History of Hasidism

David Assaf

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1. Definitions

Hasidism is a religious revival movement with a distinctive social profile. Originating in the second quarter of the 18th century, it has continued to exist without interruption up to the present day. Its ideological and historical origins are generally attributed to the figure and unique teachings of R. Israel b. Eliezer, known as the “Ba’al Shem Tov” or Besht (1698/1700–1760), his self-awareness as a leader of his people, and his activities as the purveyor of a new religious message. The emergence and rapid expansion of Hasidism, coupled with the feelings of identification it arouses, have helped it to overcome persistent opposition and become a central phenomenon of Jewish history in the Modern Era—one of the most prominent features in the religious, social, and experiential world of East-European Jewry.

The beginnings of Hasidism may be traced to spontaneous, elitist groups of Torah scholars and kabbalists in the southeast of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, particularly in the province of Podolia. These people, of whom the Besht was the most prominent, aspired as individuals or groups to infuse traditional modes of worship with a new spiritual content and to take a more active part in public leadership. In the generation following the death of the Besht, his admirers called themselves “Hasidim”—a highly charged term applied previously to individuals recognized in the community as exceptionally pious or kabbalists, who were as such allowed to adopt certain distinctive ritual practices. The members of the Besht’s circle and their disciples became charismatic leaders in numerous communities in the Ukraine, Red Rus (Ruthenia), and White Russia, attracting admirers and curious individuals, particularly young Torah scholars unable to satisfy their spiritual needs by the traditional methods of scholarship.

Poland experienced radical political changes during the 18th century, culminating in the last quarter of the century in that country’s partition among the surrounding absolutist states; at the same time, the autonomous Jewish community
began to disintegrate, making way for new sources of religious inspiration and authority. Hasidism prospered and spread against the background of the collapse of the old social order: the abolition of the Council of Four Lands in 1764; the loss of faith in the traditional institutions of community leadership, including the rabbinate, which were increasingly identified with the interests of the Polish nobility; and many manifestations of social and inter-class tension. These were further compounded by a religious-ethical crisis due to the remnants of Sabbatean messianism and Frankism, as well as the weakened position of the rabbis, many of whom were suspected of being unfit for their posts, which they owed largely to wealth and contacts with the authorities.

Despite blatant attempts by its opponents (known as mitnaggedim) to vilify Hasidism and describe its leaders as ignorant and corrupt, most ordinary people believed that Hasidism was a religiously and ethically “clean” movement and considered its leaders, the Zaddikim, as superior spiritual figures with unselfish motives. The vacuum left by the old, declining communal institutions was now filled by the leaders of Hasidism, thanks to their personal prestige and moral position; while they had originally intended not to replace the old institutions but only to reinforce them and become part of them, they essentially appropriated powers that had previously been held by the community.

Beginning in the late 18th century, Hasidism experienced processes of transformation and institutionalization that changed its historical character. As it penetrated all corners of Eastern Europe and split into numerous subdivisions, Hasidism became a popular movement which appealed to the masses and not only to the elite. As a result, it garnered supporters in all classes of traditional society, whatever their education or socio-economic position. Each such group was headed by a Zaddik (also known as rebbe or admor [Hebrew acronym for “Our master, our teacher, and our rabbi”]), who represented a new, different brand of religious leadership. These leaders enjoyed a status, prestige and authority different from those of the rabbi or parnas (lay officers)—the traditional leaders of the
community. The Zaddik was not formally appointed or elected to his post; neither was he expected to prove his mettle in Torah scholarship. He was accepted as leader by his followers (including those not living in his own community) by virtue of his charismatic personality or spiritual eminence, and, since the 19th century, by dint of his descent from a dynasty of previous Zaddikim. Membership in a Hasidic community was voluntary and informal, depending on experience; one joined by merely expressing one’s allegiance to the Zaddik. The literature of Hasidism, which cultivated the special mystical and social status of the Zaddik as divinely elected to his post, ultimately upheld the dynastic principle as the sole basis of legitimacy in Hasidic leadership. The leadership of the dynastic Zaddik is still the salient characteristic of all Hasidic groups and communities (with the exception of Bratslav Hasidism).

Hasidism is not, and never was, a “movement” in the modern sense—a centralized organization. “Hasidism” is essentially a collective term for a great variety of groups and subgroups which took shape over the centuries, whether owing to different approaches or different ideological and social emphases, or because of personal conflict within the leadership. Since the 19th century, Hasidic groups have been identified with the dynasties to which their leaders belong, and they are generally designated by the names of the East-European townships and villages where the “courts” of those dynasties were established or first became known.

The greater the achievements of Hasidism, the greater was the opposition that it aroused. The organized struggle against it, beginning in Vilna in 1772 when Hasidim in the community were excommunicated, reflected the movement’s perceived threat to the traditional structure and order of the Jewish community, its new sources of authority and leadership, and the fascination that the Hasidic “experience” held for the scholarly elites. The struggle of the mitnaggedim against Hasidism, whatever its motives, failed utterly after only one stormy generation, but it left its mark on the general social and spiritual features of the traditional
Jewish community, namely, the persisting distinction between the two main groups comprising haredi (ultra-Orthodox) society: Hasidim and mitnagdim or, as the latter are called today, “Lithuanians” (Heb. lita’im).

Since the first quarter of the 19th century, hostility has given way to coexistence. But as Hasidim and their opponents in traditional society gradually made peace with one another, Hasidism found itself facing a new, far more determined and sophisticated enemy—the Haskalah. The clash between Hasidim and maskilim was not just one more dispute between different groups in Jewish society over the correct way to worship God, nor was it motivated by competition over economic interests and positions of influence. It represented a peak in the basic tension that has characterized Jewish history throughout the Modern Era: the conflicting views of “innovators” and “conservatives” as to the religious and cultural identity of Jewish society, as well as the significance of “modern times” and their spirit in shaping the future of the Jewish people.

Hasidism—as represented by all its subdivisions and leaders—generally led the conservative front and waged a determined, uncompromising war against Haskalah, secularization, nationalism, and Zionism. Various social and religious elements characteristic of the early days of Hasidism had played a radical, innovative role as long as the struggle remained confined within the bounds of traditional society. When the movement found itself confronting modernity and a dichotomized Jewish society, other, conservative tendencies came to the fore, sanctifying the “old,” now seen as the only solution to the struggle with the “new,” the only possible defense against the threats and temptations of modernity. Hasidism was thus not only a religious and social movement, creating and operating in its inner world, but a rival to and competitor with other religious and social currents that shook East-European Jewry in the 19th and 20th centuries. These currents, Hasidism included, sought to shape the identity of Jewish society in the present and the future, not only “positively,” through innovation and inner
creation, but also by delegitimization of the opposing camp and an unyielding struggle against its influence.

2. Periodization

a. Emergence and Growth (1700-1760)

Hasidism was rooted in the milieu of the “old” world of Polish Jewry: a coherent, traditional society, with an ancient tradition of communal organization, well-defined economic and legal profile, a characteristic spoken and written language (Yiddish), and a life-style shaped by talmudic Halakhah and its authoritative interpreters, on the one hand, and by a popular ethos, as reflected in literature of customs, ethics, homiletics, and Kabbalah.

