

## “Money for Household Expenses”: Economic Aspects of the Hasidic Courts

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Once, while he [R. Aaron of Chernobyl] was still being supported by his father, the Zaddik R. Mottele, his father began to pester him, saying: Here I am, burdened with a large family, and it is hard for me to support you. How long shall you be a burden upon me, and when will you begin to make your own way? For you too can travel and go from town to town, receiving *kvitlach*, and you will be able to make a living.<sup>1</sup>

### Zaddikism as a Profession

In 1798, some time before R. Nahman of Bratslav set out on his enigmatic journey to Palestine, he bewailed his fate:

He would go to and fro in his house, saying: ‘I am poor and needy, more so than all the great men. This one has riches, and that one has money, and that one has towns — but I have nothing.’<sup>2</sup>

The “great men” (Heb. *gedolim*) of R. Nahman’s frustrated comparison were none other than his colleagues, the renowned Zaddikim of his day, most of whom had by then adopted lifestyles bespeaking opulence and material wealth. From that time on, through the 19th century and up until the eve of World War I, such lifestyles were to characterize the world of the Zaddikim and to shape hasidic life in Eastern Europe. A “great” (or, as they were usually described in contemporary sources, a “famous,”

Heb. *mefursam*) Zaddik was not only one of distinguished lineage who knew how to worship God with marvelous devotion, but also one who had managed to accumulate property, wealth and economic and political power — exemplified in their “rule” over “towns.”

This notion of being a Zaddik as a “profession,” a means of livelihood for the leader and his family, is surely one of the most vulgar phenomena of Hasidism in the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it was the outcome of religious ideas and socio-economic patterns that began to penetrate Hasidism toward the end of the 18th century, possibly even earlier.<sup>4</sup>

Even during the first, formative years of Hasidism, groups of pietists and kabbalists — some of whom were later to earn fame as the leaders of the new Hasidism — had no compunctions about soliciting financial contributions to support themselves and their activities. Local elitist circles of pietist-kabbalists devoting themselves to the study of exoteric and esoteric lore, with the support of local rich patrons (such as the famous *kloiz* at Brody), exemplified what seemed like a natural mutual relationship, modeled on the midrashic idea of “Issachar and Zebulun.” As has recently been suggested, one can also view the Besht’s group of pietists in Międzybóž as an “elite Torah-study circle” associated with the community study house (Heb. *bet midrash*). This study house, though affiliated with the kahal, was supported mainly by generous wealthy members of the community.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Besht and some of his associates at Międzybóž were granted free living quarters and tax exemptions,<sup>6</sup> though this did not prevent the Besht from continuing his activities as a professional healer, exacting fees for his services as a *Baal-Shem*, or from receiving monetary donations and

1 Reuben Zak, *Kerem Yisra’el*, Lublin 1930, p. 94; the reference is to R. Aaron of Chernobyl (d. 1871), eldest son of R. Mordecai of Chernobyl.

2 *Hayyei Moharan*, Jerusalem 1976, p. 85, “His Journey to Palestine,” sec. 19.

3 For the signs of decadence and vulgarity in the institution of the Zaddik since the mid-19th century see M. Piekarczyk, *Ideological Trends in Hasidism in Poland during the Interwar Period and the Holocaust*, Jerusalem 1990 (Heb.), pp. 157–202; idem, *Between Ideology and Reality*, Jerusalem 1994 (Heb.), pp. 199–227.

4 In this connection cf. the recent article by H. Pedaya, “On the Development of the Social-Religious-Economic Pattern in Hasidism: the *Pidyon*, the *Havurah* and the Pilgrimage,” in: M. Ben-Sasson (ed.), *Religion and Economy — Connections and Interactions* (Heb.), Jerusalem 1995, pp. 311–373. Pedaya persuasively describes the correlation between social developments in Hasidism (transition from a spontaneous group to a permanent court, crystallization of the Zaddik-Congregation relationship) and economic developments, mainly the functional conception of *pidyon*.

5 See E. Reiner, “Wealth, Social Position and the Study of Torah: The Status of the *Kloiz* in Eastern European Jewish Society in the Early Modern Period” (Heb.), *Zion* 48 (1993), pp. 287–328, esp. p. 304.

6 M. J. Rosman, “Miedzyboz and Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov,” in: G. D. Hundert (ed.), *Essential Papers on Hasidism — Origins to Present*, New York 1991, pp. 209–225.

distributing them as he saw fit.<sup>7</sup> R. Nahman of Kosów, a rich leaseholder and member of a group of pneumatics at Kutu, supported one of his colleagues, the preacher R. Aryeh Leib of Polonnoye, who later joined the Besht's circle.<sup>8</sup> Pietists and kabbalists, some of them well known disciples of the Besht, received sizable sums of money as bequests from deceased sympathizers;<sup>9</sup> and there are many more such examples. The ideological basis for such patterns of financial aid to spiritual elites unaffiliated with the rabbinic or community establishment — even those who cut themselves off from the general public — was stated and restated in the writings and doctrines of the founders of Hasidism, frequently citing homilies and other passages from the pre-hasidic ethical and exegetical literature.<sup>10</sup>

- 7 See *Shivhei ha-Besht* [In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov], ed. A. Rubinstein, Jerusalem 1991, pp. 178, 246–247 (Heb.); and compare the last will and testament of R. David of Maków: “It was his [the Besht’s] custom, too, to travel to the noblemen and heal them for a fee” (M. Wilensky, *Hasidim and Mitnaggedim*, Jerusalem 1970 [Heb.], II, p. 242); see also G. Scholem, “The Historical Image of the Besht” (Heb.), *Devarim Bego*, Tel Aviv 1975, pp. 291–299. Scholem stated that the Besht maintained himself and his family solely through his professional activities as a “Baal-Shem,” rather than take advantage of the convenient doctrine that a distinguished person was entitled to support at the people’s expense. He “knew that ‘charisma’ was not something to be exploited, as was frequently the case later” (ibid., pp. 312–313). However, Rosman’s findings (above, n. 6) refute this assumption.
- 8 *Shivhei ha-Besht*, p. 264; see A. J. Heschel, “Rabbi Nahman of Kosów: Companion of the Baal Shem,” in: *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov — Studies in Hasidism*, Chicago 1985, pp. 118–119; J. Weiss, “A Circle of Pneumatics in Pre-Hasidism,” in: *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1985, pp. 27–42.
- 9 R. David Halperin, head of the rabbinical court at Ostróg (d. 1765), made very significant bequests in his will to some of the most prominent members of the Besht’s group, among them R. Aryeh Leib of Polonnoye, the Maggid of Międzyrzecz, the Maggid of Złoczów, R. Pinhas of Korzec, R. Wolf Kotzis of Międzybóź, and others. The will was first published in *Darkhei Zion*, Polonnoye 1798; see Y. Alfassi, *Bi-Sdeh ha-Hasidut*, Tel Aviv 1987, pp. 515–531. Alfassi claims that the will was printed “as propaganda for burial societies” (p. 516), but it was probably also meant to encourage rich individuals to remember hasidic groups in their wills. Compare the story of the wealthy merchant who promised R. Hayyim Zanser, a respected member of the *kloiz* at Brody, 500 rubles to have *kaddish* recited and *mishnayot* studied in his memory, see N. M. Gelber, *Toledot Yehudei Brody* (*‘Arim ve-Immahot be-Yisra’el*, 6), Jerusalem 1955, pp. 330–331.
- 10 Injunctions such as that of R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye — “The Lord, praise be to Him, first admonished the masses to assist the learned scholar with their money, so that he should be free to seclude and sanctify himself” (*Zafnat Pa’aneah*, Piotrków 1883, p. 192; and cf. M. Piekartz, “*Devekuth* as Reflecting the Socio-Religious Character of the Hasidic Movement” [Heb.], *Daat* 25 [1990], pp. 132, 137) — were collected by Joseph Weiss in his stimulating paper, “The Beginnings of Hasidism” (Heb.), *Zion* 16 (1951), pp. 46–105. They have been interpreted as indications of the absolute economic dependence

Available sources concerning the means of sustenance of the 18th century pietistic groups are indeed scanty and partial; one cannot be sure that the information they furnish reflects the rule or possibly just exceptions. Nevertheless, it is quite likely that as early as the 1760s and 1770s the permanent courts of the Maggid of Międzyrzecz and some of his disciples supported themselves in ways not unlike those typical of courts of Zaddikim in the 19th century, and comparative evidence to that effect may be found scattered throughout both hasidic literature and anti-hasidic writings.<sup>11</sup> True, such sporadic cases of special individuals, supported by the kahal or by wealthy patrons, cannot be compared in scope with the total maintenance of the Zaddik, his family, associates and court by the Hasidim themselves, which became a typical feature of Hasidism in the 19th century. Nevertheless, the difference is merely quantitative: in both cases the Zaddik could not — or would not — leave aside his spiritual and public activities to care for his material needs. It was his self-appointed task to attend to spiritual matters, for the benefit of Jews in general and his followers and supporters in particular; hence the latter were expected, and indeed were willing, to provide the material wherewithal to enable the Zaddik and his dependents to continue their activities unhampered. As Gershom Scholem rightly pointed out, “the truth is that the later development of Zaddikism was already implicit in the very start of the hasidic movement”<sup>12</sup> — a comment that rejects any moral or ideological distinction between what some have seen as two periods in the history of Hasidism: a first period, characterized by moral principles and spirituality, and a second, primitive and corrupt. This distinction, first proposed in the work of such scholars

of the itinerant “secondary” intelligentsia (the *maggidim* and *mokhihim*), i.e., the sector of the spiritual elite that was not economically favored by the establishment, on the common people. This dependence resulted in a crisis, contributing toward the social and spiritual climate for the emergence of Hasidism. Weiss’s conclusions, however, were rejected by many scholars; thus, e.g., S. Ettinger pointed out that some of the early hasidic leaders were socially stable, and that they did not constitute a uniform social and economic group; see his “The Hasidic Movement: Reality and Ideals,” *On the History of the Jews in Poland and Russia* (Heb.), Jerusalem 1994, p. 190 [=Essential Papers on Hasidism (above, n. 6), pp. 229–230].

11 See, e.g., the oath taken by R. Isaac son of R. Pinhas of Połock: “That I shall not contribute charity as *pidyon* to their rabbi as is their custom, and that I shall not contribute charity of any amount or regular payment to their group” (Wilensky [above, n. 7], I, p. 323); or the colorful accounts of economic affairs at the court of R. Hayyim Haykel of Amdur (d. 1787), ibid., II, pp. 171–175; etc.

12 G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1961, p. 342.

as Simon Dubnow and Samuel Horodecki, is in urgent need of critical revision,<sup>13</sup> as forcefully put by Shmuel Ettinger, who criticized the dubious morality of Dubnow's distinction between the pure, "theoretical Hasidism" and the corrupt, "practical Hasidism":

I cannot agree with a moralism that allows the Besht to receive a fee for writing a charm, as if it were payment for services rendered, while condemning payment of *pidyon* to the Zaddik for his communal leadership as a purely corrupt and exploitative deed and nothing more. From a historical point of view, the problem lies neither with the payment nor with its justification, but with the role of leadership and the nature of its action.<sup>14</sup>

The student of Hasidism capable of safely hurdling the moral condemnation of 19th century Zaddikism as corrupt, and consequently concentrating on the actual manifestations of economic activity at the major hasidic courts, particularly in the Ukraine and Galicia, discovers a unique, independent financial system. The Zaddik's court maintained an existence economically apart from that of the host community and was generally quite indifferent to the needs of the latter's institutions. It was self-supporting, achieving its goals through such typical economic tools as fund-raising, tax collection, loans, savings and profitable investments. The comfortable life at the court, which encompassed not only the Zaddik and his family but a whole staff of helpers and associates, with its own, self-organized fund-raising systems, was an integral part of social reality in many 19th century hasidic communities, especially in the "royal" courts of the Ruzhin-Sadagóra and Chernobyl dynasties.<sup>15</sup> The considerable financial turnover in such courts, coupled with the fact that the use of the funds was at the sole discretion of the Zaddik (or of his representative), were the cause not only of the later

13 See J. Dan, "Hasidism: The Third Century" (Heb.), in *World Union of Jewish Studies, Newsletter* 29 (1989), pp. 29–42; D. Assaf, *The Regal Way: The Life and Times of R. Israel of Ruzhin*, Jerusalem 1997, pp. 21–24 (Heb.) [hereafter: Assaf, *Ruzhin*].

