

"THE BAAL SHEM TOV AND THE RISE OF HASIDISM"FIRST LECTURE: "LIFE AND LORE"

JANUARY 10, 1965

(Chairman introduced me; Won't bore you long; brought R.Lamm for that purpose.....")

(Bad Weather: famous Rabbi, always Gam Zu Letovah. Once foul weather, Hasidim wondered: what say now? Said: Thank Gd not always like this....)

A. INTRODUCTION:

- I. Only about 200 years ago: Judaism experienced RENEWAL, RENAISSANCE; deeply RELIGIOUS, DEMOCRATIC, ROMANTIC

One of its greatest teachings: אהבת ישראל; yet left deep SCHISMS, SCARS...
 FOUNDER: NO WRITINGS, only ORAL; YET: immense LITERATURE, const'y growing...
 Literature BY it -- Polemical; Ideological; Exegetical; STORIES ...
 Literature ABOUT it -- provoked EXTREME opinions: Mitnagdim, Haskalah, Contemporary..
 most flawed...

Some saw it in oppos'n HALAKHIC JSM; others: no problem. BOTH WRONG.
 STEREOTYPE TODAY.....all wrong

- II. WHAT WAS this VITAL, FASCINAT'G, MASS RELIG'S MOVEM'T launched by R. Israel Baal Shem Tov mid-1700's, picked up RARE GIANTS OF THE SPIRIT....that started as minor ripple & in 50 years inundated all Europe (Dubnow: 5 MILLION!)? --& this, despite VIGOROUS, BELLIGER'T, OFTEN RECKLESS OPPOSITION?

- III. THESE LECTURES: First: introd'y: histor'l background, biograph'l Besht. Then: Instead STORIES, psychology, history etc.: IDEAS, PRINCIPLES, CONCEPTS. AUXILLIARY TEXT: will identify each passage. MOST: "LAST TESTAMENT": צוואת הרי"ב"ש

B. THE BACKGROUND:

- I. ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS: Most European Jews; Meat twice a year....
- II. PERSECUTIONS: Forbidden live most BIG CITIES; Many OCCUPATIONS CLOSED; Noblemen treated Jews like SLAVES ("subjecti haereditati" proposed Siem 1740 -- failed bec. econom'c reasons; was a fact). CATHOLIC PRIESTS; BLOOD/ LIBELS: 20 from 1700-1760 (life Besht). JESUIT PUPILS: "Schiller geloif" TEXT: I-A.
- III. SPIRITUAL CRISIS: SABBATIANISM (1665, following Chmelnitzki, 1648-9); FRANK & extravag't Messianism; HOLY SIN; ANTINOMIANISM. Mostly: PODOLIA & VOHOLINIA (birthplace Has'm!) MOOD: Frustr'm, suspic'n, insecurity, desire for better leadership. Rabbinic leadership remote....
- IV. LOW CULTURAL-RELIGIOUS LEVEL: Story by R. Aryeh Leib (1725-1812), known as "SHPOLER ZEIDE" (story: controversy Shpoler Z. & R. Nachmn Bratzlaver: latter-- why they call you ZEIDE, prefer: BUBBE. He: Rather be BUBBE than just EINIKEL....) TEXT: I-B
- V. HAS'M THE ANSWER: democratiz'n for AM HAARETZ; שמחת תורהיים, JOY in תפילה

BUT: Has'm far more than react'n hardship, fill psycho-spir'l void
That came when did? PROVIDENTIAL. But: own INDEP'T MESSAGE, MIGHTY, POWERFUL, SWEEPING

NO CHANGE in JUDAISM; CHANGE in JEW....

NEW דרך בעבודת ה', new emphases

TEXT: 11-D, 11-E

C. LIFE OF BESHT: LEGENDS...hard to get facts...recent attempt move grave to ISRAEL
begin with legend: TEXT: 11-A

*ISRAEL b. ELIEZER - Okup, ^{Podolia} Carpathians, about 1700

*early: FULL ORPHAN. Raised by CHARITY. Solitude in FOREST

*12 yrs:BAHELPER. Tehn: ASS'T SHAMMASH. Sleeps by day, up all night

*18 yrs:MARRIES. Wife dies soon. BAHHELPER again, Galicia

*SLIGHT FAME: near Brody, 3rd in BORERIN (disproves:ignoramus; disguise...)

*meets SCHOLAR, R.EPHRAIM KUTOVER. Widowed Dtr, writes חנאים. Way back:

R.EPHRAIM DIES. Besht to BRODY (city scholars)claim wife fr R.ABR.GERSHOM (her broth)

* comes dressed as PEASANT. Thought BEGGAR,gave alms. Shows document. MARRIED.

* R.ABR.G. wants TEACH HIM. Feigns ignorance,uneducable. A.G. to sister:DVORCE/GET OUT!

