

MARTYRDOM, EMOTION AND THE WORK OF RITUAL IN R. MORDECAI JOSEPH LEINER'S *MEI HA-SHILOAH*

by

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Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica (1800–1853) has been described as “the most radical of the Jewish mystics” and as a religious anarchist.¹ Some scholars have wondered how he managed to resist the antinomian pull of his own doctrine, and to “suffer the chaotic without perishing within it.”² Yet this characterization bears witness to a profound tendency in much of the academic scholarship on Hasidism—and on religion in general—to privilege doctrine over practice, or to frame the object of study in theological and philosophical rather than ritual and hermeneutic terms.³ It neglects, for instance, the fact that Hasidic texts are often devoted to the elaboration of ritual cosmologies, and that ritual “work” (including the management of emotional dispositions) almost always takes place over time. As the anthropologist Victor Turner has shown, this means that ritual symbols can take on different or even contradictory sets of meanings depending on where in an ongoing ritual process they are deployed.⁴ When R. Mordecai Joseph

1. Joseph Weiss, “A Late Jewish Utopia of Religious Freedom,” in David Goldstein, ed., *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 211. Along similar lines, see Rivka Schatz, “Autonomy of the Spirit and the Law of Moses” (Hebrew), *Molad* 21 (1973–1974), pp. 554–561 and Rachel Elior, “The Innovations in Polish Hasidism” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 62 (1993), pp. 381–432. This position has already been moderated to some extent in Morris M. Faierstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven: The Teachings of Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica* (New York: Ktav, 1989). Other works on R. Mordecai Joseph include Jerome Gellman, *Fear and Trembling, and the Fire* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1994) and Shaul Magid, “Hasidism and Existentialism? A Review Essay,” *Modern Judaism* 15 (1995) pp. 279–294.

2. Weiss, *A Late Jewish Utopia*, p. 245.

3. See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and Byron J. Good, *Medicine, Rationality and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), each of which treats the difficulty associated with “belief” as an analytic category in the study of culture and religion. Moshe Idel’s *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) provides a welcome correction to the doctrinal focus in Hasidic studies, but the specific ritual models he describes (i.e. ecstasy and magic) are inadequate to R. Mordecai Joseph’s oeuvre.

4. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967). An influential statement on the role of ritual in promoting religious dispositions can be found in Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). For a critique of Geertz with special reference to Hasidic sources, see Don Seeman, “Ritual, Emotion and ‘Useless Suffering’ in the Warsaw Ghetto” (in press).

makes seemingly contradictory statements about the existence of free will or the place of anger in religious experience therefore, it is in ritual process rather than anarchy or inconsistency that an explanation should be sought. He was moved by a distinctive understanding of divine glory (*kabod shamayim*) to reevaluate ritual strategies that promoted ecstasy, emotionalism, and self-annihilation or martyrdom as religious ideals in Hasidism, and to suggest new forms of ritual work in their stead. In short, R. Mordecai Joseph sought to reconcile divine glory with divine law, and to do so at the level of the individual human will.

*“The Earth is the Lord’s”: Anger and Lust
in the Hasidic school of Izbica*

Deuteronomy 17:15 warns the children of Israel against choosing a foreigner to rule over them as king. R. Mordecai Joseph notes tersely that “This refers to a person who possesses the quality of anger (*ka’as*), because anger has no portion in Israel.”⁵ Faierstein cites this passage as an example of the apparent rejection of anger that runs throughout R. Mordecai Joseph’s two-volume corpus *Mei Ha-Shiloah*, and concludes that anger is “an emotion that has no place in R. Mordecai Joseph’s world.”⁶ Citing Heschel furthermore, Faierstein attributes this outlook to R. Mordecai Joseph’s ambivalent relationship with his one-time teacher and colleague, R. Menahem Mendl of Kotzk (Kock), with whom he broke in 1839.⁷ Yet while the Kotzker’s fearsome reputation in Hasidic legend certainly lends colorful support to this view, I will argue that it constitutes an unwarranted reduction.⁸ R. Mordecai Joseph’s teaching on anger needs to be set within a broader context of debate about the role of emotion, ecstasy, and self-annihilation in Hasidic practice, where his views show strong continuity with those of Kotzk as well as Przysucha (where he studied with R. Simha Bunem). Nowhere is this clearer than in the deep skepticism evinced in both Kotzk and Izbica towards emotionalism and martyrdom as religious ideals.

Anger, according to R. Mordecai Joseph, is rooted in our failure to recognize that “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalms 24:1). His son, R. Jacob of Radzin, taught in his father’s name that anger stems from a false sense of human ownership and mastery of the world. “Like a person who thinks that he is the master of the house, and becomes angry when things are not according to his

5. *Mei ha-Shiloah* I, *Shoftim*, 61b (p. 187). Also *MH* I, *Shelah Lekha*, 50a (p. 153). Folio page numbers refer to M. J. Lainer’s 1973 reprint of the 1860 Vienna edition of vol. 1 and the 1922 Lublin edition of vol. 2. Parenthetical numbers refer to the two-volume 1995 edition, published by Goldhaber and Spigleman.

6. Faierstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven*, pp. 69–75. Also see Elior, “Innovations in Polish Hasidism,” p. 408 n. 51.

7. A. J. Heschel, *Kotzk: In Gerangel far Emisdikeit* 2 volumes (Tel Aviv, 1973) 2: 625–27.

8. On R. Menahem Mendl’s reputation for anger, see Elior, “Innovations in Polish Hasidism,” pp. 404–406. The authenticity of sayings attributed to R. Menahem Mendl is, however, discussed by Yaakov Levinger, “The Authentic Sayings of Rabbi Menahem Mendl of Kotzk” (Hebrew), *Tarbiš* 56:1 (1986), pp. 109–135 and “The Teachings of the Kotzker Rebbe According to his Grandson R. Samuel Bernstein of Sochotchow” (Hebrew), *Tarbiš* 55:4 (1986), pp. 414–431.

intent . . . but does not become angry when he is in a friend's house."⁹ R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi makes a similar point in the twenty-fifth chapter of *Ḥigget Ha-Qodesh*, in which he argues that "were a person to believe that what happened to him is the Lord's doing, he would not become angry at all."¹⁰ But, whereas R. Shneur Zalman is careful precisely in this context to defend the principle of free will and accountability, the school of Izbica-Radzin founded by R. Mordecai Joseph takes this teaching in a far more radical direction:

The essence of anger stems from the fact that a person fails to recognize that God has ownership of the world. . . . But if a person could nullify his anger [entirely], this would indicate constant recognition that "the earth is the Lord's and all that it holds," and that God is owner over the whole world, *which would render human service [ʿabodah] completely irrelevant*. God desires, as it were, the service of Israel in this world, and that is why Moses did not cross the river Jordan, but God only showed him the Land of Israel¹¹

When R. Mordecai Joseph or members of his school describe the recognition of God's ownership of the world, therefore, they are referring to something other than the prosaic religious claim that God is master and *should therefore* be served. On the contrary, they are arguing that full recognition of God's mastery would strike at the root of divine service or ritual work, because service is premised (like anger) on the necessary illusion of a free and sovereign human will.¹²

"The earth is the Lord's" in R. Mordecai Joseph's teaching, therefore, means that even free will is limited or illusory, "like the shell of a garlic clove."¹³ Or, as he indicates in another passage, "'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it' means that [human] action is also from God."¹⁴ Human beings should be aware that not only the prayers on their lips but also the will to pray—and sometimes the *inability* to pray—are granted from heaven.¹⁵ "All is in the hands of heaven."¹⁶ However, because God paradoxically desires human service in this world (for reasons that have yet to be considered here), human beings are required to act *as if* they were partly sovereign, independent beings. That is why, in the language of the parable, Moses is granted a glimpse of the Promised Land from across the river but is prevented from crossing.

9. *Bet Ya'aqob* (Warsaw, 1909) *Noah* no. 19, 34a. See also his great-grandson's book, *Tif'eret Yosef* (Warsaw, 1935), 7a, 8a and 34b (pp. 19, 22 and 99). Parenthetical page numbers refer to Goldhaber and Spiegelman's 1997 edition. Also see *MH II, Niṣabim*, 40a (p. 128).

10. R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ḥigget ha-qodesh* (138b). Translation from *Liqutei amarim tanya* (Brooklyn: Kehot Publishers, 1981) p. 535. R. Shneur Zalman insists that although the damage caused by a violent person or by a thief has been decreed by heaven, the aggressor is nevertheless "guilty according to the laws of man and the laws of Heaven for having chosen evil."

11. *Tif'eret Yosef, Vayelekh*, 7a (pp. 18–19), emphasis added. Also see *Liqutei MHI*, 1b (p. 208).

12. Maimonides also suggests, in the fourth chapter of *Shemoneh peraḳim*, that Moses was kept from the Promised Land because of anger. Compare *MHI Ki Tissa* 30a (p. 94) on the anger of the *ṣaddiq*.

13. *MHI, Qorah*, 50b (p. 154), *Vayelekh*, 65a (p. 198), *Liqutei MH II*, 59b (p. 192). Each of these passages also cites the verse "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it."

14. *MH II, Niṣabim*, 40a (p. 128).

15. *MH I, Shelah*, 49b (p. 151). Also see *MH I, Miqes*, 16a (p. 51).

On the other hand, it is clear from this and other passages in *Mei Ha-Shiloah* that the *telos* of divine history does eventually require the children of Israel to cross that river, and that both anger and *abodah* will ultimately be annulled.¹⁷ These themes are closely related. In several passages, the *telos* of the commandments is alluded to as “the land of Israel,” as opposed to “the wilderness,” where the struggle of apparent free-willed action is still required. A Talmudic dictum states that “a person who lives in the land of Israel is like a person who has a God,” to which R. Mordecai Joseph adds that “this is because it is clear in the land of Israel that God is present in every detail, even in the things of this world . . . which is why Moses lusted to enter the land.”¹⁸

In a passage on the commandment of first fruits (*biquirim*), similarly, this perfected state is described as *maqom ha-miqdash* or “the cite of the sanctuary,” in which the importance of serving God according to the commandments is simultaneously affirmed and transcended. According to Deuteronomy 26, a person who brings first fruits to the Temple must first make a declaration to the officiating priest: “I profess this day to the Lord your God that I have come into the land which the Lord swore to our fathers to give to us” (Deuteronomy 26:3). According to Rabbi Mordecai Joseph, this declaration constitutes a rebuke of the priesthood by lay-Israelites who have come to recognize the boundaries and limitations implied by priestly *abodah*:

This implies harsh words to the priest. It alludes to the fact that even though the priest serves in the sanctuary and the farmer serves in the field, every time a soul from Israel arrives at the sanctuary to bring first fruits he thereby clarifies that he was just as much ensconced in holiness elsewhere as the priest is at service [*abodah*].¹⁹

This is the whole paradoxical understanding of the commandments in Izbicaradzin: One must bring the first fruits to the sanctuary in order to clarify that the sanctuary has no more holiness than any other place in God’s world. Having reached “the land of Israel” through toil and discipline, one realizes that God is *and has always been* present in all places without limit. Such knowledge is inimical to anger, and its attainment is related to the process of *berur*, or clarification of the divine will.

