
INTRODUCTION

Time plays an essential role in Jewish practices and beliefs. Many of the 613 commandments prescribed by *Halakhab* (Jewish law) are bound by time and operate, therefore, according to a precise framework. The rhythm of the observant Jew's life is set by time-bound rituals: from prayers that punctuate the day, to the weekly Sabbath, monthly celebrations of the new moon, and annual festivals. The cycle of Jewish calendar points also toward different temporal realms: the mythical past of the Jewish people and humankind on the one hand, and the anticipated future of redemption, on the other. The centrality of the belief in the telos of history was sealed when Moses Maimonides's thirteen principles of faith, which include the belief in the coming of the Messiah, were widely embraced by Jewish communities around the world (despite initial resistance and controversies).¹

Given the centrality of time in Judaism, it is not surprising that the emergence of Hasidism in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century, and the rejuvenation of Jewish religious life that it led to, left its mark on the Jewish experience and conceptualization of time. Yet initially, only two of the movement's characteristic features caught the interest of scholars. The first was the practice of delaying prayers beyond the halakhically prescribed times, which earned Hasidim accusations of heresy on the part of their opponents, *mitnagedim*. These charges waned away with time, as Hasidism grew into a massive movement, and merged with the *mitnagedim* into the emergent Jewish orthodoxy, in which their ideological differences became of secondary importance.² The second was the role of messianism in the Hasidic movement's early years. Eventually, the pioneering scholar of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem, set the course of the discussion when he declared that Hasidism had

neutralized the messianic message of Lurianic kabbalah in response to Sabbateanism's heretical messianism.³ Scholem's view steered scholars away from the historiosophical dimension of early Hasidic sources on the assumption that if the Hasidic masters were not oriented toward the messianic future, but strove instead to enable their followers to cleave to God in the here-and-now, then the appropriate approach was to investigate Hasidism as an atemporal doctrine.

Still, the idea of the Hasidic neutralization of messianism has not gone unquestioned. Scholars, most notably, Moshe Idel showed various ways of considering messianism in early Hasidism beyond the idea of neutralization.⁴ What really brought the concepts of messianism and messianic times back to the center of the discussion of Hasidic ideas and practice, however, was the eruption of Habad messianism in the late-twentieth century.

From the Preacher of Liozna to the "Messiah of Brooklyn"⁵

Habad emerged at the end of the eighteenth century in the present-day Belarussian-Russian borderland as a local and ideological variety of Hasidism. Hasidism began not much earlier, in the first half of the eighteenth century, in Podolia, a region located farther south, in what is now Western Ukraine and by then was the southeastern corner of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Hasidim trace the roots back to the figure of Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (also known as the Besht, who died around 1760) and the circle of his disciples and fellow mystics in Mezhbizh. Although Ba'al Shem Tov did not intend to initiate a new religious movement, and his circle may not have been something extraordinary in the Podolian landscape, his late followers, who carried on his teachings and acquired disciples of their own, retroactively projected on him the image of a religious innovator and visionary founder of Hasidism.⁶

The founder of Habad, Shneur Zalman, was born in 1745 in the town of Liozna, which at that time was still part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but soon, following the partitions of Poland, was incorporated into tsarist Russia.⁷ His life overlapped with Ba'al Shem Tov's, yet, apparently, they never met.⁸ As a young man, Shneur Zalman became a follower of Dov Ber of Mezrich, also known as the Great Maggid (1704–1772), an important student of Ba'al Shem Tov.⁹ Shneur Zalman's time at the Maggid's court, while doubtlessly formative, is very poorly documented and shrouded in Hasidic legend.¹⁰ Certainly, he was among the youngest in the circle of the Maggid's followers,

some of whom acted as Hasidic leaders either after, or even during the Maggid's life. It was these individuals, as well as other Hasidic leaders independent of this circle, who would later transform Hasidism from loosely connected elitist fraternities into a religious movement with its self-conscious identity, key concepts, literary corpus, core institutions, and organizational structure.¹¹ All these aspects of Hasidism would take shape only after the Maggid's death, and Shneur Zalman would play an important role in this process as a teacher, writer, and communal leader at the forefront of the conflict with the opponents of the nascent Hasidism: the *mitnagedim*.

