the tale" (Cooper 149). Scholem continues by saying that "the story is not ended...and the secret life it holds can break out tomorrow in you or me" (ibid). In other words, Scholem views the tale as revealing the nature of Jewish mysticism to return in stages, through different guises. Once it was the theurgic incantations of the Besht; then it was the imitation of the Maggid; then it was the verbal recounting of Reb Moshe Leib; finally, removed from ritual, time, and place, it was the mere retelling of the story. While Buber sees the tale as a vehicle for expressing the I-thou, and Agnon sees the tale as expressing divine salvation, Scholem sees the tale as expressing trends in Jewish Mysticism (which would become the title of his lecture).

Cooper next brings us to Walter Kaufmann's version of the tale. Kauffman uses the tale in his work *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, and adds a fifth layer to the story, which Cooper reads as a rejection of the story's potential spiritual elements. In this fifth layer of narrative woven around the original prayer of the Besht, Kauffmann himself asserts that the story is just a story. Perhaps the Maggid could imitate the Besht; perhaps Reb Moshe could return to the very scene and relate verbally what the Maggid had done; perhaps the Ruziner could sit at home and relate the tale from afar what Reb Moshe had done, but Kaufman rejects the responsibility of retelling their deeds, and even the

possibility of the original scene. "Indeed, a little research might recover the prayer and determine the place, but we do not think that knowing both would help" (Cooper 151). Kaufman then states that a sixth layer of the story, added by the next generation, might address the polemical issue of Jewish vs. Christian piety, at which point Cooper sees the tale as being very removed from its original context as it enters the realm of theological polemics. Cooper views Kaufmann's interpretation of the tale as its "death knell," which perhaps means that the next several iterations of the tale would no longer express the optimistic theme of the power in storytelling, but rather pessimistic or critical viewpoints of the teller (152).

To illustrate yet again how the tale became an expression of the author's opinion, Cooper cites the retelling of the tale in Elie Wiesel's novella, *Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters*, in which Wiesel "wove Hasidic stories together with his own memories, insights, lingering thoughts, and vignettes" (Cooper, 153). In Wiesel's version, the sick boy has totally disappeared, to be replaced by the threat of a terrible catastrophe which looms over the Jewish people, which the Besht averts through mystical rites. A similar catastrophe looms in the time of the Maggid, Reb Moshe, and the Ruziner, but each of them are able to ward off the impending doom, even as the theurgic prowess of the Besht morphs into the storytelling power of the Ruziner. However, Wiesel ends the tale with a depressing conclusion, that the catastrophe was not stopped this time. "Perhaps we are no longer able to tell the story. Could all of us be guilty? Even the survivors? Especially the survivor?" (Cooper 154). Wiesel's holocaust-survivor-guilt has been woven into the story, to express a conclusion that the power of the tale is no longer.

On the other hand, Hebrew novelist Abba Kovner expressed his belief that the story must be told, despite our inability to return to the time, place, and ritual of Besht. Furthermore, Cooper explains, the story had a special connection to Kovner's own personal life. Kovner commanded a troop of partisan rebels against the Nazis, hiding in the Rudniki woods after the liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto. When Kovner's son expressed a desire to see the forest where his father lived and fought against the Nazis, Kovner rejected the possibility that the place still existed. In his writing, he said he could not remember the place, and poetically connected his biography with the story of Besht, writing "we no longer can light the fires we lit then, or stand in that unique place," as if his fight against the Nazis was like the prayer of the Hasidic master, uttered to ward off catastrophe from the Jewish people (Cooper, 156). However, unlike Weisel's guilt-ridden conclusion, Kovner writes that despite our inability to return to the time and place, we must tell the story to our children. Kovner refers specifically to the Holocaust, but Cooper calls our attention to the fact that this comment can be read as a continuation of the story itself: just as the heirs of the Besht could not understand his kabbalistic ritual, yet carried the power of his actions through history by retelling the story, we may not be able to comprehend the meaning of the Holocaust, but we can communicate the terrible memory of that event by telling the story nonetheless. Thus, Cooper uses Kovner's plea to "tell the story" to highlight the power of the tale to carry a message or a memory from generation to generation[60].

[60] For further reading on Hasidic folklore and the Holocaust, see *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* by Yaffa Eliach, who collected the tales from survivors through interviews and oral histories (xxii). In contrast to Wiesel's dark questioning, she writes that the "main themes of Hasidic tales are love of humanity, optimism, and a boundless belief in G-d and the goodness of mankind" (xvi). While it is difficult for words to encapsulate the horrors of six million killed, she also writes that "the very nature of the Hasidic tale

Cooper believes the tale becomes revitalized as it entered the circle of liberal Jewish-American writers. Ron Wolfson, professor of education at the American Jewish University, used the tale as a metaphor for expressing the relationship of the assimilated, religiously-unaffiliated Jew to the Passover Seder. Much like the generations following the Besht could not replicate his acts, but could only tell of the deeds in the preceding generation, the modern Jew may feel disconnected from the ritual of the seder, let alone connected to the ancient sacrificial rites of the Passover service as it was in the ancient Temple. Yet, they can still gather the family together and read the Haggada, and by doing so, tap into the meaning of the holiday.

However, Cooper notes, in a gross mistake, Wolfson replaced the Ruziner Rebbe with the Rabbi Israel Salanter, a Rabbi in the Lithuanian camp, far removed from the context and philosophy of Hasidism. Cooper uses this dramatically altered version, which breaks the Hasidic chain of transmission with the inauthentic addition of a non-Hasidic Rabbi, to raise the question of how many details of the story can be changed before the storyteller is no longer telling the same tale. Cooper has shown us versions of the tale by several writers (Buber, Scholem, Kaufman, Weisel, and Wolfson), and each of them changed the tale somewhat to support their philosophy; for Buber it was the I-thou dialogue; for Scholem it was the decline in mystical abilities, etc. In Wolfson's case, however, the emendation was accidental, but Cooper writes that this mistake proves the very point of the story more than anything: we have forgotten even how to tell the story...but even by making an attempt to tell it, we tap into the meaning of the tale.

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made it a most appropriate literary form through which to come to terms with the Holocaust and its aftermath" (xvii).

Cooper then highlights a more recent, musical retelling of the tale by Mark Novak and Renee Brachfeld, who recorded the tale with musical accompaniment in 1996. This version, although farthest away chronologically from the Zak version, seems to me the most authentically linked to the context of live Hasidic storytelling, in that the story is orally told in a recording, and incorporates other Hasidic elements, such as wordless melodies (niggun). Cooper cites yet another version of the tale, broadcast via radio in Israel during a severe drought of 2011 by Kalman Ber of *Kol Chai* (The Voice of Life) Radio Station. The conflict in the story was changed from a sick boy to a drought, reflecting the situation of the time, much like Wiesel and Kaufman had amended their versions of the tale to become holocaust references. I view this retelling as closer to the "casual" context of Hasidic storytelling that Mintz observed between Hasidim (and Hasidim who shared stories with him), because even though a central element to the story was changed, the editing was geared towards making the story applicable to the situation of the moment, a central, organic trait I had observed firsthand in real life Hasidic storytelling, which I will discuss in the last section of this paper.

