

Yikhus and the Early Hasidic Movement:

Principles and Practice in 18th and Early 19th Century Eastern Europe

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Preface and Acknowledgments

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Thesis Abstract

Yikhus- the salient feature of the Jewish aristocracy- may be defined as a type of prestige deriving from the achievements of one's forbears and living family members in the scholarly, mystical, or, to a lesser degree, economic realms. Unlike land acquisition, by which the non-Jewish aristocracy preserved itself, *yikhus* was intimately linked with achievement in the above realms, requiring a continual infusion of new talent from each generation of a particular family. This definition is arrived at after a close consideration of the existing secondary literature and primary sources such as rabbinic literature, homiletic literature, ethical wills, memoirs.

A question which has yet to be resolved is the extent to which the founders of Hasidism, a mystical revivalist movement that swept Eastern European Jewish communities from the second half of the eighteenth century until the Holocaust, challenged prevailing notions of *yikhus*. The question relates to the identities of Hasidism's leaders- the Zaddikim- themselves. If, as the older historiography claims, the Zaddikim emerged from outside the elite stratum, and therefore lacked *yikhus*, they might be expected to challenge a notion which would threaten their perceived right to lead. If, on the other hand, the Zaddikim were really the same scions of noble Jewish families who had always led the communities, they would probably uphold the value of *yikhus*.

Chapter 1 includes a definition and history of the evolution of the concept, followed by a survey of the secondary literature on *yikhus* both before and during the rise of Hasidism. It becomes clear that most historians do not provide a satisfactory explanation of *yikhus*. Regarding *yikhus* and Hasidism, three mistaken views emerge. First, historians fail to observe that *yikhus* is a primary characteristic of a Zaddik. Instead, they point to charisma as the exclusive quality. Second, some scholars suggest that the importance of *yikhus* declined during Hasidism's rise. Finally, other scholars assume that attitudes toward *yikhus* assured the eventual institution of Hasidic dynasties, which occurred after the mid-nineteenth century.

Chapter 2 comprises an analysis of the ideals of the Zaddikim as demonstrated in early Hasidic literature, most of which is homiletic. One is able to detect, in the second generation, a split between those Zaddikim who criticize undue pride in *yikhus*, and those who uphold the value unquestioningly.

The third and final chapter considers the Zaddikim themselves. It entails a look at the family origin of twenty-eight major Zaddikim of the first three generations, to determine how many were *yikhus* possessors. Second, the type of *yikhus* the Zaddikim possess is considered, i.e., whether or not a Zaddik belonged to a prominent aristocratic family, or merely descended from a scholar or communal leader. Finally, the marriage strategies of each Zaddik for his children are described. In the course of these analyses, it becomes clear that the vast majority of Zaddikim did, indeed have *yikhus*. And virtually all Zaddikim, even those who lacked *yikhus*, sought to marry their children to *yikhus* possessors, thereby consolidating their position within the elite.

French Abstract

Le *yikhus* -- aspect clé de l'aristocratie juive -- était une sorte de prestige venant des accomplissements des ancêtres et des membres vivants de la famille dans les domaines intellectuels, mystiques ou, bien que moins, économiques. A la différence de l'acquisition foncière, une stratégie souvent employée par l'aristocratie non-juive, le *yikhus* était troitement lié aux réussites de la famille et nécessitait l'infusion continue de nouveaux talents de chaque génération de la famille. Cette définition de *yikhus* est proposé après l'analyse des sources secondaires existantes ainsi que des sources primaires tel que la littérature rabbinique, la littérature homiletique, les testaments éthiques, et des mémoires.

Une question qui n'a toujours pas de réponse définitive est celle de savoir à quel point le *yikhus* a été influencé par le Hasidisme, un mouvement mystique de renouveau qui s'est étendu dans les communautés juifs de l'Europe de l'Est entre la deuxième partie du 18e siècle et le Holocauste. La question s'adresse surtout aux identités des leaders du Hasidisme, les Zaddikim. Si, comme l'on prétend l'ancienne historiographie, les Zaddikim ont apparu en dehors des groupes élites et par conséquent n'avaient pas le *yikhus*, ils auraient contesté des idées qui mettaient en cause leur statut de leader. Si, par contre, les Zaddikim faisaient partie des mêmes familles juives nobles qui avaient toujours mené les communautés, ils auraient probablement soutenu la valeur du *yikhus*.

Le premier chapitre donne une définition du concept et une histoire de son évolution, suivi par une vue d'ensemble de la littérature secondaire à son sujet avant et pendant l'essor du Hasidisme. Il est montré que peu d'historiens donnent des explications satisfaisantes au sujet du *yikhus*. En ce qui concerne le *yikhus* et le Hasidisme, trois idées fausses apparaissent souvent. Premier, au lieu de constater que le *yikhus* faisait partie intégrale de l'identité Zaddik, les historiens mettent souvent l'accent sur l'importance du charisme. Deuxième, certains d'entre eux donnent l'impression que l'importance du *yikhus* diminuait pendant que le Hasidisme prenait du terrain. Finalement, d'autres supposent que les attitudes envers le *yikhus* ont assuré l'instauration des dynasties Hasidiques, qui se sont produits à partir de la deuxième partie du 19e siècle.

Le deuxième chapitre analyse les valeurs des Zaddikim tel qu'ils sont présentés dans le début de la littérature Hasidique, dont la plupart est homiletique. Il est possible de discerner dans la deuxième génération une scission entre ces Zaddikim qui critiquent la fierté mal placée du *yikhus* et ceux qui soutiennent sa valeur incontestablement.

Le troisième et dernier chapitre parle concrètement des Zaddikim. Il présente l'origine familiale de 28 Zaddikim importants des trois premières générations, afin de déterminer le nombre d'entre eux qui possédaient le *yikhus*. Deuxième, il considère le type de *yikhus* que les Zaddikim possédaient, cette à dire si le Zaddik appartenait à une famille aristocratique importante ou s'il venait simplement d'une lignée d'intellectuel ou de leader communal. Troisièmement, il donne une explication des stratégies utilisées pour marier les enfants. Au cours de ces analyses, il est montré que la grande majorité des Zaddikim possédaient en effet le *yikhus*. Et presque tous Zaddikim, même ceux qui manquaient le *yikhus*, cherchaient à marier leurs enfants à ceux qui possédaient le *yikhus*, de cette façon solidifiant leur position comme membres de l'élite. (-Translation by Bob White, Dept. of Anthropology, McGill University)

Chapter I: *Yikhus* According to Modern Scholarship

In mid- to late-eighteenth century Eastern Europe, a number of Jewish mystics broke with the traditional tendency to act in hidden, exclusive circles, and became leaders of enormous influence. While Jewish leaders might previously have happened to be mystics, members of this new breed began to deliberately fuse mysticism with social responsibility and leadership. The combination was potent: these new leaders came to command a tremendous amount of power both in the public sphere and over the private lives of their numerous followers. The movement is known as Hasidism, and its leaders, Zaddikim.¹

We are in the midst of a scholarly revolution regarding the social history of Hasidism. The previous historiography, which is now being questioned, claims that these Zaddikim were men of humble social origin who arose from the Jewish masses to positions of great prominence, whether deserved or not. Three variations may be discerned within this historiography. First, there is a denigration of Hasidism and the early Zaddikim. Joseph Weiss, for example, regards the Hasidic leader as a wandering preacher, “a miserable type, who sells his teachings for alms” from whom “a smell of money-grubbing rises.”² A second tendency in that historiography is the romanticization of the movement during its beginning stages.³ Those historians praise early Hasidism not only for its authenticity compared with what came after, but also for containing a progressive- and even democratic- spirit. Martin Buber, for example, imagines a “religious elite itself arising out of the mass of the people,” forming a movement with a “democratic strain” that set aside the “existing ‘aristocracy’ of spiritual possession.”⁴ The endurance of that romantic view can be detected in a third trend, in which Hasidism is considered a movement of social protest. Ben Zion Dinur characterizes the early Hasidic leaders as members of a disenchanting secondary intelligentsia.⁵ Whether negative or more positive in orientation, these views share the misguided conception that the Zaddikim were men of humble origin who rose to positions of immense power, thereby upsetting the social order.

The historiography of recent years has amounted to a massive effort to overturn that conception. Shmuel Ettinger, for example, finds no evidence that the Besht’s immediate circle were mainly wandering

preachers or members of a secondary intelligentsia.⁶ Moshe Rosman, who has gone to the archives of Miedzyboz, the Besht's town of residence, finds the Besht residing in the *kahal* house and refraining from local conflicts.⁷ Ada Rapoport-Albert has concluded bluntly that "the picture of a spiritually ambitious, egalitarian, 'democratic' Hasidism, however attractive to the modern eye, does not square with one solid historical fact..."⁸

The following study upholds that dramatic reversal. With special attention to the Hasidic movement, I will consider a phenomenon in Jewish society which has been rather neglected by scholarship: *yikhus*⁹- meaning roughly "noble descent." *Yikhus* was the stamp of the Jewish aristocracy, and therefore an excellent concept by which to test the social significance of Hasidism. If few Zaddikim could boast of distinguished ancestors or family members, and if their teachings and marriage strategies had reflected a negative stance toward the whole notion of noble descent and kinship, we would be forced to reconsider the claims of earlier historiography which have been recently rejected. As this study will reveal, however, the opposite is the case: most of the initial Zaddikim did, indeed, possess *yikhus*, refrained from attacking the principle, and nearly always appear to have married their children with *yikhus* in mind.

Not surprisingly, the older historiography encourages the impression that the early Zaddikim were lacking in *yikhus* and opposed to the value. Raphael Mahler claims that the eventual Hasidic-Mitnaggedic rapprochement occurred as a result of the novel social make-up of the Przysucha Hasidim, who "were intimates of the very rich family of Sonnenberg-Bergson in Warsaw" and "members of the well-to-do and middle classes." In contrast, previous Hasidim had no such contact with the prominent families of Jewish society.¹⁰ Isaac Levitats describes the Zaddikim as "lowly folk."¹¹ Another historian, Harry Rabinowitz, implies that early-Hasidism de-valued *yikhus*, because it "recognizes no aristocracy, neither the aristocracy of wealth, nor the aristocracy of learning."¹²

As of yet, modern historians have yet to reverse the older historiography regarding this issue. Even scholars at the forefront of the field today suggest, albeit in more guarded terms, that amongst the first Hasidic leaders lineage (and therefore, *yikhus*) may have been less important than previously. Gershon

Hundert posits such a decline;¹³ and Arthur Green, in observing that those of distinguished pedigree tended to be unfriendly to Hasidism, appears to concur.¹⁴ It appears that remnants of the old historiography continue to survive. These misconceptions probably result from two phenomena. First, several of the most outstanding early Zaddikim- among them the Besht and Great Maggid- apparently did, indeed, originate from humble backgrounds. But they are exceptions, misleading because of their prominence. A second source of confusion is, perhaps, the writings of certain prominent Zaddikim, which contain an unmistakable amplification of criticism against those who pay too much attention to their *yikhus*.¹⁵ Never, however, is that criticism aimed at undermining the principle itself.

Modern scholars, it appears, have also erred regarding a second assumption: the designation of charisma as the exclusive characteristic of a Zaddik. Jacob Katz declares that the Besht and his disciples based their right to lead upon "personal charisma."¹⁶ Similarly, Gershom Scholem attributes the secret of the Zaddik's power to "the mystery of the magnetic and dominant personality," as opposed to his teachings.¹⁷ As scholars have come to reject the social impetus for the rise of Hasidism, they have tended to uphold this assertion. Mendel Piekartz, finding little novelty in the early Hasidic teachings compared with those of non-Hasidic literature, has, like Scholem, sought reasons for the movement's success in the personal charisma of the Zaddikim.¹⁸ Ada Rapoport-Albert, in an article on the question of Hasidic succession, explains the success of the Zaddikim in a similar way.¹⁹ In the following study, however, we shall be forced to make room for a second quality possessed by the majority of early Zaddikim which has been completely overlooked: *yikhus*.

Towards a Definition of *Yikhus*

Gauging the influence of *yikhus* in Jewish society before and during the rise of Hasidism is complicated by the vague meaning of the term *yikhus* itself. It is by no means always clear what scholars mean when they do refer to *yikhus*; moreover, most choose not to invoke the term at all, preferring to speak

about lineage or pedigree. Our first task is therefore to uncover the meaning of *yikhus* as it evolved, to seek a precise definition of *yikhus* among the early Hasidim, and to determine the degree to which *yikhus* meant more than the easy definition of “lineage.” What we shall see is that *yikhus* throughout medieval and modern Jewish history became a more flexible concept, although its function- to simultaneously stratify society and sanction standards like scholarship, communal leadership, and economic achievement- remained the same.

Before continuing, let us dispense with a further complicating factor: the notion of honorary, virtual *yikhus*, called *yikhus atzmo*. This concept applied to one who formally lacked *yikhus* but by excelling in scholarship, communal office, or (especially under Hasidism) mystical endeavor, managed to penetrate the elite. One was not only recognized as great; his greatness earned him the honorary *yikhus atzmo*, and thus a place in the aristocracy. The use of the term *yikhus* in this way was not entirely inaccurate, for one’s greatness illuminated his forbears, living relatives, and future descendants. Certainly, the existence of the idea of *yikhus atzmo* is testament to the need of the Jewish elite to identify themselves in terms of *yikhus*. But such “*yikhus*” must be recognized as merely honorary; and in seeking a definition, we will consider only normative *yikhus*.

In his essay on the history of rabbinic leadership, Simcha Asaf denotes three characteristics that one must possess in order to participate in the election of the *Rav*: wealth, learning, and *yikhus*.²⁰ What, precisely is meant by the latter term? Asaf does not say. A definition which begins to reveal the intricacy of *yikhus* as it was applied in Eastern Europe is offered by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog: “it relates to family background and position, but cannot be called pedigree since it can be acquired currently as well as by inheritance, and does not necessarily require transmission ‘by blood.’”²¹ The authors thus note that *yikhus* means something more than lineage by the time Jews have reached Eastern Europe, and therein lies our difficulty.

Historians have been inconsistent in their use of the term. Sometimes *yikhus* refers narrowly to lineage; elsewhere it takes on its broader meaning. One notes a correlation between narrowness in application of the term and the extent to which rigid hereditary succession functioned in a particular society

under examination. Historians studying societies such as those of Geonic times, where hereditary succession was practiced unambiguously, tend to understand *yikhus* in its restricted sense of “lineage.” A prominent example is Avraham Grossman, whose narrow definition, as we shall see, hampers his explanation of later periods.²² In contrast, historians studying societies where automatic hereditary succession ceased, and leadership became more open to those who acquired certain traits, tend to apply *yikhus* more broadly. Jacob Katz, who in my view over-expands the meaning of the term, exemplifies this trend.²³ It appears, then, that historians, respective to their period of interest, are using the same word to describe two different things—pedigree and a broader family prestige.

I have come to regard *yikhus* in the period before and during the rise of Hasidism as falling somewhere between these two extremes. *Yikhus*, according to the various primary sources, may be defined as prestige grounded in the scholarly or mystical achievements of one’s forbears and present family members, even rather distant ones. If person X became a Torah scholar or Zaddik, his prestige spread throughout his family and future descendants. Possessing *yikhus*, X’s descendants could now obtain for themselves marriage matches with other *yikhus* possessors, wedding prestige with prestige. In some cases, a Jewish family became so renowned that its surname became famous and its power enormous. For example, the Horowitz family came to preside over an entire network of rabbinic offices throughout Eastern Europe, with fathers bequeathing their offices to sons.

Despite such bequests of office, an Eastern European Jewish family could not rest on its laurels, as had occurred Babylonia. Eastern European *yikhus* required the constant infusion of scholars or later, Zaddikim, both based ultimately upon individual merit. Sons of the elite, of course, had better educational opportunities, prestige, and greater family expectations to meet, in relation to the masses. Thus, one who possessed *yikhus* had a good chance of sustaining it. In the absence of achievement, however, a family’s *yikhus* dwindled. This unique type of aristocracy may be contrasted with its non-Jewish counterpart, where aristocrats consolidated their position in society primarily through land acquisition.

In sum, *yikhus*, the salient and defining feature of the Jewish aristocracy, derived from the actual scholarly and mystical achievements of one's forebears and current family members, and required constant infusions of new talent. A prominent family had to continue to produce scholars or Zaddikim in order to maintain its *yikhus*. The relationship between *yikhus* and merit may therefore be described as autocatalytic: each spurred the growth of the other.

Whether or not a particular period was characterized by greater opportunities for upward mobility, however, Jewish society never became democratic. One might find occasional evidence of a democratic spirit in the Jewish ethic. But even if a figure like Rabbenu Tam (Jacob ben Meir, 1100-1171) insisted that the power of the community over its members should be limited, and even if certain halakhic traditions contain a democratic sentiment, those ideas were often interpreted or counterbalanced out of existence.²⁴ Jewish self-government in practice was democratic in only the narrowest sense of the word. Shelomo Goitein has termed that limited democracy "religious democracy," meaning that aristocratic-authoritative elements in Jewish communal government functioned thanks to communal sanction.²⁵ As Gershon Hundert explains it, "even the according of deference involves a measure of choice," hardly the kind of choice we normally associate with democracy.²⁶ While not absolutely impenetrable, Jewish leadership was oligarchic.²⁷ After dispensing with the idea of a democratic Jewish leadership, it is easier to conceive of the central role that an undemocratic notion like *yikhus* could play.

Survey of the Secondary Literature

After a brief early history of the phenomenon from late antiquity, I shall consider what modern scholarship has to say about *yikhus* throughout medieval and early modern Jewish history. I shall then do the same for Hasidism, despite the apparent reluctance of students of Hasidism to invoke the actual term. This chapter's survey of the secondary literature will pave the way to a deeper consideration of the phenomenon, especially as it existed during Hasidism's rise, to be considered in the second and third chapters.

The notion of *yikhus* up until the Hasmonean dynasty is confined to its narrow sense, meaning simply lineage. The term is found first in later biblical books. There, the term refers to genealogical lists when mentioned in places such as Chronicles 9:1, Ezra 2:62 and Nehemiah 7:64. After the first exile, the question of genealogy was especially important for the returnees to Zion. Both those wishing to prove priestly descent in order to qualify for service in the Temple, and those wishing to claim family property took a strenuous interest in genealogy.²⁸

A history of *yihus*, which leads up to and centers upon the Babylonian Jewish community, is found in H.L. Poppers' article, "The Declasse in the Babylonian Jewish Community."²⁹ Since biblical times, the Jewish people had been divided into Kohanim, Levites, and ordinary people of the remaining tribes. Each category carried varying degrees of holiness, specific duties, obligations, and social advantages or disadvantages. Each person's "place in society was determined by genealogy." However, some were not "pure" in origin, and were subjected to bars upon marriage. These included proselytes and *mamzerim*, meaning approximately "bastards," but pertaining to all offspring of forbidden unions.³⁰

Under the Hasmoneans, the emphasis on lineage softened slightly. True, even the Hasmoneans, despite realizing the ideal of popular education, held on to the importance of descent. Hasmonean descent "implied prestige," and the Sanhedrin leaders were, at first, exclusively priests. But eventually, leadership passed into the hands of non-priests. Importantly as well, "nobility of descent, aristocracy of the blood, encounters the competitive demands of the intellect: the scholar steps into the position of leadership in the Pharisaic society."³¹ Thus, according to Popper, a turning point occurred in the Hasmonean period, where for the first time the value of scholarship threatened the hegemony of heredity.

It was after the destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kokhba defeat (70-135 C.E.) that the level of uprootedness and destruction of records and memories severely undermined the viability of valuing descent. A reflection of attitudinal change is found in the subsequent attempts to purify even the declasses. The definition of *mamzer* was narrowed, and restrictions against him or her were curtailed.³² Proselytes began to find tolerance and esteem in the Jewish community.³³ According to Popper, the "trend away from the stress

on racial purity towards the community of faith and spiritual heritage received further impetus through the destruction of the Temple and the widening of the Jewish Diaspora.”³⁴

An historian who has dealt with social issues in the Talmudic Age is Gedaliah Alon. The impression gained from Alon is that the trend in this period led away from hereditary succession. Such an opening of society was fueled, to a great degree, by the power struggle of the sages with the Kohenim, the latter embodying hereditary leadership.³⁵ Alon’s works illustrate well the clash between those who sought hereditary requirements for leadership, and those who demanded that leadership be achieved through merit in the scholarly domain.

We continue the thread of the early history of *yikhus* with the ideas of Avraham Grossman, who, it must be emphasized, only considers the narrow, genealogical conception. In “From Father to Son: the Inheritance of Spiritual Leadership in Jewish Communities of the Middle Ages,” Grossman argues that “the phenomenon of sons inheriting the positions held by their fathers in the spiritual leadership of the Jewish community first appeared in the Middle Ages.”³⁶ Previously, in Palestine in the talmudic age, sons did not possess the right to inherit their fathers’ yeshiva posts. Moreover, various talmudic sages of the lower stratum of the population rose to the rank of *Rosh Yeshiva* (head of the academy). Hereditary leadership was instituted by Mar Zutra and his descendants, who fled to Palestine around 520 C.E. Mar Zutra was continuing the dynastic leadership to which he was accustomed in his home in Babylon, where his father was exilarch. By the end of the Arabic period and the Crusades of 1099, the post of *Rosh Yeshiva* was the inheritance of only three families: Ben Meir, and two Hacoheh families.

In Babylon, inheritance of the *Rosh Yeshivah* post began in the eight century. At first, a son did not succeed his father immediately. An older person would often take his place for a while. Eventually, the son did succeed immediately. The post of Gaon was also the inheritance of a number of families. Distinguished birth and the right to succeed one’s father applied to other posts as well.³⁷

According to Grossman’s description, hereditary rule was a medieval innovation. The importance of *yikhus* in its genealogical sense actually increased after the talmudic age, reflected in the transmission of

offices. Grossman explains the phenomenon as a result of three factors. First, in Babylon, the yeshiva became by the period of the geonim an institution of political power and public leadership, like the Palestinian yeshiva. Second, the effect of the competition between Babylonian and Palestinian yeshivas and between the yeshivas and the exilarchs was a struggle for honor and authority: a struggle in which “succession and family lineage as a symbol of status and legitimacy were obviously of great value in those days.”³⁸ These two factors were joined by a third: the ascent of dynastic succession in Moslem society.

Grossman continues his history of medieval *yikhush* by comparing the differing values in Spain and North Africa to those of Italy and Germany until the end of the eleventh century. In Spain and North Africa, sons did not have the right to inherit their fathers' position of *Rosh Yeshiva*. In Spain, *yikhush* was still important, but “decisive weight was given to a person's qualifications.”³⁹ In North Africa, the situation was more variegated: in the large Kairouan community “there was no automatic inheritance and...the family was not the official source of authority;” while in smaller Gabes, “one family clan stood at the head of the academy.”⁴⁰

In contrast, in Italy and Germany, inheritance of spiritual leadership occurred to a much greater degree. In Italian leadership great weight was given to noble families, especially in the north. In Germany, all the leaders of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and all the prominent sages, belonged to five families: Kalonymos, Machir, Abun, Hacoheh, and Halevi. This condition was due to: 1) the fact certain merchant families were invited to settle by the rulers, and thereafter maintained their status related to the Jews arriving in their wake; 2) the smallness of the communities which allowed the extended family exclusive influence; and 3) the effect of the surrounding Christian German social stratification. There was little opposition to that condition of familial hegemony, because “the same reality existed in European feudal society;” and “the leading notable families paid taxes like all other members of the community.”⁴¹ Grossman concludes that in German society, lineage was more important, and that here, the family as a source of spiritual authority appears as an explicit teaching, in the writings of the German Hasidim. After the destruction of the First Crusade, however, the five families did begin to lose their grip. This process was abetted by the rise of the

urban classes and the guilds. By the thirteenth century were there some sages who opposed that phenomenon; and opposition continued more frequently in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴²

The major flaw in Grossman's assessment is that he invokes the term *yikhus* in only its narrow, hereditary sense. Thus, he cannot describe how *yikhus* continued to prevail in the later Middle Ages, albeit in its wider sense. Certain families continued to dominate the leadership, but their domination was no longer automatic. *Yikhus* had come to include status derived from contemporary family members who earned scholarly attainment, as opposed to forbears alone. It signified a growth in the importance of merit. That is why crises like those described by the Gaonim, resulting from the service of unworthy yeshiva heads who had inherited their posts, were no longer prevalent.⁴³

Robert Bonfil, in Rabbis and Jewish Communities, considers the social meaning of Italian rabbinic ordination, which in the period of the Renaissance "did not differ substantially from that in France and Germany."⁴⁴ Bonfil implies that lineage was not an important factor. In Italian society, rabbis even of humble origin obtained a status equivalent to that of the wealthy families. This, according to Bonfil, was due to influence of the surrounding non-Jewish environment, "within whose social frameworks the non-noble intellectual approached the pedigreed nobility."⁴⁵ Comparable to Grossman's claim that external influenced the extent to which communities were aristocratic, Bonfil credits the influence of Italian society with the purportedly non-aristocratic nature of its Jewish communities. Bonfil is nevertheless forced to consider the preponderance of members certain prominent families amongst the ordained Italian rabbis. He claims, rather naively, that apparently "the first Italian Jewry practiced a custom similar to that widespread in the Christian World, in which at least one of the sons of each prominent family attempted to enter the priesthood."⁴⁶ This explanation, however, fails to consider the political power entailed in rabbinical posts. A more likely explanation is that the rabbinate offered the greatest level of prestige; thus members of the most powerful families sought and obtained ordination, and would attempt to secure it for as many of their descendants as possible. This alternative explanation agrees with Grossman's assessment, which holds that although lineage ceased to be absolutely requisite for Italian Jewish leadership, its importance, as in Germany, remained great.

Bonfil also offers a dubious comparison between the status of the ordained rabbi and that of the non-Jewish university graduate. According to his understanding, ordination, like university study, merely augmented the noble lineage of the non-Jewish aristocrat. However, it is more likely that ordination actually *created* the Jewish equivalent of nobility, as opposed to merely complimenting it. According to Bonfil's own description, the ordained rabbi achieved honor, status and immense power (e.g. the ability to excommunicate). That tremendous status was shared by one's entire family. Thus, ordination created and sustained *yikhus*.

There is something to be gained from several of Bonfil's observations about the tension between scholarship and *yikhus*. We learn of one case in which a young, newly ordained rabbi is called up to read the Torah instead of an elder *Cohen*. The rabbi, out of modesty, attempts to defer, is nevertheless forced to read, and is subsequently physically attacked by the *Cohen*'s sons. The question is posed in a responsum: "does the ordained scholar take precedence over the elder, as was the ancient practice?" The respondent writes that "the sage takes precedence," but he may waive his honor if he so desires.⁴⁷ Another controversy existed over the ordination of the *mamzer*. As mentioned above, the *mamzer*'s status marked the opposite extreme on the spectrum from that of someone with *yikhus*. Samuel Judah Katzenellenbogen, an Italian rabbi, did not accept the principle of Moses Isserles of Poland, that ordaining a *mamzer* would degrade the Torah. Samuel Judah protests that a *mamzer* "is no worse than a proselyte, and yet how many proselytes have we found among the *tanaim* and *amoraim*! The sages already said (Horayot 3:8): 'a bastard...who is a Sage takes priority over an ignorant High Priest.'" Nevertheless, in the particular case, Samuel Judah refuses to ordain the *mamzer*. Bonfil regards this case as an illustration of the tension between a scholar's principle "that the Torah uplifts those who study it and, on the other hand, the social reality in which a person of doubtful ancestry was 'taken lightly by others.'" According to Bonfil, the *mamzer* case illuminates the prestige of ordination, to which not everyone had access. We may add that the case also illuminates the prestige of *yikhus*, by demonstrating the way in which low origin obstructed the attainment of ordination.⁴⁸

An earlier study by Bonfil, which analyzes seven Ordinances ordained by R. Judah Mintz and others in Padua, 1507, also contains observations that add to our understanding of *yikhus*. The first Ordinance is especially pertinent here, for it forbids betrothal to a woman without the presence of either her father, her mother, two relatives, or ten Jews. Bonfil detects in this an unmistakable social tendency on the part of the elite to prevent others from penetrating their stratum. He explains that there were attempts “to climb the social ladder by joining families of *yikhus* and wealth against their wishes” through marriage.⁴⁹ The gravity of such a crime is reflected in the punishment: excommunication. It is strange, notes Bonfil, that at a time when *yikhus* was being downplayed as a factor for rabbinic ordination, that such a penalty was instituted. Normally, improper marriage would have been treated as a moral/religious issue. The only explanation for the gravity of this crime is that the social implications of improper marriage- social mobility- were too much for the “Jewish nobility” to bear.

Several other works, alongside Grossman’s, deal with German Jewry and the weight of *yikhus*. Developments in medieval German society are especially pertinent to Polish Jewish society, considering the Ashkenazic origin of the first Jewish settlers in Poland. It now seems that groups of German Hasidim were a prominent part of the substantial thirteenth century German migration to Poland, establishing colonies in accordance with their own religious norms and social standards.⁵⁰ Thus, special consideration must be lent to the German Hasidim. Haym Soloveitchik comments upon *yikhus* among the German Hasidim, who were “frustrated in their efforts at communal reforms” and thus “strove to build, at least, pure family units. These efforts, coupled with the traditional concept of good lineage (*yikhus*) and their own conviction of ancestral merit (*zekut abot*) as one of the major instruments of Providence, turned their attention to marriage.” As a result, the German Hasidim developed elaborate principles of matchmaking.⁵¹

Soloveitchik postulates a deeper cause of disgruntlement, as well. The German Hasidim, he claims, rose “from the aristocratic center of the Jewish community.” Anyone less would have been “run out of town” for propounding what they did; moreover, the only Hasidim whose social origins we know are those of the founders, “bluebloods all.” This elite was, however, “now helplessly witnessing the erosion of its own

position” resulting from the successful spread of the Tosafists’ methods. These methods were “destroying the very world that the Hasidic leadership represented,” by “supplanting the primacy of their traditions, undermining their communal preeminence and sorely limiting their capacity for effective action.” German hasidic literature is the work of a “displaced aristocracy or one in the process of being stripped of its intellectual and political patrimony.” After the 1220’s, the Kalonymides and other old, famous families no longer led Ashkenaz. They were replaced by leaders from Bohemia, of whom only one was a scion of a once famous family. Concludes Soloveitchik on this subject:

The importance of lineage in the thought of the Hasidim, the repeated protests on their part against the marriage of the well-born (*bene-tobim*) with the unworthy rich, and their laments about the seizure of communal leadership by the base and the wicked reflect, I suggest, this loss by the old Rhineland aristocracy of the commanding heights of prestige and power.⁵²

If Soloveitchik is indeed correct, then articulating the importance of *yikhus* in its genealogical sense may serve as a weapon against encroachments upon aristocratic power by newer, more meritocratic leaders.