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

The main scene of the Besht’s activities was the villages and townships of the province of Podolia. After a period of “concealment” and religious preparation, during which he secluded himself in little villages at the edge of the Carpathian Mountains, “from Kosov to Kitev,” the Besht revealed himself to the public (probably in 1733) as a professional healer, proficient in the use of “Holy Names” (Ba’al Shem), a mystic possessing magical powers, and the bearer of a new religious message. The Besht directed his first efforts at the members of the aforementioned pietist elites, hoping for recognition of his exceptional spiritual
powers (which were particularly obvious in his ecstatic prayer) and the legitimacy of his charismatic leadership. After being recognized by some of them, he began to propound his unique teachings in these circles. His admirers were attracted to him mainly in the last twenty years of his life (1740–1760), when he lived in the township of Medzibozh, where he was also recognized and respected by the whole community. The Besht and his group formed an elitist nucleus with a distinctive religious life style and customs. For example, they adopted the Sephardic version of the prayer book (with added kabbalistic “intentions” [Heb. kavanot] attributed to R. Isaac Luria and his disciples), purified themselves regularly by immersion in a ritual bath (Heb. mikveh), and used highly polished knives for ritual slaughter.

The Besht’s disciples and colleagues, some of whom were associated with the early pietist groups, were community rabbis and Torah scholars (such as Jacob-Joseph of Polonnoye or Meir Margoliouth of Ostrog), preachers, itinerant and otherwise (such as Menahem-Mendel of Bar, Dov Baer of Mezhirech, or Aryeh-Leib of Polonnoye), ritual slaughterers, cantors, and melammedim (elementary school teachers). While the Besht was also active among the lower classes and heedful of their troubles and needs, they were not members of his closest circle and his new religious doctrines were not meant for them.

Despite the contemporary activities of crypto-Sabbateans in the region, there are no solid grounds for postulating any link between the early Hasidim and the last Sabbateans, or ideological influence of the latter. In any case, Hasidism vehemently denied this accusation by its opponents, though it has been accepted by some scholars of the history of Hasidism. In addition, there is no proof for a relationship between Hasidism and non-Jewish pietist groups active in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 18th century.

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

b. Consolidation and Distribution (1760-1815)

At the center of this period—the transitional stage from an intimate circle to an institutionalized mass movement—stood the “Maggid” Dov-Baer of Mezhirech (d. 1772) and his disciples, who were active mainly in Volhynia and White Russia. The influence of the Maggid was considerable, and many of his disciples became leaders of Hasidic communities while he was still alive (such as R. Aaron “the Great” in Karlin [see Karlin-Stolin Hasidic Dynasty] and Menahem-Mendel [of Vitebsk] in Minsk), and even more so after his death. The Maggid was not seen as the Besht’s formal successor, but only as one of his major disciples. Other leaders of stature were active around the same time, such as Jacob-Joseph of Polonnoye (d. 1783) and Pinhas Shapira of Koretz (d. 1790), who also considered the Besht as their spiritual mentor and adopted his directives as a religious system, but did not accept the Maggid’s leadership and were in fact critical of his ideas.

The three partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795) and the collapse of the kingdom that had hitherto combined all of East-European Jewry into one political unit provided the backdrop to the first formation of Hasidic “courts” on a permanent basis—a phenomenon that became particularly widespread in the 19th century. Emissaries and propagandists working for the Zaddikim or on their own spread Hasidism and its doctrines beyond its original homelands of Podolia, Volhynia, and Kiev provinces, reaching many communities in Western Galicia,
Central Poland, White Russia, and Lithuania. The new Hasidic community, thanks to its predominantly young membership and its pioneering fervor, adopted patterns of activity appropriate to a vibrant youth culture, which achieved coherence on the basis of a unique shared religious, social, and economic experience. Hasidim began to travel to the rebbe’s court to visit him and stay with him on Sabbaths and festivals; some, in fact, remained there for long periods and were known as “residents” (Heb. yoshevim). The “court,” which from now on became the main unifying center for the devotees, filled up not only with Hasidim coming to the court to bask in the rebbe’s teaching and guidance, but also outsiders motivated by curiosity or a hope to find solace for their troubles.

With the consolidation of the Hasidic community and the ensuing increased demand for the teachings of the Zaddikim, Hasidism almost inevitably developed, in practice and in theory, a dynastic style of leadership, regular institutions, and organized channels of dissemination. The heterogeneous, shifting social realities demanded a response commensurate with the tendency to expand: the emergence of different types of leadership (for example, “theoretical” Zaddikim who devoted most of their time to spiritual matters and worship, as against “practical” ones, whose major activity was giving advice and help to all seekers); establishment of separate prayer groups in communities distant from the “mother” court; the demand that the Hasidim ensure the economic welfare of the Zaddik, his family, and his court; and an increasing involvement of the Zaddik and his followers in the community at large, coupled with attempts to gain influence in the main corridors of community government by dismissal and appointment of communal officials and clergy (such as rabbis and religious court judges, ritual slaughterers, cantors, melammedim, and circumcisers).

As devotees gathered around different charismatic Zaddikim and established themselves around their courts, theoretical schools also began to develop, interpreting the principles of the Hasidic system of worship and stressing the new, unique role of the Zaddik as religious leader (see Hasidism: Teaching).
The 1780s saw the publication of the first literary works of Hasidism, in particular, the three classical theoretical works of Hasidic doctrine: *Toledot Ya’akov Yosef* by Jacob-Joseph of Polonnoye (first published in Koretz, 1780); *Maggid Devarav le-Ya’akov*, by Dov-Baer of Mezhirech (Koretz, 1781); and *No’am Elimelech* by Elimelech of Lyzhansk (Lwow, 1788).

Another characteristic phenomenon of this period was the systematic, organized campaign against Hasidism in several communities, chief among them being Shklov, Vilna, and Brody; the driving force behind the campaign was Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna, then considered a supreme religious authority and a venerated figure. The struggle itself was waged by rabbis, preachers, community officials, and lay leaders who objected to the Hasidic mode of worship, fearing that the activities and doctrines of the Hasidim would undermine the existing religious-social order. According to that order, only a few exceptional personalities (who might also be called *hasidim* in the old sense of “pious persons”) or members of elitist groups of scholars and kabbalists (such as the group in the famous *kloyz* of Brody) were entitled to adopt uniquely pietistic modes of behavior. Apart from such social concerns, the opponents of Hasidism were even more anxious to avert a new outbreak of heresy and quasi-Sabbatean inclinations.

Anti-Hasidic bans and agitation continued even after the Gaon’s death (1797), but they gradually died down, whether because of the failure of the persecutions, the lack of a central authority to oversee the struggle and arouse popular zeal, or the growing realization that Hasidic doctrines were not so heretical after all. The death of the preachers Israel Leibel of Slutsk (ca. 1800) and David of Makow (d. 1814), who had considered themselves as the Gaon’s personal emissaries in their vigorous anti-Hasidic activities, also symbolized the decline of the campaign (see *Mitnaggedim*).

An important turning point in the history of Hasidism was the agreement of the government to allow the Hasidim to establish separate *minyanim* (prayer groups) and elect their own spiritual leadership. Such *minyanim* had already been
recognized in Galicia, then a part of the Austrian Empire, by the *Toleranzpatent* (edict of tolerance) of 1789 (see Galicia), but in Russia recognition came later, as one result of the “Jewish Statute” of 1804, which defined the basic status of the Jewish community in legal terms (see Russia). This official recognition of the legitimacy of the religious dichotomy in Jewish society dealt a further blow to the centralist standing of the traditional community and its institutions, ultimately enabling not only Hasidism but also other groups (such as the *maskilim*) to break free of their previously enforced affiliation with the “old” traditional community.