This is also the case with regard to the appointment of a king, which leads

16. This phrase appears frequently in *Mei ha-Shiloah*, sometimes in the form “all is in the hands of heaven including the fear of heaven,” which seems to contradict the Talmudic view (*Berachot* 33b). These views are reconciled in *MH I, Yayera*, 8a (p. 27).

17. On the temporary or illusory quality of anger in the world, see *MH I, Ki Tisa*, 30a (p.94), *Liqutei MH II*, 58a-58b (pp. 186–187). Further elaboration of this idea is undertaken by R. Mordecai Joseph’s student, R. Šadoq Ha-Cohen of Lublin, *Taqanat ha-shavin* (Pietrikov, 1926) 49b, chapter 10:39. On the future annulment of the commandments see *MH I, Ki Tisa*, 30b (p. 96), and Weiss, “A Late Jewish Utopia.”

18. *MH II, Va-ethanan*, 34b (p. 111). Also see *MH I, Naso* 46b (p.143), *Masei* 56a (p.170), *MH II, Matot*, 33b (pp. 107–108). On Moses’ lust to enter the land, see *Debarim Rabbah, Va-ethanan* 2:2.

19. *MH I, Ki Tavo*, 63a (p. 192).

R. Mordecai Joseph to emphasize that a “foreigner” cannot be appointed, because “anger has no place in Israel.” Like the bringing of the first fruits, the commandment to appoint a king is dependent on entry into the “land of Israel,” and it represents a realignment of human consciousness (by means of *‘abodah*) towards the unmediated will of God:

The essential quality of a king of Israel is great assurance (*tequfot*), to the point that anything which is in his heart he will do, because anything that comes into his heart is certainly the will of God. This is a very high level that does not require any stratagem (*eṣah*) from any prophet . . . because whatever comes out of the king’s mouth are the words of God . . .²⁰

I will argue below that “stratagems” are always associated in *Mei Ha-Shiloah* with *‘abodah* or ritual work that is preparatory to God’s “personal illumination” of the spiritual adept. “Stratagems” relate to the typology of the prophet, who reveals “general words of Torah,” but the king supersedes prophecy because he speaks in God’s own voice. An analogous distinction between priests and scholars indicates that whereas priests may pray constantly for divine salvation, “the essence of a scholar is to realize that a human being has no power of his own but that which comes from God . . . Which is to say that everything is in heaven’s hands.”²¹

Terms like “king” and “prophet” in these passages need to be understood as typologies of divine service and not as concrete historical institutions. R. Mordecai Joseph interprets the commandment to choose a king in Deuteronomy 17 as a statement that “Israelites seek the ability to expand (*lehitpashet*) into every desire of their hearts, with no need for boundaries or excessive limits.”²² The biblical stricture that a king must be appointed “from among your brethren” corresponds to the prohibition against the appointment of an angry, foreign king. It refers to a typology of service, in which Israel will learn to look to God, “whereupon it will be permissible for them to expand into all the pleasures of this world, as long as all is done in holiness.”²³ “Kings” and “scholars” share this attainment to varying degrees, but “priests” and “prophets” are necessarily excluded.²⁴ That is why “kings” must be free of anger to an extraordinary degree, but anger can be tolerated in a common person, reflecting the temporary legitimacy accorded to anger from our limited perspective. Not even “a *ṣaddiq* or a person who serves God” will be saved, however, if they “heap up anger” in their hearts or make anger into a permanent character trait. It is only “anger like this,” says R. Mordecai Joseph, that truly “has no portion in Israel at all,” because it is a direct contradiction of the *te-*

20. *MH* II, *Teṣaveh*, 18b (p. 60).

21. *Ibid.* On prayer as a form of human activism, see *MH* I, *Beshalah*, 23b (p. 75).

22. *MH* I, *Shofetim*, 61a (p. 187).

23. *Ibid.*

24. The hierarchical relationship between these typologies of human service is stated explicitly in *MH* I, *Shofetim*, 60a (p. 184). “A scholar precedes a king, even though the king is greater, because a king is initially appointed only by the Sanhedrin [i.e. council of scholars] . . . But once a king has been appointed he precedes a scholar, because everything that comes from his mouth are the words of God . . .”

los represented by the figure of the king, through whom the incompatibility of faith and anger must ultimately be revealed.²⁵

Whatever R. Mordecai Joseph's feelings about R. Menahem Mendl, therefore, his stance on anger is closely related to his mentor's evaluation of *ʿabodah* for "kings," "scholars" and all "those who serve God" in a graduated spiritual hierarchy. The paradox is that *ʿabodah* is necessary to the attainment of a state in which *ʿabodah* will be superseded, and this requires a temporary illusion of human agency, which includes anger. This is not an ontological rejection of all anger, as Faierstein argues, but it does signal that the king is an ideal type who bears witness to the *telos* of humanity as a whole. In the short-term, some self-directed anger is both tolerated and necessary, because of its operational or strategic usefulness in driving the project of spiritual "clarification" forward.

A person who is overcome by forbidden desire, for example, is counseled in *Mei ha-Shiloah* to arouse the quality of anger in opposition.²⁶ This is a message that post-deluvial Noah had still to learn:

"And he sent forth a raven that went to and fro, etc." The word "raven" alludes to anger, since Noah desired that the quality [or emotion] of anger not exist in the world. Then the Holy Blessed One showed him that for now there is still a need for this quality in the world, because sometimes when a person is gripped by some negative lust, he can save himself by entering a state of anger. This is the meaning of the words, "that went to and fro until the waters receded," which is to say, "until negative desires recede from the world," because then anger will also be nullified, since water means "desire."²⁷

Moses cannot cross the Jordan any more than Noah can dismiss anger prematurely from the world after the flood. Anger is important because it helps to mask the reality that "all is in the hands of heaven," and so allows for human effort, but this is also equivalent to saying that anger is required so that lust can be restrained, because lust is associated precisely with knowledge that "the earth is the Lord's." Moses, too, "lusts" to enter the land of Israel, where human attainment will no longer be required.²⁸ The relationship between anger and lust is one of asymmetrical opposition, because anger will ultimately vanish as an illusion just at the moment when lust is redeemed. Can any created thing—or any desire—be thought irredeemably evil in God's good world?

This is a question that R. Mordecai Joseph treats in the context of restrictions on the consumption of non-sacral meat in Deuteronomy 12:

"When the Lord your God will enlarge your border, as he has promised you, and you say, 'I will eat meat,' because you lust to eat meat, you may eat meat

25. *MH II, Mishpatim*, 17a (p. 55). Also see *MH II, Ki Tissa*, 20a-20b (p. 65).

26. *MH I, Noah*, 5b(p 19), *Beha'lotkhah*, 48b (p. 149).

27. *Ibid.* For more on "water" or "ocean" as a representation of boundless desire, see *MH I, Ni sabim*, 64b (p. 195). Also see R. Gershon Hanokh's introduction to his father's *Bet Ya'aqob*, 19b-20a (p. 133).

28. See *Debarim Rabbah, Va'ethanan* 2:2, where Moses' lust to enter the land is cancelled by his anger.

Martyrdom, Emotion and the Work of Ritual

to your heart's desire (Deut. 12:20)." The verse does not say that they will leave their borders, but that their borders will be extended. For in truth, according to the four-letter name of God (which is to say blessed God who chose Israel) there are no borders, and it is permitted to expand [*lehitpashet*] into all the good [i.e. pleasurable] things. It is only through the name 'A.D.O.N.A.Y., which is to say human recognition and the boundaries of human understanding, that limits have been derived: that up to this point it is permitted to expand and from here on forbidden. Thus, according to the strength of 'abodah that is found in a person, so is that person's ability [or permission] to expand himself into good [or pleasurable] things.²⁹

The desire to eat meat is treated here as a worldly pleasure, in which a spiritual adept is permitted to indulge according to the level of 'abodah or ritual work previously attained. The spatial symbolism of this passage (expanding boundaries of the permissible) is central to R. Mordecai Joseph's whole conception, in which greater "contraction" (*šimšum*) paves the way for greater "extension" (*hitpashtut*) and hence enjoyment of worldly pleasures:

This is the meaning of "when God expands your boundaries," because at the beginning, when a person enters into service ('abodah), it is forbidden for him to extend himself, because too much extension will lead to loss of fear. But when the strength of his service and fear have increased, it is then permissible to extend beyond that service. This is the meaning of "when God expands your boundaries," which is to say that God gives you such power of service that the boundaries fall away and are removed from you, until you can even eat meat without extending past your boundary.³⁰

It is important to emphasize in this passage that the permissibility of *hitpashtut* is strongly correlated with a person's propensity for 'abodah, and is in fact limited by it. R. Mordecai Joseph does not embrace "the autonomy of the human spirit" in the anarchic sense that Shatz suggests, except to the extent that the spirit has been ritually purified and trained to dependence on the will of God.³¹

R. Mordecai Joseph's emphasis on the concept of *hitpashtut* can hardly be overestimated, and should be considered a central focus of his whole ritual system. The most popular use of this term in Hasidic literature, going back to R. Dov Baer of Mezhirech ("the Great Maggid"), is *hitpashtut ha-gashmiut* ("shedding of corporeality") through ascetic discipline and ecstatic worship in which a person "kills himself for words of Torah."³² *Hitpashtut* in this sense is related to the ideal of *bitul* or self-annihilation, and to the demand for ascetic practices that can "draw down" vitality into the phenomenal world. However, R. Mordecai Joseph draws al-

29. *MH I, Re'eh*, 59b-60a (pp. 182–183).

