the time, however, he suffered from ill health, and though he moved to Vienna, he was too weak to dedicate himself fully to this position. With his wife and young son, Ludo (a well-known historian), he was largely supported by Jewish philanthropists. Hartmann was distressed by the Prussian victory of 1866 and even more by the unification of Germany that was engineered by Bismarck in 1871.

Although Hartmann was the grandson of the famous Prague rabbi El'azar Fleckel, and despite the fact that many of his friends were Jews, he was alienated from his religion. It is said that at the age of 13 he threw his tefillin into a field of grain by the side of the road. In his youth, he was one of a small group of German-speaking literati, both Jewish and gentle, who idealized the Czech past and identified with Czech culture. The question for him remained whether he was Czech or German. It is not known if Hartmann converted to Christianity. He was married in a Christian church but was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Vienna.

Hartmann's writings included lyric and satirical poetry, novels, journalistic reports, and lively descriptions of the regions and inhabitants he visited, most notably in the French provinces. His Tagebuch aus Languedoc und Provence (Diary from Languedoc and Provence; 1858). The volume Kelch und Schwert (Chalice and Sword) glorifies the Hussites and expresses regret over their persecution. The work Pfaffen Mauritius (Rhymed Chronicle of the Priest Mauritius)—Mauritius being the Latin form of Hartmann's own first name—was published anonymously in 1845, it was banned in Austria.

The brilliant satire Reimchronik des Pfaffen Mauritius (Rhymerd Chronicle of the Priest Mauritius)—Mauritius being the Latin form of Hartmann's own first name—was published anonymously in 1849; it deals with the failure of the Frankfurt parliament and that of the Hungarian revolution. Bruchstücke revolutionärer Erinnerungen (Fragments of Revolutionary Memories), concerned with the 1848 revolution, appeared in 1861. Hartmann also used his fictional works to highlight the fight for freedom from political oppression and economic injustice; for example, his Erzählungen eines Unsteten (Tales of a Restless Man; 1858) concerns the fates of refugees and exiles. He also wrote lyric poetry in the tradition of the Austrian poet Nikolaus Lenau.


—Wilma Igers

HASIDISM
[To treat the historical rise, beliefs, and practices of the movement known as Hasidism, this entry includes five articles. The first is a historical overview that describes the development of the movement and its geographic expansion from the late eighteenth century to the present. The second article surveys Hasidic teachings and literature. It is followed by a description of the distinctive features of everyday life among Hasidim and successive articles on music and dance in Hasidism. For further and related discussion, see also entries on specific Hasidic dynasties and leaders; Misnagdim; Mysticism and Mystical Literature; and Piety.]

Historical Overview

Hasidism is a movement of religious revival with a distinctive social profile. Originating in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, it has continued to exist without interruption up to the present day. Its ideological and historical origins are generally associated with the figure and unique teachings of Yisra’el ben El’azar (1698/1700–1760), known as the Ba’al Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name; abbreviated Besht), his self-awareness as a leader of his people, and his activities as the purveyor of a new religious message. The emergence and rapid expansion of Hasidism, coupled with the feelings of identification it continues to arouse, have helped it to withstand persistent opposition and become a central phenomenon of Jewish history in the modern era—one of the most prominent features in the religious, social, and experiential world of East European Jewry.

The beginnings of Hasidism may be traced to spontaneously formed, elitist groups of Torah scholars and kabbalists in the southeastern region of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, particularly in the province of Podolia. In the generation following the death of the Besht, his admirers called themselves Hasidim (Heb., more properly Hasidim)—a highly charged term applied previously to individuals recognized in the community as unusually pious or as kabbalists, who were as such allowed to adopt certain distinctive ritual practices. Members of the Besht’s circle of Hasidim and their disciples became charismatic leaders in numerous communities in the regions of Ukraine, Subcarpathian Rus’, and Belorussia, attracting admirers and curious individuals, particularly young Torah scholars unable to satisfy their spiritual needs by traditional means of scholarship.

Poland experienced dramatic political changes during the 1700s, culminating in the last quarter of the century with that country’s partition among the surrounding absolutist states; at the same time, the autonomous Jewish community began to weaken, making way for new sources of religious inspiration and authority. Hasidism prospered and spread against the background of the collapse of the old social order, a collapse that saw the abolition of the Council of Four Lands in 1764; the loss of faith in traditional institutions of community leadership, including the rabbinate, which were increasingly identified with the interests of the Polish nobility; and many manifestations of social and interclass tensions. These were further compounded by a religious-ethical crisis due to the remnants of Sabbatian messianism and Frankism, as well as the weakened position of the rabbis, many of whom were suspected of owing their posts largely to their wealth and contacts with authorities.

Despite attempts by Misnagdim (opponents) to vilify Hasidism and describe its leaders as ignorant and corrupt, most ordinary people rejected these charges and considered Hasidic leaders, the tsadikim (sing., “righteous ones”), to be superior spiritual figures. The weakening of the authority of communal institutions provided an opportunity for the leaders of Hasidism, thanks to their personal prestige and moral position. While originally they had intended not to replace the old institutions but only to reinforce and become part of them, they essentially appropriated powers that had previously been held by the community.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Hasidism experienced processes of transformation and institutionalization that changed its historical character. As it penetrated all corners of Eastern Europe and split into numerous subdivisions, it grew into a popular movement that appealed to the masses and not only to the elite. It garnered supporters in all classes of traditional society, whatever their educational or socioeconomic positions. Each such group was headed by a tsadik (also
known as rebe or admor [Hebrew acronym for “our master, our teacher, and our rabbi”], who represented a new type of religious leadership. They enjoyed a status, prestige, and authority different from those of the rabbis or elders who had been the traditional leaders of the community. The tsadik was not formally appointed or elected to his post; nor was he expected to prove his mettle in Torah scholarship. He was accepted as leader by his followers (including those not living in his own community) by virtue of his charismatic personality or spiritual eminence, and, from the nineteenth century, by dint of his descent from a dynasty of previous tsadikim. Membership in a Hasidic community was voluntary and informal, depending on experience; one joined by merely expressing one’s allegiance to the tsadik. The literature of Hasidism, which elaborated the special mystical and social status of the tsadik as divinely elected to his post, also ultimately upheld the dynastic principle as the sole basis of legitimacy in Hasidic leadership once this custom had taken hold near the end of the eighteenth century. The leadership of the dynastic tsadik is still the salient characteristic of all Hasidic groups and communities (with the exception of Bratslav Hasidism).

Hasidism has never been a “movement” in the modern sense of having a centralized organization. Hasidism is essentially a collective term for a great variety of groups and subgroups that took shape over the centuries, whether owing to different approaches or ideological and social emphases, or because of personal conflict within the leadership. Since the nineteenth century, Hasidic groups have been identified with the dynasties to which their leaders belong, and are generally designated by the names of the East European towns and villages where the “courts” of those dynasties were established or first became known.