The Maggid's circle was by no means uniform and even its scope is difficult to ascertain.¹² It consisted of around fifteen individuals, including people who left a very deep imprint on Hasidism and whose teachings are widely studied in the present day, such as Levi Yitshak of Berdichev (1740–1809), Elimelekh of Litzhensk (1717–1787), Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl (1730–1797), or Aharon of Karlin (1736–1772), to name just a few. Members of the Maggid's circle differed with regard to their understanding of Hasidic worship, and their relationships were not always ideal. We know, for example, about a conflict between the Maggid and Avraham of Kalisk (1741–1810), which broke out shortly before the former's death and concerned the style of worship of the latter that exposed Hasidim to attacks from the *mitnagedim*.¹³ In many cases, however, they would cultivate their friendships long after the Maggid's death in 1772, and even strengthen them by marital ties. According to Habad traditions, Shneur Zalman was particularly close to the Maggid's son, Avraham "the Angel" (1739–1776), and Levi Yitshak of Berdichev. His two granddaughters, Sarah (d. 1809?) and Devorah Leah (d. 1876), were married into families of prominent *tsadikim*. Sarah married Eliezer Derbaremdiker, a grandson of Levi Yitshak of Berdichev, and Devorah married Ya'akov Yisra'el of Cherkasy, a son of Mordekhai of Chernobyl (1770–1830) and a grandson of Menahem Nahum.¹⁴

According to later Habad traditions, Shneur Zalman's colleagues considered him *primus inter pares* and, following the death of the Maggid, entrusted him with coordinating all the new centers of Hasidism. This image, however, has been debunked as an anachronistic description that projects the structure of a nineteenth-century Hasidic court on the early, decentralized and disorganized circle of the Maggid's disciples and comrades.¹⁵ Shneur Zalman himself did not immediately pursue leadership of any sorts. Instead of engaging in forming his community, he joined the group that gathered around two prominent

Hasidic leaders, Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk (ca. 1730–1788) and Avraham of Kalisk. Following their emigration in 1777 to Ottoman Palestine, Shneur Zalman was appointed their representative in White Russia. The idea of leading Hasidim from the Land of Israel through Shneur Zalman failed, however, as the Hasidim, looking for a more direct and intimate mode of leadership, soon began to travel to *tsadikim* in Volhynia and Lithuania. This trend eventually encouraged Menahem Mendel and Avraham of Kalisk to convince Shneur Zalman to become a Hasidic *tsadik* in his own right, which he reluctantly did, according to Etkes, around the year 1786. Although several members of the local Hasidic elite initially voiced some opposition to Shneur Zalman's leadership, within a few years it became uncontested.¹⁶

Shneur Zalman's ideas concerning a *tsadik's* obligations contrasted with those of other *tsadikim*. His fellow Maggid's disciples—for example, Levi Yitshak of Berdichev or Elimelekh of Lizhensk—considered the *tsadik* responsible for both the material and spiritual well-being of his community. Their primary interest was, therefore, on the *tsadik* and his worship, as the vehicle for the rank-and-file Hasidim's attachment to God. Shneur Zalman, conversely, emphasized the role of the worship of an individual Hasid, and saw himself merely as his followers' guide in spirituality and the leader of a growing network of communities. Unlike his peers, he denied having the capability to perform miracles and substantially limited the possibility for his Hasidim to ask his advice concerning their earthly needs.¹⁷

Despite taking a different path than the leaders of more popular, *tsadik*-centered versions of Hasidism, Shneur Zalman succeeded in expanding the community he inherited from Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk. He proved to be such an inspirational preacher, first as *magid* (preacher) in Liozna, and then as a Hasidic *tsadik*, that he was eventually forced to impose regulations limiting access to his court by issuing the so-called Liozna Ordinances.¹⁸ He was also a brilliant writer; his *Tanya* (1796) is an unprecedented example of a systematic elucidation of Hasidic thought.

In his book on early Habad, Naftali Loewenthal described the Habad's way as "the third dimension of Hasidism,"¹⁹ bridging the gap between the scholarly and/or mystically inclined elites and the simple followers. Shneur Zalman's sermons and, most of all, his *Tanya*, created a language capable of transmitting the Hasidic experience, and thus empowering the rank-and-file Hasidim. Still, to process Shneur Zalman's teachings required a certain level of articulacy in Jewish sources, which suggest that the core members of his following, to whom

his teachings were primarily addressed, were people with a considerable cultural and financial capital.²⁰ Shneur Zalman's sophisticated teachings, his reluctance toward miracle making, and the relatively high level of Torah education among his Hasidim contributed to the common perception of his enterprise as an intellectual one. This, in turn, was reflected in the name *Habad*, an acronym of *Hokhmah, Binah, Da'at* (Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge), which had already come into use during Shneur Zalman's lifetime.²¹

The strategies, employed by Shneur Zalman to make the Habad experience more inclusive will be discussed in detail in chapter 4. While Shneur Zalman's eloquence, erudition, and charisma were surely decisive for the growth of Habad, one other factor should also be mentioned. Before becoming a leader in his own right, Shneur Zalman operated a fund-raising network (*kollel*) in White Russia for the Hasidic settlement in Ottoman Palestine. He used correspondence and emissaries to maintain communication with local communities engaged in the fund-raising, and to keep the monies flowing. After becoming a Hasidic leader, he adapted the already existing network and used the same channels that served to collect funds to disseminate knowledge and to exercise his control. In sum, the structure of the fund-raising network prepared the ground for a relatively decentralized Habad community, where local leaders, who earlier collected donations for the Hasidim in the Land of Israel, would now enforce his ordinances, control the traffic from the peripheries to the *tsadik's* court, offer advice and transmit the *tsadik's* teachings to the local population.²²