Cooper asks us to consider how we view these changes and corruptions to the tale, asking: "Is it a mysticism substitute, a paradigm for religious experience, an opportunity to promote faith in G-d, a lamentation for a lost era...or an invitation to participate?" (162). I would say the tale is all of these things, and Cooper seems to agree, concluding that the longevity of the tale is found in its malleability. Cooper accurately defines this essence in the close of his essay, quoting the son of the Ruziner Rebbe, Rabbi David Moses Friedman of Czortkow, who said the "tales the tsadiqqim recount are [told] according to the need of the moment" (Cooper 163). Rabbi Friedman then noted that he

had heard Tzadikim recount the same tale in different ways, based on the occasion. This healing power of the tale—whereby the problems of the present can be solved by a solution found in the Hasidic tale—is a function of its malleability. The multiplicity of the tale proposed by Cooper may seem to contradict the universal possibility of the tale presented by Buber, but I argue that its very malleability, whereby anyone can find a meaningful message, is what makes the tale universal. A legend set in proverbial stone with one monolithic moral applicable to a particular group of people could not present universalized possibility. The Hasidic tale, by its nature, is the very opposite. As Cooper has shown us, the Hasidic tale is an organic creation that changes through time, and appears in different guises based on different situations. This idea of the telling the tale for the needs of the moment is written about by Buber himself in the 1946 preface to *Tales of the Hasidim*.

In his preface, Buber writes that the Hasidim, witnesses to the great events involving their zaddikim, retold the events in words that "were more than mere words; they transmitted what had happened to coming generations, and with such actuality that the words in themselves became events" (xvii). He then goes on to quote an unnamed Rabbi whose grandfather was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, who says that a story "must be told in such a way that it constitutes help in itself" (ibid). This rabbi then relates how his lame grandfather recounted how the holy Besht used to hop and dance while praying, whereupon the rabbi leapt out of his chair and was cured of his lameness. Here we have an example of the story being told according to the needs of the moment, with a curative power to effect a change in reality.

Buber goes on to write that the primarily oral transmission of the tales was not accompanied by a large scale written tradition for the masses, but that Hasidic masters would write down the deeds of their disciples for personal study, such as Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, who wrote down all the deeds of his teacher, the Maggid of Mezritch. This lack of written redaction, according to Buber, resulted in very few uncorrupted versions of the tales.

And furthermore, while in most cultures, legends and literature occur side-by-side in such a way that they are able to influence one another, this was not the case with the Hasidic legend, and "not until our own era were they couched in literary form" (ibid xviii). Buber asserts that the Hasidim could not model tales of the zaddikim on any literary example, and that the inner pulse of the oral tales was too full of life to confine in the calm form of the written word. In conclusion, "the life of the zadikkim and the hasidim's rapturous joy therein...is precious metal, though all too often not pure" (xix). Buber thus implies that his task is to take the raw material of the Hasidic tale, remove the dross, and cast the tales into a literary form: an anthology called *Tales of the Hasidim*.

Taking the Besht as his example, Buber writes that oral legends were circulated during his lifetime that were "brief indications of his greatness," which twenty-five years later were written down by Rabbi Moshe Hayim Efraim (the grandson of the Besht) in *Degel Machane Yehuda*, or *The Camp Flag of Ephraim*, and meanwhile, around the same time, disciples of the Besht published *Keter Shem Tov*, or *The Crown of the Good Name*. Buber writes that nearly half a century after his lifetime, the first biography of the Besht, *Shivtei HaBesht*, or, In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov, was published, but that the second

half of the nineteenth century was already marked by corruption in the transmission, wherein the stories appeared as "thin and wordy narratives" (ibid).

Buber is obviously unsatisfied with the written compilations of Hasidic folklore up to this point, and goes on to say that it is his purpose to "do justice simultaneously to legend and truth, and supply the missing links in the narrative" (xx). His self-described process involved rejecting the "notes" of the Hasidim, and reconstructing the tales in a form "suited to the subject matter," after which Buber returned to the "notes" in order to incorporate certain flavors and phrases that were missing from his reconstructions (ibid). Buber vehemently insists that he did not embellish or expand the tales, unlike the methodology of the brothers Grimm[61]. He divides the tales into two groupings: legendary anecdote, and legendary short story. For the most part, *Tales of the Hasidim* are legendary anecdotes, and Buber describes the preponderance of this form to the "Jewish Diaspora spirit" to express events in a pointed manner, where the irrelevant material has been removed, and the material arranged to point towards some conclusion of significance. For Buber, a short story recounts a single incident that references a single destiny; an anecdote recounts a single incident that references an entire destiny, and the legendary anecdote goes beyond even that to convey the meaning of life (ibid xxi). For Buber, no other literature in the world can convey with such poignancy the meaning of life, as much as the Hasidic anecdote. Buber warns us that there may seem to be repetition in the *Tales*, but that if a motif is repeated, its meaning is actually different based on the context, which again fortifies the notion of the Hasidic tale being told in response to the context.

[61] This is not my own assessment, but rather, what Buber himself writes.

Buber writes that *Tales of the Hasidim* contains less than a tenth of the material he collected. He set aside whatever tales did not create an "accurate portrait" of each zaddik, and taking the ones that (Buber believed) did create an accurate portrait, arranged them to create a picture of the zaddik's life story. He arranged the tales in a "biographical" but not a "chronological" order, in order to clarify what he had in mind about that particular zaddik. For example, in writing of the Besht, Buber arranged the tales into ten categories: 1) the soul of the Besht; 2) preparation and revelation; 3) ecstasy and fervor; 4) his community; 5) his disciples; 6) the Besht with the people; 7) strength and vision; 8) holiness and miracles; 9) the Holy Land and redemption; 10) before and after his death (xxiii). While the arrangement is not chronological, for Buber it adequately portrays an accurate picture of the Baal Shem Tov, reminding us of Sufrin's conclusion that Buber is not so interested in historical accuracy as much as he is interested in historical theme, and furthermore, that the need of the moment is not a biographical rendition of the Baal Shem Tov's life, but rather an expression of the Baal Shem Tov's Hasidic message—and therefore a chronological arrangement is unnecessary.

Buber writes that his journey of re-telling the hasidic tales began around the turn of the century with *Tales of Rabbi Nahman* (1906) and *The Legend of the Baal Shem* (1907). However, Buber admits that his first two books were "too free" in the interpretation of the material, and that successively, his books *The Great Maggid and His Succession* (1921) and *The Hidden Light* (1924) were reflective of his new concept of the task at hand. *Tales of the Hasidim* was mostly written after his arrival in the Holy Land after 1938. "I owe the urge to this new and more comprehensive composition to the air of this land," Buber writes, citing the Talmudic dictum of the sages that the air of the land

makes one wise (xxiv). Buber, in his prologue, thus positions his involvement with Hasidic folklore as a journey that allowed him to feel spiritually and physically settled as a Jew (in the land of Israel), but he also emphasizes that the Hasidic tale is told according to the needs of the moment, and that the tale has the power to create a better reality. We can perhaps read this in Buber's decision to conclude the prologue with reference to his decision to live in Israel. The "reality" of two world wars, a holocaust, and European Jewry left in a state of physical and directional crisis, was personally "cured" for Buber through his involvement in Hasidic folklore, where he found depth, purpose, and an answer to the questions of separation between spirit and matter.

In conclusion, we see from Buber's prologue that he is quite open about taking poetic license with the translation of the tales, in order to arrive at translating what he perceives as their inner essence. HaCohen shows us that Buber's linguistic edits, while weakening textual authenticity, actually allowed Buber to remain true to the Hasidic ideal of elevating the mundane by finding a spiritual moral within a worldly event, for Buber found a universal moral within the Hasidic tale. Sufrin writes that by reframing our demand for historical accuracy, we can address the challenges leveled against Buber of portraying Hasidism along romanticized, inaccurate lines. Finally, Cooper illustrates that the inherent nature of a Hasidic tale is indeed change, and Buber's edits were part of a long, continuing, organic process where the tale provides fresh meaning based on the time, place, and audience. Buber edits the tales, because he tells them for what he perceives as the need of the moment: the need to address the crisis of modern man, a crisis of separation of spirit and matter, man and G-d, and even man and fellow man. By recounting the acts of the zaddikim, "those who stood the test" of life, we can find the

path to “being human,” being whole, and experiencing a life of ecstatic joy. In the next section, we will explore how both Buber and I came to this path.