The organized struggle against Hasidism, beginning in Vilna in 1772 when Hasidim in the community were excommunicated, reflected the perception of the movement as a threat to traditional structure and order partly because it proclaimed new sources of authority and leadership. The struggle of the Misnagdim against Hasidism, whatever its motives, failed utterly after only one stormy generation, but it left its mark on the general social and spiritual features of the traditional Jewish community, namely, the persisting distinction between the two main groups comprising ultra-Orthodox society: Hasidim and Misnagdim or, as the latter are often called today, Lithvaks (Heb., Lita’im; Lithuanians).

Since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, hostility has given way to coexistence. Nonetheless, Hasidism soon found itself facing a new, far more determined and sophisticated enemy—the Haskalah. The clash between Hasidim and maskilim (followers of the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment) was not just a dispute between different groups in Jewish society over the correct way to worship God. Nor was it motivated by competition over economic interests and positions of influence. It also represented a peak in the basic tension that has characterized Jewish history throughout the modern era: this ill feeling results from the conflicting views of “innovators” and “ conservatives” with respect to the religious and cultural identity of Jewish society, as well as from the significance of “modern times” and their spirit in shaping the future of the Jewish people. [See Haskalah.]

Hasidism’s followers generally led the conservative front and waged a determined, uncompromising struggle against the Haskalah, as well as against secularization, nationalism, and Zionism. In its early days, Hasidism played a radical, innovative role in Jewish society but remained confined within the bounds of traditional norms (halakhah). When the movement found itself confronting modernity and a dichotomized Jewish society, conservative tendencies came to the fore. Hasidism was thus not only a religious and social movement but also a rival and competitor to other religious and social currents that shook East European Jewry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These currents, Hasidism included, sought to shape the identity of Jewish society in the present and the future, not only through innovation and inner creation, but also through delegitimizing the opposing camp and posing an unyielding struggle against its influence.

Emergence and Growth (1700–1760) Hasidism was rooted in the milieu of the “old” world of Polish Jewry. When the movement emerged at the time of the Besht, it rose on the one hand from a coherent, traditional society with an ancient tradition of communal organization, a well-defined economic and legal profile, a characteristic spoken and written language (Yiddish), and a lifestyle shaped by halakhah and its authoritative interpreters. On the other hand, it was bred by a popular ethos that was reflected in a literature of customs, ethics, and homiletics, profoundly shaped by kabbalistic ideas.

The social and ideological substrata from which the leaders of both Hasidism and its opposition emerged were circles of pietists and kabbalists known as Hasidim. They were active in the southeastern districts of Poland (now Ukraine) as individuals and as bavurot (Heb., groups), but they lacked unifying links. They operated in a variety of ways. Some individuals, reputed to be privy to the “holy spirit,” devoted themselves to religious and mystical activities of an ascetic, reclusive nature; others studied Torah and Kabbalah, engaging in prayer and religious observance with an emphasis on such values as ecstasy, joy, and religious devotion.

The main scene of the Besht’s activities was the province of Podolia. After a period of “concealment” and religious preparation, he revealed himself to the public (probably in 1733) as a ba’al shem (professional healer), proficient in the use of “holy names,” and as a mystic possessing magical powers and bearing a new religious message.

The Besht directed his first efforts at members of the aforementioned pietist elites, hoping they would recognize both his exceptional spiritual powers (which were particularly obvious in his ecstatic prayer) and the legitimacy of his charismatic leadership. After achieving some recognition, he began to propound his unique teachings in these circles. Admirers were attracted to him mainly in the last 20 years of his life (1740–1760), when he lived in the town of Mezhbizh (Pol., Międzyboż; often spelled Medzhibozh or variants) and was recognized and respected by the whole community.

The Besht and his group formed an elitist nucleus that followed the distinctive religious lifestyle and customs of similar groups of kabbalists and mystics in the eighteenth century. For example, they adopted the Sephardic version of the prayer book with added kabbalistic kavurah (intentions) attributed to Yitschak Luria and his disciples, purified themselves regularly by immersion in a mikveh (ritual bath), and used highly polished knives for ritual slaughter.

The Besht’s disciples and colleagues, some of whom were associated with other pietist groups, included community rabbis and Torah scholars (such as Ya’akov Yosef of Polnoye or Mei’r Margoliot of Ostrógo), preachers (itinerant and other-
wise, such as Menahem Mendel of Bar, Dov Ber of Mezritsh, or Aryeh Leib of Polnoye), ritual slaughterers, cantors, and teachers of young children. While the Besht was also active among the lower classes and was heedful of their troubles and needs, they were not members of his closest circle and his new religious doctrines were not meant for them.

Despite the concurrent activities of undercover Sabbatians in the region, there is no convincing evidence of a link between them and the Besht's circle, or of their ideological influence. In any case, Hasidism vehemently denied this accusation by its opponents, though it has been accepted by some scholars of the history of Hasidism. In addition, there is no proof of a relationship between early Hasidism and non-Jewish pietist groups that were then active in Eastern Europe.

The Besht's associates were not content merely to share their religious values and ideas, but also tried to exert spiritual and scholarly influence on their communities and leaders. Criticizing existing priorities in the area of religious worship, they proposed new directions of religious revival and innovation, and advocated ecstatic fervor in religious observance, especially in prayer. They expanded the concept of Torah study to other areas of knowledge, such as kabbalistic ethical literature, and favored a new mode of religious leadership that was committed to the community in which it was operating. At this stage, opposition to Hasidism was not organized and systematic but was confined to sporadic criticism of a local nature. This chapter in the history of Hasidism ends with the Besht's death in 1760.

Consolidation and Dissemination (1760–1815)

At the center of the second period—the transitional stage from an intimate circle of Hasidim to a mass movement—stood Dov Ber of Mezritsh (d. 1772), known as the Magid, and his disciples, who were active mainly in Volhynia and Belorussia. Many of the Magid's followers became leaders of Hasidic communities while he was still alive (including Aharon ha-Gadol ["the Great"] in Karlin and Menahem Mendel [of Vitebsk] in Minsk) and to an even greater extent after his death. The Magid was not seen as the Besht's formal successor, but only as one of his major disciples. Other leaders who were active around the same time, such as Ya'akov Yosef of Polnoye (d. 1783) and Pinhas Shapira of Korets (d. 1790), also considered the Besht as their spiritual mentor, but did not accept the Magid's leadership and were in fact critical of his ideas.

The partitions of Poland (in 1772, 1793, and 1795) and the collapse of the kingdom that had hitherto combined all of East European Jewry into one political unit provided the backdrop to the first formation of Hasidic "courts" on a permanent basis—a phenomenon that became particularly widespread in the nineteenth century. Emissaries and propagandists representing the tsadikim (or operating on their own) spread Hasidism and its doctrines beyond its original homelands, enabling it to reach communities in western Galicia, central Poland, Belorussia, and Lithuania.