While exact numbers are not available, anecdotal evidence testifies to the impressive growth of the Habad community. A document from 1800 of the Russian Senate's Secret Department estimates the number of Shneur Zalman's followers as being as many as 40,000.²³ Other sources proposed still higher-inflated numbers: both a Hasidic *tsadik*, Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1810), and a maskilic writer famous for his virulent anti-Hasidic satires, Yosef Perl (1773–1839), estimated the size of the Habad community at 80,000 people!²⁴ While these estimates are considered to be widely exaggerated, scholars agree that already in the 1790s, festivals when all Hasidim were allowed to visit the *tsadik* could attract anywhere between a thousand and one-and-a-half thousand men.²⁵

Not everyone was equally thrilled by the growing influence of Shneur Zalman. The opponents arose both within and without of the Hasidic community. In 1797, a controversy erupted when Avraham of Kalisk sent Shneur Zalman a letter from Tiberias, in which he criticized his

leadership. In the letter, he denounced Shneur Zalman's attempts to popularize the esoterics through the *Tanya*; a concept he considered dangerous. Instead, the proper way would be to teach Hasidim ethics and instill in them simple faith. The conflict between these two former disciples of the Maggid, which was as much a theological dispute as it was a power struggle, continued with ebbs and flows until 1806. It provoked several other *tsadikim* to become involved on both sides, but, at the end of the day, confirmed Shneur Zalman's status as the leader of a distinctive Habad community.²⁶

A stronger blow came from outside of the Hasidic world. Shneur Zalman eventually became a burning threat to the *mitnagedim*, and following their denunciations, he was twice arrested on trumped-up charges by the tsarist authorities, in 1798 and 1800. In these instances, too, he had the upper hand and was cleared of both charges. This, in turn, was commonly seen as Habad's victory over the *mitnagedim* and a stamp of approval from the authorities, which only helped consolidate the Habad camp and further strengthened Shneur Zalman's position within the Jewish community.²⁷ He spent his final years in the town of Liady (hence his cognomen), delivering regular sermons to his followers, and died in 1813 (1812 according to the Old Style calendar), while fleeing Napoleon's army. His grave in Hadiach (Ukraine) attracts Hasidic pilgrims from all around the world.²⁸

Following Shneur Zalman's death, Habad's center moved to the town of Lyubavichi, from which the movement got the second part of its name: Habad-Lubavitch. Fragmented into several courts led by scions of the Schneersohn family, Habad remained for over a century merely one of many available Jewish Orthodox affiliations. Its influence did not extend far beyond its original territory, with additional enclaves in Ottoman Palestine and the United States. It did, however, engage in the shaping of the social and political reality of Jews in Russia.²⁹ In addition, further Habad books were published, contributing to the strengthening of the Habad presence within the Jewish community. The input of the third Habad leader, Menahem Mendel Schneersohn the Tsemah Tsedek (1789–1866), was of particular importance, both as a publisher and a prolific author in his own right. The Tsemah Tsedek was not only instrumental in the publication of some of the sermons of his grandfather, Shneur Zalman, but also produced a multivolume collection of both mystical sermons (published in forty-two volumes posthumously as *Or ha-Torah* between 1913 and 1987) and halakhic writings (published, also posthumously, as *Tsemah Tsedek*; the first volume came out in 1871, the last in 1999).

Importantly for the topic of this book, the Tsemah Tsedek also authored a philosophical book titled *Sefer ha-hakirah* (as his other writings, this book was also published posthumously, in 1912), in which he raised, among other issues, the question of the nature of time. Using a genre unprecedented in the Habad tradition, the Tsemah Tsedek engaged in *Sefer ha-hakirah* works of medieval Jewish philosophers. *Sefer ha-hakirah* remains somewhat of an oddity in the Habad corpus, as even the author distanced himself from it and stressed that the ad hoc use of philosophical investigation, strange to Habad mystical thinking, was merely a tool in the struggle against the Haskalah. Nonetheless, it is a rare example of the Habad encounter with philosophy, even if in a very limited scope.³⁰

The historical, political, and cultural developments in Eastern Europe did not leave the Hasidic community unaffected, and Habad leaders put the movement at the forefront of the struggle against what they perceived as the threat of secularization. While it may seem a paradox, the Habad leaders showed a great deal of attunement to modern trends in their antimodernization methods. Particularly noteworthy was the use of Habad in iconography and press,³¹ and the establishment of the modern Habad yeshiva *Tomkhe temimim* by the fifth leader, Shalom Dovber Schneersohn (1860–1920).³² Finally, contemporary trends in literature, sciences, and arts began to trickle into Habad.³³ The love/hate relationship of Habad with modernity reached its symbolic climax in the 1920s and 1930s, when the scion of the Schneersohn clan, who would later become the rebbe himself, Menahem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), embarked on academic studies in Berlin and Paris. The impact of his academic training on his later worldview as the leader of Habad, including on his grasp of temporality, remains a desideratum.³⁴