CHAPTER VII

OUR WAY TO HASIDISM AND HASIDIC STORYTELLING TODAY

Buber's 1918 essay "My Way to Hasidism" opens up our understanding of how Buber connected to the Hasidic tale. In the introductory paragraphs of this essay, he defines the word Hasid as a "pious man." Buber further defines the word by its introduction in a Mishnaic text which states "what is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours, this [person] is a Hasid" (Pirke Avot, 5:13)[62]. With this definition from the Mishna, Buber highlights a "Hasid" as one with no claim to any possessions. Such pious men journeyed to the Holy Land to bring about the Kingdom of G-d, but repeatedly met with no success, until the Baal Shem Tov arose in Eastern Europe and formed a community of men dedicated to relating the "spiritual" to the "physical." Thus, Buber posits the Baal Shem Tov as reinterpreting of the term *Hasid*, from signifying asceticism and devotional piety in the face of great difficulty, to a member of a community that seeks to live with spiritual enlightenment wherever they are.

Buber continues by writing that, "nowhere in the last centuries has the soul force of Judaism so manifested itself as in Hasidism" (17). And yet, despite the fact that Hasidism is merely manifesting that which is already inherent in Judaism, it brings about a new freedom. It does not alter the Jewish law by one bit, but invigorates it with fresh life. While the outward trappings (here presumably Buber means language, clothing, and ritual) appear medieval, the inner truth is regenerated. Buber is very clear that (in his

[62] Buber actually misquotes the Mishna and says "what is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine," and according to the same Mishna he refers to, such a person is actually an *am ha'aretz* [an ignorant person] (Buber, *Hasidism*, 16).. I believe that Buber means to quote the particular part of the Mishna I have referred to, since this is the part that defines a Hasid.

opinion) the Hasidic movement in his day had decayed, but that process initiated by this spiritual awakening cannot be stopped.

Buber is very direct in saying that his essay is not the place to explain the philosophy of Hasidism, but he summarizes the movement in a few pithy lines. "G-d can be beheld in each thing and reached through each pure deed," and anyone who looks can find Him (17). Therefore, it is not sufficient to serve G-d in moments of ritual alone, but rather in man's entire life, eating, drinking, sleeping, working, and other activities. Daily life is replete with opportunities to serve G-d. Hasidism creates the possibility of a kingdom of perfect unity between body and soul, matter and spirit, such as Europe had never seen before. The fact that Buber refers to "Europe" and not specifically "European Jewry" again highlights the universalism of his interpretation of the Hasidic message.

Buber transitions into his biography, telling us that he grew up in Galicia with his grandparents. He was taken often to the town of Sadagora, the seat of a Hasidic dynasty, where he saw the Hasdim and their Rebbe in the shul. Buber is somewhat critical of the Rebbes of his generation, writing that they were petty magicians attempting to preserve the legendary power of their grandfathers. And yet, despite this perceived degeneration, Buber sees on their foreheads the spark of brilliance, and the austerity of character inherited from their ancestors, the zaddikim of yesteryear "in who the immortal finds its mortal fulfillment" (19). In any case, Buber sees the zadikim of his day as mediators for the Hasidim to obtain their physical needs, but in moments of watching the Rebbe pray, or expound upon the mysteries of the Torah at the third meal of the Sabbath, there can be seen the primordial glow of light which was made for the perfected man[63].

[63] Here Buber is referring to the midrashic teaching that G-d stowed away the primordial light of creation for the enjoyment of the perfectly righteous.

As a child watching the darkly-clad, fur-hatted Hasidism, Buber was struck with the realization that the world is indeed in need of a perfected man and true helper, and even if the Rebbes of his childhood memory were not the perfected legends of yesteryear, still they represented the concept of a "helper in spirit, teacher of world-meaning," the very concept of which is "the seed for future world orders" (19). Here again we see an allusion to Buber's philosophy on Hasidism as a movement with universal potential; he takes the figure of the "Rebbe" as a concept that can be lifted out of Hasidism and applied to the larger world. He is the helper that can facilitate the journey towards wholeness, a world of spirit and matter united. What Buber saw most in these childhood memories, his glimpses of Hasidim, was genuine community and genuine leadership. Although the splendor of the Rebbe's palace and the enraptured worship of the Hasidim was strange and repulsive to Buber, he knew then that "common reverence and common joy of soul are the foundations of genuine human community" (Buber, 20).

As Buber grew older, more educated, and more rational, the child-like wonderment he experienced in Savagorda was no more. He looked down upon the movement, but in retrospect, it was only because he did not wish to see what he had seen previously (Buber, 21). And yet, despite this alienation from Hasidism, it was during these years he first learned of the Baal Shem Tov, although the name would not yet have significance for him until some years later. Buber's childhood had been spent in the company of his grandfather, who ceaselessly worked on translating the Midrash, and as long as he lived with his grandfather, his roots were firmly in Judaism. Upon leaving, he lived in a world of self-described confusion, "without Judaism, without humanity, and without the presence of the divine" (Buber, 22). The discovery of Zionism once again

pulled Buber towards Judaism, for the rootless feeling inside was perhaps the feeling of all Jews in the absence of a homeland. And yet, Zionism was not enough, for even with a land to call home, Buber sensed that there would be something more. However, Zionism was still the port from which the ship of spiritual exploration set sail. His search for this Judaism with meaning led him to Hasidism.

Buber decided to relearn Hebrew, presumably at least in partial connection to his Zionist involvement. One day he happened upon a book entitled *Zevaat Ribesh* (an account of the Baal Shem Tov), and (as we have read Potok mention) Buber was very much affected by the description of the Baal Shem Tov's passion for serving G-d, a fervor so intense that his very actions, even the mundane act of rising from sleep, allow him to become a creator like the Creator of the universe. "It was then that, overpowered in an instant, that I experienced the Hasidic soul" (24). The image of the Rebbe and the Hasidim from his childhood hit him in that moment, and coupled to the words of *Zevaat Ribesh* describing the Besht, Buber saw the essence of Judaism: creation in the image of G-d was a living task, and Buber's mission was to express this notion of the perfected man (the zaddik) and his community (the hasidim) to the world. For five years after this realization he withdrew from the world and began to search and gather the fragments, by which he means, Hasidic legends and anecdotes.

His first project was *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, and the layers of commentary around the tales made Buber feel as if he needed to strip away the layers and bring forth the original words of the master. The end result was disappointingly paltry, and Buber felt that he would need to recast the tales in his own words, much as a painter makes his own strokes, inspired by the work of his master. Buber began to translate the tales, and by

the time he had reached the last two, he grown free in his interpretation, added new parts, and found himself bonded with the spirit of Rabbi Nachman, bringing forth the master's tales with more clarity and faithfulness than the Rabbi's own direct disciples (according to Buber). Next Buber moved on to collect legends of the Baal Shem Tov, both from texts and from the mouths of the people (Buber does not specific who these people are). Buber felt that he was faithfully transmitting the tale, despite his interpretations and additions, but. Indeed, "the greater the independence became, the more deeply I experienced the faithfulness" (26). Later Buber reflected on his poetic license as too free, but Buber's reshaping of the tale may actually be in line with the idea of Hasidic storytelling as malleable and oriented towards the present needs of the moment, as we have seen illustrated by Cooper's article about the progression of Hasidic tale through several narrators, including Buber himself.

