

7 Renewal and Ḥavurah

American Movements, European Roots

The Ḥavurah and Jewish Renewal movements, beginning in the late 1960s, are rightly looked upon as quintessentially American Jewish phenomena. Indeed, from the inception of Havurat Shalom in 1968, this writer and others spoke of the *ḥavurah* as an aspect of the American counterculture, setting our efforts in the context of the communitarian impulses that flourished in the broader youth culture of that era. There is no question that the banal quality of American Jewish life, including a perceived shallowness of the American synagogue, was a major motivating factor in attracting Jews to the self-proclaimed radical alternatives offered within these movements. This was part of a broad reaction against the perceived smugness and self-satisfaction of American postwar bourgeois culture as the baby-boomer generation emerged into postadolescence in the late 1960s. The document that best expressed the ethos of Ḥavurah Judaism, *The Jewish Catalogue*, was as American 1970s a product as one could imagine.

At the same time, however, there was much that was distinctively Jewish, textual, and traditional in the Judaism set forth by these claimants to the countercultural mantle. Havurat Shalom opened its doors with serious text study, including courses taught by Green, Michael Fishbane, and Zalman Schachter, among others. Serious theological conversation, intense singing of Hasidic *niggunim*, and even halakhic debates have been part of the milieu in many of the settings created by both Ḥavurah and Renewal circles in the ensuing decades. The rejected American Jewish style that characterized the postwar era in the community and its institutions was juxtaposed to a more “serious” or “authentic” Judaism learned by these young leaders mostly from European émigré intellectuals, building on developments that had taken place in a now lost and idealized interwar European Jewish community.

From German Jewry came the inspiration of Franz Rosenzweig’s Freies Juedisches Lehrhaus, the adult study institute that he founded in Frankfurt

in 1920. Appreciation of Rosenzweig had spread significantly in American Jewish intellectual circles following the publication of Nahum N. Glatzer's *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* in 1953 and the embrace of his thought by Will Herberg and others. The German term *Lehrhaus* was being used on college campuses by the mid-1960s to refer to a program of Jewish learning that, while not offering college credit, was to be fully as serious as any university instruction. It was, however, to be infused with the Rosenzweigian spirit, which is to say that its aim was personal Jewish quest and not acquisition of academic knowledge. The *Lehrhaus* model of learning may be accurately depicted as the first efflorescence of a postmodern spirit in the American Jewish mind. The link between the founders of the Haverah movement and the Rosenzweig legacy was quite direct; several of the movement's founders had been Glatzer's students at Brandeis University in the years preceding their involvement in creating the movement.

But the legacy of Eastern European Jewry was even stronger. It was clear from the outset that these groups saw themselves as neo-Hasidic, that is to say, carrying certain values of early Hasidism and limited aspects of Hasidic devotional praxis, lifted out of their original context, to Jews who lived far different lives from those of the traditional Hasidic community. While many of these young Jews may indeed be construed as *hozrim bi-teshuvah* ("returnees"), Jews more committed to tradition than was their upbringing, they were not on their way toward Orthodox Hasidism, and it would be quite inaccurate to depict them that way. They were Hasidic largely as channeled through the writings and personal influence of Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel, certainly the most widely read theologians within their circles. To an even greater extent they were inductees into the world of Hasidism as conveyed through the singular personality and teaching of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi.¹

The neo-Hasidism put forth by Schachter and his close friend and colleague Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach was much influenced by their own experiences in Lubavitch in its early Brooklyn years. Though neither Schachter nor Carlebach had been raised as a Lubavitcher,² both found their way there during adolescence and had been deeply shaped by the experience. Both had also broken with their mentor, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, a break that was essential to the emergence of the new North American Hasidism they were to create by the mid-1960s.

But neo-Hasidism did not begin in America. The term had been in use in Poland since the turn of the twentieth century. My purpose here is to trace

some of that history and thus to show the grounding of American neo-Hasidism in that which had come before it, but had been utterly cut off by the Holocaust. Both Heschel and Schachter, I hope to demonstrate, were active and self-conscious conduits of that legacy.

The idea that Jews living outside the traditional Hasidic world might still have something to learn from Hasidism and the mystical tradition could only have come about after the great battle between *Haskalah* and Hasidism came to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century. This possibility of rapprochement (heralded as early as Eliezer Zweifel's *Shalom 'al Yisra'el* in 1870) happened because modern Jews thought they were witnessing the virtual collapse of Hasidism. By the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century Hasidism was very much in retreat, especially in its original heartland of Western Ukraine and Belorussia (it remained stronger in Galicia and north-eastern Hungary). The reasons for this decline of the dominant force in Jewish religious life are complex and do not concern us here, but they include such socioeconomic factors as urbanization, industrialization, and emigration, along with the concomitant rise of Socialist, Zionist, and other secularizing ideologies. In the century's closing decade it became possible for secular historians (S. M. Dubnov in their lead) to take a nonpolemical interest in Hasidism. Shortly afterward, writers, artists, and musicians began to take up the imaginative re-creation of Hasidism that was to exercise such a tremendous hold on the Jewish artistic imagination throughout the twentieth century.

The term neo-Hasidism has been the subject of a fine recent book by Nicham Ross.³ It was first used regarding literary compositions, especially those of Y. L. Peretz and others in his circle. The term *ha-Hasidut ha-ḥadashah* was sometimes used interchangeably with *ha-Hasidut ha-sifrutit*. Indeed it was understood both by enthusiasts and critics⁴ that Peretz, for one, was not interested in mere nostalgic re-creation of bygone days but wanted to use his old/new Hasidic tales as a platform for a Jewish national revival featuring his own values. This positive appropriation of Hasidism transcended the emerging lines between Hebrew and Yiddish literature (as did Peretz). On the Hebrew side, this is especially associated with Michah Josef Berdyczewsky, S. Y. Agnon, and others, as discussed in full detail by Ross. In Yiddish literature it is represented by such major figures as Sholem Asch, Joseph Opatoshu, Der Nister (Kahanovich), and the Singer brothers.