But the radical change for Habad came together with the World War I, the October Revolution, and the establishment of the Soviet Union. Antireligious persecutions in the new Soviet state stifled Habad institutions in Russia and forced the then *tsadik*, Yosef Yitshak Schneersohn (1880–1950), to emigrate. The transplantation of the Habad school from its traditional strongholds in Lithuania-Belarus to an alien Polish environment in the 1920s deeply influenced the self-perception, ideology, and politics of Habad. In the new environment, away from its traditional constituency, Habad had to develop new fund-raising networks and educational institutions, as well as adjust the content and methods of its teachings to engage the new, Polish-Jewish audience.³⁵

The institutional and doctrinal transformation of Habad in the interwar years prepared the ground for the rapid revival of Habad in

the USA after the Holocaust. Under the leadership of the seventh and last rebbe, Menahem Mendel Schneerson, Habad emerged as one of the leading forces within the orthodox Jewish community. Young Habad Hasidic men and women followed their leader's call and went out to the streets looking to convince nonobservant Jews to put on phylacteries or light Sabbath candles. In so doing, these individuals placed themselves at the forefront of Orthodox outreach. Young families of *sheluhim* (emissaries) relocated to often far-flung locations to assist and lead the local religious community. Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the movement succeeded in building an extensive network of Habad houses all over the world, attracting thousands of new followers and forcing other, even non-Hasidic orthodox groups, to adopt some of its outreach strategies. This activity was fuelled by a strong messianic fervor and the belief that every commandment could tip the scales of history and bring the arrival of the Messiah.³⁶ Heated debates concerning the life and works of the rebbe Schneerson, as well as the controversial belief that he is the Messiah, continue to this day, more than two decades after his death.³⁷

Habad and Temporality

The literature of twentieth-century Habad is infused with temporality, with references to the mythologized past of the movement, on the one hand, and to the anticipated messianic future, on the other. Its last two rebbes, Yosef Yitshak and Menahem Mendel Schneerson, are widely credited with inculcating in their followers the belief in the imminent arrival of the Messiah, and thus the imminent end of teleological history. Historical events, such as the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, the Six-Day War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union have been used by Habad followers in an attempt to prove the validity of their concept of history, and by academics to pinpoint landmarks in Habad's acute messianism.³⁸ The passing of Schneerson in 1994 did not extinguish Habad's messianic flame. Rituals centered around the figure of the now-absent rebbe-Messiah, or the Brooklyn building that served as his headquarters, are used to shape a consciousness that defies the apparent lack of any tangible evidence that the final redemption he promised has already materialized. These rituals have enabled believers to rise above history, transcend time, and experience the world as redeemed. Moreover, the active dissemination among Jews and non-Jews throughout the world of Habad's messianic credo has spread this redemptive consciousness beyond the fluid boundaries of the Habad community itself.³⁹

Following Naftali Loewenthal, this book regards Shneur Zalman's teachings not as abstract concepts, but as the means by which he communicated a particular religious experience to his followers.⁴⁰ It was the richness of the ideas he adapted to his community's needs that made Shneur Zalman such a successful Hasidic leader. His teachings convey a multidimensional worldview that cannot be reduced either to a complex of theological ideas or to a set of practical instructions on how to lead an ideal religious or spiritual life. In fact, his vast corpus of teachings imparts the sense of a complete religious experience. This experience is governed by the daily, weekly and yearly cycles of the individual's mundane life, but at the same time, it connects him to the multigenerational congregation of Israel which, although subject to history, aims at transcending it by integration in the supratemporal divine. In focusing on the concept of time, this book explores the mystical and the mundane, the intellectual and the experiential, and finally, the individual and the communal dimensions of Shneur Zalman's teachings.

A Brief History of Jewish Time

Despite the fact that the concept of time has been a crucial factor for the understanding of Jewish religious experience, it has rarely been examined in research on kabbalah and Hasidism. Moshe Idel has discussed possible reasons for this state of affairs, including the long shadow of Mircea Eliade's categorization of Jewish time as linear and historical, notwithstanding the fact that it hardly fits the diversity of temporary experience in the various forms of Judaism that have developed over the course of history.⁴¹