However, Soloveitchik may be exaggerating the contrast between the Tosafists and the Hasidim with regard to lineage. H.H. Ben Sasson, for example, criticizes a major work on the Tosafists precisely on the basis that the author disregards the role of *yikhus* in the Tosafists’ leadership. Many, if not most of the Tosafists were of one family, writes Ben Sasson. Although “all revealed talent in their works,” talent alone did not assure them public leadership. “The ancient Jewish tradition is undoubtedly marked by the importance of *yikhus*,” a consideration which must be taken seriously.⁵³

A concurring position is found in Ephraim Kanarfogel’s work Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages. Kanarfogel disputes Grossman’s claim that among German Jews after the Crusades, the “emphasis on lineage was downplayed and scholarly ability became the major criterion for leadership.” He invokes the example of the Tosafists, as well, remarking that “they too came from a handful of families.” Even if these families were not those of the pre-Crusade period, “*yikhus* still had a hand in determining intellectual leadership.” The need for lineage was simply “more narrow.” After identifying the various

family connections of the Tosafists, Kanarfogel makes an interesting observation about sons-in-law. He distinguishes between *yikhus* as normally understood, and the *yikhus* of sons-in-law, who may be chosen for their scholarly abilities. "In their case," remarks Kanarfogel, "*yikhus* and intellectual qualifications tend to merge."⁵⁴ Kanarfogel is the first to be sensitive to a transformation of *yikhus*, but his definition is undeveloped. First, we must question his suggestion that such a merging of *yikhus* and scholarship was limited to sons-in-law. In light of Soloveichik's above observations about the rise of a Bohemian leadership in Ashkenaz, the majority of whom did not claim distinguished descent, it seems more likely anyone who rose to a high level of scholarship acquired, simultaneously, *yikhus atzmo*. Therefore, instead of limiting a merging of *yikhus* and scholarship to sons-in-law, we may describe the rise of an expanded meaning of *yikhus* that encompassed merit. *Yikhus* was becoming the paradoxical conception of family status that might be attained, might be inherited, but must be accompanied by scholarly attainment.

Yisrael Yakov Yuval's book Sages in their Generations credits the professionalization of the rabbinate with decline in the importance of lineage. Yuval describes a rise of wealthy Jewish families in Ashkenaz, from whom emerged the leaders of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. However, the professionalization of the rabbinate led to the emergence of "more objective criteria for ordination" than family and wealth. The system became democratized, and new opportunities emerged for those lacking *yikhus* (meaning lineage) to penetrate the stratum of rabbinic leadership. These "more objective criteria" are, for Yuval, "ambiguous." But he does note that personal charisma emerged as an influential trait alongside *yikhus*. Like Soloveitchik, he observes a decline in *yikhus* due to the Tosafists. The weight of *yikhus* in Ashkenaz, Yuval argues, was much less than that in French and Spanish society due to the rise of talmudic *pilpul*- the method of the Tosafists- which granted the Ashkenazim more independence from the rabbis.⁵⁵ In the thirteenth century, notes Yuval, families with *yikhus* led by the German Hasidim, initiated a reaction against that upward mobility. But this opposition group was not heeded; and "we virtually do not hear of inheritance of rabbinic posts in Germany" henceforth. Yuval therefore notes a gradual decline in *yikhus*, by

which he means lineage, due to the rising importance of scholarship. He fails, however, to realize that scholarship became incorporated into the conception of *yikhus*, as opposed to causing its decline.

A work which compares Ashkenazic and Sephardic attitudes toward *yikhus*, extending through the early modern period, is H.J. Zimmels' Ashkenazim and Sephardim. One distinction, according to Zimmels, is that the claim of nobility amongst the Ashkenazim was attached to certain localities, whereas Sephardic nobility was considered inherent in the very families. For example, the Ashkenazim of Mainz regarded themselves as nobler than those of Cologne, even raising their *ketubah* amount above what was customary in Cologne. In Spain, in contrast, certain families were aristocratic regardless of their place of birth or residence. Zimmels further asserts that Ashkenazic nobility differed because it was a "nobility of mind and character." Descent from scholars and martyrs created *yikhus* in Ashkenaz. An example of pride of descent from martyrs may be found in the surname "Sachs," which was an abbreviation of "*zera kadosh*" (Z.K.). Zimmels admits that Sephardim took pride in scholarly descent, but claims that among the Ashkenazim such descent assumed practical significance, influencing halakhic decisions. A third distinction relates to Sephardic aristocratic attitudes regarding their Ashkenazic brethren. The Jews of the Iberian Peninsula considered themselves descendants of the Jerusalem nobility, while Jews of other lands descended from the remaining population. Towards the end of the Middle Ages a new claim is made: certain Sephardic families claim to be descendants of the house of David. Such claims increased after the Spanish expulsion, as Sephardim came into close contact with the Ashkenazim.⁵⁶

In the course of time, however, "the attitudes became reversed; descent from noble families was stressed by the Ashkenazim while purity of their families was emphasized by the Sephardim." Some Ashkenazic families began to claim biblical and Davidic descent, as well. From the seventeenth century on, Ashkenazim began to compile pedigrees. This was not out of boastfulness, but rather due to realities following the Chmielnicki persecutions, which separated families and created the danger of unintentional incestuous unions.⁵⁷

Many of Zimmels' assertions need to be contested. The first, regarding the limitation of Ashkenazic nobility to locale, requires more evidence. Did the German families named by Grossman, for example, or the Tosaphists listed by Kanarfogel, really lose their *yikhus* when they left their respective towns? Neither author mentions such a precarious condition. Zimmels' single example of the Jews of Mainz is not sufficient to draw such a generalization. We must be suspicious of the second assertion, as well, in which only Ashkenazim appreciated "*yikhus* of the mind" by giving it a practical application in halakhic decision-making. Again, Zimmels furnishes too few examples (two) to draw such a conclusion. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine Sephardic scholarship bestowing less prestige upon descendants than would occur among the Ashkenazim. At least Zimmels is more sensitive in his treatment of the concept, realizing that *yikhus* can be composed of a variety of elements, including descent from scholars, martyrs, or royalty. Zimmels' third assertion, describing a gradual reverse in the level of appreciation of *yikhus* between the two groups, is much better documented.

In conclusion, the below works allow us to plot the expansion and contraction of the meaning of *yikhus* from late antiquity. Jewish leadership until the Hasmonean period was hereditary, as was *yikhus*. Under the Hasmoneans and throughout the Talmudic age, the leadership became more meritocratic, and *yikhus* came to include acquired traits. In the Geonic period, however, hereditary leadership was re-instituted, and the understanding of *yikhus* seems to have contracted again to lineage. From the Middle Ages, excepting a reaction by the German Hasidim, both leadership and *yikhus* were re-opened to include those who attained learning and charisma. Finally, a reaction in favor of hereditary succession and a narrowing of the conception of *yikhus* occurred within the Hasidic movement toward the mid-nineteenth century. It was the Hasidim who eventually returned Jewish leadership to a dynastic form not seen since Geonic times.

As we approach the close of the Middle Ages in our survey, we enter into a discussion about the period leading up to the rise of Hasidism. Examination of norms in these centuries will allow us to describe the milieu from which the movement emerged, as well as clarify the extent to which the Hasidim challenged

values regarding *yikhus*. We shall restrict our survey to comments about *yikhus* in pre- and non-Hasidic society, reserving most remarks about the Hasidim for that section alone.

The pioneering work of Jacob Katz should be considered first. Katz's article "Marriage and Sexual Life among the Jews at the End of the Middle Ages" remains the most comprehensive treatment of the subject of *yikhus*. After describing the economic function of marriage, Katz describes several other values-including *yikhus*, which determined the worth of a prospective son or daughter-in-law. Despite the facts that no fixed economic class existed, the divisions of Cohen, Levi and Israelites only applied to religious affairs, and that the talmudic dictum "all families are kosher" was effective, different levels of *yikhus* existed.⁵⁸

Katz is sensitive to different understandings of *yikhus*, although he fails to present those differences as having evolved in history. Katz delineates two distinct categories of *yikhus*, one negative and one positive. The first is a halakhic, negative association, which concerns the "unfit family," tainted by a member who is a *mamzer*, a prostitute, or has been excommunicated. The remainder of the discussion is devoted to the positive, second type of *yikhus*- the idea of the special right possessed by descendants of the "famous of Israel", especially of those distinguished in scholarship.

This second type of *yikhus* has two subdivisions. In its narrow sense, it is a "sacred-biological" conception of nobility. Eager for prestige, many families traced their genealogies, whether correctly or not. This conception of *yikhus* was often criticized. Furthermore, it was not accorded much weight in arranged marriages. The wider conception was more valuable. That wider *yikhus* rose from familia¹ connection with individuals who had become prominent through the combination of either economic prosperity, political (*kahal*) appointment, or closeness to the king (i.e., *shtadlanim*); with Torah scholarship. This wider sense of *yikhus* could be acquired. Significantly, Katz declares "personal *yikhus*" to be a contradiction, because *yikhus* was attained not through personal distinction but through relations to others.⁵⁹

Of the four categories of prestige, Torah scholarship was the highest. Torah knowledge was, in fact, sacred. A wealthy and politically eminent family could really only attain *yikhus* if one of its members was a scholar. Lacking such a scholar, a wealthy family could achieve that connection through a son-in-law. This

phenomenon provided a pathway for social mobility, as a talented but poor student could marry into a rich family. A woman, however, could not raise her social level in this way. Her success in the “matchmaking market” depended upon the *yikhus* of her father and family, her economic attributes, and her physical beauty.
60

Yikhus existed in other manifestations, as well. There was “*yikhus* of place”- a Polish Jew in Germany was considered less valuable. Here we are reminded of Zimmels’ assertion above, but his claim that Ashkenazic *yikhus* was tied to a locale is much more extreme. Katz notes, as well, a “*yikhus* of family situation”- possession of children and lack of a *halitza* certificate detracted from *yikhus*. Finally, there was “*yikhus* of marital history”- divorce or widowhood tended to lessen marriagability. Katz concludes with remarks about voluntary marriage and the rise of eroticism, which eventually invalidated both economic considerations and the weight of *yikhus* in marriage decisions.⁶¹

In Tradition and Crisis, Katz makes several observations about the operation of *yikhus* in daily life. Unfortunately, he is inconsistent in his application of the term. *Yikhus* is used sometimes to denote “pedigree,” its narrow sense, and sometimes in the broader sense of “family status.” Katz invokes the term *yikhus* in these two manifestations arbitrarily. But by stating these categories explicitly, we can navigate our way through. In one place, Katz notes a halakhic disagreement over whether pedigree should influence choice of a cantor.⁶² Elsewhere, Katz discusses seats in the synagogue, visible manifestations of family status, which were purchased by families and often passed down from father to son. Due to the characteristic social fluctuations that affected each family, such seats did not necessarily reflect the actual position of a family, for “the sons of good families held on to their honored seats even if others had meanwhile eclipsed them in terms of property or status.” But if a family became totally impoverished, the members were stripped of their seats. Rich families could display their wealth and achieve status by donating Torah scrolls, curtains for the Ark, and ritual objects. And the order in which one was called to the Torah was based on his status.⁶³ But visible signs of class were limited. A family could not, for example, secure permanent hereditary appointment in the *kehilla*.⁶⁴ (However, certain families were indeed able to monopolize the

communal leadership, as we shall see in Gershon Hundert's analysis.) Finally, Katz emphasizes that overall status was determined by "public opinion," which was influenced by official titles, public scholarly discussions, and "pedigree and family ties," which "could not be hidden."⁶⁵

In 1958, a year after the publication of Tradition and Crisis, Hayim Hillel Ben Sasson published a criticism of Katz' work, in which he expressed several problems with Katz' conception of *yikhus*. First, Ben Sasson rejects Katz' connection of medieval *yikhus* to that of Kohanim, Leviim, and Israelites in ancient times. In Ben Sasson's opinion, there is simply too great a distance between the two periods for us to get a sense of *yikhus* through such a comparison. Instead, we should consider family connections of the communal leaders and the composition of the public leadership stratum. It becomes evident after such an examination that "there were not many sons of the poor in this stratum," and that "rabbis and *roshim* were connected to each other by ancestry or marriage." Families rose and fell within that sphere, yet "remained united through the strength of Torah, leadership and wealth in various combinations, which allowed them to base their *yikhus* in reality." Thus, we must consider whole families, and not "individuals with one-sided advantages."⁶⁶

One may detect in Ben Sasson's reaction a rejection of Katz' approach, which is really that of a sociologist. Ben Sasson considers Katz' invocation of ancient class structure rather lacking in historical sensitivity. Furthermore, he guides us toward a more specific analysis of the ruling strata, for there we shall find a picture of *yikhus* at work. It must be admitted that Ben Sasson's criticism is justified, for Katz, despite his enormous contributions, is often a-historical in his approach. As noted above, Katz' does not describe the evolving significance and understanding of *yikhus*, except to note its demise as traditional society broke down. Furthermore, his generally theoretical approach leaves much to be desired in terms of detailed analysis, as Ben Sasson implies. Katz often gives us the structure of the society without the equally important story of people and evolving institutions.

To Ben Sasson's objections, I must add my own. While it is true that Katz introduces us to a wider notion of *yikhus*, he often stretches the concept so far that it loses its hereditary dimension. I find it difficult

to accept Katz' ideas about "*yikhus* of place" and "*yikhus* of family station." One searches in vain for invocations of these phrases in the actual sources. As we shall see in the next chapter, *yikhus* might have come to include family prestige, but never did it refer vaguely to one's geographical location or general marriageability. Factors such as foreign origin or the possession of children from a previous marriage would merely be weighed against a person's *yikhus*, not be considered part of it.

In Ben Sasson's own work, Theory and Leadership, he examines homiletic and ethical literature for attitudes about *yikhus*. Interestingly, such observations are only contained in the section on the critics of the wealthy. Those critics tend to associate *yikhus* with wealth. Eliezer ("the Rokeakh") notes the gap between "dear" families and "despised" ones, rich and poor. He ventures that it is not God's intention for such separation to exist among Jews, as it does between Jews and Gentiles. God desires mixture between rich and poor. In any event, according to R. Eliezer, throughout the ages "the rich also purchased the *yikhus* of ancient families." This created an unnatural union between "Torah, wealth, communal leadership and ancestral right (*zekhut avot*)."⁶⁷

Ephraim of Leczyce condemns *yikhus* on the basis of the arrogance that it causes. The sons of Leah, for example, scorned the sons of maidservants because it appeared to them that they had slightly superior *yikhus*. Today, those 'to whom it seems that they have a slight advantage over their friend, or greater wealth, or greater *yikhus*; who claim that many wealthy men or scholars are their relatives; or who possess these things themselves," distance themselves from their fellow man and "turn up their noses" at the poor and oppressed. Ephraim demarcates three types of "arrogant *yikhus* possessors in Poland:" those who are independently wealthy, those from a wealthy family, and those from a learned family.

Another social critic included in Ben Sasson's analysis is Samuel Eliezer Edels, the Maharsha. This commentator describes how the family of the rebel Korakh was a rich family who put themselves above Aaron's family. The biblical verse "Do not be like Korakh" means, according to the Maharsha, do not seek elevation of *yikhus* or wealth. He explains that the statement "God spoke to Moses" is phrased thus to emphasize that God spoke to Moses alone, so that his sons, despite their wealth and *yikhus*, would not be

appointed as Moses' successor. The present-day "sons of Moses" - sons of the learned and wealthy- "blind the eyes of the congregation."⁶⁸

Ben Sasson concludes his analysis with a summary of the seventeenth-century preacher Yedidya Gottlieb's views on *yikhus*. Yedidya raises the issue of the claim to *yikhus* of one who "ascended by his own strength." Such a self-made man is likely to be corrupted by his wealth. It is clear to Yedidya that honor and *yikhus*, once attributes worthy of respect, have in his day deteriorated into products of material wealth.⁶⁹

The examples furnished by Ben Sasson bring out a component to *yikhus* that others have not emphasized: that of wealth. He incorporates his discussion about *yikhus* into a general discussion about societal attitudes toward wealth. We learn from these examples that wealth was a more important element of *yikhus* than is described in Katz, where greater weight is lent to the ingredient of scholarship. Ben Sasson's examples are also as extreme as anything which we might find amongst the Hasidim, a fact which should be remembered during the remainder of our analysis.

Another work of great relevance is that of Gershon Hundert. While he does not refer explicitly to "*yikhus*," Hundert's The Jews Of Opatow contains a section called "Authority in the Jewish Community" in which he stresses the hegemony of the Landau family in Opatow. Hundert describes the domination of certain families in the early modern leadership:

Particularly during the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century, a kind of Polish-Lithuanian Jewish aristocracy existed. Members of a relatively small number of families held an astonishing number of rabbinical and communal offices. Among these families were the Ginzburgs, Heilperins, Horowitzs, Rapoport, and Katzenellenbogens.⁷⁰

In Opatow, members of the Landau family, which "included rabbis in at least twenty communities, elders of the regions of Cracow-Sandomierz and Lwow, and leaders of a number of individual communities," were the most influential community members for almost a century. That is, "it was unusual if at least one member of the family was not an elder in the community."⁷¹ Hundert observes that the Landaus' authority, which

allowed them to hold office, “derived from their lineage, their learning, and their wealth.”⁷² Significantly, their political power and wealth gave them special access to the magnate owners or governors of their towns.

Hundert proceeds to trace the Landau pedigree, during the course of which we are able to see *yikhus* at work. The marriage strategies are revealing, for as a rule, the Landau youth were married to the most prominent Jews of that part of the world. The daughters were married to rabbis of various communities, many among them possessing quite important posts. The sons were married to daughters of rabbis of the same supreme status, or, in one case, the daughter of a court physician of Jan Sobieski. Despite the strong links that the Landaus forged through these marriages, however, they were “not an organized party,” being occasionally riven by internal disputes.⁷³ Their authority was occasionally challenged, as well. Hundert describes several such challenges, including a major ruckus involving Ezekiel Landau. Yet, “because of his access to the center of power- that is, to the town owner- he was able to prevail, successfully overcoming a rival group within the elite.”⁷⁴

Another dynamic which Hundert’s analysis permits us to view in great detail is a family’s struggle to maintain its domination of the kahal. In one instance the kahal, undoubtedly under the influence of Judah Landau, petitioned the town owner against the rule that barred incumbents from continuing to serve in office.⁷⁵ Another case is described in which the Landaus and another family, the Ickowicz, struggled to obtain the rabbinate in Cracow for their own family member.⁷⁶ Finally, in the aftermath of the “great ruckus” alluded to above, the town owner attempted to remedy the complaint that “year after year the *galil* elder’s family and allies held the important offices in the kahal” with legislation banning immediate succession from father or brother to son.⁷⁷

The Landau family thus embodied *yikhus* in every sense of the term. They were wealthy, learned, extremely well-connected within the Jewish elite of Eastern Europe, sometimes had close ties to the town owners or governors, and monopolized several communal leadership positions. In addition, they built a synagogue, which was called by the family’s name.⁷⁸ One advantage of *yikhus* which is stressed here more than in the above studies is access to non-Jewish rulers. Hundert’s research methods merit mention as well:

The Jews of Opatow is based upon rigorous archival investigation, in contrast to the dependence on literary evidence in Katz and Ben Sasson. What results is a more vivid picture of *yikhus* as it operated in reality.

Corroborating Hundert's observations about the importance of proximity to non-Jewish leaders, Moshe Rosman, in The Lord's Jews, describes in great detail the wealth, status, and power of a Jewish general manager of a latifundium in the eighteenth century- Israel Rubinowicz.⁷⁹ Rubinowicz's connection to the magnates "gave him three principal tools to use to gain power in society: the right to employ force; discretionary power to allocate contracts, jobs, money, and minor appointments; and direct access to and influence on the magnate."⁸⁰ While the lack of Jewish sources do not allow us to know if Rubinowicz became a despot over the Jewish community, wielded influence in the Council of Four Lands or conducted personal vendettas, some correspondence shows that "within the Jewish community, Rubinowicz knew how to use his power to further his own interests and those of his family." Examples include securing rabbinical posts for his son-in-law, and afterwards, his son-in-law's own son, despite opposition in both cases; and obtaining a three-year exemption from all taxes-Polish and Jewish- for his son Marek.⁸¹ Similar to Hundert, Rosman emphasizes that, in the end, a figure like Rubinowicz's status within the Jewish community was "directly linked to the visible support" of the lord.⁸²

It will serve us well to consider, in contrast, a figure who was not so successful: the memoirist Dov Ber of Bolechow. Israel Bartal describes Dov Ber as "a person who never became a member of the Jewish elite in spite of the fact that he tried by various means to build up the prestige of his family."⁸³ Despite repeated cases in his memoirs where the reader is shown the importance of his family, Dov Ber was, in actuality, "continually snubbed by members of the elite."⁸⁴ He complains that the members of the community refuse to appreciate his contributions. According to Bartal, "the fate of his family is a good illustration of the problem of the social and financial rise of people who did not belong to the circle of the traditional community elite."⁸⁵ Ber demonstrates the difficulty of obtaining *yikhus atzmo*.

The archive-based research of Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, deals mainly with the social structure of Bohemian Jewry. However, she states that many of the conditions she describes pertain to Polish Jews, as

well. Jacob Katz affirms that the situation described in Kestenberg-Gladstein's studies "undoubtedly applied" to other places in Ashkenaz.⁸⁶ In "Differences of Estates Within Pre-Emancipation Jewry," she argues that there existed in Bohemia "a social order based on estates" into which a Jew was born. It is possible to tell which estate someone belonged to from the taxes he paid.⁸⁷ The tax which Kestenberg-Gladstein is interested in is the tax of "*Judenschutz*," (protection of Jewry). Those who obtained *Judenschutz* received protection, a permit for residence within a time limit, and a permit for work, particularly commerce. These Jews would not be expelled, and enjoyed "the right to trade in almost all kinds of goods."⁸⁸ However, the number of families and houses was fixed and could not be exceeded. An analysis demonstrates that the number of families paying the *Judenschutz* is generally much smaller than the overall number of families settled in the locality.⁸⁹ Kestenberg-Gladstein describes a condition in which "the original democratic organisation of the community had been dissolved to such a degree that some Jews 'kept' other Jews under their dominion." That is, the payment of protection money collectively was replaced by payment only by the more wealthy and influential members, making the rest dependent on them. The upshot of all this was that several families throughout Bohemia "kept other Jews in subjection."⁹⁰ Payment of the *Judenschutz* was therefore a reflection of tremendous family power and status.

This picture of stratification along familial lines is further developed in Kestenberg-Gladstone's essay on the "Jew House." These houses, built by the city's first Jewish settlers, became central to the economy because only house owners belonged to the patrician class. Only they could sit in the kahal. Most pertinent to our study is the observation that "the rule was fixed that only members of families with *yikhus* were entitled to possess these city houses;" while one who was merely wealthy could not. The purpose: "to fortify the authority of the old families who had *yikhus*."⁹¹ Other legislation was passed which forbade a house owner to divide his house or transfer his right of settlement, which also protected families with *yikhus*. Only a house owner was permitted to engage in trade, was exempt from tax, was considered a citizen, and was a political representative of the community. In their totality, the house owners constituted a first estate. But the fact that wealth was not sufficient to obtain a house presents a slightly different picture from that in

Ben Sasson, above, which ascribes such weight to wealth as a component of *yikhus*. To sum up: these studies by Kesternberg-Gladstone reveal two additional reflections of *yikhus*: payment of the protection tax (*Judenschutz*) and ownership of a house. Both allowed families with *yikhus*, and not families that were merely wealthy, to dominate Jewish society.

An important article that reveals the role of the Jewish educational system in preserving the class structure is Shaul Stampfer's "*Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah, and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional East European Jewish Society.*"⁹² Stampfer's thesis is that scholarship and learnedness maintained the status system, and "could serve as surrogates for the role of blood, nobility, or ordination."⁹³ Learning provided the elite with a security in the same way that land ownership and political independence did for the non-Jewish aristocracy. It assured status "irrespective of the vicissitudes of time," and strengthened "the authority and status of the communal leadership." Learning thus stabilized Jewish society.

For this to work, however, learning had to be a rare commodity. Thus, "it was necessary to limit access to knowledge without appearing to do so."⁹⁴ The key to that system lay in failure: the fact that the *heder* introduced all students to the Talmud without teaching it effectively was part of a selective process. All students were able to see how difficult the Talmud was, and this created an appreciation for the few who mastered it. Most students were unprepared for the openness and independence entailed in the *beit midrash*, the advanced level. As a general rule, they ended up falling into "the same categories which classified their parents"⁹⁵ Through this selective mechanism, the elite stratum was not swamped with members, and learning remained a rare- and therefore valuable- commodity. At the same time, "the religious elite could be regarded as a meritocracy in which membership was based on achievement and not family."⁹⁶ But really, it was to a high degree based on family. Parents who had the means and desire could get better teachers and studying conditions for their children. The quality of *heder* teacher, for example, was determined by parents.

Stampfer avoids Katz' overly-broad conception of *yikhus*. He realizes that qualities like *yikhus*, ordination, and learning are components of high status; but gives the sum of these attributes a different name: *shein*. For example: "it was *sheineh yidden* who had the greatest influence on communal decisions and it was from their circles that communal leaders were usually drawn;"⁹⁷ and "the relative ignorance of the masses is at the basis of the distinction between the *shein* and the *proste*."⁹⁸ Stampfer defines *yikhus* as "membership in an important family" and "the product of distinguished ancestry." Most importantly, he is the first to recognize that with "each additional generation away from a distinguished ancestor, the value of *yikhus* went down." He contrasts this with non-Jewish nobility, which retained its value for future generations regardless of their merit.⁹⁹

An important profession to consider, for which *yikhus* was a business, was that of that of the *shadkhan*, the matchmaker. A history of matchmaking is attempted by S. Shila. Tracing what the halakhic sources reveal about matchmaking, Shila determines that the profession came into existence in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries among the Ashkenazim. Matchmaking among Spanish Jews was unknown until after the expulsion. The earliest sources (from Speyer and Sens) reveal that, in the beginning, the occupation was not well-respected and had previously been a service that was free of charge. R. Simcha, for example, compares the matchmaker to a pimp. By the fifteenth century, however, it had become elevated to a respected occupation. In France, it was impossible to marry without a matchmaker. It became the business of sages, such as the Maharil, and fees for the service were high. But in later centuries, there is evidence of a decline in prestige of matchmaking.¹⁰⁰ Relating this history to what we know about *yikhus*, we should note that the profession seems to have become more prestigious around the period when automatic hereditary succession was dying out in Ashkenaz. Perhaps there is a connection: a greater need for professionals arose because the practice of arranging marriages became more complicated, due to the increasing complexity of *yikhus*.

Another category which sheds light on *yikhus* is that of the position of medieval and modern Jews regarding *mamzerim*. As stated above in the section on early history, the *mamzer*, a child of a forbidden union, embodied anti-*yikhus*. Stephen Passamaneck, in an essay entitled "Some Medieval Problems of

Mamzerut,” illustrates how the medieval halakhists narrowed and confined the scope of *mamzeruth*. In addition, they limited the power of a married man to declare one of his children a *mamzer* by, for example, significantly reducing the time-frame within which such an accusation could be made.¹⁰¹ It is clear from Passamaneck’s article that the gravity of *mamzerut* persisted. However, the fact that the authorities began to curb the bounds of *mamzerut* may have been a result of the declining importance of heredity.

But lest we overestimate that decline, it is important to realize how the issue of pure lineage endured in medieval and early modern times. This is reflected in the literature regarding accusations of *mamzerut* which were hurled at members of the elite. Such charges, called *nadlerism*, were even launched against a rabbi of the stature of the Judah Loewe, the Maharal of Prague. One article that deals with *nadlerism* is Isaac Rivkind’s “Gambling Laws.” Rivkind finds that among reasons for moralists condemning gambling is the fact that such games often result in slander, including *nadlerism*. Rivkind takes the opportunity to relate an incident in which the Maharal and other illustrious families were victims of the charge.¹⁰²

A fuller account of the *nadlerism* incident in Prague is found in Byron Sherwin’s book Mystical Theology and Social Dissent. The nadler controversy, during the Maharal’s lifetime, had spread throughout Central and Eastern Europe, causing turmoil. The Maharal became a vocal opponent of those who blemished the elite in this way, even excommunicating those guilty of *nadlerism*. His condemnations are characterized by “a rare outburst of personal emotion.” Several contemporary leaders joined him in attempting to stem *nadler* abuse; and after his death, leaders of the stature of Joel Sirkes and Solomon Luria. The latter condemned *nadlerism* that victimized one family in particular: that of the Maharal himself. Sherwin concludes that the Maharal’s “intense interest in combating slander may have been because of his having been a victim of such slander.”¹⁰³ The vigorous reactions against *nadlerism* prove the degree to which pure lineage continued to be a dear quality.