On the ideological/philosophical side, neo-Hasidism is of course most associated with the works of Martin Buber (1878–1965). Buber began publishing his famous re-creations of Hasidic tales as early as 1906. He wrote in

German, and his works were addressed to a German-reading public, both Jewish and Christian. But at almost the same time, Buber began writing essays that used Hasidism as an expression of his own religious values, some of which authentically derived from early Hasidic writings but were presented with an overlay of the romantic youth-culture mysticism widely popular in the Middle Europe of his day. As Buber's own ideology shifted from mysticism to dialogic thinking in the post-World War I years, he took Hasidism along with him, as it were, reshaping his reading of it to emphasize its interpersonal and communitarian aspects.

But Buber was by no means the only thinker of his generation to have recourse to Hasidism in search of a Jewish religious language that might address a younger generation. Aaron David Gordon (1856–1922), the most important intellectual of the Zionist back-to-the-land movement, was much influenced by his own Hasidic background and the affectionate appropriation of some of the movement's key terminology.⁵ Throughout the inter-war period, there were various attempts, both in Poland and Eretz Yisrael, to universalize and update some of Hasidism's essential religious insights.⁶ The figure most associated with these attempts in Eastern Europe, and one of particular interest to us here, is author-publicist-journalist Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942).⁷

Coming from a HaBaD family in Belorussia, Zeitlin went through the usual rebellion of Jews in his generation and left the world of religious observance fully behind him.⁸ He was a member of the emerging Hebrew literary elite around the turn of the century. Zeitlin attended the fifth Zionist Congress in 1901, at which the Uganda Plan and other ideas for immediate increased emigration from Eastern Europe were discussed. Convinced of this need, Zeitlin wavered between Zionism and Territorialism over the next several decades. A student of contemporary philosophy, Zeitlin was much influenced by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and the Russian mystic Lev Shestov. He published books in Hebrew on both Spinoza (1900) and Nietzsche (1905). But by the first decade of the twentieth century, after trying to introduce Western philosophical thought, especially romantic philosophy, into East European Jewish life, he began to seek out an authentic Jewish philosophical language. In doing so, he returned to the philosophical Hasidism of his early years. Unlike any of those mentioned above, Zeitlin took the most unusual step, for his day, of returning to traditional religious observance.

In 1924 Zeitlin began to issue calls for the creation of a movement he named Yavneh. In that year he published a remarkable tract called "The Ark"

(*Di Tevah*, in Yiddish).⁹ The pamphlet claims to be a publication of “the religious-ethical circle Yavneh of the Ahavat Re’im Society.” It seems likely that both of these nascent “institutions” existed primarily in Zeitlin’s mind.¹⁰ This was to be a network of religious seekers and communities who would commit themselves to following a unique list of principles and specific courses of action, outlined in the documents offered in English translation in the appendix to this chapter. These texts constitute the first description of a neo-Hasidic Jewish religious community. The reader is invited to examine these texts before continuing with my discussion of them.

In the introductory essay “What Does Yavneh Want?” Zeitlin (employed throughout this period as a journalist) conducts a sort of interview with himself. He immediately sets up a juxtaposition between the pristine idealistic Hasidism of the Ba’al Shem Tov’s times and the corrupt Hasidism of his own day. (The founder of Hasidism, the Ba’al Shem Tov, is referred to throughout by his acronym, the BeSHT.) It should be noted that despite Zeitlin’s return to piety, even to the point of dressing in old-style Hasidic garb, he never was quite trusted by the main Hasidic community of Warsaw, the disciples of R. Abraham Mordecai of nearby Ger (Gora Kalwarya). The antagonism was mutual; Zeitlin saw contemporary Hasidism as deeply flawed by small-mindedness and bickering, by compromise with bourgeois values and worldliness of an unattractive sort. True Hasidism, as Zeitlin describes it, that which Yavneh seeks to revive, is built around the three loves that the BeSHT had claimed were the center of his faith: the love of God, the love of Torah, and the love of Israel. He then goes on to define these in typically romantic-poetic terms.

The Hasidism of the future, however, which is first to be practiced by the proposed Yavneh communities, differs also from that of Hasidism’s founder, even regarding some very basic aspects of the Hasidic legacy. Mid-twentieth-century Hasidism is to diverge from two-hundred-year-old precedent in three essential ways. Love of Israel must no longer focus exclusively on shining an inner light on Jews and the Jewish path. “In current times, when a world has been destroyed and a new world is being built, Israel has to be a light both for itself and for all nations,” a position then justified by quotations from scripture. Love of Torah is also no longer sufficiently defined in narrow or even exclusively Jewish ways. Now “we must seek the Torah-light also in the greatest works of art and in worldly sciences, which we need to approach with a particular light in our hands.” Within the context of Zeitlin’s highly pantheistic theology, it would not be far-fetched to seek God in the work of

botanists, physicists, artists, or poets. Finally, elements of class struggle, still hardly developed in the BeSHT's day, have to be recognized by the new Hasidism, which is to be much concerned with "the demand for social justice."