* Both leave f CARPATHIAN MTS. HE: dig clay. SHE: load wagon,to market

* tremendous POVERTY. LEGEND: 7 years, then more same elsewhere.SHE:WORK,HE:SOLITUDE

* He mingles peasants, learns of FOLK MEDICINE (HERBS): שם בעל HERB S & KABBALAH....

* in his PRACTICE: also emphasized HEALING SOULS: how LIVE (STORY: "LOVE HIM MORE"),
believe, DAVEN, serve God (STORY:"CAN'T ENTER SHUL: FULL SOULS...")

* about 1734: פרטום, called בעל שם טוב, sign spir'l popular'y;Signs w name

* moves MEZHBOZH -- for greatest years, last 11 yrs life

* attract ordinary people, masses

* Gradually:: SCHOLARS: R.YAAKOV YOSEF POLNOYE (polemicist), R DOV BER, "GREAT"

MAGGID MEZRITSCH -- teacher, disciples. TEXT: 11-B.

* TAUGHT mostly thru HOMILIES,PITHY SAYINGS,COMMENTS,APHORISMS:

* צוהר תעשה לחיבה -- words must shine.....

learn from חוץ: comma after חוץ -- כל הנבעים אדם רואה חוץ מנבעי עצמו

faults find in others what own failings really are. So: ...איזה חכם הלומד מכל.

* one of EARLY FOLLOWERS this stage:BROTHER-IN-LAW,R.ABR.GERSHOM!

* NAME: HASIDIM. Others:MITNAGDIM... Latter: they Jews, Has'm = כח .

D. MAJOR IDEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE:

(STORY: too long...usually discontinue long speeches bec. throat:listeners want cut...)

I. *usually not appreciate IDEAT IONAL CONTENT: stories, social upheaval, etc.
but in MITNAGDIC polemics find GREAT opposition to IDEAS of Has'm.....

II. FUNDAMENTAL JSM:TWO ASPECTS GOD: IMMANENCE & TRANSCENDENCE; BOTH VITAL

* TRANSC'CE: קדושה ; IMMAN'CE: כבוד ; BOTH: ק"ק ד"צ מכה"כ

*TRANSC'CE: סוכ"ע ; IMMAN'CE: ממכ"ע ; שכינה (.....)

- R. Naphtali Rapschiter: "2 if you tell me when
גמ' is" R.N.R: "24" " " " "
גמ' is not!"

III. Besht: powerful emphasis IMMANENCE, closeness God: מכה"כ; לית אחר פנוי מיניה

* TEXT: III-A,B

* R. LEVI YITZHAK BERDITCHEVER: "Dudele" ---

רבש"ע אנה אמצאך ואנה לא אמצאך:
הימעל - דו, ערד - דו. מזרח - דו, מערב ... צפון...דרום...
אז עס איז גוט איז דאך - דו; חלילה ניט - ווידער דו;
און אז דו - - איז דאך שוין גוט; דו, דו, דו.

* R. SHNEOUR ZALMAN: TEXT: III-C

* MAGGID: The Besht taught me language Birds, Animals, Forests... (i.e. imman'ce Gd)

* THIS EMPHASIS ON IMMANENCE (w-o surrendering Trans'ce): "GRUNDPRINZIP"
HASSIDISM, is foundation other major ideas will discuss following lectures

E. CONCLUSION:

→ left son, יאצק (little known) a distinguished daughter's (i.e. in 1730s) ~~daughter~~ ^{daughter}
* EXPIRED: 2nd DAY SHEVUOT, 1760; already has TENS OF THOUSANDS OF HASIDIM.

* one GREATEST, MOST LUMINOUS, CHARISMATIC, yet OBSCURE CHARACTERS JEWISH, WORLD HISTORY

* HIS CONTRI BUTION: NO LESS THAN THE SAVING & REVIVAL OF JUDAISM FOR THE AGES

* Perhaps most POINTED COMMENT his achievements, as well as EXPLANATION
his NAME, בעל שם טוב, from CONTEMP'Y-DISCIPLE, R. PINHAS KORETZER:

MAN ILL, IN COMA; TO AROUSE HIM, KEEP HIM IN LIFE,
YOU CALL OUT HIS NAME.

SO: JEWS WERE IN SPIRITUAL COMA, PEOPLE ISRAEL MORIBUND.
SO ALMIGHTY SENT AN ANGEL TO CALL OUT OUR NAME, AROUSE US.
THAT MAN WAS R. ISRAEL BAAL SHEM TOV ---

IT WAS HE WHO CALLED OUT TO OUR PEOPLE, "ISRAEL, ISRAEL!"

REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU CAN YET BECOME.

SO IT IS THAT THE GREAT R. ISRAEL ben Eliezer BECAME KN OWN
AS בעל שם טוב, THE MASTER OF THE GOOD NAME

mother of R. Moshe Hayyim Ephraim (הי"ד אר)
and R. Barukh of Mezhibezh, + of Feigel,
mother of R. Nahman of Bratzlav.
She was known amongst
Hasidim as דברי צדקת אר