The new Hasidic communities, thanks to their predominantly young membership and pioneering fervor, adopted patterns of activity appropriate to a vibrant youth culture, and achieved coherence on the basis of unique shared religious, social, and economic experiences. Young men began to travel to their rebbe's court and to stay with him on Sabbaths and festivals. These visits frequently led to their becoming Hasidim. Some, in fact, remained for long periods and were known as yoshvim (Heb., residents). The "court" became the main unifying center for the devotees. It was filled not only with Hasidim coming there to bask in the rebbe's teaching and guidance, but also with outsiders motivated by curiosity or a hope of finding solace for their troubles.

With the consolidation of the Hasidic community and an ensuing demand for the teachings of the tsadikim, Hasidism developed a dynastic style of leadership, regular institutions, and organized channels of dissemination. Different types of leaders emerged. Among its heads were "theoretical" tsadikim devoted mostly to spiritual matters and worship; these contrasted with "practical" leaders whose major activity was to give advice and help to all seekers. Separate prayer groups in communities distant from the "mother" courts were established. Demand arose for Hasidim to ensure the economic welfare of the tsadik, his family, and his court. The tsadik and his followers were increasingly involved in the community at large, attempting to gain power in the corridors of community government by influencing the dismissals and appointments of communal officials and clergy.

As devotees gathered around different charismatic tsadikim and established themselves around their courts, theoretical schools also began to emerge, interpreting the principles of the Hasidic system of worship and stressing the new, unique role of the tsadik as religious leader. The 1780s saw the publication of the first Hasidic books. In particular, three classic works on Hasidic doctrine were issued: Toldot Ya'akov Yosef by Ya'akov Yosef of Polnoye (first published in Korets, 1778); Magid devurav le-Yaakov, by Dov Ber of Mezritsh (Korets, 1781); and No'am Eli-melekh by Elimelekh of Lizhensk (Lwów, 1788).

A systematic, organized campaign against Hasidism began in 1772 in several communities, notably Shklov, Vilna, and Brody. It was inspired and driven by the outspoken opposition to Hasidism of Eliyahu ben Shelomoh zalman, the Gaon of Vilna, then considered a supreme religious authority and a venerated figure. The struggle itself was waged by rabbis, preachers, community officials, and lay leaders. Moreover, communal authorities used the sanctions at their disposal to enforce their opposition. These opponents objected to the popularization of the Hasidic mode of worship and other practices and doctrines. Opponents feared these would undermine the existing religious and social order in which only a few exceptional personalities (that is, Hasidim in the old sense of the term) were entitled to adopt uniquely pietistic modes of behavior. These elite included groups of pietists and kabbalists (such as the group in the kloyz of Brody). Opponents of Hasidism were also anxious to avert a new outbreak of heresy and quasi-Sabbatian inclinations.

Anti-Hasidic bans and agitation continued even after the Gaon's death in 1797, but they gradually diminished, whether because of ineffectiveness, the lack of a central authority to oversee the struggle and arouse popular zeal, or the growing realization that Hasidic doctrines were not so heretical after all. The death of the preachers Yisra'el Leibel of Slutsk (ca. 1800) and David of Makeve (Maków; d. 1814), who had considered themselves to be the Gaon's personal emissaries in their vigorous anti-Hasidic activities, also added to the decline of the campaign.

An important turning point in the history of Hasidism occurred when the Russian authorities agreed to allow the Hasidim to establish separate minyanim (prayer groups) and elect their own spiritual leadership. Such minyanim had already been recognized in Galicia, then a part of the Austrian Empire, by the Toleranzpatent of 1789, but in Russia rec-
ognition came later, with the Jewish Statute of 1804. This official recognition of the legitimacy of the religious dichotomy in Jewish society dealt a further blow to the traditional community, ultimately enabling not only Hasidism but also other groups (such as maskilim) to break free of their previously enforced affiliation with the traditional community. During this period, some of the most important Hasidic dynasties took shape, and new types of tsadikim (representing the many faces of the phenomenon) appeared in various areas of Eastern Europe.

**Southwestern Provinces of Russia (Kiev, Podolia, Volhynia).** Though several disciples of the Magid of Mezritch did not themselves lead large groups of devotees, they still had considerable spiritual impact. Among these were the preachers Menahem Nahum of Chernobil (ca. 1730–1797), who founded the Twerisky (or Chernobil) dynasty, and Zeev Volf of Zhitomir (d. 1798), whose book Or ha-Me’ir is considered a basic work of Hasidic literature. Another remarkable figure from this region was Levi Yitsak of Barditshev (Rus., Berdichev; ca. 1740–1809), a rabbi and Torah scholar of Pinsk who was expelled from his town through pressure.
from the Misnagdim and from 1785 to his death was active in Barditshev as a venerated Hasidic rabbi and leader. Also noteworthy were the Beshit’s grandsons—the brothers Mosheh Hayyim Efrem of Sudilov (ca. 1740–1800) and Barukh ben Yehi’el of Mezhbizh (ca. 1756–1811); and the Beshit’s great-grandson Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1810), whose unique spiritual approach shook the Hasidic world. Descendants of the Magid were notable as well; among them were his only son, Avraham, known as the “Angel” (ca. 1740–1776), who never served as a Hasidic leader; and his grandson Shalom Shakhniah of Pohorbi ch (1769–1802), father of Yisra’el of Ruzhin and one of the first tsadikim to adopt the “regal way,” which rejected asceticism in favor of a display of wealth.

**Northern Provinces of Russia.** Farther north, in Grodno and Minsk provinces, Aharon “the Great” of Karlin (1736–1772) and his disciples were so active and prominent that Misnagdim referred to Hasidism in general as Karliners. He was succeeded by his disciple Shelomoh of Karlin (1738–1792), who was exiled from his hometown in 1786 to Ludmir, Volhynia (mod. Ukrl., Volodymyr-Volyns’kyi). The next admiror was Asher Perlov of Stolin, son of Aharon (1765–1826), under whom Karlin-Stolin Hasidism prospered until it became the largest dynasty in Polesy. Other important groups formed under Hayyim Haykyl of Amdur (d. 1787) and Mordekhai of Lakhovits (1742–1810).

In the northeast provinces of Vitebsk and Mohilev, the most prominent Hasidic leaders were disciples of the Magid of Mezritch: Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk (1730–1788), who moved to Vitebsk from Minsk; Avraham of Kalisk (1741–1810); and, after the latter two had immigrated to the Land of Israel (1777), Shneur Zalman (1745–1812), who founded the first Hasidic court located in an urban milieu (rather than a small village or town). Nearly all leaders of Hasidism in Poland and Galicia, in his generation and later, considered themselves to be his disciples. Other important followers of Elimelekh of Lihzenshik who headed large communities were the magid Yisra’el Hanpiot of Kozhenits in Poland; Menahem Mendel of Rimanov in Galicia (d. 1815), whose court, which attracted many scholars, had previously been in Prishtik (Przytatyk); and Avraham Yechezk’la Heshel of Apt (1748–1825), who after much wandering finally settled in Mezhbizh, and was considered in the last decade of his life to be the oldest living tsadik.