Rather remarkably, if we look at the neo-Hasidic Judaism both preached and practiced in North America some eighty years after Zeitlin issued this call, the areas of departure from classical Hasidism are quite the same. He understood the ways in which Hasidic attitudes toward the outside world, both ethnically and intellectually, would have to be reshaped in order to appeal to moderns. While Zeitlin as a traditional worshipper might have had little taste for some of the liturgical innovations of these later circles, he too was author of original prayers composed in the vernacular.¹¹ Gender egalitarianism was also not yet a central issue for him, though he did publish an early essay on the place of the Jewish woman, again in a highly romantic tone.¹² But the call for a broadening of the Hasidic ethos across once inviolable borders sounds entirely contemporary.

Zeitlin was a well-known and popular writer in interwar Jewish Poland. He contributed columns on aspects of traditional Jewish life for Warsaw's two great secular Yiddish daily newspapers, *Heynt* and *Moment*. He was both prolific and polemical in tone. In the 1930s his writings took on a dark and prophetic tone as he predicted the terrible calamity to come. As a Territorialist, he sometimes entered into sharp conflict with the growing Zionist consensus that emerged as the threat grew greater.

Zeitlin visited Eretz Yisrael in 1924. Following that visit, he asked a few of his followers there, including Yitzhak Landberg (later famed Palmach commander Yitzhak Sadeh) to try to create a Yavneh chapter in Jerusalem. As far as is known, such a group never came to be. But some of the followers of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook noticed an affinity between Zeitlin's religious writings and those of their master, and encouraged their publication. After the war a few surviving Polish Jews, especially Simha Bunem Auerbach, continued to write on Zeitlin and see that his works appeared in Israel.¹³ In North America he was completely unknown outside Yiddish-reading circles. His books on Bratslav and HaBaD Hasidism, in Yiddish, were published in New York in 1952 and 1957 by his son Aaron Zeitlin, the well-known Hebrew and Yiddish poet.

A surprising area of Zeitlin's influence has to do with translation of the Zohar. Zeitlin was an avid student of the Zohar throughout his adult life. Indeed, the account of his death, reported by ghetto survivor Hillel Zeidman,¹⁴ tells us that Zeitlin went out to the notorious Umschlagplatz, the gathering-

place for the journey to Majdanek, wearing *tallit* and *tefillin* and carrying a copy of the Zohar in his hands (I imagine he was thinking of the Tiqquneq Zohar's claim, repeated by Rabbi Nahman, that "with this book—the Zohar—Israel will go forth from exile"). Zeitlin had begun to translate the entire Zohar into Hebrew, accompanied by his own partly scholarly, partly neo-Hasidic commentary.¹⁵ The manuscript was lost in the Holocaust, along with Zeitlin himself. Only his translation of the introduction to the Zohar survived, having been printed in London during the war in Simon Rawidowicz's *Metsudah*.¹⁶ But Zeitlin's onetime neighbor (they had once lived in the same building in Warsaw), literary historian Fishel Lachower, was living in Eretz Yisrael. After Zeitlin's death he took up the dream of translating the Zohar into modern Hebrew. He approached Gershom Scholem with this notion, and Scholem linked him up with a young graduate student name Isaiah Tishby. Thus the well-known *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (now available in English as *Wisdom of the Zohar*) came about.¹⁷ The first volume lists Lachower as coeditor with Tishby, though he in fact had died in 1947, well before the volume appeared.

But the connection between Zeitlin and North American neo-Hasidism is of different origins, and is not coincidental.¹⁸ On a visit to Israel in 1959, Zalman Schachter (still a Lubavitcher Hasid but one already open to ever-widening sources of influence) met Natan Hofshi and was introduced by him to Zeitlin's writings, including the call for Yavneh. Schachter had by this time come in contact with Christian monasticism; he often visited Roman Catholic abbeys and convents and was becoming well read in Christian mystical sources. He also recalls having been greatly moved by the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, which gave him the opportunity to imagine that some form of monastic living had once been a part of Jewish religious history. All of these, including the influence of Zeitlin, came together in a plan he developed for the creation of a quasi-monastic Jewish community in North America. It was first publicly described in an article in *Judaism*¹⁹ in 1964 titled, "Toward an Order of Bnai Or."

Bnai Or, named for the eschatological community of the righteous described in a Qumran scroll, was to be a full-time communal enterprise for both married and single Jews who wanted to devote themselves wholly to a life of religious devotion. Schachter describes a group whose members would spend eight hours a day in communal prayer, meditation, and study. Another eight hours would be devoted to communally based work in efforts that would both enrich the outside Jewish community and help to sustain the Bnai Or enterprise. These might include, for example, writing (liturgical cre-

ativity was to be a special area of concern), teaching, printing/publishing, or artistic and musical endeavors. By the mid-1960s, Schachter had constituted a group of perhaps ten or twelve people (the present writer and his future wife among them) who had expressed serious interest in forming the core of this community, one that never came to be.

In 1967 and 1968, when I (along with several mentors and friends) developed the idea for Havurat Shalom, the Bnai Or concept was certainly in the background. What became the Havurah was somewhat different, primarily because the monastic style that attracted Schachter had less pull for me and I knew it would be a turn-off to the young Jewish seekers we were attracting. Although I am not sure whether I had yet seen Zeitlin's Yavneh-related writings at that time,²⁰ in some ways Havurat Shalom was closer to their spirit than to the original Bnai Or. The political milieu in which we emerged, the anti-Vietnam War urgency of 1968, made the political and social component more central to us than it had been to Zalman, who in those days was somewhat more other-worldly. While we could have hardly opened our manifesto, as Zeitlin had, with a call to working the land or becoming tradesmen (we were already highly educated and upwardly mobile American Jews, living in the United States of 1968 rather than Poland of 1924), we were indeed attracted to the dream of rural community, and a subgroup of the early Havurah members who met in Somerville, Massachusetts, often talked about moving to western New England to create a communal farm and retreat center, another dream that was never to come to be, though we see shades of it into today's *Teva*³ and *Adamah* programs. While Havurat Shalom was quite far from the Orthodoxy of Zeitlin's own religious life, the echoes of his call for religious renewal in the context of a sharp critique of the socioeconomic order were surely well heard in Somerville.