14 Ettinger (above, n. 10), pp. 197–198. The above examples are also inconsistent with Benzion Dinur's views of the social-egalitarian character of early Hasidism; see idem, "The Origins of Hasidism and its Social and Messianic Foundations," in: *Essential Papers on Hasidism* (above, n. 6), pp. 143 ff. For a survey and critique of this view see E. Etkes, *From Esoteric Circle to Mass Movement: The Emergence of Early Hasidism*, The Open University, Tel Aviv 1991 (Heb.), pp. 105–108; idem, "Trends in the Study of the Hasidic Movement" (Heb.), *Jewish Studies* 31 (1991), pp. 6–8.

15 For a comprehensive discussion of the emergence of the hasidic "royal" courts in the 19th century and a description of their physical features, socio-economic structure and the various functions that operated within them, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 363–434.

historians' strictures, but also of contemporary criticism, whether voiced by hasidim, mitnaggedim or maskilim, and consequently of suspicion and bitter hostility toward Hasidism in general.<sup>16</sup>

The main fund-raising tools at the court's disposal were: 1. the *pidyon* paid by every hasid coming to appear before the Zaddik; 2. the Zaddik's regular or occasional trips to visit his scattered hasidim, during which contributions were solicited and special fund-raising campaigns were held; 3. special dues, known as *ma'amadot*, collected from the Zaddik's followers wherever they lived; 4. "maggidut contracts" that awarded the Zaddik full control over the appointment of religious functionaries in the communities and granted him, his descendants or their representatives the profits from a variety of economic monopolies. In this paper we shall briefly survey the nature of these tools and the ideological explanations that were proposed for them. It should be reiterated at this point that these activities were not typical for all Zaddikim in the 19th century, but only for what we are calling here "royal" courts.

### The Meaning of the *Pidyon*

The *pidyon*, a gift of money of unspecified quantity that the hasid presented to the Zaddik when visiting him, was to become one of the most distinctive indications of the hasid's ties with his leader and a major economic factor in the maintenance of the hasidic court. The Zaddik would "do something" for the hasid in return for the *pidyon* — give a blessing and a prayer for the latter's welfare or success in his spiritual or material endeavors.<sup>17</sup>

16 The critical reactions of mitnaggedim were collected by Wilensky, op. cit. (above, n. 7), Index, s.v. "*pidyonot*." Censure of economic corruption among the Zaddikim was the major theme of Haskalah attacks on Hasidism; it may be found in almost any anti-hasidic work by maskilim, whether satirical or directly polemical and ethically motivated. In this respect Haskalah attacks on the Zaddik R. Israel of Ruzhin (d. 1850) and his sons were the most abusive; see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 158–162.

17 This is the common meaning of the hasidic term '*asiyyat pidyon*'. It is not our object here to investigate the literary evolution of the term, which may be found in pre-hasidic kabbalistic literature in a different sense: the performance of a ritual involving use of the kabbalist's or Zaddik's money itself. See A. Rubinstein, "Notes on a Collection of Testimonies against Hasidism" (Heb.), *Tarbiz* 32 (1963), pp. 92–94; cf. also the linguistic note by A. Zederbaum, *Keter Kehunnah*, Odessa 1867, pp. 77–78, which compares the etymologies of this and similar terms in Polish and Russian. The idea of *pidyon* and the economic dependence of the Zaddik on his hasidim, their development in time, and the various explanations and problems involved in it, have been widely discussed in the scholarly literature; see, e.g., S. Dubnow, *History of Hasidism*, Tel Aviv 1931 (Heb.),

The primary, literal meaning of the word *pidyon* — redemption, ransom money — shaped its ritual significance for the hasidim. The biblical verse, “If ransom is laid upon him, he must pay whatever is laid upon him to redeem his life [Heb.: *pidyon nafsho*]” (Exodus 21:30), was interpreted as meaning: the hasid had to give a sum of money (“ransom”) as commanded by the Zaddik (“whatever is laid upon him”), and this action would save, “redeem,” his soul and help him in various ways, some unexpected and invisible. At the same time, the *pidyon* created an insoluble, mystical link between the giver–hasid and the receiver–Zaddik.

The various different explanations and justifications of the *pidyon* are drawn from a broad variety of ideas, ranging from emphasis on the benefit enjoyed by the hasid, as if the *pidyon* had been created for him alone, to the Zaddik’s obligation to receive payment, as if he were being forced to act against his will. Between these two extremes one finds the view of *pidyon* as an administrative measure of considerable spiritual and social import, from which both parties to the “transaction” derived benefit.

R. Elimelekh of Leżajsk (d. 1787), who dealt extensively with *pidyon* in his writings, explained it as the logical outcome of the hasid’s desire to make himself dependent on the Zaddik in a way that would further his spiritual development and save him from the sin of heresy:

Whosoever lets scholars and Zaddikim derive benefit from his property, that benefit will have the result that he will not rush to sin, to become an absolute villain and deny the Torah, heaven forbid... The conclusion is that by giving to the Zaddik the power of the *kelippot* [=forces of evil] is shattered and [the donor] is linked by an everlasting tie to the Zaddik, so that his evil inclination will not tempt him to sin greatly, heaven forbid; on the contrary, he will be sanctified by the Zaddik. That is the meaning of Scripture, ‘I hereby give you’ [Numbers 18:8], that the Lord, praise be unto Him, commanded us to present an offering to the priest, and the Lord, praise be unto Him, said to him [=the priest]: ‘Behold, by this I enjoin you, to be given into your hands, that you shall be the protection of my offering, that through the offering they give you they shall be protected [from sin].’<sup>18</sup>

Index. s.v. “*pidyon nefesh*”; Weiss, op. cit. (above, n. 10), pp. 49–51; A. Wertheim, *Law and Custom in Hassidism*, Jerusalem 1960 (Heb.), pp. 161–164; Pedaya (above, n. 4), pp. 329–345.

18 *No’am Elimelekh*, ed. G. Nigal, Jerusalem 1978, pp. 422–423. R. Elimelekh’s “Zaddikism” doctrine was discussed at length by Nigal in his introduction, *ibid.*, pp. 19 ff. An exceptional explanation for the *pidyon* was offered by R. Nahman of Bratslav, who held

On the other hand, the Zaddik R. Yohanan of Rotmistrivka (d. 1895) appealed to the rather worn metaphor of “Issachar and Zebulun.” Just as Zebulun the merchant supported his scholarly brother Issachar,

so too it is the custom of hasidim to give the Zaddik, their rabbi, sufficient money for his support, and the Zaddik is obliged to radiate the abundance upon them in return... that they should lack for nothing, whether in their health, their livelihood, or the like. Only if they lack such things, then do they come to the Zaddik and give him a *kvitl* in which all their needs are inscribed.<sup>19</sup>

It is indeed true that the main theoretical justification for the idea that the masses should support the Zaddik relied on a hasidic interpretation of the old ideal of partnership between Issachar and Zebulun. However, the “partnership” in question was far from egalitarian. It was derived from the elitist, class-conscious outlook pervading the writings of many hasidic thinkers, according to which the world is divided into “people of matter” (the masses) and “people of form” (the Zaddikim). Despite the organic partnership imposed upon them, as if they were limbs of the same body, the “partners” did not occupy the same existential and spiritual level; in fact, because of the deterministic element in this idea, the masses could not expect ever to reach the same level as the Zaddikim.<sup>20</sup> It was this ideology that prompted the Besht’s grandson, R. Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sudykóv (d. 1800), to explain the masses’ duty to support spiritual leaders as the logical conclusion of their unconditional subservience to spiritual authority:

For the men of matter know and understand this, that they fulfill

that it was intended primarily to promote the spiritual development of the Zaddik and not of the hasid; see Y. Liebes, “R. Nahman of Bratslav’s *Hattikun Hakkelali* and his Attitude towards Sabbathianism” (Heb.), *Zion* 55 (1980), pp. 205–206; and cf. *Sefer ha-Middot*, Jerusalem 1941, s.v. “Zaddik,” sec. 20.

19 A. D. Twerski, *Sefer ha-Yahas mi-Chernobyl ve-Ruzhin*, Lublin 1938, pp. 69–70. On the sources for the motif of the Issachar-Zebulun partnership see M. Beer, “Issachar and Zebulun: On the Question of the Economic Sustenance of the Palestinian Amoraim” (Heb.), *Bar-Ilan — Annual of Bar-Ilan University: Studies in Judaica and the Humanities* 6, Ramat-Gan 1968, pp. 167–180.

20 The organic philosophy of hasidic writers is one of those basic truths that need almost no proof (see, e.g., A. Rapoport-Albert, “The Hasidic Movement after 1772: Continuity and Change” [Heb.], *Zion* 55 [1990], pp. 192–195). Nevertheless, it is still occasionally ignored — witness the recent critique by M. Piekarz, “Hasidism as a Gospel to Mankind?” (Heb.), *Jewish Studies* 34 (1994), pp. 115–124.

worldly needs solely in order that the men of form should enjoy comfort and be filled with all the good that they need, so that they should not be disturbed and desist, heaven forbid, from their beneficial labor. Therefore they [=the men of matter] obey their every word, and watch over them to supply them [=the men of form] with all their needs.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the sage of Sudytków himself, though referred to as one who “did not live the life of a practical Zaddik,”<sup>22</sup> possessed a written contract in which certain leaseholders undertook to obey him and, in return for his prayers and study of the Torah, pay him a fee of 0.6 percent of their profits.<sup>23</sup>

Alternatively, the *pidyon* could be considered a substitute for sacrifice in the Temple. This comparison was already made by R. Nahman of Bratslav,<sup>24</sup> and similar ideas were current among other Hasidim.<sup>25</sup>

The idea that the *pidyon* actually benefited the hasid himself was responsible not only for justifications of ugly manifestations of moral callousness, but also for a paternalistic, condescending attitude to the hasidim as subjects, spiritually and materially subservient to the Zaddik. Thus, the Zaddik Zevi Hirsch “the Attendant” of Rymanów (d. 1846), explained in a homily:

[Why did Scripture say,] ‘Let them take for me an offering’ [Exodus 25:2], rather than ‘Let them give me...’? Because in order to benefit an Israelite, so that strict justice shall not be meted out to him, he should take from himself ransom for his own soul, with mighty arm and hand.<sup>26</sup>

21 *Degei Mahaneh Efrayim*, Jozefów 1883, Portion “Tzav”, p. 91.

22 A. Kahana, *Sefer ha-Hasidut*, Warsaw 1922, p. 307.

23 See below, n. 95. The change in the economic status of the Rabbi of Sudytków is also attested by a hasidic tradition that “he was at first poor and destitute... but then he began to behave like a rich man” (Isaiah Wolf Tzikernik, *Ma’asiyyot u-Ma’amarim Yekarim... meha-Beshi umi-Nekhadav*, Zhitomir 1902, p. 24; and cf. Kahana, op. cit., p. 309).

24 “Whosoever benefits the Zaddik with money — it is as if he had performed the sacred service in the Temple” (*Sefer ha-Middot* [above, n. 18], p. 256); cf. Joseph Perl, *Uiber! das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim*, ed. A. Rubinstein, Jerusalem 1977, p. 104.

25 A Russian report on R. Israel of Ruzhin, written in 1840, states, “[The Hasidim] are obliged to appear before him frequently, or at least once a year, in order to receive his blessing... But no less, they are expected to bring gifts, which are considered as equivalent to the sacrifices that Israelites used to offer in the Temple at Jerusalem.” See Assaf, *Ruzhin*, p. 477; cf. Isaac Even, *Fun’m Rebben’s Hoyf*, New York 1922, p. 186.