This is born out in a work which analyzes the responsa of Rabbi Joel Sirkes (1561-1640). The author, Elijah Judah Schochet, defines a desirable match as one “arranged with families of substance or learning or good learning, preferably those possessing all three qualities.”¹⁰⁴ Any violation of the betrothal

agreement would destroy the reputation of the violator, diminishing his or her chances of an honorable match in the future. However, parents would break the match if a member of the other family committed an indiscretion. Such was the desire to “arrange matches for their children with honorable families.”¹⁰⁵ Under such conditions, *nadlerism* could cause a great deal of damage. According to Schochet: “Among the upper classes a good family name and reputation was a most prestigious, albeit fragile commodity, and it was the prime target for an envious lower class through the media of slander.” Rabbi Sirkes therefore remained skeptical about any such gossip; and punishments for *nadlerism* were severe.¹⁰⁶

Evidence that *nadlerism* persisted throughout the nineteenth century is found in an essay by Yehuda Friedlander, entitled “‘The Words of the Talebearer are as Wounds’- On Megillat Yuhasin Attributed to Rabbi Mendel Landsberg of Kremitz.” The subject of the article-the work *Megillat Yuhasin*- is a parody, written in talmudic (*pilpulistic*) style, that includes an attack on a rich, powerful Kremniz resident, whom the author charges, among other things, is a *mamzer*. Friedlander traces the roots of *nadlerism* back to the thirteenth century, during the Maimonidean controversy. He notes that such satirical works which attempted to spoil the victim’s *yikhus* constitute a genre. Friedlander concludes that the author’s charges of *mamzerut* are intended to prove that his rival must be forbidden from serving on the kahal.¹⁰⁷

Although not comparable to a *mamzer*, another disadvantaged type in the marriage market was the female widow. While she might have *great yikhus*, widowhood severely limited woman’s desirability in the marriage market. In “Rituals of Marriage in the Later Middle Ages,” authors Esther Cohen and Elliott Horowitz discuss the problems of widowhood for women. The widows lack of appeal in the marriage market is found to “permeate medieval Jewish writings.”¹⁰⁸ The widower is evidently complicitous in her husband’s death, and has a considerable sexual appetite. In one case a rabbi, “himself a widower, refused to marry the well-dowered daughter of a prominent rabbi because of her widowhood.”¹⁰⁹ This same situation existed in Christian society, as well.

Another issue, already mentioned regarding Italian society, is that of clandestine marriage. It is discussed with reference to early modern Ashkenaz by David Biale, in *Eros and the Jews*. Biale reveals that

legislation in sixteenth century Lithuania was as harsh as that described by Bonfil. He relates several incidents and a tale of clandestine marriages between socially disparate parties, such as a young man of *yikhus* and a maidservant. However, Biale is not interested in the socio-economic implications of these examples, concentrating exclusively upon the romantic aspects.¹¹⁰

Two articles explain the phenomenon of genealogy in the early modern period. In his article on the Bruck family, Alfred Bruck claims that the interest in genealogy among Jews revived between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, due to changes in the socio-economic status of many Jews. These changes “prompted the new rich to search for their past for some link with a noble or famous ancestor in order to prove the legitimacy of their new social position.”¹¹¹ Meir Wunder explains the growth of the importance of genealogy in that period in light of the confusion in the wake of the 1648 pogroms. Whereas before the “deluge,” Isaiah Horowitz could downplay *yikhus* in the sense of lineage, ascribing greater significance to *yikhus atzmo*, acquired *yikhus*, his son Shabbetai Sheftel could not afford to think like that. Living in the aftermath of devastation, the son urges every family to prepare a genealogy to assure that a “blemish” did not enter.¹¹² Wunder then provides an impressive bibliography of European Jewish genealogies from that period until the present. He also comments that in Poland and Russia, *yikhus* (probably meaning lineage) was not very important, in contrast to Hungary. Unfortunately, one is forced to treat the observations of these to essays with caution, because their claims usually lack adequate documentation.

Before proceeding to the modern period, we should briefly consider one last article, bearing the title “*Yikhus* in the Shtetl and *Dignitas* in the Late Roman Republic.” The author, Saul Bastomsky, invokes the popular historian Max Dimont’s definition of *yikhus*- “an amalgam of family background, tradition, learning and occupation, which usually was inherited, but which could be possessed through the acquisition of knowledge.”¹¹³ Bastomsky goes no further than this, providing, however, a more sophisticated definition of *dignatus*. According to his own admission, a comparison between the two concepts is unfruitful.

Saving our discussion of *yikhus* among the Hasidim for last, we turn now to literature on the meaning and function of *yikhus* during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In these works, we often see that

attitudes toward *yikhus* met the same fate as other features of Jewish traditional society. But in the so-called *shtetl*, at least in those which remained isolated, traditional attitudes endured even into the twentieth century.

A rather comprehensive account of *yikhus* in the nineteenth century is found in Immanuel Etkes' "Marriage and Torah Study Among the *Lomdim* in Lithuania in the Nineteenth Century." Etkes considers the tension between family life and Torah study among the Lithuanian scholars, devoting much of his discussion to the *kest* period, during which the scholar was supported by his wife's family. But several issues pertain to *yikhus*. Etkes mentions the typical features of matchmaking and marriage in nineteenth-century Lithuanian Jewry, which "were essentially the same as in traditional Ashkenazic society."¹¹⁴ Marriages were still arranged by parents, although more commonly dependent upon the couple's consent. The most important values in the marriage market were still wealth, lineage, and scholarly talent. An expression of the latter was "the custom of submitting the prospective groom to an examination at the initiative of the bride's father before the agreement was signed."¹¹⁵ During the nineteenth century, however, a new factor also became important: the degree of the candidate's loyalty to tradition.

In an article about Haskalah autobiography Alan Mintz portrays the disenchantment of several maskilim over traditional marriage procedures. These writers felt alienated by early marriage, which had deprived them of the romantic experience they read about in works like those of Rousseau. Worse, for Mordechai Aaron Guenzburg, the trauma of early arranged marriage brought on sexual impotence. He bitterly describes his and other arranged marriages as "a set of transactions in which each family tries to maximize its three basic sources of 'capital': learning, ancestry, and money."¹¹⁶ During his own matchmaking process, tragedy struck: a relative of his father converted to Islam. As a consequence of his *yikhus* being ruined, Guenzburg was "sold into bondage to a family of wealthy but vulgar tailors."¹¹⁷ Mintz, emphasizes the theme of powerlessness. For us, however, it is important to mark the enduring influence of traditional conceptions of *yikhus*, even in the second half of the nineteenth century.

A segment of society which did dispense with traditional ideas about *yikhus* was that of the revolutionaries. In "The Family in Revolutionary Jewish Society," Mordechai Levine finds that *yikhus* was

transformed in that society. For the parents of revolutionaries, their children's affiliation was disastrous from a *yikhus* standpoint. It brought shame on the entire family, and was a blemish that could break up matches. One father felt he had no choice but to move to another town.¹¹⁸ But according to Levine, the matchmaker had become anachronistic. The revolutionaries had developed their own version of *yikhus*, derived from one's fame as a revolutionary. Levine furnishes several examples of the new "family with *yikhus*," in that radical sense.¹¹⁹

In an article entitled, "Social Issues in Peretz' Short Dramas," the issue of *yikhus*, as well as the larger phenomenon of arranged marriage, is shown to be one of Peretz' primary concerns. In one drama, *Far der tir*, "a soon to be married young man of good *yikhus* pleads with a young woman to accept his affection and he will break off the engagement, a *shidukh*, arranged by the parents." The woman, though, rejects him, viewing such a clandestine marriage as virtually impossible.¹²⁰ Taub, the author, notes, as well, the prevalent theme of unnatural marriages and matchmaking arrangements in Peretz dramas: "*Almones. agunes*, the misery of young women forced to marry men of their parents' or relatives' choice—a rather grim picture of life in the East European shtetl." For Peretz, rebellion against values and traditions of the past is the only hope.¹²¹

There exists a body of literature that is largely based upon interviews conducted in the pre-World War II "shtetl" by anthropologists and sociologists. These findings are almost preoccupied with the phenomenon of *yikhus*. This is probably due to the fact that the issues which most interested the interviewers were social stratification, mobility and class struggle. Such material is helpful, because the "shtetl"- by which the authors mean a culturally isolated Jewish small town- seems to have been a place where traditional patterns endured, relative to the state of communications and transportation. Samuel Kassow defines the ideal type shtetl as "a form of settlement based on a market that served as a contact point between the Jewish majority and a Gentile hinterland whose social composition and cultural level minimized the threat not only of assimilation but even of acculturation."¹²² According to Kassow, "the hold of religion, if only in the form of *haltn shtat* (doing things for appearance' sake), remained strong- until the very end."¹²³

If these two qualities- cultural isolation and enduring traditional behavior- characterized the towns under consideration, then perhaps even a twentieth century shtetl will teach us much about *yikhus* in the eighteenth century.

The most acclaimed of such studies is undoubtedly Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog's "Life is With People." It is based upon oral interviews with 128 informants who had migrated to New York from a shtetl, ten more whose parents had come from there, and fifty life histories found in YIVO. Hampered as it may be by nostalgia, "Life Is With People" is nevertheless filled with insights about *yikhus* in the shtetl. In characterizing the *sheyne yidn*, the upper-scale Jews, the authors include *yikhus* as an important subset. We have noted their definition of *yikhus* in the introduction, above. The authors add several details to that definition. *Yikhus* is "a product of learning plus wealth, of learning without wealth, or of wealth so used as to be translatable into the highest common denominator- fulfillment of divine command."¹²⁴ They emphasize a criterion for *yikhus* which the above works have not, and that is benefaction. Giving of charity is second in importance only to learning.

Perhaps the most important contributions are Zborowski and Herzog's categorizations. *Yikhus ovos* is acquired through descent from learned, eminent, or notably charitable ancestors; but dwindles if it is not validated through the individual's own activities. *Yikhus atzmo* is that achieved through one's own success in study or business. However, acceptance of these varieties was not universal. Some refused to acknowledge *yikhus atzmo*, while others dismissed *yikhus* achieved only through money. The latter phenomenon is illustrated through a personal anecdote of an interviewee, who recalls that her parents rejected a rich suitor of her sister because he was a "tailor from a *prosteh* (low) family."¹²⁵

The family would strive to retain the purity of its *yikhus*. Purity was corrupted if a member married beneath his or her *yikhus*, or if a man engaged in manual labor. In the case of marriage, some refer to the marriage of a "plebian" to an "aristocrat" as "intermarriage."¹²⁶ But *yikhus* was not necessarily compromised by losing one's money. Such a person was an *opgekummener*, "one who has come down."¹²⁷ Unless he lost his money through licentiousness, he still received honor and a great deal of charity.¹²⁷

According to the description of Zborowski and Herzog, wealth was nevertheless a powerful force. A son of wealthy parents could afford parents-in-law with greater *yikhus* and learning. The bride had to compensate for any negative qualities, especially physical ones, with a greater dowry. Finally, the authors note that many jokes and anecdotes regarding the matchmaker imply that “a handsome sum could cover almost any defect.”¹²⁸ Wealth and *yikhus* were therefore continually in tension.

A study more limited in scope is conducted by Celia Rosenthal, relating to the town of Stoczek from 1925-38. Rosenthal interviews ten survivors from the town, which contained 2,500 Jews. She reaches similar conclusions about the role of money. Although the informants were apparently obsessed with wealth, frequently incorporating expressions about money into their daily speech, one who was wealthy per se was not respected. Status was contingent upon using one’s money for charity, scholarly attainment at least for one’s sons, and marrying one’s daughters into *yikhus*. As in Zborowski and Herzog, the giving of charity as a conferrer of status is emphasized. The newly rich did not easily attain respect. The learned person from a humble background, however, was respected completely. *Yikhus* was often only recognized by a person himself, who “merely traced back to some ancestor, no matter how far removed, who was learned or prosperous and generous and leaned on him for self-esteem.” However, for *yikhus* to be recognized by the whole community, one required a direct relationship to a revered rabbi, or a rich, community conscious person; and, as discussed in Zborowski and Herzog, one needed “live up to his position.” Rosenthal concludes with recollection about a marriage. An impoverished family with *yikhus*, it is recalled, arranged a marriage between their son and the daughter of a newly-rich man. This was considered a great tragedy for the first family, and a windfall for the second. ¹²⁹

Another study which briefly considers *yikhus* is one conducted by Natlie Joffe. Based on interviews with an unspecified number of “informants directly or indirectly familiar with East European Jewish culture,” as well as written materials, films, and photographs, Joffe’s paper contains few additional insights. She takes *yikhus* to mean “lineage,” and uses it to describe the *nagidim*, (prominent community leaders). One thing she does emphasize, however, is that the issue of benefice as essential in conferring status.¹³⁰

We conclude this section with discussion of a paper by Nathan Hurvitz, "Marriage Among East European Jews Prior to World War I as Depicted in a *Briefenshteller*," which is a book of sample, model letters. Such letters relate to a specific incident, situation or relationship associated with courtship and traditional arranged marriage. The writer would copy from a *Briefenshteller* a sample letter appropriate to his or her situation, fill in the pertinent names, and send it. Most of the letters that Hurvitz finds in the YIVO library are from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but one dates back to 1610. Examining these letters, Hurvitz argues, will evoke an understanding of the East European Jewish cultural values, norms, and way of life. The letters which Hurvitz selects deal with both traditional, matchmaking procedures, and with young lovers who are able to circumvent the matchmaker through this direct correspondence. One standard matchmaker's reply promises a "handsome lad from a fine family." But such letters give way to the direct love-letter models, which suggest, according to Hurvitz, "how ideological factors, in concert with industrialization and related processes affected this (East European Jewish) family."¹³¹

In this chapter, we have witnessed an increase in the complexity of *yikhus*, before it died out as a value within the Jewish mainstream. *Yikhus* came to mean prestige derived from the scholarship, political power, wealth and benefice of one's ancestors and living relatives. A family's *yikhus* was reflected through such things as owning a house, giving charity, securing auspicious marriages, bequeathing and inheriting communal office, connections with the non-Jewish leadership, and scholarly accomplishment. The last remained the most important. Without it a family lacked *yikhus* altogether; yet a scholar who lacked every other element was still recognized as possessing *yikhus*. In the final section on Hasidism, we shall see how a new quality emerged with the movement's rise, which subsumed even learning as a conferer of *yikhus*: charisma.

Hasidism

According to Jacob Katz, the sole criterion for early Hasidic leadership was "personal charisma, which derived in turn from the immediate religious strength of their personalities."¹³² Such an observation produces the impression that anyone, even the poor, unlearned, and lacking in *yikhus* was eligible to become a Zaddik, provided he had charisma. Historians have basically ignored a second feature common to the vast majority of Zaddikim- *yikhus*. In fact, no historian of Hasidism has dealt explicitly with the notion of *yikhus* amongst the early leaders. However, the following works do consider the social position of Zaddikim, their pedigrees, and problems of succession. From these works we may at least glean the prevailing attitudes.

As mentioned in the introduction, historians from the "old school," who detected in the movement an element of social protest, may be expected to imply that Hasidism was for those who were lacking in *yikhus*. Yet, contrary to what we might expect, Benzion Dinur does not portray the alleged social conflict in terms of the masses' discontent with *yikhus* possessors. In "The Origins of Hasidism," Dinur claims the reverse: the phenomenon which arose to make the oligarchy less tolerable was the rise of leaders in the kahal who actually lacked *yikhus*. These new leaders were closely tied to the non-Jewish nobles, and "were not always from the respected families that had always in the past combined scholarly attainment and communal leadership."¹³³ This new breed, who lacked *yikhus*, was particularly exploitative. The rabbis were no better than the secular leaders: they exploited the masses to "increase their power, their wealth, and the status of their family;" thus they, too, were without *yikhus*.

The Besht, in Dinur's view typical of other early hasidic leaders, also harked from the lowest position in the social hierarchy.¹³⁴ Dinur therefore posits a clash between the Hasidim, representing the masses, and the communal leadership, containing the *nouveau riche*. Both sides supposedly lacked the prestige of *yikhus*. However, as mentioned already, this notion of Hasidism as social rebellion is untenable. And, as we shall see further on, viewing the Besht's social background as typical for a Zaddik is also misguided.

Isaac Levitats, in The Jewish Community in Russia: 1772-1844, demonstrates how entrenched was nepotism in all levels of Jewish society when Hasidism made its appearance. The various associations, called

hevrahs, were a central feature of that society. Although each served a distinct function, their organizational forms were nearly identical. Levitats writes: "While admission was theoretically conditioned solely upon the candidate's personal merit, in practice all associations discriminated in favor of relatives of members, particularly sons and sons-in-law."¹³⁵ Those sons and sons-in-law also paid less for special privileges.¹³⁶ This was the atmosphere within which the first Hasidim were nurtured. Shneur Zalman of Lyady, notes Levitats, "was admitted to the Holy Society in Liozno in 1750 at the age of three."¹³⁷

In Jewish communal leadership, the attitude was the same. Although rules existed "with a view to preventing the administration from becoming a family affair," they did not prevent certain families from remaining in control.¹³⁸ Hasidism did nothing to reverse this trend.¹³⁹ The principle of heredity even operated amongst the artisans, with sons, sons-in-law, or grandsons inheriting customers.¹⁴⁰ Levitats is, however, misleading in one regard: he characterizes early Hasidic leaders as being "lowly folk," citing the Besht, Great Maggid, and Grandfather of Shpola as examples.¹⁴¹ As we shall see, these Zaddikim were the exceptions, not the rule. Such a mistake is surprising, in light of the fact that Levitats notes Shneur Zalman's membership in the Liozno Holy Society.

Moshe Rosman has dealt extensively with the life of the Besht. His major contribution has been to cast doubt upon the notion of Hasidism as a movement of social protest. Regarding *yikhus*, Rosman finds that there are two traditions regarding the Besht's lineage: one contained in *Shivhei Ha Besht*, and one in *Gedolim Ma'aseh Zaddikim*. Rosman considers the latter more accurate, in which "no claim is made here for the Besht's pedigree." In this version, "it is not pedigree or destiny or secretly granted esoteric knowledge that determines his sudden, newfound greatness but his piety and his wisdom." In the former, *Shivhei Ha Besht*, "the Besht was made to resemble a nineteenth-century zaddik with pedigree..." which is untenable.¹⁴² The Besht therefore possessed neither pedigree, nor learning, nor wealth; that is, no *yikhus*.

Yet Rosman finds the Besht in the company of those who do have great *yikhus*. He observes, "the honorifics applied to the Besht by R. Meir, the scion of a very important rabbinic family, indicate that the Besht was a person of some fame and worthy of the respect of scholars."¹⁴³

If neither pedigree, learning, nor wealth were possessed by the Besht, then the implications of his acceptance by men of such stature are deep. Apparently, additional means toward *yikhus atzmo* had emerged: skill in mystical endeavor, and charisma. The occupation of “Baal Shem,” as Rosman points out, “could be a respectable religious vocation that functioned alongside rabbis and was related to the realm of mystical-ascetic hasidism.”¹⁴⁴

The notion that success in practical mysticism came to confer *yikhus* is proven in a study about previous *baalei shem* by Emmanuel Etkes. In “The Role of Magic and *Ba 'alei-Shem* in Ashkenazic Society in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,” Etkes considers the subject of *yikhus* from various angles. First, reminiscent of the Besht’s acceptance by the elite, Etkes describes how members of the aristocratic Katzenellenbogen family revered *baalei shem* and availed themselves of their services.¹⁴⁵ He even considers some *baalei shem* to have been members of the elite class themselves by the 17th and 18th centuries.¹⁴⁶ Second, Etkes observes that amulets were sometimes passed from father to son, which must have added to a family’s perceived power. Knowledge of magic also became the possession of certain families, and was also transferred amongst the generations.¹⁴⁷ Finally, Etkes describes a particular *baal shem yikhus* in his description of Joel Baal Shem. This *baal shem* was the grandson of a previous Joel Baal shem, and was quite conscious of his descent. Etkes finds in Joel Baal Shem II’s claims “an example of the transfer of magical knowledge from generation to generation, within a ‘chain’ of *baalei shem*.”¹⁴⁸ Etkes adds that “R. Joel prided himself exceedingly upon his *yikhus*, and emphasized that the works that he achieved as a *baal shem* were based upon the magical knowledge that he received from his famous grandfather.”¹⁴⁹ Regarding the Besht, Etkes concludes that despite his lack of wealth and learning, his deeds as a *baal shem* made him famous.¹⁵⁰ A new means toward achieving *yikhus atzmo* had emerged alongside scholarship.

An historian who suggests a new criterion for social status after Hasidism arose is Gershon Hundert. While Hundert rejects the possibility that Hasidism was a socially progressive movement, he does detect in

Hasidism a lack of emphasis upon lineage, as we have noted in the introduction. He cites the following tradition:

A promising young student, Yisra'el ben Shabbetai of Opatow, whose father was a poor bookbinder, was taken to Checiny to display his erudition before Avigdor, the rabbi of Checiny. The rabbi embarrassed the young man regarding his undistinguished lineage. 'If his father is a bookbinder (*korekh sefarim*), he must be related to me. We are both Levites, and the *korhi* family are Levites.' *Korhim* was a popular name for the Landaus... In the story, of course, after the rabbi made sport of the young man, the tables were turned and the rabbi was shamed by the young man's erudition. Yisra'el ben Shabbetai grew up to become a prominent Hasidic leader, known as the *maggid* of Kozienice.¹⁵¹

Hundert ventures that "it may be that one of the unnoticed dimensions of Hasidism was precisely its modification of the significance of lineage in determining social status."¹⁵²

Another scholar at the forefront of the field who mentions attitudes toward lineage amongst the early Hasidim, also alluded to in the introduction, is Arthur Green. In "Typologies of Leadership," Green observes that "those with the pedigrees of learning- *and family*- from Elijah Gaon in Vilna to Ezekiel Landau in Prague, were known to be unsympathetic to the movement and its leaders."¹⁵³ Such a statement might imply that the Hasidim themselves were of a different type of pedigree, an idea which shall be refuted. However, Green is sensitive to the occasional Hasidic tendency to have a high regard for *yikhus*. In a section entitled "The Zaddik as King," Green illustrates how the notion of inherited dynasty, which became the norm by the second decade of the nineteenth century, had a precedent in the behavior of early Zaddikim like Baruch of Miedzyboz.¹⁵⁴

Another view of the place of lineage in the Hasidic movement is found in Bedrich Nosek's essay "Shemuel Shmelke Ben Tsvi Hirsh Ha-Levi Horovits: Legend and Reality." Commenting upon that Zaddik's assumption of leadership in Moravia, Nosek notes, "in this way one of the descendants of the well-known Horowitz family...returned from Poland to Czech lands."¹⁵⁵ Nosek stresses Shmuel Shmelke's lineage throughout, quoting the tale at the beginning of this section regarding the Besht's esteem for lineage. That tale, and stories from the Horowitz family cycle, prove "the obvious importance of the family (i.e., the

Horowitz') for Hasidim."¹⁵⁶ The fact that Shmuel Shmelke, too, was conscious and proud of his lineage may be attested by his gravestone, "whose upper part bears the engraved symbol of Shmelke's family- the Levite set." His epitaph contains his illustrious father's name, as well.¹⁵⁷ Nosek is the first to note the predominance of a particular aristocratic family amongst the first Zaddikim.

Another scholar implies that *yikhus* in its traditional conception continued among the Hasidim for practical reasons. According to Israel Kazis, "in order to give status to his movement, the Besht had tried to attract to it men who were members of the scholarly-rabbinical class. One of these men whom he succeeded in winning over was Dov Ber."¹⁵⁸ Many of Kazis' ideas are superseded by recent scholarship, and his choice of Dov Ber as an example is a poor one, as he seems to have lacked *yikhus*. But this particular hypothesis- posing the likelihood that the Besht sought to attract members of the elite, is helpful.

An essay which has much to teach us about early Hasidism and *yikhus* is Elkhanan Reiner's "Wealth, Social Position and the Study of Torah." This study is about the *kloiz*, a place of study and prayer. The Landau's (see Hundert in the previous section) owned a *kloiz*. We learn from Reiner that this institution was totally independent and reserved for the elite, in distinction to the *Bet Midrash*. As such, membership in the *kloiz* was another physical manifestation of *yikhus*. It was founded by the head of a specific family, and "the founding family generally continued to maintain its ties with the *kloiz* even after the death of the founder, and sometimes- even after many generations."¹⁵⁹ Founders of the *kloiz* had to have wealth, *yikhus*, and learning. The head of the *kloiz* was usually the son or son-and-law of the founder.

Reiner contrasts the *kloiz* members with the Hasidim. The Besht was a member of the *Bet Midrash*, thus not part of the elite. When a ban of excommunication was issued against those who engaged in kabbalistic practices, targeting the Hasidim, the Brody *kloiz* members were exempted. It becomes apparent that these members represented the old-style hasidim, and that the kabbalistic practices of non-*kloiz* members such as the Besht constituted a threat. Reiner's essay does not tell us much about the weight of *yikhus* among the earliest Hasidim, but it does portray them as separate from the elite, audaciously (in the eyes of the elite) engaging in elitist, kabbalistic practices.¹⁶⁰

A final corpus of literature to consider is that regarding Hasidic succession. Succession, like marriage strategies, may be regarded as a test of the importance of *yikhus*. I do not intend to suggest, however, that the institution of hereditary succession is synonymous with *yikhus*. Instead, such an institution may be seen as resulting from a society's appreciation for the ideal of *yikhus*. Hereditary succession is an action that reflects a high regard for *yikhus*, itself a hereditary concept.

In general, historians concentrate on the conflict over hereditary versus disciple succession in the early period of the movement. After discarding the notion that Hasidim belonged to a "secondary intelligentsia," noting that the disciples of the Great Maggid came from "various social strata," Shmuel Ettinger turns to the issue of succession.¹⁶¹ He argues that Baruch of Miezyboz "had claims to become 'the spokesman of the generation' by virtue of his pedigree," which led to a conflict with Shneur Zalman of Lyady. That controversy "touched the roots of a problem of great importance to Hasidism- and to all movements with a charismatic leadership- namely, how to transfer authority. Should it be from father to son, or from teacher to disciple?"¹⁶² The early Hasidim, Ettinger concludes, decided upon the latter. Ironically, the great Hasidic dynasties arose from their descendants.¹⁶³

Stephen Sharot observes that "in the early generations of Hasidism the designation of a successor by followers took precedence over hereditary succession."¹⁶⁴ In Sharot's view, charisma was the quintessential quality of a Zaddik, but discipleship to the Besht or the Maggid added legitimacy. However, the majority of Zaddikim were succeeded by both sons and disciples, who established themselves in other locations. But the hereditary successor usually continued in the place of residence of his deceased father. Of the prominent disciples of the Maggid, two were succeeded by disciples, three by family heirs, and seven by both disciples and family heirs.

By the fourth generation, hereditary succession was the norm. Sharot explains that this triumph of hereditary succession is not surprising, due to the fact that "lineage was an important basis of status in Jewish society." In some dynasties, the wife had to be of pure lineage, as well. Charisma was still important, but "confined within limits set by the hereditary principle."¹⁶⁵

In light of Ada Rapoport Albert's comments on the subject of succession, the views of Ettinger and Sharot about "succession" categories appear anachronistic. According to her, the sons of Zaddikim in these first generations could not have succeeded their fathers, because such a notion did not exist at that stage.¹⁶⁶ Rapoport-Albert discards the idea of formal succession, proposing the more simple idea that the Maggid, like the Besht, "came to be regarded as the greatest hasidic leader of his time, just as the Besht had been regarded before him."¹⁶⁷ No actual appointment occurred. Similarly, the Maggid's disciples began their own circles during his lifetime, based on their own charisma, and continued after his death. The counter-argument that R. Baruch of Miezyboz and Nahman of Braclaw based their superiority on lineage does not hold up to scrutiny. In the case of R. Baruch, such claims are contained in an unreliable source. As for Nahman, his pedigree may have helped him in the beginning, but "once this sense of mission had crystallized, not only did it extend far beyond the hereditary link with the Besht but it actually led R. Nahman to reject that link, which did not accord with his conception of himself as a *hidush*- an extraordinary phenomenon the like of which the world had never seen."¹⁶⁸ Charisma, not lineage, was decisive for the Hasidim.

In an earlier study, Rapoport-Albert considers, as well, the mechanism of succession in the period leading up to that of Hasidism. Since geonic times, "heredity ceased to function as a formal constitutional principle in Jewish communal organization," but Jewish government was nevertheless oligarchic.¹⁶⁹ Sons often succeeded fathers, even if they no longer did so automatically. They now had to be elected. According to Rapoport-Albert:

Thus election and heredity could operate side by side to perpetuate the rule over the Jewish communities of a number of distinguished families, often combining both wealth and scholarship, who formed a class which remained open to few outsiders, recruited only from amongst those who, despite unfavorable circumstances of birth, had distinguished themselves in learning and were allowed to penetrate the ruling families by way of marriage.¹⁷⁰

By the period in which Hasidism arose, Rapoport-Albert notes a marked increase in "instances of direct transmission of office from father to son or to his nearest relative," which reached its peak in the nineteenth

century.¹⁷¹ A son was expected to take over his father's post upon the latter's death or departure; in fact it was the son's "honorable duty" to do so.¹⁷² Therefore, when Hasidism began to undergo denominalization, adapting to traditional customs and values, hereditary transmission of the Zaddik's office was instituted.¹⁷³ We must, however, object to this last point, for the simple reason that the later Hasidim dispensed with election and returned to a more radical hereditary succession than had existed in the past thousand years.

A clear example of the beginning of a transition to hereditary succession is born out by Rosman in his description of the contest between Schneur Zalman's rival successors, Aaron of Starosielce and Dov Ber. This was a contest of disciple vs. son and superior scholarship vs. a more personal approach. Dov Ber, Rosman shows, "embarked on a publishing campaign designed to spread his own version of Hasidism to the widest possible public."¹⁷⁴ He claimed that his father had chosen him to write down his teachings, and thus that he was the sole legitimate source for those teachings. Finally, through *Shivhei ha Besht*, Dov Ber "used the biography of Besht to legitimate his own style of leadership and behavior"¹⁷⁵ by bringing out parallels between his and the Besht's life. If a man like the Besht, scorned by the elite, could rise to such heights, these tales implied, so could Dov Ber. In the end, his special lineage and charisma triumphed over Aaron's claims to superior learning.