A unique and later highly influential figure in Polish Hasidism was a disciple of the Seer, Ya’akov Yitzhak of Pshiskhe (Przyssucha; 1766–1813), generally known as Ha-Yehudi ha-Kadosh (the Holy Jew). His relationship with his teacher, who had from the start singled him out as a successor, was marred by tension and jealousy. An elite group of admirers gathered around Ya’akov Yitzhak and challenged the Seer’s leadership. The new trail blazed by Ya’akov Yitzhak’s followers—who combined Hasidic and scholarly values with intense criticism of “practical” Hasidism, which they saw as a vulgarization—as well as their custom to begin prayers at a late hour, aroused considerable opposition. One of these opponents was Shabab Bumern of Pshiskhe, who organized them as a distinct Hasidic community and defied the leaders of Lublin’s Hasidic center.

**Eastern Galicia.** Known especially for its centers at Lihzenshik and Rimanov, eastern Galicia was home to other Hasidic leaders as well. The most important tsadik of the region was Yehi’el Mikhl of Zlotshev (now Ukr., Zolochiv; 1726–1781), a disciple of the Besht and the Magid. Considered the teacher of many future tsadikim, his descendants established a ramified dynasty in Galicia and Volhynia (Zvil [Ukr., Novohrad Volyns’kyi], Stepin, Brezna). Another important figure in Galicia was Meshulam Fayvush Heller of Zberezh (ca. 1740–1794), disciple of the Magid of Zlotshev and author of major literary works, including Derekh emet and Yisher divre emet. Finally, Mosheh Leib of Sasov (ca. 1745–1807) was famed for his religious ecstasy and intense devotion to charitable acts and the ransoming of prisoners.

By the end of the eighteenth century, a small Hasidic presence existed within the borders of the main areas of Jewish settlement in Eastern Europe including Bessarabia (Russia), Moldavia, and Bucovina (Austria). While various tsadikim visited these districts, none of them settled for any length of time, and local disciples affiliated themselves with far-off Hasidic centers in Ukraine, Galicia, or Poland. One influential figure who helped to spread Hasidism in these parts was Hayim Tyrer (1760–1816/17), a rabbi in Czernowitz and Kishinev who later immigrated to the Land of Israel, and an important Hasidic thinker (author of Be’er majim hayim and Siduro shel Shabat).

**Hungary.** Hasidic influence was confined to the rural northeastern districts (referred to by the Jews as Unterland), bordering on Galicia and Bucovina where the Jewish presence was sparse. In the
1780s, Yitzhak Isaak Taub (d. 1821) established a Hasidic center in Nagykálló, and small groups of Hasidim were active mainly in the Máramaros (now Rom., Maranure) district. Here, too, Hasidism gained strength only in the mid-nineteenth century.

**Land of Israel.** Hasidism was bent on preserving traditional Jewish life in the Diaspora and on finding solutions for the difficulties of everyday life among the Jewish masses of “old” Eastern Europe. Despite the centrality of the Holy Land in religious consciousness and Diaspora Jews’ recognition of the need to extend material help to those who lived there, the Land of Israel occupied a marginal place in the world of most tsadikim and Hasidim.

As had been the custom for generations, individual Jews including Hasidim immigrated to the Land of Israel—it was said that even the Besht had made an abortive attempt to do so. In 1777, a large group of Hasidim—not just a few individuals—led by Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk and Avraham of Kalisk, immigrated to Palestine. This wave of immigration, motivated, according to some, by messianic expectations, created a sizable Hasidic presence in the Holy Land, mainly in Tiberias and Safed, and laid the organizational foundation for the collection of funds in the Diaspora for members of the Hasidic community in the Holy Land. While Hasidic immigration never actually ceased, most leaders of the movement preferred to preserve Jewish life in Eastern Europe, rather than settle either in Palestine or in Western countries.

**The Problem of Succession.** Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the established Hasidic communities in Ukraine, eastern Galicia, and Belorusia began to face the problem of succession (the problem arose somewhat later in other areas such as Poland). The belief that the tsadik could bequeath his religious charisma to his offspring eventually became the guiding principle behind leadership of the movement, but not without difficulty.

Lubavitch Hasidism, for example, experienced a bitter struggle after the death of its founder, Shneur Zalman of Liady in late 1812. The rivals were his son, Dov Ber, known later as the Middle Rebbe (1773–1827) and a disciple, Aharon ha-Levi Horowitz of Starosielec (1766–1828). Their struggle, which was both personal and theoretical, centered over who was authorized to interpret the founder’s teachings and what ways represented the proper mode of worship. The dispute ended in the victory of the genetic heir, but the movement split, and from that point on, “outsiders” not descended from previous tsadikim (or married into their families) had very little chance of assuming Hasidic leadership.

The years 1810–1815 witnessed the deaths not only of Hasidism’s most vehement opponents, but also of many founding figures of Hasidic leadership. Their places were now taken by a new generation of tsadikim, members of dynasties or disciples who had reached maturity and earned fame on their own merits.

The year 1815 was also of literary significance. Two of the most important works of Hasidic narrative were published then in Hebrew and Yiddish: *Shivye ha-Besht* (In Praise of the Ba’al Shem Tov)—an anthology of hagiographic stories about the lives of the Besht and his disciples, compiled and edited by Dov Ber of Lmits, whose father-in-law, Aleksander, had been one of the Besht’s close companions; and *Sipure ma’asiyot* (Tales)—a collection of 13 stories, replete with a profound symbolism, that Nahman of Bratslav had told to his followers. Reacting to these books, a prominent maskil, Yosef Perl, published a brilliant satire titled *Megaleh temirin* (Revealer of Secrets; written in 1816, with publication delayed by censorship until 1819). These three books, each of which also had a Yiddish version, were highly influential in shaping the ethos of Hasidism and the Haskalah and helped to sharpen the messages and positions of the warring factions; to this day, they provide an invaluable key to the historical and ideological worlds of Hasidim and their opponents.

**Expansion and Atomization (1815–1880)**

Following the Congress of Vienna (1815), Jews in “Congress” Poland and in the Russian Pale of Settlement again were under the rule of the same government, despite differences in legal status that still effectively separated the two communities.

The acceptance of Hasidism in most East European Jewish communities, and its new status as a multigenerational mass movement, led to the formation of institutionalized social mechanisms. One was not just a “Hasid,” with no further affiliation; one had to be associated with a specific tsadik or Hasidic court. As a result, the tsadik, his family, and the attendant court establishment became a major focus of identification and social cohesion.

