

Rabbi Nahman Bratslaver's Journey to the Land of Israel

Arthur Green

I

The journey of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav to the Land of Israel in 1798–99 has long been seen as a turning point in the life of that incredibly complex and baffling figure. No wonder; it was Nahman himself, both in direct statements and through various half-hidden references, who first revealed the centrality of this event to any understanding of his life and career. Though he had already, with great reluctance, taken on the role of Zaddik for a small band of followers before his journey, it was only upon his return from Eretz Israel that the twenty-seven-year-old Nahman really allowed himself to become a public figure. He ordered any teachings of his which dated from before that journey be deleted from his collected works, claiming that they were now of little worth.¹ In later periods of spiritual dryness Nahman was to proclaim that it was only the fact of his journey to the Holy Land that kept him “alive” and allowed him to continue in his role as Zaddik.²

The account of Nahman's journey has survived in two versions, both of them composed by his leading disciple and secretary Nathan of Nemirov. One of these versions, the one comprising the second part of Nathan's *Shivhe ha-RaN* (also published separately under the title *Mas'ot ha-Yam*), was written with considerable literary flourish, and indeed with just a touch of that mythic imagination which so characterizes Nahman's own *Sippure Ma'asiyyot*. The second version, forming a chapter of the fuller biographical memoir entitled *Hayye MoHaRaN*, is highly fragmentary and unpolished but contains a wealth of materials, particularly with regard to explanations of the journey. The dating of these two accounts and the relationship between them has been the subject of a thoroughgoing study by Ada Rapoport.³

1. *Hayye MoHaRaN* (henceforth: *Hayye*), *sihot ha-shayyakhim la-torot* 55; *Hayye* II, *Ma'alat torato* 18, 43; *'avodat ha-shem* 33. The two major sources on Nahman's journey will be designated as follows: *Shivhe ha-RaN*, Part II (*Mas'ot ha-Yam*) = *Shiv*; and *Hayye MoHaRaN*, *nesi'ato le-'eretz yisra'el* = *EY*.

2. *Sihot ha-RaN* (henceforth: *Sihot*) 153.

3. “Two Sources on R. Nahman's Journey to the Holy Land” [Hebrew], *KS*, XLVI (1971), 147–53. Rapoport has shown that the version of *Shivhe ha-RaN* is the earlier of the two accounts.

Nathan's memoirs in general are impressive and unique within Hasidism for their full and highly accurate recording of detail, offered without the supernaturalistic embellishments so characteristic of other Hasidic tales of the masters. In seeking to explain this phenomenon, Joseph Dan has referred to the Bratslav corpus as hagiography that has transcended itself; the events of the master's life are so crucial and holy in themselves that one dare not tamper with them.⁴ The accuracy of Nathan as a reporter (with minor exceptions) is also accepted in the studies of Joseph Weiss and Mendel Piekartz, the basic critical writers on the history of Bratslav. Elsewhere we hope to show that this regard for biographical detail, on the face of it so nearly modern, is deeply tied to the Bratslav image of Nahman as the last of the great Zaddikim in world history, and is modeled on what the Hasidim took to be the "historical" descriptions of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai and his circle in the Zohar.

This high regard for detail does not, however, keep the chronicler in *Shivhe ha-Ra'N* from filling his account with an exciting aura of mysterious moments of seemingly great but hidden significance: Nahman's nocturnal visit to Kamenets-Podolsk, the childish games he played in Istanbul, his readiness to leave the Land almost as soon as he had set foot on its soil, his strange encounter with a young Arab in Haifa, his visits with the Hasidic community of Tiberias and at the graves of the saints—all of these lend to the account a sense of some secret and divine mission, the precise nature of which remains as hidden as the mysterious nature of Nahman himself. One cannot help but feel, in reading this account, that here Nahman in life has appeared as a character out of one of his own later stories.

The story of Nahman's journey to the Holy Land has fired the imaginations of modern writers on Hasidism no less than it has served as a source of inspiration to the Bratslav Hasidim themselves.⁵ Several writers have tried to

This version, first published in 1815 as an addendum to the first edition of Nahman's *Sippure Ma'asiyyot*, was probably composed sometime shortly after Nahman's death in 1810. The account in *Hayye MoHaRa'N* must have been composed sometime after Nathan's own visit to the Holy Land in 1822, to which he makes reference (# 10). Rapoport's conclusions, with which I am in full agreement, are disputed by Joseph Dan (*Ha-Sippur ha-Hasidi* [Jerusalem, 1975], p. 185) who seems to claim that the *Shivhe* version was written by someone other than Nathan. Nahman's sayings with regard to the sanctity of the Holy Land have been collected by Nahman of Cheryn in his *Zimrat he-'Aretz* (Lvov, 1876).

4. Dan, *Sippur*, pp. 183 ff.

5. The chief modern discussions of the journey are to be found in S. A. Horodezky, *Ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Hasidim* (Tel Aviv, 1953), III, 23 ff.; IV, 57 ff.; idem, *Ole Tziyyon* (Tel Aviv, 1947), pp. 160 ff.; H. Zeitlin, *Reb Nahman Braslaver* (New York, 1952), pp. 82 ff.; S. M. Dubnov, *Toledot ha-Hasidut* (Tel Aviv, 1960), pp. 292 ff.; M. Buber, *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman* (New York, 1956), pp. 179 ff.; and J. K. Miklishansky in *Ha-Hasidut ve-Tziyyon* (Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 246 ff.

describe the journey in proto-Zionist terms, as the example *par excellence* of the great attachment of Hasidism to the Land of Israel. Others have been baffled by it, and like nearly everything else in the life of the much misunderstood Nahman, it has even been the source of calumny.⁶ The most interesting explanation of the journey is that undertaken several years ago by Neal Rose, who tried to apply to Nahman the insights of Mircea Eliade concerning rites of passage and the journey to the center, as described in Eliade's many writings on the phenomenology of religion.⁷ The present study agrees with Rose in the evocation of Eliade's categories for an understanding of Nahman's voyage, but with some serious shifts of focus. The fact is that despite the many treatments of the subject, no one has yet carefully examined the sources in Nathan's writings, including several very important and revealing statements by Nahman himself, in order to understand the true motivation for the journey and its meaning in Nahman's life.

The fact that Nahman should choose to embark upon a journey to the Land of Israel is on the face of it no cause for surprise. The eighteenth century had seen a great increase in travel and emigration of Eastern European Jews to the Holy Land. At first these journeys took place in circles closely connected to the Sabbatian movement,⁸ but the voyagers later came to include key figures of early Hasidism. The meaning and possible messianic implications of these journeys have been much discussed by modern historians of the Hasidic movement.⁹

6. S. M. Dubnov sees the journey as a result of Nahman's quarrel with his uncle Barukh, who could not tolerate Nahman as a competitor for power among Ukrainian Hasidim. Since Nahman had no major support in this battle, "a new idea arose in his mind: to journey to the Land of Israel and to receive a sort of authorization from the holiness of the Land and the group of Zaddikim there" (*Toledot*, p. 292). Following Dubnov's argument is Solomon Zeitlin, who used the occasion of a review of Jacob Minkin's *The Romance of Hasidism* to propose a shockingly vituperative attack on Nahman (*JQR*, n.s. XXVII [1937], 251). Only because such a view has been propounded by otherwise respectable scholars is it worthy of refutation. Nahman's argument with his uncle did not occur until some time after his return from Eretz Israel. In the winter of 1802-3 "there was still peace between them" (*Yeme MaHaRNaT* [Bene Berak, 1956], pp. 12 ff.), and this was four years after Nahman's return in 1799. Further, Nahman was on good terms with any number of Zaddikim in the Ukraine in this early period. Surely Levi Yizhaq of Berdichev, who stood by Nahman through all his later difficulties, would gladly have supported him had he been in any difficulty in 1798. Less pernicious than this view of the journey but no more accurate was that of Horodezky (*Hasidut*, III, 25), who claimed that Nahman's plan was to settle in the Holy Land. There is no evidence to support the contention that anything more than a short visit was intended.

7. "Eretz Israel in the Theology and Experience of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav," *Journal of Hebraic Studies*, I (1970), 63 ff.

8. Best known of these is the pilgrimage led by Judah Hasid and Hayyim Mal'akh in 1700. For a full discussion of that journey, see M. Benayahu, "The Holy Brotherhood of R. Judah Hasid," in *Shneur Zalman Shazar Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1960), pp. 131 ff.

9. Cf. I. Heilpern, *Ha-'Aliyyot ha-Rishonot shel ha-Hasidim le-'Eretz Yisra'el* (Jerusalem, 1947). These journeys have been discussed within the context of the place of messianism in the Hasidic

The first of these journeys within circles close to Hasidism was that of Gershon of Kutow (Kitov), the brother-in-law of the Ba'al Shem Tov and a member of the Klaus in Brody, who arrived in Eretz Israel in 1747.¹⁰ R. Gershon first settled in Hebron and later in Jerusalem, where he joined the already established Kabbalistic community of Beth-El. Nahman's own paternal grandfather, Nahman of Gorodenka, who was also a member of the Ba'al Shem Tov's circle, settled in the Galilee in 1764, along with Menahem Mendel of Premyshlyany.¹¹ The Ba'al Shem Tov himself had set out on such a journey, as did his disciple Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye. The BeSHT interrupted his journey at Istanbul and returned to Podolia, a fact which has led to much speculation on the part of historians.¹² In some way he must have felt that it was not right for him to proceed further. Whether this had to do with a sense that his leadership was needed at home or with a feeling of some other spiritual "obstacle" cannot be determined from the available sources, highly shrouded as they are in legendary embellishments. In his famous letter to Gershon of Kutow, written around 1750, the BeSHT admitted that he had given up on his plans to visit the Holy Land.¹³ In the case of Jacob Joseph, who was to serve as courier for that letter, it was apparently the BeSHT himself who advised him to stay at home.¹⁴ Years later Pinhas of Korzec also attempted a journey to the Holy Land, but he died shortly after he had set out on his way in 1791.¹⁵ Of the Miedzyrzec circle, Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk and Abraham of Kalisk arrived in Eretz Israel in 1777, settling first in Safed and

movement. Those who tend to place a greater emphasis on the role of messianism in Hasidism (Dinur, Tishby) will look for significance in the journeys of early Hasidic figures to the Holy Land (especially Ben Zion Dinur, *Be-Mifneh ha-Dorot* [Jerusalem, 1955], pp. 192 ff.), while their opponents in this larger controversy (Buber, Scholem, Schatz) will tend to see such pilgrimages as lacking in larger significance.