As it happened, Zalman had a sabbatical from his position in Winnipeg during 1968/69, the first year of Havurat Shalom, and he joined us as a Havurah member on a one-year basis, very much enriching the life of that group. Some seven years later, after he moved to Philadelphia (where the Greens also lived by then), Zalman began actively to create what was to become Bnai Or, Pnai Or, and eventually the Aleph/Jewish Renewal movement. The monastic flavor had disappeared, replaced by a much more "Aquarian Age" tempo. Elements of Sufism and Eastern religious practice were rather casually blended with a neo-Hasidic Judaism in a mix that at first demanded very little of traditional Jewish commitment or knowledge and was thus open and attractive to the many seekers who were experimenting with new religious forms in that age. While the casual visitor would have had no encounter with

them, Zalman's own translations of pieces by Zeitlin, along with writings of R. Nahman, various HaBaD leaders, *piyyutim*, and *zemirot*, were on the shelves of the original Bnai Or house on Emlen Street, alongside Idris Shah, Timothy Leary, and Baba Ram Dass. A new age had indeed begun.

APPENDIX

What Does Yavneh Want?

Hillel Zeitlin

I. What Does Yavneh Want? (A Dialogue)

What does Yavneh want?

Yavneh wants to bring old Hasidism, that of the BeSHT, back to life and establish it on foundations that are more acceptable in the present time of the "Messiah's footsteps."

Of what does this old BeSHTian Hasidism consist?

Three loves: the love of God, the love of Israel, and the love of Torah.

How did the BeSHT understand the love of God?

Until the BeSHT, even the purest love of God (and we speak here only of the love of God in its purest form. Those who love God because He gives them health, length of days, glory, and wealth, are not being considered here at all) was conceived only like the love of a glorious king or a great sage. Maybe, in the best case, it was like the way one loves a father. But the BeSHT came and taught that one must love with a terrible thirst, a terrible burning, terrible suffering that fills the entire soul and body in such a way that no room for anything else remains.

Was the BeSHT the first to conceive of the love of God this way?

Long before the BeSHT there were those who saw the love of God as entailing suffering as long as the person remains in the body and does not have an actual "outpouring of the soul."

Who were they?

R. Eleazar Rokeach, R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid, and in the time of the BeSHT, R. Ḥayyim Ibn Attar.

And how did such enlightened Jews as R. Bahya Ibn Pakuda, Maimonides, and many others understand the love of God?

They understood "love" as an act of the mind, of consciousness, of knowledge.

And R. Eleazar Rokeach, R. Yehudah he-Hasid, R. Hayyim Ibn Attar, and the BeSHT think that “love” is not an act of mind, consciousness, or knowledge?

They respect these as well. But they demand that the love of the Most High take in the entire person. It is the highest form of passion, the desire of all desires. It embraces all particular wills, all of a person’s senses, the totality of passion, all one’s lust for life, all thoughts, all words, all deeds!

Did they come to this all-consuming love just out of their own souls, or were they somehow aided by the ancients?

They saw this love in the words of the poet: “As the hart pants after streams of water, so does my heart pant for You, O God.” . . . “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” . . . “Who else do I have in heaven? I want none but You in the earth.” . . . “My flesh and heart wear away, O rock of my heart; God is my portion forever.”

If Rokeach, Yehudah he-Hasid, the BeSHT, and Ibn Attar saw this in the words of the poet, what did they add to it?

Everyone knows these words of the poet. But they are taken as just that—poetry—unique and special moments of divine inspiration. Along came the Rokeach, R. Yehudah, Ibn Attar, and the BeSHT, and they made it a requirement for every individual in every hour and moment, like the air we breathe.

And what did the BeSHT in particular add to this?

For the Rokeach, R. Yehudah, and Ibn Attar, this all-consuming love was a positive commandment, alongside all the others. But for the BeSHT it is the foundation of everything. He never stops talking about it in all his teachings, stories, and aphorisms.

And how did the BeSHT understand the love of Israel?

He once said to someone: “Believe me, I love the worst Jew in the world much more than you love your favorite child.” This is what love of Israel meant to the BeSHT.

And what did the love of Torah mean to him?

If you understand “Torah” only as sharp-minded, expert, deep learning, you can find love of Torah among other great sages and righteous folk, perhaps even more than in the BeSHT. But the BeSHT’s love of Torah touches especially upon the light of Torah, the hidden light, attachment to God through the letters of the Torah, the “worlds, souls, and divinity” that exist within every letter. Those letters combine to form words, and out of the joining of these words are formed awesome unifications, bringing near the coming of messiah.

And why do you call all this a “return to the original Hasidism” of the BeSHT? Why don’t you simply say: “to Hasidism?”

Because today’s Hasidism is very far from the pure Hasidism of the BeSHT.

In what way has today’s official Hasidism turned away from the pure Hasidism of the BeSHT?

Simply in the fact that it no longer possesses that love of God, Israel, and Torah.

What do you mean?