The fact that all parts of the traditional Jewish community, including Misnagdim, accepted the existence of Hasidism and recognized it as a religious movement, reflecting legitimate, though different, norms of behavior and religious lifestyle, contributed to the continuing spread of Hasidism. Hostility gave way to coexistence, generally enabling the two groups to live harmoniously, each cultivating its own specific culture. Still, the increase in the strength of the “Lithuanian” yeshiva world, as well as the rise of the Musar movement, were spiritual phenomena that must be understood not only in terms of their inner logic, but also as responses to the Hasidic challenge.

During this period—the last in which major new dynasties were established—Hasidism spread rapidly into the provinces of Congress Poland, and was generally accepted there without particular friction. In spite of many communal tensions in that region and period—some of them so acute that they reached the ears of government authorities—issues mainly concerned economic or personal conflict rather than ideology. Hasidism also expanded its influence in the southern provinces of the Russian Empire (New Russia, Moldavia, and Bessarabia) and the eastern parts of the Austrian Empire (Bucovina, western Galicia, and northeastern Hungary). In fact, Hasidism’s reach almost completely matched the distribution of Yiddish as a living, spoken language, and was blocked only where Jews had adopted the local language—Hungarian in Budapest, German or Czech in Prague, and German in Poznań.

The expansion of the number of Hasidic courts in this period and their increasing diversity arose partly as a result of significant improvements in communication networks, particularly due to the railroad, beginning in the 1860s. The railroads facilitated mobility, which resulted in considerable change in everyday life, making the courts more accessible as well.

**Ukraine.** Hasidism became exceptionally popular in Ukraine, where it appealed to the majority of the traditional Jewish community. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the best-known courts were those of Mordekhai Twersky of Chernobil (Czernubyl; 1770–1837), Moshe Tsevi of Savran (d. 1838), and Yisrael Friedman of Ruzhin (1796–1850), great-grandson of the Magid of Mezritz.

The young and popular tsadik Friedman began his “reign” in 1815, ostentatiously
displaying his wealth like a Polish magnate. Accused of complicity in the murder of two Jewish informers, he was imprisoned and interrogated, subsequently (in the early 1840s) escaping from Russia to Austria. Eventually, he reestablished his sumptuous court at Sadagora in Bukovina, attracting thousands of Hasidim from both sides of the border.

Almost all the descendants of these dynasties set up courts of their own: Mordekhai of Chernobil's eight sons were active in Ukraine, the best known of them being David of Talnoye (the "Talner Rebbe"; 1808–1882) and Yisshak of Skvira (1812–1885). The most renowned of Yisra'el of Ruzhin's six sons, active in Galicia, Moldavia, and Bessarabia, were Avraham Ya'akov of Sadagora (1819–1883) and David Mosheh of Tshortkev (Pol., Czortków; Ukr., Chortkiv; 1827–1903). These two dynasties and their offshoots were the dominant Hasidic groups of their respective districts.

Despite attempts by Russian authorities, in the 1860s, to restrain the activities of the tsadikim in Ukraine and curtail...
their freedom of movement, these restrictions could not stem the expansion of Hasidism. Another well-known Hasidic group was made up of Bratslav Hasidism, whose devotees were led after the death of Nahman by his faithful disciple and scribe, Natan Sternhartz of Nemirov (1780–1844). This small, lively, and restless Hasidic community attracted considerable attention—but also sharp oppositions. These were headed by Noa Hasidic community in Belorussia and Lithuania. The most prominent Hasidic community in Belorussia was that of the Lubavitch Hasidim. From 1813 its center was in Lubavitch, but it had many distant offshoots in Ukraine, New Russia, and Bessarabia. After the death of Menahem Mendel Shneerson (or Schneersohn; 1789–1866), known as the Tsemah Tsedek, there was a dispute over the inheritance of leadership among his five sons, and a dissenting court was established in Kopust.

In Lithuanian Polesye, Karlin-Stolin Hasidism had become an important group under Aharon Perlov (the Second) of Karlin (1802–1872), grandson of the founder. Because of a dispute with members of a powerful Pinsk family, Aharon and his court were expelled from Karlin (probably in 1864) and resettled in Ston. Karlin-Stolin Hasidism had four main offshoots that developed into independent dynasties. These were headed by Noah of Lakhovits (1774–1832), Mosheh Polier of Kobrin (1784–1858), Shelomoh Hayim Perlov of Koidanov (1797–1862), and Avraham Weinberg of Slonim (1804–1883).

**Galicia.** In Austrian-ruled Galicia, Hasidism spread rapidly, establishing large centers that attracted thousands of devotees. Most of the dynasties originated in the generation of the Tseer of Lublin, the Magid of Kozhni and Menahem Mendel of Rimov, and some of their disciples. Naftali Horowitz of Ropshits (Ropczyce; 1760–1827), known for his acerbic tongue, founded a dynasty whose most famous offshoots were in Dzikow (Tarnobrzeg-Dzików) and Rozwadow (Rozwadow). Shalom Rokach (1783–1855) founded the Belz dynasty, later a major branch of Hasidism whose leaders were deeply involved in Jewish public life, especially in the time of his son Yehoshu'a (1825–1894).

Members of the Eichenstein family headed dynasties representing a special aspect of kabbalistic Hasidism; the most prominent tsadikim in this dynasty were Tsevi Hirsh of Zhidachov (or Zhidetschoyv; 1763–1831) and his nephew Yitschak Yehuda Yehiel Safrin of Komarno (1806–1874). Both were prolific authors, profound mystics, and venerated leaders.

The most important Galician tsadik was Hayim Halberstam (1797–1876), who lived from 1830 on in Sandz (often Zanz or Tsanz; Pol., Nowy Sacz), where he served as rabbi and gained recognition as a distinguished halakic authority, whose rulings were also accepted by non-Hasidic circles. His best known book is the collection of his responsa, Divre Hayim. Thousands of Hasidim flocked to his court, which he ruled with a conservative, zealous hand, exemplified in his excommunication in 1869 of the Sadagora dynasty and their followers. His descendants established courts in Shinyeve (Sieniawa), Gorlits (Gorlice), Tosheshyn (Cieszanow), and Bobov (Bobowa).

Other important figures in Galician Hasidism were Kalonymos Kalman Epstein of Krakow (ca. 1751–1823), whose work Ma'or Va-shemesh is one of the fundamental works of Hasidism, and his son Yosef Barukh (1792–1867), a renowned miracle worker known as the Guter Yid (tsadik) of Neustadt (Nowa Miasto). Uri ben Pinhas of Streilisk (1757–1826), known as the Seraph because of his ecstatic style of prayer, headed a group known for their poverty and asceticism. His disciple and successor was Yehudah Tsevi Brandwein of Stratin (1780–1844), who had been a ritual slaughterer before he became a tsadik. Tsevi Elimelekh of Dinov (1785–1841) was a rabbi and kabbalist, a prolific author (among his texts were Bene Yisakhur and Derekh Pokudekha), and a fannatical foe of Haskalah. His descendants headed the Munkats dynasty (Hun., Muknac; now Ukr., Mukacheve).