Another look at this conflict over succession is contained in Naftali Lowenthal's book Communicating the Infinite: the Emergence of the Habad School. Lowenthal cites various opinions of contemporaries which upheld the claim that Dov Ber, being Shneur Zalman's son, had a unique connection to the latter.¹⁷⁶ By this third generation, the dynastic principle came to the fore, encouraged by such tendencies already present within the rabbinate, and by the monarchic and priestly models upon which the Zaddik was based.¹⁷⁷

An illustration of the shift to complete hereditary succession is provided in the final article under consideration. In her paper entitled "An Exploration into the Lubavitcher Hasidic Leadership Kinship Alliance Network," anthropologist Anne Berger-Sofer charts the endogamous marriage practices of the Lubavicher dynasty. Beginning with Schneur Zalman, the Lubavicher genealogy shows that "the position of

rebbe has always remained in the family, with each new rebbe being a descendant of Schneur Zalman.”¹⁷⁸ Berger-Sofer speculates that “the offspring of Dov Baer’s daughters were continually drawn back into the lineage in order to contribute potential leaders to the group and to keep Dov Baer’s gene pool.”¹⁷⁹ This prevented the dispersion of leadership among non-family Lubavichers, providing the Zaddik with a greater number of family members to choose from. In addition, this gave the Zaddik absolute control over his sons, sons-in-law, and nephews, each of whom was a potential successor. We see through this analysis how hereditary succession, although broadened to include family members other than sons, was tremendously stabilizing for the movement.

Students of Hasidism are not entirely in agreement regarding the endurance of lineage as a value. Some (e.g. Hundert, Levitats) posit a decline, because the particular Zaddikim they are considering happen to be among the few who lacked *yikhus*. Others (e.g. Rapoport-Albert, Sharot) err towards the other extreme, regarding Hasidism’s eventual institution of hereditary succession as an inevitable adjustment to the norms of the parent society. Both views are exaggerated. On the one hand, *yikhus* continued to be a major attribute of a leader during Hasidism’s rise. On the other hand, dynastic succession was not an inevitable adjustment to the parent society, for that society contained nothing akin to the dynasticism of the later Hasidic movement. It is better to seek an explanation for the rise of dynasticism in the particular type of merit that Hasidism introduced. By emphasizing charisma at the expense of scholarship, the Hasidim lost a great deal of quality-control, a problem which was eventually solved by the institution of hereditary leadership. The enduring value of *yikhus* in the earlier stages of the movement merely made that dynastic solution possible.

¹ For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to all of these leaders as “Zaddikim,” even though the term should really be restricted to those Hasidic leaders who commanded a significant following and were regarded as such. For example, a leader like Phineas of Korzec, a member of the Besht’s elite circle, was not technically a Zaddik. Gershom Scholem limits the development of Zaddikism to a period “after Hasidism had become the religious organization of large masses.” See Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, (New York, 1974), p. 337.

² Joseph Weiss, “The Dawn of Hasidism,” Zion XVI: 3-4, 46-105. Quoted in Shmuel Ettinger, “The Hasidic Movement,” in Gershon Hundert, ed., Essential Papers on Hasidism. (New York, 1991), p. 229.

- ³ For a critique of this tendency, see J. Dan, "A Bow to Frumkian Hasidism," Modern Judaism XI:2, (1991). Also, see Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Hagiography and Footnotes," in Rapoport-Albert and Steven Zipperstein, ed., Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Chimen Abramsky (London, 1988), pp.119-159.
- ⁴ Martin Buber. The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism, ed. and trans. by Maurice Friedman. (New York, 1960) p.58 and p.61.
- ⁵ Benzion Dinur, "The Origins of Hasidism and its Social and Messianic Foundations," in Hundert, Essential Papers, pp.86-208. See also Raphael Mahler, in Hundert, op. cit., pp. 401-98.
- ⁶ Shmuel Ettinger, in Hundert, op. cit., p.229.
- ⁷ Moshe Rosman, "Miedzyboz and Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov," in op. cit., pp.209-225.
- ⁸ Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism after 1772: Structural Continuity and Change," in Rapoport-Albert, ed., Hasidism Reappraised (London, 1996), p.85.
- ⁹ The word is occasionally transliterated as *yihus*. However, as such a rendering is incompatible with the word-processing program being currently used, I have chosen the spelling *yikhus*, an acceptable alternative.
- ¹⁰ Raphael Mahler, "Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment," in Hundert, op. cit., p.458.
- ¹¹ Isaac Levitats. The Jewish Community in Russia: 1772-1844, (New York, 1970), p.162.
- ¹² Harry Rabbinowitz. The World of Hasidism (London, 1970), p.183.
- ¹³ Gershon Hundert, The Jews of Opatow (Baltimore, 1990), p.155. Hundert's suggestion shall be explained below.
- ¹⁴ Arthur Green, "Typologies of Leadership." Jewish Spirituality II: From the Sixteenth Century to the Modern Revival, ed. by Arthur Green (New York, 1986), p.130. Green's comment shall be considered in more detail below.
- ¹⁵ Several expressions against "pride in one's own *yikhus*" are found in the classic early Hasidic text Noam Elimelekh, ed. by Gedalya Nigal (Jerusalem, 1978), pp.341, 340, and 421. We shall discuss these in detail in the following chapter. See also the tale attributed to Israel of Rhuzhin, in Hundert, The Jews of Opatow, p.133.
- ¹⁶ Jacob Katz. Tradition and Crisis, trans. by Bernard Dov Cooperman (New York, 1993), p.204.
- ¹⁷ Scholem, op. cit., p. 337.
- ¹⁸ Mendel Piekarz, Bivamei Zemihat Ha Hasidut (Jerusalem, 1978).
- ¹⁹ Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," p.93.
- ²⁰ Simcha Asaf. "Lekorot Ha Rabbanut," in Simcha Asaf, ed., Be Ohalei Yakov (Jerusalem, 1943), p.32.
- ²¹ Zborowski, Mark and Elizabeth Herzog, Life is With People (New York, 1952), p.76.
- ²² Avraham Grossman, "From Father to Son: The Inheritance of Spiritual Leadership in Jewish Communities in the Middle Ages," in The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory, ed. by David Kraemer (New York, 1989), pp.115-132. More examples will occur below.
- ²³ Jacob Katz, "Nisuim Ve Hayei Ishut Be Motsei Yamei Ha Benayyim," Zion X (1944-5), 33-48.
- ²⁴ See, for example, Shalom Albeck, "Rabenu Tam's Attitude To the Problems of His Time," Zion XIX (1954), 128-30; and Gerald Bildstein, "Individual and Community in the Middle Ages: Halakhic Theory," in Daniel Elazar, ed., Kinship and Consent (University Press, 1983), pp. 217-258.
- ²⁵ Shelomo Dov Goitein, "Political Conflict and the Use of Power in the World of the Geniza," in Elazar, op. cit., pp.169-181.
- ²⁶ Hundert, The Jews of Opatow, p.117.
- ²⁷ For just one of many portrayals of the oligarchic nature of Jewish leadership, see Salo Baron, The Jewish Community, vol. III (Philadelphia, 1948), p.132. Even unqualified relatives and friends were appointed as judges, for example. Cf. Jacob Reischer, Shebut Ya'avob (New York, 1960/1), Vol. II, p.143. A similar point about undeserved succession is made by S. Assaf in "le Korot ha Rabanut," p.40. In Eastern Europe, however, things do not seem to have reached a crisis point due to undeserved succession which occurred in geonic times. In the latter case, hereditary succession was far more entrenched.
- ²⁸ "Yihus" and "Genealogy." Encyclopedia Judaica, Vols. XVI and VII.
- ²⁹ H.L. Poppers, "The Declasse in the Babylonian Jewish Communities," Jewish Social Studies XX (1958), 153-179.
- ³⁰ Poppers, pp.153-4.
- ³¹ Ibid., p.164.
- ³² Ibid., p.167-8.
- ³³ Ibid., p.170-1.

- ³⁴ Ibid., p.164.
- ³⁵ Gedaliah Alon, The Jews in Their Land. Trans. by Gershon Levi (Harvard, 1990), p.102.
- ³⁶ Grossman, "From Father to Son," p.116. Many of these ideas are found, as well, in his other works, including Hakhamei Ashkenaz HaRishonim (Jerusalem, 1981), pp.400-40.
- ³⁷ An exception, as Grossman notes, was Saadya Gaon, who received that post despite his lack of *yikhus*. But, as Grossman emphasizes, this arose from a predicament in which no suitable successor could be found in Sura. See *ibid.*, p. 120.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p.119.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p.122.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p.123. Cited in Menachem Ben Sasson, The Jewish Community of Medieval North Africa: Society and Leadership (Jerusalem, 1983), pp.104-7.
- ⁴¹ Grossman, "From Father to Son," p.126.
- ⁴² Ibid., p.126-7.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p.120.
- ⁴⁴ Robert Bonfil, Rabbis and Jewish Communities, trans. by Jonathan Chipman (Oxford, 1990), p.35.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p.41.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., p.43.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p.56.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p.43.
- ⁴⁹ Robert Bonfil, "Aspects of the Social and Spiritual Life of the Jews in Venetian Territories at the Beginning of the 16th Century," Zion XLI (1976), 68-96.
- ⁵⁰ Israel Ta-Shma, "On the History of Polish Jewry in the 12th and 13th Centuries," Zion LIII (1988), 347-369.
- ⁵¹ Soloveitchik, Hayyim, "Three Themes in the *Sefer Hasidim*," AJS Review I (1976), 319-20.
- ⁵² Ibid., pp.350-1.
- ⁵³ Ben Sasson, H.H, "Hanhagut Shel Torah," Behinot IX (1995), 44.
- ⁵⁴ Ephraim Kanarfogel, Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages (Detroit, 1992), p.68.
- ⁵⁵ Yisrael Yakov Yuval, Hahamim Be Doram (Jerusalem, 1988), pp.336-8.
- ⁵⁶ H.J. Zimmels, Ashkenazim and Sephardim (London, 1958), pp.280-6.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p.286.
- ⁵⁸ Jacob Katz, "Nisuim Ve Hayei Ishut Be Motsei Yamei Ha Benayim," p.29.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.29-31.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p.32.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., pp.33-48.
- ⁶² Jacob Katz, Tradition and Crisis (New York, 1993), p.334, no.12.
- ⁶³ Ibid., p.153.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., p.173.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., p.177.
- ⁶⁶ Hayim Hillel Ben Sasson, "Musagim ve Mitsyot be Historya ha Yehudit be Slakh Yamei ha Benayim," Tarbiz XXIX (1959-60), 301.
- ⁶⁷ Hayim Hillel Ben Sasson, Hagut ve Hanhagah (Jerusalem, 1959), pp.96-7.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., p.97.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., p.98.
- ⁷⁰ Gershon Hundert. The Jews of Opatow, p.117.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ Ibid., p.118-23.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., p.132.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., p.124.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., p.127.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p.131.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., p.124.
- ⁷⁹ While Rosman is unable to find extensive biographical information about Israel, the patronymic "Rubinowicz" suggests that he was a member of that aristocratic family.

- ⁸⁰ Moshe Rosman, The Lords' Jews (Harvard, 1991), p.170.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., p.173.
- ⁸² Ibid., p.181.
- ⁸³ Israel Bartal, "Dov Ber of Bolechow: A Diarist of the Council of Four Lands in the Eighteenth Century," Polin IX (1995), 189.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., p.190.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Katz, Tradition and Crisis, p.332 no.6.
- ⁸⁷ Kestenberg-Gladstein, "Differences of Estates Within Pre-Emancipation Jewry," Journal of Jewish Studies V (1954), 157.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., p.163.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., part II, Journal of Jewish Studies VI (1955), 39.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., p.45.
- ⁹¹ Kestenberg-Gladstone, "The Jew House," Tarbiz XXIX (1959-60), 179.
- ⁹² Shaul Stampfer, "Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah, and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional East European Jewish Society," Studies in Jewish Education III (1988), 271-289.
- ⁹³ Ibid., p.274.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., p.276.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., p.287.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid., p.288.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid., p.272.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., p.283.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., p.274.
- ¹⁰⁰ S. Shila, "Ha Shadkhan Be Mishpat Ha Ivri," in Mishpatim IV (1973), 361-73. (The first initial only of Shila's given name is provided.)
- ¹⁰¹ Stephen M. Passamaneck, "Some Medieval Problems in Mamzeruth," Hebrew Union College Annual XXXVII, (1966), 121-45.
- ¹⁰² Isaac Rivkind, "Mishpatei-Kubiustusim," Horev II:1 (1935), pp.60-5.
- ¹⁰³ Byron L. Sherwin, Mystical Theology and Social Dissent (London and Toronto, 1982), pp. 169-170.
- ¹⁰⁴ Elijah Judah Schochet, Rabbi Joel Sirkes: His Life, Works and Times (Jerusalem/New York, 1971), p.179.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.181.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.199.
- ¹⁰⁷ Yehuda Friedlander, "'The Words of the Talebearer are as Wounds,'- On Megillat Yuhasin Attributed to Rabbi Mendel Landsberg of Kremnitz," (Hebrew), Hebrew Union College Annual XXXVII, (1986), 21-37.
- ¹⁰⁸ Esther Cohen and Elliott Horowitz, "Rituals of Marriage in the Later Middle Ages," The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies XX:2 (1990), 245.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.246.
- ¹¹⁰ David Biale, Eros and the Jews (New York, 1992), pp.64-5.
- ¹¹¹ Alfred Julius Bruck, "The Bruck Family," Historia Judaica IX (1947) 160.
- ¹¹² Meir Wunder, "The Reliability of Genealogical Research in Modern Rabbinic Literature," Avotaynu XI:4 (1995), p.31.
- ¹¹³ Saul Bastomsky. "Yikhus in the Shtetl and Dignitas in the Late Roman Republic," Judaism XXXIX:1 (1990), 93.
- ¹¹⁴ Immanuel Etkes, "Marriage and Torah Study Among the Lomdim," in Kraemer, ed., The Jewish Family, p.155.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.156.
- ¹¹⁶ Alan Mintz, "Guenzburg, Lilienblum, and Haskalah Autobiography," AJS Review IV (1979) 71-110.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.77
- ¹¹⁸ Mordechai Levine, "Ha Mishpaha Be Hevra Mahefkanit Yehudit," Ma'asaf XIII (1982-3), 113-4. Continued in Ma'asaf XIV (1984).
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid., part II, 160.
- ¹²⁰ Michael Taub, "Social Issues in Peretz's Short Dramas," Yiddish X:1 (1995), 19.

- ¹²¹ Ibid., p.22.
- ¹²² Samuel D. Kassow, "Community and Identity in the Interwar *Shtetl*," in Yisrael Gutman et al., ed., The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars (Waltham, 1989), p.200.
- ¹²³ Ibid., p.204.
- ¹²⁴ Zborowski and Herzog, Life is With People, p.77.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid., p.272.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid., p.273.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid., p.79.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid., p.273.
- ¹²⁹ Celia Stopnicka Rosenthal, "Social Stratification of the Jewish Community in a Small Polish Town," The American Journal of Sociology XXXIV (1953), 1-10.
- ¹³⁰ Natalie F. Joffe, "The Dynamics of Benefice Among East European Jews," Social Forces XXVII (1948-9), 238-47.
- ¹³¹ Nathan Hurvitz, "Marriage Among Eastern European Jews Prior to World War I as Depicted in a *Briefenshteller*," Journal of Marriage and the Family XXXVII (1974), 422-30.
- ¹³² Katz, Tradition and Crisis, p.204.
- ¹³³ Ben Zion Dinur, "The Origins of Hasidism," in Hundert, ed., Essential Papers, p.107.
- ¹³⁴ Ibid., p.136.
- ¹³⁵ Isaac Levitats, The Jewish Community in Russia: 1772-1844 (New York, 1970), p.109.
- ¹³⁶ Ibid., p.111.
- ¹³⁷ Ibid., p.113.
- ¹³⁸ Ibid., p.133.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid., p.139.
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.236.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.162.
- ¹⁴² Moshe Rosman, Founder of Hasidism (California, 1996), pp.156-8.
- ¹⁴³ Moshe Rosman, "Social Conflicts in Miedzyboz," in Ada Rapoport-Albert, ed., Hasidism Reappraised, pp. 51-62.
- ¹⁴⁴ Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, p.128.
- ¹⁴⁵ Emmanuel Etkes. "The Role of Magic and *Ba'alei Shem* in Ashkenazic Society in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," Zion LX (1995), 77.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.88.
- ¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.80-3.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.96.
- ¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.101.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.104.
- ¹⁵¹ Hundert, The Jews of Opatow, p.155.
- ¹⁵² Ibid.
- ¹⁵³ Arthur Green, "Typologies of Leadership," p.130.
- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.145.
- ¹⁵⁵ Bedrich Nosek, "Shemuel Shmelke Ben Tsvi Hirsh Ha-Levi Horovits: Legend and Reality," Judaica Bohemiae XXI:2 (1985), p.75.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.78.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.89.
- ¹⁵⁸ Israel Kazis, Hasidism: A Study in the Sociology of the History of Religion (Cambridge, 1939) p.105.
- ¹⁵⁹ Elchanan Reiner, "Hon, Ma'amad Hevrat, ve Talmud Torah: ha Kloyz be Hevrah ha Yehudit Be Mizrah Eiropah be Meot 17-19," Zion LVIII (1993), 41.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.39.
- ¹⁶¹ Shmuel Ettinger, "The Hasidic Movement- Reality and Ideals," in Hundert, ed., Essential Papers on Hasidism, p.238.
- ¹⁶² Ibid., p.240.
- ¹⁶³ Ibid.
- ¹⁶⁴ Stephen Sharot, Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic, p.169.
- ¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.172.

¹⁶⁶ Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism after 1772: Structural Continuity and Change," p.77.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.93.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.118.

¹⁶⁹ Rapoport-Albert, The Problem of Succession in the Hasidic Leadership, With Special Reference to the Circle of Nahman of Bratslav, Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 1970), p.87.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.88-9.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., p.95.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.99.

¹⁷⁴ Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, p.201.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.204.

¹⁷⁶ Naftali Lowenthal, Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School (Chicago, 1990), pp.104-7.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.108.

¹⁷⁸ Anne Berger-Sofer, "An Exploration Into the Lubavitcher Hasidic Leadership Kinship Alliance Network," Working Papers in Yiddish and East European Jewish Studies, XXVII (1977), p.2.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.10.

Chapter II: *Yikhus* in Principle

In those days seeking a wife did not mean looking for a girl. It meant searching for a family, for *yikhus*- pedigree, or caste, if you will. The girl was really the last thing to be considered. Of prime importance were not only her immediate forbears, but those of generations back, as well as uncles, aunts and kinfolk of all kinds, no matter how distantly related. Everything that happened in, and everybody who was connected with, a family was important in the matter of marriage. Although affluence and influence were considerations of importance, *yikhus* usually involved learning and scholarship. The more scholars a family boasted, the greater was its standing.¹

The attitude portrayed in the Hebrew scriptures towards *yikhus*- applying there to genealogy alone- is rather straightforward. The many genealogical lists, including lineage descriptions of many major biblical figures, suggest an unequivocal appreciation of ancestry in the Bible. Exceptions like Abraham, Jethro, and Ruth probably exist to uphold the validity of conversion to Judaism, as opposed to representing an ideal genealogical history. And in Abraham's case, of course, the Jewish genealogical line is activated for the first time. As the Bible's position is rather straightforward, I shall begin instead with the more complex problem of rabbinic Judaism's regard for *yikhus*, for it was during this stage that the term took on a more complex meaning. I will consider first the views about *yikhus* in the period leading up to Hasidism; and second, the various ideas which the early Hasidic thinkers themselves entertained about *yikhus*. Such a comparison and analysis should further clarify the meaning of *yikhus*, as well as help to determine if that value ever diminished under Hasidism.

In contrast to the straightforward ideology presented in the Bible, an unmistakable tension runs through the rabbinic literature regarding *yikhus*. There is, on the one hand, a tendency to uphold *yikhus*. That is not only due to the vested interests of many of the rabbis. It also derives from the requirement that rabbinic methodology reconcile every utterance with Scripture, which is unambiguous about the importance of heredity. However, a number of utterances betray a discomfort with *yikhus*, which clashed with scholarship, an inherently meritocratic endeavor. Intellectual pursuit, a primary means through which Jews sought to fathom the divine will, could not be bequeathed; and a scholar from a humble background might

make as strong a contribution as a scion of the greatest family. The friction between these ideals- *yikhus* and merit- may be witnessed in thousands of years of literature.

In the Mishnah, the balance is decidedly in favor of notions of genealogical purity and maintenance of lineage distinctions. The fourth Mishnah of Kiddushin IV, for example, lists ten genealogical classes in order of prominence, and declares which groups of people are forbidden to marry into other groups.² Another Mishnah, describes certain days upon which the “daughters of Jerusalem came out and danced in the vineyards” in a matchmaking ritual. These women exclaim to the men: “Do not set your eyes on beauty, but set your eyes on (good) family.”³

However, several expressions of dissent do occur. Another Mishnah, after stating which descendants take precedent over others, makes the impressive assertion that “the learned bastard takes precedence over the ignorant high priest.”⁴ And in another Mishnah, we read:

He (Akhabya’s son) said to him: ‘Father, commend me to your colleagues.’ Akhabya answered: ‘I will not commend you.’ The son asked: ‘Have you found some fault in me?’ ‘No,’ said Akhabya, ‘but your own deeds will bring you near (to the Sages), or your own deeds will thrust you far (from them).’⁵

Through examples such as these, the Mishnah curtails an absolute emphasis upon *yikhus*.

The debates in the gemara also weigh heavily in favor of lineage. This is illustrated in the gemara’s response to marriage between castes. A ceremony of *Ketzatza*, or “cutting off,” entails the following pronouncement: “ ‘brethren of the house of Israel, hear. Our brother So-and-so has married a woman who is not worthy of him, and we are afraid lest his descendants will be united with our descendants...’ ”⁶ Further on, Rabbi has arranged a marriage between his son and the daughter of R. Hiyya. The prospective bride, however, passes away right before the betrothal agreement is to be written. Rabbi asks, “Is there, God forbid, a taint in the proposed union?” After a genealogical inquiry, it is found that Rabbi only descended from Avital, while R. Hiyya descended from a brother of King David. The uneven family status is taken to be the cause of the girl’s death.⁷

In general, one is encouraged to proclaim: "I do not want a shoe too large for my foot;"⁸ while "he who takes a wife who is not fitting for him, the Writ stigmatizes him as though he had ploughed the whole world and sown it with salt." One who marries below his station "disqualifies his seed and blemishes his family."⁹ As a corrective to obsession with family purity, however, the gemara also states that "all families stand in the presumption of fitness" when marrying into a priestly family, unless that fitness is contested.¹⁰

Beyond the issue of marriage above or below one's station, the gemara states plainly: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, causes His divine Presence to rest, it is only upon families with *yikhus* in Israel."¹¹ The statement passes undisputed. Another dictum states:

One should always cling (i.e. through marriage) to good people; for behold, from Moses who married the daughter of Jethro (an idolater) there descended Jonathan, while from Aaron, who married the daughter of Amminadab, there descended Phineas."¹²

Although Moses is not inferior to Aaron for having married a proselyte, it adversely affects the character of his offspring. As a result of such genealogical determinism, *nadlerism*, libel against one's family descent, is sharply condemned: "He who declares others unfit is himself unfit."¹³

The rabbis of the Talmud often attempt to reconcile the value of lineage with the importance of learning. A scholar is to derive no enjoyment from a feast at the betrothal of the daughter of a priest to an Israelite, nor of the daughter of a scholar to an ignoramus. The two values- genealogical purity and scholarship- are thus equated.¹⁴ The rabbis exhort their followers to sell all they have and marry the daughter of a scholar, and marry their daughters to scholars. In a combination of the genealogical and scholarly values, the rabbis explain that a man should marry the daughter of a scholar, "for if he dies or goes into exile, he is assured (!) that his children will be scholars. But let him not marry the daughter of an ignoramus, for if he dies or goes into exile, his children will be ignoramuses."¹⁵

Another fusion of the two values occurs in the following passage:

Sons of a scholar whose father holds the office of *Parnas* may, if they possess the capability of understanding (the discourses), enter and sit down before their father with their backs to the people. When, however, they do not possess the capability of understanding (the discourses) they enter and sit down before their father with their faces towards the public. Eleazer son of R. Zadok said: In a festive gathering also they are treated as attachments to their father.¹⁶

Here, compromise is struck. Sons who do not understand are still seated near their father, albeit with “faces towards the public.” In another case, R. Johanan is urging Ze’iri to marry his daughter, and Ze’iri is evading him. R. Johanan asks indignantly, “Our learning is fit, but our daughters are not?” The gemara, however, upholds Ze’iri, demonstrating a higher regard for *yikhus* than learning.¹⁷

If most passages tend to champion *yikhus* over scholarship alone, we must nevertheless recall that they are fenced in by statements such as: “The learned bastard takes precedence over the ignorant high priest.”¹⁸ Ideally, one possesses both *yikhus* and merit, as is reflected in the gemara’s explanation of the Bible’s mention of the *yikhus* of the officers of King David’s army (I Chron. 7:40). According to R. Judah, in the name of Rab, the officers’ purity of descent is necessary “in order that their own merit and the merit of their fathers might aid them.”¹⁹

Midrashim display a similar tension. A few examples will suffice. In Genesis Rabbah, it is recorded in the name of R. Simon: “The Holy One, blessed be He, is reluctant to uproot a name from its place in a genealogical tree.” Therefore, says R. Simon, Reuben (I Chron. 5:1) “was deprived of the birthright in respect of the estate (heritage), but not in respect of genealogy.” Other sages disagree.²⁰ In Numbers Rabbah, R. Judah explains that Scripture enumerates Reuben, Simeon and Levi separately (Ex. 6:14) because “all the other tribes did not preserve their genealogical purity in Egypt while Reuben, Simeon and Levi did.”²¹ Yet extreme emphasis upon *yikhus* is eschewed through interpretations like the following: “‘Mine ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live by them (Lev. 38:5).’ It does not say ‘priests’ or ‘Levites’ or ‘Israelites,’ but ‘a man.’ This teaches that even an idolater who becomes a proselyte and studies the Torah is like a High Priest.”²²

The above statements, coexisting rather uncomfortably, probably prevented both extreme stratification, which would sacrifice merit, and extreme democratization, which would sacrifice stability. The message bequeathed to subsequent generations of Talmudic scholars was far from simple: both nobility of birth and merit are important; although in most cases where the two values clashed, *yikhus* was favored. This dialectic- although lopsided- provided a degree of flexibility, allowing a more merit-based culture to develop in the Middle Ages out of the same intellectual tradition which had nourished the dynastic societies of Geonic times.

The medieval commentators generally follow the Talmud's position. Rashi (Solomon ben Isaac, 1040-1105), usually attempts to make the Talmud more comprehensible, as opposed to formulating an independent theory. But his sentiments about *yikhus* are revealed in a statement of self-degradation before members of distinguished families who are of inferior learning: "I hasten to answer one of the small ones who sit on the bench at your feet...Who am I to lift my head and disregard him, since I am your pupil!? Why did you pay attention to somebody like me who is like a plant that grows in the dirty water of laundry?"²³

According to Abraham Grossman, the period after Rashi marks a slight decline in the importance of *yikhus*, resulting from Crusades chaos and destruction, in favor of scholarship.²⁴ One finds hints of that transformation in the following interpretations, where the generations after Rashi appear more lenient about issues concerning proselytes. In response to the claim that "proselytes are as hard/difficult for Israel as a scab,"²⁵ Rashi explains that because of their lax observance, proselytes set a bad example for "regular" Jews. This interpretation is supportive, but tones down the gemara's own exposition, which compares proselytes to leprosy. The Tosafists, however, move even further away from the gemara's apparent meaning. Disputing Rashi, they suggest that proselytes are often more observant. A righteous proselyte exists to shame Jews of pure descent into repenting, for he exposes the spiritual poverty of those who should know better. It is only after their assimilation into Israel that they become injurious, because Israel then loses a reminder to be righteous. The assimilated proselytes are, in a sense, punished for this loss through the fact that "when the Holy One, blessed be He, causes his divine presence to rest, it is only upon families with

yikhus in Israel.” We therefore may detect a general increase in tolerance and respect for proselytes, who embody the total absence of *yikus*.²⁶ This should not, however, suggest that the Tosafists were unimpressed by *yikhus*. In one instance, they claim that the holiness of the son of Rabbi Menachem b. Simai “hangs upon the holiness of his father, who was also holy.”²⁷

As may be expected, the medieval German pietists display an unequivocal esteem for *yikhus*. A passage in The Book of the Pious (Bologna, 1538) claims, for example, that marriage below one’s station produces children who are ignoramuses and impious. If, after three or more generations of pious scholars such children appear, they are the result of a genealogically unsuitable match, as opposed to some defect in the Torah.²⁸

Several other medieval thinkers are also appreciative of *yikhus*. Nahmanides (Moses ben Nahman, 1194-1270), for example, states that “the father is the root, and the son springs from his root.”²⁹ Ralbag (Levi ben Gershon, 1288-1344), in a commentary on the book of Samuel, writes: “the first (section) demonstrates the *yikhus* of Samuel for his honor, and tells us that the rock from which he was chiseled was very distinguished, from his father and mother’s side.”³⁰ The medieval attitude towards *yikhus* therefore apparently remained favorable, with only occasional exceptions of the mild sort found in the Tosafot discussion of proselytes.

Finally, we should consider medieval wills. In the will of Eleazar of Mainz (d.1357), we read: “Marry your children, O my sons and daughters, as soon as their age is ripe, to members of respectable families. Let no child of mine hunt after money by making a low match for that object.” According to this father *yikhus*, overrides economic concerns.³¹ Another will illustrates the desired balance between *yikhus* and scholarship. German-born Judah Asheri (1250-1327,8) who leaves a will containing a very extensive family history, exhorts his children: “And the good name which your fathers bequeathed, uphold it and leave it to your children as a heritage.”³² The Torah, however, is not merely an inheritance from one’s fathers, which “needs no personal effort to win it.” The children must toil in it, or they will not acquire it, and will forsake their family tradition.³³ As in the Talmud, both *yikhus* and scholarship are desirable.