Very simple. Today’s *hasidim* still *talk* about all these things. But they mix all sorts of incidental things in with them—fanciful interpretations, homilies, intellectual games—until the real point is obscured. Second—and this is really the main thing—for some of today’s Hasidim their Hasidism has become a purely external matter. They study without a real taste for it; they pray in the same way. They pursue wealth and glory no less, and sometimes even more, than non-Hasidim. They’re always busy praising their own rebbes and castigating all the others, along with their disciples. They’ve set up rebbes’ courts and dynasties and get all involved in the politics of these. They spend a good part of their lives fighting about rabbis, slaughterers, and other religious officials. They consider only themselves to be proper Jews and everyone else to be nothing at all. They make Hasidism consist entirely of external manners, outer dress and outward customs. They regularly mix fanaticism with piety. They pursue the young people over petty and foolish matters, sometimes pushing them away from Jewish religious life with their very hands. . . .

Are you claiming that today’s hasidim contain even less true and pure Judaism than the non-hasidim?

God forbid! First, I’ve only spoken here about a portion of today’s *hasidim*, not about all. Certainly there are other sorts of *hasidim* present today as well: those who bear a deep inwardness, a deep attachment, passionate love of God. They have love for all Jews, a love of truth and a longing for peace, a strong, clear understanding of all that is happening around them. Second, even those other *hasidim*, the ones of outwardness and dress, still have lots of good qualities, those that belong to all Jews. Whatever failings a contemporary *hasid* may have, he still bears a certain sense of shame, a fear of God, a brokenness, something of modesty, humility, a leaning toward lovingkindness, goodness, and love. But everyone—the inward *hasidim*, those who concentrate on the externals, and just ordinary

Jews—today needs a new light that will shine into their souls, a Hasidism of the future, rays of messiah’s light.

Does Yavneh want to be that “Hasidism of the future,” that “ray of messiah’s light?”

That Hasidism is not yet here. The rays of messiah’s light show themselves hardly at all, only to those most pure of sight. But Yavneh wants to *prepare* for that future. Yavneh seeks, bit by bit, to qualify individuals for it. It wants to create vessels to contain that light, which must come sooner or later.

And in what way is the “Hasidism of the future” to be differentiated, not only from today’s external Hasidism, but from that which is inward, and even from the Hasidism of the BeSHT?

Differentiated from inward Hasidism and from that of the BeSHT? Not at all! On the contrary, it will be built entirely on the Hasidism of the BeSHT. But what then? It will go farther, broader and deeper, appropriate to these messianic times.

What will that “going farther,” both in breadth and depth, consist of?

In the time of the BeSHT it was enough for Israel to shine a light for itself. In these times, in a time when a world has been destroyed and a new one is being built, Israel has to be a light for itself and for all peoples, as in the verse (Is. 42:6): “I the Lord call you in righteousness and hold fast to your hand, making you as a covenantal people, a light to the nations.” And Scripture also says (Is. 49:6): “Is it easy for you to be My servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the guarded ones of Israel? I have made you a light unto the nations, so that My salvation reach the ends of the earth.” And it also says (Zeph. 3:9): “Then I will turn all the nations toward a clear tongue so that they all might call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him together.”

And in what else?

In the time of the BeSHT we sought the light of Torah only in the Torah itself. Sometimes they also sought it out in ordinary folk-stories, in which they discovered a hidden light. (“Declare His glory among the nations” according to a profound remark of Rabbi Nahman, means that “the glory of God cries forth from all things, even from tales told by the non-Jews). But in the times of this final great purification we need to seek out the Torah-light in all the finest works of art, in all forms of worldly knowledge. We need to approach these with a certain light in our hands, with a certain kind of foresight. “A candle of the Lord is the human soul, searching out

all the belly's chambers." It will have to separate, seek out and nullify, casting aside heaps of lies in order to get at the kernel of truth. . . .

And in what else?

In the time of the BeSHT the class conflicts among people were not yet so sharply defined. The demand for social justice had not yet been articulated with full seriousness and honesty. Today we are undergoing horrible evils that are taking place in the world. But these are leading us to a more just and honorable relationship with those who work with sweat on their brows. The "Hasidism of the future" will incorporate all that is healthy, pure, and honorable in Socialism. But it will be with great bitterness that we will cast aside all in Socialism that is petty, egotistical, merchant-like in its materialism, unjust, jealous, or vengeful. It will reject the dark and wild tyranny of the masses and of those adventurers who climb up on the backs of the masses.

In the Hasidism of the future the love of God will shine forth and burn even more brightly than it did in the days of the BeSHT. The "Love of Israel" will be transformed into a great worldwide "Love of Humans." Nevertheless, Israel will always be recognized as the firstborn child of God, the one who has borne, continues to bear, and will continue to bear the godly light. "Love of Torah" will spread forth over all that breathes with sublime wisdom, after the inner light teaches the Jews to distinguish between that within the worldly sciences which is of the divine mind and that which is just self-proclaimed human conviction, error, and lies. "Justice, justice shall you pursue" will be spread through all social relationships. Justice will be demanded not only of the opposing class (as both the capitalists and the proletariat do today), but people will demand justice *of themselves*. Pursuit of justice will be not only a public matter (as it is today), but rather of individual concern. Each person will think not about how to avoid being exploited, but rather about how to avoid exploiting the other.

Perhaps you could outline for me, just briefly, how you see the hasid of the future, that for which the Yavneh member is preparing.

I'll try to do so. The *hasid* of the future will live only from his own physical labor. He will exploit no one in the world, doing not even the slightest harm to anyone. He will partake of God's own holiness, living in uninterrupted communion with the Endless. He will walk through divine fire while praying, will study Torah with an inner godly light, will seek and find everywhere the light of Torah and messianic light. In all his thoughts and deeds he will strive only for true peace and unity. He will be filled with

love and compassion for every Jew and non-Jew, for every creature. He will long to raise up the form of the *Shekhinah* in the holy land and to spread her light through all the world. He will be a great seer and a great knower. In his own eyes he will be as nothing at all, having not just an external veneer of modesty but a deep inner recognition, a full consciousness that he is “just a small creature, lowly, dark, standing with but a weak mind before the One who knows perfectly.” In that moment he will be a true “chariot” for the divine, a true servant of God, a faithful messenger.