10. Cf. A. J. Heschel, "R. Gershon Kutover," *HUCA*, XXIII (1950-51), Part I, Hebrew section, 46 ff. This article contains a wealth of valuable information on the earliest Hasidic journeys to Eretz Israel.

11. Their journey and settlement were described by Simhah ben Joshua of Zalozhty in *Sippure 'Eretz ha-Galil*, published as a section of his *'Ahavat Tziyyon* (Grodno, 1790), and reprinted by A. Ya'ari in *Mas'ot 'Eretz Yisra'el* (Tel Aviv, 1946).

12. The BeSHT's aborted journey is briefly mentioned in *Shivhe ha-BeSHT*, ed. S. A. Horodezky (Berlin, 1922), pp. 48, 111 f. A. Ya'ari has pointed out that the Yiddish version of *Shivhe ha-BeSHT* treats the journey more explicitly than does the better-known Hebrew version (*KS*, XXXIX [1964], 559 ff.). Dinur (*Be-Mifneh*) makes much of this journey, seeing its failure as the crucial turning point in the early history of the Hasidic movement.

13. "If God wills it, I shall be with you—but this is not the proper time for it." The letter was published by Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye at the end of his *Ben Porat Yosef* (Korzec, 1781), and has been frequently reprinted.

14. *Shivhe ha-BeSHT*, p. 50.

15. M. Biber, *Mazkeret li-Gedole Ostrog* (Berdichev, 1907), p. 212; Horodezky, *Hasidut*, I, 152 f.

later in Tiberias. They became the effective leaders of the Hasidic community in the Holy Land.¹⁶

Among Nahman's stated purposes in journeying to the Land of Israel was his desire to commune with his grandfather, who lay buried in the graveyard of Tiberias. Given the young Nahman's penchant for visiting the grave of the Ba'al Shem Tov (his maternal great-grandfather),¹⁷ it is hardly surprising that he should have wanted to be at the burial place of his paternal grandfather as well, "so that he always have access to that which he is to know through him."¹⁸ A visit to the grave of his saintly forebearer was not merely a matter of respect, but might be a source of some revealed "knowledge" from the upper world.¹⁹ He sought the same sort of instruction at the graveside of the elder Nahman that he felt himself to have received at the grave of the BeSHT. In a larger sense, in seeking to undertake the dangerous but sacred journey to the Holy Land, Nahman was following the example of his two revered ancestral heroes. We must hasten to add, however, that communion with the spirit of his late grandfather was perhaps the least of the highly complicated purposes that moved Nahman toward this voyage. As we shall see, he nearly missed visiting Tiberias altogether, and it seems to have required both the pleas of the living and the attraction of the gravesite to get him there.

Before seeking to understand Nahman's complex motives for journeying to the Holy Land, it is appropriate that we recount the details of the journey itself, as recorded in the writings of Nathan of Nemirov. It should be emphasized that none of this account is first-hand; Nathan met Nahman only several years after the latter's return from Eretz Israel. The account must thus be seen as one based entirely on recollections shared with Nathan by Nahman's friend and earliest disciple, Simeon, who accompanied his master on

16. Heilpern, *Aliyyot*, and further details in Gershon Hundert, "Toward a Biography of R. Abraham Kalisker" (M.A. thesis, Ohio State University).

17. *Shivhe ha-Ra'N*, I, 19.

18. EY 5. This account contains a typical example of the self-censorship found in many Bratslav sources. When Nahman was living in Medvedevka and was unable to make the journey to Medzhibozh, where the BeSHT was buried, he would send messages to the BeSHT through the Zaddik Isaiah of Yanev, who lay buried in the nearby Smela graveyard. For a while he communed with Nahman of Gorodenka in the same way, but at some point he was prevented from doing so. Nathan's account reads: "He also said that he was going to Eretz Israel for this reason. Previously, when he had needed something from his grandfather R. Nahman, who lay buried in Eretz Israel, he would send the Zaddik R. Isaiah, who lay in Smela. But now, etc., and he could not send him." It would be interesting to know what lies behind that "etc." of censorship.

19. Communion with the spirits of the saintly dead as a means toward mystical enlightenment was well known among the Safed Kabbalists of the sixteenth century. The best example of such mystical visits to sacred gravesites is to be found in Moses Cordovero's mystical diary *Sefer Gerushin*. This phenomenon has been discussed by R. J. Z. Werblowsky in his *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 51 ff. Cf. especially the passage by R. Hayyim Vital quoted on p. 76.

the journey, and to a lesser extent by Nahman himself. In retelling the tale, we have omitted certain repeated accounts of the great dangers and trials, as well as the constant side remarks in praise of the master's heroism, seeking to glean from Nathan's rather elaborate rendition what is more or less a simple and factual account of Nahman's journey.

II

Nahman's announcement of his decision to travel to Eretz Israel was preceded by another mysterious journey, a visit to Kamenets-Podolsk, which he undertook in the early spring of 1798. This journey set the pattern for a number of such visits to various locales in the Ukraine, which Nahman would visit incognito and where he was reputed to have performed the unfathomable acts of a hidden Zaddik. On his journey to Kamenets he was accompanied by his friend Simeon and by another disciple whose name is not given. When they set out from Medvedevka, their destination was not yet known to them; it was only after a stop at Medzhibozh and a visit with his parents that Nahman was "informed by heaven"²⁰ as to the destination of this journey.

The city of Kamenets-Podolsk is well known in Jewish history and in Hasidic lore for one reason: it was here that the famous debate with the followers of Jacob Frank had taken place in 1757, and the city—which had no Jews—was thus seen as a locus of the much-hated Frankist movement. According to Hasidic legend, both the Ba'al Shem Tov and Nahman of Gorodenka had debated the Frankists (though some sources connect this legend to the Lvov debate);²¹ it is no wonder that Kamenets should have held some fascination for Nahman.

This fact has led Hillel Zeitlin to the highly interesting conclusion²² that Nahman visited with Frankists in Kamenets, perhaps trying to win back their souls for Judaism. This theory, however, misses the mark in one crucial way: we know of no community of Frankists that survived in Kamenets as late as 1798, and it seems highly unlikely that there was one. The Jews were driven out of that and other cities of Podolia following the death of their protector Bishop Dembowski a few months after that first debate. After the Lvov

20. *Shiv*. 15-16; parallel in EY 1.

21. A. D. Twerski, *Sefer ha-Yahas mi-Chernobyl ve-Ruzhin* (Lublin, 1938), p. 100. M. Balaban denies the historicity of these traditions (*Toledot ha-Tenu'ah ha-Frankii* [Tel Aviv, 1934], pp. 295 ff., esp. p. 316).

22. Zeitlin, *Reb Nakhman Braslaver*, pp. 84 f.

debate and the conversions of 1759–60 we do not hear of Frankists settling in Kamenets, where as Jews they would not formerly have been permitted to dwell. By the end of the eighteenth century the center of Frankism had moved westward to Moravia and Germany, and those Polish Frankists who had converted were centered in Warsaw. While there may have been isolated crypto-Sabbatians in the Ukraine as late as the turn of the nineteenth century, it is clear that forty years after the debates the association of Kamenets-Podolsk with Frankism was a matter of memory, not of living fact.²³

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that Nahman's visit to Kamenets had something to do with the *former* presence of Frankists in that city. After violating the local ordinance which forbade any Jew to spend a night within the city limits,²⁴ Nahman and his anonymous disciple (Simeon had remained behind at Medzhibozh) went calling at certain houses in the city. Once inside the house, Nahman would recite the proper blessing and have a drink of liquor. It would seem that during the night Nahman had inquired or by some means divined which had been the houses occupied by Frankists during the Kamenets debate. He then gained entry to those houses, and by means of his blessing and the glass of *schnapps* sought to perform some mysterious rite of purification. The custom of having a drink for the *tiqqun* (restoration) of a soul is well known in Hasidism; here, however, it seems to be the dwellings rather than the souls which Nahman had in mind. These houses had to be purified of the Frankist stain so that Jews might dwell in them again. Indeed, Nathan tells us, shortly after Nahman's visit the residence ban on Jews in Kamenets was lifted.²⁵

That the visit to Kamenets had something to do with the heretical past of that city is confirmed by Nahman's own words concerning the meaning of his visit there: "Our master said that he who understands why the Land of Israel was first ruled by Canaanites and only afterwards by Israel will understand why he was first in Kamenets and only afterwards in Eretz Israel."²⁶

The analogy clearly points to a version of the "descent of the Zaddik" into the realm of impurity before he could attain to a higher rung of perfection.

23. Balaban, *Ha-Tenu'ah ha-Frankit*, pp. 192 ff.

24. There were frequent expulsions of Jews from that city in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The most effective of these bans seems to have been that of 1750, which may in fact have kept Jews out of Kamenets for as long as fifty years. These expulsions are discussed by R. Mahler in *Di Yidn in Poiln* (New York, 1946), p. 234.

25. The ban was lifted, according to Mahler (*A History of Modern Jewry* [New York, 1971], p. 381), in 1797, a year before Nahman's visit. There was, however, a meeting of Podolian notables at Kamenets in June of 1798 (*ibid.*, p. 383) which may have, among other things, ratified this edict.

26. *Shiv. 2. Shiv. 3* contains a censored reference to the fact that the journey to Kamenets caused a good deal of controversy. "Everyone offered some interpretation of it, some praising it while others etc."

This idea, itself deeply rooted in Sabbatian thinking,²⁷ was generally referred in Hasidism to the work of the Zaddik in redeeming the souls of others. It plays a major role, as is known, in Nahman's own later thinking.²⁸ To reach the great heights which Nahman sought on his journey to the Holy Land, he would have to stoop to the greatest depths. He who seeks to rise to that most sacred of places must first descend and seek to purify the most defiled of human space.