After the medieval period, despite an overarching tendency to exalt *yikhus*, the value is doubted more frequently in literature. This is reflected in some of the ethical literature, which we shall consider briefly first. The medieval thinker Bahya ben Joseph (second half of the eleventh century) remarks upon “the special goodness of God to a certain family among the families of the nations, such as the appointment of the priesthood and the Levites, as also the succession of sovereignty conferred upon the house of David.” One who fulfills these duties will be “a distinguished nobleman or a teacher of righteousness” like Phineas: one who fails, however, will meet the fate of Korah.³⁴ In another work, Bahya exhorts us to cling to good families, because the nature of our descendants will be affected, as noted above in the section on Talmud. Marrying above or below one’s station, he continues, leads to conflict.³⁵ Later, this sentiment is echoed in the Shulkhan Arukh.³⁶

In contrast, *yikhus* is devalued in a later ethical work, *Orhot Zaddikim* (Prague, 1581). In a section on the sin of pride, a story is told about a king who is furious that the nobles have seated themselves on thrones of descending height. When asked how they dared to do this, the one seated on the throne answers, “The greatness of my family *yikhus* entitles me to sit on a higher place than my companions.” The second one attributes his higher throne to his wisdom. The third one answers that his humility has caused him his lower place. The king “raised him and made him great.” Two things may be deduced from this tale: 1) the claim of first noble, who possesses great *yikhus*, probably reflects the accepted notion of the prominence of *yikhus*; yet 2) that claim is now rejected by our author, suggesting increasing misgivings about *yikhus*.³⁷

An occasional dissenting voice may be found in other rabbinical literature from this period, as well. While the Shulhan Arukh (Venice, 1565) admonishes every man to find a decent wife without a blemish, the author tends to emphasize Talmud’s more lenient opinions. One who is overly concerned about the blemishes of others is himself suspect. And unless there is reason for suspicion, every family is presumed to be fit.³⁸

Jacob Katz portrays the attitudes toward *yikhus* in the ethical wills and other literature of several generations of the Horowitz family:

His (R. Isaiah Horowitz') father, R. Abraham Horowitz, took a clear stand against the privileges of pedigree, arguing that "the son brings honor to the father and not *vice versa*"; *Yesh Nohalim*, fol. 3b. On a practical level he argued against paying attention to pedigree in choosing mates; *ibid.*, fol. 42a. R. Isaiah himself took a similar stand, arguing that the only use of pedigree was to encourage sons to emulate their parents; *Shnei Luhot ha Brit*, fol. 346a, comment on Leviticus 26-42: "I shall remember my covenant with Jacob." But R. Isaiah's son, R. Sheftel Horowitz, the third generation in the dynasty, already exhibits a clear tendency to emphasize his pedigree.

Katz demonstrates, based on Sheftel Horowitz' will, the positive value he ascribes to *yikhus* by including a listing of his pedigree, the quotation from Kiddushin 70b about the Divine Presence resting only upon families with *yikhus*, and by asserting his descendants' "ancestral heritage" to maintain a yeshivah.³⁹ In these three generations, one can almost feel the value of *yikhus* rebound after being briefly challenged.

Rabbinic responsa literature from this period is another important source. In his responsa *Nodeh Be Yehuda* (Prague, 1776 and 1811) Ezekiel Landau (1713-1793) claims that his *yikhus* from Rashi grants him a special insight to the latter's commentary: "Because I am from the stock of Rashi, I will interpret his sayings correctly."⁴⁰ The views of various rabbis about whether *yikhus* should influence the choice of a cantor are also revealing. One halakhic authority who asserts the importance of *yikhus* is Jacob ben Asher (c.1270-1340). He argues that "to appoint despised families to lead the public" is to "despise the mitzvah, as if the families with *yikhus* in Israel are no more worthy than anyone else." That proclamation is, however, hedged in by the following statement: if one is "a possessor of *yikhus* and evil, what benefit is there, in the presence of that place, in his *yikhus*? And if he is from a lowly family and is a Zaddik, it is good to bring one closer who is from a distant seed."⁴¹ In a commentary on this last statement, however, an opinion of Solomon Luria (c.1510-1574) is brought: "in any case, if both of them are equal, of course the one with *yikhus* comes before the one without *yikhus*, and it is fitting to be strict about this, for nothing is comparable to the prayer of a zaddik who is the son of a zaddik."⁴²

Such comments do not merely allude to the concept of *yikhus*; they state the term outright. We should therefore pay close attention to how the word is being used. Jacob ben Asher contrasts "despised families" with "families with *yikhus*," and a "person from a lowly family" with a "possessor of *yikhus*."

Luria describes a *yikhus* possessor as a “son of a zaddik.” We have, then, both a wider use which relates *yikhus* to the status of one’s family, and a narrower one which limits *yikhus* to the righteousness of a person’s father.

It is probably most useful, however, to judge early Hasidic views against those of their non-Hasidic contemporaries. Hasidim’s arch foe, Elijah ben Solomon, the Vilna Gaon (1729-1797), claims the following:

He who is from the seed of a Zaddik is saved from evil, namely from doing evil and from evil coming upon him, as it is written (Brachot 20): ‘A Zaddik to whom good occurs is a Zaddik who is the son of a Zaddik; a Zaddik to whom evil occurs is a Zaddik who is the son of an evil person. and even if he is a Zaddik he is not saved from evil befalling him, until he is a Zaddik who is the son of a Zaddik, as it is written (Numbers 14) “the sins of the father are visited upon the sons on the third and fourth,” and therefore he is not saved from evil until he is from the seed of four generations of Zaddikim.⁴³

The Vilna Gaon is therefore clear about the unavoidable taint or benefit to be derived from one’s “seed.”

A friend of the Vilna Gaon, the Maggid of Dubno (Jacob ben Wolf Kranz, 1741-1804), appears similarly firm about the importance of lineage. Interpreting the rape of the biblical Dinah, he attributes the brutal vengeance of her brothers to indignation at the rapist’s purported desire to join their “honorable family.” The Maggid decides that Chamor, father of the rapist, “compounded the offense by asserting that his son had been carried away not by the maiden’s charms but only by the desire to ally himself to the house of Jacob.” It is this audacity that evokes the apparently extreme reaction by Dinah’s brothers, who are actually reacting to an attempt by an outsider to marry above his station and blemish their line.⁴⁴

In stark contrast with both the genealogical determinism of the Vilna Gaon, and the reverence for genealogical purity conveyed by the Dubno Maggid, are the views of Hayyim of Volozhin (1749-1821), who teaches the following:

Sons of the poor do more deeds in Volozhin than sons of the rich, because their fathers do not give them much tuition money for good teachers, and the deed lies in their own strength,

and through their persistence comes the strength for the deed; but the rich, that which lies in their strength derives already from the good teachers.⁴⁵

This meritocratic claim, which goes so far as to favor those of humble backgrounds, should be borne in mind in the next section, where we will see a similar teaching by the Zaddik Elimelekh of Lezajsk.

Hayyim deals more specifically with family background, as well. After warning the listener that it is not permissible to be overly proud in matters of matchmaking, as it is often thought, Hayyim adds, conversely:

If one happened to receive a good match, it means that it will be good...apparently, for the recent generations even if he is from a small family, for this (good) had simply not previously been revealed, and now, at this time, they gave him a good match.⁴⁶

Hayyim does not openly criticize possessors of *yikhus*, nor does he place them on a lower spiritual rung, which will be seen further on in Elimelekh's teaching. But by favoring the "sons of the poor" and accepting those who marry above their station as an act which *expost facto* proves the goodness of their "small" families, Hayyim clearly dissents from the value that many of his predecessors place upon *yikhus*. Rejection of traditional conceptions of *yikhus* was not, therefore, unique to Zaddikim like Elimelekh.

In the above opinions, the value of *yikhus* appears to be more frequently questioned, as compared with those of medieval thinkers. However, despite debate over *yikhus*, critical views are significantly outnumbered by more positive ones, and are often neutralized by subsequent opinions. Despite the increase in dissenting voices, the value of *yikhus* remained central to Jewish belief.

This is born out in the memoirs from the Early Modern period, which begin to bridge the gap between ideals and reality. For while the scholar, endeavoring to create a better society, tends toward idealism, the memoirist is likely to illustrate inadvertently the actual societal values in the telling of his or her story. A scholar like Abraham Horowitz might condemn the emphasis upon *yikhus* in matchmaking; but

a memoirist's description of matchmaking illustrates, intentionally or not, the importance of *yikhus* in practice.

The memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln (1645-1724) are filled with recollections of matchmaking. Twenty of those matches or groups of matches which Gluckel describes as "good" are accompanied by a short explanation. Good matches fall into the following categories: the groom, groom's father, or bride's father is described positively as 1) learned; 2) rich; 3) of a "good family;" or 4) an office holder. Several matches belong to more than one category, as they possess more than one of these qualities. The "rich" category contains by far the greatest number, twelve. Five are learned, four of good family, and three are respectable office holders. It is therefore clear that in Gluckel's account, wealth is the most important feature of a good match, although it is best accompanied by the other attributes. Although less frequently mentioned, scholarship, office holding, and *yikhus* are nevertheless sufficient for Gluckel to consider the possessor of only one of these qualities a good match, as well. And in one case, wealth is insufficient, being overshadowed by the lad's "many, many failings."⁴⁷

What is meant by a "good family?" One example provides insight: a learned son of Gluckel's father-in-law marries into "a prominent family, the daughter of the famous Rabbi Sholem of Lemberg," which suggests that a good family contains scholars.⁴⁸ But, in another case, the family is prominent due to success in the banking business.⁴⁹ Ideally, a person possesses all of the above attributes. For example, Elias Cohen muses, " 'Why shouldn't I make as good a *parnas* as my brother-in-law Loeb? I am as clever and as rich, and don't I come from as good a family?' "⁵⁰

One instance illustrates the immense charisma of Torah learning. A certain Rabbi Abraham of Broda is so learned as to cause the community of Metz to beg him to remain as their rabbi, offering him "whatever his heart desired." Upon his departure, the community has "naught but bad times- much sickness and great losses of money," and deaths.⁵¹ This attribution of supernatural powers to a scholar or his scholarship foreshadows the phenomenon among the East European Hasidim, who, half a century later, will revere mystical preachers- the Zaddikim- in a similar way.

The image conveyed in the memoirs of Ber of Bolechow (1723-1805) is rather different. In the majority of matches in his account, learning and office holding are valued above all else. Wealth is not emphasized nearly to the same degree. A “good family” is one which contains scholars: Ber’s own match, although a widow, is described as “beautiful, clever, accomplished and of a good family; her brothers are distinguished scholars.”⁵² One person is lauded by Ber for having married all of his children into “families of Rabbis and other notable people.”⁵³ Ber arranges the marriage of one of his own sons with the “daughter of the excellent scholar R. Joseph.” He proceeds to list the *yikhus* of this R. Joseph, which includes a father-in-law referred to as “Gaon” (genius), who is the son-in-law of a deputy to the Council of Four Lands.⁵⁴ In this case alone is wealth considered an important quality: “The grandfather of the bride was greatly pleased when he saw ‘the house of my precious things,’ and found that I was a man of substance. He thanked the Almighty that his grandchild was given to reliable people.” What is shocking about this case, however, is that the wealth of Ber, the groom’s father, is only noticed after the betrothal, during the wedding.⁵⁵

Another memoir, that of Solomon Maimon (c.1753-1800), also records a matchmaking incident in which wealth is de-emphasized. Maimon, already famed for his great learning, is sought after by a certain Madame Rissa as a match for her daughter. Madame Rissa’s family attempts to dissuade her: Maimon’s fame has “already provoked the attention of the most prominent and wealthy people of the town;” and her own fortune is insufficient. However, the widow succeeds in procuring the match with the aid of the chief rabbi, who “represented to my father the advantages of this match, the high ancestry of the bride (her grandfather, father and uncle having been learned men, and chief rabbis), her personal attractions, and the willingness and ability of Madam Rissa to satisfy all his demands.” The appeal of bride’s *yikhus* is a major factor in enabling Madame Rissa to overcome the economic shortcomings of the match.⁵⁶

It is significant that Maimon defines “high ancestry” in the last quotation as descent from scholars and chief rabbis. This tendency is also found in an overwhelming number of instances in *Yesh Manhillim*, the autobiography of a Jew named Pinhas Katzenellenbogen (b.1691). The author, himself a scion of a distinguished family, is preoccupied with *yikhus*. He states in the beginning of his work that his teaching is

that which he received from his father, who in turn received it “from his father, may the Zaddik be always remembered, and from his father’s father, may the geniuses be remembered, and therefore I follow them...”.⁵⁷ He describes his own *yikhus* in detail, noting each scholar and communal head in his family line.⁵⁸ In fact, nearly every mention of an individual in *Yesh Manhillim* is accompanied by the name of that person’s prominent relative or relatives. In certain cases, a person’s chain is rather lengthy, stretching, for example, from a girl to her father (unnamed), to his father (named), to his father’s father-in-law (named).⁵⁹ The list usually ends with the most famous relative, sometimes rather distant. At one point the author refers to his uncle as being of a “superior chain and *yikhus* composed of all great people.”⁶⁰

Greatness of forbears, in the overwhelming majority of cases, is due to their scholarly attainment. Often Katzenellenbogen names the book which a person’s relative is famous for having written (e.g., “he was the son of the author of *Yadei Moshe al ha Midrash Rabbot*”).⁶¹ Less frequently, a person is identified as head of a rabbinical court. In contrast to Gluckel of Hameln, wealth is rarely a quality worthy of note.

This is born out in the recollections of various marriage matches. Every potential match is described according to the scholars which that person’s family line is able to boast.⁶² Katzenellenbogen’s own potential matches are described in such a manner; and it is clear that for the author, marriage is foremost a means for attaching himself to the family of a great rabbi. He exclaims, for example, that one prominent rabbi’s proposed match for him is “a great thing, to draw me close and give me the sister of his wife, who was the daughter of great ones.”⁶³ Elsewhere, he “merits” the honor of clinging “to the seed of our holy rabbi, may his name be remembered eternally,” through marriage.⁶⁴ Katzenellenbogen is also proud to record the marriage of his own daughter to a “son of one in Israel who is great in Torah and in the greatness of the rabbis...”.⁶⁵ In each of these cases, the particular scholars of whom the match’s family may boast are added like adjectives to the person under consideration.

It is not possible to conclude from these memoirs that the Jews of Eastern Europe placed greater emphasis upon learning as opposed to wealth in betrothal arrangements than did Central European Jews. It may be that Gluckl was in a more tenuous economic situation, and became more preoccupied with economic

concerns. Yet the difference between Glukl's matching concerns and those portrayed in the memoirs of Ber, Maimon, and Katzenellenbogen is striking. In the East European Jewish memoirs, scholarship is the paramount quality that distinguishes one's family and ancestry.

In conclusion, the pre- and non-Hasidic ideas about *yikhus* are by no means uniform. Nevertheless, it is possible to generalize. Negative expressions appear to have been correctives to a potentially extreme embrace of the hereditary ideal, which would have endangered the very meritocratic endeavors- scholarship and business- upon which Jewish society was based. As the early modern period unfolded, there occurred an increase in literary dissent regarding the *yikhus* question. The memoirs from this period, however, demonstrate the limited way in which these criticisms affected societal norms: in nearly every matchmaking case in the memoirs, the issue of the match's relatives is raised. When it came time to make a match, the parties involved scrambled to obtain a catch from the noblest family line possible. Whether riches or scholarship composed that nobility, the picture from the memoirs is unbridled concern for *yikhus*. This is the environment within which Hasidism arose. The question before us is, to what extent did the early Hasidim challenge or accept these values?

Yikhus and the Early Zaddikim

First, it must be observed that as Hasidism transformed the scale of societal values, the Hasidic definition of *yikhus* was transformed along with it. While wealth might retain its importance in Hasidic society, and therefore its importance in determining *yikhus*, the same could not hold true for Torah scholarship. With the rise of Hasidism, Torah learning slid down slightly on the scale of values, while personal charisma and piety assumed primacy. As a result, one's prominent relatives might now include Zaddikim alongside, or instead of, scholars. As the scale of values was transformed, descent from a

prominent Zaddik became even more important even than descent from as prominent a scholar as Rashi. While great scholars remained a source of family pride, by the second generation a Zaddik was an even greater boon. Nahman of Braclaw, for example, was admired for his descent from the Besht, while his alleged descent from Rashi was seldom mentioned.⁶⁶

It is possible to trace this rise of charisma on the Jewish scale of values through the increasing prominence of early eighteenth century *baalei shem*. In *Yesh Manhillin* we find instances where charisma and magic have already acquired a prestige approaching that of Torah scholarship. The reverence which the author and his father accord *baalei shem* is explicit. Scholars consult *baalei shem*; and some *baalei shem* are renowned scholars themselves.⁶⁷ The special knowledge of the *baal shem* may be bequeathed to one's descendants. Evidence for a type of *baal shem yikhus*, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is preserved in the approbation to Joel Baal Shem, who claims to have taken charms from an "old collection of the accepted, great, our teacher and rabbi Eli. Baal Shem, may he be remembered, and from the writings of my father's father, the great rabbi...Joel Baal Shem...".⁶⁸ As Etkes notes, Joel, by this claim, places himself in a "chain" of *baalei shem*, attempting to increase his own stature in a way similar to the possessor of scholarly *yikhus*. The rise of the prominence of *baalei shem* helps to explain the full-fledged acceptance of mystics as leaders during the Hasidic movement, as well as the acceptance of the new type of *yikhus* which some of them carried.

More difficult to grasp than the type of *yikhus* that the Hasidim appreciated is their attitude toward *yikhus* of any kind. There is no single viewpoint around which the Hasidim are unified. Different Zaddikim held conflicting opinions. However, it is possible to discern an evolution of Hasidic opinions relating to *yikhus* between generations, with dissent against excessive pride in one's *yikhus* mounting by the second generation, and diminishing in the third.⁶⁹ Furthermore, a split is found between those in the second and third generations who uphold *yikhus* unquestioningly, and those who are more critical. The latter group is the most interesting, for it is they who might reflect a break with past opinion.

The First Generation

Was there a lapse in appreciation for *yikhus* amongst the early Hasidim, and thus, possibly, a temporary democratization of Jewish society, before Hasidic society petrified into a collection of dynasties by the mid-nineteenth century? I shall consider first the movement's founder, the Baal Shem Tov (c.1700-1760). According to most sources, the Besht was impressed by those with great *yikhus*, seeking to draw them into his movement. An extreme portrayal is contained in a collection of sayings attributed to Shmuel Shmelke Halevi Horowitz (1726-1778), a disciple of the Besht, entitled *Shemen HaTov*. The account testifies both to the enormous importance of especially the Horowitz family, and contains the Besht's own alleged viewpoint:

I heard from Simcha Bunem, the genius teacher of Israel, *av bet din* Wislowiec, grandson of the holy Naftali Zvi Horowitz, chief rabbi of Ropczyce, that he, (Naftli Zvi) added the name Horowitz, after the surname of his mother's father... Isaac Halevi Horowitz, *av bet din* of Altona, Hamburg and Nadsavk. For the Besht, may he be always remembered, said that there are three pure families generation after generation which discharged Abraham and his oath to Isaac, and placed it before Jacob: 1)the Margalioth family; 2)Shapiro; and 3)Horowitz. And because of this, the Besht loved the Rabbi *Meir Netivim*, the genius teacher Meir Margalioth, and the holy R. Phinehas Shapiro from Ostrog, and the holy R. Zvi Hirsch Horowitz, *av bet din* of Zborov (and) Czortkow, who were his students.⁷⁰

The Besht, it is claimed, revered the above families and favored those disciples who were of those families. The same tradition is recorded in *Sefer Niflaot Ha Yehudi*, a collection of sayings attributed to Jacob Isaac, the Holy Jew of Przysucha (1765-1814). However, this cannot be considered corroborating evidence, because the tradition acknowledges *Shemen HaTov* as its source.⁷¹ The lateness of these sources, being quoted in the name of the Ropshitzer's grandson, casts a shadow of doubt upon them. There is good reason to assume that this tradition was manufactured by the later Hasidic dynasties in order to affirm the sanctity of *yikhus* and therefore their own stature. The fact that this supposed utterance is so flattering to the three

families listed is further cause for caution. The possibility that a member of the Horowitz family fabricated the teaching to edify his own family, and those of his colleagues, cannot be ruled out.

However, one cannot dismiss as mere coincidence the fact that members of each of these families were, indeed, prominent amongst the Besht's elite circle. To better determine the accuracy of the above passage in characterizing the Besht's outlook, we must consider it in light of several other sources.

An earlier work, *Shivhei ha Besht*, presents the Besht's attitude toward *yikhus* in several places. While the veracity of many of these tales has been questioned by scholars,⁷² including their claims about the Besht's own pedigree, there nevertheless remains much to be gleaned from them. At the very least, the tales reveal the social mores at the time of their publication (1814, Kopys). Beyond that, it may also be possible to discern historical elements in certain tales.⁷³

One account touching attitudes toward *yikhus* is that of the Besht's match with Gershon of Kutty's sister, a divorcee. Her father Hayyim, a famous rabbi of Kutty, is dazzled by the Besht, and offers his daughter to him in marriage. The Besht agrees, on the condition that the match be made with the Besht himself, "and not with my knowledge of Torah and my wisdom. I do not want you to exaggerate my virtues in any way. You should write simply '*Mar* Israel, son of *Mar* Eliezer.'" The father then passes away; and the son, Gershon, finds the engagement contract in his father's papers. He is "amazed that his father, who was a famous man, could make a match with a person of low rank, and, moreover, with *someone whose background and family lines were unknown.*" Nevertheless, after the bride's consent, the match is honored.⁷⁴

This tale might appear to justify Rosman's assertion that *Shivhei HaBesht* was printed as a polemic for the cause of Dov Ber of Lubavich in his struggle over his father's succession with Aaron of Starosielce, who was more learned. Those in Dov Ber's camp, according to Rosman, printed a version of *Shivhei ha Besht* in which the Besht would greatly resemble Dov Ber. They therefore fabricated an *incognito* Besht, who appeared unlearned to the elite until he revealed himself.⁷⁵ Yet we cannot overlook a major discrepancy between the representation of the Besht and the actual Dov Ber, found in the matter of pedigree. For, in

addition to his supposed learning, the Besht wishes also to conceal his *yikhus*. That aspect of the *incognito* Besht bears no resemblance to Dov Ber, who in his struggle with Aaron has primarily his *yikhus* to recommend him. Preceding tales, which attempt to build up the Besht's pedigree, are more likely fabrications of Dov Ber's supporters, if we accept Rosman's theory.

The portrayal of the Besht's reluctance to flaunt his *yikhus* suggests a degree of historical veracity. Although it is hinted that, had the Besht wanted to do so, he might have embellished his own name with the names of memorable family members instead of the common *Mar*, the tale itself is silent regarding which names these might have been. In contrast, the tale does describe the Besht's impressive scholarly ability. We might similarly expect a nineteenth century Hasidic publisher to reassure the reader with a string of the prominent ancestors and family members. The Besht's purported modesty would then appear more impressive.

A reason for the silence is, perhaps, due to embarrassment over the fact that the Besht really did lack *yikhus*. Horodezky, it should be noted, describes the Besht as "a son of unknown parents, and not the 'son of famous ancestors.'" ⁷⁶ That description appears valid, in light of the fact that even after he reveals himself, the Besht makes no claim to lofty pedigree. The Besht's lack of *yikhus* is mentioned in a later tradition, as well, which relates that the Besht wishes to procure a match between one of his children and a member of Margalioth family, but the wife of Meir Margalioth refuses because of the Besht's lack of *yikhus*. ⁷⁷ Neither of these traditions could be flattering in the eyes of nineteenth century Hasidim, for whom heredity was a crucial leadership quality. Latter day attempts to link the Besht's family to the House of David, which are entirely without basis, serve to emphasize this point. ⁷⁸ That the tale in *Shivhei HaBesht* makes no such attempt suggests a degree of authenticity.

Another element argues for the tale's authenticity: the match is made with a divorcee (albeit one whose father is famed for his learning). This is certainly nothing to brag about, for a divorcee's chances for procuring a prestigious match were considerably lower. It is quite plausible that one lacking *yikhus* might make such a match, if, like the Besht, he was remarkable in some other way. The practical Kabbalah of the

baalei shem had been rising in prestige. Perhaps Gershon, living in another town, was not yet aware of the Besht's mystical achievements, as opposed to Gershon's father. His bewilderment over the match would, in that case, be understandable. In any event, although Gershon balks at the penetration of his family by a social inferior, the scenario entailing the marriage of a low-born *baal shem* to a high-born divorcee is perfectly possible. For two reasons, then, the tale appears plausible. No exalted claims about the Besht's *yikhus* are made; and the Besht's marriage-match is a divorcee, hardly an edifying detail.

After determining the veracity of important components of this tale, which portrays the Besht as marrying above his station, we may conclude that the Besht was concerned with social advancement. That conclusion lends credence to the description of the Besht as one who showed favor toward members of specific families. Several other tales in *Shivhei HaBesht* contain attestations to the importance of *yikhus* which the Besht himself allegedly upholds. A certain Hasid has passed away and is survived by a "young talented son who was being pushed into a marriage of low degree." Upon hearing the recollection of the dream of a certain R. Joseph, in which the Hasid bids him to stop the match, the Besht tells the deceased Hasid's wife not to make the match.⁷⁹ In another tale, the Besht concludes a letter with the postscript: "Best wishes to your only son, the famous rabbi, my friend, his honor, our teacher, Samson, *and his heir*, who is a friend of our rabbi and teacher, Herts, may his light endure."⁸⁰ Once, the Besht refuses to be the godfather at a circumcision ceremony, because he perceives that the boy is a *mamzer*.⁸¹ Finally, *Shivhei ha Besht* tells of an incident in which during a sermon, the Besht exclaims, "God O God, it is known and revealed to you that I do not preach this sermon for my honor (but for the honor of my father's and my mother's families)."⁸² These tales convey a positive attitude towards *yikhus*, and sustain the tradition regarding the Besht's preference for scions of certain families.

The Besht's position concerning *yikhus* which is portrayed in the above excerpts from *Shivhei Ha Besht* is upheld by several tales in the collection *Gdolim Maaseh Zadikim*, collected by a member of the Margalioth family. The very first tale, in which the Margalioth brothers are drawn by an uncontrollable urge to meet the Besht, who is working as a slaughterer *incognito*, illustrates the Besht's esteem for those of high

yikhus. For it is as if the Besht recruits the brothers solely due to their being Margaliots. No other reason, such as their great scholarship, is mentioned.⁸³

Although such a tale is probably meant to glorify the Margaliot family through its association with the Besht, and for that reason must be regarded cautiously, Rosman argues that this tale is authentic, especially because it does not presume a pedigree for the Besht.⁸⁴ Rosman is inconsistent, however, in one regard: he fails to notice that the tale lends credence to the same *incognito* account that he rejects in *Shivhei ha Besht*. First, in the beginning of the tale the Besht is described as having “kept to himself and nothing had yet been heard from him.” Next, the brothers travel to the Besht in secret, without the knowledge of even their father. Upon their return, their father asks, “what is the greatness of the slaughterer of Kaszelowiec that people such as yourselves would stay with him such a long time?” Finally, it is only after the Besht “became famous” that “they traveled to him every year.”⁸⁵ Perhaps some aspect of the *incognito* account in *Shivhei HaBesht* is true, however manipulated in later years by the Dov Ber campaign. This is a further verification of the above matchmaking tale in *Shivhei ha Besht*.

Another tale from *Gdolim Maaseh Zaddikim* tells of the Besht’s great affection for the Margaliot brothers, and makes a claim to their special status with the Besht. He says to them: “My sons, you love me very much and I love you. Any object of love which you choose, I will do it for you.” The affair ends with the Besht giving his autographed prayer book to the brothers.⁸⁶ Again, no reason is given for the Besht’s favor shown toward the Margaliots. Again, it appears that they are accorded special status simply by virtue of being Margaliots. These tales lend additional credence to the tradition that the Besht especially loved certain families, although their glorification of the Margaliot family is reason for caution.

Further support for that tradition is found in a tale conveyed in Naftali Horowitz’ *Ohel Naftali* and *Responsa Imrei David*, which has the Besht compliment the Horowitz family. According to this story, Isaac Horowitz, a famous scholar opposed and derided the Besht, at least initially. When the Besht’s disciples asked him why he did not respond to Isaac’s abuse, the Besht responded, “What can I do? He is of a stock whose descendants are heard when they weep before the Lord.”⁸⁷ A. J. Heschel, in a fairly detailed

biographical treatment of Isaac, does not question the veracity of this account. Once again, however, we must treat cautiously a tale which so obviously glorifies a specific family.

Another book, *Keter Shem Tov*, presents a less enthusiastic regard for *yikhus* than the views considered thus far. While scholars doubt its absolute authenticity,⁸⁸ it is nevertheless a very early source, having been published in 1794-5. In a section about God's command to Abraham to leave his father's house, the Besht remarks that Abraham is being ordered to leave his "birthplace, which is Terah (Abraham's father), idolatry, the root of the *klipot* (i.e., evil), and there is power of the father in the son...". He then cites a source from *Sefer Yetsirah*, an ancient Kabbalistic work, in order to prove that the power of the father is in the son. The Besht concludes: "Therefore separation is necessary, to separate and distinguish the *klipah* (i.e., evil) on the father's side and his birthplace and his father's house..." from Abraham's quality of lovingkindness.⁸⁹ This teaching upholds the potency of *yikhus*, without being fatalistic. While the Besht admits that the father-son bond is powerful and intimate, the son can root out the aspect of his father, if that aspect is evil.

Another passage also portrays the Besht as less enthusiastic toward *yikhus*. While he appears to value the worth of *yikhus* no less than we might expect, he enjoins the possessor to remain humble:

the man who, though he possesses greatness and pride, and it seems to him that he is a scholar and possessor of *yikhus* and good qualities and a Zaddik and God-fearing and pleasant and nice, and (he realizes that) because of his high level, it is fitting that he not befriend nor turn toward any man, only so that they will not cause him to become proud, and he reasons that his duty is to be humble, the Lord of the Universe will make him humble. For he is like one who sits on a cart and falls asleep when the owner of the cart travels with him onto the high mountain, and afterwards, when he has come straight up the mountain, and the sleeping man awakens and they say to him that he is on the mountain, he does not believe it, because he has not seen any evidence (of the arduous journey); yet he will thank him (the driver) as he descends from the mountain down the other side. And likewise is the man who was *born* on this mountain, which is high, etc. He will not understand this until the Lord of the Universe accustoms him to the quality of humility, by which he shall know the greatness of the Creator and his own lowliness.⁹⁰

The Besht appears in this passage as a preacher, warning the high-born, pious scholar to guard himself against pride. He has been raised to this lofty level by the "driver of the cart," and should not take credit for

it. Even less deserving of pride is one who was “born on this mountain,” i.e. one who was born into a prestigious family through absolutely no effort of his own. But this does not amount to a condemnation of the trait; the Besht is merely warning the possessor of *yikhus* to recognize the accident of his “greatness.” Therefore, this teaching does not necessarily conflict with the other sources. It merely rounds off the Besht’s respect for *yikhus* with the traditional warning not to overestimate its importance.