II. Commandments for Every True Member of Yavneh (Fourteen Principles)²¹

1. *Support yourself only from your own work!* You must try as hard as you can to support yourself from simple physical work, and not from trade. Trade is based primarily on the deception of customers, and this means lies. And lies completely oppose what the Blessed Holy One, who is Absolute Truth, demands of us (“God, our Sovereign, is truth.” And, “the signet of God is truth.”).

If you are, brother, a workingman, try to become an expert craftsman in your field. Don’t look forward, as so many do today, to leaving this work so that you can support yourself through easier business. If you are not yet a worker, make the effort to become one. If you have not yet been given the opportunity to join a labor union for religious or moral reasons, try to establish, together with a few of the members of “*Yavneh*,” co-operative workshops and the like.

If you cannot work as a physical worker because of old age or weakness, try at least to choose for yourself a type of livelihood that succeeds with a minimum of commerce in it, and help your friends working with their hands in every way you can.

2. *Keep away from luxuries!* Luxuries throttle the mind and the strength of a person. Luxuries bring on deeds of constant deceit, leading from there to thievery and robbery. Striving for the true Jewish life, and at the same time for a life of luxuries, is like dipping in a purifying pool while holding a defiling abomination in your hand.

Therefore choose a life of modesty, simplicity, keeping yourself far away from all external luxuries. Refrain as much as you can from various habits that cost you money, that do not benefit your body, and harm your soul. My friend, turn your steps away from the theatre, from parties, guard yourself

from smoking, from liquor, from expensive clothes, from adorning yourself with rings, and the like. Desire not to adorn your dwelling with costly decorations. It would be better if you would purify and adorn your soul, my dear friend.

3. *Do not exploit anyone!* Were you to support yourself solely by the work of your hands, the length of your days would be surrounded by modesty, calm, and humility, by abstention from indulgence, luxury and pleasure seeking. It will simplify your task to fulfill the great and holy commandment to every pure mortal: do not exploit anyone! Do not “use” anyone, seeking your own benefit without her or his agreement, or even with her or his agreement, if a full exchange of value is not received. Every person is a complete world. From the standpoint of morality and pure religion, every business abuse, in any form whatsoever, is robbery and murder.

A factory boss or supervisor who takes advantage of workers by paying them the lowest wage acceptable on the market, and not the full and proper sum for value received, is exploiting those workers. The merchant who takes unfair advantage in buying or selling exploits the people she or he is dealing with.

Abuses are to be found today also among politicians, journalists, doctors, and the rest of the people involved in the free professions. Every pressing of advantage that is not the result of the complete, considered, free and serious agreement of the person involved, is a sin.

Protect yourself from all this as you protect yourself from fire, my dear brother!

4. *Purify your family life.* The family has always been a stronghold for the Jew. In the face of work, persecution, and daily troubles, the Jew found rest and comfort in his quiet, pleasant, and pure family life. The family has always been the Jew’s sanctuary. Even Balaam saw this, and against his will declared: “How good are your dwelling places, O Ya’akov.”

Today, to our disaster, the anarchy of the street has broken into the Jewish family. This bulwark, the pure and pleasant Jewish family of Poland, has started to disintegrate since the time of the German conquest [World War I]. Now, this fall is deepening more and more. Further, this decline is abetted by the general moral ruin of the street, the theatre, the movies, the pulp journals, and obscene literature. And a good bit of the so-called better and more serious literature abets this. Knowingly and unknowingly, many of those that declare themselves to be artists contribute to this decline.

Protect your soul from this catastrophe, my dear brother! Strengthen yourself to protect the quiet, the peace, and love in your family!

5. *Sanctify your sex life altogether!* The preservation and sanctification of the covenant, these are the exalted bases of both interior and exterior holiness. Concerning this, we are charged: “Be holy” and “one who sanctifies oneself a little here below, will be greatly sanctified from above.” “The sexual organ is the termination of the body, sign of the holy covenant.” One who is pure in this matter is holy; one who is impure in this area is defiled. In this one must be guarded not only from actual sin, but also from sinful thoughts. And the proven ways to this are: always to be occupied with work (at best, physical work), and also with the learning of *Torah*, with concentration and depth. “There is no room for sin except in a heart that is void of wisdom,” says the Rambam. “*Torah* is good when mated to work; the exertion of both cause sin to be forgotten.” Actual work—on no account idleness. Idleness brings on all misfortune.

6. *Guard yourself from forbidden foods!* “You will be defiled by them.” Read this as, “You will be *blocked* by them.” Forbidden foods defile the body and soul; forbidden foods create vile and impure blood in the human body. If some of today’s Jewish youth have a tendency to go toward evil, this is mainly an outcome of not protecting themselves against forbidden foods. Be careful, my sister and brother, of forbidden foods, and thus you will save yourself your impurity, evil and quick temper.

7. *Sanctify your Shabbos!* The Sabbath is not just an ordinary commandment, but the basic foundation. One who weakens the Sabbath, Heaven forbid, desecrates the God of Israel. A person who doesn’t sanctify the Sabbath is like one who worships idols. “Keep” and “remember,” the single God uttered at once. Unite with the holiness of the Sabbath, and in this way, commune with the Holy Blessed One. The Sabbath, however, must be kept not only on the outside, but also within. This means prayer, learning, a basic stocktaking of the soul, concentration of the mind on holy and pure matters. *Shabbat* upholds the whole Jewish people. The congregation of *Yisrael* and *Shabbat* are truly a pair, and in them resides the Holy Ancient of Days.