30. *Ibid.*

31. Rivka Schatz, "The Autonomy of the Spirit and the Law of Moses."

32. Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, ed., *Maggid devarav le-Ya'aqob* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, [1781] 1990), pp. 329–331, paragraph 205. Also see pp. 204–209, paragraph 153. The latter passage may also presage R. Mordecai Joseph's specific identification of the king with *hitpashtut*.

most exclusively on a secondary use of the term in early Hasidic literature, which is the “extension” (*hitpashtut*) of divine presence or glory (*kabod*) into all created things. “Everything contains the *hitpashtut* of the blessed Creator,” writes R. Dov Baer, “His glory fills the world.”³³ This may be why Schatz argues that that *Mei ha-Shiloah* makes little or no use of traditional Hasidic terminology, and why Faienstein goes so far as to claim that R. Mordecai Joseph “negates the cosmic myth central to Lurianic Kabbalah and Hasidism,” both of which would seem to be overstatements.³⁴ R. Mordecai Joseph does occasionally describe the “drawing down” of divine blessing or the “unification” of the cosmos, as do his disciples.³⁵ Yet it seems fair to say that he downplays the peregrination of divine vitality implied by “repair” (*tiquin*), which was so important to other Hasidic writers, because of his profound commitment to the principle that the earth is the Lord’s *already*.³⁶

Ritual work in *Mei ha-Shiloah* can, in other words, be seen to help prepare human beings for the power of divine revelation, so that they can feel themselves to have “earned” the divine gifts that are in any case (from God’s point of view) freely given. Only *‘abodah* can transform divine blessing into “the fruit of your labor,” according to R. Mordecai Joseph, which means that the same divine blessings that were once known by the name of their Giver can become “known by the name of their recipients,” as well.³⁷ This terminology probably alludes to the biblical episode in 2 Samuel 12, in which David’s general Joab warns David to appear in person at the battlefield, “lest I capture the city myself and my name will be called upon it.” The king’s participation in this battle is of a largely ritual nature, since the city has already been rendered defenseless, but royal glory demands that David play an active role. This is a powerful model of ritual work, in which all is earned yet all is given. *‘Abodah* is vital in this context not just for allowing human beings to overcome their resistance to the proposition that “the earth is the Lord’s,” but also for allowing them to share by right (as well as by grace) in the *hitpashtut* of divine glory.

The dialectic between *šimšum* (contraction) and *hitpashtut* (expansion) on a cosmological level is mirrored for R. Mordecai Joseph in the dialectic of anger and lust described above. Anger is the “lower” of the two expressions, and is even identified in some Izbica-Radzin writings with the root of idolatry (literally “strange worship” or *‘abodah zarah*) because it narrowly identifies divinity with the sphere of human accomplishment (*‘abodah*) alone.³⁸ Ultimately, the “contraction” of the

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44, paragraph 26. Schatz-Uffenheimer argues that this usage does not appear in earlier Lurianic writings.

34. Schatz, “Autonomy of the Spirit,” p. 555; Faienstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven*, p. 41.

35. See *Liqutei MH* II, 49a (p. 188) and 60a-60b (p. 193). Compare R. Gershon Hanokh’s discussion of ritual efficacy in his introduction to *Bet Ya‘aqob*, 21b-22a (pp. 144–146).

36. For a striking expression of this theme, see *MH* I, *Vayigash*, 16a-b (pp. 55–56), wherein the exile itself is described as illusory. Also see *MH* II, *Re’eh*, 36a (p.115), wherein the biblical “abominations” are described as treasures belonging to God.

37. See *MH* I, *Tazria*, 35a–35b (p. 110); *MH* II, *Lekh Lekha*, 5b (pp. 17–18); and *MH* II, *Va-‘et hanan*, 35a (p.112). Also see *MH* II, *Lekh Lekha*, 5b (p. 17–18); and *Liqutei MH*, II, 44a, 44b, 59b-60a (pp. 141, 143, 191). A similar formula is used in the Talmud (*‘Abodah Zarah* 19a) with respect to Torah study, but without the broad implications of R. Mordecai Joseph’s usage.

38. See *MH* I, *Va-‘era*, 21a (p. 67) and *Bet Ya‘aqob*, *Noah*, 34a, respectively.

human personality through restrictions and anger must give way to a sense of greater *hitpashtut* and permissiveness since “the earth is the Lord’s,” but this is entirely compatible with an ethic of stringency and self-doubt in the here and now. “Since the forbidden foods were prohibited,” writes R. Mordecai Joseph, “it follows that *šimšum* is sometimes required with regard to the permitted foods as well.”³⁹ Therefore, rather than questioning whether R. Mordecai Joseph is “for” or “against” anger in some abstract doctrinal sense, we ought to question the specific uses and dangers of anger in relation to the demands of a ritual system in which *‘abodah* or “working through” is accomplished slowly, over time. The teachings on anger are a key entry point for any attempt to understand this system.

Yishub ha-Da‘at and the Work of Ritual:

A Hasidic Polemic against Ecstasy

Anger and lust are not, of course, the only two emotional qualities that *Mei ha-Shiloah* treats. But as Claude Levi-Strauss has argued, the power of symbolic thinking lies precisely in its ability to expand continually upon a given but limited set of initial conceptual distinctions.⁴⁰ All of the primary emotional and ritual qualities that R. Mordecai Joseph describes in *Mei ha-Shiloah* can be assimilated to the basic, asymmetrical dichotomy between anger and lust outlined above. Sadness, or what we would probably call depression, is clearly linked to anger for R. Mordecai Joseph, because it, too, derives from an inability to appreciate that “the earth is the Lord’s.” A person may become so outraged and saddened by the sins of the community that he seeks to leave the world behind. “A person should not become so angry at those who violate [God’s] will,” writes R. Mordecai Joseph, “that he comes to despise life, as we have found with regards to Elijah . . . who said [to God] ‘take my soul,’ and also Jonah who despised his own life”⁴¹ “Great people” are especially susceptible to this kind of anger, because “they derive no pleasure from the good things of this world” and judge themselves as well as others unremittingly. The only antidote is *tovat ‘ayin*, or generosity of spirit.⁴²

Joy, by contrast, is related to lust, since both emotions involve *hitpashtut* or extension of the self into external pleasure. “Wine makes the heart glad,” but too much wine (or enjoyment which has not yet been “clarified”) is identified as lust or drunkenness, which a Jew must work to resist.⁴³ Although both joy and lust are related to the world of *hitpashtut* therefore, they are differently valued, since lust is an extreme or premature expression of *hitpashtut* that calls for discipline. This kind of dialectic between categories and, indeed, within categories is entirely characteristic of R. Mordecai Joseph’s approach, in which emotional opposites are jux-

39. *MH II, Bereshit*, 5a (p.15), also see *MH I, Mattot*, 55a (p. 167).

40. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

41. *MH II, Shoftim*, 36b-37a (p. 118).

42. *MH I, Tazria*, 35b (p.111). Also see *Liquetei MH II*, 49a (p.1 47), on the relationship between “a good eye” and the principle of divine glory.

43. On wine or drunkenness as a metaphor for lust, see *MH I, Noah* 5a (p. 18); *Lekh Lekha 7a* (p. 24); and *Vayeshev*, 14b (p. 47). As joy and *hitpashtut*, see *Liquetei MH I*, 11a, (p. 236); *MH II, Ekev*, 35b (p. 114); and *Liquetei MH II*, 50b and 57b-58a (pp. 162 and 185). Finally, on drunkenness as premature *hitpashtut*, see *MH I, Shemini*, 33b (p. 106) and *II Shemini 23b-24a* (pp. 76–77).

taposed and balanced through ritual forms. Fear (*yir'ah*) is divided between the fear of God associated with the commandments and the prosaic fear of earthly power, but both are expressions of self-contraction (*šimšum*), from which anger also springs.⁴⁴ Both types of fear are contrasted with love (*ahavah*) as well as with “faith” (*bitaḥon* or *emunah*), and especially with “assurance” (*tequfot*), all of which are emotions of *hitpashtut*.⁴⁵ A primary axis of R. Mordecai Joseph’s thought is the dialectic between doubt (*safeq*) and assurance (*tequfot*) in human experience, which follows the same centripetal-centrifugal pattern.⁴⁶ “Assurance” is the *telos* of human existence, but doubt and *šimšum* are unavoidable aspects of the human condition to which the commandments of the Torah are primarily addressed (see Figure 1).

Each of the *Mei ha-Shiloah*’s binary pairs is worthy of careful and separate study for the emotional and spiritual values they intimate. Although they all share a common semantic framework and some structural features, they are not reducible to one another, and their meaning can shift significantly from one passage or context to the next. Each binary pair is furthermore linked to one or more practical commandments, through which they are mediated and balanced. Fringes (*šišit*) teach about the fear of God, but phylacteries (*tefillin*) allude to the quality of assurance (*tequfot*) or communion (*devequt*), which transcends that fear.⁴⁷ Each ritual practice can be further subdivided into elements that are related to assurance and to fear respectively, so that the individual commandment turns out to be a microcosm of the ritual system as a whole. When his grandson Gershon Hanokh came of age, R. Mordecai Joseph taught him to recite the blessing over the *tefillin* that are worn on the head with an exceptionally sweet melody, because they allude to the quality of assurance and communion with God. The *tefillin* of the hand, by contrast, bespeak a necessary illusion of divine service in this world.⁴⁸ With respect to the commandment of *šišit*, R. Mordecai Joseph finds a distinction between the “thread of blue” described in Numbers 15:39, which represents caution “not to step a hair’s breadth outside the words of Torah,” and the “fringes” described in Deuteronomy 21:12, which represent assurance of God’s loving illumination. “That is why there is a ‘thread’ as well as a ‘fringe’ in the commandment of *šišit*, to show that a person needs to use both of these qualities according to the illumination he receives from the will of God.”⁴⁹

44. See *MH I Beshalah*, 22b–23a (pp. 72–73). On the relationship of these two forms of fear to anger, also see R. Šadoq Ha-Cohen, *Pri Šadiq* on Hannukah, paragraph 17 (vol. 1; Lublin: 1901), 84b.

45. See for instance *MH I, Vayeše*, 12a (p. 40); *Beshalah*, 22b–23a (pp. 72–73).

46. See for instance *MH I, Toledot*, 10a (pp. 33–34); *MH I, Beshalah*, 22b–23a (pp. 72–73); and *MH II, Beḥuqotei*, 27a–27b (pp. 87–88). A good restatement of the teaching on “assurance” can also be found in R. Issac Hutner’s eighth essay for Rosh Hashanah, *Pa ḥad Yišḥaq* (New York: Gur Aryeh Institute, 1990), pp. 72–82. A comprehensive study of the use and reworking of Izbica teachings by R. Hutner remains a desideratum. See Steven S. Schwarzschild, “An Introduction to the Thought of R. Isaac Hutner,” *Modern Judaism* 5:3 (1985), pp. 235–277.

47. See *MH I, Aḥ arei*, 36b–37a (p. 114), *Vayelekh*, 64b–65a (p. 197). With regards to *tefillin*, also see *MH I, Ki Tisa*, 31a (p. 94), *MH II, Vayeḥi*, 13b (p. 44).

48. R. Gershon Hanokh Henich describes this memory in *ʿAyn Tekhelet* (Warsaw, 1909), which is cited in *Liquṭei MH II, Va-ʿet ḥanan*, p. 244 of the new edition.

49. *MH II, Shela*, 30a (p. 98).