Buber concludes his essay by narrating a personal event. After delivering one of his lectures on Judaism, he retired to a coffee house to have a lively philosophical give-and-take with some young students. He was approached by a servant from his father's house, whom he had probably not encountered since childhood. The simple man sat with the group and listened to the philosophers debate and discuss, devotedly but with no understanding. Finally, he pulled Buber aside and asked about a potential suitor for his daughter, a young man who had just obtained a degree. Was he steady? Did he have a good head on his shoulders? Should the young man become a doctor or a lawyer? While Buber answered the first two questions in the affirmative, the last one he declined to answer, whereupon the man insisted that Buber could answer if he wanted to, but

nonetheless, thanked Buber for his time, and left. It was then that Buber realized the role of a zaddik as a leader, who the simple man turns to for guidance.

Buber writes that all men have a responsibility to act in a way that positively affects the world, since their every action, no matter how small, can have lasting repercussions. And yet, there are some men who are often confronted with the special responsibility of guiding others—not rulers and statesmen, whose decisions involve the masses—but rather, a spiritual guide who deals with men on an individual basis, and gives them an answer to their concerns. This is the zaddik, and through his help, he elevates those who come to him; "he elevates their need before he satisfies it" (Buber, 30). He is a guide and helper who helps the common man sanctify his life, and unifies the spiritual and the physical. The world is in need of such a perfected figure, Buber concludes.

This personal essay presenting autobiography through the lens of philosophical discussion about the journey to Hasidism, ending with a narrative about how Buber realized the advice-giving responsibility of the zaddik, implies that Buber's mission is to carry the knowledge of this perfect leader and his community out into the wider world, and thus, Buber was most inclined to express the essence of Hasidism through tales of the leaders, the zaddikim. Indeed, looking back over his brief autobiography, we see that it was the scene of the leader and his community that awakened in young Buber an interest in Hasidism, and when this image coupled with the words of fervor he read in *Zebaat Ribesh*, he recognized that the "Hasidic soul" was expressed through the Hasidic Tale; hence *Tales of the Hasidim* becomes Buber's vehicle for carrying this teaching into the world.

At the outset of my paper, I had mentioned that as a practicing Hasidic Jew, I felt some distance between the lifestyle I lived and observed around me, and Buber's anthology, namely because—while emphasizing joy, spiritual wholeness, and connection to a zaddik—Buber downplayed the importance of Jewish Law, not mentioning it more than in passing. Earlier I referenced articles by Bialik and Levine that stressed the importance of nomos in relation to narrative, but the articles by Cooper, Sufrin, and HaCohen helped me to reframe my expectations. I would like to share a few scenes of Hasidic storytelling that I observed firsthand, in order to examine the limits of Buber's concept of "ecstatic joy" and "spiritual wholeness" in comparison to Hasidic storytelling as I have experienced it. In my conclusion, I would like to relate a personal storytelling experience that—along with the aforementioned articles—helped me reconcile with Buber's goals as a storyteller, and recognize the value of his process.

A scene from a Chabad *fabrengen* will illustrate Hasidic storytelling as I had come to know it (a fabrengen is a gathering of story, song, food, drink, Chassidic teaching, often geared toward mutual encouragement amongst Chasidim towards self-betterment). It was a Shabbos (Sabbath) afternoon in the summer of 2014, and Rabbi S. Sherman, Rabbi of the Chabad Synagogue of the Main Line outside of Philadelphia, told a story of a Hasid who raised a large sum of money to redeem a fellow Jew taken captive by the local Polish landlord[64]. The landlord took the money, and then informed the hapless philanthropist that the prisoner was already dead. That night, an angel approached the Hasid in a dream, and offered a reward for attempting to fulfill this mitzvah; the Hasid would merit one of two things. Either he could taste the delight of the world-to-

[64] Redeeming a captive Jew from prison is considered one of the 613 Torah Commandments

come, or all the money he had given to the prince would be returned. The Hasid chose to taste the delight of the world to come.

Rabbi Sherman concluded the story by relating that the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Shneerson, would say that the Hasid of this story could not be a Hasid of Chabad, for if he was, he would have taken the money. Rabbi Sherman gave a pause for comic effect, and then went on to explain that the money could have been used for further tangible good deeds, such as redeeming other captives. Tangentially, this conclusion illustrates the philosophy of Chabad Hasidus (Chabad Hasidic philosophy) as action-oriented. However, the "taste" of the world to come that the Hasid merited was that the angel taught him the niggun (wordless melody) referred to as *ani zemiros*. Rabbi Sherman then launched into singing this niggun, and the men assembled around the table joined him in song. This fabrengen was like a scene right out of Buber's storytelling, live and in person. If I had read such a story in Buber's anthology, I would have been able to picture the food, music, clothing, and general atmosphere, since I had experienced these elements first hand. What about a reader who had never attended a fabrengen? Could they experience the same effect upon reading the tale? How could they incorporate the tale into their own life as much as the Hasidic Jews who could now attribute greater significance to the niggun they sang?

I perceived the fabrengen as "authentic" Hasidic storytelling, and not only because it involved real Hasidim telling a story. The setting was certainly Hasidic, but the audience was also comprised of people who lived their life according to the philosophy of the Hasidim—that is, they adhered to a system of believe and practice set forth by a Hasidic Rebbe (in this case, the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi). The story

reflected a nomos applicable to their life (namely the commandment to redeem captives), and it was told to provide additional insight to the singing a niggun that would feature prominently in the liturgy of the coming holidays at the end of the summer season. In contrast to Buber's stories, which are mostly devoid of descriptive context other than his translated words, here in front of my very eyes was the food, the music, the dress, the Sabbath day, and the lifestyle in all its authenticity, not only because of appearances, but also because the participants lived the Hasidic lifestyle. But should it be the case that the teller, audience, and context be Hasidic in order to express the "authentic" inner message of the story?

Upon further reflection I realized that the issue of "Hasidic storytelling" was a little more complicated than the purism of a Hasidic fabrengen with live Hasidim. Another story experienced first-hand will illustrate this complexity: Rabbi M. Goldberger, the Hasidic Rabbi of the Tiferes Yisrael Synagogue in Baltimore, told a story of his trip to Israel during his Shabbos Drasha (Sabbath sermon). The story was as follows: while he was at the kotel (the plaza in front of the Western Wall), a car pulled up and Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Kanievsky (a well-known, non-Hasidic Torah authority in this generation) emerged from the vehicle. Immediately Israeli soldiers surrounded the Rabbi for his security. The crowd of Jews pressed around the Rabbi, attempting to get a look at the great spiritual leader. One particularly vocal man screamed out "We demand to see the *gadol hador* (the great one of the generation[65])." He repeated this over and again, and finally the soldiers parted, whereupon the man recited a loud blessing[66]. Rabbi Goldberger told this story to illustrate how in the Jewish month of Tishrei, we should be

[65] Actually, Rabbi Kanievsky is regarded by many Hasidim as well to be the pre-eminent halachic Torah authority in this generation

[66] There is a special blessing which is recited for seeing a preeminent scholar

more audacious about our attempts to connect with G-d because of the approaching High Holy Holidays such as Rosh Hashanah (the New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). And yet, Rabbi Kanievsky—one of the main subjects of the story—is not a Hasidic Rabbi, while Rabbi Goldberger—the storyteller—is. Would this still qualify as Hasidic storytelling? Rabbi Goldberger was certainly telling a story about a *zaddik* (according to the colloquial Orthodox definition, a righteous person), but Rabbi Kanievsky is not a Hasidic *Rebbe*, the type of zaddik that Buber refers to in his tales. What constitutes Hasidic storytelling? Must the subject, the teller, and the listener be Hasidic in order for the full value of the story to be maximized? For example, does reading my small child (who cannot fully comprehend the moral of) a story about the Satmyr Rebbe count as Hasidic storytelling?