Shortly afterwards, on the eve of Passover in 1798, Nahman announced his plans to depart for Eretz Israel. At the gathering of Hasidim on that holiday he offered an interpretation of the verse: "When your way led through the sea, your path through mighty water, and no one saw your footprints . . ." (Psalm 77:20), making reference, we should note, to a journey across the seas rather than to a visit to Eretz Israel.²⁹ He evinced no regard for family or property in the planning of his journey. When his daughter asked what would become of the family while he was away, he replied: "You will go to your in-laws. Someone will take your older sister as a household servant. Your younger sister will be taken into someone's home out of pity. Your mother can find work as a cook, and I shall sell everything in the house to cover expenses for the journey."³⁰

Nahman saw the expected opposition of his family to the journey as a *meni'ah*, an obstacle in the path which had to be overcome. This accounts for the harshness of his retort. In much the same way did Nathan view the violent anti-Hasidic feelings of his own family when he first set out to become Nahman's disciple.³¹

It was about a month after Passover, on the eighteenth of Iyyar—May 4, 1798—that Nahman and Simeon³² set out on their way. From Medvedevka

27. This idea is discussed at length by J. Weiss in his "Reshit Tzemihatah shel ha-Derekh ha-Hasidit," *Zion*, XVI (1951).

28. Cf. for example *Liqute MoHaRaN* (henceforth: *Liqute*), 64:3, which describes the *necessary* descent of the true Zaddik into the abyss in order to redeem those souls which are lost there.

29. *Shiv*. 5. For the parallel in *EY* 19, see below.

30. *Shiv*. 6.

31. *Yeme MaHaRNAT*, p. 12, and *passim*.

32. While in the earlier account Nathan took care not to mention the name of the single Hasid who accompanied Nahman on his journey, it does slip out in *EY* 8. A. Rapoport ("Two Sources," pp. 147 ff.) claims that most of Nathan's information on the journey came from Simeon rather than from Nahman himself. Simeon returned to the Holy Land to settle there permanently in 1820. It is for this reason, Rapoport claims, that in the account written after 1822 Nathan is more willing to mention him by name. As Piekartz has shown (*Hasidul Braslav* [Jerusalem, 1972], pp. 203 ff.), there was a struggle for leadership in the community in the early years following Nahman's death, and Simeon at that point may have been a threat to Nathan's position. Mentioning a rival as the one who accompanied the master on his sacred journey, and thus reminding the reader of his own latecomer status within the community, would not have served Nathan's ends at the time of the earlier version; hence the silence.

they traveled overland to Nikolayev, where they found a barge carrying wheat down the Dnieper to Odessa. Departure from Odessa was contrary to the usual route of Jewish travelers, who generally preferred to embark on the Black Sea voyage from Galati (Galatz), at the mouth of the Danube. Nahman of course saved time by choosing Odessa; it may also be that he had gotten word of the particularly severe pogrom that had nearly wiped out the Galati Jewish community in 1797.³³

From Odessa they found a ship which took them, after a dangerous and stormy four-day journey, to Istanbul. Nahman spent his time on board ship writing down his teachings, but even his friend Simeon was not permitted to see what it was that he had written. This is the earliest reference we have to Nahman's habit of composing "secret" writings, which paralleled his exoteric literary production until his final illness set in; most of these writings were destroyed, on Nahman's orders, by his closest disciples.³⁴

On his arrival at Istanbul, where he was forced to stay for some time while awaiting a ship bound for Eretz Israel, Nahman began to behave in a strange manner.

He acted in all sorts of childish³⁵ ways, going about barefoot, without a belt, or without a top hat. He would go about [in the street] in his indoor clothing, running around the market like a child. There he would play war games, as children do. They [the players] would call one side "France" and the other something else, and they would war with one another, using real battle tactics. He did very many childish things in Istanbul.³⁶

While in the Turkish capital, Nahman and Simeon came across a Hasidic emissary from the Holy Land who was on his way to Russia to collect funds for the Hasidic community of Tiberias, which was then headed by Abraham Kalisker. Nahman refused to reveal his true identity to the emissary, who, beset by the troubles of his own community, assumed that Nahman was an enemy of the Tiberias Hasidim who was being sent to the Holy Land to create some mischief.³⁷ Nahman compounded the difficulty by applying his "childish" behavior to this man and his companions as well. Each time they would

33. *Shiv*. 8. On the pogrom in Galati, see *Jewish Encyclopedia*, X, pp. 513 f.

34. *Shiv*. 8-9. Nahman's secret writings are discussed by J. Weiss in *Mehqarim be-Hasidut Braslav* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 181 ff.

35. Hebrew: *oseh kol mine qatnut*. The Hebrew term has the double entendre of "childishness" or "lower spiritual state."

36. *EY* 11-12.

37. *Shiv*. 10. It is not clear whether they took him to be a *mitnagged* or a Hasid of Shneur Zalman of Liadi, whose controversy with Abraham Kalisker of Tiberias had broken out a year earlier.

ask him his name he would offer a different reply. Once he said that he was a *kohen*, then he denied it; he pretended for a while that he was the son of the Komarno Zaddik,³⁸ but once the other was convinced of this he turned around and heaped curses upon his alleged father. They became frustrated and angry and began to insult him. Nahman seemed to enjoy their degradations and insults, and once awakened them for no reason in the middle of the night, just to annoy them further. Although one of the emissary's companions was a ritual slaughterer and they thus had kosher meat available to them (pious Ashkenazim would not rely upon the somewhat different rules of kosher slaughter practiced by the Sephardic Jews of Istanbul), they would not share their food with the pestering young man, who was in this matter separated from his more docile, if tight-lipped, companion.³⁹

What was the meaning of all this strange behavior? Nahman himself later explained it as having been an essential part of his journey to the Holy Land:

The fact is that he did all this intentionally. He allowed himself to be reviled in all sorts of ways. He told the one who accompanied him that this degradation would be of great help, both on the forward journey and on their return. For the power of the great obstacles (*meni'ot*) which he had to overcome in going to Eretz Israel cannot be imagined, measured, or told. As he later explicitly said, it would have been impossible for him to get to Eretz Israel without this *qatnut*. He said that had he not undergone these degradations and this *qatnut* it would have been utterly impossible for him to have gotten there. He saw that he would be forced to remain in Istanbul and to die there. The *qatnut* and degradations saved him. . . .⁴⁰

The point is again that of the dialectic of spiritual ascent and descent in the life of the Zaddik, though here in a somewhat less dramatic sense. Just as one who reaches for greater purification must do so by means of prior descent into the realm of defilement, so must one who reaches for *gadlut*, a state of higher spiritual consciousness, begin from an exaggerated position of *qatnut*. Here, as frequently in Hasidism, the Sabbatian sting has been removed from this dialectic, and it is portrayed in almost moralistic terms. The issue has now become one of humility, of seeking to avoid the accusations of the *meqatregim*, negative or "accusing" forces, who would claim that one is seek-

38. The specific person to whom he was referring, who had a son named Isaiah and was involved in some sort of controversy, is unknown to me.

39. *Shiv.* 10, and *EY* 11.

40. *Shiv.* 9.

ing to rise beyond that place which is proper for a human being. Such accusations may be avoided by beginning the ascent through the disguise of self-humiliation.⁴¹

It is clear that Nahman's choice of Istanbul as the scene for this *qatnut* was in part a reaction to the Ba'al Shem Tov's unsuccessful journey to Eretz Israel some fifty years earlier. Hasidic legend recounts, we will recall, that the BeSHT had terminated his journey in Istanbul. It was in Istanbul that he saw that "heaven was not allowing him to go on to the Holy Land."⁴² Another version of the legend has it that the BeSHT saw the fiery sword of Eden warning him of danger unless he returned home without completing his mission.⁴³ Given this association with Istanbul, Nahman must have considered this to be the crucial point in his journey. If only he could pass through this city in safety, he would be able to reach the Land of Israel.

Once the emissary and his men had left Istanbul, Nahman began to return to his adult self.⁴⁴ He admitted his true identity to a Jewish ship-agent, who set out to arrange his passage. Meanwhile, a group of Hasidim from the Ukraine arrived in Istanbul on their way to Eretz Israel. The group included Rabbi Ze'ev Wolf of Charny-Ostrog, a disciple of the Maggid of Miedzyrzec who was later to become a leader of the Hasidic community in the Galilee. The elder Zaddik, informed of Nahman's identity, treated him with the respect due to a descendent of the BeSHT, despite some degree of continued erratic behavior on Nahman's part.⁴⁵

As Nahman and Simeon planned to sail from Istanbul, another type of obstacle threatened to hold them back. By the beginning of 1798, the Napoleonic navy was fighting in the Eastern Mediterranean; Napoleon had by then begun the invasion of Egypt. Due to the dangers of battle, the Jewish community of Istanbul announced a ban on any further Jewish pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Having traditionally assumed primary responsibility for the victims of maritime disasters and piracy in the area, the community did not want to take on unnecessary risks. Nahman's reaction to this ban is highly instructive, and lends credence to the interpretation of the journey which we shall propose:

41. In EY 12 the matter is explained specifically with regard to the sanctity of the Holy Land. Because Eretz Israel is *gadlut de-gadlut*, one may only reach it through *qatnut de-qatnut*.

42. In the passages referred to in the preceding note, Nahman is quoted as saying that the BeSHT's journey had failed because he was not able to descend sufficiently into *qatnut*. The quotation from the BeSHT is taken by Dinur, *Be-Mifneh*, p. 192, from *Adat Tzaddiqim*, p. 4a.

43. *Shivhe ha-BeSHT*, p. 48.

44. *Shiv. 12*.

45. *Shiv. 13*.

Our master did not pay any attention to this [ban] and *wanted to risk his life*.⁴⁶ He said to the one who accompanied him: "Know that *I want to place myself in danger, even great and terrible danger*. But I do not want to risk your life. Therefore, if you want, take money for expenses and go home in peace. I shall travel on alone, unbeknown to the people of Istanbul. *For I risk my life, come what may*" and so forth. His companion declined, saying "where my master is, whether for life or death, there will your servant be. 'Whither thou goest, I shall go.'"⁴⁷

As it turned out, Nahman's refusal to change his plans was shared by an elderly and respected Sephardic sage from Jerusalem, who felt that as one already close to death he did not mind the risk. Under pressure from this *hakham*, the community allowed one last ship to sail for Jaffa, and Nahman and Simeon were given passage. Interestingly, Nahman asked the *hakham* to take him directly to Jerusalem, "for he said that he did not want to be in either Safed or Tiberias."⁴⁸ Since almost the entire Hasidic community of the Holy Land lived in those two towns of the Galilee, it might seem that Nahman wanted to avoid contact with them. It would also seem from here that a visit to his grandfather's grave was less than essential to his journey. It may be suspected, however, from the fact that Nahman never did go to Jerusalem, that this was but another ruse to fool those demonic powers who might hold him back if he were to reveal his true destination.