The literature of the Sages, for example, is much less interested in linear history than it is with the cycles of days, weeks, years, *shemitah*, and jubilee, which, according to Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, serve as a springboard toward primordial, mythical time. The experience of Sabbath or festivals is for the Talmudic rabbis not only a reminder, but also a reenactment of God's act of creation. The Sages effectively translate the biblical drama into cyclical rituals, which, in turn, "dramatize paradigmatic or archetypal events, which, although they may have originated within history, are no longer conceived in historical terms."⁴² The question has been raised of whether or not the Sages actually conceptualized time as an abstract entity. As Sacha Stern has argued, the Sages did not think of time as an existing being that can be measured, experienced, and described in ontological terms. Rather, they experienced reality through "process, change and motion, without having

to resort to the abstract concept of a time dimension."⁴³ The cyclical recurrence of events and rituals does not equal the concept of cyclical time, but only, as Stern has argued, "a concept of cyclical events."⁴⁴ Stern has also pointed at what Rubenstein calls the dehistoricization of Israel's experience: the Sages perceived historical events as occurring within a cyclical, calendric pattern. This did not spring from the Sages' idea of time as a cyclical entity, but from associating particular types of events with certain days of the year. Historical events were reduced to events that occur in a cycle determined, in the end, by astronomical factors.⁴⁵ Time as an independent entity, Stern has argued, emerges in the rabbinic world only with the development of medieval Jewish philosophy, predominantly with the works of Moses Maimonides (1135–1204).⁴⁶

Maimonides cannot be credited with being the first Jewish philosopher to refer to time as an abstract entity;⁴⁷ nonetheless, he provided an influential definition of time as "an accident consequent upon motion [which] is necessarily attached to it."⁴⁸ The definition, influenced by the Aristotelian definition of time as a measure of movement,⁴⁹ proved problematic for Maimonides's successors: Aristotle's definition is connected to his belief in an eternal universe, which stands in contrast to the image conveyed by the Torah according to which God created the world in six days. Whether Maimonides shared this tenet of Aristotelian philosophy remains a matter of dispute.⁵⁰ Be that as it may, in order to disconnect time from movement, Maimonides's prominent critic, Hasdai Crescas (1340–1410/11), proposed to view time as the measure of duration. As such, time's status was no longer dependent on creation, and in fact, time, or its essence, could exist prior to the creation of the world.⁵¹ Medieval philosophy had a significant impact on the development of kabbalah and, directly and indirectly, also on Hasidism. As Jonathan Dauber has demonstrated in his recent book, the ethos of the early kabbalah developed following the transplantation of philosophy, developed in the sphere of the Islamic culture, to Christian lands. The kabbalah adopted the philosophical ethos, with the investigation of God as its highest religious value, and creatively incorporated some philosophical concepts and terms.⁵² Several authors have pointed at the presence of temporal reflection in various kabbalistic and Hasidic discourses and attempted to present it in a broader framework of temporal models of religious times. Moshe Idel, while criticizing Eliade's unidimensional representation of time in Judaism as linear, constructed three temporal models in Judaism, all the while emphasizing that in the course of

history these models intertwined, with some gaining dominance in certain periods and types of literature. These three models are: *micro-*, *meso-* and *macrochronos*. *Microchronos* relates to the time of cyclical repetitions of shared rituals, which both connects Jews with God but also relates them to events from their mythical past. *Mesochronos* is the time understood as a linear development from the past through the present to the future. The events that take place in *mesochronos* are singular. While the *microchronic* model has at its center the congregation of Israel united in enduring worship, the *mesochronic* model focuses on the Jewish people's history and covenant with God. Finally, the third, *macrochronic* model, deals with the macrocycles of cosmic time, in which the whole universe comes into being and perishes in the cycles of cosmic *shemitot*.⁵³

Yet, there is still more to the kabbalistic-Hasidic temporal discourse. Some kabbalistic and Hasidic thinkers, inspired by philosophical concepts of time, also embarked on both theoretical and practical investigations into that which transcends time and into eternity. As Moshe Idel and Adam Afterman have pointed out, some mystical traditions informed by Jewish early neoplatonic and neoaristotelic philosophy saw time as an obstacle on the way to the true reality that transcends time; a way from multiplicity to unity, from dynamic to static, and from profane to holy. According to Abraham Abulafia's ecstatic kabbalah (1240–ca. 1291), for instance, the clinging of the soul to the supratemporal divinity constituted the religious ideal and the way of achieving eternal life, whereas clinging to worldly matters, which by nature fall under the category of temporality, condemned the soul to temporal existence and eventual doom.⁵⁴

Other traditions, influenced by later Neoplatonism, transcended the dichotomy of time and eternity. Theosophical kabbalists strove to experience a higher, divine or sacred form of time. According to the kabbalistic traditions of, most prominently, Azriel of Gerona (ca. 1160–1238) or Moshe Cordovero (1522–1570), time has relevance for some aspects of the divine pleroma and is related to the movement and order of *sefirot*. The order of *sefirot*, in turn, corresponds to the days of creation and the days of the week. Just as in the past, medieval philosophers associated the root of time experienced in sublunar reality with the movements of heavenly spheres,⁵⁵ so these kabbalists associated the origins of worldly time with the dynamic of the divine emanations—the *sefirot*. Needless to say, these traditions still wished to preserve the ontological difference between our world and the Godhead, as well as between our time and the temporality of the *sefirot*. To that end, they

created a distinction between worldly time, and the “order of time” (*sefer ha-zemanim*) of the *sefirot*.⁵⁶ The changes that occur within the world of the divine emanations, albeit beyond the dimensions of past, present, and future, can be described in terms of relations of priority and posteriority. These relations are the divine, eternal matrix above for the temporal modes of past and future, experienced in the passing of time in the world below.