During this period, some of the most important Hasidic dynasties took shape, and new types of Zaddikim, representing the many faces of Hasidism, appeared:

*Southwestern provinces of Russia* (*Kiev, Podolia, Volhynia*). Several disciples of the Maggid of Mezhirech earned renown in these provinces; while never apparently heading large groups of devotees, their spiritual impact was considerable. Among them were the preachers Menahem-Nahum of Czernobyl (1730–1797), founder of the Twersky dynasty (see Czernobyl Hasidic Dynasty), and Ze’ev-Wolf of Zhitomir (d. 1798), whose work *Or ha-Me’ir* is considered a basic work of Hasidic literature; Levi-Isaac of Berdichev (1740?–1809), a rabbi and Torah scholar of Pinsk, was expelled from that city through pressure from the *mitnaggedim*, and from 1785 to his death was active in Berdichev as a venerated Hasidic rabbi and leader; the Besht’s grandsons, the brothers Moshe-Ḥayyim-Ephraim of Sudylkow (1740?–1800?) and Baruch of Medzibozh (1756?–1812); the Besht’s great-grandson Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1810), whose unique approach and spiritual world shook the contemporary Hasidic world; the descendants of the Maggid—his only son, Abraham, known as the “Angel” (1740?–1776), who never served as a Hasidic leader, and his grandson Shalom-Shakhna of Pohorbishch (1769–1802), father of Israel of Ruzhin and one of the first Zaddikim to adopt the “regal way” (see Ruzhin Hasidic Dynasty).
Lithuania and White Russia. One of the most famous Hasidic communities in the provinces of Grodno and Minsk was that of Aaron “the Great” of Karlin (1736–1772) and his disciples, who were so active in the area that the mitnaggedim referred to Hasidim in general as “Karliners.” He was succeeded by his disciple Solomon of Karlin (1738–1792), who was exiled from his hometown in 1786 to Ludmir in Volhynia. The next admor was Asher Perlow of Stolin, son of R. Aaron (1765–1826), under whom Karlin-Stolin Hasidism prospered until it became the largest in Polesia (see Karlin-Stolin Hasidic Dynasty). Other important groups formed under Hayyim-Khaykl of Amdur (d. 1787) and Mordecai of Lachowicze (1742–1810).

The most prominent Hasidic leaders in the provinces of Vitebsk and Mohilev were disciples of the Maggid of Mezhirech: Menahem-Mendel of Vitebsk (1730–1788), Abraham of Kalisk (1741–1810), and, after the latter two had immigrated to Eretz Israel (1777), Shneur-Zalman (1745–1813), who founded the intellectually leaning Lubavitsh Hasidism, first in Liozna and later (from 1804) in Lyady.

Central Poland. At this time this region was the arena in which several small groups of Hasidim associated with the Maggid of Mezhirech and his disciples were active, mainly in small communities. Up until the 1780s we know of a Hasidic presence in Ryczywół, Ostrowiec, Apta (Opatow), Zhelikhov, Novy Dvor, as well as Kraków and the Praga suburb of Warsaw. From 1754 to 1776 a yeshiva of Hasidic character in Ryczywół was headed by Samuel-Shmelke Horowitz [later in Nikolsburg] (1726–1778); among his disciples were Levi-Isaac [of Berdichev], Uzziel Meisels (1744–1785), Israel Hopstein [of Kozienice], Eliezer of Tarnogrod (d. 1806), and others. These were not real, independent, Hasidic centers, but early nuclei, hardly foreshadowing the great expansion of Hasidism in 19th-century Poland.

Western Galicia. The largest and most important court in this region, now a part of the Austrian Empire, formed around the figure of Elimelech of Lyzhansk
(1717–1787), brother of Zusya of Hanipoli and disciple of the Maggid. R. Elimelech is considered the archetypal “practical” Zaddik, who saw himself (and was seen by his Hasidim) as a kind of “channel” through which the divine “abundance” could be brought down from the supernal worlds to our world. As such, he devoted most of his time and spiritual activity to the material welfare of his followers (in Hasidic parlance: the quest for “children, life, and food”—that is, descendants, health, and livelihood); at the same time, however, he expected them to support him, his family, and his court through the monetary contributions of Hasidim who had received his blessing.

Even before Elimelech’s death, some of his disciples founded new Hasidic centers, which were well established by the beginning of the 19th century. The most prominent of these disciples was Jacob Isaac Horowitz of Lancut (1745?–1815), known as the “Seer of Lublin.” He was a charismatic personality who combined mystical Hasidism with leadership over a large community. In addition, his study house in Lublin was the first example of a Hasidic court formed in an urban milieu (rather than a small village or township). Most leaders of Hasidism in Poland and Galicia, in his generation and later, considered themselves as his disciples. Other important Zaddikim who were disciples of Elimelech of Lyzhansk and headed large communities were the maggid Israel of Kozienice in Poland (1737–1814); Menahem-Mendel of Rymanow in Galicia (d. 1815), whose court, which attracted many scholars, was previously in Przytyk; and Abraham-Joshua-Heshel of Apta (1748–1825), who after much wandering finally settled in Medzibozh, Podolia, and was considered in the last decade of his life as the oldest living Zaddik (see Apt Hasidic Dynasty).

A unique and later highly influential figure in Polish Hasidism was a disciple of the Seer, Jacob-Isaac of Przysucha (1766–1813), nicknamed Ha-Yehudi ha-Kadosh (“the Holy Jew”). His relationship with his teacher, who had from the start singled him out as a successor, was marred by tension and jealousy. A group of elitist admirers gathered around the “Holy Jew” and challenged the Seer’s
leadership. The new trail blazed by his followers—a combination of Hasidic and scholarly values with intense criticism of “practical” Hasidism, which they saw as a vulgarization—as well as their custom to begin prayers at a late hour, aroused considerable opposition. One of the opponents was Meir of Apta (d. 1827), author of the work *Or la-Shamayim*, who had considered himself a worthy successor of the Seer. After the Holy Jew’s death, many of his devotees flocked to his disciple Simḥah-Bunem of Przysucha, who organized them as a distinct Hasidic community, defying the Hasidic center of Lublin.

*Eastern Galicia.* Besides the centers at Lyzhansk and Rymanow, other Zaddikim were active here, the most important being Jehiel Michel of Zloczow (1726–1781), a disciple of the Besht and the Maggid, considered the teacher of many Zaddikim in the next generation. His descendants established a ramified Hasidic dynasty in Galicia and Volhynia (Zvihil, Stepin, Brezna). Other important figures in Galician Hasidism were Meshullam-Feivush Heller of Zbarazh (1740?–1794), disciple of the Maggid of Zloczow and author of major Hasidic literary works (*Derekh Emet, Yosher Divrei Emet*), and Moses-Leib of Sasov (1745?–1807), famed for his religious ecstasy and intense devotion to charitable acts and ransoming of prisoners.

By the end of the 18th century there was already a negligible Hasidic presence on the outskirts of the areas of Jewish settlement in Eastern Europe (*Bessarabia* in Russia; *Moldova* and *Bukovina* in Austria). While various Zaddikim visited these districts, none of them settled there for any length of time, and local Hasidim affiliated themselves to far-off Hasidic centers in the Ukraine, Galicia, or Poland. One influential figure who helped to spread Hasidism in these parts was Ḥayyim Tyrer (d. 1818), a rabbi in Czernowitz and Kishinev and an important Hasidic thinker (author of *Be’er Mayim Ḥayyim, Sidduro shel Shabbat*).