The voyage was not an easy one. The ship encountered a terrible storm on the high seas, and the rising waves threatened to engulf them all. Again, Nahman's attitude is instructive as to the meaning this journey had for him:

Nobody thought that they would be saved from death. Everyone cried out to God, and there was a night which was just like Yom Kippur, with everyone crying, confessing his sins, and seeking atonement for his soul. They recited *selihot* as well as other prayers and supplications. But our master sat in silence. When asked why he was silent in such a time of woe, he refused to reply. But then the wife of the rabbi of Khatin, herself a learned woman, who had been crying and screaming all night, asked him the same. It would seem that he cursed her and said "If only you too would be quiet, it would be good. *By this you will be tested*. If you are still, the waters of the sea will become still as well."⁴⁹

The group, we are told, then followed Nahman's counsel, and soon the seas were still again. Having weathered the storm, however, the passengers

46. Hebrew: *le-hafqir 'et 'atzmo*.

47. *Shiv*. 14. Emphasis mine.

48. *Shiv*. 13.

49. *Shiv*. 14. Emphasis mine.

were confronted with the new danger of a shortage in the supply of drinking water. When these and other tribulations were finally overcome, a fortuitous wind blew them into the port of Jaffa, the point of disembarkment for Jerusalem. Nahman sought to accompany the elder *hakham* to Jerusalem, but the port officials, especially cautious in times of war, were suspicious of his foreign dress and his ignorance of the local languages. They feared he might be a French spy in some outlandish disguise (!) and refused to allow him off the ship. He thus remained on board, proceeding northward along the coast to Haifa, and disembarked on Monday, September tenth—the eve of Rosh Hashanah.

Nahman's feeling as he first set foot on the Holy Land was one of great elation. He promptly informed his faithful companion that he should consider himself to be especially blessed to have been witness to such a momentous event.⁵⁰ On his arrival in the Holy Land, Nahman conducted himself as a *rebbe*, accepting petitions for prayer and conducting a public festive meal on the eve of Rosh Hashanah. Here he showed none of the reluctance which had characterized his earlier forays into the public arena. By the end of prayers on the following morning, however, he had become depressed. "Tremendous worry and brokenheartedness were aroused in him, and he did not speak to anyone at all."⁵¹ Immediately after the holiday, he announced that he wanted to depart at once, without traveling to Tiberias or visiting any of the other holy places. It was only the pleas of Simeon and of the Hasidim in Safed and Tiberias, who had meanwhile heard of his arrival, which convinced him to remain awhile in the Holy Land.

While Nahman was in Haifa, another strange incident occurred to which he attributed great significance. It seems that a young Arab "discovered" Nahman and began to visit his quarters regularly. The young man took a great liking to Nahman, but in vain did he seek to transcend the language barrier which existed between them. Failing to make his affection for Nahman understood, he at one point became angry and challenged the Zaddik to a duel. Frightened by the prospect, Nahman hid himself in the home of his friend the rabbi of Charny-Ostrog, who had arrived in Haifa with him. The "Ishmaelite," however, was soon appeased, and again showed great affection for Nahman. This too Nahman found disquieting, and said that he "suffered more from the love of this Ishmaelite than from his hate or anger." He felt that some great danger might await him in this person, and he may have claimed⁵² that the young man was none other than Samael himself.⁵³

50. *Shiv.* 15.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Hebrew: *ki-medummeh she-nishac mi-pito.*

53. *Shiv.* 17.

Exactly what it was about this man that the already depressed Nahman found so alarming is impossible to reconstruct from the single source which speaks of their encounter. The fact that a Zaddik should find himself the object of affection on the part of a non-Jew was not in itself any cause for wonder; in Eastern Europe it was very common for non-Jews, peasants and nobles alike, to pay homage to certain of the Zaddikim. The relationship here, however, gives no indication of such veneration. The Arab seems to have seen himself as a peer, rather than as a would-be disciple, of Nahman. Perhaps this thought in itself was upsetting to the Zaddik, who was unaccustomed to anyone relating to him outside the traditional canons of his role. His own inability to respond to this offer of friendship may be the reason why the other's offer of love caused Nahman more pain than his hate. We should further note that the word *'ahavah* when used in these sources may refer to almost any degree of affection, love, or friendly feeling; it is also within the realm of possibility that Nahman feared sexual advances on the part of the young man. Nahman, ever tormented by his own conflicts with regard to sexuality, would have been particularly terrified by such an advance, a much more common and accepted happening in the Near East than in Eastern Europe. This would account for Nahman's sharp designation of this Arab as the demonic power incarnate.

The depression which had begun to set in on Rosh Hashanah remained with Nahman through the holiday season. Even on Simhat Torah, when a great spirit of celebration engulfed the newly arrived Hasidim in Haifa, Nahman refused to join in the festivities. At the conclusion of the holidays, a month after his arrival, Nahman once again sought to embark on the journey homeward, and it was again only Simeon's insistence that moved him to travel to Tiberias.⁵⁴ While the sources offer no particular explanation of this depression, it seems understandable as a kind of postclimactic let-down after the conclusion of what had become to Nahman's mind (as we shall see) the great and transforming journey. Realizing as he did, a day after his arrival, that the burdens which had always weighed down upon his soul had not been lifted from him as he set foot on the holy soil, and that his initial elation had in fact been transitory, he fell into a depression which remained with him until he left Haifa.

At Tiberias the two were greeted with great affection by Abraham Kalisker and his Hasidim. Nahman showed great respect for the leader of the Tiberias Hasidic community, and refused to 'say Torah' in the presence of one he deemed greater than himself. Though Abraham's teachings were presented

54. *Shiv.* 18.

in such a manner that "not a word could be heard amid all the ecstasy and shouting," Nahman praised them lavishly. He was later to confide to Nathan that of all his contemporaries in the Hasidic world, he would attribute the quality of wholeness only to this Zaddik. Indeed, the small and elite community of the Tiberias Hasidim seems to have served as an important model for Nahman, both in the creation of the Bratslav community and in his fantasy of an ideal Hasidic brotherhood with which he opened his tale of *The Master of Prayer*. His respect for Kalisker went so far that when he became ill for a few days while in Tiberias Nahman treated Kalisker as his master, sending him a gift (*pidyon*) accompanied by a petition for prayerful intercession. The local master in turn showed great deference for Nahman (in part, no doubt, because of his lineage), and when the latter on one occasion bowed his head to receive a blessing, Kalisker deferred as a sign of their equality.⁵⁵

Cheered by the warm welcome they received, and perhaps attracted by the pleasant climate of Tiberias in the winter months, Nahman and Simeon remained there until February or March of 1799. From Tiberias they journeyed to several of the holy places in the Galilee. Of particular interest is the account of Nahman's visit to the cave of Simeon ben Yohai:

When they arrived at the cave of Rabbi Simeon, the young people recited prayers and studied the *Zohar*, as he had instructed them to do. They did not see him do anything, however. He was very elated, and would constantly go back to the one who accompanied him and say: "Blessed are you," etc. At night he went from chamber to chamber, encouraging them to keep reciting passages from the *Zohar*, etc. He himself said nothing, but went about singing to himself, in great happiness, until the light of dawn. When day broke, he donned his *tallit* and *tefillin* and prayed for several hours.⁵⁶

This passage, like so many others in the Bratslav corpus, has undergone the heavy hand of inner censorship. Nahman, at least later in life, having seen himself as R. Simeon reincarnate, clearly was depicted in an original version as viewing this "return" as a highlight of his journey. The words which are blocked by the etceteras of this passage most likely gave some clear indication, later considered too dangerous for publication, of his identification with the hero of the *Zohar*.⁵⁷

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Shiv.* 19.

57. This notion, while quietly hinted at in Nahman's own statements, is quite clearly stated in later Bratslav literature. Cf. Abraham Hazan, *Sihot ve-Sippurim* (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 166; as well as the sources quoted by Piekarz, *Hasidut Braslav*, pp. 15 ff.

Sometime during that winter Nahman made yet another attempt to leave for home. He sent Simeon ahead to Haifa to book passage for them. In Haifa, however, Simeon met Jacob Samson of Shepetovka,⁵⁸ who had just returned from a mission abroad⁵⁹ to collect funds for the Hasidim of the Holy Land. At that time, however, a certain Jewish informer had told the local Turkish pasha in Tiberias that large sums of money were about to arrive from abroad, and there was a danger that the entire amount would be confiscated by the authorities. Jacob Samson, who was well-known as an emissary, was therefore afraid to deliver the funds in person, and Simeon offered his services as an intermediary. He thus returned safely to Tiberias, bearing the funds but without having arranged a return journey.⁶⁰ Seeing that his plans to leave had been thwarted once again, Nahman finally decided that it was indeed meant that he remain in the Holy Land for a longer period of time. He actually made plans for a journey to Jerusalem, but was discouraged by Abraham Kalisker, apparently due to the dangers thought to await Jerusalem from the invading Napoleonic army.

Whatever his resolve was at that point, it was the Napoleonic conquest of the Palestinean coastline, and specifically the threat to the port of Acre, that forced Nahman's hand and finally convinced him to set out for home at once. When he heard that Acre was about to be laid under siege (Haifa having already fallen), he set out for the port immediately, hoping to still find a ship flying the flag of neutral Ragusa.⁶¹ They arrived at Acre on Friday, March 15, and were straightaway caught up in the great rush of civilians leaving the city. The siege actually began on March 19,⁶² but the Turks had already warned all civilians to leave the city by Sunday, on pain of death. Passage on a neutral ship became impossible to find, and on the last possible day (March 17) the two passengers were fortunate even to find passage on a Turkish merchant vessel.

In the tumult of the evacuation, however, things went from bad to worse. Not speaking the local languages and not knowing one ship from another, Nahman and Simeon wound up on a Turkish warship which, as soon as it

58. Jacob Samson was a disciple of Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye and of Pinhas of Korzec. He had settled in the Holy Land in 1794. See A. Ya'ari, *Sheluhe 'Eretz Yisra'el* (Jerusalem, 1951), p. 623.

59. There is some question as to where he had been on this journey. Ya'ari (*Sheluhe*, p. 623) speaks of it as a journey to Egypt and North Africa, but Horodezky (*Hasidut*, II, 132 f.) notes that he wrote an approbation to the Slavuta, 1798 edition of *Me'or 'Enayim* by Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl. This approbation, reprinted in later editions, begins: "On my way the Lord led me here to the holy congregation of Slavuta."