Hasidic masters had at their disposal, and made use of in their work, a plethora of earlier kabbalistic and philosophical works and ideas.⁵⁷ It is hardly surprising that the Hasidic concepts of time, eternity, temporality, and atemporality also draw on and combine a variety of earlier concepts. Hasidic masters therefore retained the idea of the soul’s imperative to transcend the temporal world and experience the divine unity that is higher than time, yet still subjected some aspects of the divine—the seven lower *sefirot*—to the order of time. As Idel has concluded, the Hasidic concept of time exemplifies the movement’s synthetic commitment to theosophical and ecstatic kabbalah.⁵⁸

Hasidic doctrines deal with the ways a person may transcend the constraints of time and delve into the various aspects of eternity and supratemporality, be it in the sphere of the “order of time” of the seven lower *sefirot*, or in the divine unity that is above this subtle domain. Idel demonstrates that Dov Ber of Mezrich introduced this idea to Hasidism and disseminated it through his teachings and students: Ze’ev Volf of Zhitomir, Levi Yitshak of Berdichev, Elimelekh of Lizhensk, Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, and last but not least, Shneur Zalman of Liady.⁵⁹ These Hasidic masters taught that the supratemporal reality is to be reached from within the Jewish body and through Jewish religious praxis. The special connection that Jews share with the supratemporal God and which they keep by dint of performing the commandments in the physical world enables them to transform the multiplicity of time into the unity of that which is above time.

Shneur Zalman of Liady adopted a singular position among this group of students. While, for example, Levi Yitshak of Berdichev emphasized the role of the *tsadik* in serving the material and spiritual needs of the community, Shneur Zalman placed in the center a common Hasid’s worship and personal struggle against the evil inclination. While Elimelekh of Lizhensk in his *No’am Elimelekh* strove to maintain the elitist character of the fraternity of *tsadikim*, Shneur Zalman made his teachings available to all educated readers. While Avraham of Kalisk was protective of Hasidic mystical traditions, set very demanding standards for mystical worship capable for transcending time and space,

and postulated promoting simple faith among the Hasidim, Shneur Zalman believed the mystical experience could and should be communicated broadly, and taught intellectual contemplation as a means leading toward the transcendence.⁶⁰ Against Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, who valued most worship leading to complete divestment from corporeality, Shneur Zalman stressed the role of body and corporeal commandments in reaching the divine.⁶¹ Moreover, the vivid interest in messianism connects Shneur Zalman with Nahman of Bratslav, a maverick *tsadik* unrelated to the Maggid's circle. Although Shneur Zalman offered different understanding with regard to the role of the rank-and-file and the *tsadik* in the messianic process, he shared with his controversial contemporary the intense expectation of the messianic times and the belief in their harmonistic and all-encompassing character.⁶²

Regardless of later attempts by Habad writers to posthumously portray Shneur Zalman as the Great Maggid's (and therefore, the Ba'al Shem Tov's) main student and successor, his teachings deserve particular attention. His mystical lore contains subtle and nuanced discussions of the concept of time, its relation to individual existence, and to collective anticipation of the messianic advent and the end of history. The abundance of sources, superior in number to those in the writings of contemporaneous Hasidic masters, allow the careful reader to get a well-rounded idea of the Hasidic discourse of time developed in the school of the Great Maggid, which combines earlier kabbalistic and philosophical ideas and integrates the various modes of *micro-*, *macro-* and, to some extent, *mesochronos*. It is not a purely theoretical issue but a concept that is directly related to the existential struggle of every Jew, whose very condition as a dualist—torn between his or her animal and divine soul and between his or her evil and good inclination—is a constant struggle between the unredeemed present and the redeemed future, and between temporality and eternity, not only from the perspective of the entire world expecting the advent of the Messiah, but also, importantly, from the perspective of the microcosm (*'olam katan*)—a human being.⁶³