The limits of the Besht’s appreciation for *yikhus* are demonstrated, as well, in his actions towards his son. While he sought actively to recruit scions of the most noble families, like the Margaliots, that favoritism did not extend to his own son, Tzvi Hirsch. This is probably due to the latter’s failings. In *Shivhei ha Besht*, we read the account of the Besht’s son, Tsvi Hirsch, at his father’s death-bed. The son begins to cry, and the Besht says to him: “I know that I gave you a holy soul for when I joined in union with my wife the heavens shook. If I had wanted to, in the secret of conception, it was in my power to bring the soul of Adam. I knew everything that was necessary (to do that), but you have a holy soul, and you did not need all that.” This confession is full of significance. The Besht declined to give his son the soul of Adam, which would bestow automatic greatness, but he did give him a soul that was holy enough to attain greatness through his own efforts. One senses that the Besht is disappointed that his son did not fulfill his potential. This is another clue to the Besht’s feeling about heredity: *yikhus* can only do so much; merit is also important. Tsvi Hirsch asks the Besht to at least teach him something, but alas, the son cannot understand his father. The Besht finally resigns himself to teaching him a single name, and a way to remember it.⁹¹

Scholars have sought in this episode an explanation for why the Besht did not appoint his son as his successor. Rapoport-Albert has rejected this interpretation as anachronistic, for no mechanism for succession can be said to have existed at this early stage, and certainly not to any position of central leadership.⁹² Moreover, we might add, it is not even certain that the Besht was the leader of a self-conscious movement. The most we can say is that the tale provides another indication that, despite his apparently high regard for genealogical connections, the Besht was not willing to completely sacrifice the ideal of merit and find a greatness in his son which was simply not there. The tale is quite likely authentic,

considering how out of step it is with general nineteenth century Hasidic assumptions about the hereditary bequest of mystical powers.

According to a tale from the book *Midrash Pinhas*, however, the father-son bond does allow Zvi Hirsch unique access to the Besht, who visits him in a dream. In the story, the Besht tells Zvi Hirsch “to have the mystical intent of a name composed of *alef-bet-gimel*, for I myself am this Name.”⁹³ The fact that both Zvi Hirsch and Phineas of Korzec are convinced that this incident occurred says much about continued acceptance of *yikhus* in the first generation of Hasidism. Even an unremarkable son like Zvi Hirsch is privy to special information about the Besht, for no apparent reason besides heredity.

One final demonstration of Besht’s feeling towards *yikhus* can be gleaned from a remark he makes regarding his grandson, Moses Efraim of Sudylkow. In the “Holy Epistle,” a letter by the Besht, he writes the following to Gershon of Kutuy:

And also my grandson, the important young man, the honorable Ephraim, a great prodigy at the highest level of learning; certainly, if the time is propitious, it would be fitting for you to come here yourself and see and be seen with him face to face and to rejoice in our joy as you promised me.⁹⁴

That the Besht wishes Gershon to come and witness in person the talents of his grandson, as well as bask in his glory, might be little more than family pride. But indications of such pride are important. From what we have concluded about the Besht’s own humble background, and considering his disappointment with his own son, we may detect extreme pleasure at having formed a remarkable family line, which his talented grandson finally affirms. Such a grandson firmly establishes his family’s place in the elite. Furthermore, as Gershon is the boy’s great-uncle, the Besht’s appeal suggests an attempt to shore up the kinship connection between the two.

The sum of these accounts amounts to a complex, but consistent ideology. The Besht was no different from his predecessors and contemporaries with regards to *yikhus*. He was undoubtedly impressed

by *yikhus*- which he himself lacked- seeking colleagues and disciples from the most impressive family backgrounds. Possibly, the Besht hoped to compensate for his own lack of *yikhus* by gathering around him those who were not merely rich and learned, but also the high-born. His behavior suggests that he held scions like the Margaliots and Horowitzes in special regard, as did everyone else. In the next chapter, this favoritism will become even more evident as we examine the actual family backgrounds of those disciples and colleagues. But despite that inclination, he was unwilling to accept someone who had *yikhus* and yet other failings, as illustrated by his exasperation with his own son. On the other hand, he did accept a person like Dov Ber, the Great Maggid, for whom no conclusive evidence of *yikhus* possession may be found. In avoiding both extreme acceptance and rejection of *yikhus*, the Besht was entirely in step with his non-Hasidic predecessors.

Several accounts of one of the Besht's contemporaries, Phineas of Korzec (1726-1791), add to the picture of *yikhus* and Hasidism at its earliest stage. Although not necessarily a disciple of the Besht, Phineas was part of his circle of intimates.⁹⁵ He was enormously influential upon Hasidism's development, claiming such disciples as "The Grandfather of Shpola," Raphael of Bershad, and Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir. He was also a member of the illustrious Shapiro family. In Phineas' teachings, a stance similar to the Besht's is found: he held *yikhus* to be a major determinant of a person's character, yet betrayed an equally strong regard for merit.

In *Midrash Pinhas*, is recorded as having:

Commanded one man not to reside in a village. And he said that the reason is that this man did not have a father who is a *Talmid Hakham* (Torah scholar), and (one's) surrounding qualities derive from the father, and because of this, his thoughts are not sufficiently strong to enable him to cling always to God, blessed be He; and he must guard himself so that he will not be amongst the *goyim*.⁹⁶

Apparently, the father's lack of scholarly accomplishment (he does not call the father an ignoramus, he is simply not a distinguished scholar) automatically weakens the son, who would not therefore be able to resist

assimilating into his non-Jewish surroundings. The son's lack of *yikhus* endangers his very adherence to Jewish ways.

In another passage, Phineas also attests to the intimacy of the father-son bond. He cites a passage from the book *Shnei Luhot Habrit*, where Lurianic concept of the “direct ray of light” and the “reflecting ray of light,” originally invoked by Isaac Luria to illustrate divine emanation between *sefirot*, is used by the author to describe the relationship between father and son.⁹⁷ What is remarkable is that this idea is exactly opposite of that proposed by Hayim Vital, Luria's disciple *par excellence*. Vital believes that the affinity of the roots of souls have nothing to do with family kinship, and that there is no connection between the souls of parents and the souls of children.⁹⁸

Phineas' regard for proselytes is ambivalent. While he admits that “Israel was created for no other reason than to accumulate proselytes” (B.T. Pesahim, 87), he also claims that the proselytes mentioned in Esther 8:17 were not righteous, “and they all died in the desert, and Jethro was the only righteous proselyte...”.⁹⁹

In other traditions, however, Phineas advocates greatness achieved through merit. In one teaching, he distinguishes between a “complete Zaddik” and an “incomplete Zaddik:”

He said that ‘complete’ refers to teaching, i.e., that the Master of the Universe taught (him) to be good, for when he was born he possessed bad qualities and brokenness; and a Zaddik who is ‘incomplete’ means one whom the Master of the Universe did not teach- he was merely born with good qualities.

The terms themselves (“complete” and “incomplete”) suggest hierarchy: the one who has overcome his inferior nature is “complete,” thus clearly the greater of the two. Phineas feels compelled to add:

In any case, he (i.e., the “incomplete Zaddik”) is a Zaddik, the one who is not like he who broke his bad qualities (i.e., the “complete Zaddik”). And he said this about R. Isaac of Korzec, the holy community mentioned above, that he was born with good qualities. (And

he said of the Rabbi of Devalstok that he was of a humble nature, and of the Rabbi of Szepietowka that he overcame his sins.)¹⁰⁰

This teaching is similar to that of Elimelekh of Lezajsk, who, as we shall see below, differentiates even more explicitly between the Zaddik with *yikhus* and the self-made Zaddik. Phineas does not go so far as to frame the distinction in terms of *yikhus*. But he does display a preference for merit which certain Zaddikim of the next generation could expand upon.

Other traditions similarly contain a germ of ambivalence about *yikhus*. In one tale, Rabbi Eleazar, son of Elimelekh of Lezajsk, travels to Phineas and, “when he sat at the table of R. Phineas, he mentioned the merit of his father. And R. Phineas said, ‘Perhaps he is not your father...’” The implication is that perhaps Eleazar has not yet earned the merit of having such a father. The tale concludes with Eleazar reporting the incident to his father, who tells him that he should have responded with the following analogy: even though Eleazar is not on a level lofty enough to call God “Father,” he still does so, and God still helps him.¹⁰¹ What is most important, however, is Phineas’ cool reception of the son of a Zaddik.

Finally, we should at least note a rather late tale, even if it is difficult to authenticate:

When Phineas was a child of approximately four years old, a fire erupted in his father’s house, and everything inside went up in flames. His father sat by the ruins of the house and mourned the bitterness of his fate. Phineas asked: ‘Father, why do you cry?’ His father said to him: ‘Not over the burnt house and over the possessions which went up in flames do I mourn, but over the *yikhus* letter of our family, which is related to the Rosh, may his memory be for a blessing, which was in my possession and was devoured by the fire, do I bitterly cry. Little Phineas said to him: ‘Father, cease to cry. There will be a new *yikhus* for our family- from me it will begin.’¹⁰²

If the tradition accurately conveys a teaching by Phineas, it is quite a statement in favor of *yikhus atzmo*-self-made *yikhus*- as against traditional *yikhus*. To complicate the matter of authenticity, however, an almost

identical tale exists about Dov Ber, the Great Maggid.¹⁰³ At least between the two versions, we can guess that the Phineas tale is older, based upon the age of Phineas himself in relation to the Great Maggid.

Another glimpse at the importance of *yikhus* for the early Hasidim is afforded through tales involving a non-Hasidic contemporary of the Besht, Zalman Perlis, related in *Gdolim Maaseh Zadikim*. The introduction to one tale describes Zalman's glory as having been so great as to allow him "to make matches with the great ones of the world, and the *yikhus* possessors of Israel."¹⁰⁴ A second tale describes how Zalman, by economic means, once forced a reluctant prominent rabbi to marry his daughter to him, thus attaining *yikhus* for himself.¹⁰⁵ These tales do more than show the extent that *yikhus* was valued in the Besht's generation. They are also important because they are related in the name of Zalman's son-in-law, Sender Hayim, who was Hasidic,¹⁰⁶ to the father of the author of this collection of tales, Samuel Margalio, also Hasidic. While the latter story is not necessarily flattering in our eyes, that these Hasidim preserved and conveyed the tales suggests that they are impressed by Zalman's matchmaking exploits. In general, Hasidic tales exist for the edification of their heroes. These tales are therefore an additional testament to the enduring value of *yikhus*.

That value does not diminish in the works of Meir Margalio of Ostrog (1700-1790), the younger of the Margalio brothers. As remarked above, Meir's wife would not permit the Besht to make a match with their family because of his insufficient *yikhus*, and Meir did not overrule her. His family pride is confirmed in his instructions to his children, contained in *Sod Yakhin U Boaz*. In it, he expresses first the concern that money worries "not worry my heart, the hearts of my seed and the seed of my seed." He next wishes to "awaken the heart of my son and daughter, and grandchildren" to the fear of God. From the example of Abraham and his household, we learn that "one who produces the son of a Zaddik is as if he is not dead." Meir also expresses the hope to his descendants that "perhaps I will merit to know your good deeds, and I will delight in them." One perceives the force of Meir's determination to have an enduring family legacy.¹⁰⁷

An even greater sense of the importance of *yikhus* is conveyed in Meir's famous halakhic work *Meir Netivim*. With a similar fatherly pride to that displayed by the Besht over his grandson, Meir cites one

teaching in the name of his “dear” son Saul, embellishing his name with accolades.¹⁰⁸ In one actual case regarding the right of the congregation to choose its Torah reader, Meir cites Rashba (Solomon ben Abraham Adret, 1235-1310), who ruled that if a cantor “wishes to appoint his son to aid him in parts (of the service), even if the son does not have a pleasant voice, the son fills his place for the remainder before any other man; and the congregation cannot erase his action.”¹⁰⁹ This is reminiscent of a similar case stated in the previous chapter regarding the appointment of a cantor. Yet there, the opinions appear more sensitive to the actual nature of the son, i.e., is he good or evil.

Meir’s attitude towards those *yikhus* offenders, the *mamzerim*, is also rather strict. In one query, which Meir receives from “another city,” a man’s wife apostatizes, and the man’s brother apostatizes to marry her. She bears this man’s (the brother’s) children. He then leaves her and returns to Judaism, bringing the children with him. The question is posed: may the children enter the community? Meir’s response is filled with reasons why the children should be considered *mamzerim*.¹¹⁰ In general, his stance on *mamzerim* is conservative, for example, upholding the opinions of Rashi.¹¹¹ Meir is no more lenient concerning proselytes, whose number he wishes to limit.¹¹²

In contrast to Meir and the other Zaddikim considered above, who appear to rest firmly within the tradition concerning *yikhus*, it is possible to detect amongst other disciples of the Besht greater skepticism. Such expressions of discontent are, however, usually restrained. Most criticism is aimed at those who have sinned by being too proud of their *yikhus*, which does not constitute a rejection of the value itself. An example of such ambivalence is found in Jehiel Michael’s (1731-1786) *Yeshuot Malkho*. This Zaddik, who traces his own descent to Rashi and refers to his own five sons as “the Five Books of Moses,”¹¹³ derides Korah for having been overly proud of his *yikhus*, which made him feel that he “was worthy of greatness more than all the tribe.”¹¹⁴ This is a clear condemnation against pride in one’s *yikhus*, meant in its simple, genealogical sense. Yet elsewhere he interprets the family name “Hazarkhi” (which means “shining”) to mean that if one merits the opportunity to do good deeds, he shines; and “there are many families which help him to shine.” It is not certain what Jehiel Michael means by this, i.e., whether family helps a person to

shine simply by support and encouragement, or by *yikhus*. But the biblical verse (Num. 25:12) upon which he is commenting consists of a genealogical chain.

A similar complexity exists in the classic work *Toledot Yakov Yitzhak*, a collection of teachings by another possessor of great *yikhus*, Jacob Joseph of Polonne (d.1782). In places, he is positive about the worth of *yikhus*. He quotes Maimonides, claiming that the sins of the father are visited upon the sons because “the power of the father is in the son;” and even the family of the father’s brother receives punishment.¹¹⁵ He upholds Rashi’s praise of *yikhus* possessors. For example, he uncritically cites a statement by Rashi which deems the officers of David’s army “Zaddikim with *yikhus*”(again, the term refers to genealogy only.)¹¹⁶

Jacob Joseph agrees with Rashi’s interpretation of the verse about Phinehas’ *yikhus*, as well, which, according to Rashi, lends Phineas the necessary prestige to be an effective leader.¹¹⁷ But with the following statement he diverges from Rashi’s intention:

He (Phinehas) was a midpoint between the Holiness and the *Klippah*, who are the evil ones of Israel, because from his mother’s side he was (descended) from idol worshippers, and from his father’s side there was a chain of *yikhus* and holiness from Aaron’s seed and a pure man, so it was becoming for him to make peace and reconcile two opposites: those who were given an eternal covenant of peace, and those who were despised by the tribes.¹¹⁸

Three points should be acknowledged. First, Jacob Joseph recognizes a positive aspect of Phineas’ low descent: it can be used to unite people. That goes well beyond Rashi’s interpretation, which recognizes the positive benefit of Phineas’ *yikhus* side only. Second, it should be observed that Jacob Joseph again uses the term exclusively in its narrow, genealogical sense. Finally, such a statement may suggest a gender aspect of *yikhus*: while matrilineal descent determines if one is a Jew, we might conclude from this example that the father’s line, in this case overshadowing the mother’s line, is dominant concerning *yikhus*.

The issue of matrilineal vs. patrilineal descent with regard to prestige is worthy of a brief digression. In the memoirs of Ber of Bolechow, we encounter a reference to an individual who is known as “Israel, son of Leah.” The editor Mark Vischnitzer comments that such appellations occur in cases where one’s mother

achieves greater renown than one's father.¹¹⁹ It is difficult to know how often this occurred. Under Hasidism, we have a few notable cases. The Besht himself is often referred to as "Israel ben Sarah." For example, he defends himself against an accusation by Isaac of Drohobycz regarding his alleged use of forbidden spells and holy names. The Besht answers, "But there are no oaths nor any Names in my amulets...save my very own, 'Israel, son of Sarah, Baal Shem Tov.'"¹²⁰ This appellation is not always used for the Besht, however: in one version of the same tale, he calls himself both "Israel, son of Eliezer" and "Israel, son of Sarah."¹²¹ Elsewhere, he refers to himself by his father's name only.¹²² A Zaddik who always uses his mother's name is a disciple of Dov Ber of Miedzyrzecz named Aryeh Leib Sarah's (son of Sarah). A third example is Aryeh Leib, the Grandfather of Shpola. According to one tale, the Grandfather orders his servant to call out: "In the name of the Holy Council, which is now assembled here, I inform you that Rabbi Loeb, the son of Rachel, summons the Holy One to a trial of Justice...".¹²³ Occurring as they do in such a patriarchal culture, each of these traditions may be viewed as accurate as far as names are concerned. As the fathers of each of these Zaddikim are rather obscure, Vischnitzer's explanation is plausible; although such appellations are not found in every case where the mother is more prestigious than the father.¹²⁴

Several of Jacob Joseph's teachings concerning *yikhus* are more negative. In his interpretation of the Korah rebellion, he exhorts us to behave like Moses, who was extremely humble, in contrast to "those who vexed Israel, who were distinguished and important possessors of *yikhus*" (i.e., Korah and his followers).¹²⁵ Again, *yikhus* is restricted to genealogy, and the appeal is in the interest of humility.

Elsewhere, he provides a scale of values which illustrates well the place of *yikhus*: 1) Abraham represents those who have no *yikhus*, because his father was not Jewish. He attains greatness by his own deeds, and by God's lovingkindness (*hesed*). He thus embodies *hesed*. He is on the highest level. 2) Isaac represents those who believe that they automatically deserve a reward, like a *yikhus* possessor, or because they have mastered the gemara and its commentaries. By merely receiving the greatness that is his by right, Isaac embodies judgment (*din*). *Din* is on a lower level than *hesed*. 3) Jacob represents those who rely upon

both *yikhus* and great deeds: “There are those who combine both, called Jacob...For he relies upon good deeds and receives his reward from *din*, which is like Isaac; and we learn that he does not rely exclusively on *hesed* and compassion, which is like Abraham.” Jacob receives the reward which is his due, and attracts God’s *hesed* by exceeding what is merely expected of him. The author, who clearly belongs to this class, does not assign Jacob a specific level. We are not told whether Jacob, who combines *yikhus* and merit, represents the highest level, or an intermediary level between Abraham and Isaac. But the fact that Jacob combines the two qualities of *hesed* and *din* suggests that this is, indeed, the paramount level. ¹²⁶

In the conclusion of this passage, Joseph Jacob emphasizes the greatness of Abraham, who “through *hesed* God brought him to do His work, and not through *zekhut avot* (ancestral right), which was Terah (his father). What we have said here is that Isaac, from *din*, deserves this (reward) because of his father Abraham, and thus is the matter with (all) people.” He therefore re-affirms both the self-made Zaddik, and the worthiness of a *yikhus* possessor, although in more measured terms. It may be concluded from this passage that those who, like Isaac, rely exclusively on the greatness of their fathers, although deserving of reward, are on an inferior level. In such an ambiguous way does Jacob Joseph criticize the sons of the rabbis who rely exclusively on their *yikhus*. He does not, however, fundamentally challenge the societal value. ¹²⁷

One more passage also might be taken as social criticism. Jacob Joseph, citing Nahman Kitzover, remarks:

“ ‘Do not turn to the fathers’ (a corruption of Leviticus 19:4, contained in *Likkute Shimoni*), which is to say, why did you not see this Hasidism from my father, or from my father’s father, and so-on, if it brings the Messiah, etc.? And the sages say, and we have said: in the days of Elijah the fathers knew that it was not done like this, yet they chose the way of their sons, who had chosen better.

Aware that he is on dangerous ground, Jacob Joseph adds:

‘And return the hearts of the sons to the fathers’ (Malakhi 3:24) is applied against those (sons) who did not walk in the ways of the rabbis who were teachers of the correct path,

similar to the verse 'a father who spares the rod hates his son' (Proverbs 13), i.e. (sons) whom the father deserved to walk before.¹²⁸

The tenuous position of the early Hasidim is brought out in this passage. The author admits that an innovation has occurred, and he is attempting to justify it. In doing so, he must further justify the diversion of many sons from the path of their fathers, which the new movement entails. But this is in no way a rejection of *yikhus*. In exhorting his followers to eschew the path of their fathers, he is not advocating the abandonment of the prestige of *yikhus*.

Jacob Joseph prefers his followers to abandon the path of their fathers, not their fathers' good name. He is critical only of those who rest upon their *yikhus* exclusively. It appears then, that among the first generation of Hasidim, the importance of *yikhus* was fully acknowledged, and possessors of *yikhus* were well sought after. The Zaddikim did not actually condemn *yikhus*. They merely condemned exclusive reliance on *yikhus* and the need for the possessors of it to be heedful of pride, as had many rabbis before them.

The one major Zaddik of this generation from an apparently humble background is Dov Ber of Miedzyrzecz, the "Great Maggid" (1704-1772). Several sources suggest that Dov Ber might have had *yikhus*, but the evidence is insufficient. Two such sources are a certificate of ordination for a kosher slaughterer from 1767, and an autograph approbation by Dov Ber to the Halakhic compendium *Halakha Pessukha*, by R. Todros ben Tsvi Hirsch, issued in 1765. In both documents, Dov Ber signs his approbation: "Dov Ber, son of Rabbi Abraham of blessed memory...".¹²⁹ A third document- a letter discovered in the Stolín *geniza* from Dov Ber to Eliezer Halevi, a rabbinical judge in Pinsk, and to Hayim of Pinsk- is also signed in such a way.¹³⁰ But these signatures are simply not enough to prove that Dov Ber's father Abraham was learned or otherwise distinguished. Notably, they lack mention of a specific rabbinical office. Furthermore, the majority of biographies contain only a description of Abraham's poverty, and are silent regarding his possible scholarly or other attainment. The biographers who link Abraham to King David, the ancestor of choice for most *yikhus* fabricators, provide no evidence.¹³¹

Sources for Dov Ber's attitude about *yikhus* are few. The following passage, contained in *Likkutim Hadashim*, published first in 1784 as an appendix to *Maggid Devarav LiYakov*, comments upon the phrase in B.T. Talmud *Berakhot* 7a: "Why is there a Zaddik for whom it is good, and a Zaddik for whom it is bad?"

Dov Ber explains:

This means, why is there a Zaddik who needs great deeds to break his bad characteristics, and there is a Zaddik who does not need great deeds for this (purpose); and the teaching: "Zaddik son of Zaddik" (ibid.) wishes to teach that always the son has his father's nature, despite freedom of choice, even so, most have a nature equal to their fathers; and thus the teaching: "For a Zaddik son of a Zaddik, it is good (ibid.), for he already possesses a nature from his father, and here "Zaddik son of an evil person" (ibid.) *and his nature is reversed*.¹³²

The message conveyed is that being born to a righteous father is a great advantage in the quest for one's own righteousness, for usually a person's nature imitates his father. However, Dov Ber, like the Besht in *Keter Shem Tov*, argues that it is possible to reverse that nature and become a Zaddik despite having an evil father. This interpretation is also similar to that of Phineas of Korzec, cited above; however, there, Phineas actually expresses a preference for the Zaddik who is born flawed. But the difference between Dov Ber's interpretation and his contemporary Elijah Vilna Gaon's reading of the same phrase, quoted above, is even more compelling. The Vilna Gaon interprets the teaching deterministically, stating that evil will inevitably befall a Zaddik who is the son of an evil person, a curse which will only be broken after four generations. The contrast highlights the generally optimistic philosophy of Hasidism. The tendency to regard evil as reversible or even complicit in the attainment of good, a major innovation of the movement, here affects social values, as well. The low-born Zaddik can, through a great deal of effort, transform his "low-born" nature and become righteous. This attitude, we should also note, is another foreshadowing of the teachings of Elimelekh of Lezajsk on the subject.

Dov Ber, like the Besht, probably did not even have the option of appointing his son as a successor; and for reasons different from Tzvi Hirsch, his son did not become a Zaddik. But, as in the Besht's case, this

did not constitute any rejection of *yikhus*. In a tale in *Shivhei Ha Besht*, the Great Maggid requests two community leaders to “arrange for my son, may he have a long life, to marry the daughter of the rabbi, our teacher, Faivel, the author of the book *Mishnat Hakhamim*.”¹³³ Thus, whether he inherited *yikhus* or not, Dov Ber is portrayed in this tale as a marriage strategist who wishes to connect his son to a family of scholars.

The Second Generation

The problem of Elimelekh of Lezajsk (1717-1786), himself of noble descent, is one of degree: the extent to which he dwells upon *yikhus*, far greater than perhaps any thinker considered thus far, is puzzling. For, we will recall, *yikhus* is an integral part of the parent society within which Hasidism has arisen, and should seemingly have been taken for granted. Why then did this Zaddik, who was so influential amongst the next generation of Zaddikim, harp on the issue? Perhaps Elimelekh’s central role in this pivotal generation forced him to contend with the problem.

By the second generation, the need for stability began to be felt. Scholarship had already been downgraded on the scale of values, and a more volatile personal charisma assumed primacy. The other element which has helped stabilize Jewish society, *yikhus*, had remained intact. Eventually, *yikhus* would increase in importance, as a result of that need for stability. Its physical manifestation- hereditary succession- would emerge in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet a Zaddik, according to the initial formulators of the concept, was supposed to achieve a state of *devekut* (union with God) through joy, honest conduct, simple piety, Torah study for its own sake, and various mystical techniques—not through heredity. Neither the Baal Shem Tov nor his colleagues and disciples argued that one must be born a Zaddik. Should not any remarkably gifted individual be able to become a Zaddik, just as he might have become a Torah scholar in spite of a disadvantaged background? Obviously, the son of a Zaddik had quite an advantage, perhaps even a hereditary one. But did he have an exclusive right? The same tension between *yikhus* and merit that we saw

in the previous chapter began to be felt at this early stage of the movement. *Yikhus*, a value which guaranteed a degree of stability, clashed with the ideal of merit, embodied by the Besht and Dov Ber, by the next generation. That conflict was possibly aggravated by the alleged exclusivist claims of members of the Besht's line- Baruch of Miezyboz, and later, Nahman of Braclaw. Two distinct groups became discernible: those who consented to the traditional exaltation of distinguished lineage, and those who, in limited ways, dissented. In this atmosphere, Elimelekh's pronouncements might amount to an attempt to stem the tide toward hereditary succession without denying a value that was almost natural.

Many of Elimelekh's remarks about *yikhus* concern the danger of pride. This may be compared with the comments of Jehiel Michael and Jacob Joseph; but in Elimelekh's work *Noam Elimelekh*, these observations appear far more frequently. It is therefore an issue of emphasis. The verse "On the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers"(Exodus 12:3) receives the following interpretation:

That he should humble himself in this, that he will not become proud of his father's *yikhus* if he is from a family of *yikhus*, he shall only think that his seed and his (ancestral) right helps him to do the work of God, but not to please him and make him proud. Or go this way: 'to the house of their fathers,' meaning: that he will always worry and think 'when will I reach the place of my father, that I will be a Zaddik like him?'"¹³⁴

On the verse "forget your people and your father's house and let the king be aroused by your beauty"(Psalms 45:11): "if you come to this level, that you forget from which people you are, and from which father's house you are descended (*m'yukhas*) then you will arouse the king- King of the universe- by your beauty. And this is the meaning here: 'according to the house of their fathers,' meaning that they will be humble in their *yikhus*."¹³⁵ And on the verse "a staff from each ancestral house"(Numbers 17:17): "that they will humble themselves and not pride themselves on the *yikhus* of their fathers."¹³⁶

Excessive pride in one's *yikhus* may corrupt a person. Elimelekh hopes that the children of Israel will "watch over themselves carefully, and not watch over their ancestral merit, in order that there not come

over them, God forbid, any boasting because of their *yikhus*.” They should “look upon themselves as if they no ancestral merit at all.” Otherwise, “they can defile the spirit.”¹³⁷

This does not prove that Elimelekh is opposed to *yikhus*. Like some of his predecessors, although with a greater level of concern, Elimelekh hopes to guard against the negative effects of *yikhus* on a person. Expanding on Rashi, Elimelekh distinguishes between positive and negative use of *yikhus*:

Ancestral merit is a *great thing*, and stands before a man in the hour that he wants to do the work of God, for it will be for him heavenly assistance for doing a good deed completely. And this is because he did not take the exaltation of *yikhus* to another (evil) side, and therefore *it helps him in doing the work of the Creator*.

This is to be distinguished from Korah’s use of *yikhus*, where he “took his *yikhus* to his controversy (with Moses) and divided himself from them (Israel) because of his *yikhus*.”¹³⁸

There has been some disagreement over Elimekh’s theory of *yikhus* and the Zaddik. Rappoport-Albert refutes scholars such as Aescoly and Horodecky, who have incorrectly found Elimelekh to be a proponent of hereditary succession.¹³⁹ As she implies, the passages in question speak for themselves. One such passage reads as follows:

And it is written, ‘your first-born son (you will give me)’(Exodus 22:28). This is a clue about the holy Zaddik who from his mother’s womb is holy *like* a first-born son, who is holy from the womb, for he is sanctified by his father’s holy thoughts during intercourse, and he is called ‘son of the place of the Blessed One.’¹⁴⁰

Horodecky takes the metaphor literally, understanding the Zaddik to actually be the first-born son, and concludes that Elimelekh is advocating hereditary dynasty.¹⁴¹ From the passage, however, it is evident that Elimelekh is merely equating the two, both of whom are conceived in holiness. And as Rapoport-Albert points out, no reference is made to the father being himself a Zaddik, which would more convincingly imply dynastic succession.