*Kingdom of Hungary.* Hasidic inroads in that country were confined to the northeastern districts (referred to by the Jews as *Unterland*), bordering on Galicia and Bukovina. Jewish presence in this rural area was sparse, and it excelled
neither in scholarship nor in economic standing. In the 1780s Yitzḥak Isaac Taub (d. 1821) established a Hasidic center in Nagykálló, and small groups of Hasidim were active mainly in the Máramaros district. Here, too, the Hasidic foothold was feeble; it would gain strength only much later, beginning in the mid 19th century.

Eretz Israel. An important development in the history of Hasidism concerns its attitude to Eretz Israel. Hasidism was basically a movement bent on preserving traditional Jewish life in the Diaspora and finding solutions for the difficulties of everyday life among the Jewish masses of “old” Eastern Europe. Despite the centrality of the Holy Land in religious consciousness and the recognition of the need to extend material help to its Jewish community, it occupied a merely marginal place in the real world of most Zaddikim and Hasidim; of course, there were always individual Hasidim who immigrated to Eretz Israel—it was in fact said that the Besht had made an abortive attempt to do so. The first real change in this attitude took place in 1777, when a large group of Hasidim, led by Menaḥem-Mendel of Vitebsk and Abraham of Kalisk, immigrated to Eretz Israel. This wave of immigration, motivated among other things by a rumor about the imminent advent of the messiah, created a sizable Hasidic presence in the Holy Land, mainly in Tiberias and Safed, and laid the organizational foundations for the collection of funds in the Diaspora for the members of the Hasidic Kolel living in Eretz Israel (ḥalukkah funds). While Hasidic immigration never actually ceased since then, most important leaders of the movement, from the early 19th century until after the Holocaust, preferred to preserve the foundations of traditional Jewish life in Eastern Europe, rather than settle elsewhere, whether in Eretz Israel or in Western countries.

Beginning around the end of the 18th century, the established Hasidic communities in the Ukraine, Eastern Galicia, and White Russia were plagued by the problem of the “sons of the Zaddikim” (in other parts of the Hasidic world, such as Poland, the problem arose somewhat later). The accepted wisdom that the Zaddik could bequeath his religious charisma to his offspring was the basic factor
that shaped the future leadership of the movement. Lubavitsh Hasidism was apparently the first community to experience a bitter struggle after the death of the founding father, Shneur-Zalman of Lyady (1812). The rivals were an “offspring” (his son, Dov-Baer, known as the “middle rebbe” [1773–1827]) and a “disciple” (Aaron Halevi Horowitz of Starosielce [1766–1828]), and the struggle had aspects that were both personal (filling the founder’s shoes) and theoretical (who was authorized to interpret the founder’s teachings and what was the proper mode of worship). The dispute ended in the victory of the genetic heir, with a split in the movement (see Lubavitsh Hasidic Dynasty). From that point on, “outsiders” not descended from previous Zaddikim (or married into their families) had very little chance of assuming Hasidic leadership.

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

The year 1815 was also of literary significance. Two of the most important and coherent works of Hasidic narrative were published in that year in Hebrew and Yiddish: Shivhei ha-Besht (In Praise of the Ba’al Shem Tov)—an anthology of hagiographic stories and anecdotes about the lives of the Besht and his disciples, compiled and edited by a ritual slaughterer named Dov-Baer of Linitz, whose father-in-law Alexander was one of the Besht’s close companions; and Sippurei Ma’asiyot (Tales) — a collection of thirteen stories, replete with a profound symbolism, that Naḥman of Bratslav used to tell his followers. Reacting to these books, a prominent maskil, Joseph Perl, published a brilliant satire entitled Megalleh Temirin (Revealer of Secrets; written in 1816, publication delayed by censorship until 1819), considered one of the earliest works of modern Hebrew literature. These three books, each of which also had a Yiddish version, were highly influential in shaping the ethos of Hasidism and the Haskalah, and helped
to sharpen the messages and positions of the warring factions; to this day, they provide an invaluable key to the historical and ideological worlds of Hasidim and their opponents.

c. Expansion and Atomization (1815-1880)

The beginning of this period is associated with the fall of “The Duchy of Warsaw” (1807–1813), a French protectorate which collapsed after the defeat of Napoleon’s armies. Following the Congress of Vienna (1815), Poland was partitioned for the fourth time, with most parts of ethnic Poland (that is, the areas in which native Poles constituted the majority, and where Polish language and culture were dominant) controlled by Russia as “Congress Poland.” The Jews of Poland and the Russian Pale of Settlement again found themselves under the same government, despite the differences in legal status that still effectively separated the two Diasporas.

The acceptance of Hasidism in most East-European Jewish communities, and its new status as a multi-generational mass movement, led inevitably to the formation of rigid, institutionalized social mechanisms. The main important of these mechanisms was that one could not be just a “Hasid,” with no further affiliation; one had to be associated with a specific Zaddik or Hasidic court (Lubavitsh Hasid, Tzanz Hasid, etc.). As a result, the Zaddik, his family, and the attendant court establishment became a major focus of identification and social cohesion. The fact that all parts of the traditional Jewish community, including mitnaggedim or “Lithuanians,” accepted the existence of Hasidism and recognized it as a religious movement, reflecting legitimate, though different, norms of behavior and religious life-style, contributed to the rapid spread of Hasidism. Hostility gave way to coexistence, generally enabling the two groups to live harmoniously side by side, each cultivating its own specific culture.
The need to take a stand vis-à-vis Hasidism aroused a variety of spiritual and social responses among its East-European opponents. The increase in the strength of the “Lithuanian” yeshiva world (whose main strongholds were the yeshivot of Volozhin and Mir) and the rise of the “Musar” movement were spiritual phenomena that must be understood not only in terms of their inner logic, but also as original, new responses to the Hasidic challenge.

During this period—the last in which new dynasties were established—Hasidism began to spread rapidly into the provinces of Congress Poland, and was generally accepted there quietly and naturally, without particular friction. Hasidism also took root in the southern provinces of the Russian Empire (New Russia, Moldova, and Bessarabia) and the eastern parts of the Austrian Empire (Bukovina, Western Galicia, and Northeastern Hungary), experiencing an impressive growth everywhere. In this respect, the geographic expansion of Hasidism almost completely matched the distribution of Yiddish as a living, spoken language; its influence was blocked only where Jews had abandoned Yiddish for the national tongue (as Hungarian in Budapest, Czech in Prague, or German in Poznań).

As Hasidic leadership passed down from one generation to the next, the older courts established themselves further and new courts emerged. Another factor contributing to the increasing diversification of the Hasidic movement was the significant improvement in communication networks, particularly the railroad, beginning in the 1860s. This resulted in considerable changes in everyday life and facilitated mobility, making the Hasidic courts more accessible.