My own decision to identify as a Hasidic Jew was part of a slow, ten year process, which began with my exposure to non-Hasidic orthodox Jewry. Initially what drew me in was the music and atmosphere of the Sabbath day lunch. The melodies, food, and atmosphere had me returning every week, along with the inspirational and thought provoking ideas on the weekly Torah reading. Over time, I became exposed to other streams of Orthodox Judaism, such as the Chabad movement, which actively seeks to *mekaruv* (literally draw close) unaffiliated Jews towards the fulfillment of mitzvos, and perhaps ultimately, living a religiously observant life. Because I did not grow up in a religious home, and because Chabad was geared towards interacting with the non-religious, I was most drawn to their communities. Additionally, because Chabad believes in reaching out to Jews all over the world, no matter where I went, there was a Chabad

community to join. During these times, I was exposed to the style of prayer, the services, the music, storytelling, and Hasidic philosophy of Chabad.

Like most American Jews, if I traced back my lineage far enough, I would eventually find orthodox family members. Because I knew my family had come from Europe, I assumed they were Ashkenazi, non-Hasidic Jews (I have never confirmed this). Because there is a concept in Judaism of honoring the previous generations, I decided to follow the customs and laws of Ashkenazi Jewry, despite my involvement with Chabad. The decision to change my religious identity within Orthodox Judaism was in a large part due to reading a book by Rabbi Nachman of Breslev entitled *Likutei Moharan* (The Collected Teachings of our Master). After reading some of the teachings of this Hasidic Rebbe, I was inspired to grow out my beard, grow peyos (long hair on the side of my head), wear a streimel[67] on the Sabbath after marriage, and switch the rite of prayer to the Hasidic rite. I suppose my discovery of Hasidism in a book, coupled with memories and experiences with Hasidim, echoes Buber's rediscovery of Hasidim in opening *Zevaat Ribesh*, to see the inspirational words about the Besht.

My identity as a Hasidic Jew is complicated by my upbringing, which was not at all Hasidic, and my journey to religious Judaism, which was colored by involvement with other streams of Judaism as well. If I were to reflect on some of the elements that comprise my identity as a Hasidic Jew and differentiate my practices from those of more general Jewish Orthodoxy, I would say that the main things are appearance (beard, payos) clothing (streimel and bekishe[68] on Shabbos), rite of prayer (sefard rite), daily mikveh attendance, and the learning of Hasidic *seforim* (books on Hasidic philosophy).

[67] A fur-lined hat worn by married men on the Sabbath, holidays, and significant days for rite of passage
[68] A long coat, traditionally silk; many today are polyester

Surprisingly, living in a Hasidic community, and speaking Yiddish are not important parts of that lifestyle, probably because of my upbringing, which was not Hasidic. Most importantly, underscoring all these elements is the thread common to all streams of Orthodox Judaism: observance of the halacha (Jewish law). In summary, my Hasidic identity is comprised both of Jewish observance (common to Orthodoxy in general) and extra elements such as dress, philosophy, appearance, etc. Coming to Buber's anthology, I felt that his stories were missing these elements of religious observance, especially since Buber was avowedly a non-Hasidic (although spiritually-oriented) Jew. Buber wrote that the Hasidic life was a life of "ecstatic Joy" and finding the "messianic future in the present." Where was the reference to the practical details of daily life, namely, a system of laws that regulates every moment of an orthodox (and therefore Hasidic) Jewish life? How could one skip over these crucial details and arrive at the "core" of Hasidic philosophy?

Additionally, in my experience with Hasidic communities I found that Hasidic storytelling was not a static canonized element drawn exclusively from books. In fact, it was a living, ever growing, changing, organic element of the Hasidic lifestyle. Among the Chabad Hasidim, I heard many stories from both men and women about the Lubavitcher Rebbe, about anecdotes they had heard, or personal experiences with the Rebbe (such as receiving a dollar from the Rebbe[69], or seeing the Rebbe in a dream). In fact, Chabad has complied hundreds of videos of interviews of people telling stories of

[69] It was the custom of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to meet with individuals, address their concerns, and then give them a dollar in fulfillment of the precept to give Tzedakah. Many Hasdim save their "Rebbe Dollar." My wife has such a dollar, given to her by a spiritual mentor who met the Rebbe, and the dollar sits framed on our shelf.

their interaction with the Rebbe[70], which often involve miraculous financial, medical, and life predictions from the Rebbe. Although I never met the Lubavitcher Rebbe, I myself have several Rebbe stories.

My wife and I went to visit her sister in Crown Heights, the Lubavitch neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. We entered 770 Ocean Parkway, the world headquarters of Chabad, and the Rebbe's home and office. Curious, we walked down a hall deeper into the building, where an enthusiastic Hasid took us into a small room filled with a large switchboard. In the days before the internet, this small room was the command center of broadcasting the Rebbe's teaching all over the world. Phone lines went directly from this room to various "Chabad Houses" all over the globe, where the local *shliach* (literally "emissary," but a title that included many functions such as Rabbi, perhaps mohel, shochet, etc. depending on the needs of the community) could pick up a phone and hear a weekly address on Hasidic philosophy from the Rebbe himself. I was awed by the Rebbe's practicality and drive to use modern technology to disseminate Chasidus[71]. Although I never met the Rebbe, this visit to his office with a behind-the-scenes tour of his communications arm provided details about his life, and I felt myself drawn closer to him. As a self-identified Hasidic Jew, whose religious journey was greatly influenced by Chabad and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, this experience helped me connect to the Rebbe, serving as an example of the connection that Buber discusses in his introduction between the Hasid and the zaddik.

[70] See for example, "My Encounter with the Rebbe" for some examples of these stories: http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/523698/jewish/My-Encounter.htm

[71] Mintz also contrasts the practical nature of Chabad to other streams of Hasidism, by citing their organization of an internal police patrol to cut back on neighborhood crime in Crown Heights.

Another time, I was waiting in a Chabad shul (synagogue) for the services to start, when an acquaintance approached me, and for no particular reason, told me this story about the Rebbe: There was a local politician in New York who met with the Rebbe. After the meeting, the Rebbe pulled him aside, and the politician prepared to receive some request relating to the improvement of the Jewish neighborhood. To his surprise, the Rebbe informed him that in his opinion, Chinese immigrants were culturally more reserved than Americans, and less likely to approach the politician for the assistance they needed. He advised the politician to proactively assist the Chinese immigrant community. The politician was stunned; the Rebbe had nothing to do with Chinese immigrants. This story was meant to illustrate the humanism of the Rebbe as one who cares for all people, not just his immediate community; it echoes the theme of "becoming human" that Buber addresses, along with the theme of supernatural spiritual vision discussed by Nigal in her writings about the hallmarks of stories about the tsadiq. One could even say that this paper itself is part of a Rebbe story. I began graduate school in the Fall of 2011, left for several years, and returned to this project in the fall of 2016, in large part because the Rebbe advised that one should finish a project that they start.