26 Abraham Abbale Kanerfogel of Rymanów, *Beerot ha-Mayim*, Przemyśl 1897<sup>2</sup>, p. 8b; cf. Joseph Perl’s ridicule for the idea that through *pidyon* the Zaddik mitigates the justice meted out to the giver (*Megalleh Temirin*, Wien 1819, p. 6b). See also below, n. 42.

For a son of R. Mordecai of Chernobyl (d. 1837), the situation was quite simple: “It was our father who gave them [=the hasidim] their riches, so you may surely take as much money as you wish.”<sup>27</sup>

The justification for *pidyon* was questioned even within Hasidism, both by Zaddikim and by laymen; at times such doubts embarrassed the Zaddik himself, who could not deny their logic or the inner contradictions that they exposed. Thus, R. Israel of Ruzhin was asked,

Why should you [=the Zaddikim] receive money from your followers? For it is you yourselves who radiate the abundance, so why should you give away all that abundance, only to get it back from your followers? Surely it would be better for you to keep what you need and only then bestow it upon the world! and R. Israel replied, You have asked well....<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the famous complaint voiced by R. Elazar, son of R. Elimelekh of Leżajsk, attests to a profound unease about the contrast between the Zaddik’s essence — and public image — as a supremely moral personality, supposedly in no need of the masses’ money, and the realistic need to collect *pidyonot*. R. Elazar’s answer to an anonymous interlocutor, who solicited R. Elimelekh’s view on the matter, essentially established the classical hasidic answer to such questions, both externally (to mitnaggedim and maskilim) and internally, according to which the tension was only apparent:

And should you wish to say, if the Zaddikim spurn ill-gotten gain, why should they take money from people, even if offered all day? My beloved brother, in this connection I have several secret reasons that cannot be committed to writing; but the simplest is also the true one. For they [=the Zaddikim] never place money in a box, and it never remains in their possession, even overnight, but they spend it for the need of the poor of Israel and to marry off the maidens of Israel, for there is now no greater commandment than that.... Alternatively, they give money to ransom captives and support students of Torah

27 Pinhas Simeon Kopelowitz, *Stories of... Rabbi Mordecai Hayyim of Slonim*, Benei Berak 1989 (Heb.), p. 154. The idea that riches amassed by the hasidim belonged to the Zaddik evolved directly from the earlier notion that the riches of ignorant individuals belonged to scholars, as proposed in *Midrash Talpiyyot* by Elijah Hacoheh of Smyrna, and it is echoed in hasidic literature as well, see M. Piekarz, “Religious Spiritualism versus Zionism and Deterministic Elitism” (Heb.), in *Zaddikim ve-Anshei Ma’aseh — Hasidism in Poland*, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 291–292.

28 Meir Halevi of Mariampol, *Irin Kadishin Tinyana*, Bartfeld 1907, p. 27a.

who have no-one else to support them.... And that is the meaning of the verse, 'Hand to hand, the evil man will not be cleansed [but the seed of the righteous (Heb. *zaddikim*) shall escape]' (Proverbs 11:21), that is to say: When one takes from one hand and gives to another hand, one is doing a favor to the person from whom one is taking, for the evil power accusing him on high will not clean him out of his possessions.<sup>29</sup>

The main point of the text is: the Zaddikim are not avaricious at all, and they do not put the money given them to their own personal use — indeed, they do not allow it to remain in their possession for any length of time. The money is earmarked for various charitable causes which would not — or could not — be taken care of by individual donors on their own.<sup>30</sup> At any rate, the Zaddikim, by taking people's riches, are thereby greatly benefiting them, for otherwise the strict Divine justice meted out to them would rapidly make them destitute.

Doubts expressed by Zaddikim on this count were clearly sincere and not merely apologetic or intended to improve their public image. R. Judah Zevi of Rozdół (d. 1847), pondering such universal readiness to donate money to a single person, gives us a glimpse of his personal misgivings as a Zaddik, overburdened with such weighty responsibility:

It is the custom in the world that a few hundred or thousand souls of Israel journey to a single Zaddik and give him money. What does this mean, that so very many people give to one person? Perhaps the reason is that any building needs a foundation, and if there is no strong foundation the entire building will fall and be worthless. Indeed, the entire world as a whole is also called a building... and the Zaddik is the foundation..., hence it is proper that all the world should give him money for his upkeep, from their silver and gold, for he reinforces and sustains them. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to understand why the masses journey to me too and give me money, for I surely know

29 *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, printed at the end of *No'am Elimelekh* (above, n. 18), pp. 601–602. Dubnow (above, n. 17) believed that the letter was a reaction to accusations by maskilim (pp. 184–186); while Wilensky (above, n. 7) holds that it was issued in response to the mitnaggedim (I, pp. 168–169). The letter should be dated to the mid 1770s. See: I. Halpern, *Eastern European Jewry: Historical Studies*, Jerusalem 1969, pp. 298–299.

30 It was already said of the Besht that “money never spent a night in his home,” and whatever was left to him was given to charity immediately after his debts had been settled (*Shivhei ha-Besht* [above, n. 7], pp. 231–232).

that I cannot be considered in the category of “the Zaddik as *Axis Mundi*.”<sup>31</sup>

The hasidic hagiography is indeed replete with descriptions of Zaddikim inspired exclusively by unselfish motives, all of whose wealth was put only to charitable, positive use and served to benefit the public. The hasidic argumentation was not content with such self-evident charities as feeding of the poor, financing poor brides' marriages or ransoming captives. It frequently took flight into the realms of pure fancy; for example, it was claimed that all the funds raised under R. Mordecai of Chernobyl's auspices were for the upkeep of the 36 anonymous righteous men of that generation — in fact, whoever dared to challenge this assertion was condemned as a heretic.<sup>32</sup> A good illustration of the discrepancy between the naive world view of the hasidim and the actual needs of the Zaddikim is the story of R. Mordecai's son, Moses of Koristyshev (d. 1866). Though not heading a hasidic court proper, he nevertheless needed some means of sustenance. At the end of an unsuccessful fund-raising trip R. Moses reached a certain community, where he announced to his audience that

he had not succeeded in his journey, for he had not collected more than a small part of the money that he needed... And they said to the rabbi: 'Indeed, we believe that it is not the intention of our *admor*<sup>33</sup> on his travels merely to collect money, God forbid, but rather to mend souls.' And the rabbi was angry at them for holding him to be so great, saying to them that he did not know what they were talking about, as the only reason for his travels was that he needed money for his household expenses.<sup>34</sup>

Many hasidic leaders were undoubtedly exceptional figures whose pure intentions, modest life styles and high ethical standards were beyond

31 Israel Berger, *Eser Kedushot*, Piotrków 1906, p. 61, sec. 11.

32 For a collection of relevant sources see Israel Jacob (Klapholtz), *The Admorim of Chernobyl*, Tel Aviv 1971 (Heb.). The saying “Whoever does not believe that the Holy Rabbi Mordecai of Chernobyl supported the 36 righteous men of his generation is a heretic” is attributed to R. Issachar Dov Rokeah of Betz (d. 1927); see I. Klapholtz and N. Ortner, *Seder Haggadah shel Pesah*, Benei Berak 1965, p. 20.

33 Hebrew acronym for “Our Master, Teacher and Rabbi.”

34 Isaiah Wolf Tzikernik, *Sippurim Nifla'im u-Ma'amrim Yekarim*, Lwów 1908, p. 4. Zaddikim of the Chernobyl dynasty traveled particularly frequently to raise funds (see below); it was said of R. Isaac of Skwira (d. 1885), who traveled relatively infrequently, that “he did not travel in the world more than two or three Sabbaths each year” (*ibid.*, p. 6).

question. Nevertheless, the mere fact that the question of *pidyon* and the accumulation of wealth in the hasidic courts were constantly being debated and constituted a never-ending source of talebearing, polemics and slander indicates that the distinctions between ends and means were not infrequently blurred. This was particularly evident with regard to the “royal” hasidic courts of Ruzhin, Chernobyl, Rymanów and their offshoots, which could not function properly without vast funds. The means of collecting such funds often pressed the most sublime spiritual values, such as charity and morality, into the service of greed, opulence and materialism.

### The Cost of the *Pidyon* and Methods of Amassing a Fortune

It was only natural that during the 19th century, as Hasidism became a mass movement, the number of visitors flocking to the Zaddik’s court constantly increased. The large number of hasidim seeking the Zaddik’s help, on the one hand, and the burgeoning fiscal needs of the court, on the other, encouraged a more normative and rational view of *pidyon*. It came to be seen among the hasidim not so much as a mystical rite, enabling the Zaddik to perform certain magical operations, but rather in a purely capitalist light, as an “entrance fee” paid for services rendered or for the advantages that the believer reaped from the visit. There was a “price” to be paid for the Zaddik’s talents, for the benefits enjoyed by a stay at the court; it was only proper that those interested should pay, and pay well. The Zaddikim, on the other hand, understood *pidyon* as a legitimate tool to promote the court’s organizational interests, but also as a full expression of the mystical partnership between the Zaddik and the faithful, and of the hasidic community’s overall responsibility for the court’s physical existence and the Zaddik’s well-being. Given the competition that often governed relations between neighboring hasidic courts, the Zaddik’s ability to extract more funds from his followers, to enhance the court’s visible wealth and opulence and improve its “services” were seen as evidence of the Zaddik’s greatness on a spiritual level, increasing his prestige in the eyes of both his own hasidim and his colleagues.<sup>35</sup>

The sums levied as *pidyon* varied from time to time and place to place,

35 See, e.g., the unconcealed envy expressed by R. Menahem Nahum of Stefănești (d. 1867), speaking of his brother-in-law, the Zaddik R. Menahem Mendel of Vizhnitz (d. 1884): “Judging from his great success in all his affairs and the multitude of people who heed his bidding... the measure of his income is like one of the Rothschilds” (Hayyim Kahana, *Even Shetiyyah*, Munkács 1930, p. 95).

depending on such factors as the hasid’s financial standing, the whims of the Zaddik himself or of his *gabba’im* (i.e., the Zaddik’s personal assistants); or the gravity of the problem which the Zaddik was expected to solve (the sums thus stipulated were not always consistent with the donor’s means). The minimal sum of *pidyon*, a silver ruble, was viewed by some Zaddikim with suspicion and contempt.<sup>36</sup> The customary payment was 18 coins (this being the numerical value of the Hebrew word *hay*, “living”), in rubles or any other valid currency; another common sum — very high, but still of major mystical value — was 160 coins (the numerical value of the Hebrew word *kesef*, “silver” or “money”).<sup>37</sup> Particularly large sums were solicited from rich hasidim; the larger the donation actually made, the heartier the welcome granted the donor and the more favorable the treatment he received from the Zaddik and his *gabba’im*.<sup>38</sup> This treatment might imply a better seat at the *tish* — Sabbath table — or during prayers, a publicly announced appreciation, the Zaddik’s personal attention and interest in the donor’s welfare, hence more time spent in consideration of the latter’s requests, small gifts, etc. — all means to ensure the donor’s continued, long-term affiliation with the Zaddik and his court.

36 For example, it was reported of R. Mordecai of Chernobyl that he threw a one-ruble note back into a person’s face “because he had given him only one silver ruble, whereas if he had given him the sum of twenty-five silver rubles he would surely have sought some solution” (*Sefer ha-Yahas* [above, n. 19], p. 60). A late hasidic source in fact relates that R. Mordecai once demanded *pidyon* “and took the money in the middle of the *Shemoneh-‘Esreh* [= *Amidah*] prayer and counted it” (Aaron Joseph Lurie, *Likkutim Yekarim* [Stories of Mordecai Hayyim Slonim], Jerusalem 1966, pp. 28–29).