Ukraine. Hasidism became exceptionally popular in the Ukraine, where it accounted for the majority of the traditional Jewish community. In the first two decades of the 19th century, the best known courts were those of Mordecai Twersky of Czernobyl (1770–1837; see Czernobyl Hasidic Dynasty), Moses-Tzvi of Savran (d. 1838; see Savran-Bendery Hasidic Dynasty), and Israel Friedman of Ruzhin (1796–1850), great-grandson of the Maggid of Mezhirech. The young and
popular R. Israel began to “reign” in his “regal” court in 1815, ostentatiously displaying his wealth like any Polish magnate. Accused of complicity in the murder of two Jewish informers, he was imprisoned and interrogated, subsequently (in the early 1840s) escaping from Russia to Austria. After various trials and tribulations he reestablished a sumptuous court at Sadegora, Bukovina, attracting thousands of Hasidim. Almost all the descendants of these dynasties set up courts of their own: Mordecai of Czernobyl’s eight sons were active in the Ukraine, the best known of them being David of Talnoye (1808–1882) and Isaac of Skvira (1812–1885) (see Czernobyl Hasidic Dynasty). The most renowned of Israel of Ruzhin’s six sons, active in Galicia, Moldova, and Bessarabia, were Abraham-Jacob of Sadegora (1819–1883) and David-Moses of Czortków (1827–1903) (see Ruzhin Hasidic Dynasty). These two dynasties and their offshoots became the dominant Hasidic groups of their respective districts. Despite attempts by the Russian authorities, in the 1860s, to restrain the activities of the Zaddikim in the Ukraine and curtail their freedom of movement, these restrictions could not stem the expansion of Hasidism. Another well-known Hasidic group in the Ukraine was Bratslav Hasidism, whose devotees were led after the death of R. Nahman by his faithful disciple and scribe, Nathan Sternhartz of Nemirov (1780–1845). This small, lively, and restless Hasidic community attracted considerable attention—but also sharp opposition, and was therefore constantly persecuted by other Hasidim.

**White Russia.** The most prominent Hasidic community in White Russia was that of the Lubavitsh Hasidim (known in Hebrew as Ḥabad, an acronym for three Hebrew words meaning “Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge”). From 1813 on its center was in Lubavitsh, but it had many distant offshoots (in the Ukraine, the provinces of New Russia, and Bessarabia). After the death of the third *admor*, Menahem-Mendel Schneersohn (1789–1866), known as the *Tzemah Tzedek*, Lubavitsh Hasidism was split among his five sons, because of a dispute over the
inheritance, and the result was the formation of a dissenting court in the township of Kopust (see Lubavitch Hasidic Dynasty).

**Lithuanian Polesia.** This region was the home of Karlin-Stolin Hasidism, which had become an important group under Aaron Perlow (the Second) of Karlin (1802–1872), grandson of the founder. Because of a dispute with members of a powerful Pinsk family, R. Aaron and his court were expelled from Karlin (probably in 1864) and resettled in Stolin. Karlin-Stolin Hasidism had four main offshoots, which developed into independent dynasties. These were headed by Noaḥ of Lachowicze (1774–1832), Moses Polier of Kobrin (1784–1858), Solomon-Ḥayyim Perlow of Koidanow (1797–1862), and Abraham Weinberg of Slonim (1804–1883) (see Korbin-Lachowicze-Koidanow-Slonim Hasidic Dynasties).

**Galicia.** In Austrian-ruled Galicia, Hasidism spread rapidly, with the establishment of large Hasidic centers, attracting thousands of devotees. Most dynasties founded there originated in the generation of the Seer of Lublin, the Maggid of Kozienice, and Menahem-Mendel of Rymanow, as well as a few of their disciples. Naftali Hurowic of Ropczyce (1760–1827), known for his acerbic tongue, founded a dynasty whose most famous offshoots were in Tarnobrzeg-Dzikow and Rozwadow (see Ropczyce-Bobow Hasidic Dynasty); Shalom Rokeaḥ (1783–1855) founded the Belz dynasty, later a major branch of Hasidism whose leaders became deeply involved in Jewish public life, especially in the time of his son Joshua (1825–1894) (see Belz Hasidic Dynasty). Members of the Eichenstein family headed dynasties representing a special aspect of kabbalistic Hasidism; the most prominent Zaddikim in this dynasty were Tzvi-Hirsch of Zydaczow (1763–1831) and his nephew Isaac-Judah-Jehiel Safrin of Komarno (1806–1874). Both were prolific authors, profound mystics, and venerated leaders (see Zydaczow-Komarno Hasidic Dynasty). The most important Galician Zaddik was Ḥayyim Halberstam (1797–1876), who lived from 1830 on in Nowy Sącz, where he served as rabbi and gained recognition as a distinguished halakhic authority, whose
rulings were also accepted by non-Hasidic circles (his best known book is the collection of his responsa, *Divrei Hayyim*). Thousands of Hasidim flocked to his court, where he ruled them with a conservative, zealous hand, exemplified in the ban pronounced in 1869 on the Zaddikim of the Sadegora dynasty and their followers. His descendants established courts in Sieniawa, Gorlice, Cieszanów, and Bobowa (See Tzanz Hasidic Dynasty).

Other important figures in Galician Hasidism were Kalonymus-Kalman Epstein of Kraków (1751?–1823), whose work *Ma’or va-Shemesh* is one of the fundamental works of Hasidism, and his son Joseph-Baruch (1792–1867), a renowned miracle worker known as the “Giter Yid” (= Zaddik) of Neustadt (Nowe Miasto). Uri of Strelisk (1757–1826), known as the “Seraph” because of his ecstatic style of prayer, headed a group of Hasidim known for their poverty and asceticism. His disciple and successor was Judah Tzvi Brandwein of Stratyn (1780–1844), a ritual slaughterer before he became a Zaddik. Tzvi-Elimelech Shapira of Dynow (1785–1841) was a rabbi and kabbalist, a prolific author (his best known books are *Benei Yissakhar* and *Derekh Pikkudekha*), and a fanatical foe of Haskalah. His descendants headed the dynasty of Munkacs in Carpatho-Russia (see Munkacs Hasidic Dynasty). Meir of Przemyslany (1780–1850) was known as a miracle worker and his court attracted many admirers seeking his blessing for welfare and livelihood. His descendants headed the dynasties of Nadworna and Kretshniff. Another unique figure was Tzvi-Hirsch of Rymanow (1778–1846), nicknamed *Mesharet* (“Attendant”). Ordained as a Zaddik by his mentor, Menahem-Mendel of Rymanow, he began to lead his flock only after the death of Naftali of Ropczyce (1827). Not known for his scholarship, he was famed for his religious fervor. For that reason, as well as his “lowly” social origins (he was a tailor’s apprentice in his youth), his leadership was criticized by other Zaddikim of his time.

*Congress Poland.* The dynamic center of Polish Hasidism shifted from Lublin to Przysucha and its environs. A circle of scholarly Hasidim, congregating
around Simḥah-Bunem of Przysucha (1765–1827), a disciple of the “Holy Jew” and a licensed apothecary by profession, shook the Hasidic world with its radically critical, anarchistic doctrines, and produced some of the most important leaders of Polish Hasidism in the coming generations (see Przysucha Hasidic Dynasty).

After Simḥah-Bunem’s death, some of his Hasidim pledged allegiance to his charismatic disciple Menahem-Mendel Morgenstern of Kotsk (1787–1859), who further reinforced the scholarly trend and set himself and his followers radical standards of ethical perfection and self-denial. Toward the end of 1839 a kind of rebellion shook the Kotsk court: Mordecai-Joseph Leiner (1801–1854), one of the rebbe’s favorite pupils, left him, taking with him a group of leading Hasidim. Following and perhaps even before these events, the Rebbe of Kotsk began to exhibit strange, threatening behavior, locking himself up in his house and refusing to see anyone. This self-imposed seclusion, which bordered on mental aberration, lasted some twenty years, till the Rebbe’s death; over those years, the inner cohesion of his Hasidim was undermined.