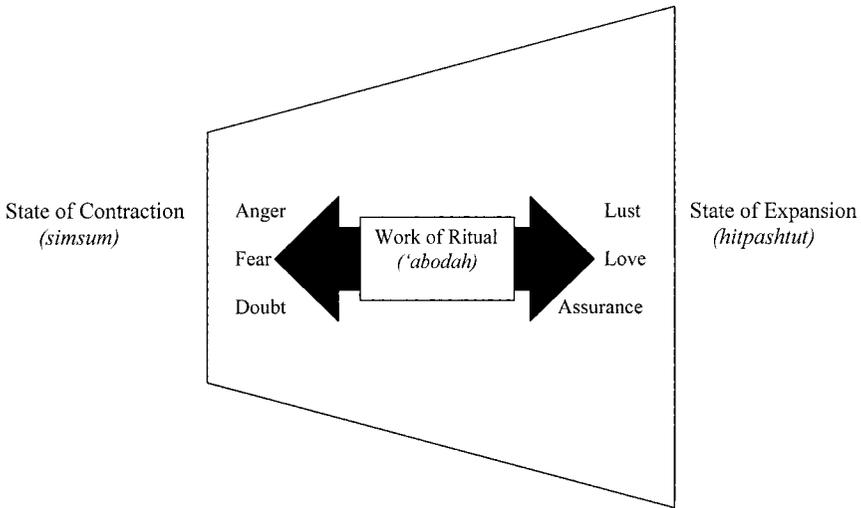


Figure 1.

Among the Jewish festivals, similarly, R. Mordecai Joseph singles out *Sukkot* for its emphasis on assurance, but he also distinguishes between dwelling in the *sukkah* itself, which is an embodiment of assurance, and the waving of the palm branch, which is an expression of fear.⁵⁰ These distinctions are rooted in an even more essential Lurianic symbolism of *igulim* (circles) and *yosher* (straight lines), which represent the unmediated and reflected or emanated divine light, respectively.⁵¹ As with lust and anger, *igulim* and *yosher* are held in asymmetrical balance by Jewish ritual; whereas both are required, it is ultimately the reflection of assurance in the aspect of *igulim* towards which humanity strives. R. Mordecai Joseph frequently repeats the Talmudic teaching that “in the future God will make a circle dance for the righteous,” which he reads as a promise that the realm of *igulim* will emerge dominant in human experience. In a circle dance he writes, *abodah* is transcended, because “all are equally distant from the center, none is more distant than another.”⁵² *igulim* is related to the notion of *zechut avot*, or merit of the ancestors, because all Jews share this merit equally whatever their level of individual service.

When the binary schema of *igulim* and *yosher* is mapped onto the emotional coordinates of oppositions like those between assurance and fear or between lust and anger, a clear link is forged between the ritual, emotional and cosmological di-

50. *Liqutei MH* II, 60a (p. 193). Also see *MH* II, *Shoftim*, 36b (p.117) and *MH* I, *Emor*, 41a (p. 127).

51. See Mordecai Pachter, “Circles and Straight Lines: The History of an Idea” (Hebrew), *Daat* 18 (1987): pp. 60–90.

52. *Ta’anit* 31a. See *MH* I, *Vayigash*, 17a (p. 57), *Qorah*, 50b (p. 155), *Vi-zot ha-berakhah*, 66a-66b (p.202); *MH* II, *Vi-zot ha-berakhah*, 41a (p. 132); *Liqutei MH* II, 60a-60b (p. 193). Compare Nehemiah Polen, “Miriam’s Dance: Radical Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought.” *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992) pp. 1–21.

mensions of human existence. Whenever R. Mordecai Joseph refers to one of these dimensions, therefore, associations with the other two are immediate. Every action, disposition or commandment can be located along a continuum of circles and lines, contraction and expansion, with a minimum of effort (see Figure 2), but it is characteristic that no one of them is ever allowed to dominate human experience to the exclusion of others.⁵³ They are balanced through a shifting array of practices and commandments, referred to as “counsels” or “stratagems” (*‘eṣot*) in an apparent allusion to Maimonides, who argued that “most of the rules of the Torah are none other than *counsels* (*‘eṣot*) from of old (Isaiah 25:1),” whose purpose is “to correct our dispositions (*de‘ot*) and straighten all our actions.”⁵⁴ Elsewhere Maimonides specifies that the “straight path” is the one that leads to “the mean in each group of human dispositions; namely that disposition which is equidistant from the two extremes, not nearer to the one than to the other.”⁵⁵ Although their cosmological referents were very different, R. Mordecai Joseph shared Maimonides’ view of the law as a set of stratagems “concerned with the intricacy and instability of the human temperament,” and devoted to its training.⁵⁶

Both Kotzk and Izbica-Radzin emphasized the study of Maimonides, and this is reflected in R. Mordecai Joseph’s frequent use of the term *‘eṣot* to describe the role of the commandments (or “general words of Torah”) that precede divine illumination.⁵⁷ He cites the *Zohar* rather than Maimonides: “We have been taught that the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave six hundred and thirteen counsels [or stratagems] unto man, in order that he might be perfect in attachment to his Lord,” but the Zoharic derivation seems only partial.⁵⁸ While it has been much cited in Hasidic tradition, this passage lacks the specific focus on training and moderation of the dispositions that Maimonides and *Mei ha-Shiloah* share, and it should be noted that there is a tendency in Izbica-Radzin to emphasize citation of esoteric authorities at Maimonides’ expense.⁵⁹ For R. Mordecai Joseph, the commandments of the Torah are “stratagems to teach the children of Israel good dispositions [*mid-*

53. See the explicit statement to this effect in *Liqutei MH II*, 54a (p. 173).

54. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Temurah* 4:13.

55. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De‘ot* 1:4. On Maimonides’ “straight path,” see Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 459–464.

56. The quote is from Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*, p. 416.

57. See Israel Ya’aqob Dienstag, “The Guide for the Perplexed and the Book of Knowledge in Hasidic Literature” (Hebrew), in Samuel Belkin editor, *The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume* (New York: Shulsinger Brothers, 1964); Raphael Mahler, “Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment,” in Gershon David Hundert editor, *Essential Papers on Hasidism* (New York: New York University Press, 1991) pp. 468–472; and Faiierstein, “Personal Redemption in Hasidism.” R. Gershon Hanokh argues in his introduction to *Bet Ya’aqob* (7a [p.48]) that Maimonides enjoyed a degree of prophecy similar to that of Abraham, and second only to Moses.

58. *MH I*, 40b (p. 125), *Liqutei MH II*, 58a (p. 187). Also see the introduction to *Bet Ya’aqob*, vol. I, *Petah Ha-Sha’ar* 23a (p. 155). The quote is from *Zohar II* 82b, translated by Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul P. Levertoff, *The Zohar* vol. 3 (New York: Soncino Press, 1984) p. 249.

59. See *Liqutei MH II*, 65a (p. 208), wherein Maimonides’ concept of the mean is cited obliquely from “books,” but R. Isaac Luria is mentioned by name. Despite his extensive focus on Maimonides in the introduction to *Bet Ya’aqob* (7a [p. 50]), even R. Gershon Hanokh protests that he does not identify with Maimonides overmuch. See Dienstag, “The Guide for the Perplexed and the Book of Knowledge in Hasidic Literature.”

Martyrdom, Emotion and the Work of Ritual

	<i>State of Contraction (simsum)</i>	<i>State of Expansion (hitpashtut)</i>
<i>Ritual Expression</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>tefillin</i> of the hand 2. Fringe of blue (<i>tekhelet</i>) 3. Palm branch (<i>lulav</i>) 4. Fast of Atonement (<i>yom haqippurim</i>) 5. Prayer 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>tefillin</i> of the head 2. Prayer shawl (<i>tallit</i>) 3. Ritual booth (<i>sukkah</i>) 4. Feast of Booths (<i>sukkot</i>) 5. Study of Torah
<i>Emotional Expression</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fear/Doubt 2. Sense of Lack 3. Self Restriction 4. Anger 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Love/Assurance 2. Sense of Completeness 3. Self Expansion 4. Desire/Joy
<i>Cosmological Expression</i>	Pervading Light (<i>yosher</i>) "Straight Lines," Finitude.	Surrounding Light (<i>igulim</i>) "Circles," Infinity.

Figure 2.

dot],” and also to “fix truth in the heart.”⁶⁰ A person at the beginning of service must “multiply stratagems each time through words of Torah” until this training is complete.⁶¹

More striking still is *Mei ha-Shiloah*’s direct appropriation of Maimonides’ “middle path” for Hasidic cosmology:

“She [Wisdom] takes her stand at the topmost heights, by the wayside, at the crossroads” [Proverbs 8:2]. This verse can be explained through what is found in books [sic] that a person who wants to fix his dispositions [*middot*] must reverse himself from one disposition to its opposite. For instance, someone who is accustomed to miserliness should lean in the direction of extravagance, even though extravagance is also an imperfect disposition because it is not the mean. If a person accustoms himself to extravagance, he may acquire the disposition of generosity, which is the mean.⁶²

This is a close paraphrase of Maimonides’ teaching on generosity from the fourth chapter of *Shemonah Peraqim*, and it draws on the language of Ibn Tibbon’s Hebrew translation. But R. Mordecai Joseph continues by translating this teaching into the language of sephirotic Kabbalah:

This is the meaning of “She [Wisdom] takes her stand at the topmost heights” (Proverbs 8:1), that through labor a person can change his disposition [*middah*] from one extreme to the next, and will then arrive at a place which is

60. For the former, see *MH I, Emor*, 40b (p. 125). For the latter, see *MH II, Ki Tavo*, 38b (p. 124).

61. *MH I, Mishpatim*, 27a (p. 75).

62. *Liqutei MH II*, 51a (p. 164).

above the power of that disposition. He will then be “by the wayside, at the crossroads” (Proverbs 8:1), which is to say that his intellect will direct his dispositions . . . since he will stand at the crossroads, which is to say the place from which all roads extend, to determine all of his behavior on his own.

The term *middah* (literally “measure”), which in its Maimonidean context referred to a given disposition or emotional quality, is here given a sephirotic connotation. In this symbolism, the various *middot*, or dispositions (*hesed*, *gevurah*, etc.) are defined by their branching out to the right or the left from the central body of the sephirotic tree (represented by *da'at-tif'eret*). R. Mordecai Joseph here suggests that the *middot* of emotional experience need to be brought back to the source of their divergence (*da'at*), from which they can be redirected or indeed transformed.