37 For the significance attached to this number of coins even before the advent of Hasidism see Rubinstein, op. cit. (above, n. 17), pp. 92–94; Y. Mondshine, *Kerem Chabad 4/A* (1992), p. 81 n. 1. Other sums, too, relied on a variety of acronyms (*notarikon*) and numerical valuations (*gematria*), such as the sum of numerical values of the letters in the hasid’s name, and so on. See, e.g., the story of the Maggid of Międzyzrzecz who, approached by a barren woman who implored his help, asked her for 52 *gulden* — the numerical value of the Hebrew word *ben* = son (Eleazar Dov Gimen, *Sifran shel Zaddikim*, Lublin 1929<sup>2</sup>, p. 12).

38 Although rich hasidim enjoyed special favor, both from the Zaddik and from the *gabba’im* (who not infrequently exerted the most influence on court life and the Zaddik’s daily schedule), they had to pay heavily for the privilege. An interesting practice was reported of R. Israel of Ruzhin’s *gabba’im*: “Many a time, when wine was needed at his holy table and there was no worthy person there, the *gabba’im* would spend [money] and place wine on his holy table at the expense of those rich Jews, though the rich Jews were not present at the time” (Moses Hayyim Kleinman, *Mazkeret Shem ha-Gedolim*, repr. Benei Berak 1967, p. 187; Solomon Gabriel Rosenthal, *Hitgallut ha-Zaddikim*, Warsaw 1905, pp. 55–56).

Zaddikim especially famous for their exorbitant demands were Mordecai of Chernobyl, Israel of Ruzhin and Zevi “the Attendant” of Rymanów. R. Israel of Ruzhin once said to his hasidim that

if the world knew what benefit the Zaddik brings to the whole world when he has money, they would cover the whole floor of his home with gold coins.<sup>39</sup>

His hasidim took the hint, reports the source, and they began to work toward the goal he had set them. But when R. Hayyim Yehiel of Mogielnica (d. 1849), the Maggid of Kozieniec’s grandson and a Zaddik in his own right, brought him *pidyonot* to the tune of 300 silver rubles, laboriously collected from R. Israel’s admirers in Poland, the Zaddik of Ruzhin treated the tremendous sum of money with contempt, clearly expressed in quite amazing terms:

There is no man in the world who has no blemish. But I am the sole favorite son, for I am wholly perfect. Therefore all the money in the whole world belongs to me. So why have you brought me so little money?!<sup>40</sup>

Such megalomaniacal ideas not only shaped this ethos of wealth but also determined the practical relationship between the Zaddik and his hasidim. Thus, in 1838, when R. Israel of Ruzhin was imprisoned for interrogation as being indirectly involved in the murder of two Jewish informers, some 30,000 silver rubles were needed to defray the many legal expenses. It was reported that this vast sum was found in cash (!) in R. Israel’s home, but he refused to sanction its use, giving instructions “to borrow money from elsewhere, for he said, ‘How can one leave the people of Israel even for one

39 *Raza de-‘Uvda...*, pt. II: *Sha’ar ha-Otiyyot*, New York 1976, pp. 119–120, sec. 2. Perhaps this is the origin of the popular legend that the floor of R. Israel’s palace at Ruzhin was made of silver rubles; see A. Hilberg, “Der Rabbi von Sadagóra,” *Die Gartenlaube*, Leipzig 1876, pp. 471–475.

40 Solomon Zalman Breitstein, *Sihot Hayyim*, Piotrków 1914, p. 24. For the wording of R. Israel’s retort, which more than hints at Frankist leanings, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 331–332. Some maskilim used such doctrines in their satirical writings; for example: “And for that reason the Zaddik has to dress with opulence and grandeur, with silver and gold and jewelry, and all the silver and gold in the world belongs to the Zaddik” (Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Divrei Zaddikim* with ‘*Emek Refa’im*, Odessa 1867, p. 16); “It is a major and well-known article of faith that all the silver and gold in the world should go to the Zaddik alone, just as all streams go to the sea” (Had min Havraya [=Judah Leib Levin], “Hitgallut ha-Yenuka mi-Stolyn,” *Ha-Shahar* 6 [1875], p. 26).

night without money”<sup>41</sup> — yet another instance of the Zaddik’s personal wealth being identified with public funds.

Particularly harsh criticism was leveled against R. Zevi of Rymanów, who did not leave the amount of *pidyon* to the hasid’s discretion but set it himself — a practice first instituted, according to hasidic tradition, at the court of R. Mordecai of Chernobyl.<sup>42</sup> It is indeed recorded that this was R. Mordecai’s usage: “When a person came to him to ask him to pray for him, for his welfare and his salvation, he [=R. Mordecai] set him a sum of money: ‘If you give me such-and-such an amount of *pidyon nefesh*, your will shall be done, with God’s help.’”<sup>43</sup>

The explanations provided by these Zaddikim for hoarding up wealth were rather lame. The hasidim of the Rymanów Rebbe interpreted his apparent avarice as a desire to realize religious and social values through money:

The love of money, too, is so that he should be able with that money to carry out his Lord’s will, to give charity to the poor and to be

41 Reuben Zak, *Keneset Yisra’el*, Warsaw 1906, p. 17.

42 “He [=R. Zevi] used to determine the sum of money to be given him. This has never been seen done by any Zaddik, save the Holy Rabbi R. Mottele Chernobler, may his memory protect us, he behaved in that way” (Aaron Rath, *Menahem Zion*, Satu-mare 1935, pp. 26–27). And cf. *Be’erot ha-Mayim* (above, n. 26), “Behar,” p. 11 (“it was his holy practice to demand a large fixed sum from people who came to him... and for that reason many of the Zaddikim of his time complained bitterly about him and wished to do certain things to him”). Interesting evidence of the influence of this practice may be found in an account of a change instituted by the Zaddik R. Isaac of Niesuchojeże (d. 1868): “In addition to his *pidyon* of 18 and 160 [coins], he also fixed a *pidyon* of 24. In previous years he had not been used to demanding money, and when asked how much to give as *pidyon* for whatever purpose, he would say, ‘It is not my practice, Heaven forfend, to demand money, but whatever each person gives, that is what the Holy One, blessed be He, is giving me out of the goodness of the donor’s heart...’ And when he heard that [others] were taking money, he frowned upon the practice and would boast, ‘I do not command to give me...’ But toward the end of his life we frequently saw that he knew what every person was giving him as *pidyon*, and the older he became, the more particular he was about receiving a large *pidyon*. It was his custom to treat whoever gave him a certain sum of *pidyon* with liquor and sweetmeats.... In old age, he was very strict that a woman should not enter his home without her husband, unless she gave him a certain sum of *pidyon*.... And during his very last days he was very strict about the large sum for *pidyon*, and would often say, ‘If he give me such-and-such a sum he may come in to me, but if not I do not wish to answer him’” (Isaac Landa, *Zikkaron Tov* Piotrków 1892, pp. 53–54).

43 Eliezer Shenkel, *Sippurei Anshei Shem*, Podgórze 1903, p. 9, sec. 9.



charitable and observe the commandments through them. Otherwise he would not have loved money.<sup>44</sup>

R. Mordecai did not scruple to demand “a vast sum” from a rich hasid who came to him requesting his blessing, and in return even agreed to provide the hasid with a letter to his deceased father, R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, to be delivered by the rich man when he died.<sup>45</sup> He explained that he needed “a great deal of money with which to support the 36 hidden righteous men.”<sup>46</sup> To convince his audiences, R. Mordecai reverted to an explanation that was commonly cited in medieval ethical literature — the mutual dependence of the “people of form” and the “people of matter” obliges them to become partners, as neither can act without the other:

The masses do not have food for the soul, while the Zaddikim do not have bodily food and sustenance.... Ordinary people come to the Zaddik and give him of the gold of Sheba, and the Zaddik prays for the soul of the masses and continually blesses them.<sup>47</sup>

R. Mordecai's son, R. Isaac of Skwira, offered an honest evaluation which reveals not only the Zaddik's subjective feeling that it was perfectly legitimate to demand material recompense for his effort and the time spent aiding his followers, but also a budding modern capitalist outlook. Underlying this new way of thinking was the assumption that everything has a monetary value, and that time and investment of resources — including mystical or spiritual talents — should also be measured in economic terms:

I do not know why they give me money.... Later he said that it is because I sit for several hours, and I listen to all the pains and

44 *Be'erot ha-Mayim* (above, n. 26), Shavu'ot, p. 16b; cf. *ibid.*, p. 9a. R. Zevi Hirsch personally defended himself with homilies on such texts as “the priest shall assess him” (Leviticus 27:8; R. Zevi was of priestly descent), “Let them take me an offering” (and not “give me”; Exodus 25:2), “Blessed be He Who redeems [Heb. *podeh*] and delivers” (it is the *pidyon* that delivers), etc. See A. Ovadyah (Gottesdiener), “Rabbi Zevi Hirsch of Rymanów,” in *Selected Works*, I, Jerusalem 1942 (Heb.), pp. 216–219.

45 *Sha'ar ha-Otiyyot* (above, n. 39), pp. 5–6. The story of the letter sent up to heaven is not entirely foreign to East European Jewish life. Cf. Abraham Baer Gottlober's tale in his *Memoirs and Travels*, ed. R. Goldberg, I, Jerusalem 1976 (Heb.), pp. 156–158, about such a letter sent to request abrogation of the military conscription laws.

46 See above, n. 32; and cf. Michael Frumkin, *Sippurei Zaddikim*, [Lemberg] 1864, p. 7 (unnumbered).

47 *Be'erot ha-Mayim* (above, n. 26), p. 8b.

sufferings of the Children of Israel, of each and every person, and I shatter all my limbs.<sup>48</sup>

Despite certain vulgar aspects of the collection of *pidyon* money, the actual act of payment involved strictly observed ceremonial rules. Although the real purpose was obvious, neither party to the transaction desired to picture the Zaddik's relationship with his followers as a purely economic affair of “give and take.” To camouflage the proceedings, therefore, a special etiquette, designed to obscure the business aspects of the deal, became customary. The money was never given directly to the Zaddik: visitors placed their *pidyon* fees on a small table by the door to his room, from where it was generally taken to one of the *gabba'im*, who stood at the entrance holding a special purse. For example, a hasid appearing before R. Israel of Ruzhin knew that he had to present the *kvitl*, on which his requests were written, directly to the Zaddik, but the *pidyon* would be placed surreptitiously in the *gabbai's* purse.<sup>49</sup> The fact that certain Zaddikim were known to submit *pidyonot* to one another, and that even the Zaddik's family would on occasion pay him such fees, served to stress the spiritual element and to blur the economic motivation.

Income from *pidyonot* was the fuel driving the economic machinery of the Zaddik's court: it assured the Zaddik and his family a suitable upkeep, paid salaries to the various functionaries, bought food, clothing, furniture, religious objects, etc., financed development and maintenance, and answered the needs of charity, intercession with the gentile authorities or any other initiative that the Zaddik might wish to take. One can gain some idea of the sheer magnitude of the turnover necessary to run a “royal” court like that of Ruzhin from one of R. Israel's retorts to his followers when he was forced to stay at Kamieniec-Podolski in 1838 for interrogation:

People are saying that I wish to live in Kamieniec. That is not true!

48 Hayyim Lieberson, *Zeror ha-Hayyim ha-Shalem*, Bilgoraj 1903, p. 64. This argumentation, justifying *pidyonot* in terms of the special mental resources upon which the Zaddik drew when listening to his visitors' pleas, is featured, in a satirically distorted vein, in a popular joke: A certain woman who came to R. Naftali of Ropczyce, gave him *pidyon* and “opened her mouth and poured out nine measures of talk.” R. Naftali's brother, who was present, could not contain himself and burst into laughter. After she had gone, the Zaddik said to his brother: “The *pidyon* that I take is specifically for suppression of laughter” (M. Lipson, *From Generation to Generation*, II, Tel Aviv 1937 [Heb.], no. 1434; and cf. D. Sadan, *A Bowl of Raisins*, Tel Aviv 1940 [Heb.], no. 114).