Sources

Shneur Zalman's corpus consists of over thirty volumes, the majority of which were published posthumously. His homilies (*derushim*) or discourses (*ma'amarim*) make up the largest category within this corpus.⁶⁴ Delivered orally in Yiddish, they were translated into Hebrew even as they were being transcribed by his followers.⁶⁵ The

homilies circulated in manuscript form for many years, until the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menahem Mendel Schneersohn the Tsemah Tsedek, initiated the process of making them available in print. He published two volumes of Shneur Zalman's homilies on the weekly Torah portions, *Torah or* and *Likutei Torah*, in 1837 in Kapust and 1848 in Zhitomir. Teachings pertaining to prayer were included in Shneur Zalman's prayerbook, *Seder tefilot mi-kol ha-shanah*, first published in Kapust in 1816. An additional collection of unpublished *ma'amarim* appeared in Jerusalem in 1926 as *Boneh Yerushalayim*. However, the more comprehensive publication of Shneur Zalman's sermons began only in the second half of the twentieth century, when Habad's Kehot Publishing House brought out a series of volumes titled *Ma'mere Admor ha-Zaken*. This process continues to some extent to the present day, as brochures of rediscovered copies of homilies are published occasionally in print and online.

Another important segment of Shneur Zalman's corpus, generally overlooked by scholars interested in the philosophical or theological dimensions of the Habad tradition, are his halakhic works. Two of them were published in Shneur Zalman's lifetime in Shklov: *Hilkhot talmud Torah* in 1794 (Compendium of the Laws of Torah Study), and *Seder birkhot ha-nehenin* in 1800 (Laws of Blessings for Enjoyment, republished in 1801 alongside *Dine netilat yadayim* [*Laws of Ritual Washing of the Hands*]). His other legal writings were compiled posthumously into *Shulhan 'arukh Rabenu ha-Zaken*, published by his sons in Kopys and Shklov in 1814 and 1816.⁶⁶

Shneur Zalman's writings also include a large number of letters, addressed to his Hasidic followers collectively or to certain individuals. Some contain mystical teachings, others issue instructions to remote Habad communities, others still relate to his involvement in fund-raising for Hasidic settlements in the Land of Israel, and more again testify to his controversies with other Hasidic leaders or with *mitnagedim*. In general, the letters provide invaluable insights not only into Shneur Zalman's style of leadership but also into the model of spirituality he propagated. They were first collected and published by David Zvi Hillman in Jerusalem, in 1953, as *Igerot Ba'al ha-Tanya u-vene doro*. Later, Kehot published a new edition of Shneur Zalman's letters in two volumes, entitled *Igerot kodesh* (together with the letters of Dov Ber Shneuri [1773–1827] and Menahem Mendel the Tsemah Tsedek).

Finally, there is the book *Tanya*, the publication of which in Slavuta in 1796 established one of the unique features of the Habad school of Hasidism: the *Tanya* is the first more or less systematic exposition of

a Hasidic model of spirituality.⁶⁷ It is one of four of Shneur Zalman's books to be published during his lifetime, and the only one that concentrates on his mystical teachings. He explains in a letter that precedes the printed versions that he wrote the work to provide his followers with a manual of direct spiritual guidance so as to render regular personal contact with him unnecessary. Effectively, the book was to serve as a substitute for a personal meeting with the *tsadik* (the so-called *yehidut*).⁶⁸ Still, the discrepancies between the content of *ma'amarim* and the *Tanya* prompted some scholars to draw a firm line between them, and while the distinction between exoteric *Tanya* and esoteric *ma'amarim* proposed by Isaiah Tishby and Joseph Dan was generally rejected, many still attempt a content-oriented analysis in their scholarship.⁶⁹ Form-oriented research of Habad writings, focusing on their transition from oral to written form and from Yiddish to Hebrew, remains a desideratum.

A brief review of Shneur Zalman's works reveals that the vast majority were, in fact, written by his followers. In other words, what is known as Shneur Zalman's body of writings was largely compiled from manuscripts prepared, copied, and preserved by others. Shneur Zalman's writings indicate that he was aware of the unrestrained dissemination of his teachings through these manuscripts and attempted to control this process by appointing editors responsible for checking and correcting them.⁷⁰ But despite these efforts, in many cases it remains difficult to determine where Shneur Zalman's words end and scribal or editorial interpolations begin.⁷¹ There is also some disagreement among Habad scholars about the attribution of some of the discourses. For example, *Shene ha-me'orot* and *Be'ure ha-Zohar*, which are usually attributed to Dov Ber, appear in Foxbrunner's work as Shneur Zalman's own.⁷² All in all, many factors contributed to the fact that Shneur Zalman's writings vary greatly, be it the time of their production, their genre, the way they were preserved and edited, and so on. His output, therefore, should not be seen as a whole, self-contained doctrine, but as a dynamic and often inharmonious body that changes and adjusts according to temporal circumstances.

This Book's Structure

The book is divided into five chapters. The chapter 1 sets out the conceptual framework for analyzing Shneur Zalman's idea of time. In it, I explore the various contexts in which time features in his works, focusing first on the relation between God and time, and its place in

the process of creation. I discuss its location within the *sefirotic* structure and the discourse on divine names, locating the sources of Shneur Zalman's treatment of time within the earlier strands of the Jewish mystical tradition he inherited. I demonstrate how Shneur Zalman's attempts to conceptualize time intertwine with his kabbalistic mind-set, giving birth to the notion of continuous cycles of creation and annihilation by way of *ratso va-shov*—the perpetual rhythm of descent and ascent by which the life-giving energy of the divine illuminates creation and sustains its existence.