60. *Shiv*. 19.

61. The city-state of Ragusa remained neutral in the Napoleonic wars until 1805. See Francis W. Carter, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa): A Classic City-State* (London, 1972), pp. 524 f.

62. M. Gihon, "Napoleon's Siege of Acco," in *Western Galilee and the Coast of Galilee* (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 165 ff.

had left the harbor, became entangled in battle with the French navy. Unable to make themselves understood, the pleas of the two to be put ashore went unheeded, and they found themselves in the midst of a raging battle at sea. The Turkish captain and sailors, as can be imagined, were none too happy to discover their two accidental passengers, and Nahman and Simeon hid in a small cabin, fearing to show themselves on deck lest they be killed by the sailors. They were kept alive only by the ship's cook, who took pity on them and brought them a bit of coffee twice a day.⁶³

The dangers of battle gave way, after a while, to the even greater dangers of storm. Blown back and forth between one coastline and another, the ship, perhaps already damaged in battle, began to fill up with water. All cargo was thrown overboard to lighten the vessel, but still the ship was sinking. The two passengers feared to leave their cabin, yet the cabin was so filled with water that they had to climb to the top of some tall piece of furniture to escape drowning within the ship. They thought little of their chances for survival, and even if they should survive they were quite convinced that the sailors would sell them as slaves. At this point Nahman resolved that even if he were to be enslaved and thus prevented from living the ritual life of a Jew, he would still be able to fulfill the *mitzwot* in spirit:

He had reached the understanding of how to serve God even if he were, God forbid, not able to observe the commandments. He had attained the service of the patriarchs who had served God before the Torah was given, fulfilling all the *mitzwot* even though they did not observe them in their ordinary form (*ki-feshutan*). Just as Jacob fulfilled the commandment of *tefillin* by stripping the sticks⁶⁴ and so forth—until he understood how he would fulfill all the *mitzwot* in this way if forced to do so in the place where he might be sold, God forbid.⁶⁵

As the ship's pumps were reported to fail, the fear that had overcome the two men worsened. Here the bravado Nahman had borne previously on his journey seems to have fled him. Simeon was so paralyzed by terror that he could not even open his mouth in prayer. Nahman, too, now faced with a truly desperate situation, found that his personal fears were coming between himself and God. Finally he called out in the name of his ancestors, depending on the collective merits of the BeSHT, his daughter Odel, and Nahman of Gorodenka to save him. While the seas did not grow calmer,

63. *Shiv*. 20–21.

64. The reference is to Genesis 30:37. We find the interpretation of this mysterious action of the patriarch was a kind of proto-observance of the *mitzwot* already in the writings of Dov Baer of Miedzyrzec. See the sources quoted by R. Schatz, *Ha-Hasidut ke-Mistiqah* (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 56.

65. *Shiv*. 22. The meaning of this rather startling pronouncement will be discussed below.

somehow the sailors managed to repair the leaks in the vessel and they survived the storm.

After a month of terror, the ship sailed into the harbor of Rhodes on the eve of Passover. Nahman and Simeon, having nearly despaired of life itself, now found themselves within near reach of a Jewish community that would save them from the sailors as well as the sea, and would even enable them to celebrate the festival of deliverance. Negotiations ensued between the ship's captain and Jewish communal leaders, and for an adequate price the two captives were released to the Rhodes Jewish community on the third day of Passover. As it turned out, the captain of this ship was well known to the local Jews, and the dangers of murder or enslavement had in fact been quite real.⁶⁶ The rabbis of Rhodes, knowing the writings of Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, were honored to have a descendent of the Ba'al Shem Tov among them. After much rejoicing through the remainder of the holiday, they were put on a safe and fast vessel which got them to Istanbul after only three days' journey. In Istanbul their adventures resumed when they were told that their passports were out of order, and it was only through the helpful hand of bribery that they were permitted to depart for Galati. Once again their ship was caught in a storm and most of the passengers drowned. After various other encounters with ransom, storm, and plague, they arrived home, having traveled overland from Galati via Jassy, sometime in early summer of 1799.⁶⁷

III

In Nathan's first account of his master's journey, from which most of the above rendition has been culled, Nathan paid little attention to the reasons for the voyage or the meaning it had in his master's life. Only when he returned to this aspect of his biographical writings, after an interval of at least a decade, did he begin to set forth the traditions with regard to the journey's meaning. Though this second of Nathan's accounts is, as we have said, more fragmentary, it may also be said to reflect the concerns of a more mature biographer. The relevant chapter in *Hayye MoHaRaN* offers four explanations of the journey, all of them offered in Nahman's own name. This multiplicity of explanations provides no problem for Nathan, we should

66. Piracy was indeed a major danger in the eastern Mediterranean at that time. Cf. the comments by the Crimean Karaites traveler Benjamin Yerushalmi who sailed to Eretz Israel (J. D. Eisenstein (ed.), *'Otzar Masa'ot* [Tel Aviv, 1969], p. 214). For an account of Jews captured for ransom in the Aegean Sea as late as 1880, see *Jewish Encyclopedia*, X, 40.

67. *Shiv*. 24-26.

note, a biographer who will never be found guilty of underestimating the complexity of his subject's mind:

It was thus heard that there were several reasons for his voyage to the Land of Israel, in addition to those hidden reasons which he never revealed at all. Indeed, for all the things he did he never had only a single reason, but rather thousands and tens of thousands of deep and elevated motivations—most especially so for this great journey to Eretz Israel, for which he risked his life so very greatly.⁶⁸

One of Nahman's stated motives for the journey has been discussed above: the hope of receiving some revealed knowledge at the grave of his grandfather. The three other reasons given for the journey also all have to do with some higher form of religious knowledge or illumination accessible only through a journey to the Holy Land. Our task is now to examine each of these in some detail, hoping to see whether they can be integrated into any overarching explanation of the journey which will avoid reductionism while at the same time not veer too closely toward Nathan's recourse to esotericism in explaining his master's actions. We shall quote each of the three explanations directly from Nathan's account.

1. I heard in his name that he said before his journey to Eretz Israel that he wanted to go in order to attain *hokhmah 'ila'ah*. There exist higher and lower forms of *hokhmah*; the lower he had already acquired, but he was yet to attain the higher. For this he had to go to the Land of Israel.⁶⁹

The motif of the two aspects of *hokhmah* has a long history in Kabbalistic literature.⁷⁰ While the term may have been employed by Kabbalists in varying ways,⁷¹ it may generally be said that *hokhmah 'ila'ah* is associated with

68. EY 5.

69. EY 6.

70. The two aspects of *hokhmah* are often mentioned in the Zohar. The upper *hokhmah* is the *sefirah hokhmah*, a hidden entity which cannot be known by man (I, 141b). The lower *hokhmah*, sometimes known as the lesser (*ze'irah*), is more accessible and is identified with the wisdom of Solomon (II, 223a R.M.), an appellative of the *shekhinah*. *Hokhmah* as a name for the tenth *sefirah* is already found in *Sefer ha-Bahir*. Thus it may be said that the earliest Kabbalistic sources contain, at least by implication, a notion of upper and lower *hokhmah*. See G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin, 1962), index s.v. *Hokhma*. The parallels between this series of symbols and the world of ancient (particularly Valentinian) Gnosticism are known and have been discussed by Scholem there and in his *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* (Zurich, 1962), pp. 138 ff.

71. Following the breakdown of each of the ten *sefirot* into a further ten, a move first popularized through the works of Moses Cordovero, Kabbalists variously assigned the term *hokhmah tata'ah* or *hokhmah ze'irah* either to the element of *malkhut* within the upper *hokhmah* or alternatively to *hokhmah* within *malkhut*. The former view is espoused by Hayyim Vital in his (pre-Lurianic) notes to the Zohar included in A. Azulai, *'Or ha-Hamah to Zohar*, I, 141b. For the latter view,

the second of the ten *sefirot* (or the first, according to some reckonings), and *hokhmah tata'ah* is associated with *malkhut*, the lowest of the ten sefirotic rungs within divinity. In Nahman's own later writings, the lower *hokhmah* is taken to be the immediate source of all worldly wisdom, while the higher *hokhmah* is the source of the primordial Torah, the "holy of holies" in the sefirotic world, the primal root of all existence.⁷² More significantly, *hokhmah 'ila'ah* is identified with the esoteric aspect of each of the *mitzwoth*, always higher than the 'revealed' aspect which is embodied in the performance of the act. In Nahman's dialectic of spiritual ascent, the upper *hokhmah* is to be pursued to the point of complete self-transcendence and absorption in the divine *nihil*.⁷³ Thus our passage would mean that Nahman had already mastered all that could be attained by one who still held on to this-worldly existence and wisdom; only by journeying to the Holy Land could he achieve that total transcendence of self which was the goal of much of early Hasidic piety.

2. It was heard from his holy mouth during the Passover season that preceded his journey from Medvedevka to the Land of Israel that he wanted to go to Eretz Israel in order there to fulfill all of the six hundred and thirteen commandments, including those which are dependent upon the land together with those which may be fulfilled outside it, fulfilling them all spiritually so that afterward he would be able to fulfill them all physically.⁷⁴

Once again, now more clearly, the notion of an esoteric aspect of the *mitzwoth* makes its appearance. Even the most pious of Jews, living after the destruction of the Temple and outside the Land of Israel, observes far fewer than the originally prescribed 613 commandments of the Torah. Many of the *mitzwoth* are completely in abeyance since the Temple's destruction and the suspension of the sacrificial cult; others, particularly those relating to the agricultural cycle, apply only to Jews living in or eating the produce of the Land of Israel. Based upon older mystical speculations propounding an organismic view of Torah, according to which each of the commandments

see the commentary to the liturgy by Nahman's contemporary Shneur Zalman of Liadi (New York, 1965), p. 112c. In devotional terms, Shneur Zalman identifies the lower *hokhmah* with *bittul ha-yesh*, a semiintellectual awareness that the world has no existence independent of God, while the higher *hokhmah* is identified with *bittul ha-etzem*, an experience of envelopment in the all-pervasive oneness of God (p. 108d). These terms seem roughly equivalent to the use of the terms *qatnut* and *gadlut* elsewhere in the school of Miedzyrzec, and are quite parallel also to Nahman's later usage of these terms.

72. *Liqqute*, 61:6, and II, 91.

73. *Liqqute*, 22.