His dissenting disciple Mordecai-Joseph Leiner founded a Hasidic dynasty in the small town of Izbica, which adopted a doctrine of radical determinism with distinct antinomistic overtones, as reflected in his book Mei ha-Shilloah. He was succeeded by his son Jacob (d. 1878), who moved the court shortly before his death to Radzyn, and then by his grandson Gershon-Henikh (1839–1891), an imperious, stormy, innovative personality, who was constantly provoking controversy. He was known for writing a “New Talmud” to Order “Tohorot” of the Mishnah (to which there is no real Talmud), and even more so for his claim to have rediscovered the secret of producing the blue dye (tekhelet) for the tzitzit (fringes of the tallit) from the blood of a certain snail — his Hasidim zealously observed this commandment, but almost all contemporary rabbis and Zaddikim did not recognize his discovery (see Izbica-Radzyn Hasidic Dynasty).

Another important dissenting disciple of the Kotsk court who moved to Izbica was Judah-Leib Eger of Lublin (1816–1888), scion of a well-known
rabbinic family of Poznan, who was attracted to Hasidism in his youth. In 1854, after the death of his mentor Mordecai-Joseph, he returned to Lublin, where he headed a Hasidic community committed to the Izbica school of Hasidism.

Some disciples of the Rebbe of Kotsk kept faith with him during his years of seclusion. Among these were his brother-in-law, Isaac-Meir Alter of Warsaw (1799–1866), also known as an astute Torah scholar and halakhist (known for his books Ḥiddushei ha-Rim), and Ze’ev-Wolf Landau of Strikov (1807–1891). In 1859, after the Rebbe’s death, Isaac-Meir became leader of a large group of Hasidim and settled in the town of Góra Kalwaria, near Warsaw, where he founded the Gur school of Hasidism, which was to become the largest Hasidic dynasty in pre-Holocaust Poland (see Gur Hasidic Dynasty). David, son of Menahem-Mendel of Kotsk (1809–1873), continued to lead Hasidim in Kotsk, and his descendants established small courts in Pylow (Pilawa) and Sokolow (see Kotsk Hasidic Dynasty).

Other branches of Przysucha Hasidism are represented by the Warka-Amshinow [Mszczonów] school, established by Isaac Kalish of Warka (1779–1848), disciple of Simḥah-Bunem of Przysucha, a close friend of the Rebbe of Kotsk and a well-known intercessor for the interests of Polish Jewry (see Warka Hasidic Dynasty), and Alexander, an offshoot of Warka. Alexander Hasidism was established after R. Isaac’s death by his disciple Shraga-Feivel Dantziger of Gritsa (Grójec), who officiated as Zaddik, however, for a very brief period (he died in 1848). He was succeeded by his son Jehiel (1828–1894), who established his court at Aleksandrów, near Lodz, ultimately making it the second largest Hasidic Dynasty in Poland (see Alexander Hasidic Dynasty).

Among other Zaddikim identified with Przysucha-Kotsk were David Biederman of Lelow (1746–1814) and his son Moses (1777–1851), who immigrated to Eretz Israel in his last years (see Lelow Hasidic Dynasty). Ezekiel Taub of Kuzmir [Kazimierz Dolny] (1772–1856), known for his sophisticated musical talent, was a forerunner of Modzitz Hasidism, celebrated for its melodies.
Hanoch-Henikh Levin of Alexander (1798–1870) was considered the major disciple of Isaac-Meir of Gur. After the latter’s death in 1866, many of his disciples went to Hanoch-Henikh’s court in Alexander, but returned after his death to the courts of Gur and Sochaczew. Jacob-Aryeh Guterman of Radzymin (1792–1874) was a disciple of Isaac of Warka who, after the latter’s death, was leader of thousands of Hasidim and was famed for writing amulets and working miracles. Some descendants of the “Holy Jew” who rejected the doctrines of Simḥah-Bunem of Przysucha headed Hasidic courts at Parysów, Bychawa, Szydłowiec, and Kaluszyn.

Confronting the Przysucha school of Hasidism and its offshoots was another school of the Seer’s disciples, which placed emphasis on material well-being as a basis for religious life. This school considered the Zaddik a major channel for reception of divine abundance and responsible for the subsistence and well-being of his Hasidim. Among the most prominent advocates of this approach were Meir of Apta, who assumed the leadership of the opponents to Przysucha; Isaiah of Przedborz (1758–1831); Issachar-Baer of Radoszyce (1765–1843), famed for working miracles and known as Ha-Saba ha-Kadosh (the “Holy Old Man”); Solomon Rabinowich of Radomsk (1803–1866), leader of an important dynasty of Zaddikim which attracted many followers (see Radomsk Hasidic Dynasty); and Abraham Landau of Ciechanów (1784–1875), father of Ze’ev-Wolf of Stryków, the only Zaddik in the history of Hasidism who insisted on using the Ashkenazic prayer rite (see Ciechanov-Strikov-Biala Hasidic Dynasty). The descendants of the Maggid Israel of Kozienice, heading courts in Kozienice, Mogielnica, Będów, and Grodzisk, formed another distinct group that rejected the Przysucha doctrines (see Kozienice Hasidic Dynasty).

Bessarabia. Two small Hasidic dynasties were active in Bessarabia. One was headed by Aryeh-Leib Wertheim of Bendery (d. 1854), the other by Joseph of Rashkov (d. ca. 1837).
Hungary. A prominent Hungarian disciple of the “Seer” was Moses Teitelbaum (1759–1841), a scholar and kabbalist who also was known for his amulets. In 1808 he left Sieniawa in Galicia and settled in Sátoraljaújhely, Hungary. Hasidism gained strength in those regions, especially in Transylvania and Carpatho-Russia, only in the 1850s, when Hasidic centers established themselves in Mukachevo, Máramaros-Sziget and Satu mare (see Satmar-Munkacs Hasidic Dynasties). The influence of the Sadegora and Tzanz dynasties and their offshoots in these parts was considerable, but even more so was that of the Zaddikim of Vizhnitz (Vijniţa) in Bukovina. The leader of the Vizhnitz Hasidim was Menahem-Mendel Hager (1830–1885), younger son of the Galician Zaddik Ḥayyim of Kosow (1795?–1844) and son-in-law of Israel of Ruzhin (see Kosow-Vizhnitz Hasidic Dynasty).

Eretz Israel. The small Hasidic community in Eretz Israel was defined by affiliation with kolelim, reflecting their geographical association with, and economic dependence on, the “mother” courts in Eastern Europe: Hasidim from Volhynia and Galicia congregated in Safed, under the leadership of Abraham-Dov of Ovruch (1765?–1840), who came to the Holy Land in 1833; while Hasidim hailing from White Russia settled mainly in Tiberias. In 1819, a small Hasidic community was established in Hebron, later becoming a center for Lubavitsh Hasidim. An organized Hasidic community in Jerusalem was established in the early 1840s, on the initiative of two printers, Israel Bak of Berdichev and his son Nissan, who were Sadegora Hasidim and representatives of that dynasty in Eretz Israel.