There have been other times where I experienced a Hasidic story was directed towards me. For example, I was discussing with a friend who identifies as a Hasid of Chabad my reluctance to grow out my beard. He told me the story of a Hasid who complained to his Rebbe about how the Rebbe was overly friendly with a non bearded Jew. "When that man gets to heaven," the Rebbe explained, "they will say 'Jew, where is your beard?' But when you get to heaven, they will say, 'beard, where is your Jew?'" The story was meant to inculcate an understanding that external identifiers are not a mark of

spiritual authenticity, but some few weeks later, I made a decision to grow out my beard. I am not connecting the two with any kind of causality, but I have often wondered if that Hasidic story led me to contemplate a deeper understanding of the meaning of the beard, and led to my decision to let my beard grow out (Hasidim do not generally shave their beards). This experience was an example of a personalized moral illustrated through storytelling, not only first hand, but in an impromptu, organic way, based on the discussion of the moment. This organic nature of the Hasidic tale was missing from Buber's anthology, although this tension is probably common to all genres of storytelling as they make their transition to print. However, this individual anecdote illustrates the theme of the tale being told according to the needs of the moment, which Cooper discusses in his article, and Buber mentions in his prologue to the Tales.

Another example of Hasidic storytelling occurred as a Chabad Rabbi in the Baltimore area ended his Shabbosh Drasha (Sabbath Sermon) on the Sabbath which fell during the eight day festival of Chanukah, when Jews light an eight-branched candelabra called a Chanukiah. The Rabbi related a story of the Nazi death camps, where the soldier in charge of one particular bunk would set out a large vat of margarine, which the hungry Jews would climb into in order to scoop out a little something to put on their crusty bread. A certain Jew refused to denigrate himself by jumping into the vat, but one day, he leapt right in, and rolled around in the margarine fully clothed. When the guard left, he began to rip his greasy clothing into strips; his bunkmates thought he had lost his mind. He reminded them that night was the festival of Chanukah, when Jews are commanded to light the Chanukia. He used the greasy strips of cloths as wicks, and lit the menorah. The story was meant to corroborate the message of the sermon, about shining spiritual light

into the "dark places" of life. It also—as a Hasidic story—fortified the resolve of the listeners to fulfill the halachic commandments.

This emphasis on the importance of halacha in Hasidic life is not so prominently featured in Buber's storytelling. Furthermore, the above narrative, which occurred during the holocaust, challenges the canonical "sealed" nature of Buber's anthology, which effectively implies that the Hasidic story ends with the sixth generation of Hasidim. In actuality, this story illustrates the current and living nature of the Hasidic tale. Hasidic stories are swapped among friends, shared in synagogues, and delivered at the Shabbos table. Hasidic folklore did not die out within the first few generations; it is alive and well today, and a prominent part of Hasidic life.

Hasidic storytelling is also alive and growing in digital contexts like the web and video. Hasidic stories (many by storyteller Yitzchok Buxbaum) are featured on websites like Chabad.org. There is also a Chabad custom every *motzai Shabbos* (literally the exiting of the Sabbath, or Saturday night) to play a video in the shul of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe delivering a Torah discourse, followed by an interview with someone who shares a story of their interaction with the Rebbe; this video series is called *Living Torah.*[72] Hasidic storytelling has expanded beyond Hasidic circles as well, into the Reform and Conservative movements. Professional storyteller Doug Lipman writes in his article "Letting the Story Choose Me" (*The Hasidic Stories Homepage*) about a speaking engagement on a Friday night in an unnamed synagogue. He intended to tell one particular story, but found himself transitioning into a different, longer tale. The audience was polite, but he detected exasperation with the length of his performance. Lipman could not determine why his performance had gone awry, until later he met with the

[72] http://www.chabad.org/therebbe/livingtorah/default_cdo/aid/42106/jewish/Archives.htm

Rabbi, who informed Doug that the story (which was about the loss of a child) touched a personal chord, because the Rabbi had lost a child a few years before. "I no longer feel an obligation only to choose stories well. Now I also feel the obligation to let the right stories choose me" (Lipman). With this observation, Doug Lipman echoes Levi Cooper's conclusion that the Hasidic story is told according to the needs of the moment.

To supplement my research, I decided to interview the Hasidic Rabbi who had told the story about the Jew in the concentration camp. This Rabbi, I had noticed, frequently integrates storytelling into his weekly Sabbath sermon. Rabbi Elchonon Lisbon of Baltimore is a Rabbi in the Chabad Hasidic movement, (founded by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745 -1812), author of the Hasidic work the *Tanya*). Rabbi Lisbon and I sat at his dining room table, and he addressed some of my questions about Hasidism and the Hasidic tale, which we can compare to Buber's definitions, and the discoveries of Mintz and Fader.

In response to the question "what is Hasidism," Rabbi Lisbon explained that Hasidism was revealed to our recent generations by the Baal Shem Tov. It is "*Penimius Hatorah*," or the "inner teaching of Torah." Hasidism is not a revolutionary teaching, but reveals that which is already inherent in Judaism and Torah. Because of historical circumstances, the inner dimension had to be revealed in more manifest ways. Hasidism is "a manifestation of the deeper connection of the Jew to his own soul…his Torah…his creator" (Lisbon). This function of Hasidism to reveal the "inner dimension" of Torah is not so clearly explained by Buber, but the mention of connection to a deeper layer of self echoes what Buber writes about the Rebbe facilitating spiritual wholeness by connecting heaven and earth, and his Hasidim to G-d. Furthermore, Rabbi Lisbon validates Buber's

claim that Hasidism presents nothing revolutionary in terms of material, for such material was already an inherent part of Judaism.

Rabbi Lisbon explained the nature of the Rebbe, the Hasid, and the relationship between them. The "Rebbe" is a special soul that comes into the world for the purpose of living as a role model, mentor, teacher, and guide for other Jewish people, to illustrate what it means to be a true servant of G-d. He helps those who want to be connected to him know proper behavior and direction in life. A Rebbe is a Tzadik, because such leadership requires "a righteous person." A tzadik is one who has developed (through lineage and/or education) a selfless nature, synchronized to a higher purpose in life; he is completely selfless and in-touch with a higher reality, and the tzadik's life is "a physical manifestation of higher reality." A Hasid spends a lifetime trying live a lifestyle based on the inner teachings of Torah—selflessness, dedication, love, and joy in the service of Hashem (a word for G-d), which is manifested in the relationship between man and G-d, and man and fellow man. For the Hasid, G-d is always in front of him (or her). It is demanding and rigorous, but also inspirational and exciting. Here Rabbi Lisbon validates Buber's emphasis on the importance of "becoming human" and the sanctity of interpersonal relationships.

According to Rabbi Lisbon, although Hasidism follows the same Torah as general Jewish Orthodoxy, it differs, for the Rebbe inspires his Hasidism with a higher degree of religious observance, "not just mitzvah, but *hidur* [beautification of the] mitzvah…observance of the mitzvah in the most meticulous way" without the need to rationalize or "work around" observance: Hasidim search for truth rather than compromise, and "a true Hasidic lifestyle will manifest those ideals." Jewish Orthodoxy

requires following the 613 mitzvos [commandments], but Hasidim may be distinguished by the fact that "the Hasid has G-d, neshama [soul], purpose" much more often as part of the conversation than a traditional religious Jew, for his purpose is "to find a deeper and more significant connection to Hashem, Torah and Mitzvos" than otherwise required by Jewish Orthodoxy. Meaning and significance to the law is given far more attention and detail in Hasidic thought. Here Rabbi Lisbon validates the arguments of critics that importance of Halacha was downplayed in Buber's writing, when in actuality it is central to the Hasidic lifestyle.

When I asked about elaboration on the relationship between the Rebbe and his Hasidim, Rabbi Lisbon paused to give this question serious thought. "A Hasid finds his Rebbe," he began. A Hassid's Rebbe is someone who knows the soul of his Hasidim, and the soul of the Rebbe is a general soul that incorporates the souls of his Hasidim in his circle and beyond. The Hasid attempts to live a lifestyle through the instructions of his Rebbe, because his Rebbe is a personification of how the Torah is supposed to be lived. Here Rabbi Lisbon echoes the writing of Mintz, and even Buber in his introduction, when he writes of the zaddik as one who attends to the big and little concerns of his Hasidim—he knows and cares for them on a personal level.