8. *Keep your home holy!* Not only the synagogue, the house of learning, the prayer-room, but also every Jewish house is a small-scale sanctuary. When can this be said? When the house abounds with words of *Torah*, prayers, blessings, *Kiddush* and *Havdalah*, and when these are expressed seriously, truthfully, with profound and intent sincerity! When a mother and a father, a

brother and a sister, live in calm and true peace (for in a peaceful place, there is the blessing of the Father of peace); when the children are educated in the spirit of the serious and pure *Torah*; when all the children of the house speak the Jewish tongue and are full of love, honor and recognition for every Jewish thing.

But what is today the structure of a house of an average Jewish merchant? Mostly, it is a place of selling and buying, sometimes a feverish stock market, sometimes a club for a game of cards, and sometimes a hall for parties. The father goes out in search of “pleasures,” and the mother she seeks her own. In the house—a constant ill will, constant arguments behind the backs of others, or worse, to their face. The daughters no longer speak Yiddish; the sons are being prepared for empty careers. Even where *Shabbat* is kept in an exterior way, it is without celebration, without soul, without life. They pray, and when they have the opportunity, they fulfill commandments and customs, but everything is mechanical. In a place where there is no light and no fire, no love or devotion—there is no resting place for the almighty God.

Yavnehite! Don’t allow your house to become secular and commercial. Let your house be suitable for a Jew—a small Sanctuary of the Lord! Allow the Jewish language to be heard in your house, allow the voice of *Torah*, words of peace, heartfelt prayers, taking part in the immense and tragic mystery of *Yisrael* and silent hopes for redemption.

9. *Live always amid the whole Jewish people and for the whole Jewish people.* Don’t be concerned about yourself, but about all of Israel. The pain of all should be your pain; Israel’s joy, your joy. Every single Jewish soul is a part of the *Shekhinah*, called *Kenesset Yisra’el* because she is the totality of Jewish souls. The Community of Israel is the lower *Shekhinah*, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The suffering of a Jewish soul is distress to the *Shekhinah*, as it were. So how can you, Yavnehite, cause pain to any Jew? Whoever works honestly and wholeheartedly for the redemption of Israel—as he understands it—is working to redeem *Shekhinah*. Blessings to anyone who does something good for the Jewish people—even if his views are far from our own! Blessings to any hand that is stretched out to bring help to Jewry!

Yavnehite! In all your thoughts, all your longings, all your words and deeds, do not have yourself and those close to you in mind, but rather the entire great holy Jewish people. Bring yourself and your loved ones into that whole. The salvation of the whole will be yours as well.

10. *Remove yourself from party politics.* Though you are bound to live as a part of the general community, and work especially for the community, do not join

any particular party, be it ever so close to your heart. As long as the party is occupied with politics, it is bound for the furtherance of that politics to transgress the bounds of justice and communion of all of *Yisrael*. If you are a member of a party, and you find it difficult to leave it, especially if the main purpose of the party is the up-building of the nation—set your heart to scrutinize every act and deed of the party. Your humanity, your Judaism, your hidden treasure, is a thousand-fold more important than even the best and loftiest party.

Whether you are a member of a party or not, you can and ought to participate in the work of any party, to the extent it directs deeds to the building of the whole nation, and to the unification of the nation, and you are bound to remove yourself from it, when it divides Jews, or when, to achieve its purpose, it uses means that are contrary to the Jewish spirit, which is that of love, justice, and holiness.

11. *Remember and never forget the three loves!* The Yavnehite is bound to seek religious perfection: avoidance of sin, and the fulfillment of commandments in real acts. But, one is especially bound to awareness of the three loves: the love of God, the love of *Yisrael*, and the love of Torah.

12. *Subdue pride!* Pride—this is the most profound and strongest idol. Pride—this is “the strange god in a human’s body.” Pride has deeply rooted itself in us, and in order to uproot it, concerted effort over decades is necessary. We must combat it all the days of our life. As long as it rests in us, it hides God, it hides others, and it hides the world outside ourselves. We cannot reach the light of truth as long as pride rests in us. “Pay attention to this cursed one—and bury it!”

13. *Sanctify speech!* Speech is the expression of the soul. Guard the covenant of the tongue; the holiness of the tongue. Not one word of evil speech! Not one round of gossip! No idle words at all; and it goes without saying, not to defile your tongue with filth. Do not think that there is no damage from speech. What difference does it make? A vulgar joke? Whom does it hurt? No, dear brother! A word has the power to build and destroy worlds. It is your duty, Yavnehite, to be a builder, a creator, repairing lives that have been destroyed. Therefore, let your words be holy.

14. *Sanctify your inner life!* Let not a day in life pass, without taking stock of your soul. Every day, learn or hear *Mussar*. Books like *The Duties of the Heart*, *The Path of the Upright*, *The Way of the Righteous*, *Tanya*, *Likkutey Eitzot* should always be your companions.

Even if you are busy, and cannot afford more time, separate yourself for five to ten minutes every day, in your chosen corner, for a short and precise tally of your soul. And at this same time, let there be a short silent prayer in your heart:

“Sovereign of the world, set me on the right path, on the path of light.”

Note: Any reader who has firmly decided to start living in accord with the fourteen principles outlined above, even if gradually, in steps, may turn in this regard either orally or in writing to Hillel Zeitlin, Szliska 60, Warsaw.