Emotional extremes are almost always destructive for R. Mordecai Joseph, because “Every thing that can be considered a *middah* (i.e., a deviation from the mean) implies its opposite also.”⁶³ He likens the choice of a path through life to the navigation of a ship through rough seas of desire, in which only stratagems (*'esot*) will yield a middle path. But it is the merit of this effort (*'abodah*) that leads God finally to send “salvation by the middle channel,” which is to say the channel of *da'at*, the king’s highway, from which all of the emotional dispositions emanate.⁶⁴ This means that no one disposition (e.g., anger, joy, lust) should ever be allowed to overpower any other, and that the goal of human personality is the attainment of cognitive and emotional equanimity or *yishub ha-da'at*, which is another central value of Maimonidean psychology. Attention to the radical implications of R. Mordecai Joseph’s theology has distracted scholars from the essentially conservative implications of *yishub ha-da'at*, which is the subject of no less than forty separate homilies in the two volumes of *Mei ha-Shiloah*. Terms like *hitlahavut* (fervor) that played such a central role in the teachings of R. Levi-Yiṣṣaq of Berdichev, or *hitpa'alut* (ecstasy) that preoccupied the Habad school, are correspondingly absent.

For Maimonides, *yishub ha-da'at* is a scholars’ virtue; it appears in a variety of different contexts as the mental composure and concentration that are required for study or prayer. “A person who finds that his mind is confused and his heart troubled is forbidden to pray until his mind becomes composed (*'ad she-tityasheb da'ato*).”⁶⁵ This usage is closely related to Maimonides’ advocacy of the middle path, since it requires a state of tranquility that is devoid of overwhelming emotions like fear, anger or desire.⁶⁶ A pregnant woman with cravings for forbidden foods is fed just enough so that “her mind becomes composed,” according to Maimonides, and a teacher who is required to simulate anger for some educational purpose is counseled nevertheless to “remain tranquil” (*da'ato me'yushevet*) within

63. *Liqutei MH II*, 55a (p. 176). The ideal of the *hasid* who deviates from the mean seems to be disallowed in this passage. See however *Liqutei MH II*, 53b-54a (p. 172).

64. *MH II*, *Ki Tavo*, 38a (p. 121).

65. *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Tefillah* 4:15. Also see *Ibid.*, *Hilkhot qeriyat shema* 4:7. On the importance of *yishub ha-da'at* for Torah study and intellectual attainment, see *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 1:2 and 4:6.

66. *Ibid.*, *Hilkhot Sanhedrin* 13:1.

himself.⁶⁷ R. Mordecai Joseph's teaching can accommodate the concept of *yishub ha-da'at* in all of these contexts, but it also transforms the term by importing a sense of *da'at* as the "middle channel" between contraction and expansion, or between the fear of God and the assurance that "all is in heaven's hands." The result of this confluence is an ethos of emotional restraint that would have been foreign to most Hasidic schools of the time, but that sits well with what we know of R. Mordecai Joseph's immediate predecessors in Kotzk and Przysucha. Mendel Piekarcz has described the anti-emotionalism of these two schools at length.⁶⁸ Of the Kotzker, Gershom Scholem writes simply, "He hates emotionalism!"⁶⁹

In his commentary on the biblical prohibition against destroying fruit trees in time of war (Deuteronomy 20:19) R. Mordecai Joseph identifies *yishub ha-da'at* with the transcendence of destructive anger:

"When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees" . . . This warning teaches that even in a time of agitation and anger, a person should find *yishub ha-da'at* not to ruin a thing that can provide even a little pleasure. That is why it is written, "When you besiege etc., to make war against it," nevertheless do not destroy its trees. This is a quality which Israel possess, that even in their time of anger they maintain *yishub ha-da'at* . . . since God will clarify that Israel wants nothing but the point of good which is found in everything . . .⁷⁰

Stating that Israelites maintain *yishub ha-da'at* even in a "time of anger" really means that they maintain knowledge that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" even when they are engaged in the realm of partial blindness we know as *abodah*. Faierstein points out that "tranquility is the ideal one should strive to cultivate in anger's place," but *yishub ha-da'at* mediates lust as well.⁷¹ In his commentary on Exodus 15:1, R. Mordecai Joseph makes the overall cosmological and ritual setting of *yishub ha-da'at* explicit:

"Horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea." "Horse" alludes to haste [*mehirut*] and to expansion [*hitpashtut*]. "His rider" alludes to *yishub ha-da'at* which limits [*mišamšem*] the horse so that he cannot run. When they behold

67. Ibid., *Hilkhot Ma'akhalot 'Asurot*, 14:14 and *Hilkhot De'ot* 2:3 respectively. Also see *Hilkhot De'ot* 4:2, 4:17 and 5:4, where the term *yishub ha-nefesh* is applied.

68. See Mendel Piekarcz, *The Hasidic Leadership* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999) pp. 283–292, and *Ideological Trends of Hasidim in Poland During the Interwar Period and the Holocaust* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1990), pp. 157–160. In the latter, Piekarcz describes the polemic on emotion in Kotzk within the context of a debate on the nature of Hasidic leadership between the successors of Przysucha (including R. Menahem Mendl) and the extravagant school of Ruzhin.

69. Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961), p. 345.

70. *MH* II, *Shoftim*, 37a (p. 119). Also see *Liqutei MH* II, 43a (p. 169).

71. Faierstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven*, p. 70. Passages in which *yishub ha-da'at* appears as a corrective to lust include *MH* I, *Shemini*, 34a (p. 106), *Qedoshim*, 37b (p. 116), *Beha'alotekha*, 48a–48b (p. 148), and *Liqutei MH* II, 49b (p.158).

the pleasures of this world, the [Gentile] nations do not have the power to limit themselves, but expand forth in all the lusts of their heart. That is why the verse first says, “horse,” and only then, “his rider.” They [the nations of the world] fill all their lust until they have no more strength, and then they desist.⁷²

Expansion or *hitpashtut* is associated with lust at the level of human emotion, whereas *yishub ha-da'at* is in this case a form of contraction, or *šimšum*. The cosmological drama of creation plays itself out through every new balance of lust and restraint, but “the nations” are described as those who have no balance because they know no restraint.

This does not, however, mean that desire is rejected. “When God gives goodness to Israel,” reads the continuation of the above passage, “He first contracts it, so that a person cannot take it without seeing the Giver. Afterwards he can indulge according to his heart’s desire.” Seeing the giver or seeing God “face to face” is an expression of “clarification” or *berur* in the works of Izbica-Radzin. The failure to perform *‘abodah* in preparation for receiving God’s goodness, by contrast is tantamount to “turning one’s back” on the giver.⁷³ *Yishub ha-da'at* is invoked because extreme asceticism would be just as misleading as libertinism, both of which deny the *telos* of human spiritual work. “A person who tends to be hasty [because of desire] . . . does not know anything,” according to R. Mordecai Joseph, “but a person who does not desire anything is like a beast.”⁷⁴ “There is a great difference between a scholar who indulges himself in pleasures and an ignoramus, because a scholar’s actions are covered in grace and beauty (i.e., *tiferet*, the middle channel), since he does everything with *yishub ha-da'at* . . . for heaven’s glory.”⁷⁵ Of the patriarchs, only Jacob (who is associated with *da'at-tiferet*’s middle path) is said to have achieved permanent divine illumination.⁷⁶

Ultimately, *yishub ha-da'at* is a protean virtue. It mediates a shifting balance between each of the categories upon which R. Mordecai Joseph’s teaching is based, including not just anger and lust but also fear and assurance, contraction and expansion.⁷⁷ The need to evaluate every emotional experience or desire for its proper balance means that spontaneity or “haste” are necessarily devalued, and this has wide-ranging implications for R. Mordecai Joseph’s whole spiritual method. Haste (rendered as *mehirut*) and confusion (*behalah*) are the result of lust or of other strong emotions, which cause a person to act—or even to indulge a given sentiment—without sufficient vetting for God’s will. When Jacob discovered that Joseph was still alive in Egypt, according to R. Mordecai Joseph, he had to test his joy through four sepa-

72. *MH I, Beshalah*, 24a (pp. 75–76).

73. *Liqutei MH I*, 5b (p. 220). Compare Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Maggid Devarav Le-Ya'aqob*, pp. 328–329 (para. 204).

74. *Liqutei MH II*, 56b-57a (p. 180).

75. *Liqutei MH II*, 51a (p. 163). Also see R. Šadoq Ha-Cohen’s short essay on the mystical significance of eating, “*Quntres ‘Eyt Ha-Okhel*.” Published in *Pri Šadiq* (Jerusalem, 1972 [Lublin, 1901]), 118a-120b. I am grateful to David Lester for bringing this source to my attention.

76. *MH I, Va-ye še*, 12a (p. 40), *Vayehi*, 17a, 17b (pp. 58, 59). See Weiss, “A Late Jewish Utopia,” p. 216.

77. See for instance *MH I, Beshalah*, 22b-23a (pp. 72–73); *Shemini*, 34b-35a (p. 108); *Mešora*, 36b (p. 113); *MH II, Re'eh*, 36a (p. 116).

rate stratagems before he could rest assured that God had actually sent this joy to him.⁷⁸ He (1) “aroused his good inclination,” (2) studied Torah, (3) recited the “Hear O Israel” doxology, and (4) meditated on the day of death. Only when his joy remained strong after all of these stratagems had failed was Jacob permitted to indulge.

Spontaneity is suspect in the not-yet-perfected human personality because it may not conform to *yishub ha-da’at*, which is the state in which one asks, “will lasting existence and vitality derive from this act?”⁷⁹ This is a question whose answer requires both cognitive and ritual attention, because only ritual stratagems can distinguish between counterfeit desires rooted in spiritual carelessness and those that represent an honest human reflection of divine *hitapashtut* in all things. The implications of this approach may appear antinomian from the perspective of Jewish law (“general words of Torah”), but they are far from “anarchistic,” and point less to the autonomy of the human spirit than to its ritual constraint and dependency on the divine will. This is actually a kind of “mystical empiricism,” through which the adept struggles to distinguish between subjective emotional phenomena by systematically resisting them in a ritual field.⁸⁰ It is a far cry from the turbulence of emotional extremes that characterizes most Hasidic teachings, including those for whom ecstatic emotion is only a way station on the path to self-annihilation (*bitul ‘ashmi*), as in Habad.⁸¹ The ethos of *yishub ha-da’at* resists ecstasy and *bitul* alike, and this is crucial for an understanding of R. Mordecai Joseph’s restrained teaching on martyrdom, to which we now turn.

Martyrdom, Anger and the Expansion of Heaven’s Glory:

An essay by R. Dov Baer of Lubavitch entitled “Concerning Prostration upon the Graves of *ṣaddiqim*” was published for the first time around 1814.⁸² R. Dov Baer argues that although visiting cemeteries is always beneficial for inspiring broken-heartedness and thoughts of repentance, actual prostration upon a *ṣaddiq’s* grave leads to spiritual attainments that exceed the level of normal human understanding. Prostration implies *bitul*, the annihilation of self-awareness, “in great submission and literal giving up of one’s life” (*mesirut nefesh mamash*), and it leads to communion with the soul of the *ṣaddiq* who is in paradise.⁸³ The Cave

78. *MH I, Vayigash*, 16b-17a (pp. 56–57).