Hasidic storytelling is a powerful tool that allows a Hasid to learn Hasidic philosophy and see how it was practiced by the previous generation; it takes theory and makes it real by applying the Hasidus [Hasidic philosophy] to different life situations. We learn how the Hasidim maintained their Hasidim, and how the Rebbe lived his life. Even the Torah itself follows this pattern, for before we receive the laws (as we might say, *nomos*), we learn about the stories of the patriarchs in the book of Genesis (*narrative*).

Serving a great Torah master is of greater benefit than learning from the Torah master, because one can see how the lifestyle is actually lived. Seeing that reality is a powerful tool of inspiration, and that is the function of the Hasidic tale: to teach the listener about how to live the Hasidic life, a life where the Torah is observed along the most meticulous, beautified lines.

As for the method of categorizing the tales, the stories may come in many forms, "and each story has its place." The bottom line is that it is a mitzvah to tell over the story, for we see what another Hasidic did in that situation, and therefore, Hasidic storytelling is "as varied as life itself." As for the kabbalistic power of storytelling to create a change in reality, Rabbi Lisbon responded that it was possible "only if the person who hears the story becomes a changed person because of the story. It can fall on deaf ears and not go anywhere." In Hebrew, the word for story is *sipur*, which relates to the word *saphir* (gemstones, particularly sapphire). If you take the story to heart and start living it, then you become a brilliant gem, and that is the purpose of the story fulfilled. There may be some deeper kabbalistic effect, but that's not the intent of the story; rather, we must focus on the message and adopt what the story is telling us. According to Rabbi Lisbon, everything in Torah has a ripple effect, but the Rebbe does not tell the story for the purpose of kabbalistic machinations—he tells it for the Hasidim to consciously absorb, take the message to heart, and live it out.

To illustrate an example of this didactic inspirational nature of the Hasidic tale, I would actually like to reference another moment in my interactions with Rabbi Lisbon. During a Sabbath day lunch meal on a separate occasion, he had an unusual bottle brought over to the table, which he had purchased as a souvenir from a spring in the

Ukraine, attributed to a miracle of the Baal Shem Tov. Once, when the Baal Shem was walking in the woods, the time came for the afternoon prayer. The Baal Shem Tov would always wash his hands before praying, but there was no water to be found. He lay down on the ground and asked that G-d not make him pray without first washing his hands, whereupon a spring came up from the ground, and to this day, one can visit the spring which is attributed to the Baal Shem Tov. Rabbi Lisbon had visited this spring, and said that while the surrounding landscape was locked in snow and ice, the water of the spring was unfrozen moving, from which he took the message that despite the spiritual coldness or stagnancy of one's surroundings, one can maintain their spiritual life force by continuing to move. Here, Rabbi Lisbon illustrated that the prime function of the Hasidic tale was drawing an inspirational message from the story, as he had said in my interview with him.

Rabbi Lisbon stated that this inspirational function of the tale is especially seen in the *fabrengen*, a central part of Chabad Hasidic practice, where Hasidim gather together to tell over stories that illustrate the beauty of the Torah in real terms. Hasidim are encouraged to write "their part" in the story and be inspired. However, despite their important place at the fabrengen, there is not a specific place for the Hasdic story, for it is best told "wherever it fits"…if the story is part of a Torah message, it takes the message out of the realm of the scholastic into the actual. Storytelling is not supposed to be ritualized or formal, because storytelling (and in particular, the practice of fabrengen) requires the spontaneity of reaching out from the heart to give another Hasid help, "the deepest measure of love and concern for each other." I have experienced what Rabbi Lisbon discusses firsthand, when, in casual conversation with Hasidim, they begin to tell

stories of Hasidim and/or Rebbes from previous generations that relate to the topic we are discussing. Here we see that the extemporaneous nature of the fabrengen again highlights the nature of the Hasidic tale to be told according to the needs of the moment.

I asked Rabbi Lisbon to address the universal applicability of Hasidic storytelling. "Hasidus [Hasidism] was never meant to be a group within Judaism. It was meant to help Jews access the deepest part of their neshama (soul), and for everybody to gain something from that journey." I asked Rabbi Lisbon if there was possibility for the power of the Hasidic story to reach beyond Jewish circles, to non-Jews as well. Could the stories present anything of value and significance for the wider world, which Buber seems to indicate in his introduction, and by the very act of translating the tales for a wider readership? "I think so," Rabbi Lisbon responded, "because we all have a soul, and every soul has an inner and exterior level. To transition from external life to a spiritual life…is something that all people can do…to have a deeper connection to something more inward…more intensely part of an essential self." I asked Rabbi Lisbon how he had seen this universal potential in practice, and he replied that in telling Hasidic stories to non-Jewish groups, he has seen a positive response. The audience has told him the stories are "eye-opening" and "inspirational." It gives them a connection to an inner dimension.

Storytelling is integral to Hasidism because it takes the Torah out of the realm of the instructional into the experiential—but could that full Hasidic experience be communicated to an audience that did not live the Hasidic lifestyle? I explained to Rabbi Lisbon that many of his answers about Hasidism, the Rebbe, the Hasid, and Hasidic storytelling were explicitly mentioned by Buber in his writing (albeit an emphasis on Halacha was missing). I asked Rabbi Lisbon to address why, as a Hasidic Jew, I felt

something missing from Buber's anthology, especially because of the omission of reference to Halacha. Rabbi Lisbon responded by saying that as far as Buber's ability to carry the Hasidic message through his stories goes, Buber looks at the stories as an outsider (Buber himself would perhaps not deny this, since he openly stated that he could not live as a Hasid). I asked if Buber's claim of ecstatic joy as the central tenet of Hasdism was "ambiguous, and yet accurate." Rabbi Lisbon answered (in true Hasidic storytelling fashion) with a story from the Rebbe Maharash (the fourth Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch 1834 – 1882).

An unlearned farmer hired a tutor for his son, and the farmer would also give the tutor his mail to read out loud. One day, the farmer handed the tutor a particular letter, which stated that the farmer's father had passed away. Upon hearing the news, the farmer fainted. The Rebbe Maharash asks: why, when the farmer hears the news, he faints, but the tutor who reads the news has no reaction, and even continues to read? The difference is that the news is about the farmer's father—it means something to him, but it does not have personal significance for the tutor. "Buber writes stories, [but] it's not his father. They're stories on paper. The message cannot come across from a pen that looks at it from the outside as opposed to the inside" (Lisbon).