In the history of Hasidism, this period represents a transition from a single movement with numerous communities, each representing its own spiritual tendencies or a different type of religious leadership, to extreme atomization, with communities splintering into tiny sub-communities. While a similar phenomenon had not been unknown in earlier periods, it now reached a climax. Hasidim no longer gathered around the leadership of an agreed successor—for almost each son
of the previous Zaddik (and sometimes also grandsons and sons-in-law) saw fit to set up his own court. Given the great demand for Hasidic leadership, these would-be Zaddikim presumably had no difficulty in attracting devotees. Alongside the stable characteristics common to all groups, representing a pull toward structural institutionalization and routine, atomization also brought out dynamic characteristics, reflecting disintegrative, unstable trends: bitter disputes between Zaddikim, competition for the loyalty of the Hasidim, and formation of an internal, popular hierarchy of prestige, measuring the merits of the numerous Zaddikim, whether as individuals or relative to their rivals.

These splintering processes also reflected contradictory spiritual and social currents, contributing to the extreme diversification of the Hasidic mosaic: Alongside innovative trends, sometimes approaching the radical and even the anarchic, one also finds in this period a pessimistic longing for the conservative, pre-Hasidic values of pietism and asceticism, an emphasis on the value of traditional Torah study, and a preference for fanaticism and halakhic stringency.

The excessive number of personal power struggles, ostensibly presented as ideological arguments, also reflected elements of decline and decay. The attempts to excommunicate Przysucha Hasidism (between 1815 and 1825); the persecution of Bratslav Hasidim in the 1830s by the Savran Hasidim and in the 1860s by the Talnoye and Skvira Hasidim; and the stormy controversy that erupted in 1869 between the Zaddik Hayyim of Tzanz and his followers, on the one hand, and those of the Sadegora dynasty and its offshoots, on the other — these are just examples of the internal friction that agitated and split the Hasidic and rabbinic world in the Russian Pale of Settlement, Poland, Galicia, and elsewhere for several decades.

**d. Stagnation and Struggle (1880-1918)**
Pogroms in southern Russia in 1881–1882 shocked East-European Jewish society as a whole, provoking a social and national awakening and far-reaching changes in practically every area. Waves of emigration, both internal—from country to city within the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires—and external—to the West, especially America, as well as the increasing popularity of new social forces and ideas, had their effect on Hasidism as well. Dozens of Zaddikim, major and minor alike, were active at the time in hundreds of Hasidic communities all over Eastern Europe, but the history of Hasidism at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries has received little if any scholarly attention. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the Hasidic court was severely shaken by the storms pounding its walls from without. It was generally felt that modern life and the secular-revolutionary atmosphere sweeping over the Jews of Eastern Europe would do much more damage to Hasidism than the distribution of satires and polemical tracts or attempts to enlist the help of the authorities—the methods that had characterized the struggle of the maskilim against Hasidism in the previous generation.

The secularizing trend in Jewish society was the greatest enemy of Hasidism. Secularization derived its strength both from the emergence of modern Jewish nationalism, revolving around the Zionist movement, and from the rise of Jewish socialism, at whose center stood the Jewish workers’ movements with their radical social ideologies. Processes of Russification and acculturation to the surrounding culture, the decline of the shtetl (life in which was increasingly identified with decadence and stagnation), changes in traditional economic patterns, accelerated industrialization and urbanization, crowded living conditions, the tremendous increase in the Jewish population of the Pale of Settlement (which offset emigration figures), and numbing poverty—all these created an entirely new spiritual and social climate. It was a revolutionary climate, undermining convention, inflaming and agitating the relaxed atmosphere of the past. The new literature and journalism, in Hebrew and in Yiddish, not only gave vent to an abundant creativity and aesthetic ambition, but was also a major factor in Jewish
public discourse and its consolidation around the new ideas. But there was almost no representation of Orthodoxy, including Hasidism, in that discourse. The Orthodox struggle against these new currents only heightened their built-in inclination to close ranks in defense, painting their leaders with a conservative, fanatical color.

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

As early as 1878, several Galician admorim, headed by Joshua Rokeaḥ of Belz, established an organization named Mahāzikēi ha-Dat (defenders of faith), which was supposed to oppose the maskilim of Lwów and promote the interests of Hasidic Orthodoxy using modern, political tools: They published a newspaper, participated in Austrian parliamentary elections, and operated in the standard frames of political action. The most significant turning point, however, came at the end of the period. Contacts that had already begun in 1909, resulting in the establishment of the World Federation of Agudat Israel (1912), came to fruition toward the end of World War I. In 1916, a group of German haredi rabbis joined forces with the Zaddikim of the Gur dynasty, the largest Hasidic body in Poland, to establish in Warsaw the political arm of Agudat Israel. While the movement considered itself to be the guardian of ultra-Orthodox Jewry as a whole, bringing together Polish Hasidim, Lithuanian mitnaggedim, and German Neo-Orthodox, it was largely dominated by the Polish-Hasidic element, and the its leadership generally reflected this domination.

Around this time the Hasidic world experienced another important development—the foundation of Hasidic yeshivot in the spirit of the old Torah-
study values. Until then, the yeshiva had been more often identified with the mitnaggedim or Musar movement in Lithuania; its “adoption” by Hasidic courts may be attributed not only to a return to the “classical” conservative values, but also to the realization that the yeshiva study method was a fitting response to the threat and seductive power of secularization. The first Hasidic yeshivot were founded in the early 1880s, in Vishnitsa, Galicia, by Solomon Halberstam (1847–1905), grandson of Ḥayyim of Tzanz and founder of the Bobow dynasty (see Ropczyce-Bobow Hasidic Dynasty); and in Sochaczew, Congress Poland, by Abraham Bornstein (1839–1910), son-in-law of the rebbe of Kotsk, who was known as a Torah scholar and whose books (Avnei Nezer, Eglei Tal) are also studied in the non-Hasidic yeshiva world (see Sochaczew Hasidic Dynasty). Subsequently, yeshivot, large or small, were established in almost every Hasidic court; among the best known is the Tomekhei Temimim yeshiva, founded in Lubavitsh (1897) on the initiative of the fifth admor Shalom-Dov Schneersohn (1860–1920; see Lubavitsh Hasidic Dynasty). The emergence of the Hasidic yeshiva exemplified the processes of orthodoxization that gradually blurred the religious differences between Hasidim, non-Hasidim, and mitnaggedim, combining them into what would later be known as haredi society—a loose coalition of diverse, sometimes conflicting, groups, waging a common war against all manifestations of Haskalah, modernization, and secularization.

The most prominent leaders in Poland at this time were those of the three major dynasties—Gur, Sochaczew, and Alexander—who emphasized the traditional values of Torah scholarship and halakhic stringency, thus giving Polish Hasidim its more scholarly coloring. The leaders of the Gur Hasidim were then the second admor, Judah-Leib Alter (1847–1905), grandson of the founder of the dynasty, known for his multi-volume work Sefat Emet, and his son and successor, Abraham-Mordecai Alter (1866–1948), one of the founders of Agudat Israel and its driving force (see Gur Hasidic Dynasty). Sochaczew Hasidism, founded in 1870, was led by Abraham Bornstein and, after his death in 1910, by his son
Samuel (1855–1926; see Sochaczew Hasidic Dynasty). The leader of the Alexander dynasty from 1894 was Yerahmiel-Israel-Isaac Dantziger (1854–1910), later succeeded by his brother Samuel-Tzvi (d. 1923).