79. *MH I, Beha’alotekha*, 48a (p. 148). According to *MH I, Qedoshim*, 38a-38b (p. 118), even ostensibly prophetic utterances are subject to this ritual vetting or “clarification” before they can be accepted.

80. Compare this statement from an important historian of science: “The research worker gropes but everything recedes, and nowhere is there a firm support. Everything seems to be an artificial effect inspired by his own personal will. Every formulation melts away at the next test. *He looks for that resistance and thought constraint in the face of which he could feel passive.*” Ludwig Fleck, *Origin and Genesis of a Scientific Fact* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1935] 1979), p. 94, emphasis added.

81. See Louis Jacobs, *Tract on Ecstasy* (London, 1963). Rachel Elior (“Innovations in Polish Hasidism”) suggests that an emphasis on emotionalism led R. Mordecai Joseph’s early teacher, the Seer of Lublin, to portray *yishub ha-da’at* as the opposite of Hasidic spirituality.

82. *Ṭnyan ha-hishatḥut*, in *Ma’amarei admor ha-emṣai, Quntresim* (New York: Kehot, 1991), pp. 17–36.

83. Also see R. Shneur Zalman’s *Liqutei amarim tanya*, chapters 29 and 42.

of the Patriarchs in Hebron is invoked as an especially efficacious site for prostration because of the *ṣaddiqim* who are buried there, and also because of its traditional proximity to “the gate of paradise.” These teachings are entirely in keeping with the spirit of R. Dov Baer’s other essays, and indeed with those of the whole Habad school, for whom *mesirut nefesh* and *bitul* are primary motifs.⁸⁴ But Piekarz notes that R. Simha Bunem of Przysucha lacked “that (verbal) drunkenness of annihilating reality [*bitul ha-mesiut*] and divestment of the corporeal [*hitpashtut ha-gashmiut*],” which were characteristic of earlier Hasidic leaders, and Levinger concludes that *bitul* was foreign to the ideology of Kotzk.⁸⁵

R. Mordecai Joseph’s terse commentary on Leviticus 26:1 takes on special significance in this context:

“You shall not have a work of figured stone in your land, to prostrate upon it.” Figured [i.e., imagined] which is to say that a person would abandon his *da’at* and intellect and give up his life to God on every occasion, which is prohibited. As it has been written, “Even though [this form of service] was beloved to me in the time of the patriarchs.” A person does not need to give up his life [i.e. be martyred] except for three things, and only in the Temple [*miqdash*] is he permitted to abandon his *da’at* before God.⁸⁶

R. Mordecai Joseph agrees with R. Dov Baer that prostration is a ritual expression of *mesirut nefesh* (giving up one’s life to God) and that this is related to the abandonment or transcendence of intellect (*da’at*), but his evaluation of these actions is quite different. Aside from the question of martyrdom to which it relates, it is important to note that R. Mordecai Joseph considers prostration itself to be suspect “outside of the Temple” because of its ecstatic implications. Along similar lines, it is worth noting that R. Menahem Mendl of Kotzk bluntly rejected the custom of visiting the graves of *ṣaddiqim*, including that of his own teacher. On the first anniversary of R. Simha Bunem of Przysucha’s death, R. Menahem Mendl is said to have encountered R. Isaac of Worke at the latter’s grave, and to have told him, “Isaac, I have not come for the *hillula*. I am not a grave-Jew (*ich bin nisht kein kevaros yud*). It is only you I have come to see.”⁸⁷

84. For an excellent overview, see Naftali Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Also Rachel Elior, “HaBaD: The Contemplative Ascent to God,” in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality: from the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present* (New York: Crossroad, 1987); Roman A. Foxbrunner, *Habad: The Hasidism of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi* (Northvale New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1992) p. 114.

85. Piekarz, *The Hasidic Leadership*, p. 288, my translation; Levinger, “The Teachings of the Kotzker Rebbe,” pp. 422–423. Where the term *bitul* does appear in sayings attributed to R. Menahem Mendl, it usually signifies obedience to the commandments rather than mystical self-abnegation.

86. *MH I, Behar*, 43b (p. 135). Also *MH I, Ki Tissa*, 29b (p. 92). The phrase “abandon his *da’at* before God” probably alludes to the discussion of zealotry in *Berakhot* 19b-20a, and to the proof text cited there from Proverbs 21, “There is no wisdom [*hokhmah*], nor understanding [*tevnah*], nor stratagem [*esah*] before the Lord.” R. Mordecai Joseph here reads “stratagem” as a synonym for *da’at* in the sephirotic progression. The identity of the two terms is stated more or less explicitly in *Liquetei MH I*, 21a (pp. 263–264).

87. *Emet Ve-Emunah*, p. 25. Another version of this story has R. Menahem Mendl tell R. Isaac,

R. Mordecai Joseph does not relate specifically to the custom of prostration on graves, but he does caution more generally against “falling upon one’s face” in prayer and supplication.⁸⁸ Biblical texts depict both Moses and Aaron falling upon their faces in prayer, but R. Mordecai Joseph warns that this was only permitted them because “they were certain that by this means God would answer their prayers.” Prostration during prayer is a ritual enactment of self-extinction, according to R. Mordecai Joseph, and this is usually in opposition to God’s will, since “the life of an Israelite is exceedingly precious to God.” Again, this stands in contrast to the approach of R. Shneur Zalman, for whom Roman A. Foxbrunner asserts that “martyrdom actively desired but not actively pursued,” was an axiological priority.⁸⁹ Nor was R. Shneur Zalman alone. R. Mordecai Joseph’s contemporary, R. Shelomo of Radomsk (1803–1866), cites “falling upon the face” as “the essence of the service of every *ṣaddiq* of the generation, to be in a state of self-sacrifice [*mesirut nefesh*] for the community of Israel.”⁹⁰ In Izbica by contrast, extreme *mesirut nefesh* is rejected as a religious model except in those few cases where it can be clearly shown to be in accordance with God’s will. The contemplation of martyrdom during prayer, which plays such an important role elsewhere in the Hasidic world, is strikingly absent from Izbica-Radzin, where *hitpashut* rather than *bitul* is promoted as the profoundly wished consummation of religious life.⁹¹

Like anger, to which it is related, martyrdom in the wrong context is portrayed as nothing short of idolatry in *Mei ha-Shiloah*:

“*You shall not erect a stone pillar*” (Deuteronomy 16:22). This means that a person should not be stubborn about anything, even the service [*‘abodah*] of God. As Rashi comments, “even though it was beloved by me in the days of the patriarchs.”⁹² The patriarchs were strong and used to give up their lives even for a small thing. This is because God’s kingship was not yet manifest in the world, and so this act was necessary. But now it is forbidden to give up one’s life except for three well-known exceptions. This verse also alludes to the fact that no person should be stubborn towards another, forcing him to accept his opinion [*da‘at o*], even though he believes that justice is on his side.⁹³

This teaching is repeated several times in *Mei ha-Shiloah* with only slight variations. Ritual work—of which martyrdom is only an extreme example—takes place in a world in which God’s kingship has not yet been made wholly manifest. R.

“You know me, that I am not one to travel about in order to cry upon the graves [of *ṣadiqim*], but I have come to see you . . .” (Ibid., p. 121).

88. *MH* II, *Behar*, 27a (p. 87).

89. Foxbrunner, *Habad*, p. 114.

90. R. Shelomoh of Radomsk, *Tiferet Shelomoh* vol. 1, *Qorah* (Jerusalem: 1992 [1869]), p. 274, or 95a in the 1973 Jerusalem edition. It is worth noting that R. Shelomoh was counted among the opponents of R. Menahem Mendl of Kotzk. See Piekarz, *The Hasidic Leadership*, pp. 264–280.

91. On the contemplation of martyrdom as a spiritual exercise, see Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 136–150.

92. See *Sifre* to Deuteronomy 18:22 and *Hilkhot ‘abodah zarah* 6:6 of Maimonides.

93. *MH* I, *Shofetim*, 61a (p. 186).

Mordecai Joseph's innovation is to insist that martyrdom becomes less necessary (and therefore less permissible) to the extent that God's glory has already been revealed in the world. Once the Torah has been given, martyrdom is circumscribed to the "three well-known exceptions" that are clearly enumerated in Jewish law.

The well-known exceptions to which R. Mordecai Joseph alludes involve any circumstance in which a Jew is forced on pain of death to commit murder, idolatry, or forbidden sexual relations. In each of these three cases, the Talmudic dictum "let him be killed rather than transgress" is applied. The sole dilemma to which R. Mordecai Joseph's teaching pertains is therefore the question of voluntary martyrdom as an act of special piety under other circumstances. Maimonides ruled famously that voluntary martyrdom is really a form of prohibited self-murder.⁹⁴ The vast majority of Ashkenazi authorities (and some important Sephardic authorities) disputed this view, and it is striking that R. Mordecai Joseph makes no apparent allowance for their opinion.⁹⁵ He does not cite Maimonides by name, but he does state clearly that martyrdom outside of the "three well-known exceptions" is a result of spiritual stubbornness, or of the inability to recognize God's progressive expansion of glory in the created world.⁹⁶ Martyrdom was appropriate to earlier generations much in the same way that strong *ʿabodah* is appropriate to an individual at the beginning of his spiritual path, but it is a type of service which must ultimately be transcended lest God's expanding plan for humanity suffer.

Like all other values in *Mei ha-Shiloah*, martyrdom is presented as one element in a binary yet asymmetrical balance, in this case between sanctification [*qedushah*] and glory [*kabod*], which are related in ritual cosmology to the categories of contraction and expansion respectively:

Even when a person gives up his life for the sanctification of God's name [*qiddush hashem*], which seems to the eye as if nothing could be clearer as a fulfillment of God's will, still in truth he requires clarification whether heaven's glory [*kabod shamayim*] will derive from this act. David said, "My soul is in my hand always, and your Torah I have not forgotten" (Psalms 119: 109). "My soul is in my hand always," means that I am always ready to give my life for *qiddush hashem*. But "your Torah I have not forgotten" means that my desire for life is also heaven's glory, because through my life the glory of Torah expands [*mitpashet*] and the glory of heaven is magnified.⁹⁷

Sanctification and glory are mediated by *yishub ha-da'at* or "moderation" (*met-*

94. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot yesode ha-torah* 5:1.

95. Because he describes Maimonides' argument as simply "the standard theological position," Faierstein ("Personal Redemption in Hasidism," p. 220) probably underestimates the novelty of R. Mordecai Joseph's appropriation. See H. Soloveitchik, "Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example," *AJS Review*, XII (1987) pp. 205–221; Yiṣḥaq Twersky, "*Qiddush ha-shem vi-qiddush ha-hayyim*," In Isaiah M. Gafni and Aviezer Ravitsky, eds., *Sanctity of Life and Martyrdom: Studies in Memory of Amir Yekutiel* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 1992), pp. 167–190.