Chapter 2 discusses the historiosophical underpinnings of Shneur Zalman's teachings. I discuss his idea that cosmic history is the product of the dynamic tension between creation, identified with exile, and redemption, perceived as the telos of creation. This leads to a detailed analysis of Shneur Zalman's interpretation of Israel's historical exiles, which he transforms into spiritual states of enslavement as punishment for sin, impurity and the absorption of gentile wisdom, all amounting to detachment from God. The main focus is placed on the Egyptian exile, which—based on a recurring wordplay in Shneur Zalman's teachings that reads the Hebrew name for Egypt, *Mitsrayim*, as *metsarim*, "constraints"—is taken to represent the limitations of materiality and corporeality. I discuss the exile in Egypt as the paradigm of both the enslavements experienced by the Jewish people throughout history and the personal enslavement of each and every individual within the material world. The hard labor performed by the Israelites during their enslavement in Egypt becomes an allegory for worship in the state of ontological exile, namely during life in the material world. This is followed by a discussion of Shneur Zalman's presentation of the biblical Exodus as the paradigm of redemption. I analyze his concept of worship within the material world by means of prayer, Torah study, and the performance of the commandments as the only means of attaining redemption by way of building God's "dwelling place in the lower worlds" (*dirah ba-tahtonim*).

While chapter 2 discusses cosmic history as the process that ultimately leads to redemption, chapter 3 focuses on Shneur Zalman's eschatology. In this chapter, I highlight the distinction he makes between the messianic days and the time of the resurrection of the dead, exploring the place and role of the gentile nations in the world-to-come in view of his conviction that the end of days will bring about the ultimate eradication of evil and impurity, which are clearly associated with the gentile nations throughout his writings. I also explore the role of the Messiah in Shneur Zalman's teachings, especially against

the background of the scope he allows for individual redemption within the unredeemed world, which takes place irrespectively of time and place and is achievable by means of the daily performance of religious rituals. I conclude the chapter with an examination of the future-to-come as the end of history, namely, as the era in which the dynamics of *ratso va-shov*—the continuous creation and annihilation of worlds by the descent and ascent of the life-giving divine energy—will be replaced by a state of permanent *shov*, the overflowing abundance of godliness. I distinguish between the two paradigms of this everlasting future that are discernible in Shneur Zalman's teachings: the future-to-come as the everlasting Sabbath, and as the eighth day that is "entirely long and good," which is connected to the ritual of circumcision and the abundance of God's blessings that come as a result.

In chapter 4 I discuss the temporal experience in the everyday life of Shneur Zalman's followers. I concentrate on the rituals of prayer and Torah study (in particular on the study of Torah at set times) as a means of transcending temporal limitations. Two aspects of these rituals are of particular interest. First, both rituals are time-bound: the times of prayer are determined by Jewish law, and the times for Torah study are set by the student. Second, the significance of the ritual of setting times for Torah study in Shneur Zalman's doctrine tells us much about his target audience and his idea of Hasidism in general. I unpack the various ways in which he reinterpreted this seemingly minor halakhic precept in order to empower and enrich the religious experience of middle-class businessmen who were hardly as spiritually and intellectually accomplished as the elite core of the Habad movement. This chapter bridges the gap between Shneur Zalman's concepts of time and history, on the one hand, and the everyday experience of his followers, on the other. It shows how the emphasis he placed on the power of time-bound rituals to enhance the spiritual experience of each and every one of his Hasidim helped turn Habad into a broad movement without ever compromising on its intellectual and spiritual ideals.

Chapter 5, the last chapter, deals with the nexus of time and gender. It investigates some hagiographical traditions about Shneur Zalman's unique attitude toward women in an attempt to show that there is hardly any convincing evidence that he shared the more inclusive attitude toward women of the last two Lubavitcher rebbes. I take as my starting point the fact that Shneur Zalman locates the source of time within the *sefirotic* tree in the feminine constellation of Nukba. I then discuss the function of gender categories in Shneur Zalman's thought inasmuch as they relate to the polarity of giver and recipient in the

sefirotic structure. I analyze the *ma'amarim*, in which gender imagery is employed to depict the exilic present and the envisioned redemption, including those that feature the elevation of the feminine aspect of the divine in the future-to-come. In relation to these, I attempt to determine whether there is any correlation between the elevation of the cosmic female and the status of flesh-and-blood women on earth. I look closely at his attitude toward women's exemption from time-bound commandments, and to the commandments generally considered feminine (such as the lighting of the Sabbath candles) in order to comment on his attitude toward feminine spirituality.