A unique figure in the world of late Hasidism was Tzadok Hacohen of Lublin (1823–1900), a disciple of the Izbica school, who became a leader of Hasidim only after the death of his mentor, Judah-Leib Eger. He was known as a prolific author, who wrote several works of original Hasidic-kabbalistic thought (such as *Tzidkat ha-Tzaddik*, *Pri Tzaddik*, and *Resisei Laylah*), which aroused considerable interest outside the Hasidic world as well.

e. Upheaval and Destruction (1918-1945)

World War I and the disintegration of the multinational empires Austro-Hungary and Czarist Russia resulted in the physical destruction of some of the greatest Hasidic centers in the Ukraine, Poland, and Galicia (such as the courts of Sadegora, Czortków, and Belz). The Zaddikim, their families, and associates were forced to relocate, departing for other countries or large cities (such as Vienna). This shift of Hasidic courts from the small *shtetl* or township to the great city was one of the signs of the times.

Civil wars in the Ukraine, the Communist Revolution, and the creation of the Soviet regime, which sealed the borders of Russia, all but liquidated Hasidic activities within the Soviet Union. The only Hasidic community that managed to maintain an underground presence under the iron fist of the anti-clerical regime was Lubavitsh. Hundreds of Bratslav Hasidim in Poland, deprived of the ability to assemble, as they used to, at the grave of R. Naḥman in Uman moved the location of their “Holy Gathering” to the city of Lublin. They lodged and prayed in the specious halls of the Ḥakhmei Lublin Yeshiva, enjoying the hospitality of its principal, Meir Shapira, himself a Hasidic rabbi.
Even in independent Poland, however, Hasidism could not recoup its losses, although a few of its centers seemed to be enjoying some quantitative and qualitative success, particularly in the larger cities (Warsaw and Lodz) and medium-sized towns. Typically “Polish” branches of Hasidism, such as Gur or Alexander, which favored a combination of Hasidic piety with a tradition of deep political involvement in Jewish community affairs, still attracted thousands of followers and admirers; but even these successes could not stem the tide of secularization, socialism, and Zionism (including religious Zionism) which swept over most of Jewish youth in Eastern Europe.

In reaction to the threat of secular heresy and Zionism, haredi society (including Hasidism), especially in Galicia and Hungary, closed its ranks, adopting even more stringent and conservative positions than previously. Leading Hasidism at this time, and largely dictating the fanatical tone, were the rebbes of Belz, Tzanz, Satmar, and their offshoots, which were opposed not only to Zionism but even to the haredi Agudat Israel. The most prominent leaders were the venerated leader of Belz Hasidism, Issachar-Dov Rokeaḥ (1854–1926), and his sworn rival, Ḥayyim-Eleazar Shapira of Munkacs (1872–1937), leader of the Carpatho-Russian Hasidim from 1914, known for his scholarship but also for his belligerent personality.

One particularly fanatical figure was Joel Teitelbaum (1887–1979). In 1934, he settled in Satmar where, thanks to his vigorous activities as rabbi, principle of the yeshiva and Zaddik, and by virtue of his charismatic personality, he became a revered Hasidic figure in Transylvania. In 1944 he escaped the Germans in the “Zionist” rescue train organized by Rudolf Kasztner, reaching Switzerland and from there Palestine. After a brief stay, he left for the United States, where he reestablished his court, making it the largest Hasidic community after the Holocaust, and continuing to be an indefatigable foe of the State of Israel (see Satmar Hasidic Dynasty). Another fierce opponent of Zionism and Agudat Israel was Joseph-Isaac Schneersohn (1880–1950), leader of the Lubavitsh
Hasidim in Soviet Russia. Imprisoned in 1927 and then released, he wandered through Russian, Latvian, and Polish cities, finally reaching New York in 1940, where he reestablished his court (see Lubavitsh Hasidic Dynasty).

One of the most colorful Hasidic leaders was Aaron Roth of Beregszász (1894–1947), who founded a new, extreme, Hasidic community known as *Shomerei Emunim*, with centers in Satmar, Beregszász, and Jerusalem. His Hasidim followed strict rules of simplicity and modesty, and were well known for their fierce anti-Zionist stand.

The terrors of the Holocaust and the diabolical implementation of the Final Solution dealt a mortal blow to ultra-Orthodox Jewry in general and to Polish Hasidim in particular. Besides murders, burning, and torture, the Hasidim had to grapple with grave theological misgivings, a desperate quest for Divine Providence, profound guilt feelings, and attempts to explain the catastrophe as a Divine punishment. Impassioned faith was mingled with sensations of bitterness, guilt, and doubt as to the wisdom of Hasidic leaders who had despised Zionism before the Holocaust, urging their followers to remain in the Diaspora, but had unhesitatingly taken the opportunity to escape to safety in their time of need.

Unique Hasidic voices could be heard even among the flames of the Holocaust. One such voice was *Esh Kodesh* (“Holy Fire”), an anthology of sermons delivered by Kalonymus-Kalmish Shapira of Piaseczno (1889–1943) to his Hasidim in the Warsaw Ghetto, reflecting the horrors of the Holocaust from a sober, anguished, Hasidic perspective. Another book, *Em ha-Banim Semeḥah* (“Happy Mother of Children”), by Issacher-Solomon Teichtel of Slovakia (1885–1945), is a rare expression of personal and communal self-reckoning written in the midst of the Holocaust (Budapest, 1943). Teichtel, rabbi, yeshiva principle and loyal Hasid, a foe of Zionism, did not hesitate to castigate contemporary Zaddikim for their fanatical opposition to the national movement and Zionism, and for their loss of the opportunity to save the Jewish people from extermination.
f. Rehabilitation and Revival (1945–present)

The destruction of the centers of Hasidism during the Holocaust, especially in Poland and Hungary, signaled the historical end of Hasidism as a Jewish experience on East-European soil. From then on, the history of Hasidism belongs to those countries where remnants of the movement, having escaped or survived the European inferno, managed to reconstitute their communities—this applies in particular to the eastern regions of the United States and the State of Israel. Despite the inherently East-European character of Hasidism, leaders and devotees of the movement were able to adjust to entirely new political and economic conditions, in fact taking advantage of them to consolidate their communities anew. In the course of the 1950s, thanks to an impressive series of charismatic leaders with organizational talents, who knew how to instill their followers with faith and self-confidence, the world of Hasidism has successfully rebuilt itself; within a single generation, it has reestablished itself on the spiritual, social, and demographic planes. In so doing it has once again proved its unbelievable power of survival and its inherent vitality and creativity.

Despite sea changes in Hasidism in this period, its East-European features are still evident, whether in the names of the various courts, which still preserve the name of the East-European town or village that was once its East-European center, in its customs of everyday clothing, its culinary traditions and religious life-style, but particularly in the survival of Yiddish as the main spoken language among most Hasidic communities.

Since the collapse of Communist rule, Hasidim have been expressing their East-European roots through ritual pilgrimages to the tombs of Zaddikim and other historical sites associated with Hasidism, and through vigorous activities aimed at repairing tombstones and memorials of famous Zaddikim (known in Hebrew as tziyyun or ohel = “tent”). These developments are especially evident in the Ukrainian villages of Medzibozh, where the Besht and some of his disciples
and successors are buried, and Uman, site of Nahman of Bratslav’s grave, which has become—especially during the High Holy Days—a favorite pilgrimage site for thousands of visitors, many of whom are not even Bratslav Hasidim. Hasidic hotels have in fact been built in these villages to accommodate the many visitors.

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

**Bibliography**