Other leaders included Meir of Premishlan (Peremysłan; 1780–1850), known as a miracle worker whose court attracted admirers seeking his blessing for welfare and livelihood. His descendants headed the dynasties of Nadworne and Kretshnov (Rom., Cračiunești). Tsevi Hirsh of Rimanov (1778–1846), nicknamed Mesharetet (Attendant), was recognized as a tsadik by his own mentor, Menahem Mendel of Rimanov, but began to lead his flock only after the death of Naftali of Ropshits (1827). Famed for his religious fervor, Tsevi Hirsh was not known for his scholarship, and for that reason, as well as his “lowly” social origins (he had been a tailor's apprentice in his youth), other tsadikim were critical of him.

**Congress Poland.** After 1815 the dynamic center of Polish Hasidism shifted from Lublin to Pshiskhe and its environs. A circle of scholarly Hasidim around Simhah Bunem of Pshiske (1765–1827), a disciple of the Holy Jew and a licensed apothecary, shook the Hasidic world with its radically critical, anarchistic doctrines and scholarly tendencies, and produced some of the most important leaders of Polish Hasidism. After Simhah Bunem's death, some of his Hasidim pledged allegiance to his charismatic disciple Menahem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotsk (1787–1883).
1859), who further reinforced the scholarly trend and set radical standards of ethical perfection and self-denial for himself and his followers.

Toward the end of 1839, a kind of rebellion shook the Kotsk court: Mordekhai Yosef Leiner (1801–1854), one of Morgenstern's favorite pupils, left him, taking with him a group of leading Hasidim. Following and perhaps even before these events, the Rebbe of Kotsk began to exhibit strange behavior, effectively becoming a recluse in his own house. This self-imposed seclusion lasted some 20 years until his death; over those years, the inner cohesion of his Hasidism was undermined.

Mordekhai Yosef Leiner founded a dynasty in Izbhits (Izbita) and adopted a doctrine of radical determinism with distinct antinomian overtones, as reflected in his book Me ha-Shiloah. He was succeeded by his son Ya'akov (d. 1878), who moved the court shortly before his own death to Radzin (Radzyn), and then by his grandson Gershon Henik (1839–1891), an imperious, stormy, innovative personality. Gershon Henik was known for writing a “New Talmud” to the order Tohorot (fringes of the prayer shawl)—his Ha-

Other branches of Pshiskhe Hasidism are represented by the Yurke and Aleksander schools. Yurke-Amshinov (Meszczowo) Hasidism was established by Yitschak Kalish of Yurke (1779–1848), disciple of Simhan Bunem of Pshiske, a close friend of the rebbe of Kotsk, as well as a well-known intercessor for the interests of Polish Jewry. Aleksander Hasidism, an offspring of Yurke, was established after Yitschak’s death by his disciple Shraga Feivel Danziger of Grta (Grójec), who officiated as tsadik for a very brief period (he died in 1848). He was succeeded by his son Yehiel (1828–1894), who established a court at Aleksander (Aleksandrow, near Łódź), ultimately making it the second largest Hasidic dynasty in Poland (after Ger).

Among other tsadikim identified with Pshiskhe-Kotsk were David Biederman of Lenov (1746–1814) and his son Moshe (1777–1850), who immigrated to Palestine in his last years. Yechezkiel Taub of Kuzmir (Kazimierz Dolny; 1772–1856), known for his musical talent, was a fore-runner of Modzis Hasidism, celebrated for its melodies. Hanokh Henik Levin of Aleksander (1798–1870) was considered the major disciple of Yitschak-Me’ir of Ger. After the latter’s death in 1866, many of his disciples went to Hanokh Henik’s court in Aleksander, but returned after his death to the courts of Ger and Sokhachev (Sochaczew), Ya’akov Aryeh Guterman of Radzyn (1792–1874) was a disciple of Yitschak of Yurke; after the latter’s death, Guterman led thousands of Hasidim and was famed for writing amulets and working miracles. Some descendants of the Holy Jew who rejected the doctrines of Simhan Bunem of Pshiske headed Hasidic courts at Purisev (Parysów), Bekhevy (Bychawa), Shidlovts (Szidlowiec), and Kaleshin (Kalyszy)

Confronting the Pshiskhe school of Hasidism was another school of the Seer’s disciples, which placed emphasis on material well-being as a basis for religious life. This school considered the tsadik a major channel for reception of divine abundance and responsible for the subsistence of his Hasidism. Among its most prominent advocates were Me’ir of Apt, who assumed the leadership of opponents to Pshiske; Yesha’yah of Pshedborzh (Przedborz; 1758–1831); Yisakher Ber of Radeshits (Radoszyce; 1765–1843), famed for working miracles and known as Ha-

Saba’ ha-Kadosh (Holy Old Man); Shelomo Rabinovich of Radomsk (1803–1866), leader of an important dynasty of tsadikim that attracted many followers; and Avraham Landau of Chekhanov (1784–1875), father of Ze’ev Volf of Strikov and the only tsadik in the history of Hasidism who insisted on using the traditional Ashkenazic prayer rite. The descendants of the Magid Yisra’el of Kozhnetz, who headed courts in that town, Moglnitse (Mogielnica), Blendev (Bledow), and Grodzisk, formed another distinct group that rejected the doctrines of Pshiske.

Bessarabia and Hungary. Two small Hasidic dynasties were active in Bessarabia. One was headed by Arey Leib Wertheim of Bendery (d. 1854), the other by Yosef of Rashkov (died ca. 1837).

The first to spread Hasidism in Hungary was Mosheh Teitelbaum (1759–1841), a disciple of the Seer of Lublin and a scholar and kabbalist also known for his amulets. In 1808, he left Sieniawa in Galicia and settled in Uyhel (Sátoraljávahely), Hungary. Hasidism gained strength in those regions, especially in Transylvania and Subcarpathian Rus’, only in the 1850s, especially in Munkács (Yid., Mukatsch), Máramarossziget (Sighet Marmăți), and Satu Mare (Satmar).

The influence of the Sadagora and Sandz dynasties and their offshoots in these parts was considerable, but even more so was that of the tsadikim of Vizhnits (Rom., Vïnița; Ukr., Vyzhnyts’a) in Bucovina. The leader of the Vizhnits Hasidim was Menahem Mendel Hager (1830–1884), younger son of the Galician tsadik Hayim of Kosov (ca. 1795–1854) and son-in-law of Yisra’el of Ruzhyn.