In conclusion, Rabbi Lisbon confirmed many of Buber's statements about Hasidism, the Rebbe, Hasidim, and Hasidic storytelling. He seemed to imply that the full experience of Hasidic storytelling was best experienced by Hasidim telling, receiving, and living out the message of the tales, for one of the prime focuses of the tale was to inspire and instruct Hasidim on how to live the Hasidic lifestyle. And yet, Hasidism did offer something to the wider world; an opportunity to see the deeper meaning in life, and

connect to the deeper parts of one's self and the Divine. In my reading of Buber, I had focused on his status as an "outsider," and it left me with a feeling that the tales were somehow inauthentic, a charge that was echoed by critics who took issue with his romanticized depiction, linguistic gentrification, historical inaccuracy, or neglect of halachic references. What if I could shift my focus from what was "lacking" in Buber's anthology, to what it offered—that is, the opportunity to connect with something deeper in life? Admittedly, Buber downplayed the interplay between Jewish ritual law and storytelling, and we have seen the importance of that interweaving through the research of Mintz and Fader, and the writings of Bialik and Covers. And yet, surely the possibility of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness could still be applicable to people who did not incorporate the Hasidic legend into their own lives through the fulfillment of the Hasidic lifestyle. A personal storytelling experience with the Hasidic legend leads me to conclude that Buber's vision indeed has universal potential.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

In the spring semester of 2013, I was asked to make a presentation on Hasidic Legends for a class I was taking as a graduate student[73]. There were two stories I particularly gravitated towards that I had read and decided to share as samples of Hasidic storytelling (one in a pamphlet about the power of saying Psalms, and another in an anthology called *A Treasury of Chasidic Tales*, by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, a tale which was also in Buber's anthology[74]). As the day of the presentation approached, I grew nervous about my ability to captivate the audience with these Hasidic tales, depicting a lifestyle that had nothing to do with their own: how would they react to these stories? Would I be able to convey them in an engaging way?

I decided to amend the morals of these tales to make them more accessible, changing the word "Jew(s)" to "person" or "people" and making the morals "when a *person* experiences remorse in their heart, that repentance is sufficient," and "these are the heartfelt prayers of the simple *people*." I also changed some of the Hebrew words into their English equivalents in order to make the language understandable. The first story went as follows:

"Once a man violated the Sabbath by accident [here I briefly explained the concept of the Sabbath and how it involves refraining from certain creative or work-related activities]. He asked his Rabbi for a way to repent, and the rabbi suggested he light candles every Friday afternoon in synagogue, before the approach of the Sabbath.

[73] This was a course taught by Dr. Dorothee Ostmeier on Magic, the Uncanny, and Surrealistic and Fantastic Tales

[74] Buber, "Heavy Pennance." *Tales of the Hasidim*, pages 142-143.

Another man sitting and learning at the back of the synagogue saw this person lighting candles and scoffed at how easy it was for this sinner to repent. Every week, he would cause something go awry with the candles—they would go out, or a dog would come along and eat them.

"One afternoon, this man sitting and learning in the back of the synagogue received a letter from the Baal Shem Tov himself, an invitation to spend Shabbos [the Sabbath] together. He set out in a coach to see the Baal Shem Tov, but along the journey, one bad thing after another kept happening: the wheels broke, the horses died, and the wagon got stuck in the mud. Even though the man had left on Wednesday, it was late Friday afternoon before he arrived in the Baal Shem Tov's city, dangerously close to the arrival of the Sabbath [here I reiterated that it is forbidden to travel on the Sabbath]. He burst through the door, only to find the Baal Shem Tov standing by the table holding a wine goblet, sanctifying the Sabbath. The man fainted and fell to the floor: he had arrived too late, and violated the Sabbath by traveling.

"When he awoke, the Baal Shem Tov told him that the Sabbath had not really arrived yet, and that he was just bringing in the Sabbath early by choice. The Baal Shem Tov explained that he knew this man scoffed at the sinner's simple act of repentance, and he had invited him here, orchestrating everything in order to illustrate that *when a person feels remorse in his heart* (as the man surely did coming into the Baal Shem Tov's house, thinking that he had violated the Sabbath) *that is sufficient repentance*."

The second story went as follows:

"At the third meal of the Sabbath, the Baal Shem Tov would invite his most elect disciples to sit around the table as he gave over a deep kabbalistic discourse. One of the Hasidim asked the Baal Shem Tov why he favored the simple people so much.

"The Baal Shem Tov commanded his Hasidim to close their eyes and hold hands, forming a ring around the table. Then he launched into the singing of a niggun [wordless melody] and the Hasidim felt themselves lifted up to supernal heights. They began to scream out phrases in Yiddish like "please G-d, help us to have children," or "please G-d, help me to make the money I need to support my family." Soon the feeling subsided, and the Hasidim felt themselves back in this world.

"The Baal Shem Tov explained that his lofty, accomplished Hasidim, well versed in the study of the Torah and the Kabbalah, were experiencing the prayers of the simple people down the street, gathered in the synagogue, who were to ignorant to do anything other than recite the Psalms with no understanding, and cry out to G-d with their whole heart. *These are the prayers of the simple people.*"

As I looked around at the students, I was surprised to find that I had their full attention. They were listening to every word, and engaged in the stories. Later, reflecting upon the experience, I realized why they were engaged and able to connect to the stories: I was giving them a moral about the power of true, heartfelt remorse, and the power of simple people to accomplish great things. This was not a moral locked into the Hasidic world, dependent on the fulfillment of Jewish Law; it was a moral with universal potential.

The term "universal" might seem problematic, since it is difficult to say that anything other than the basic functions of life can apply to every group of people in the

world. Indeed, I cannot prove that a moral about the sincerity of heartfelt remorse and the power of simple people to accomplish great things would resonate with every single person, but I argue that it is valid to say these morals can be meaningful beyond the Hasidic world that Buber portrays; therefore, I say that the Hasidic legend indeed has a potential for universal applicability. Again, I quote Buber himself, who writes in the foreword to *Hasidism* that "Hasidic truth [is] vitally important for Jews, Christians, and others…for now is the hour, when we are in danger of forgetting for what purpose we are on earth" (foreword). Additionally, we might question the applicability of Buber's work today based on the timing of his remarks. At the outset of his work with Hasidism, his existential search for meaning was conducted against the confusion and fragmentation of multiple currents of thought[75] that vied for the loyalty of humankind as the world emerged into the twentieth century; at the conclusion of his work, the world had just experienced two World Wars, a Holocaust, and total destruction; therefore, the urgency of the hour as it relates to the quest for meaning is well understood in his foreword. Whether or not we live in such tumultuous times today, I am not qualified to answer. However, humankind has always searched for deeper meaning in life, regardless of the time period and place, whether it is in eighteenth-century Poland, or the twenty-first century United States. Cooper has helped us see that the Hasidic tale has a malleability whereby it can be applied in many different situations. Therefore, I argue that the universal potential of the Hasidic tale which Buber presents is applicable even for today.

Granted, unlike Buber, in my presentation of the stories I explained the halachic concepts in some detail (for example, the Sabbath), for otherwise I felt that the listeners would not understand the story. And yet, in other ways, I emulated Buber's process of

[75] For example, as it relates to Jews in Europe: Zionism, Orthodoxy, the Haskalah, just to name a few.

translation. I transposed words out of Hebrew and into English, in order to make them less foreign-sounding to my audience; I removed the word "Jew" and replaced it with the more general "person" and "people." Did my stories remain authentic? I believe they did. Would my renditions be labeled as "romanticized" or "inaccurate"? Perhaps they would be, but my reflection on the storytelling experience helped me understand Buber's work and his goals. Buber did not craft an anthology of Hasidic Legends for Hasidic Jews. As a practicing Hasidic Jew reading his anthology, I demanded a halachic "authenticity" which was not germane to his text. I still believe that in order to be "Hasidic" one needs to follow Jewish Law (for example, observing the Sabbath and laws of kashrus), and Buber seems to confirm this himself by writing that despite his immersion in Hasidic texts, he chooses not to adopt the lifestyle. However, I do not believe that the message of "ecstatic joy" and "spiritual wholeness" achieved in the path to "becoming [more] human" should be confined to Hasidism only. What Buber presents is the possibility of achieving these goals through reading about the lives of the Hasidic masters, the zaddikim. *Tales of the Hasidim* is Buber's instruction manual for this process. It is his universal vision, accessible to all people, who can achieve a life of ecstatic joy and spiritual wholeness that is shown to us by the Hasidic masters.

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