

Suggested Themes for Term Papers

(students may suggest their own subjects to instructor)

1. Describe the character and career of the itinerant preacher, as he emerges from the tales and legends in In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov. (For general context of Maggidim throughout history, see Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. VIII, pp.252b ff., and Louis I. Newman, Maggidim and Hasidim: Their Wisdom, Bloch, 1964, pp. xliii-lv). Then compare results with Joseph G. Weiss, "A Circle of Pneumatics in Pre-Hasidism," Journal of Jewish Studies, VIII (1957).
2. Describe the self-image of the Besht, including his vocation as a writer of amulets, as it emerges from the stories in In Praise.... How does this self-image compare with what others thought of him?
3. Compare the self-image of the Besht, as evident from In Praise..., with the self-image of R.Isaac Luria as it emerges from Tales in Praise of the Ari, by Klein (Jewish Publication Society, 1970).
4. Collect and delineate the anti-Rabbinic nuances in In Praise... and compare your results with the attitude of R.Yaakov Yosef of Polonnoye (see Dresner, The Zaddik... ).
5. Describe and analyze the attitudes of In Praise... to the following three groups: Sabbatians, Frankists, Christians.
6. How does In Praise... deal with sexuality? What picture does it give of the mores of the shtetl of those days? What is its attitude to women?
7. According to In Praise..., what were the relations between the Besht and R. Gershon of Kutov? - and R.Yaakov Yosef? - and the Great Maggid? On all three, cf. Wiesel, Souls on Fire.
8. Hasidic Thought as reflected in Hasidic music. See A.Z. Idelsohn, Jewish Music and its Historical Development, and Velvel Pasternak, Songs of the Chassidim.
9. Compare the differing perspectives on the nature and value of Hasidic story-telling and legend of the following: M.Buber (Introduction to Tales of the Hasidim; "Interpreting Hasidism," in Commentary, Sept. 1963); Scholem ("Martin Buber's Hasidism," in Commentary, Oct. 1961 -- reprinted in his The Messianic Idea in Judaism, Schocken 1971); Wiesel (Souls on Fire).
- \*10. Compare the treatment of the Besht and the early movement by Graetz; Dubnow, Toledot Ha-Hasidut, chap.1; Horodetzky, in his preface to his edition of Shivhei Ha-Besht.
- \*11. The Besht as a scholar of Halakhah and Kabbalah. Compare the treatment by In Praise... with Scholem's article in Molad (XVIII), 1960.



12. Develop the following concepts as they appear in In Parise... :  
a) Prayer; b) Devekut; c) observance of the commandments
13. The same for: a) saintliness (kedushah); b) ascetic practices
14. The same for: a) friendship; b) Ahavat Yisrael
15. Compare the attitudes to the Mitnagdim (with special attention to the Gaon of Vilna) by the Karlin Zaddikim and the mdur Hasidim (see W.Z.Rabinowitch, Lithuanian Hasidism)
- \*\*16. The famous Friday Night incident in Kotzk; summarize the treatment of the incident in Heschel, Kotzk, vol. II, pp.559-577, and Wiesel, Souls on Fire.
- \*17. Prepare a summary of one of the following (of the series edited by Bromberg, חזון איש - חזון איש) and compare with the treatment by Wiesel (Souls...)
  - a) חזון איש, חזון איש
  - b) חזון איש, חזון איש
  - c) חזון איש, חזון איש
  - d) חזון איש, חזון איש

\* -Requires knowledge of Hebrew

\*\* - Requires knowledge of Yiddish