74. EY 5.

was seen as a particular 'limb' of the Torah's 'body,' in turn both reflecting the 'limbs' of the divine 'body' of *Adam Qadmon* and corresponding to the limbs of the human body, these unobservable *mitzwo*t became a problem in Hasidic thought.⁷⁵ If the Torah is a single whole, and if its 613 commandments bespeak the fulfillment of the 613 limbs of man's spiritual body which is the image of God in him, how can one possibly achieve that fulfillment if not all the commandments may be followed?⁷⁶ Even he who does all he can to live in accordance with the Torah would of necessity leave whole areas untouched, thus not allowing for the completion of the system of correspondences that leads to fulfillment. In response to this and similar problems, Hasidic teachers propounded the rather dangerous doctrine of purely spiritual fulfillment of these divine commandments. While certain of the Torah's precepts still required a bodily act, others could be fulfilled by means of *kawwanah* alone, thus allowing the worshipper to feel that these were not 'dead letters' in his spiritual life. Combined with ancient and well-known speculations concerning the abrogation of certain or all of the *mitzwo*t in messianic times, Hasidism here reaches near the border of antinomian thinking. The distinction between the Hasidic view mentioned here and the antinomian view that the *true* fulfillment of all the commandments is purely spiritual is a fine one.⁷⁷

Examining the passage at hand more closely, we will note that the text as it stands does not quite make sense. In order to *spiritually* fulfill the *mitzwo*t *ha-teluyot ba-'aretz* one would not have to travel to the Holy Land. The order of the final line should probably be reversed to read: "Fulfilling all of them physically so that afterward he should be able to fulfill them all spiritually". One who had never experienced the actual observance of a particular *mitzwo*ah would not know how to properly spiritualize it. Thus Nahman's journey is seen as an attempt to gain access to those areas of the Torah which apply in the land alone, so that afterwards he might include them in his 'spiritual observance' of the *mitzwo*t.

75. On the view of Torah as an organism, see G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), pp. 44 ff. On the problem of the *mitzwo*t in Hasidism, see Schatz, *Hasidut*, chap. 5.

76. This notion of Torah as organism also comes to be related to the image of *haluqa de-rabbanan*, the mystical garment the soul is to wear in the afterlife, woven of the *mitzwo*t one has fulfilled in this world. According to N. Shapira (*Megalleh 'Amuqot*, 113), Moses wanted to enter Eretz Israel so that he could perform the *mitzwo*t *ha-teluyot ba-'aretz*, without which his garment would be incomplete. Cf. also Levi Yizhaq of Berdichev, *Qedushat Levi* (Jerusalem, 1958), p. 247.

77. In addition to the Hasidic sources quoted by Schatz (in *Hasidut*), see the views of Corovero, A. Azulai, and Nathan of Gaza in G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* (Princeton, N.J., 1973), pp. 319 ff. The progression from the radical insights of the two "orthodox" Kabbalists to the open antinomianism of the Sabbatian prophet leaves one somewhat in doubt as to where the actual cut-off point of heresy is to be found. Schatz demonstrates that the same is true with regard to much of early Hasidic thought with regard to the *mitzwo*t.

This reading of the passage is confirmed by that most curious and rather shocking statement Nahman made during the return voyage, to the effect that he could now continue to observe all the *mitzwoth* in spirit even if he were to be impressed into slavery and thus unable to keep them in the flesh. It now seems that this statement was not merely a rationalization born of his dire situation on the sea; the realization of the spiritual Torah was in fact an essential and planned part of his journey from the outset. Such an intent, of course, in no way means that Nahman sought to abandon the *mitzwoth* in their ordinary sense.

In that statement on the seas Nahman claimed that he had attained the rung of the patriarchs and their spiritual fulfillment of the commandments. The idea that the patriarchs had fulfilled the divine will before Sinai by means of acts other than the accepted *mitzwoth*, or even by *kawwanah* alone, is well known in early Hasidic writings. Scholars have seen in this theme the projection of a certain ambivalence the Hasidic authors felt about the need for the actual corporeal fulfillment of the *mitzwoth*, given a world-view in which pure spirituality was the ultimate religious value.⁷⁸ Here we see that Nahman as a young man was also strongly attracted to such thinking, and that while such antinomian tendencies were not acted out in his life they did occupy a significant place in his speculations.⁷⁹ From this perspective, the journey to Eretz Israel may be seen as an attempt to reach new heights of spiritualization with regard to the *mitzwoth* by including the commandments relating to the land in his repertoire of contemplation.⁸⁰

3. He then told R. Yudel that he wanted to go to the Land of Israel. R. Yudel offered him his blessing and said to him: "Our master! Surely you want to perform some great thing there. May it be God's will to help you do that which you intend." Our master nodded in response

78. Schatz, *Hasidut*, chap. 5; and G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), pp. 203 ff.

79. This comes out most clearly in the interpretation of *Liqqute*, II, 78, which we hope to offer elsewhere. In this connection notice should be taken of another startling statement made by Nahman during his return voyage. He and Simeon were studying Mishnah to occupy themselves during their travels. When they reached *Sotah* V:2 and read "A generation will arise that will proclaim the purity of the third degree [of ritual impurity, those taboos not based upon scriptural injunction]," Nahman became ecstatic, clapped his hands, and proclaimed: "Who sees as I do!" (EY 13). The implication seems to be that his is the generation that will find a way to purify this category of the defiled. This in itself cannot be called "antinomian," as it follows the Law's own prediction, but it again is clearly reminiscent of well-known motifs in Sabbatian thought.

80. Levi Yizhaq of Berdichev, in a most daring homily (*Qedushat Levi, lekh lekha*, pp. 15 f.), employs a motif similar to that used here. In noting that Abraham came to know the commandments only after he entered Eretz Israel, he says that until entering the land Abraham served by means of *mesirut nefesh* alone. He could not enter into the world of *mitzwoth* until he was in that land where he could observe them in their totality, or else he would have remained unwhole. Only after Sinai do any of the commandments become binding outside the land.

to his blessing and afterwards said: "I could fulfill that which I seek and desire to do in Eretz Israel right here by means of prayer and supplication alone. Then I would not have to travel to Eretz Israel. The difference is that if I merit to be in Eretz Israel I will receive my understanding in 'garments', whereas if I stay here I will receive it without the 'garments'. This is also the difference between the holiness of the Sabbath and that of the festival." He opened the prayerbook of the ARI of blessed memory for R. Yudel and showed him in the *kawwanot* that this was the difference between Sabbath and festival: that on Sabbath the light is clothed in garments, while on festivals it does not have this garb, as is known.⁸¹

Here once again Nahman's journey is depicted as an attempt to achieve some higher degree of spirituality, speaking here in somewhat different and more paradoxical Kabbalistic language. Before Nahman was in the Holy Land, according to this source, he had received his spiritual understanding (*hassagah*) directly, without the "garb" in which such understanding should be clothed. Contrary to what one might expect, "garbed" understanding is here presented as a higher rung of attainment than that which comes to man without such "garb"; the need for covering the understanding indicates that it is derived from a higher source, one which could not be attained by man without such a protective *levush* (garb).

While Nahman did not explain this rather cryptic statement to his disciples, he did make reference to *Siddur ha-'ARI*, the prayerbook edition of Isaac Luria, as the source of his thoughts. While the phrase *Siddur ha-'ARI* in the mouth of a late eighteenth-century Eastern European Jew could well have been applied to any one of several Kabbalistic compendia on the liturgy,⁸² all of them based on the Lurianic system, we are here in the fortunate position of being able to identify the precise text which Nahman had been reading. This turns out to be none other than the famous *Siddur Qol Ya'aqov* by Jacob Koppel Lipschütz of Miedzyrzec, whom Tishby has shown to have been a secret Sabbatian but whose *Siddur* was highly prized by the Ba'al Shem Tov and others.⁸³ In his introduction to the *kawwanot* of the festivals, which

81. EY 7.

82. Two versions of the Lurianic liturgy which were available in print in Nahman's day were those of Sabbatai of Raszkw (Korzec, 1794) and Asher Margulies of Brody (Lvov, 1788). Other versions are discussed by G. Scholem in *Kitve Yad ba-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1930), pp. 129 ff.

83. I. Tishby, *Netive 'Emunah u-Minut* (Israel, 1964), pp. 204 ff. This *Siddur* was first published in Slavuta, 1804. Tishby denies the existence of a Korzec, 1794 edition. Nevertheless, as Tishby notes, the work was widely circulated in manuscript, and exercised an influence on those works mentioned in n. 82, even though they preceded it in print. *Qol Ya'aqov* is quoted by Simhah of Zalozhtsy as early as 1757.

immediately precedes his discussion of Passover, Jacob Koppel discusses the difference in holiness between Sabbath and festival. Because the Sabbath day is possessed of an inherent holiness, he says, deriving from the blessing of Genesis 2:3, its spiritual status is higher than that of the festivals, the sanctity of which is derivative from the holiness of Israel.⁸⁴ For this reason, he continues, the light of *hokhmah* shines more brightly on the Sabbath than it does on other holy days of the sacred calendar. The Sabbath light is so bright that *binah*, the next lower divine emanation, could not receive it unless it were partially veiled in some *levush*. If the much dimmer festival light, on the other hand, were to be transmitted in the same *levush*, it would be totally imperceptible.⁸⁵ On the following page the author connects all of this with the difference between the Holy Land and the rest of Creation. That higher "garbed" consciousness, available outside the land only on the Sabbath, is present also on weekdays in the Land of Israel. Here he may be basing himself on older sources which relate the Land of Israel to another sort of garb: the garment of the soul which the righteous are to wear in the world to come.⁸⁶

It was on the eve of Passover in 1798 that Nahman first announced to those around him his plans for a journey to the Holy Land. In preparing for the holiday, he had been reading the appropriate passages in the Kabbalistic liturgy that was revered by his esteemed great-grandfather and had been passed on to him. In it he found confirmation of an idea that had already taken hold of him previously: to achieve a higher rung of enlightenment he would have to journey to Eretz Israel. The image of a veiled revelation emanating from a higher divine rung than an unveiled truth, so typical of the paradoxical dialectic of the Kabbalah, would have been precisely the sort of formula that would have had greatest appeal to Nahman's ever paradoxical turn of mind.