49 S. A. Horodecki, *Ha-Hasidut voha-Hasidim*, IV, Berlin 1923, p. 157; A. I. Bromberg, *The Admor R. Israel Friedman of Ruzhin (Mi-Gedolei ha-Hasidut)*, 6, Jerusalem 1952 (Heb.), p. 92.

For at Ruzhin I have expenses of 200 silver rubles per week, while at Kamieniec I should have expenses of 300 [per week], so how could I take upon myself to encumber the world [=his hasidim] with such a large outlay?<sup>50</sup>

If this testimony may be taken at face value, the weekly outlay for maintenance of the court was some 200 silver rubles — a very considerable sum for the time and place. During the 1870s a similar sum was recorded as the weekly cost of maintaining the court of R. Abraham Jacob (d. 1883), R. Israel's son and deputy, at Sadagóra in Bukovina.<sup>51</sup>

To administer such a large budget, the Zaddikim needed capital which could be realized (or the profits realized) at short notice. In that sense, court funds were managed in all respects as in a bank. Any surplus money (if it existed) was invested by the Zaddikim or their financial advisors in real estate, commodities or other channels. Even in the early days at Ruzhin, where R. Israel had registered as a member of the second merchants' guild by virtue of his holdings, he owned a considerable amount of landed property. Later, in Sadagóra, he purchased a vast estate at Potok Zloty, including agricultural and industrial installations; the estate was managed even after his death as any economic business would have been.<sup>52</sup> R. Israel invested a further large sum (51,400 florins) in a partnership with a Polish nobleman, in a pickled cucumber factory at Chernovtsy, while his son R. Abraham Jacob chose to be partner in a sugar factory.<sup>53</sup> Other Zaddikim

50 Reuben Zak, *Bet Yisra'el*, Piotrków 1913, p. 18, sec. 1. In comparison, R. Menahem Mendel Auerbach of Krzemieniec, according to the contract appointing him rabbi in 1821, was to receive a salary of 100 rubles per annum, see *Nachlat Zvi*, III, Benei Berak 1990, pp. 101–103.

51 As reported by his disciple, R. Meir Leibush Langerman of Turka: "And we calculated exactly that what was given [to charity] each year came to approximately 10,000 silver rubles" (*Binyan Shelomo*, pt. II: *Likkutim Talpiyyot*, Jerusalem 1987, p. 60). According to another contemporary observer, the expenses of R. Abraham Jacob's court (including various charities) was on average some 2,000 florins per week, see Verus [=Ahron Marcus], *Der Chassidismus*, Pleschen 1901, p. 372.

52 On R. Israel's registration in the second merchants' guild, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 127–128; on his real estate in Russia: *ibid.*, p. 480; on Potok: *ibid.*, pp. 224–228. Real estate was a popular investment among the Russian Zaddikim, see, e.g., D. Assaf, "From Volhynia to Safed: Rabbi Abraham Dov of Ovruch as a Hasidic Leader in the First Half of the 19th Century" (Heb.), *Shalem — Studies in the History of the Jews in Eretz Israel*, 6, Jerusalem 1992, pp. 239–240.

53 R. Israel's partnership in the pickled cucumber factory is attested by an Austrian document of 1845, dealing with his request for a residence permit in Bukovina. See

ran a kind of private bank in their courts, lending money to the needy and investing capital in various profitable partnerships.<sup>54</sup>

However, the income from *pidyon* and other contributions of those frequenting the court was generally inadequate, in particular when the Zaddik was unwilling to draw on his own personal wealth.<sup>55</sup> Other action was therefore necessary to answer the pressing needs and enlarge the financial means at the court's disposal; such action was aimed not only at raising funds, but also at reinforcing the commitment and participation of the hasidim.

### The Zaddik's Travels

The Zaddik's trips to visit his scattered adherents were not an innovation — they were as old as Hasidism itself. In fact, as Joseph Weiss wrote over 40 years ago, "the transformation from the itinerant Zaddik to the domiciled Zaddik was one of the most important events in the sociology of Hasidism."<sup>56</sup> Even if Weiss's thesis that this transformation was an outcome of supposed disagreement between different schools is questionable,<sup>57</sup> there is no doubt that the institutionalization of the Zaddik's court had far-reaching consequences for Hasidism as a whole. However, the Zaddikim were not content to remain passively in their courts and receive their visitors, but also traveled to visit their admirers wherever they might be. These visits, which generally extended over the Sabbath, were an important component

Assaf, *Ruzhin*, p. 488. On the sugar factory see David Kahana Gelb, *Bet Shelomo*, Orsova 1928, p. 5b.

54 Joseph Perl, in a hostile tone which bespeaks authenticity, describes a rich Zaddik lending money gained from *pidyonot* at exorbitant interest, operating through the agency of hasidim among his close associates (*Megalleh Temirin* [above, n. 26], p. 27b). Information provided by Menashe Margulis in his memoirs indicates that Zaddikim in Volhynia used to deposit their funds in the bank of Jacob Joseph Halperin of Berdyczów (R. Israel of Ruzhin's father-in-law) and even recommended that their hasidim do so; see S. L. Zitron, *Shetadlanim: Interesting Jewish Types of the Recent Past*, Warsaw [1926] (Yiddish), pp. 282–284. For the phenomenon in general — the Zaddik's court as a "business" and a "bank" — see I. Bartal, "Where did the Purse of Money Go? — Haskalah Criticism on the Economic Aspects of Hasidism" (Heb.), *Religion and Economy* (above, n. 4), pp. 375–385.

55 See above, n. 41.

56 Weiss, *op. cit.* (above, n. 10), p. 53.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 103–105.

in the consolidation of the Zaddik's leadership; they furthered the creation of a special affinity with community members, both through the existence of a temporary court, with its own ceremonies and functionaries, and through the Zaddik's presentation of himself as an "itinerant judge" who would solve domestic and business disputes or act as arbitrator in various disagreements.<sup>58</sup>

The temporary departure of the Zaddik and his retinue from its "home base" became an integral part of the 19th century picture of Eastern European *shtetl* Jewry. Every Jewish boy or girl was familiar with such scenes as the august figure of the *Admor* arriving in town, the excitement and curiosity aroused by the visit, the reception ceremonies held outdoors, in the public square, and indoors, in the synagogues and study houses, the Rabbi's *tish* (i.e., "table" — the communal meal at the Rebbe's table) on the Sabbath, the intrigues that split the community, and the patterns of cultural experience and folklore engendered by the occasion. Such scenes are well represented in the Jewish press of the time, in Jewish *belles lettres* and the memoir literature.<sup>59</sup>

The Zaddik's visit created a stir in the neighborhood, and many came from far and near to see him, even to spend the Sabbath with him and pray in his presence. The members of his retinue supervised the "public relations" aspect of the trip and made considerable efforts to prepare the locals for the occasion and ensure the proper atmosphere.<sup>60</sup> A characteristic instance of the powerful propaganda effect attendant on the Zaddik's journeys is the following story, told by a Jewish innkeeper from the Złoczów region, in whose inn R. Israel of Ruzhin slept in 1835:

58 See, e.g., the description of the Ruzhiner's travels in B. Mayer, *Die Juden unserer Zeit*, Regensburg 1842, pp. 7–9 (cited in full [in Hebrew translation] in Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 136–138). This is a major point for the history of Hasidism, as it presents interesting additional evidence of the role of the Zaddikim as an alternative to the communal institutions, which had lost their authority and credibility — including even the local rabbinical court, which dealt with civil cases.

59 This broad subject still awaits a proper account. Incidentally, the Zaddik's visit sometimes caused disputes over procedures within the community and in the synagogue; see, e.g., Y. Z. Kahana, "Halakhic Problems Generated by 'Hasidism'," in *Studies in the Responsa Literature*, Jerusalem 1973 (Heb.), pp. 413–414.

60 Particularly aggressive propaganda tactics were adopted by the *gabba'im* of R. David of Talnoye; see D. Assaf, "'The Causeless Hatred is Ongoing': The Struggle against Bratslav Hasidism in the 1860s" (Heb.), *Zion* 59 (1994), pp. 474–484.

He travelled with three carriages of his own, and the Jews flocked to him in such crowds that more than 700 vehicles were upon the road, either accompanying or going to meet him. He slept at this inn on his way from Brody to Lemberg. The crowd of Jews that visited him was such that he could hardly get rest, and many came to look upon his face while he was sleeping.<sup>61</sup> So great was the excitement, that the Austrian Government became alarmed and ordered him to leave the country in three days.<sup>62</sup>

What was the meaning of the agitation and excitement, the highly charged atmosphere created by the visit of R. Israel and his company? Was a Zaddik's visit so rare that hundreds of Jews came in coaches and carts to gaze at the visitor, who was known to them only by hearsay? Indeed, at this time visits of "famous" Zaddikim were still not a matter of routine. One should remember that many of the Zaddik's faithful followers first laid eyes upon him not at his court, but when he came to their community (or a neighboring community) on a trip. In addition, the mythological dimension of the Ruzhiner's figure intensified the experience and, as it were, electrified large sectors of society. After all, by then entire village populations in the Ukraine and Galicia were completely hasidic, so much so "that no Jew dare appear on its streets unless dressed entirely in the Jewish manner, for fear the Chasidim should tear him to pieces."<sup>63</sup> Given that background, the Zaddik's royal airs presumably made a considerable impression everywhere, particularly in remote villages and small towns — it was probably a powerful tool in the dissemination of Hasidism. There are numerous accounts of the thrilling scene: the coach, drawn by magnificent horses, was driven by resplendently uniformed servants; before and after the coach traveled the Zaddik's retinue in a procession of *gabba'im*, beadles, cantors, cooks, slaughterers and the like, carrying the Zaddik's personal

61 It was apparently not unusual for crowds to crowd around the windows of the Zaddik's inn in order to catch a glimpse of his face. See, e.g., the report of R. Isaac of Niesuchojeze in *Zikkaron Tov* (above, n. 42), p. 62. A hasidic source rebukes "those foolish people who wish to feast their curious eyes on our Rebbe [=R. Israel of Ruzhin], to see what he is doing each night in his room, whether he sleeps like other people or is awake and worshipping the Lord" (Abraham Isaac Soibelman, *Sippurei Zaddikim he-Hadash*, III, Piotrków 1910, p. 11, sec. 83).

62 A. Bonar and R. M'Cheyne, *Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry to the Jews from the Church of Scotland in 1839*, Edinburgh 1843, p. 462. R. Israel is referred to not by name but as "the now imprisoned Rabbi of Rugen." For his visit to Lwów that year and his subsequent expulsion, see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 153–157.

63 Bonar and M'Cheyne, loc. cit.

effects. The entire colorful cortège was accompanied with music played by a full band. The ordinary Jew of the time was unused to such spectacles, and the emotional impact left by such visits was translated into a tremendous popular admiration for the Zaddikim and the rapid spread of Hasidism.

The Zaddik usually traveled to places in the vicinity of the court, the declared goal being to visit his hasidim and give them guidance, to cement the personal bond between the Zaddik and his flock, to promote the cause of Hasidism in general and of his specific court in particular, and to widen the circle of hasidim and others who identified with the Zaddik. For Zaddikim like R. Nahman of Bratslav, these journeys took on mystical and sometimes obsessive dimensions. They were compared to the wanderings of the Divine Presence and the Ark of the Covenant; sometimes apparently aimless, they remained as a profound, incomprehensible mystery.<sup>64</sup> The marked improvement in means of transport, starting in the 1870s (and in particular the development of the railroads), also enhanced the mobility of the Zaddikim and reinforced the communication between them and their more remote followers, as well as between them and other Zaddikim, scattered around Eastern Europe.<sup>65</sup> Visits by Zaddikim indeed left a tremendous impression on the members of a community, mainly promoting feelings of pride, unity and brotherhood among the local hasidim and strengthening their ties with “their” Zaddik. Nevertheless, it was quite clear to any observer that the major goal of the trips was the raising of funds to finance the routine expenses of the court.