Land of Israel. The small Hasidic community in Palestine was defined by affiliation with kulels, reflecting their geographical association with, and economic dependence on, the “mother” courts in Eastern Europe: Hasidim from Volhynia and Galicia congregated in Safed under the leadership of Avraham Dov of Ovruch (Ovruch; ca. 1765–1840), who had come to the Holy Land in 1833, while Hasidim hailing from Belorussia settled mainly in Tiberias. In 1819, a small Hasidic community had been established in Hebron, later becoming a center for Lubavitch Hasidism. An organized Hasidic community in Jerusalem was established in the early 1840s on the initiative of two printers, Yisrael b’AK of Berdichev and his son Nisan, who were Sadagora Hasidim.

Splinters and Controversies. In the his-
tory of Hasidism, the period from 1815 to 1880 saw a transition from a single movement with numerous communities, each representing its own spiritual tendencies, to extreme atomization, with communities splintering into tiny subcommunities. Almost every son of a tsadik (and sometimes grandsons and sons-in-law) saw fit to set up his own court. Atomization led to disintegrative, unstable trends: bitter disputes between tsadikim, competition for loyalty, and the formation of an internal, popular hierarchy of prestige that measured the merits of the numerous tsadikim, whether as individuals or relative to their rivals.

These splintering processes also reflected contradictory spiritual and social currents, contributing to the extreme diversification of the Hasidic mosaic. Flanking innovative trends, sometimes approaching the radical and even the anarchic, one also finds a nostalgic longing for the pre-Hasidic values of piety and asceticism, an emphasis on the value of traditional Torah study, and a preference for halakhic stringency. Numerous personal power struggles, often presented as ideological arguments, also reflected elements of decline and decay. Attempts to excommunicate Pshiskhe Hasidism (between 1815 and 1825); the persecution of Bratslav Hasidim (between 1830s by Savran Hasidim and in the 1860s by Talnoye and Skvira Hasidim; and the stormy controversy in 1869 between the tsadik Hayim of Sandz and the Sadagora dynasty are just examples of the internal friction that agitated and split Hasidic communities for several decades.

Stagnation and Struggle (1880–1918)

The period of pogroms and the waves of emigration in the last decades of the nineteenth century had their effects on Hasidism, but the secularizing trends in Jewish society were its greatest enemy. Dozens of tsadikim, major and minor alike, were active at the time in hundreds of Hasidic communities all over Eastern Europe, but the history of Hasidism at the turn of the twentieth century has received little if any scholarly attention. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the Hasidic court was severely shaken by the storms pounding its walls from without. It was generally felt that modern life and the secular-revolutionary atmosphere sweeping over the Jews of Eastern Europe would do much more damage to Hasidism than the distribution of satires and polemical tracts or attempts to enlist the help of the authorities.

Secularization derived its strength not only from modern Jewish ideologies of nationalism and socialism, but also from increasing acculturation, decline of the shtetl (life in which was identified with the stagnation of the tradition), changes in traditional economic patterns, accelerated industrialization and urbanization, crowded living conditions, the tremendous increase in the Jewish population of the Pale of Settlement, and numbing poverty—all of which created an entirely new spiritual and social climate. Though new forms of literature and journalism, in Hebrew and in Yiddish, became major factors in Jewish public discourse, there was almost no representation of Orthodoxy, including Hasidism, in that medium. The Orthodox struggle against these new currents only heightened their inclination to close ranks in defense, painting their leaders with a conservative, even fanatical color.

Hasidism gradually lost its attractiveness. Wealthy courts found themselves in financial straits; the old, traditional educational system, incapable of giving its graduates a general education or vocational training, was undermined; and Torah scholarship and piety lost their primacy in the internal hierarchy of the Jewish community. Hasidic leaders, not blind to this unprecedented spiritual crisis, took various steps in an attempt to halt the erosion.

As early as 1878, several Galician admo-rim, headed by Yehoshu'a Rokeah of Belz, established Makhzikey ha-Das (Defenders of Faith), to oppose the maskilim of Lwów and promote the interests of Hasidic Or-
thodoxy using modern, political tools. They published a newspaper and participated in Austrian parliamentary elections. The most significant turning point, however, came at the end of the period. Building on contacts that had already begun in 1909, in 1916 a German rabbi joined forces with the tsadikim of the Ger dynasty to establish, in Warsaw, the political arm of Agudas Yisroel. While the movement considered itself to be the guardian of ultra-Orthodox Jewry as a whole (seeking to unite Polish Hasidim, Lithuanian Misnagdim, and German Neo-Orthodox), it was largely dominated by the Polish Hasidic element, and its leadership generally reflected this domination.

Another innovation of this period was the foundation of Hasidic yeshivas. Until then, yeshivas had been identified with the Misnagdim or the Musar movement in Lithuania; their adoption by Hasidic courts may be attributed not only to a return to the conservative values of classic Torah study, but also to the realization that the yeshiva study method was a fitting response to the threat and seductive power of secularization. The first Hasidic yeshivas were founded in the early 1880s, in Vishnitz, Galicia (Pol., Wiśnica), by Shelomoh Halberstam (1847–1905), grandson of Hayim of Sandz and founder of the Bobov dynasty; and in Sokhachev, Congress Poland, by the rebbe of Kotsk's son-in-law Avraham Bornstein and, after his death in 1910, by his son Shemu'el (1855–1926). The leader of the Aleksander dynasty from 1894 was Yerahmi'el Yisra'el Yitsak Dantsiger (1854–1910), later succeeded by his brother Shemu'el Tsevi (d. 1929).

A unique figure in the world of late Hasidism was Tsadok ha-Kohen of Lublin (1823–1900), a disciple of the Izhbits school, who became a leader of Hasidim only after the death of his mentor, Yehuda Leib Eger. He was known as a prolific author who wrote several works of original Hasidic-kabbalistic thought (including Tsikvat ha-tsadik, Peri tsadik, and Resise laillah) that aroused considerable interest outside the Hasidic world as well.

**Upheaval and Destruction (1918–1945)**

World War I and the disintegration of the multinational empires of Austria and Russia resulted in the physical destruction of some of the greatest Hasidic centers in Ukraine, Poland, and Galicia (including the courts of Sadagora, Chortkiv, and Belz). The tsadikim, their families, and associates were forced to relocate, departing for other countries or large cities such as Vienna. The shift of Hasidic courts from the small town to the great city was one of the signs of the times.

Civil wars in Ukraine and the creation of the Soviet regime, which sealed its borders, all but liquidated Hasidic activities within the Soviet Union. Only Lubavitch managed to maintain an underground presence under the iron fist of the anticlerical regime. Hundreds of Bratslav Hasidim in Poland, unable to assemble at the grave of Nahman in Uman, moved the location of their “Holy Gathering” during the High Holy Days to Lublin. They lodged and prayed in the spacious halls of the Hakham Lublin Yeshiva, enjoying the hospitality of its principal, Meir Shapiro, himself a Hasidic rabbi.