These explanations, all of them recorded in succession in Nathan's memoir, all generally point in the same direction. The purpose of the journey was a search for some higher form of spiritual illumination than that accessible to Nahman outside the land. Though the young ascetic had, through his countless earlier struggles, attained a very high rung of personal development and religious understanding, he now stood before an impasse: further growth now required a major breakthrough, one that was possible only by means of such a journey. In the Holy Land he could receive the garbed or higher wisdom, apprehend the secret of the commandments, and commune

84. Cf. *Betzah* 17a, and RaSHI's commentary thereon.

85. *Qol Ya'akov* (Lvov, 1858), pp. 170b, 171b.

86. Cf. Shapira, *Megalleh Amuqot*, 62 (Lvov, 1858), p. 10b.

with the spirit of his grandfather in pursuit of direct knowledge from above. In contrast to a certain tendency toward spiritual glorification of life in the diaspora to be found elsewhere in early Hasidism,⁸⁷ at this point in our reading it would seem that Nahman is in his own way echoing the well-known rabbinic dicta to the effect that prophecy or the holy spirit could not easily be attained outside the Land of Israel.⁸⁸

IV

Our thorough biographer could not, however, resist passing on to us one further account of Nahman's announcement of his journey, one that throws all of the above into new relief. Included in a later section of his second account of the voyage, the passage has about it a ring of almost startling authenticity, conveyed not least by the broken bits of language it records.

Shortly before he departed for the Land of Israel, someone asked him why he did not draw them [the disciples] near and speak with them. He said that he now had no words, but he said that "by means of the verse 'When you pass through water I shall be with you' (Isaiah 43:2) it has become known to me *how one may see the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob whenever one wants*. I wondered why it should be through that particular verse, but now I think it is because I have to cross the sea. But why [should I tell] you this? What need have you for it? Even were I to dress it in some moral teaching that would be appropriate to everyone—but I have no words now." Afterwards he walked to and fro in the house saying: "I am poorer and more destitute than any of the great ones. One has money, another has towns [dominated by his hasidim]—and I have nothing. My only comfort comes when I recall that in the world of truth they will all need me and will long to hear my teachings [hiddushim] which I create in every moment. What is this 'I'? Rather 'which my soul creates'."⁸⁹

In this fragment, reported to Nathan by one of Nahman's early disciples, we are given a rare glimpse of the young master in a terrible state of agitation. Before he decided on his trip to Eretz Israel, he was undergoing one of his

87. Cf. *Not'am Elimelekh, wa-yeshuv*; and the sources listed by Dinur, *Be-Mifneh*, p. 192, n. 4.

88. *Mekhilta, Bo* (ed. Horovitz, p. 2); *Mo'ed Qatan 25a; Zohar, I, 141a*.

89. EY 19. The concluding line reads as follows in the Hebrew: *mahu 'ani? raq mah she-ha-neshamah shelli mehaddesh* (!). Emphasis here and in the following source is mine. The context of the Isaiah passage refers to the return of Israel's exiles to the Holy Land.

famous "dry" periods, which continued to evidence themselves throughout his later life and which had so great an effect upon his teachings.⁹⁰ He had distanced himself from his students, saying that he "had no words," that he was not able to teach them anything. His problem was a purely personal one, knowledge of which would not be of any help to others. True, he retained a faith in his ultimate vindication, but his present crisis could be resolved only by a journey over the seas. Here we have an explanation of the journey which is of a much more dramatic and immediate sort: it was not in order only to *increase* his knowledge or illumination that Nahman set out, but rather in response to a deep personal crisis. Standing behind Nahman's decision for the journey is no longer an ordered pattern of ascent but rather a precipitous fall. The depths to which he was shaken by this crisis are poignantly reflected by his pacing through the house and by the confusion recorded in his closing lines. Nahman hastens to correct the impression it is his 'I' that constantly speaks *hiddushe Torah*; it is rather his soul that continues to create, even in those times when his 'I' is afflicted by spiritual dryness and cannot speak. *I as a person*, he is saying to his disciples, have nothing to offer you at this time. *If my soul* continues to create, do not assume this to mean that *I* have anything to give you.⁹¹ We should also note that in this text, as well as in the brief reference to this moment in *Shivhe ha-RaN* (quoted earlier) where a different scriptural verse is adduced, the reference is to a voyage across the seas, rather than to Eretz Israel.

What was the nature of this crisis in Nahman's life? And how was it that a sea journey was seen as its proper resolution? The most direct goal of his voyage, and the resolution of his personal crisis, seems to be sought in a vision of the patriarchs. This same motif of a vision of the patriarchs is reported from an earlier period in Nahman's life, in a dream Nahman had as an adolescent. The text describing this event is highly revealing.

He was once sitting at his father-in-law's table during the third Sabbath meal. He was seated in a corner and it began to grow dark in the house. He as usual went his own way, and he began to ask God *to show him the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. He promised God that "when You show me this, I will cast aside this desire [eating] as well." He did what

90. Cf. Weiss, "Reshit," *passim*; and my "R. Nahman Bratslaver's Conflict Regarding Leadership," in M. A. Fishbane and P. R. Flohr, eds., *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glatzer* . . . (Leiden, 1975), pp. 141 ff.

91. The distinction Nahman is making here between "self" and "soul" is quite surprising. Jewish literature generally does not know of such a distinction. Note, however, the unusual formulation *ha-neshamah 'amerah le-ha-rav*, "the master's soul said to him" in *Tzava'ot RIVaSH* (Cracow, 1896), p. 4b. Nahman's novellae are seen by him as a sort of inner revelation, rather than as a creation of his own mind. See below, n. 95.

he did in this matter, entering into the thoughts very deeply, until he fell asleep. His forebearer the BeSHT came to him in a dream and recited to him the verse 'I shall put grass in the field for your animals' (Deut. 11:14). He awoke wondering what possible connection there could be between this verse and that which he had sought. He then recalled a passage in the *Tiqqune Zohar*⁹² which interprets the word 'esev' ['grass', consonantly 'sb] as referring to the pupil of the eye [abbreviation for *bat 'ayin*, the locus of vision] and the patriarchs, the three of them alluded to by the three-pronged *shin*. This is its meaning: it is impossible to see the patriarchs unless you have first destroyed your animal nature, namely the desire for food. Then he overcame this desire.⁹³

The relationship between these two texts has not heretofore been recognized. The desire to obtain a vision of the patriarchs was not new to Nahman in 1798. On the contrary, it had been with him at least since adolescence, the period of his hardest struggles against the desires of the flesh. That this early dream remained crucial to him is witnessed by the fact that it was one of those few events in his life which he specifically instructed his disciples to retell among themselves.⁹⁴ The vision of the patriarchs was to be his reward for ultimate victory in the battle against his own animal nature, symbolized here by his desire for food, but elsewhere by his sexual struggles. It appears that now, at the age of twenty-six, he had still not achieved that final victory, for the vision of the patriarchs, or at least constant access to that vision, was still a goal to be sought. Given the violent ups and downs in Nahman's self-esteem, we may well assume that there were points in his life when he felt this goal to be well within his reach—but that these were only to be followed by further falls, during which times the patriarchs once again seemed to distance themselves from him. *The patriarchs, who fulfilled the mitzvot in purely spiritual ways, are, in Nahman's imagination, symbols of complete transcendence of the bodily self.*

It is now clear that Nahman's announcement of his journey has to do with his ongoing struggle and its promised rewards. In his earlier days he had suffered periods of emptiness and awareness of God's distance from him, due to his failure to achieve mastery over his "animal" self and its base desires. As he ambivalently accepted the role of Zaddik, these periods manifested

92. I have not been able to find such a reference in the *Tiqqune Zohar*. The references suggested in the editions of *Liqqute* 47 to *Tiqquna* 51 and to *Zohar*, I, 25b, lead one to what in fact is an entirely different interpretation of the word 'esev, containing no exegesis of Deut. 11:15.

93. *Hayye, sippurim hadashim* 12. The pun cannot be fully translated. One reaches the vision (*bat 'ayin*) of the patriarchs (the letter *shin*) by upsetting (*shaded*, here related to *sadekha*) one's animal nature.

94. *Ibid.*

themselves as times when he "had no words," when he felt himself unworthy to address his disciples. In a world where the teaching of Torah was seen as a pneumatic act rather than as an intellectual exercise, this transition is perfectly clear. If the teaching of Torah is an event in which "the *shekhinah* speaks through his mouth,"⁹⁵ the Zaddik who feels himself to be far from God can only be embarrassed by the demands of his disciples.

But what has all this to do with a journey to the Holy Land? The fact is that there is no intrinsic connection between Nahman's struggle to overcome his desires and a visit to the Land of Israel. Our passage speaks only of a sea voyage, and it is the voyage itself which is crucial in this connection. Eretz Israel itself was of great importance for Nahman; he *did* believe that there were higher forms of religious knowing which were accessible only there. But in this passage *it is the voyage rather than the destination which seems to occupy his thoughts.*

This view of the journey is sustained by a number of other interesting references in the writings of both Nahman and Nathan. Only two months before his death in 1810, Nahman underwent the best-known of his depressions. During that time he spoke to his disciples about the Zaddik (the reference is clearly to himself) as one who at times is like the most simple of men. At such moments he knows nothing and has no access to Torah. His only sustenance at such times is through *derekh 'eretz*⁹⁶ here taken to refer to *derekh 'eretz yisra'el*, the way to the Land of Israel. "He sustained himself in times of simplicity only by the way to Eretz Israel."⁹⁷ In other words, the fact that he had made the journey to the Holy Land, and the memory of that journey, were sufficient to sustain him through even the most bitter periods of dryness and self-doubt.

95. Thus the act of preaching was discussed in the circle of Miedzyrzec. Cf. 'Or ha-Me'ir by Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir (New York, 1954), p. 95c; and the discussion by J. Weiss in JJS, XI (1960), p. 150. This phrase and similar ones were first employed to describe the prophetic experience of Moses. Cf. the sources quoted by A. J. Heschel, *Torah min ha-Shamayim*, II (London, 1965), 215 f., 335 f. Beginning in the sixteenth century, such phrases appear in the description of personal mystical experiences: revelations of *maggidim*, automatic speech, etc. Cf. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, p. 269, and *passim*. In Hasidism these phrases describe not only the act of preaching by the Zaddik but the act of prayer as well. For one of many examples, see Dov Baer of Miedzyrzec, 'Or ha-Emet (Brooklyn, 1960), p. 1b; and the discussions by Weiss and by Schatz, *Hasidut*, pp. 95 ff. This is one of the most striking examples of the popularization of mystical phenomena in Hasidism. For the use of the phrase within a Hasidic context to describe actual prophetic experiences, see Kalonymos Kalman of Cracow, *Ma'or wa-Shemesh* (New York, 1958), p. 51b. A full account of *shekhinah medabberet mi-toch piv (gerona)* would prove most rewarding. The dependence of the Jewish development upon those Islamic sources discussed by A. Altmann in his *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1969), pp. 150 ff., might be the proper starting point of such an account.