96. Also see *Liqutei MH* II, 49a (p. 157) on Psalms 72. This set of associations is even more explicit in *Tiferet Yosef, Bereshit* 24a (p. 69) and *Hagigah* 91a (pp. 263–264).

97. *Liqutei MH* I, 21a (pp. 263–264). However, for a rare example in which *Mei ha-Shiloah* deploys *kabod shamayim* in the context of self-affliction, see *Liqutei MH* II, 49a (p. 188).

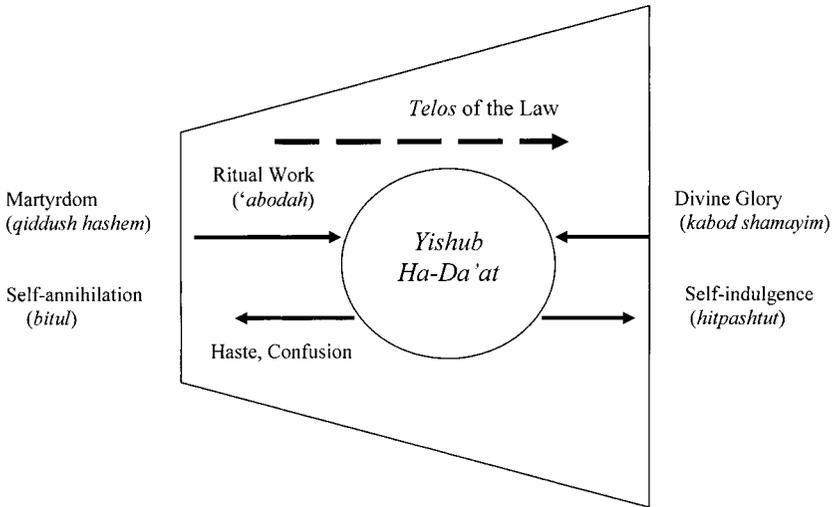


Figure 3.

inut), whereas martyrdom is often related to “haste” or *mehirut* [see Figure 3]. Of course, haste is *also* sometimes God’s will, as in the earlier generations when martyrdom was encouraged, but R. Mordecai Joseph is adamant that *metinut* and *yeshuv ha-da’at* are the rule for contemporary *’abodah*.⁹⁸

These teachings are all the more striking because they constitute a reversal of widespread Hasidic terminology, in which *kabod shamayim* is associated with submission and annihilation (*bitul*) before the will of God. R. Shelomoh of Radomsk’s *Tiferet Shelomo* provides a good example of the more common Hasidic view, in which “heaven’s glory” is dependent on radical submission and self-sacrifice (*mesirut nefesh*):

There are *ṣaddiqim* who are called “zealous for God” because they spend all their days in *mesirut nefesh* for the sake of God’s glory [*kabod*], may His name be magnified and sanctified, and that is why they are zealous with respect to the wicked who violate God’s will. Thus it is written with regard to Pinhas (Numbers 25:11), that “he exercised my zealotry among them,” and this is also true of Isaac our father These two *ṣaddiqim* despised the life of this world because of the pain of the *shekhinah*’s exile . . . and this is also true with regard to Elijah who asked [God] to end his life . . . [saying], “I have been zealous for the Lord of hosts.”⁹⁹

98. *Liqutei MH II*, (p.177–178). For limitations to the principle of *yishuv ha-da’at*, see *MH I Qedoshim*, 38a (pp. 117–118), *Liqutei MH I*, 3a (pp. 212–213), *MH II Re’eh* (p. 116), and *Liqutei MH II*, 50b-51a (p. 162–163).

99. *Tiferet Shelomoh*, Vol. I, *Miqes*, 37a (p. 107). This is a major theme in R. Shelomoh’s writing, although he notes frequently that Jewish law does not mandate such self-sacrifice. See for instance *Pin ḥas*, 103b (p. 299). R. Dov Baer of Lubavitch also describes Elijah as a positive example of *mesirut*

Zealousness, anger toward the wicked, and *mesirut nefesh* unto death constitute a positive and mutually reinforcing set of values in this passage, whose validity is never questioned. Yet, an analogous teaching in *Mei ha-Shiloah* reads like a direct rebuttal of these claims:

“Do not sacrifice to the Lord an ox or a sheep in which there is a blemish.”
This verse warns against becoming so angry at those who violate God’s will that you despise [or seek to bring an end to] life, as we find with Elijah . . . and also with Jonah, who despised his life . . . ¹⁰⁰

The will to death or to martyrdom, which masquerades as an act of religious faith par excellence, can sometimes derive from a “blemished” view of the world, according to R. Mordecai Joseph. Our haste to give up everything to God can express a paradoxical and implicit denial that everything belongs to God already, in the precise technical sense that “the earth is the Lord’s.”

These issues go to the very heart of what it means to be a Jew according to R. Mordecai Joseph, and set him systematically at odds with other important Hasidic movements. R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, for instance, argued in his *Tanya* that every Jew inherits from the Patriarchs a hidden propensity for martyrdom that goes beyond human understanding:

“So brutish am I, and ignorant: I am as a beast before Thee; yet I am continually with Thee, . . . [Psalms 73:22]” meaning that “Because I am brutish and as a beast, I am continually with Thee.” Therefore even the most worthless of worthless and the transgressors of the Israelites, in the majority of cases sacrifice their lives for the sanctity of God’s Name and suffer harsh torture rather than deny the one God, although they be boors and illiterate and ignorant of God’s greatness . . . Rather [do they suffer martyrdom] without any knowledge and reflection, but as if it were absolutely impossible to renounce the One God.¹⁰¹

This propensity is literally “above *da’at*”; the soul of an Israelite is “like the flame of the candle whose nature it is always to scintillate upwards,” evoking a strong connotation of ecstatic compulsion, or like the light of the sun within the orb of the sun itself, signifying *bitul*.¹⁰²

In *Mei ha-Shiloah*, by contrast, we find that the characteristic capacity rooted in every Israelite soul is precisely *yishub ha-da’at*, or the measured response to specific spiritual needs. In a biblical passage that requires a person who has been stricken with leprosy to be brought before a priest, R. Mordecai Joseph reads “priest” as a symbol for the *yishub ha-da’at* present in every Jew:

nefesh in *Ma’amarei ’admor ha-em sa’i, Derushei Hatunah* (Brooklyn, Kehot Publication Society, 1988) pp. 112–114.

100. *MH II, Shofetim*, 36b-37a (p. 118).

101. Translation from *Liqutei amarim tanya* (23a), pp. 76–77.

102. See for instance *Liqutei amarim tanya* 24a (pp.77–78), 78a (pp. 293–294).

Martyrdom, Emotion and the Work of Ritual

*He will be brought to the priest . . . [This] alludes to fear, as it is written [Malachi 2:5], "I will put my fear upon them and they will fear me." This means that he [the priest] has yishub ha-da'at in every thing small or great [to know] if its is God's will. This point [nequdah] is found in each and every Israelite, but only sometimes, when they are engaged in 'abodah, in some matter relating to a commandment . . . which is when they can be called by the name "priest."*¹⁰³

In the continuation of this passage we are told that a person "must adopt the quality of the 'priest,' which is to say 'abodah and yishub ha-da'at, and contract himself according to his need as he begins to heal." Other writers are more likely to invoke the priest as a model of zealotness and haste, in which the whole concept of yishub hada'at seems out of place.¹⁰⁴

Unlike the flame in R. Shneur Zalman's metaphor, furthermore, R. Mordecai Joseph emphasizes that a candle retains its own individual light, just as acts of the *ṣaddiq* retain their individual significance before God. R. Jacob of Radzin taught in his father's name that *ṣaddiqim* are likened to candles in the presence of a torch for just this reason:

*Why are the ṣaddiqim before the shekhinah likened to candles before a torch [Talmud Pesahim 8a]? I heard from my honored father and teacher . . . that they did not say "a candle before the sun" because . . . its light is nullified in the light of the sun, which is the source of light. But a candle before a torch is not nullified . . . and its separate light can be seen Even when the clarity of God's light is revealed and it becomes known that choice and 'abodah have no reality, the acts of the ṣaddiqim will still continue to shed light because of all that they wearied themselves and suffered in the time of [God's] hiding, so that their 'abodah would be called by their name.*¹⁰⁵

Rather than a hidden propensity for martyrdom, R. Mordecai Joseph insists that Israelites inherit *yishub ha-da'at* and the power to speak God's praises on their own accord. The goal of religious life is not annihilation but *hitpashhut*, or "seeing God face to face," as mature spiritual beings who do not look away.¹⁰⁶

From what we know of his contemporaries, R. Mordecai Joseph's reticence regarding both *bitul* and martyrdom may also have had more immediate political ramifications. Starting in 1846, Hasidic leaders in Poland began to mobilize opposition to an edict that compelled Jews to abandon their separate mode of dress.

103. *MH I, Me ṣora*, 36b (p. 113), emphasis added. Also see *MH II, Shoṭim*, 37a (p. 119).

104. See for instance R. Menahem Mendl of Lubavitch, *Derekh miṣvotekha* (New York: Kehot, 1991 [1911]), p. 112: "This matter of "haste" (*mehirut*) alludes to the priesthood . . . through whom all the revelation and drawing down of lights from above to below occurs."

105. This teaching is cited in several passages in *Bet Ya'aqob*, including *Noah*, 26b-27a, 34a (sections 3 and 19), and is included by Goldhaber and Spiegelman in their edition of *Liqutei MH II*, p. 265. Also see *MH I, Ve-zot ha-berakhah*, 66a-66b (p. 202) and *MH II, Ve-zot ha-berakhah*, 41a (p. 132), where a similar theme is at stake. For earlier use of the candle metaphor, see Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Maggid devarav le-Y'aqob*, p. 97 (par. 61).

106. *MH I Ha'azinu*, 65b (p. 200).

