

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Scholarly inquiry on the Hasidic ideology and personal religiosity of Rabbi Nahman ben Simhah of Bratslav (1771–1810) remains essential for understanding the nature of Jewish mysticism as it developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Eastern Europe. Although Martin Buber's studies in the first part of the twentieth century and Arthur Green's intellectual biography of R. Nahman, *Tormented Master*, introduced this unique religious personality to the English-speaking scholarly world, little else has appeared since and many of the older German and Hebrew studies remain untranslated and, in some cases, unavailable. Although other scholarly articles have appeared in various journals throughout the years, both in Hebrew and in English, I felt it would be of use to the larger academic community to produce a volume dedicated to some interesting new approaches to the study of Bratslav Hasidism and to include translations of some of the classic literature into English, enabling the academic and religious communities to more fully comprehend this seminal figure's contribution to Hasidic thought.

This volume is divided into two parts. Part 1 includes new studies either on the Bratslav tradition or on Rabbi Nahman. Part 2 includes translations of three classic studies on Bratslav Hasidism, published in German, Yiddish, and Hebrew.

Most of the new studies in part 1 take a fresh approach to the study of Hasidism in general and Bratslav Hasidism in particular. Aubrey Glazer's translation and annotation of *Shiur Yedidut*, a poem written by an anonymous Bratslav Hasid and printed at the beginning of many editions of Bratslav literature, serves as the antechamber to this collection. The poem resonates with many of the themes dealt with in the writings of R. Nahman and his disciples. The first chapter maps out *Likkutei MoHaRa'n's* diverse and complex hermeneutical theory by suggesting various ways in which the ambiguous term *behinot* is used by R. Nahman to create a "frame of meaning" into which his ideas are developed. Utilizing theories from the general area of hermeneutical theory, this chapter serves as an introduction to the creative and complex world of R. Nahman's discourse. David Roskies presents a provocative thesis that the modern Yiddish

story as it developed in Jewish Enlightenment literature draws heavily from R. Nahman's "Tales" (*Sippurei Ma'asiot*). Roskies argues that the Yiddish writers of the nineteenth century used the "Tales" as a model for their own creative contribution to Jewish literature. Elliot Wolfson, developing his many earlier studies on gender in medieval Kabbala, takes a new look at the issue of gender as it unfolds in R. Nahman's understanding of circumcision. Nathaniel Deutsch offers a new approach to the Hasidic doctrine of the zaddik as androgyny as developed in *Likkutei MoHaRan*, viewing it from the context of contemporary gender theory and literary criticism. Yakov Travis revisits R. Nahman's move from Bratslav to Uman, a central theme in Bratslav Hasidism. Taking issue with Mendel Piekarz's earlier study on this topic, arguing that R. Nahman's move largely had to do with his infatuation with the *Maskilim* and their heretical ideas, Travis rereads some of the Bratslav sources on this issue, without necessarily adopting their conclusions. Martin Kavka offers a critical appraisal of Marc-Alain Ouaknin's recent book entitled *The Burnt Book* that discusses literary theory and Talmud based on his interpretation of the legend of R. Nahman's "Burnt Book" (*Sefer Ha-Nisraf*), a treatise that R. Nahman commanded his disciples to destroy before it could be made public. Kavka analyzes the final chapter of Ouaknin's book that deals specifically with this legend and its implications. Ouaknin then offers a response to Kavka's criticism.

Part 2 is a collection of three seminal articles on Bratslav written in German, Hebrew, and Yiddish. One of these older studies deals with issues that are revisited in part 1. Zeitlin's chapter on R. Nahman as Messiah deals with some of the same material Wolfson and Deutsch analyze in their chapters. Samuel Abba Horodetzky's comparative analysis of Schleiermacher and R. Nahman is important, albeit somewhat dated, in that it attempts to see common threads in the spiritual lives of two important thinkers in Christianity and Judaism in the nineteenth century. Finally, Joseph Weiss's chapter constructs a typology of Hasidism, placing Bratslav on the side of "faith," as opposed to the more intellectual trends of Hasidism, such as Habad.

The preparation of this volume was a long time coming. In some sense it began the instant I left the Bratslav community in Jerusalem many years ago, although many more years passed before the idea began to take form in words. Scholarship is usually about criticism—criticism for the sake of clarity—and in that sense this volume is no different. However, for those of us who have lived with R. Nahman's words for some time, criticism does not adequately express what appears on these pages. It is also a testament to his creativity, some say his genius, while acknowledging the dangerous edge, the narrow bridge one must walk in order to remain on the margins of his larger circle of admirers. Many voices hover over these words, many of whom I'd like to thank, some of whom may feel uncomfortable being mentioned. Thanks to Franci Levine-Grater for her editing

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