One Zaddik who traveled extensively during the last few years of his life was R. Mordecai of Chernobyl. His overt purpose was to exorcise the impurity that had affected one community or another in the area under his sway; as it was reported, “only for that purpose, that is, that wherever there was a source of impurity, Heaven forbid, there he made a source of holiness.”<sup>66</sup> But his son, R. David of Talnoye, whose fund-raising campaigns in the 1860s stirred up considerable unrest and caused the Russian authorities to issue a decree forbidding Zaddikim to leave their home towns without permission,<sup>67</sup> related that when his father traveled

64 See Z. Gries, *Conduct Literature*, Jerusalem 1989 (Heb.), pp. 257–261.

65 This was of the utmost significance in the history of Hasidism, but the topic lies outside the scope of this article. The fact that most of the “famous” Zaddikim in the 19th century were personally acquainted with one another, or at least corresponded through letters or emissaries, was of inestimable value in shaping the socio-political ethos of the hasidic leadership and intensifying its sense of power, unity and self-confidence.

66 *Sefer ha-Yahas* (above, n. 19), p. 75.

67 Important archival material throwing light on this episode, and on the Russian authorities’

anywhere for the Sabbath, “he heard an announcement before the journey, as to the sum of money he would collect in that city where he would spend the Sabbath.”<sup>68</sup> R. Israel of Ruzhin, too, did not merely consolidate his spiritual contact with his hasidim, but engaged in fund-raising as well. His success so was considerable that when he came to Lwów in 1835 the local maskilim managed to persuade the city police to expel him, on the grounds of an attempt to smuggle money out of the country.<sup>69</sup> During his Sadagóra period (1842–1851) R. Israel traveled much less, and in the last five years of his life practically not at all, because of illness; but by then he was at the peak of his fame and did not have to raise funds. The myth that surrounded the wealth of the Ruzhin court was self-perpetuating, in the sense that it encouraged the flow of further donations and contributions to the court without the need to solicit them explicitly.

### The *Ma’amadot* Taxes

Another major means toward establishing the distant hasid’s spiritual commitment to his Zaddik was the collection of an annual tax known as *ma’amad* or *ma’amad umazav*.<sup>70</sup> These taxes were intended mainly to finance court expenses, though at times they were earmarked for special charities initiated

attitude to Hasidism in the 1860s, was published in Ukrainian and Russian by Ilya Galant, “On the History of the Struggle against the Zaddikim,” *Zbirnyk 2*, Kiev 1929, pp. 313–344; and see now my article (above, n. 60).

68 *Sha’ar ha-Otiyyot* (above, n. 39), p. 23.

69 See Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 157, 486.

70 For the linguistic aspect of these terms see Zederbaum, op. cit. (above, n. 17), p. 135 n. 1; and cf. I. Rivkind, *Jewish Money*, New York 1959 (Yiddish), pp. 155–156 (*Ma’amadot-Gelt*). The phrase was also used for campaigns to raise funds for non-hasidic purposes, such as rabbinical salaries or slaughterers’ fees; this may be seen, e.g., in a letter from the leaders of the community of Fălticeni to the Zaddik R. Meir of Peremyshlyany, reporting a special *ma’amad* held to raise a salary for R. Solomon Kluger, who had been appointed to the rabbinate in their town. Kluger, however, withdrew his consent, “and the *ma’amad umazav* that we had held went down the drain” (*Kerem Shelomo*, 8/7 [1985], p. 43). The word *ma’amadot* was also used for money sent to support Zaddikim who had immigrated to Palestine; see, e.g., R. Nathan of Nemirov, who was considering immigration to Palestine and expressed his confidence “that I shall easily be able to hold a *ma’amad* for my upkeep through our rich relatives and our associates” (*Yemei Maharnat*, Benei Berak 1956, II, sec. 3); or a letter written by R. Moses of Lelów to his hasidim just prior to his immigration (in 1850): “Please remember your promise to me to keep me in mind, do not be idle in collecting the *ma’amadot* in which you have

by the Zaddik.<sup>71</sup> It was once thought that the first *ma'amadot* tax was levied by R. Pinhas of Korzec (d. 1791); but as R. Pinhas did not have a great following, this seems rather dubious, and indeed the sources in question are late and unreliable.<sup>72</sup> Although it is now accepted that the founder of *ma'amadot* was R. Mordecai of Chernobyl,<sup>73</sup> there are reports of the tax being collected in the late 18th century that have nothing to do with R. Mordecai.<sup>74</sup>

Evidence that the collection of *ma'amadot* was intended not only to improve the court's financial situation, but also to help the Zaddik consolidate his position as a leader of many hasidic communities, may be found in an early letter of R. Israel of Ruzhin, sent in around 1826 (R. Israel began to

taken so much trouble for my sake" (*Tif'eret Banim*, in: *Sifrei ha-Yehudi ha-Kadosh mi-Przysucha*, Jerusalem 1987, p. 216).

71 Thus, for example, in 1847, R. Israel of Ruzhin instructed the hasidim of the Zaddik Zevi Hirsch of Rymanów, who had died leaving many debts, "to travel from town to town holding a *ma'amad umazav* in each for the benefit of the deceased Zaddik's family... so that there should not be a righteous man abandoned etc." See: *Tiferet Israel — Journal of Torah and Chasidus* 12 (1986), p. 24 [Hebrew].

72 It was told of R. Pinhas that he "had a *ma'amad* in a good many towns and that he himself would record annually how much each person should give, and two of the best disciples would travel to collect the *ma'amad*" (*Emunat Zaddikim*, Warsaw 1900, sec. 56, p. 29); see also Even, op. cit. (above, n. 25), pp. 193–195.

73 See S. A. Horodecki, *Rabbi Nahum of Chernobyl and his Descendants*, Berdyczów 1902 (Heb.), p. 31; idem, *Ha-Hasidut* (above, n. 49), III, p. 85; idem, *Shivhei ha-Besht*, Tel Aviv 1968, p. 198. Cf. I. Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and its Branches*, II, Jerusalem 1993 (Heb.), pp. 538–539 n. 76. R. Mordecai of Chernobyl, in a letter written in 1826 to the communal leaders of Khashchevatoye (between Bershad and Sawrań), ordered them to hold "a regular weekly *ma'amad* in order to support him comfortably" — referring to a friend who was a rabbi in the community but had become the center of a controversy; see Jacob, op. cit. (above, n. 32), pp. 256–258.

74 It was told of R. Nahman of Bratslav that when he was living in Medvedivka (around 1790) "some village people got together and made him a permanent *ma'amad* to give him one gold coin each week" (*Hayyei Moharan* [above, n. 2], p. 70, "His Residence and his Travels," sec. 9). A Yiddish satirical work entitled "The Greatness of R. Wolf of Czarny Ostra" refers to *ma'amadot* in connection with the Zaddikim, Zeev Wolf of Czarno-Ostrów (immigrated to Palestine in 1798) and Meshullam Feibish of Zbaraż (d. end of 1794), see *Joseph Perl's Yiddish Works*, Vilna 1937 (Yiddish), p. 229. For *ma'amadot* in Habad Hasidism see a letter sent by the so-called "Middle Rebbe," R. Dov Baer, to his hasidim in 1813: "That every man should send his *ma'amad*... and just as you, our associates, undertook this duty in writing before my father... let them arouse much mercy upon me, lest I be obliged to travel, Heaven forbid, in order to support my family" (*Iggerot Kodesh me'et Admor ha-Zaken*..., New York 1987, p. 235; and see also Y. Mondshine, *Migdal 'Oz*, Kefar Habad 1980, pp. 326–335).

act as a Zaddik circa 1813, when he was only 16 years old). Though the letter is not dated, the fact that Międzybóž is listed among the communities required to pay the tax indicates that it was written only after the death (in 1825) of the Zaddik, R. Abraham Joshua Heschel of Opatów, who lived there at the end of his life. Moreover, R. Israel's reference to the need "to keep my seat secure" indicates that the letter was written at an early stage of his career. He appeals to the leaders and residents of several communities in Volhynia and Podolia, promising that if they paid *ma'amadot* in time, he would not cease praying for them:

Indeed, just as individuals have benefited from the matter of the *ma'amad* that they collected from each and every one, to keep my seat secure and flourishing, and it is their earnest desire that I should write them a letter, I hereby comply with their will and inform them that I favor their wish and desire in this matter. May the Lord grant them courage for ever, and their heart may trust that I shall not desist from my prayer for their sake at every opportune time, to entreat for them within the community of Israel, that they should enjoy every possible blessing. Let them be careful to ensure the matter of the *ma'amad* to deliver [the tax] to the commissioner in their locality at its appointed time, every half-year. The role of the commissioner is a permanent one. No-one should send the *ma'amad* contribution of individuals here. [Instead], the commissioner shall deliver [the tax] to my most learned friend, our Master Rabbi Alter of Bar, may his light shine, who bears this letter, and via him [the tax] will reach me safely. And in order that the hearts of our brethren the Children of Israel shall be secure that whatever they have sent has arrived safely and that they shall be favorably remembered, my aforementioned friend has been instructed to bring them a receipt from one of my subordinates here. Thereby their desire and mine shall be fulfilled.<sup>75</sup>

The letter explicitly attests to the institutionalization of the tax: while it was originally collected only from individuals who wished to help the Zaddik establish himself, the Zaddik now agreed that whole communities should also take part. It was collected twice a year, by a permanent local representative (Heb. *mit'assek*, literally: the one dealing with the matter), who was permanently entrusted with the task and could not be

75 The letter was sent to the communities of Międzybóž, Sieniawa, Latyczew, Wonkowce, Płoskirów, in Podolia; and to Nowy Konstantynów and Derażna in Volhynia. See: *Tiferet Israel* (above, n. 71) 35 (1995), p. 34 [Hebrew]; Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 126, 405–406.

replaced. The Zaddik was unwilling to receive “*ma’amad* contributions of individuals,” that is, moneys sent to the court otherwise than through the “commissioner,” while the latter himself was instructed to deliver the funds he had collected to the Zaddik’s personal representative, on the basis of his written authorization. To avert suspicion that the money might not reach its destination, the Zaddik’s representative was to provide each contributor with a receipt. The receipt was of course intended to allay people’s suspicions — this was only natural in view of the numerous requests for contributions solicited by diverse impostors, emissaries, self-appointed Zaddikim and descendants of Zaddikim (genuine or spurious) who wandered from community to community in Eastern Europe throughout the 19th century. We do not know to what extent this description is realistic. The sources indicate that the instructions were not always followed to the letter, resulting in a broad range of collection methods, depending first and foremost on the Zaddik and his *gabba’im*.

*Ma’amadot* — ostensibly an internal, voluntary tax — were of course, collected only from the hasidim, and not from the community as a whole. Hasidic sources in fact describe the *ma’amadot* in an ideal light as taxes paid voluntarily by the hasidim, moved by their love for the Zaddik.<sup>76</sup> This generalization, however, should be treated with caution. Although there were no means of actual coercion, social pressure no doubt had its effect, creating an atmosphere in which even impoverished or penurious hasidim could not evade payment; any attempt at evasion would have been seen as desertion, rejection of an object of social identification. Such pressures were presumably most effective in small localities, where the great majority of the community were affiliated with a single court.