NOTES

1. Neo-Hasidism remained the dominant ideology of what came to be called the Jewish Renewal movement, carried out by such institutional bearers as Bnai Or (later: Pnai Or) Religious Fellowship, Aleph, OHALAH, and many varied local Renewal groups, all of which were created by Schachter or under his direct influence. For the Ḥavurah movement, the remarks on its neo-Hasidic content refer primarily to Havurat Shalom in Boston. The broader movement (especially as carried on by the National Ḥavurah Institute) became most fully committed to an egalitarian and participatory style of Jewish expression, welcoming all sorts of ideological influences if presented within those parameters.

2. Schachter is from a Belz Hasidic family that migrated to Vienna in the 1920s and had become somewhat assimilated to Austrian Jewish life, educating their eldest son at the modern Orthodox Chajes-Gymnasium rather than within the Hasidic domain. Carlebach was the scion of a well-known German Orthodox rabbinic family. His father, Naf-tali Carlebach, had been rabbi in the resort town of Baden-Baden before the war.

3. Nicham Ross, *A Love/Hate Relationship with Tradition: Neo-Hasidic Writing at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Beersheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2010) (Hebrew).

4. Among the fiercest of these was Shai Ish Horowitz (1861–1922), who referred to neo-Hasidism as *tenu’at ha-bimbum*. See Stanley Nash, *In Search of Hebraism: Shai Hurwitz and His Polemics in the Hebrew Press* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980).

5. See Avraham Shapira, *The Kabbalistic and Hasidic Sources of A. D. Gordon’s Thought* (Hebrew title: *Or ha-Hayyim be-“Yom Ketanot”*) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996).

6. Two significant examples of this trend are Menahem Eckstein’s *Tena’ey ha-Nefesh le-Hassagat ha-Hasidut* (Vienna, 1921); translated as *Visions of a Compassionate World: Guided Imagery for Spiritual Growth and Social Transformation* (New York: Urim, 2009), and the writings of Kalonymos Kalman of Piasecna.

7. The most important studies of Zeitlin in Hebrew are the biography by Shraga Bar-Sela,⁷ *Between the Storm and the Quiet: The Life and Works of Hillel Zeitlin* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999), and several articles by Yonatan Meir. My volume, *Hasidism for a New Era: the Religious Writings of Hillel Zeitlin*, is to appear in the Classics of Western Spirituality series published by Paulist Press.

8. Zeitlin's brief autobiographical memoir titled *Kitsur Toldotai*, written in 1928, will appear in translation at the head of the introduction to my forthcoming volume (see n. 7 above).

9. Most of the Yiddish text (with the exception of some poetic—and highly messianic—sections) was translated into Hebrew by Natan Hofshi and published in Hebrew in 1962 (n.p.).

10. In a letter written to a Jerusalem disciple in 1925, Zeitlin mentions the existence of a Warsaw group. We have no external confirmation of this group, its size, or its longevity. See Z. Harkavy, "Perurim," in *Sefer Zeitlin* (Jerusalem, 1945), 127–48.

11. *Gezangen tsum Eyn Sof* (Warsaw, 1931). Most of the prayers included here were first published in Hebrew in *Ha-Tekufah* 12 (1921): 370–92. The prayers, translated by Joel Rosenberg, will be included in my forthcoming volume (see n. 7 above).

12. "Di Froi bey Yudn," *Yugend-Velt* 1 (1908). Hebrew translation "Ha-Ishah etsel ha-Yehudim" in Zeitlin's *Alef Bet shel Yihadut* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1983), 123–28.

13. A bibliography of Zeitlin's writings as well as discussions and reviews of his work by A. R. Malachi appeared in *Ha-Tekufah* (1948): 848–76. Auerbach's memoir of Zeitlin, *Toledot Neshamah Ahat*, was published in Israel (n.p., Shem va-Yefet) in 1953.

14. Published in the New York *Morgn-Zhurnal*, v. 46, nos. 13,650 and 13,676 (29 Av and 29 Elul, 5706/1946).

15. See the thorough study of Yonatan Meir, "Zeitlin's *Zohar*: The History of a Translation and Commentary Project," *Kabbalah* 10 (2004): 119–57 (Hebrew). This project was entirely different from that of Zeitlin's fellow Warsaw Jew R. Yehudah Leib Ashlag, whose translation and commentary, *Ha-Sulam*, follows his own Lurianic reading of the *Zohar*. On Zeitlin and Ashlag see Y. Meir, "Wrestling with the Esoteric: Hillel Zeitlin, Yehudah Ashlag, and Kabbalah in the Land of Israel" in H. Pedaya and E. Meir, eds., *Judaism, Topics, Fragments, Faces, Identities: Jubilee Volume in Honor of Rivka* (Beer-Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2007), 585–648 (Hebrew).

16. Vol. 1 (1943), 40–82. See also three letters by Zeitlin to Rawidowicz about his *Zohar* translation, two published to introduce the translation and the third in *Metsudah* 3–4 (1945): 339–41. The translation and commentary were reprinted after the war in Zeitlin's *Be-Pardes ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Kabbalah* (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1960).

17. This history is more fully treated in Meir, "Zeitlin's *Zohar*," cited above (n. 15).

18. Elsewhere (Arthur Green, "Three Warsaw Mystics," in *Qolot Rabbim: The Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer Memorial Volume*, ed. R. Elior and J. Dan [Jerusalem, 1996], v. 2) I have discussed Zeitlin's influence on Heschel, the other major conduit of his approach to Judaism.

19. *Judaism* 13 (1964): 185–97.

20. I read Zeitlin's "*Yesodot ha-Hasidut*" as early as 1961, probably led to it by Schachter. I also read parts of Zeitlin's book on Rabbi Nahman sometime in those years.

21. Revision of a translation first made by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi.



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