In fact, Elimelekh places the Zaddik who is the son of a Zaddik on a lower level than the self-made Zaddik. The passage alluded to throughout this chapter shall now be recited in full:

There are two types of Zaddikim. There are Zaddikim sanctified by their fathers who were holy and perfect and godfearing and "the Torah returns to its lodgings," and there are Zaddikim called "nazirites" because they set themselves apart, although they are sons of common people. And these Zaddikim (i.e., the ones who are not the sons of Zaddikim) cannot quickly fall from their sacred rank, for they have nothing to rely on, and they stay humble and watch themselves with open eyes perpetually. But the Zaddikim sons of saints, even be they full of Torah and commandments, by virtue of their fathers helping them sometimes- there can arise from that divergence on the one hand and loftiness on the other (i.e., they will become full of pride) and they will fall quickly from their rank. And this is 'say to the priests the sons of Aaron' here he hinted at the Zaddikim who are sons of Zaddikim, and are called 'priests sons of Aaron,' warning them strictly that they should not presume to think at all of the *yikhus* of their fathers...and choose the best way for themselves.¹⁴²

The following passage confirms that idea:

There are three stages which cause a man to become a Zaddik. 1) From reincarnation, that he was a Zaddik in the first reincarnation, and because of this it was easy for him to be a Zaddik now, as well. 2) Because of his ancestral merit, that (his ancestors) were Zaddikim, and because of them, their portion of family honor was to merit that their sons would be Zaddikim. 3) Because the Holy One Blessed be He, the Great Lord, decreed in the creation of the world that there will be so many 'Reuvens' and so many 'Simons' and now a certain man is reincarnated into the world and is given the name of a Zaddik who was previously in the world, this causes that man to be a Zaddik, as well, because the light of the Zaddik in heaven is awakened. And the difference between the Zaddik due to the first reincarnation (1) and the Zaddik due to ancestral merit (2) is this: that the Zaddik due to the first reincarnation benefits from advice, because he was already in heaven, and heard everything that will occur in the future of the world, and therefore he has this power to give advice. But the Zaddik due to ancestral merit is not on this level. And this is what King David, servant of God, said: 'You guided me and led me toward honor,' (Psalms 73:24) meaning: that he used to pray to himself that he will be a Zaddik either on the level to give advice, or, in any event, due to the honor of his father...¹⁴³

Elimelekh is, again, explicit in stating the inferiority of the Zaddik with *yikhus*, who is, however, still a Zaddik.

Elimelekh advises one not to pay attention to his *yikhus*, but rather to concentrate on good deeds. And if he does not have the aid of ancestral merit, he should not despair. He should “work for God in earnest,” and assistance will come from heaven regardless of his family background.¹⁴⁴ In contrast to Phineas of Korzec and others, Elimelekh believes that the son’s bond with his father weakens as he grows, until he becomes entirely detached. *The Zaddik, according to Elimelekh, is the son’s true kinsman, and it is to the Zaddik’s soul that a man’s own soul is bound.*¹⁴⁵ This teaching reveals another source of Elimelekh’s misgivings: undue attachment to one’s kinship group might diminish the Hasid’s allegiance to the Zaddik.

Elimelekh’s explicit use of the term *yikhus* on several occasions are well worth examining. In most cases he invokes the term in a narrow, genealogical sense. *Yikhus* is used interchangeably with the terms “seed,” “ancestral right,” “ancestral merit,” “ancestral house,” and “father’s house.” Only the last term is more flexible, able to include living family members. Such wording implies that *yikhus* is a type of prestige, based on both lineage and family.

Another Zaddik from this generation who occasionally questions the place of *yikhus* is Levi Isaac of Berdyczow (1740-1810). Like Elimelekh, Levi Isaac clearly prefers a man who is raised by his own merit, as opposed to his pedigree. In *Kedushat Levi*, he teaches the following regarding the excessive pride of members of the priestly class:

It is not fitting for a man boast about anything other than something which he (himself) has done, and toiled, and he reached it. And a thing which he has not worked for, for example the *yikhus* of his fathers, it is not fitting that he boast, for what is this considered? And thus: ‘Say to the Kohanim sons of Aaron,’ (Leviticus 21:1, approximately) which is to say...to them: that which God desires is not they themselves, but rather their being the sons of Aaron, for Aaron was holy...¹⁴⁶

Levi Isaac’s preference for self-sufficiency is unmistakable. Yet *yikhus* is also precious: according to the last sentence of the passage, God respects the trait of *yikhus*. However, He does not respect the actual individuals who possess it. It is not proper to take credit for something that one has not acquired through any effort of

his own. Levi Isaac appears to deliberately refer to “the *yikhus* of his father,” as opposed to one’s own *yikhus*. This, along with the comparison to Aaron’s sons, implies that Levi Isaac understands *yikhus* be the father’s holiness reflected onto the son.

The message here is similar to that of Elimelekh: 1)boasting about one’s *yikhus* is a sin; 2) *yikhus* is yet a great thing; 3)more valuable, however, is an attribute or accomplishment which one has acquired by his own deeds. Proof of Levi Isaac’s commitment to the notion of *yikhus*, despite his criticism against those who take undue credit for it, is found in his remark about Nahman of Braclaw, a Zaddik whom Levi Isaac praised “for his own merit as well as for that of his holy ancestors.”¹⁴⁷

As a result, the biblical Abraham poses a problem for Levi Isaac. He must admit that Abraham is descended from Terah, the idol-worshipper; thus this is the origin of all Jews. Levi Isaac resolves this *yikhus* problem by stating that:

The progenitor of Abraham our father was that thought which he raised before the Creator, blessed be He. And what was that thought? That Israel will be in the world, so that by them His great name will be sanctified. And this is the thought that brought the soul of Abraham our father, servant of God, and this thought is called the ‘father’ of Abraham our father, and not Terah. And the son has a portion of the father’s spiritual world, and the mother’s thoughts which she has during the hour of intercourse, which make an impression on the son, both good ones and bad ones...But this was not so with Abraham our father, servant of God, who did not have any portion of his father Terah’s soul and his mother, and Terah’s intercourse did not make an impression on Abraham.¹⁴⁸

Levi Isaac reasserts this point several times in the same passage, before stating that the land of Israel was bequeathed to Abraham, and then to the Jews, not by his father Terah, but by his spiritual father, the divine thought. In the course of this passage, Levi Isaac reveals the deep spiritual connection which he believes to exist between children and parents. That he is uncomfortable with the Abraham “problem” demonstrates the continued potency of *yikhus* for him, despite his admonitions against pride in *yikhus*.

A third Zaddik of this generation, Ze’ev Wolf of Zhitomir (d.1798), might be categorized with the above promoters of self-sufficiency. One instance, conveyed by his son-in-law in *Bet Pinhas*, reveals this

Zaddik's attitude. Ze'ev Wolf, according to this account, is sitting at the window, when he sees a man walking together with his son. They are "very drunk and fell to the ground because of their drunkenness." Ze'ev Wolf calls his son, Israel Dov, and says to him, "'Know, my son, that I am jealous of this man.'" He explains:

My son, what I mean is that this disgusting drunk already acts before God in a such a way that his son will be like him. He is a drunk, and his son is also a drunk, like him. But I have not yet acted before God enough to merit that you will be like me. And there is yet more distance between me and your son. And why should it be that drunk acts more for God than I? Therefore, my son, be successful and go after the truth, and see that you become like me.¹⁴⁹

Ze'ev Wolf apparently longs for a family legacy quite intensely, attaching such an attainment to the service of God. But that sentiment is contained within the warning that greatness will not come automatically to his son and grandson. Despite their hereditary connection, there is a distance between Ze'ev Wolf and his descendants that increases with each generation. Far from advocating any theory of genealogical determinism, the father tells his son that he must achieve greatness on his own. Nevertheless, such greatness is framed in a genealogical context.

The teachings of the Zaddik Israel Hapstein, the Maggid of Kozienice (1733-1815), a disciple of Elimelekh, appear rather contradictory. The Maggid of Kozienice was from a humble background- his father was but a poor bookbinder. We will recall the tale cited by Hundert, in which the rabbi of Checiny, related by marriage to the Landaus, makes fun of the Maggid of Kozienice for his undistinguished lineage. According to the story, Israel shames the rabbi with his erudition. Hundert feels that, regardless of whether the story reflects actual events, it might reveal something about "the forces at work in Jewish society at the end of the eighteenth century," namely, the diminishing significance of "lineage in determining social status."¹⁵⁰ But by no means does Israel emerge as an absolute proponent of that counter trend. His teachings are contradictory.

Two examples are very much in step with the message that the above tale promotes. One tradition about the Maggid of Kozienice is as follows:

‘My hours are not too busy for me to concern myself with matters of *yikhus*,’ said the Maggid of Kozienice. For had he not known that his origin is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he would have taken off his hat and danced like a Cossak in the middle of the market. ‘However I know that my source is Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’”¹⁵¹

This declaration is impressive, because the Maggid of Kozienice appears to support the idea of *yikhus*; but of course, he changes its definition. If *yikhus* merely refers to descent from the forefathers, then he is implying that all Jews have *yikhus*.¹⁵² This tradition is conveyed by Menahem Mendel of Kock, a Zaddik who lived at a time when dynastic succession was well under way. Menahem Mendel himself possessed great *yikhus*, having descended from Israel Halperin, *av bet din* of Ostrog and disciple of the Besht, and David Halperin, also *av bet din* of Ostrog. He would have little to gain by fabricating a tradition that undercut a major tenet of his own prestige. Another reason to assume that the statement is authentic because it reflects a reality: the Maggid of Kozienice’s lack of impressive pedigree.

Another tradition presents the Maggid of Kozienice’s humble background as influencing his ideals. In the anthology *Siah Srafei Kodesh*, the following statement is recorded:

The Rabbi from Lublin, may he be remembered, because he was rich and born in wealth, because of this perpetuated wealth in the world, because he saw himself that due to wealth, we can do the work of God. And the Maggid of Kozienice (Israel), may he be remembered, because he was poor and born in poverty, did not wish to perpetuate wealth. Because he saw that we can do the work of God in poverty.¹⁵³

This comparison of the Maggid of Kozienice’s attitude toward wealth to that of the Seer of Lublin suggests that the former drew strength from his humble background. He appears to have been unashamed of it, declaring that one may serve God in poverty just as effectively. Wealth and *yikhus* are two different things;

however both are tied to social prestige. The Maggid of Kozienice's humble background is mentioned often enough to produce the impression that it was remarkable for a Zaddik of such origins to achieve his stature.

Yet, in his work *Avodat Yisrael*, the Maggid of Kozienice betrays his appreciation for *yikhus*. He describes how one's deeds reverberate throughout one's ancestral chain:

when a man does something good in the eyes of God, he arouses the root of his soul through his father and his father's father, and brightens everyone in the light of its holiness. And when, God forbid, the man is blemished in his deeds in a certain matter, this is enough to blemish his root through his father and his father's father.¹⁵⁴

This teaching is, in fact a reverse of the notion of *yikhus*, which assumes that the deeds of one's forebears affect him. But it does illustrate the intimate, spiritual bond between father and son. The Maggid of Kozienice affirms that bond, as well, in his interpretation of the incident between Ham and Noah. He explains that "the son confuses the mind of the father, even if he is a Zaddik, because the mind of the son comes from the mind of the father." Similarly, the father's mind can become awakened to holiness by a wise son.¹⁵⁵ Finally, worthy of note is a third passage, in which the Maggid of Kozienice takes pains to describe the genealogy of the biblical character Phineas.¹⁵⁶

It is difficult to reconcile the above views. The Maggid of Kozienice's first teaching, regarding the nobility of all who have descended from the forefathers, a rather egalitarian pronouncement which is understandable considering his own background, clashes with his attitudes in *Avodat Yisrael*, in which he teaches that a person is rooted in his origins. Of the several traditions available to us, the latter is the earliest and therefore easiest to vouch for. However, if the other traditions accurately reflect the Maggid of Kozienice's outlook, as well, we must conclude that his conception of *yikhus* was complicated by his unique background. Unlike most other Zaddikim of his generation, the Maggid of Kozienice did not possess distinguished ancestry. He therefore had to legitimize his position with statements like the first examples quoted above. At the same time, being raised in a society which championed the sons of the elite, the

Maggid of Kozienice no doubt internalized some of his society's values, becoming convinced of the mystical nature of the father-son relationship and, by extension, the essential worth of *yikhus*.

A second category of Zaddikim from this pivotal generation entails those who are much less hesitant to uphold the importance of possessing *yikhus* than those listed above, and unwilling to condemn even excessive pride in *yikhus*. We may assume that many of these Zaddikim derived a great deal of their authority from their *yikhus*, and were reluctant to question its value. For Zaddikim belonging to this category invariably possessed great *yikhus*. One example, is Joseph of Jampol (d.1824), a son of Jehiel Michael of Zloczow. About his paternal grandfather, Isaac of Drohobycz, Joseph claims that "the Holy Spirit had been with R. Isaac's family uninterruptedly for seventy-two generations," a statement which, of course, reflects positively upon Joseph himself.¹⁵⁷

Two Zaddikim, Moses Hayyim Ephraim (1748-1800) and Baruch of Miezyboz (1753-1811), were able to boast the greatest *yikhus* of all: descent from the Besht. These brothers were grandson's of the Besht, through his daughter, Adel. In *Degel Mahaneh Ephraim*, Moses Hayyim Ephraim is unfailingly positive about the worth of *yikhus*. He dedicates a section of his work to the sayings of his father, Jehiel Michael Ashkenazy, and often quotes teachings of the Besht, referred to proudly as "my grandfather."¹⁵⁸ He deems Zaddikim the new Kohanim, which might imply a special genetic caste.¹⁵⁹ Like several of the above Zaddikim, Moses perceives an extremely intimate spiritual bond between father and son. In his grandfather's name, he claims:

He who dies and has no son cannot raise the heavenly curtain, and even if he has a son who does not behave properly or has several failings, it is also a failing for the father...But in the opposite case, if the son is a complete Zaddik and has no failings, then he raises also the father...¹⁶⁰

While this message includes the requirement that the son be a Zaddik, and thus demands merit, it also entails an extreme dependency between father and son.

Moses' interpretation of the *yikhus* chain in the story of Noah is revealing, as well. He asks, why is Shem described as the brother of Yefet? He reasons that the description is not for the sake of establishing Shem's *yikhus*, for "if the purpose was to convey his *yikhus*, it would have been more appropriate to mention his *yikhus* after Noah, his father, about whom it is written that he was a pure Zaddik." Moses proceeds to give a mystical explanation for the mention of Shem's brother. For our purposes, however, it is important to regard Moses' positive tone as he considers Shem's *yikhus*.¹⁶¹ Also, it is significant that Moses uses the term in its narrow, genealogical sense.

Another passage, concerning the biblical Sarah, further illustrates Moses' positive regard for *yikhus*. Sarah is described as a dwelling-place for the Holy Spirit, for she "like the chain of fathers, needs to preserve world. And heavenly judgment was with her, for from her came the fathers of the Zaddikim to preserve the world, and not from any other family." This teaching is remarkable in that it praises a female figure, something rare in Hasidic literature, going so far as to even portray Sarah as a vital source of *yikhus*.

Given his stance on *yikhus*, Moses' negative comments about proselytes are not surprising. He remarks that " 'proselyte' is a nickname for the lowest level."¹⁶² In his grandfather's name, Moses' quotes: "when a man is in (a state of) smallness, he gives birth to proselyte souls."¹⁶³

Moses' brother, Baruch of Miezyboz, is famous for invoking his own *yikhus* to assert his authority, regarding himself as a successor to his grandfather, the Besht.¹⁶⁴ But, according to Rapoport-Albert, much of the evidence for Baruch's most radical claims is flimsy. In an alleged argument with Shneur Zalman, contained in *Butsino Dinehora*, Baruch says angrily, "I am the grandson of the Besht and I should be shown respect." Shneur Zalman answers, "I, *too*, am the grandson of the Besht, his spiritual grandson, for the great Maggid was an outstanding disciple of the Besht and I am a disciple of the Maggid."¹⁶⁵ Some scholars have taken this discussion to be a dispute over types of succession, with Baruch advocating hereditary transfer of leadership and Shneur Zalman defending the principle of transmission from teacher to disciple.¹⁶⁶ Rapoport-Albert not only rejects this exaggerated interpretation, but raises serious doubts as to whether this conversation even took place. She considers it "a piece of fictional writing by Rodkinson, inspired by the

dynastic outlook which had become characteristic of Habad by the second half of the nineteenth century...”, tacked onto an authentic letter by Shneur Zalman.¹⁶⁷

In fact, many parts of *Butsino Dinehara HaShelem* have been proven inauthentic. It contains material collated and composed as late as the 1920s, and relies upon forgeries.¹⁶⁸ Significantly more reliable is an earlier collection of Baruch’s teachings, entitled simply *Butsino Dinehara*. On the very first page, we encounter an exegetical comment which speaks positively of *yikhus*. According to Baruch,

Abraham trusted in God that his son also would brighten the worlds, like him. And how did he trust in God that his son would also be like this? For to do this one would need great work and great strength in clinging to the ways of God. ‘And He counted it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6),’ meaning: because Abraham did not think that by himself and his own deeds he came to brighten and illuminate all the worlds; and that this righteousness was only his because of God. And (therefore) Abraham trusted that his son could also brighten all the worlds.

In contrast to a similar interpretation by Jacob Joseph, cited above, Baruch’s regard for Isaac is not at all negative. He actually denounces excessive pride over one’s own merit! Baruch insists that deeds do not matter, for everything is according to God’s will. By de-emphasizing Abraham’s deeds and attempting to prove that Isaac will be great without his father’s tremendous efforts, Baruch is implying that *yikhus* is a form of greatness, equivalent to that achieved through one’s own deeds. Apparently, as a grandson of the Besht- whose deeds he cannot hope to imitate- Baruch is modeling himself on Isaac, and legitimizing his own claim to greatness.¹⁶⁹

Perhaps the most famous passage in *Butsino Dinehara* is the one in which Jacob Joseph deems Baruch successor to the Besht. He says to him, “ ‘Boruchl, I heard from your grandfather the Besht that you will be his successor; can you take snuff like the Besht? For the Besht, when he wanted to go to the worlds above, would take snuff...’”. This tale, if true, would reveal as much about Jacob Joseph and the Besht as it does about Baruch. For Baruch, according to the tradition, is very young (lit. “soft in years”) when this

conversation occurs. The instructions for the succession, coming from the Besht when he is still alive, would have occurred earlier. Therefore, it would be unlikely that the proposed succession was based on merit, but rather due to Baruch's *yikhus*. But what we already know about the Besht and Jacob Joseph renders this story problematic. In order to appoint a successor, the Besht would have had to be consciously creating a new movement, which has by no means been proven. Furthermore, certain teachings of Jacob Joseph, mentioned above, state the inferiority of a *yikhus* possessor (Isaac) one who rose due to merit (Abraham). It is difficult to imagine Jacob Joseph backing the "succession" of a young boy, who has yet to display his mettle. Such a scenario would fit more comfortably in the mid-nineteenth century.

Finally, Baruch's motive for fabricating this tale is undeniable. Such a tradition must have been a tremendous boost to Baruch's career and legacy. According to Arthur Green, Barukh "was not a great original thinker or spiritual teacher, but saw himself rather as custodian of the path that had been laid out by his grandfather, the Ba'al Shem Tov, and as heir to his authority." He rejected the "rather intellectualized mystical path" of Dov Ber of Miedzyrzec.¹⁷⁰ Elsewhere, Green observes: "No doubt Barukh did see himself as the legitimate heir of the Ba'al Shem Tov and viewed those who opposed him as usurpers."¹⁷¹ Such a story as that cited here would shore up his *yikhus*-based claim on authority.

A Zaddik who might be expected to oppose the views of Baruch is Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745-1813). Fictional though the above conversation with Baruch may be, there was at least some dispute between Baruch and himself. Nevertheless, expressions of opposition to the benefit of *yikhus* are absent in Shneur Zalman's work. In a collection of his teachings, *Ma'amrei Admor Ha Zaken*, he asserts the intimacy of the father-son bond: "the connection of the son's will to his father, is taken from the essence of his father's soul, and not (merely) from his influence; there will be no changes at all in the connection between his soul and his father's soul, which is in contact with the essence of his father like a unity."¹⁷² This is the opposite of the opinion of Elimelekh, who, as cited above, holds that the bond deteriorates as the son matures, and is replaced by a bond with the Zaddik.¹⁷³ It appears to be a direct response to Elimelekh.

In his classic work the *Tanya (Likkutei Ammarim)*, Shneur Zalman explains that parents, when they beget children, give them a garment of their own essence, and that garment influences the child's performance of good deeds; and "even the goodness that descends to him from heaven flows through that garment...However great a soul it may be, it still needs the father's sanctification." The only evidence of a misgiving occurs in Shneur Zalman's admission that a lofty soul sometimes begets a lowly one.¹⁷⁴

The Third Generation

As Hasidism had never been centralized, there never was a struggle for supreme succession. By the third generation, however, struggles over succession within a departed Zaddik's territory could occur. The clash between Shneur Zalman's son, Dov Ber (1773-1828), and favorite disciple, Aaron of Starosielce (1766-1828), was of this sort. Against that background, Dov Ber's *pro-yikhus* theories appear as weapons of propaganda. Similar to his father, Dov Ber asserts that "for all children and every person, his root is in the mind of his father." He claims that "even though every generation is called 'father' by their sons in the generation after them, each generation is contained in the previous generation."¹⁷⁵ Proselytes are "as hard/difficult as a scab" because "they possess a severe admixture in their ascent from *Nogah* (which contains good and evil)...with the exception of those very lofty souls of the righteous proselytes..."¹⁷⁶ While Dov Ber's pronouncements are similar to those of his father, they do occur more frequently. This is probably due to the struggle in which he was engaged.

Yet, in contrast to the teachings of Dov Ber, *yikhus* was still being questioned in the third generation. Like their dissenting predecessors, such teachings never dismiss *yikhus* completely. But they are certainly less than enthusiastic about it, for distinct reasons.

Dov Ber's opponent, Aaron, is basically silent about *yikhus*. It is unclear whether he should be included amongst the dissenters. However, in one passage in his *Shaar Ha Tefilla*, he tells a story about a prince who must prove himself worthy of his inheritance. As difficult as it is for the king to do so, he

banishes his beloved son from his palace. The son is forced to learn to support himself in the outside world by using the wisdom he has been taught as a child. Only after he has proven himself successful on his own merit does he earn his inheritance.¹⁷⁷ Whether Aaron is alluding here to Dov Ber, we can only guess. But it may reflect Aaron's feelings about automatic inheritance, and perhaps *yikhus*.

Several teachings of Jacob Isaac Horowitz, the "Seer" of Lublin (1745-1815), are highly relevant to the son vs. disciple question. Jacob Isaac was a disciple of Elimelekh. His pronouncements elicit an unmistakable preference for disciples, as opposed to sons. In *Divrei Emet*, Jacob Isaac actually changes the obvious simple meaning of "son," claiming that the Torah is really referring to disciples. He teaches, for example, that "there are sons of life and spiritual sustenance, i.e., generations of Zaddikim, and good deeds, and students are called 'sons.'"¹⁷⁸ On the verse "Phinehas, son of Eleazer, son of Aaron..." he explains:

This needs clarification, and it appears that, with His help, it wants to do more than merely explain the *yikhus* of Aaron's son, for many times it is written simply 'Eleazer the Kohen' alone, and it (his *yikhus*) was known. So it wants to explain that, measure for measure, the covenants of peace which were made with 'the son of Aaron the Kohen' meaning 'students' of Aaron, lover of peace.¹⁷⁹

These replacements of "son" with "disciples," which violate the evident meaning of the verses, are undoubtedly deliberate. Jacob Isaac's teacher, Elimelekh, had two sons who succeeded him in Lezajsk. But they were not nearly as effective in accumulating their father's followers as were disciples like Jacob Isaac. Perhaps Jacob Isaac's above teachings were intended to bring that situation about.

In *Zikaron Zot*, we find a message similar to that in Elimelekh's works, as well. Jacob Isaac teaches that there are two types of hearts. The first is that of Moses, which is humble and full of repentance. The second is the heart of Korah, who "did not desire this (humility), for he thought much of his *yikhus*, being the 'son of Yitzhar,' etc. And thus 'and Korah took...' means that he took the light downwards" (i.e., he abused his *yikhus*).¹⁸⁰ In *Zikaron Zot*, Jacob Isaac questions whether Korah really had *yikhus* at all:

Korah, who has no good qualities, thinks of the *yikhus* of his father. 'And Korah took' something, the son of Yitzhar (if he really was, he would have said he was the son of Jacob, for he probably would also have thought this). And Dathan and Abiram took it into their heads that they were the sons of Ahaliav. And thus the evil sons of Peleth, who were sons of Reuven, who was the first-born. 'And they rose before Moses' and Aaron: this does not signify any *yikhus* at all.¹⁸¹

By dismissing Korah's *yikhus*, however, Jacob Isaac reveals that he actually thinks highly of *yikhus*. Korah's abominable deeds prove that he must not really have possessed such a noble quality. Jacob Isaac's criticism is consistent with that of the other Zaddikim who speak negatively about *yikhus*. He does not dismiss its worth; he merely inveighs against its abuse. And like them, he reveals a preference for merit. He teaches that, in a certain midrash, God means to say: "All the gifts which I gave you are given according to your merit, and to your sons after you according to their merit."¹⁸² Concerning Jacob Isaac's definition of *yikhus*, it is plain that he uses the term to describe one who is the son or ancestor of someone great, and nothing more.

Several traditions about Jacob Isaac, which appear in the works of others, are also revealing. The following is important because it resembles the supposed dispute, of which Rapoport-Albert is skeptical, between Shneur Zalman and Baruch of Miezyboz, regarding the significance of Baruch's Beshtian *yikhus*:

I heard from R. Yashish that the rabbi of Lublin said to the rabbi R. Brochele: 'True, you have resolve and courage, due to your grandfather, the Besht. But Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke (of Nikolsberg) had resolve due to his Torah (i.e., teaching).'¹⁸³

Merit- in this case, Torah- is as great as the greatest *yikhus*. The fact that the specific conveyer of the story, R. Yashish, is named is encouraging with regards to authenticity. If this conversation actually occurred, then the issue of plausibility regarding the similar argument between Baruch and Shneur Zalman should be

reconsidered. At the very least, it provides a further indication that a certain tension did, indeed, result from Baruch's over-emphasizing his Beshtian *yikhus*.

One final story about Jacob Isaac illustrates a belief that the nature of the father determines the character of the daughter, and reveals a distaste for wealth without learning. The incident involves a match made between Jacob Isaac and the daughter of a "simple rich man":

I heard from my father, my teacher, the *gaon* and Hasid M. Tzvi Ezekiel, who was *av bet din* of Plonsk, in the name of reliable elders, that the Rabbi of Lublin was son of the rabbi R. Eliezer, *av bet din* of Jozefow, who was a great Zaddik... And he made a match for his aforementioned son, who was a prodigy from the city Krzesnivrod, with (the daughter of) a simple rich man who was a property owner there in Hakreczmi, next to the city.

Jacob Isaac, upon meeting his bride-to-be, has a bad premonition about her, and flees the city in his wedding clothes. He eventually takes refuge with Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsberg. As it turns out, the girl really is a "bad seed", for it is later found that she apostatizes.¹⁸⁴ That the girl's father is a "simple rich man," and nothing else, is revealing of a certain distaste for marriages motivated solely by wealth.

A similar condemnation of matches made primarily due to considerations of wealth is expressed by the aforementioned Shmuel Shmelke's father, Meir, also a member of the Horowitz family. In his case, the standard for determining the worthiness of a match is none other than *yikhus*. His injunction is recorded by Shmuel's son, in *Nazir HaShem*:

He (Meir) commanded me to be very, very careful to make matches in the name of heaven for my children, according to the sayings of the sages 'never sell', etc. For the majority of matches in these generations are made due to considerations of wealth, and the woman is purchased with coins and money, or due to rabbinical office, or other reasons. Indeed, God forbid that you must be reminded at all, for the foundation and great principle in the eyes of God and men is to make (matches) with the *yikhus* possessors of Israel.¹⁸⁵

In addition to affording us a glance at the importance of *yikhus* through this teaching, Meir also reveals what *yikhus* is *not*. He makes an unmistakable distinction between *yikhus* and possession of wealth or rabbinical office in and of themselves. These are apparently external to the essence of *yikhus*, or at least are not taken independently to be *yikhus*. One must not be tempted by a potential match's offerings of money or office; only *yikhus* is a worthy incentive. Apparently, "the *yikhus* possessors of Israel" possess something greater than wealth or office alone.

We conclude with a consideration of the conflicted views of Nahman of Braclaw (1772-1810), another possessor of *yikhus* from the Besht, his great-grandfather. Several scholars have dealt with Nahman's feelings about his own *yikhus*. According to Rapoport-Albert, Nahman's attitude evolved along with the high opinion he developed of himself. When he was younger, he often prayed at the grave of his grandfather, the Besht, in order to "draw nearer to the Lord, blessed be He." His *yikhus* from the Besht gained him the immediate respect of other Zaddikim. Rapoport-Albert concludes from this that "it is hard to imagine that R. Nahman's sense of his special mission was not fostered by his pedigree when he started out on the path of zaddikism."

However, "once this sense of mission had crystallized, not only did it extend far beyond the hereditary link with the Besht but it actually led R. Nahman to reject that link, which did not accord with his conception of himself as a *hidush*- an extraordinary phenomenon the like of which the world had never seen."¹⁸⁶ R. Nahman develops a messianic view of himself. He therefore must not rely on his Besht *yikhus*: "The world thinks that it is because I am the (great-)grandson of the Besht that I have attained this eminence. Not so. Only through one thing have I succeeded, and through it I have been able to ascend and achieve what I have."¹⁸⁷ In fact, "without denying the fact of his family connection with the Besht, R. Nahman stood the relationship between them on its head," claiming that the Besht needs him:

And when he came to Miezyboz to the house of his righteous father and mother, may their memory be for a blessing, and they rejoiced greatly at his coming, his mother said to him: 'My son, when will you go to your grandfather the Besht? Meaning, to his holy grave. Our

rabbi, may his memory be for a blessing, replied: 'If my grandfather wants to see me let him come here.¹⁸⁸

This attitude leads to a rift with his uncle, Baruch of Miezyboz. Nahman has the nerve to tell Baruch that he (Nahman) had already attained the Besht's level at the age of thirteen. Baruch is furious, and attempts to push Nahman out of the window.¹⁸⁹

Several problems with Rapoport-Albert's analysis reveal themselves upon close scrutiny. First, the idea that Nahman stood the relationship with the Besht on its head is rather too extreme a portrayal of Nahman's consideration of his Beshtian *yikhus*. In the story of his refusal to visit the Besht's grave, Rapoport-Albert omits the last, rather crucial, part of the tale. In the omitted part, Nahman's mother asks him a second time when he will visit the Besht's grave, and he answers, "now I will not be at his grave, (but) during my return, with God's help, I will be at his grave."¹⁹⁰ Nahman thus implies that when he dies (i.e., his "return") he will be buried with the Besht. This demonstrates Nahman's continued desire to be associated with the Besht, even if it is in a limited way. Furthermore, even the portion of the passage that Rapoport-Albert does include fails to prove that Nahman actually reversed his relationship with the Besht. At most, it is a sarcastic statement that displays a newfound self-sufficiency, which is a far cry from seriously claiming that the Besht needs him in any way. Nahman has outgrown his childhood pilgrimages to his great-grandfather's grave.