96. Here Nahman is playing on the well-known rabbinic dictum *derekh 'eretz qadimah la-torah* (*Leviticus Rabbah* IX:3).

97. *Sihot* 153.

In order to further understand why the journey itself, as distinct from the destination, should play so central a role in Nahman's thinking, we must touch upon another central motif of his thought to which we have made occasional reference above. This is the motif of "obstacles" (*meni'ot*) which the man of faith has to overcome in his search for a path to God. These *meni'ot* are best described in Nahman's tale of *The Rabbi and His Son*,⁹⁸ where the obstacles are at once the result of the doubts which the rabbi entertains about the true Zaddik and the work of the demonic forces themselves. This dual understanding of the *meni'ah*, as psychological block to faith and as the work of demonic powers, is crucial to Nahman's self-understanding. Man's task is ever to do battle with the *meni'ot*, whether they take the form of mental or physical barriers; the search for God requires the strength of a Samson.⁹⁹ And the great example in Bratslav literature of the battle to overcome *meni'ot* is none other than the journey of Nahman to the Land of Israel!

He said that he was very happy to have merited to be in Eretz Israel. For on the way to Eretz Israel he had undergone many obstacles, confusing thoughts, delays, and struggles, including financial obstacles. But he had overcome them all and had brought the matter to completion by reaching Eretz Israel. He further said this: I believe, and indeed I know well, that of all the movements, thoughts, and deeds that one undertakes in order to perform some holy act, not a single one is ever lost. For after all the obstacles have been broken through and the act has been completed, all those confusing thoughts and movements which had taken place while one was still weighing the act . . . are elevated to the highest state of holiness. Everything is recorded above for good, including every move one had to make along the way. Blessed are those who manage to overcome all the obstacles and to complete some good deed.¹⁰⁰

The lesson to be learned from Nahman's journey to the Holy Land is not that "the atmosphere of Eretz Israel makes one wise" or gives one access to visions, indeed it is not that one should follow in the master's footsteps by making such a pilgrimage, but rather that one should struggle constantly to overcome *meni'ot*! Given this use of the journey, it is no wonder that the voyage itself rather than the destination takes a central place here.

The journey from the Ukraine to the Holy Land was in fact a dangerous one. As we have seen, the frail ships upon which Nahman and his disciple finally did sail were subject to all sorts of natural disasters, and shipwrecks

98. *Sippure Ma'asiyyot*, no. 8 (New York, 1949), pp. 18b ff.

99. *Liqqute* 74, 115, 249; II, 43, 46; *Sihot* 146.

100. *Sihot* 11; cf. also *Shiv*. 28.

were fairly common. Added to these were the dangers of shipboard disease, piracy, and the battles of the Napoleonic wars in which Nahman became embroiled. The journey was an act of *mesirut nefesh*, of willingness to endanger one's life to achieve some sacred purpose. As we look back over the account of the journey, we see that Nahman repeatedly sought to stand in the face of the greatest dangers. What greater act of overcoming *meni'ah* and of transcending the bodily self than the willingness to risk one's very life for God? Despite the rabbinic injunctions against testing the Lord,¹⁰¹ it apparently became clear to Nahman in the twenty-sixth year of his life that only by such a radical act of self-sacrifice could he overcome those "base" desires continuing to torment him and thus prove his faith in God. When later he spoke of the relationship between purity in the act of eating and the sanctity of Eretz Israel,¹⁰² he clearly had his own journey in mind, a journey undertaken for the purpose of self-purification by ordeal, the ordeal of "when you pass through water." Indeed, this is not the first trial by water that we hear of in his life. Of the adolescent Nahman we are told "he would take a boat out into the river, even though he did not know how to operate it, and when the boat was in the midst of the river, far from land . . . and he was about to drown, he would call out to God."¹⁰³ Is it any wonder that this same person, now a young adult, should test his faith by a dangerous voyage across the seas? The journey to Eretz Israel is a repetition on a much grander scale of a "trial by water" that Nahman had already undertaken—repeatedly, it would seem—as an adolescent.

V

The legitimacy of using such terms as "rite of passage" or "voyage of initiation" with regard to Nahman's journey has now been clearly demonstrated. The would-be initiate, whether in primitive tribal culture or in the rich myth-making imagination of a religious figure at the edge of modernity, seeks to undertake the death-defying voyage to the center in order to receive that knowledge which only the initiate may possess. Nahman, in confronting the real possibility of death and disappearance in a watery grave, tests his trust in God and his transcendence of his lower self once and for all. If he survives the great ordeal, he will reach the Holy Land, at once the source of renewed life through Creation (for it was here that Creation had begun)

101. For a clear statement of such prohibition, see Nahmanides' commentary to Deut. 16:6.

102. *Liqqute* 47.

103. *Sihot* 117.

and the locus of prophetic inspiration. Indeed, his voyage is homologous with that journey of which Eliade has written:

The road is arduous, fraught with perils, because it is, in fact, a rite of the passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to the divinity. Attaining the center is equivalent to a consecration, an initiation; yesterday's profane and illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring, and effective.¹⁰⁴

Elsewhere Eliade has described the particular forms of initiation which must be undertaken by one who seeks to assert himself as a shaman,¹⁰⁵ a type of religious figure who in his combination of personal ecstasy, communal centrality, and his reputed power to bless and heal, is not altogether lacking in parallels to the Hasidic Zaddik. Nahman feels a call that he can no longer seek to escape: he is to become the leader of a Hasidic community. Later, indeed, he is to see himself as the single leader of his entire generation. The dialectic of descent and ascent, of death and rebirth, must assert itself. If ambivalence and hesitation are ever to be overcome, they are overcome only by means of the ultimate journey.

Our explanation of Nahman's journey as a death-defying *rite de passage* does not necessarily contradict any of the interpretations that Nahman himself offered and that have been mentioned above. On the contrary, it provides them with that clarity of focus they had previously lacked. The granting of higher wisdom, *hokhmah* 'ila'ah or "garbed" wisdom, as a result of such initiation, corresponds directly to that claimed for rites of initiation in the most varied religious cultures. The account in which Nahman claims his goal was attainment of the spiritualized commandments is also made transparent through this explanation. Whatever ambiguity may be found elsewhere in Hasidism with regard to the enjoyment or transcendence of this-worldly goods is lacking in Nahman. For him it was quite clear that only he who achieves *hitpashhut ha-gashmiyyut*, total transcendence of the bodily self,¹⁰⁶ can

104. M. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* [= *Cosmos and History*] (Princeton, 1971), p. 18.

105. M. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (New York, 1965), pp. 81 ff.

106. The "stripping off" of corporeality is a central term for self-transcendence in Hasidic sources. This medieval term was popularized, if not created, by its inclusion in both the *Tur* and the *Shulhan Arukh* ('*Orah Hayyim* 98:1) as part of the prescription for proper prayer. See the discussion by Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 61 f. Scholem (*Von der mystischen Gestalt*, p. 288, n. 84) claims that the term originates in the *Tur*. It has not been traced to earlier philosophical or Kabbalistic literature. It would seem, however, that various parallel phrases were first employed to describe the prophetic state. See, for example, the use of *shelilat ha-homriyyut* in Bahya ben Asher's commentary to Ex. 3:5, or the somewhat later *nitpashet-gufo mi-malbush ha-homri* in Yehiel of Pisa's *Minhat Qena'ot* (ed. Kaufmann, p. 25). In both of these cases the reference is to Moses. Here too it would seem that we have a description of the prophetic state which later becomes

reach the spiritual Torah. Yet, though it was the higher Torah of Eretz Israel that he sought, that Torah could only be obtained by the ordeal of *derekh 'eretz yisra'el*, the transforming journey. It would seem that he chose varying ways in which to account for his imminent journey, varying in accord with whom-ever he was addressing or whatever degree of self-revelation he felt prepared to offer in a particular moment. All of the explanations, however, point to the same basic meaning: the journey as an attempt to transcend his own lower self.¹⁰⁷

This understanding of the voyage also helps to explain the most curious fact of all in Nahman's visit to the Holy Land: as soon as he set foot on the soil of Eretz Israel, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah in 1798, he announced that "when he had walked four ells in the Land of Israel he had already achieved all that he had sought"¹⁰⁸ and he was ready to return home immediately after the festival. Had his goal in fact been a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, including prayers at the holy places, a visit to the grave of his grandfather, or contact with the local Hasidic community, such a readiness to depart after only two days in the port of Haifa makes no sense whatever. If, however, his real goal was the adventurous journey itself, and if *arrival* in Eretz Israel signified the attainment of his goal and the completion of the ordeal, then his willingness to return home at once is rendered completely understandable.

It was indeed through the strength gained on his journey to Eretz Israel that Nahman returned to establish his place as a major figure in the Ukrainian Hasidic community. This strength was not, however, a matter of external "authorization" or prestige; it was rather a sense that he had, in some way that seemed absolute, achieved mastery over his own inner self. He had "passed through water" for the sake of God, and had seen his faith withstand the trial of imminent death. He was now one who could deserve the vision of the patriarchs, having followed their example by the utter denial of his corporeal self. Having survived his great encounter with danger on the seas, he was now ready to return to his people and become the leader they had sought in him.

prescriptive for every man in the life of prayer. A parallel development in medieval Islam, where a description first applied to Mohammed's prophecy is taken over to describe mystical experience in general, is traced by A. Altmann in "The Ladder of Ascension," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom C. Scholem* (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 1-32 (reprinted in his *Studies*, pp. 41 ff.).

107. Another curious passage (*Shiv.* 31) reveals how secretive Nahman himself was with regard to the true meaning of his Eretz Israel journey. When a certain scholar in the Holy Land pleaded with him to reveal the nature of his visit there, Nahman explained that he was sworn to secrecy on this matter. When pressed, he began to discourse on it indirectly. "But as he began to speak, blood came forth from his throat, and he said to the scholar: 'Now you see that God does not agree that I should reveal this to you.'"

108. *Shiv.* 15.

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*Edited by Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel
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