Even in independent Poland, however, Hasidism could not recoup its losses, although a few of its centers seemed to enjoy some quantitative and qualitative success, particularly in the larger cities (Warsaw and Łódź) and medium-sized towns. Typically “Polish” branches of Hasidism, such as Ger or Aleksander, which favored a combination of Hasidic piety with a tradition of deep political involvement in Jewish community affairs, still attracted thousands of followers and admirers, but even these successes could not stem the tide of secularization, socialism, and Zionism (including religious Zionism) that swept over large numbers of Jewish youth in Eastern Europe.

In reaction to the threat of secular heresy and Zionism, ultra-Orthodox society (including Hasidism), especially in Galicia and Hungary, closed its ranks, adopting ever more stringent and conservative positions. Leading Hasidism at this time, and largely dictating the fanatical tone, were the rebbes of Belz, Sandz, and Satmar and their offshoots, who opposed not only Zionism but even Agudas Yisroel. Most prominent were the venerated leader of Belz Hasidism, Visakhkar Dov Rekeah (1854–1926), and his rival, Hayim El'azar Shapira of Mukhats (1872–1937), leader of the Carpatho-Rusyn Hasidim from 1914, who was known for his scholarship but also for his belligerent personality.

One particularly outspoken figure was Yo'el Teitelbaum (1887–1979). In 1934, he settled in Satmar where, thanks to his vigorous activities as rabbi, principal of the yeshiva, and tsadik, he became a revered Hasidic figure throughout Transylvania. In 1944, he escaped the Germans in the “Zionist” rescue train organized by Rezső Kasztner, reaching Switzerland and going from there to Palestine. After a brief stay, he left for the United States, where he reestablished his court, making it the largest Hasidic community in existence after the Holocaust, and continuing to be an indefatigable foe of the State of Israel. Another fierce opponent of Zionism and Agudas Yisroel was Yosef Yitsak Shneerson (1880–1950), leader of the Lubavitch Hasidim in Soviet Russia. Imprisoned in 1927 and then released, he wandered through Russian, Latvian, and Polish cities, finally reaching New York in 1940, where he reestablished his court.

One of the most colorful Hasidic leaders was Aharon Roth of Beregsas (Hun., Béregiszás; now Ukr., Berchove; 1894–1947), who founded a new, extreme, Hasidic community known as Shomrei Emunim, with centers in Satmar, Beregsas, and Jerusalem. His Hasidim followed strict rules of simplicity and modesty, and were known for their fierce stance against Zionism.

The terrors of the Holocaust and the di-

---

HASIDISM: Historical Overview 669
abolical implementation of the Final Solution dealt a mortal blow to ultra-Orthodox Jewry in general and to Hasidism in particular. Besides the physical threat, Hasidim had to grapple with grave theological misgivings, a desperate quest for divine providence, profound guilt feelings, and attempts to explain the catastrophe as a divine punishment. Impassioned faith was mingled with bitterness and doubt about the wisdom of Hasidic leaders who had despised Zionism before the Holocaust, some of whom had urged their followers to remain in the Diaspora but had unhesitatingly taken the opportunity to escape to safety in their own time of need.

Unique Hasidic voices could be heard even during the Holocaust. One such voice was Esh kodesh (Holy Fire), an anthology of sermons delivered by Kalonymus Kalonymus Kalmish Shapiro of Pisetsne (Pia- seczno; 1889–1943) to his Hasidim in the Warsaw ghetto, reflecting on the horrors of the Holocaust from a sober, anguished, Hasidic perspective. Another text, Em ha-banim seme ah (Happy Mother of Children), by Slovakian rabbi Yisakhar Shelomoh Teichthal (1885–1945), is a rare expression of personal and communal self-reckoning written in Budapest in the midst of the war (1943). Teichthal, formerly a foe of Zionism, did not hesitate to castigate contemporary Tsadikim for their fanatical opposition to the national movement, and for their loss of the opportunity to save the Jewish people from extermination.

Rehabilitation and Revival (since 1945)

The destruction of the centers of Hasidism during the Holocaust, especially in Poland and Hungary, signaled the historical end of Hasidism as a Jewish experience on East European soil. From then on, its history has belonged to those countries where remnants of the movement, having escaped or survived the European inferno, managed to reconstitute their communities—in particular, the eastern regions of North America and the State of Israel. Despite the inherently Eastern European character of Hasidism, leaders and devotees were able to adjust to entirely new political and economic conditions, in fact taking advantage of them to consolidate their communities anew.

In the course of the 1950s, thanks to an impressive series of charismatic leaders with organizational talents who knew how to instill their followers with faith and self-confidence, the world of Hasidism began successfully to rebuild itself. Within a single generation, it has again established itself on spiritual, social, and demographic planes. In so doing it has once more proved its unbelievable power of survival and its inherent vitality and creativity.

Despite sea changes in Hasidism in this period, its East European features are still evident, whether in the names of the various courts (which preserve the names of the East European towns or villages that were once their centers), in their customs of everyday clothing, culinary traditions, and religious lifestyle, but particularly with the survival of Yiddish as the main spoken language among most Hasidic communities.

Since the collapse of Communist rule, Hasidim have been expressing their East European roots through ritual pilgrimages to the tombs of Tsadikim and other historical sites associated with Hasidism, and through vigorous activities aimed at repairing tombstones and memorials of famous rebbes. These developments are especially evident in the Ukrainian towns of Mezhibzeh, where the Besht and some of his disciples and successors are buried, and Uman, site of Nahman of Bratslav’s grave, which has become—especially during the High Holy Days—a favorite pilgrimage site for thousands of visitors, many of whom are not Bratslav Hasidim themselves. Hasidic hotels have in fact been built in these towns to accommodate the many visitors.

Hasidic emissaries are active today in Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states, particularly members of the Lubavitch and Karlin dynasties, but their activities are aimed primarily at reinforcing religion and traditional education among the Jewish community at large and not at creating new Hasidic communities.


Translated from Hebrew by David Louvish

Teachings and Literature

The term Hasidic theology should refer to a body of ideas that have characterized Hasidic thought from its beginnings in the mid-eighteenth century to the present, and may be distinguished in a meaningful way from the thought of non-Hasidic teachers, both before and during this period and since. Every attempt by modern scholars to present such a body of ideas, however, has failed. The conceptions and ideas that dominate Hasidic literature can be found in kabbalistic and ethical literature of the eighteenth century, and play a prominent role in modern non-Hasidic and anti-Hasidic writings as well. It is very easy to distinguish between a Hasid and a non-Hasid by their dress, customs, manner of prayer, loyalty to a rebbe, and many other obvious aspects of daily life. **670 HASIDISM: Teachings and Literature**