R. Isaac Meir of Warsaw and R. Isaac of Warka—both associates of R. Menahem Mendl of Kotzk—attempted to intercede with the government against the decree, but when all else failed, some leaders resorted to more extreme measures. R. Menahem Mendl was reportedly “agitated to the very depths of his being” when he was told that R. Abraham of Ciechanow and R. Isaac Meir of Warsaw had ruled that Jews were obligated to give their lives in opposition to the new government policy.¹⁰⁷ His reaction was characteristic:

Our master took hold of the end of his beard and cried a great cry. “Thus they have decided the law! They looked into that *sugya* [Talmudic discussion], and found this ruling? I have also perused a book on occasion, and I also know the small letters. I have never found this ruling, that a person should rather allow himself to be killed [in a case like this] than to transgress. How they are cheapening the blood of Israel . . . !¹⁰⁸

There is no written record of R. Mordecai Joseph’s involvement in the case, but it is clear from his general approach to martyrdom that he would have sided in this matter with R. Menahem Mendl. It was R. Menahem Mendl, after all, who declared that “A moderate person [*matun*] is someone who acts with *yishub ha-da’at*, and does not hasten to do anything.”¹⁰⁹ R. Mordecai Joseph echoes this sentiment in the specific context of martyrdom when he teaches that “the early generations possessed a quality of haste which is very precious in its appropriate time,” but that contemporary Jews should exercise moderation, because that is what *yishub ha-da’at* demands.¹¹⁰

There is only one exception to this rule, but it is an important one because it helps to situate martyrdom more broadly within R. Mordecai Joseph’s ritual cosmology. According to R. Mordecai Joseph, only a perfected soul is obliged—and therefore only a perfected soul is permitted—to choose martyrdom in contexts beyond those specifically required by Jewish law. This is the esoteric meaning of a biblical text in Deuteronomy that requires a person to “send away the mother bird” when taking eggs from a nest:

“Mother” refers to the general principles of the Torah A person should act in accord with general principles of Torah in everything, and these principles determine that a person is not obliged to give up his life except for three well-known cases [i.e. idolatry, incest and murder]. But the commandment of sending forth the mother bird teaches that in a case where a person knows that a certain commandment is linked to the root of his soul, in that case he is obliged to give his life even for a minor commandment. There is an allusion to this

107. Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment*, pp. 476–477.

108. *Emet ve-Emunah*, p. 39. See also p. 26.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 12. Also recorded by R. Samuel of Sochatchow in *Shem mi-Shemuel, Debarim*, 28b. For a lengthy discussion of moderation and *yishub ha-da’at* as Hasidic virtues, see the 1917 essay in *Shem mi-Shemuel, Vayigash*, pp. 295a–298a.

110. *MH I, Mishpatim*, 27a (pp. 85–86). Other passages on martyrdom or *mesirut nefesh* include *MH I, ‘Emor*, 41a (p.127); *Va-‘Et hanan*, 57b–58a (p. 177); *Shoftim*, 61a (p.186); *Ki Te se*, 62b–63a (p.189); *Liqutei MH I*, 21a (p. 263); *Liqutei MH II*, 55a–55b (pp. 177–178).

Martyrdom, Emotion and the Work of Ritual

teaching in the sending away of the mother bird, which means that a person should “send away” the general principles of Torah and pay no heed to them, but rather give up his life.¹¹¹

“General words of Torah” are associated with the “mother” in *Mei ha-Shiloh* because they are formulated with a mother’s assumed concern to protect her child from stumbling, whereas the “father” represents a mode of service based on lived experience and painful trial. Elsewhere, these two modes of service are identified with talmudic and biblical Judaism respectively.¹¹²

Even in this context, however, it is important to note that the expanded application of martyrdom beyond Jewish legal requirements applies only to the elite who are capable of recognizing the specific commandment in which their soul is rooted.¹¹³ This is far from the generalized ethos of martyrdom that characterizes R. Shelomo of Radomsk. What is more, this extralegal *mesirut nefesh* is presented not as a form of annihilation on God’s behalf, but as a special *leniency* granted by God to the righteous, so that they will not have to give up the spiritual benefit for which they have worked. In a characteristic reversal, R. Mordecai Joseph describes the period before clarification (i.e., when permission for martyrdom is limited) as the period when “a person needs to be willing to give his life up to God *even in the world to come* (i.e., the afterlife).”¹¹⁴ A person shows true willingness to sacrifice for God, that is, by *renouncing* martyrdom, and the spiritual merit with which martyrdom is generally associated. Only later, when clarification has been achieved, can the will to martyrdom in specific extralegal contexts be indulged. The powerful rhythm of *šimšum*. and *hitpashtut* that informs R. Mordecai Joseph’s whole ritual model is thus transposed to the afterlife, from which perspective the withholding of martyrdom in *this* life is a paradoxical form of *šimšum*. on God’s behalf.¹¹⁵

We have now come full circle. We saw at the beginning of this section that Israelites are not permitted to prostrate themselves upon a “work of figured stone.” R. Mordecai Joseph takes this to mean that a person is not permitted to abandon *da`at* and be martyred for every small matter. Only “in the Temple” can *da`at* be abandoned, and this refers to a state of human clarification or *berur* attained through *abodah*. In the meantime, prostration is a kind of ritualized “little death,” a dangerous practice which can bring real extinction in its wake. This is the context in which R. Mordecai Joseph cites an enigmatic Talmudic ruling that “an important person is not permitted to fall upon his face [in prayer] unless he knows that he will be answered like Joshua bin Nun.”¹¹⁶ The Talmudic context of this passage seems to imply that the warning against prostration is meant to protect im-

111. *MH I, Ki Te še*, 62b-63a (p. 189).

112. See *MH I, Naso*, 47b (p. 145). Also *Liquetei MH II*, 56b-57a (p.182), and *Mishnah Berakhot* 9: 7.

113. See Fairstein, “Personal Redemption in Hasidism,” pp. 219–220.

114. *MH I, Va-Ei hanan*, 55a (p. 177).

115. Piekarz, *Between Ideology and Reality*, p. 130, describes a similar transposition of martyrdom on the part of an earlier writer, R. Neta of Chelm (d. 1812).

116. *MH II, Behar*, 27a (p. 87). The Talmudic quote is from *Megillah* 22b.

portant personages from ridicule in case their fervent prayers are left unanswered. But commentators have puzzled over the Talmud's specific choice of Joshua as a model for this teaching.

For R. Mordecai Joseph, there is no dilemma. As Moses' successor, and as the person who brought the children of Israel finally to the Promised Land, Joshua represents a quality that no other biblical actor can adequately convey, which is the transcendence of anger and *ʿabodah*. According to the biblical text, Joshua parted the waters of the River Jordan so that the Israelites could enter the land, just as Moses parted the sea for them when they left Egypt. These two crossings mark the beginning and end of ritual work. But unlike Moses, Joshua commands the priests who are carrying the Ark of the Covenant (i.e., the Torah) to stand in the midst of the dry riverbed until the rest of the Israelites have crossed. For R. Mordecai Joseph, this is a sign that some form of *ʿabodah* (and hence anger) remains even at the moment of crossing:

The river Jordan in the world corresponds to the liver in a human being, which alludes to anger . . . and the Red Sea in the world corresponds to the spine in a human being, which alludes to lust.¹¹⁷ Our teacher Moses, peace be on him, split the Red Sea, which means that Israel would always be able to rise above and conquer any lust, and cross upon the dry land. Joshua split the Jordan, which corresponds to anger, so that all of Israel would be able to conquer their anger. But the priests "passed through all the waters of the Jordan" [Joshua 4:18], which is to say that the priest serves God [i.e., conducts *ʿabodah*], and his anger is "the outrage of scholars" [*ruṭaḥah de-rabbanan*] which is good on all sides.¹¹⁸

Moses gave the children of Israel *ʿabodah* and anger as an antidote to lust, but Joshua completed the task of clarification by taking them into the Promised Land, beyond anger's reach. When the Israelites finally cross the Jordan, according to R. Mordecai Joseph, it is because they have come to know through the power of their own *ʿabodah* that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." The only surprise is that they bring their "priests" (i.e., their power of *ʿabodah* and "outrage of scholars") along with them. Why not leave *ʿabodah* and anger decisively behind?

It is only through "priests" that the children of Israel are able to attain the "land of Israel," in which ritual work is attained and transcended. Yet ritual attainments are rarely once and for all. R. Mordecai Joseph moves tirelessly in his teachings between the final *telos* of human *hitpashlut* and the mundane world of *šimšum* and *yishub ha-dáat* in which *ʿabodah* takes place. Thus, although there are *typologies* of freedom from the law in *Mei ha-Shiloah* (the king, the scholar, etc.), there are no social *categories* of persons who are consistently free from the law in practice. Like Moses, some servants of God are left standing on the far side of the Jordan, able to glimpse but not to enter the Promised Land. Others do cross that

117. Also see *Liqutei MH* II, 43a (pp. 138–139).

118. *Liqutei MH* I, 1b (p. 208). For a close parallel text, see R. Gershon Hanoch's *Sod yesharim* (New York, 1971) *Debarim*, pp. 280–281. On the relationship between scholarship and outrage, see b. *Taʿanit* 4a, "Raba further said 'If a young scholar becomes outraged it is because the Torah enflames him . . .'"

river, but only in the company of priests, who represent a quality of clarified *‘abodah* and anger—the outrage of scholars—that is necessary for them even here.¹¹⁹ These typologies may be thought of as successive moments in a fluid ritual-hermeneutic field, so that every person must sometimes strive for Moses’ conquest of lust and sometimes for Joshua’s conquest of anger, depending on their level of clarification and the needs of the hour. It is, as I have said, fundamentally misleading to transpose this teaching into a set of static doctrines about *the* meaning of anger or *‘abodah* in *Mei ha-Shiloah*.

Even an individual who has already attained some degree of clarification in a given context must continue coming to terms with *‘abodah* in practice, according to R. Mordecai Joseph, if only to avoid leading the rest of the people who still require that *‘abodah* astray.¹²⁰ The same practice takes on different meanings depending on the human context in which it is performed. In other words, all things have their place in R. Mordecai Joseph’s world, even martyrdom and anger, but these latter are strongly circumscribed by the cosmology of *hitpashtut* and by the deep knowledge that God seeks to encounter human beings primarily not through prostration or self-extinction (*bitul*), but “face to face,” in the clarified ritual space where divine glory and human desire meet.

119. The distinction between “outrage of scholars” (either *rutahah* or *rugza de-rabanen*) and “anger which descends to Sheol” is “exceedingly thin,” according to R. Mordecai Joseph, therefore only God can testify which is manifest. The sin of Qorah in Numbers 16 was related precisely to his inability to make this distinction because of his insufficient regard for divine glory (*kabod shamayim*). Also see *MH I, Ve-zot ha-berakhah*, 66a (p. 201), and *Liqutei MH II*, 43a (pp. 138–139).

120. “This is the difference,” teaches R. Mordecai Joseph, “between ‘fear of God (*Elohim*)’ and ‘fear of the Lord (*YHWH*).’ ‘Fear of God’ means that a person contracts himself in some way because of the lack (*hisaron*) that he has in his heart, which has not yet been purified. ‘Fear of the Lord’ teaches that a person must contract himself for the sake of the community of Israel, even though he has no lack in this matter.” *MH I, Mishpatim*, 27a–27b (p. 86). See also *MH I Vayera*, 9a (p. 29).