Quite naturally, the *ma’amadot* and *pidyon* harmed the regular community institutions, as was pointed out by Haskalah critics such as Alexander Zederbaum (Erez), the editor of *Ha-Meliz*, in his book about Berdyczów in the 1860s. Not only was the tax a heavy burden for many people, he wrote, but it undermined the financial basis of such institutions as the synagogue and study houses, as resources generally earmarked for charity and local community institutions found their way to the Zaddik’s court. Zederbaum complained that these taxes, which were supposed to be voluntary, were actually a compulsory payment that could not be evaded: “We are convinced that not even 10 percent of those who give *ma’amadot* and *pidyonot* do so of their own free will.”<sup>77</sup>

76 Even, op. cit. (above, n. 25), p. 191.

77 A. Zederbaum, *Di Geheymenise fun Berditshov*, Warsaw 1870 (Yiddish), p. 17.

In their propaganda, the Zaddikim preferred to underline the ideological foundations of the *ma’amadot*: it was the individual hasid’s way of expressing his loyalty to “his” Zaddik, thus actualizing the mutual dependence and interrelationship between the center — the Zaddik’s court — and its many peripheral communities. Indeed, although its purpose was basically economic, it also had certain social and ideological aspects that could not be measured in terms of profit and loss alone. An illustration of the Ruzhiner’s efforts to graft a human dimension onto the technical and organizational aspect of the collection of *ma’amadot* may be found in a report by his son, R. David Moses of Czortków (d. 1903):

He had a rabbi who traveled from town to town collecting *ma’amad* money from his followers. And once this rabbi came back from his rounds and gave him lists of the people [who had paid] *ma’amad*. The Ruzhiner read the lists of people, and while doing so inquired about a certain person who had been accustomed to give five gold pieces as *ma’amad* money but was no longer mentioned in the lists. The traveling rabbi replied that the person in question lived in a village distant from any town and the journey to him would cost more than the profit. My father, of blessed memory, replied: You [=the collectors] would not spend one ruble so as to receive five gold pieces?! I wish you to spend five rubles so as to receive from the man five gold pieces!<sup>78</sup>

On the other hand, there was no lack of displays of greed, for which a variety of excuses was proposed. For example, R. Israel of Ruzhin instructed his *gabba’im* to explain to the hasidim that it would be wrong to donate small, torn banknotes, for since the donors were “engraved on the tablet of the Zaddik’s heart,” they too should give up their money “wholeheartedly.”<sup>79</sup> It was told of R. Aaron of Chernobyl’s tax collector that he was afraid to enter Kishinev when a plague was raging in the town. He sent the money “and wrote a letter about the situation in the town, [saying] that he wished to return home.” R. Aaron insisted, however, that the collector not leave the town, promising that he would come to no harm since “I have erected an iron wall between the Angel of Death and the town of Kishinev.”<sup>80</sup> An interesting letter from R. Aaron “the Second” of Karlin (d. 1872) to his

78 *Bet Yisra’el* (above, n. 50), p. 151, sec. 41; and cf. *ibid.*, p. 161, sec. 1.

79 S. Telingator, *Tif’eret Yisra’el*, Jerusalem 1945, p. 52; Bromberg, op. cit. (above, n. 49), p. 92.

80 *Sifran shel Zaddikim* (above, n. 37), p. 42.

Hasidim in Ovruch (Volhynia) betrays clear signs of the financial distress of the hasidic courts at the time and, at the same time, the avarice of the Zaddikim (the two elements were not unrelated):

As they know, from time immemorial I have always traveled through their community at this time of year... Now that I have not been successful... I am sending my beloved friends and relatives, who bear this letter and lists of names [of members of the community], may they live long, and it is known how much each and every one was accustomed to give each year; some of them committed themselves to pay *ma'amad* and undertook to send it annually to my home. And now, because of the heavy yoke of debts weighing down upon my neck, and since our followers have repeatedly undertaken to contribute more than they were wont, and I have seen that nothing has come of it — in view of the deficit in the amount of *ma'amad* money, I have decided to issue a command in this letter to all those who do my bidding, not to donate less than their [usual] annual donation when I stay in their community; whoever adds more shall be additionally blessed, and the *ma'amad* should not come to less than formerly. In addition, each and every person should double his donation by not less than the amount [originally] given, this debt to be defrayed no later than the coming festival of Shavu'ot.... Perhaps in this way the yoke of my debts may be mitigated.<sup>81</sup>

The tax collectors set out on their journeys at fixed times, generally once or twice per year — occasionally four times.<sup>82</sup> They traveled to the towns and villages in the Zaddik's sphere of influence, collecting money on the basis of previously prepared lists of names. These "*pidyon*-beggars," as they were nicknamed in the anti-hasidic literature,<sup>83</sup> were professionals, well versed in the "art" of fund-raising, familiar with the locality and with its hasidic residents. For the most part, they were respected, venerable rabbis, but also warm, personable individuals who readily established friendly relations with people. Their arrival in town was considered a festive occasion for the local hasidim, who interrupted their labors and gathered in the *kloiz* to listen

81 *Kerem Shelomo*, 3/4 (1980), pp. 15–16. Though the letter is undated, it is probably from the 1860s; cf. R. David of Talnoye's letter complaining to his hasidim of the grave economic situation and urging them "to strengthen the matter of the *ma'amad* with large, new increments" (ibid. 10/9 [1987], pp. 14–15).

82 Even, op. cit. (above, n. 25), p. 191.

83 Tishby, op. cit. (above, n. 73), pp. 538–539.

to talks, stories and lessons, as well as the latest news and gossip from the Rebbe's court.<sup>84</sup>

The collectors were expected to update their lists according to the results of the current collection, and the lists were kept in a special archive at the Zaddik's home. Unlike the case of the government population censuses, which Jews usually evaded in order to reduce their tax assessments, here the hasidim were specifically interested in being accurately listed; only then could they be confident that they would be remembered at the Zaddik's court and receive his blessing. On the other hand, it was in the court's best economic and administrative interests to update the lists; thus, each year, after the collectors had completed their rounds, the total collected was compared with the previous years' income. Here is how a hasidic source describes a conversation between the Zaddik, R. Nahum Dov of Sadagóra (d. 1883), and a returning tax collector:

Once the emissary, who had returned from his journey to collect his *ma'amad* money, came to him, and gave him the lists of all those who had given *ma'amad*, by name. And the Zaddik went to the chest and took out last year's list, only to find that one man was missing in the new list, who had given four silver rubles in the previous year. So he asked the emissary: 'Why is this man not included in the list?' And the emissary answered that he had died. Thereupon the revered Zaddik replied: 'Why should his sons not give for him?' Said the emissary: 'See, his son so-and-so is a poor man and has nothing.' And the revered Zaddik said: 'But has he enough for the Sabbath expenses?' To which the emissary replied that he even found it difficult to procure enough for the Sabbath. Said the revered Zaddik: 'Let us calculate

84 See the picturesque account by Even, op. cit. (above, n. 25), pp. 191–195. Ahad Ha-'Am, in his "Memoirs," in *Complete Works of Ahad Ha-'Am*, Tel Aviv–Jerusalem 1961 (Heb.), p. 466, describes a Sadagóra *ma'amadot* collector named Sheftel Horowitz, of Berdyczów. Israel Rappaport, a tax collector for the Czortków court, describes the annual collection of taxes in his *Divrei David*, Husiatyń 1904, pp. 52–53. On the *ma'amadot* collectors of the Zaddikim of Chernobyl and Talnoye see P. Minkowski, "From the Book of My Life" (Heb.), *Reshumot* 1 (Odessa 1918), pp. 98, 114. For an account of the *ma'amadot* collectors in Gliniany (Galicia) see A. Korekh, *In Exile and in Homeland — Memoirs*, Jerusalem 1941 (Heb.), pp. 63–64. R. Zeev Wolf of Stryków, himself an *admor* and a scholar, served as tax collector for R. Menahem Mendel of Kock, see his letter of 1848: "For I have to set out on the charitable way, to collect the money which our friends the Hasidim in the neighborhood have committed themselves [to give] for the home of our Master and Teacher... in Kock," (*Zer Zahav*, Antwerp 1988, p. 101).

how much he needs for Sabbath expenses'... Then the revered Zaddik said: 'Tell that son he should save from all his Sabbath expenses a sum of four kopecks per week for *ma'amad* money. For the Zaddik is equivalent to the Sabbath, and the *ma'amad* money is as highly valued as Sabbath expenses.'<sup>85</sup>

After the necessary inquiries, the Zaddik would bless the localities which had made good their payments and grant them a symbolic coin as a gift; this coin was brought back by the tax collectors on their next visit. It was then auctioned off among the hasidim and the proceeds used for celebrations that went on for the duration of the collector's stay.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, while the collection was in progress the tax collector would present the community with a special coin, which the Rebbe had specially held and blessed specially as a protective charm, in exchange for the money collected. Such customs of "reversed *pidyon*" were a symbolic expression of the mutual ties between the Zaddik and his hasidim, of the idea that the beneficial "abundance" flowed in both directions, affecting both the Zaddik and his flock.

### Concessions and Privileges

Yet another source of financial stability for the court was the Zaddik's income from various concessions and privileges. Rabbis and other religious functionaries had always enjoyed various perquisites in addition to their salaries. This usage was also rooted in religious law,<sup>87</sup> and was reflected in various ways in rabbinical contracts.<sup>88</sup> Thus, a commonly accepted way of compensating rabbinical employees for the generally low salaries offered by the communities was to grant them commissions for various

85 *Bet Yisra'el* (above, n. 50), p. 162. For the Zaddik as "the equivalent of the Sabbath" see also R. Abraham Jacob of Sadagóra in S. Telingator, *Even Yisra'el*, Jerusalem 1945, p. 39.

86 Even, op. cit. (above, n. 25), p. 192.

87 See, e.g., *Tur, Hoshen Mishpat* 156: "If a scholar should bring goods to trade in the town, the townspeople must prevent any person from selling until the scholar has sold his goods." And cf. *Shulhan 'Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 253:11.

88 This was indeed explicitly prohibited in the Statute of 1804, para. 52, which stipulated that rabbis should receive no more than their salaries and were barred from collecting fees for their services; see S. Ettinger, "The Statute of 1804" (Heb.), in idem, *On the History...* (above, n. 10), p. 256. In actual fact, however, this prohibition was never enforced, as may be learned from rabbinic contracts and other 19th-century sources. See also, Assaf, *Ruzhin*, p. 410 nn. 96–97.

services and monopolies on the sale of various commodities. The Zaddikim, however, were by no means ordinary employees who could be bound by contracts. They were not the "property" of the community within whose precincts they lived, and their spiritual authority could not be defined by a standard rabbinical contract in terms of privileges and duties. Naturally, the community could not dictate terms to Zaddikim, appoint them, dismiss them at the end of their tenure or otherwise terminate their service. Nevertheless, some Zaddikim held concessions which served in a sense as substitutes for salaries paid by the relevant communities. This situation, noted by both mitnaggedim and maskilim,<sup>89</sup> was also associated with an institution that has gone almost unnoticed in the scholarly literature — the "*maggidut* contract."

The title *maggid* borne by several Zaddikim of the Twersky family (the Chernobyl dynasty and its offshoots)<sup>90</sup> does not allude to the traditional *maggid mesharim*, hired to preach to the community on Sabbaths and festivals. This latter role almost completely disappeared in 19th century hasidic society, the sermons in synagogue being replaced by the "Torah" or "words of *hasidut*" spoken by the Zaddik over the Sabbath meals at his court.<sup>91</sup> In the few places where the title survived it was given a new meaning, through a signed formal contract, known as "*ketav maggidut*" (*magidus briv* in Yiddish), which declared that a certain community "belonged" to that specific Zaddik, who "ruled" the region, and to no other. It was by virtue of this contract that the Zaddik and his entourage enjoyed monopolies and considerable economic prerogatives within and around the community, such as a set percentage of the income from the lease of various assets or taxes (e.g., the meat tax) or monopolies on the sale of various commodities

89 Joseph Perl, op. cit. (above, n. 24), p. 106, refers to the Maggid of Kozieniec's daughter, who sold amber oil to visitors to the court (for use in her father's charms); in *'Emek Refa'im* (above, n. 40), pp. 16–17, 19, the Zaddik sends his guests to buy wine from his son and olive oil from his daughter. R. David of Maków (in Wilensky, op. cit. [above, n. 7], II, p. 174) reports that R. Hayyim of Amdur's wife and father-in-law made a good living cooking for the hasidim.

90 The first member of this dynasty to be called *maggid* was R. Nahum of Chernobyl; the title was also borne by his son R. Mordecai and some of his grandchildren, although none of them (except R. Nahum himself) was considered a preacher or *maggid mesharim* in the original sense of the word. The title was almost unknown in the Ruzhin-Sadagóra dynasty and other hasidic sects (although the ancestor of the Ruzhin dynasty, R. Dov of Międzyrzecz, was known as "the Great *Maggid*"); see Horodecki, op. cit. (above, n. 49), III, p. 93.

91 E. Etkes, "Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady as a Hassidic Leader" (Heb.), *Zion* 50 (1985), pp. 341–342.



(such as salt, candles and other tallow products, yeast, etc.). In addition, they alone were entitled to appoint various religious functionaries, and also had the authority to cancel appointments not to their liking. Such signed agreements were apparently common only among Zaddikim active in the southwestern districts of the Russian Empire (the Zaddikim of Chernobyl, Ruzhin, Sawrań and their offshoots).<sup>92</sup>

In 1867 Alexander Zederbaum, the editor of *Ha-Meliz*, described how these Zaddikim had divided up the control of the communities among themselves and pointed out the social and economic implications of their rule:

They [i.e., the Zaddikim] divided up the land among themselves as an inheritance, not as secular rulers do, according to geographical borders, but according to cities in each province and district, they did not [divide up the territory] by lot, but when they or their delegates went on their journeys, the local residents joined their ranks, tempted by the counsel of a few enthusiasts; they crowned them [i.e., the Zaddikim] as leaders and granted them contracts of rabbinate or *maggidut*, to serve them as protection and refuge.... Without them, no-one shall lift up hand or foot, and in all communal matters their instruction is awaited, and they send them rabbis, judges, slaughterers, cantors, teachers, beadles and even bathhouse attendants. As payment, the communities send an annual head-tax per family, called *ma'amadot*, in addition to gifts in every case, whether good or bad, [this is also] in addition to the tax they [the Zaddikim] receive when visited in their sanctuaries or when the Zaddik comes once a year (or more) to travel from city to city in his realm....<sup>93</sup>

This brief description lists all the major financial characteristics of the process through which the hasidic courts built up their economic power or consolidated their control over the communities: the fund-raising visits of the Zaddik himself; his "enthronement" in a contract of rabbinate or *maggidut*;

92 Concerning *maggidut* contracts see the extended discussion in Assaf, op. cit. (above, n. 60), pp. 465–506, where I cite evidence of R. David of Talnoye's efforts to secure such contracts from "his" communities, and also describe the dispute between the Zaddik R. Isaac of Skwira and the Bratslav Hasidim in Teplik and Nemirov, who refused to observe his *maggidut* contract. Cf. the responsum of the Hasidic Rabbi, Moshe Nahum Yerushalimski (*Be'er Moshe*, Warsaw 1990, no. 26), in which he stated that the *maggidut* contract was a custom unique to the Ukrainian provinces — the center of the Chernobyl dynasty.

93 Zederbaum, op. cit. (above, n. 17), pp. 134–135.

the Zaddik's control of communal appointments; the *ma'amadot* taxes and *pidyonot*. The use of communal appointments as a tool in the service of the Zaddikim, whether for purposes of propaganda and the dissemination of Hasidism, or for economic aims, has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>94</sup> Here, attention will be focused on the question of the economic monopolies.

A prototype for the later *maggidut* contracts is the agreement concluded in 1797 between the Besht's grandson R. Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sudytków and a group of 14 leaseholders ("distinguished holders of *arendas* in the villages"). The latter undertook "to do his bidding in everything he would say" and to grant him a percentage of their earnings ("six gold pieces from each thousand"). In return, the Zaddik promised to provide them with "protection and refuge... to help with his learning and prayer, which benefit all those who cluster in his shade." An interesting comment of the leaseholders is that they are doing so "as in all the places [where people] come to take refuge under his wings," indicating that they were by no means exceptional.<sup>95</sup> R. Menahem Mendel Hager, R. Israel of Ruzhin's son-in-law and the founder of the Vizhnitz dynasty, was in partnership with cattle merchants who gave him "a certain percentage of the business" in return for his advice. "Whenever they had to travel to Vienna with the bulls, they first secured our Master's permission." The Zaddik did not trust his partners and checked their accounts thoroughly.<sup>96</sup>

Care for the Zaddik's economic standing may be discerned in a detailed *maggidut* contract from 1846, which awarded R. Aaron of Chernobyl a varied range of privileges, monopolies and sources of income. The document was signed by more than 120 Jews, representing "all the residents of our holy community together with its environs," who granted the Zaddik, his descendants and their representatives "for ever and ever" a monopoly on the income from the sale of candles, soap and related commodities (such as tallow, wicks, cotton wool, and felt) in Chernobyl and the neighboring communities. All the residents of the community undertook not to purchase these commodities from any persons other than the Zaddik and his

94 See Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 264–272.

95 The document was published (including a facsimile) by Kahana (above, n. 22), p. 304. See also Ettinger, op. cit. (above, n. 10), p. 194; the source is one of a collection of hasidic *maggidut* contracts in the Manuscript Department of the Jewish National and University Library at Jerusalem (ARC 4° 1699, File 20). Kahana was unable to read the name of the community with which the leaseholders were associated; to my mind, the reading should be "in the villages near the Holy Community of Leśniów" (Eastern Galicia).

96 *Even Shetiyyah* (above, n. 35), p. 98, sec. 6.

representatives — whether gentiles or Jews from other communities, not even in the most minute quantities. It was forbidden for any person to manufacture these commodities independently, to import them from outside the community or to trade in them anywhere, wholesale or retail, even with visitors to the community. Although the document is now rare, there were undoubtedly many others like it and it well illustrates the ties forged between a community and a Zaddik living in their midst.<sup>97</sup>

A particularly interesting clause in the agreement indicates that the community also required the leaseholders of the meat tax to siphon off part of their income to the Zaddik's court. Moreover, they even undertook to compensate leaseholders not belonging to the community — and therefore less amenable to persuasion — for any loss, provided only that the Zaddik's income did not suffer:

The tax farmer himself is forbidden to sell tallow to any one, save to the *Admor* R. Aaron or his representative, similarly all Jews are forbidden to buy tallow from the tax farmer, save only the *Admor* and his representatives. If the meat tax farmer should hire another collector from elsewhere, the townspeople must compensate the tax farmer until he, too, agrees to all these measures for the good of the aforementioned Holy *Admor* R. Aaron and his representatives, as stated.

This agreement was concluded, as indicated above, in 1846 — only two years after the kahal was officially abolished in Russia. The meat tax was supposed to have been taken out of the kahal's hands and made the sole responsibility of the leaseholders. Though the latter were required to set aside part of their income for various officially recognized communal needs (such as the salaries of government-appointed rabbis or funds for state schools), in actual fact the communities continued to control the meat tax budgets and to divert part of the income for purposes not sanctioned by the government. Thus, for example, some communities leased the meat tax themselves; having ensured that there was no competition, they leased the tax cheaply and secretly subleased it at a profit, thus financing their own activities. This was clearly one of the devices adopted by Jewish

97 The document was published (without indication of the source) in *Ha-Mahaneh ha-Haredi*, no. 559, 11 Tevet 5752 [=December 18, 1991], pp. 22–23; Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 414–415. The original document is in the collection of *maggidut* contracts (above, n. 95), File 11.

communities in the Pale of Settlement to finance expenses not recognized as necessary by the Russian government.<sup>98</sup>

Though meat and candles were necessities of Jewish life — whether on weekdays or particularly on Sabbaths and festivals — as most communities were quite poor, the Zaddik's total income by virtue of this agreement could not have been very high. This may be one more reason that the Jews of this particular community and its vicinity preferred to grant the Zaddik various benefits through subleasing, rather than directly pay him a regular salary (even if the subleasing had to be done covertly).

The Zaddik's power to intervene in the internal communal government was not confined merely to the acquisition of various monopolies; he was also able to revoke old monopolies and institute more equitable arrangements. An interesting example may be found in a letter of R. Mordecai of Chernobyl to the Jewish community of Talnoye (the letter is undated; an obvious *terminus ad quem* is 1837, the year of the Zaddik's death). R. Mordecai declared that “owing to the treacherous and distressful times, it being difficult to make a livelihood, the poor have multiplied and the moneys allocated in the past are decreasing every day,” he therefore decided, with the agreement of the local rabbinic judges, to take over the yeast monopoly from the present leaseholder (who would be compensated weekly from the kahal's coffers) and to transfer the income to the community for the benefit of the community poor, so as not to leave it, “Heaven forbid, to the *skarb* [=the government treasury].”<sup>99</sup> This interesting information, which is supported by other sources,<sup>100</sup> not only attests to a certain social orientation in the Zaddikim's public activities but also points to the weakness in the distorted, negative image of the Zaddikim as guided by their own financial interests alone.

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98 See A. Shochat, “Leadership of the Jewish Communities in Russia after the Abolition of the ‘Kahal’” (Heb.), *Zion* 42 (1977), pp. 195–197; idem, *The “Crown Rabbinate” in Russia*, Haifa 1975 (Heb.), p. 15. Cf. the report that the Zaddik R. Moses of Czezelnik, grandson of R. Moses Zevi of Sawrań, leased the meat tax himself in order to finance his court expenses: S. Vigderman, “An Ass's Burial” (Heb.), *Reshumot* 2 (1927), pp. 448–453.

99 *Nachlat Zvi*, II, Benei Berak 1990, p. 90.

100 For R. Israel of Ruzhin's intervention in questions of leaseholding and monopolies see Assaf, *Ruzhin*, pp. 255–258. Such activities on the part of Zaddikim also contributed to the spread of Hasidism in its early days; see C. Shmeruk, “Hasidism and the Leasing of Property” (Heb.), *Zion* 35 (1970), pp. 182–192.

The burgeoning running costs of the “royal” courts, the increased number of “residents” directly dependent on them for their living and, in particular, the continuous expansion of the Zaddik’s family through ramified marriage ties and the settlement of all his descendants and their relatives at court, all necessitated great expense and in time caused financial crises that sometimes brought the courts to the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>101</sup> This situation had long range implications for the historical development of Hasidism in the 20th century. Insufficient attention has hitherto been paid to the economic aspects of the phenomenon of well-established hasidic courts which moved to other places; such moves have been attributed mainly to external events, such as wars. It may be presumed, however, that one of the reasons that most of the Zaddikim of the Ruzhin dynasty (Sadagóra, Czortków, Husiatyń, Boian, Buhuși, etc.) remained in Vienna or Leipzig even after the close of World War I, and made no effort to reestablish the courts in their previous homes, was associated *inter alia* with the desire to shed the tremendous financial yoke due to the maintenance of the courts in the original localities.

Towards the end of the 19th century, as the winds of change and modernity began to blow through the hasidic townlets and villages of Eastern Europe, the impact of the social pressures created by the hasidic milieu upon the faithful was lessened: the *ma’amadot* tax was levied from far smaller numbers, mainly a few wealthy hasidim, and the visits of Zaddikim to their flocks scattered around the countryside no longer made such a profound impression. “The hasidim came to the outskirts of the city to welcome their Rebbe, but without the fervor that had seized the previous generation... *Shtetl* life did not become one big festival. Life continued as usual, the tailor was busy with his needle and the cobbler with his awl...”<sup>102</sup>

101 Echoes of the financial distress of the hasidic courts may be discerned in numerous sources. See, e.g., Erez, “A Driven Leaf: Neither Bears nor Forest” (Heb.), *Ha-Meliz* 9 (1870), no. 38, p. 257; *ibid.*, 26 (1886), no. 73, p. 1026. It was reported of R. David of Czortków that “he needed... a large sum of money to spend for the relatives and grandees whom he was accustomed to support out of charity” (*Bet Yisra’el* [above, n. 50], p. 143, sec. 5); “Once there was much distress in the *admor*’s home and the income was insufficient to cover expenses, and the Rabbi’s wife [Feige] went in to the *admor* with a complaint that she did not have enough to maintain the holy court” (*Kerem Yisra’el* [above, n. 1], p. 92).

102 Z. Sharfstein, *Dunajewzi My Home Town*, Tel Aviv [1957] (Heb.), pp. 40–41.



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