Rapoport-Albert is certainly correct in perceiving Nahman's occasional tone of condescension when speaking of his forebears. Once, he denies having traveled to Kamenets in order to find letters of the Besht, for, he claims, "I do not need them at all."¹⁹¹ Other examples exist, as well.¹⁹² But they really amount to an attempt to free himself from the constraints inherent in *yikhus*, i.e., being regarded only as someone's grandson.

This liberation only goes so far. Although Nahman sometimes attempts to escape the trap of *yikhus* possession when it compromises his own preeminence, he seems to want to have it both ways. As Arthur

Green's analysis in *Tormented Master* proves, far from ceasing to mention his *yikhus* upon being convinced of his messianic mission, which Rapoport-Albert's line of reasoning would require, Nahman actually invokes it. Green demonstrates that Nahman's perceived descent from the House of David, allegedly through both the Besht and his grandfather Nahman of Horodenka, is precisely what convinces him of his destined messianic role.

Before describing how *yikhus* actually encouraged Nahman's messianic tendencies, it will be useful to recount several instances in Green's study which illustrate how deeply ingrained Nahman's sense of *yikhus* must have been. First, that consciousness was carried into Nahman's conflicts with other Zaddikim. Among the possible reasons for his conflict with Barukh, Green quotes an alternative tale to that offered by Rapoport-Albert. According to this version, the split occurs when Barukh, whom the Besht used to visit in his dreams, is told that the Besht has now abandoned him in favor of Nahman.¹⁹³ This version therefore has Nahman vying for the Besht's legacy, as opposed to belittling it. Green's description of Nahman's dispute with Aryeh, the Grandfather of Shpola also suggests an exacerbating lineage factor: Aryeh "would have been pained by a challenge from the Besht's own family, and not only because of the chances of its success."¹⁹⁴ In both conflicts, Nahman's Beshtian *yikhus* appears to be an element in his quarrels.

The depth of Nahman's awareness of his ancestry is further revealed in his dream recollections. In December, 1809, Nahman dreams of an old man, who begins to berate him, saying, "How is it that you are not ashamed before your ancestors, Rabbi Nahman (of Horodenka) and the Besht?" In the latter part of the dream, Nahman repents for his unnamed sin. As he does so,

all those before whom the old man had said I should be ashamed, my grandfathers and the patriarchs and all the rest, came to me, reciting over me the verse: 'The fruit of the land shall be pride and splendor' (Is. 4:2). They said to me: 'On the contrary, we shall take pride in you.' They brought all my disciples and children back to me (for my children, too, had cut themselves off from me).¹⁹⁵

Nahman does not resemble a person who might lose the desire to please his ancestors.

In fact, throughout the period of Nahman's messianic strivings he refers explicitly to his *yikhus*. According to one of his teachings, the family of the Besht (himself included) are especially prone to melancholy, "since they were of the Davidic house, and David's only concern was that he break his heart before the Lord always."¹⁹⁶ Elsewhere, he states a similar reason for his sad demeanor.¹⁹⁷ In 1803, after the wedding of his daughter Sarah to Isaac, the son of the wealthy Leib Dubrovner, Nathan "hinted that it would be fitting that he (i.e., the messiah) come from this union...".¹⁹⁸ Nahman, at a certain stage, believed that his offspring would produce the messiah. He considered himself to be Messiah ben Joseph.¹⁹⁹ Again, his Davidic descent proved that likelihood. Upon the birth of his first son, Solomon Ephraim, Nahman now believed the redeemer to be this son, and not the son of one of his daughters.²⁰⁰ Nahman symbolically dressed in white on the holiday of Shavuot, which served to announce the imminent redemption. These messianic ideas came to an abrupt end, however, after the death of his son within a few weeks.²⁰¹

Green's analysis proves that, far from diminishing his acceptance of his illustrious *yikhus*, Nahman's messianic ideas about himself and his offspring increased his dependence on it. Even after the messianic storm abated, during his final years, Nahman "took special pleasure" when he heard people say that his newborn grandson's name was "Israel ben Sarah, the same as the name of the Besht."²⁰² This is not one who sought unequivocally to distance himself from the Besht. The several instances during which Nahman appears to do so are attributable to an earlier stage in his life, when he was still trying to make a name for himself. Nahman flaunted his *yikhus* when it was helpful, and only struck against it when it threatened his perceived originality.

By way of comparison, let us briefly consider the reactions of other sons of great Zaddikim to their immense *yikhus*. One story involves Phineas of Korzec's son Ezekiel, who "came to one of the cities of Poland, and when he said that he was the son of the Zaddik Phineas of Kozec, all the inhabitants of the city feared to call him, and so since then (because of his modesty) he did not say whose son he was."²⁰³ Whether Ezekiel's reticence is due to modesty or not, this passage is important in that it demonstrates the apparently natural need of a son to distance himself from his great father, as well as the alienation that such a

son must experience. Some sons, however, were content to bask in their father's glory. We have a reminiscence of someone whose father received Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsberg's son Tzvi Joshua as a guest in their home. The narrator, then a boy of twelve years, served Tzvi Joshua diligently:

And he asked me to tell him why I served him all day, and I said to him 'so that I will be able to say that I knew a holy man, son of a holy and awesome man, the rabbi R. Shmuel Shmelke.' And immediately he said to me, 'You are deserving of a blessing.' And he blessed me with two holy hands.²⁰⁴

In this story, a *yikhus* possessor (albeit, one who probably lacked Nahman's ambition) is flattered to be recognized as the son of a great man.

Finally, I shall attempt to decipher Nahman's attitude towards the universal value of *yikhus*, as opposed to his own *yikhus*. One teaching contends with the problem of Abraham, who had to distance himself from his family, because "there were many follies and lies associated with it." Nahman then proceeds to chastise those who do not come from great families, but attempt to marry possessors of *yikhus*: "those who attach themselves to possessors of great *yikhus*, as if all the honor belongs to them, and all that comes out of this is a remainder of follies and confusion, God, blessed be He, orders one to leave and go away from them."²⁰⁵ Nahman's elitist tendencies are revealed here, as he inveighs against marrying above one's station. This, in spite of the fact that his great-grandfather, the Besht, did precisely that.

Another teaching betrays again how powerful Nahman feels that *yikhus* is. In a midrash, the biblical character Jacob asks that his name not be mentioned in the description of Korah's *yikhus*, yet he does wish his name to be mentioned in a *yikhus* chain elsewhere. Nahman concludes that this mention of Jacob in the latter *yikhus* chain is meant to "mend the blight of the Korah rebellion."²⁰⁶

In one passage, Nahman admonishes those who are preoccupied with their greatness, whether *yikhus* or something else:

Everyone from Israel can reach this level, for example, in his prayer. However if there are two motivations, and one is before the prayer, that is, he stands to pray in greatness, because

he has great *yikhus*, or because he worked and reached (greatness) in the work of the Creator, and because of this it is impossible that he will be ruled by his prayer. One only needs to forget all this, and it will seem to him as if it is the day of his birth, and he is at one with the world. And this is like Menassah, the language of amnesia and forgetting. And thus: 'For God has made me forget...all my father's house'(Genesis 41:51), this is *yikhus*.²⁰⁷

In this teaching, the worst aspect of the greatness of *yikhus* is that it obstructs prayer. However, Nahman equates "great *yikhus*" with reaching greatness "in the work of the creator." Far from denigrating *yikhus* alone, Nahman simply wishes one to forget all of one's positive qualities- whether attained by *yikhus* or merit- in order to pray more effectively.

Nahman also comments on the son vs. disciple question, favoring the son. Significantly, the teaching is published after the death of his own son. First, he equates son and disciple: "son and disciple are all one, as stated above, for the son is also a disciple...and the disciple is also like a son...". But Nahman then states his preference:

Despite this, there is a difference between son and disciple. For the son who is a disciple, he is higher than the disciple alone. Because the son is entirely drawn from the father, from his head to his feet, and there is nothing extra which is not drawn from the mind of the father. As a result, his attainment as a son is greater than his attainment as a disciple.²⁰⁸

Further on in this same discussion, however, Nahman emphasizes that "the son must be like a disciple, and the disciple must be like a son, so that both will have reverence."²⁰⁹ Both son and disciple have something to learn from each other. But, as voiced in the preceding passage, that does not mean that they are of equal stature. The sum of these teachings places Nahman firmly within the category of those who revere the ideal of *yikhus* unswervingly.

Conclusion

The term *yikhus* is used in a variety of ways in the above examples, ranging from a reference to one's genealogy, to one's present-day family. The fact that the genealogical conception is invoked far more frequently might simply have to do with the biblical context in which most of the above teachings occur. The narrow, genealogical conception of *yikhus* found in the Scriptures may have influenced the way in which Hasidic commentators used the term in their biblical commentaries. Nevertheless, occasional references to a wider, more contemporary *yikhus* also occur. *Yikhus*, in these instances, is glory derived from one's family, father, or father's "house."

Whatever misgivings members of the dissenting group might have had regarding *yikhus* never ran very deep. Never did they offer a fundamental challenge to *yikhus*. Never did they go much further in their condemnations than the non-Hasidic Hayyim of Volozhin. At most they spoke out against dependence upon it.

Such admonitions, it is true, were both amplified and multiplied by several Hasidim in the second generation. Several explanations have been proposed. It was, perhaps, a reaction against Zaddikim of the other category, who occasionally made outrageous claims based on their *yikhus*; a reflection of dedication to Hasidism's theological innovations, which ideally had nothing to do with family and ancestry; a reflection of the Hasidic emphasis upon modesty; and/or a reaction against an institution such as family that might compromise a follower's allegiance to the Zaddik. But the early Zaddikim were never extreme in their denunciations. Their reticence allowed the eventual triumph of the principle of heredity by the fourth generation.

Zaddikim of the other category, many of whom had a greater stake in the enduring worth of *yikhus*, encouraged the revival of dynasty even more. It is not difficult to see how a favorable attitude toward the principle of *yikhus* might yield the actual institution of hereditary succession. But the sum of these views is not significantly different from the stance in the parent society within which Hasidism arose. The most we

can say is that these early Hasidim created an ideological environment in which a hereditary solution to the problem of stability was viable.

By the fourth generation, the hereditary ideal was dominant. One quite radical expression of respect for *yikhus* is found in the responsa *Bnei Yissakhar* (Zolkiev, 1846) of Tsvi Elimelekh Shapiro of Dinov, a disciple of the Seer of Lublin. Tzvi Elimelekh's family name was originally Langsam, but was changed to Shapiro.²¹⁰ The passage reads:

A great thing continues from the names they place before a man, in addition to his principle name. From this is known one's family *yikhus* for generations to come, because members of generations are called by the names of their fathers, and likewise the sons of sons for generations. And it is also known after several generations that he is from a certain house, for example the families Rapoport, Horowitz, and Shapiro.²¹¹

This statement suggests that several generations of prominent men within a family culminated in the formation of a "certain house," denoting a superior brand of *yikhus*. As we will see in the next chapter, several of the pillars of the early Hasidic movement hailed from these very families.

¹ Miriam Shomer Zunger, *Yesterday: A Memoir of a Russian Jewish Family* (New York, 1978), p.49.

² B.T. (Babylonian Talmud) Kidushin IV, 4. All translations are based on Israel Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* (Soncino Press: London, Jerusalem and New York, 1972), after close consultation with the original Aramaic or Hebrew text in the same edition.

³ B.T. Taanit 16b.

⁴ B.T. Horayot 13a.

⁵ B.T. Eduyot 5, 6-7. Cited in Israel Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills* (Philadelphia, 1954), p.8.

⁶ B.T. Ketubot 8b.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 62b.

⁸ B.T. Kiddushin, 49a.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 70a.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76b.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 70b.

¹² B.T. Baba Batra 109b.

¹³ B.T. Kiddushin 70b.

¹⁴ B.T. Pesahim 49a. Note, however, the order: that the statement about a daughter of a priest precedes the one about a daughter of a scholar.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ B.T. Horayot 13b.

- ¹⁷ B.T. Kiddushin 71b. Note that the controversy is over Babylon vs. Palestine with regards to genealogical purity, not only over the particular litigants.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 13a.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 76b.
- ²⁰ Midrash Rabbah, (Soncino Press: Atlanta, 1985), Genesis, *Vayishlakh* 82:11.
- ²¹ Ibid., Numbers, *Naso* 8:8.
- ²² Ibid., 13:15.
- ²³ Grossman, "From Father to Son," p.124. This statement, according to Grossman, is not merely exaggerated modesty, for similar statements are not found his letters to other sages (Grossman, "From Father to Son, Zion L (1985), 213 (Hebrew)).
- ²⁴ Grossman, "From Father to Son," p. 127.
- ²⁵ B.T. Yebamot 109b. The word *kashe*- used here in its plural form, *kashim*- can mean "hard" in its literal sense, or in the sense of "difficult."
- ²⁶ B.T. Kiddushin 70b-71a, and glosses.
- ²⁷ B.T. Pesachim 104.
- ²⁸ Sholem Alchanan Singer, Medieval Jewish Mysticism: The Book of the Pious (New Jersey, 1971), p.90.
- ²⁹ Moses Maimonides, Commentary to Deuteronomy, 29:17. Cited in Ha Hasidut Be Mishnat Ha Rishonim, (1989), p.27. Editor and Publisher uncited.
- ³⁰ Ralbag, Commentary to Samuel I, 1:7- 1:15. Cited in Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid., p.210.
- ³² Israel Abrahams, Hebrew Ethical Wills, p.171.
- ³³ Ibid., p.173.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p.245.
- ³⁵ Bahya Ben Joseph, Midrash Rabbeinu Bahya Al Hamisha Humshei Torah, *Hay Sarah*, (New York, 1967), p.80.
- ³⁶ Joseph Karo, Shulkhan Arukh, Even Ha Ezer 1:5 (New York, 1961-6).
- ³⁷ Orhot Zaddikim (the Ways of the Righteous), (Anonymous). Transl. by Seymour J. Cohen (Jerusalem/New York, 1974), p.49.
- ³⁸ Shulkhan Arukh, Even Ha Etzer 1:2. Upholding the Gemara in B.T. Kiddushin 76b.
- ³⁹ Katz, Tradition and Crisis, p.333 no.11.
- ⁴⁰ Ezekiel Landau, Nodeh Be Yehuda, Mahadorah Tanina, section Yoreh Da'at, no.201. Cited in Judah Leib Hakohen Fishman, Sha'are Ha Meah, Vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1944), p.188.
- ⁴¹ Shulkhan Arukh, Orah Hayim 53.
- ⁴² Maharshal, Commentary on the Tur, in Bet Hadash, Cited as a gloss on ibid.
- ⁴³ Elijah, the Vilna Gaon, Commentary to Proverbs, 11:20. Cited in HaHasidut Be Mishnat HaRishonim, p.28.
- ⁴⁴ Benno Heinmann, ed., The Maggid of Dubno and his Parables (New York, 1967), pp.59-61.
- ⁴⁵ Hayim of Volozhin, Nefesh Ha Hayim (Bnei Brak, 1989), section *Etz Hayim*, p.448, no.134.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, no.137.
- ⁴⁷ The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln, transl. by Marvin Lowenthal (New York, 1977), p.132.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p.31.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p.285 no.1.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p.17.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p.271.
- ⁵² The Memoirs of Ber of Bolechow, transl. by M. Vischnitzer (Oxford, 1922), p.80.
- ⁵³ Ibid., p.69.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p.118.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p.126.
- ⁵⁶ Solomon Maimon: An Autobiography, ed. by Moses Hadas (New York, 1967), pp.24-7.
- ⁵⁷ Pinhas Katzenellenbogen, Sefer Yesh Manhillin, ed. by I.D. Feld (Jerusalem, 1986), p.61-2.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., p.156.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p.262.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p.321.

- ⁶¹ Ibid., p.93, for example.
- ⁶² Ibid., pp.181, 187, 207, 217, 243.
- ⁶³ Ibid., p.207.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., p.254-5.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., p.231.
- ⁶⁶ See examples below.
- ⁶⁷ Katzenellenbogen, pp.22, 24, 51.
- ⁶⁸ Joel Baal Shem, Toldot Ha'am, approbation. Cited in Emanuel Etkes, "The Role of Magic and Ba'alei-Shem in Ashkenazic Society in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," Zion LX (1995), 96.
- ⁶⁹ "Generation" is used in this paper only in a loose sense.
- ⁷⁰ Nathan Nata Kronenberg, ed., Shem HaTov (Pietrokov, 1905), p.106 no.106 (misprinted as: no.100). This is a collection of sayings attributed to Shmuel Shmalki Horowitz of Nikolsberg et al.
- ⁷¹ Isaac ben Asher, ed., Sefer Niflaot Ha Yehudi: Bet Zaddikim (Jerusalem, 1907), p.88. This is a collection of sayings attributed to Jacob of Przysucha.
- ⁷² Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, ch.9.
- ⁷³ For a discussion of the attempts of various historians to discern such historical elements, see *ibid.*, pp.146-55.
- ⁷⁴ Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome R. Mintz, ed., In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov (Shivhei ha Besht) (Indiana, 1970), tale no.8, p.21. Italics: "...im ploni almoni she lo nodah mekomo u mishpaho."
- ⁷⁵ Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, p.204-5.
- ⁷⁶ Samuel Horodezky, Leaders of the Hassidim, trans. by Maria Horodezky-Magasanik (London, 1928), p.5.
- ⁷⁷ Meir Wunder, Elef Margalioi, (Jerusalem, 1993) p.24.
- ⁷⁸ A. D. Twersky, Sefer Yahas Mi Chernobyl ve Ruzhin (Lublin, 1938), p.101. Cited in A. Green, Tormented Master, (Alabama, 1979), p.54, no.13.
- ⁷⁹ Ben-Amos and Mintz, tale no. 41, p.54.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., tale no.49, p.65.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., tale no.184, p.195.
- ⁸² Ibid., tale no. 83, p.107.
- ⁸³ Yaakov Margalioi, Gdolim Maaseh Zadikim: Hasidic Tales, ed. by Gedalya Nigal (Jerusalem, 1991), tale no.1.
- ⁸⁴ Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, p.156.
- ⁸⁵ Margalioi, tale no. 1.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid, tale no.10.
- ⁸⁷ Naftali Horowitz, 'Ohel Naftali (Lwow: Zeidman and Oisshnit, 1910), pp.73 and 138; and Responsa Imrei David, Introduction, no.14. Cited in A.J. Heschel, The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov (Chicago, 1985), p.163.
- ⁸⁸ Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, p.260, no.69.
- ⁸⁹ Keter Shem Tov, ed. by Aaron ben Zvi Ha-Kohen of Opatow (Jerusalem, 1988), p.9.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., p.52.
- ⁹¹ Ben Amos and Mintz, p.258, no.249.
- ⁹² Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," pp.77-139.
- ⁹³ Phineas of Korzec, Midrash Pinhas, section 39, p.30. Cited in Gedalya Nigal, Magic, Mvsticism, and Hasidism, transl. by E. Levin (New Jersey, 1994), p.31.
- ⁹⁴ The Holy Epistle of the Besht. Cited in and trans. by Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, p.108.
- ⁹⁵ Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," p.81. Rapoport-Albert regards Abraham Joshua Heschel's The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov, ed. Samuel Dresner, Chicago, 1985, as the most important reconsideration of the Besht's relationship to other members of his circle.
- ⁹⁶ Phineas of Korzec, Midrash Pinhas (Ashdod, 1989), p.47, no.25.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid., p.9, no.9. Phineas cites Shnei Luhot Ha Brit, Shar Ha Otiot, 4.
- ⁹⁸ Hayim Vital, Sha'ar Hamitsvot (Tel Aviv, 1962), pp.33-5. Cited in Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," p.127.
- ⁹⁹ Midrash Pinhas, p.95, no.42.

- ¹⁰⁰ Phineas Shapiro of Korzec, Imrei Pinhas HaShalem, ed. by Ezekiel Shraga Frankel (Ramat Gan, 1988), Shaar Bet, no. 2, p.41.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, Likkutim, no.91, p.229.
- ¹⁰² Eliezer Steinman, Sefer Be'er HaHasidut (Tel Aviv, 1950), p.42, source uncited.
- ¹⁰³ Shlomo Yoseph Zun, Sipurei Hasidim (Tel Aviv, 1957), p.155, source uncited. In this version, the Great Maggid is said to descend from R. Yohanan HaSandlar (as opposed to the Rosh).
- ¹⁰⁴ Gdolim Maaseh Zaddikim, tale no.33.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, tale no.35.
- ¹⁰⁶ This can be inferred from Sender Hayim's positive regard for the Zaddik Jehiel Michael in tale no.33; as well as from his friendship with the author's father, Shmuel.
- ¹⁰⁷ Meir Margalio, Sod Yakhin u Boaz (Berdichev, 1902), p.35.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Meir Netivim (Brooklyn, n.d.), Part I., p.61, Question 31.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Part I, p.57, Question 33.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Part I, p.87, Question 60.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Part II, p.47.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, Part II, p.40.
- ¹¹³ Tzvi Rabinowicz, The Encyclopedia of Hasidism (New Jersey, 1996), pp.242-3.
- ¹¹⁴ Jehiel Michael, Otzar Ha Hasidut: Yeshuot Malko (Jerusalem, 1973), p.59. Jehiel Michael attributes the saying to the book Or Hakhamim, by R. Tvi (Ashkenazi) Malik.
- ¹¹⁵ Jacob Joseph Hakohen of Polonne, Toldeot Yakov Yitzhak (Jerusalem, 1962), p.51, parshat *Lekh Lekhah*. This passage is similar to that quoted in Keter Shem Tov above (no.85). Both passages refer to the same verse in Sefer Yetsirah.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.293, Parshat *Zav*.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.342, Parshat *Kidushin*.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁹ Mark Vischnitzer, ed., The Memoirs of Ber of Bolechow, p.70.
- ¹²⁰ A.J. Heschel, The Circle of the Ba'al Shem Tov, p.170. Cf. Yekutiel Ariel Kamelher, Dor Da'at (New York, 1962). Gershon Hundert has, however, alerted me to certain kabbalistic and magical uses of the mother's name, for example, during a blessing for healing.
- ¹²¹ Abraham Kahana, Sefer HaHasidut (Tel Aviv, 1978), pp.63-65.
- ¹²² See no. 75.
- ¹²³ S.D. Horodezki, Leaders of Hassidism, p.72.
- ¹²⁴ For example, Uri, the Seraf of Strelisk is not named matrilineally, despite the fact that his mother was learned and his father was "simple." (See Israel Berger, Eser Zahzahot, (Israel, 1972), p.76.) The weight of the father's line vs. the mother's has only been considered by scholars of late antiquity. A.S. Hirschberg, in "Ha Issah Mahutah ve Toldoteha," (Devir IV:2, 1935), introduces the concept of "Issah"- family members who are tainted specifically by the mother's impurity. An "Issah" may be purified; moreover, the father's side of the family is not infected by the mother's impurity of descent. This implies that the mother's line was weaker. A second article, "The Matrilineal Principle in Historical Perspective," by Shaye Cohen (Judaism XXXIV, 1985), contains the argument that "status, kinship and succession are determined through the father," despite the fact that "who is a Jew" is determined by the identity of the mother." Thus, at least in late antiquity, *yikhus* was more a reflection of the father's line than the mother's.
- ¹²⁵ Tolot Yakov Yosef, p.393, Parshat *Amor*.
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.144, Parshat *Ve'ereh*.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.163, Parshat *Bo*.
- ¹²⁹ Jacob Immanuel Schochet, The Great Maggid (Brooklyn, 1974), pp.170-2. This work contains a facsimile of the *kabalah* of a *schochet* and a translation of an approbation to *Halakha Pessuka*, both written by Dov Ber. Based on these signatures, Schochet deems R. Abraham "a scholar steeped in rabbinic learning." (p.21).
- ¹³⁰ W.Z. Rabinowitz, Lithuanian Hasidism (London 1970), pp.13-14.
- ¹³¹ For example, Schochet, *op cit*, p.21.
- ¹³² Dov Ber of Mezherich, Likkutim Hadashim, 202a. Cited in Moses Solomon Kasher, ed., Mesillot BeMahshevat HaHasidut (Jerusalem, 1977), p.22.

- ¹³³ Ben Amos and Mintz, p.95, tale no.75.
- ¹³⁴ Elimelekh of Lezajsk, Noam Elimelekh, Gedalya Nigal, ed. (Jerusalem, 1978), p.197, Parshat *Bo*.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.194, Parshat *Bo*.
- ¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.421, Parshat *Korah*.
- ¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 340-1, Parshat *Amor*.
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.417, Parshat *Korah*.
- ¹³⁹ Ada Rapoport-Albert, The Problem of Succession, pp.128-30.
- ¹⁴⁰ Noam Elimelekh, p.69, Parshat *mishpatim*. Cited in *Ibid.*, p.129, trans. by Dynner.
- ¹⁴¹ Samuel Horodecky, ed., Shivhei Ha Besht (Tel Aviv, 1947), notes, p.190, no.8.
- ¹⁴² Noam Elimelekh, Parshat *Emor*, trans. by Shmuel Ettinger, in "The Hasidic Movement," in Hundert, ed., Essential Papers, p.240.
- ¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.104, Parshat *Bemidbar*. Cited in Rapoport-Albert, The Problem of Succession, p.131, trans. by Dynner.
- ¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Parshat *Lekh Lekha*.
- ¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.350, Parshat *Behar*. Cited in Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," pp.126-7.
- ¹⁴⁶ Levi Isaac of Berdyczew, Kedushat Levi ha Shelem (Jerusalem, 1993), p.200, Parshat *Emor*.
- ¹⁴⁷ Nahman of Braclaw, Hayvey Moharan II, 3:93. Cited in A. Green, Tormented Master, p.112.
- ¹⁴⁸ Levi Isaac of Berdyczew, Kedushat Levi ha Shelem, p.21-2, Parshat *Lekh Lekha*.
- ¹⁴⁹ Phineas of Koretz, Bet Pinhas, Warsaw, 1924, ch.2, pp.18-9.
- ¹⁵⁰ Hundert, The Jews of Opatow, p.155.
- ¹⁵¹ Israel Hapstein of Kozienice, Tiferet Adam. Cited in M. Seinfeld, Emet Mi Kotsk Titzmah (Bnei Brak, 1961), p.233.
- ¹⁵² However, see Shalom Guttman, Tiferet Bet Levi (Jassy, 1909), p.15. Levi Isaac similarly explains that "we are great *yikhus* possessors, children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while you (non-Jews) have nothing for a father..." Such expressions should not necessarily be taken at face value to be rejections of *yikhus* as it is normally understood. What is interesting about Israel of Kozienice's statement, however, is that he makes it about himself. In light of his own background, we should take such a statement more seriously.
- ¹⁵³ Simha Bunem et al., Siah Srafei Kodesh (Brooklyn, n.d.), pp.77-8.
- ¹⁵⁴ Israel of Kozienice, Avodat Yisrael (Bnei Brak, 1973), p.46, Parshat *Balak*.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Parshat *Bo*.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.47, Parshat *Pinhas*.
- ¹⁵⁷ Joseph of Jampol, Mayyim Rabim (Warsaw, 1903; rpt. Jerusalem, 1964). Cited in A.J. Heschel, Circle of the Baal Shem Tov, p.153.
- ¹⁵⁸ Moses Hayyim Ephraim, Degel Mahaneh Ephraim (Jerusalem, 1995), p.257.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.159, Parshat *Aharei*.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.182, Parshat *Korah*.
- ¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.9, Parshat *Noah*.
- ¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.221, Parshat *Ra'ah*.
- ¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.79, Parshat *Ve'areh*.
- ¹⁶⁴ Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," p.110. But not as a successor to any centralized movement.
- ¹⁶⁵ Baruch of Miezyboz, Butzino Dinehara Ha Shelem, "Mekor Baruch," ed. by Reuben Margalio (Bilgoraj, n.d.), s.9,24. Cited in Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," p.111.
- ¹⁶⁶ Notably, Ettinger, "The Hasidic Movement," p.239.
- ¹⁶⁷ Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," p.112.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.110-2.
- ¹⁶⁹ Baruch of Miezyboz, Butzino Dinehara (Israel, 1970), p.1.
- ¹⁷⁰ Arthur Green Tormented Master, p.95
- ¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.98.
- ¹⁷² Shneur Zalman, Ma'amrei Admor Ha Zaken (Brooklyn, 1957), p.169.
- ¹⁷³ See no. 128, above. This view accords with that of Phineas of Korzec, no.94, above.
- ¹⁷⁴ Shneur Zalman, The Tanya (Likutei Ma'amarim) (Brooklyn, 1969), p.30.
- ¹⁷⁵ Dov Ber of Lubavich, Ner Mitzvah ve Torah Or (Shar Emunah ve Shar Ha Yahzor) (Brooklyn, 1995), p.110 (56).
- ¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Tract On Ecstasy, Transl. by Louis Jacobs (London, 1963), p.123.

- ¹⁷⁷ Aaron Halevi of Starosielce, Sha'ar Ha Tefillah (Jerusalem, 1971), p.138(68).
- ¹⁷⁸ Jacob Isaac Halevi, the "Seer of Lublin," Divrei Emet (New York, 1946), Parshat *Hai Sarah*, beginning.
- ¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.41-2, Parshat *Pinhas*.
- ¹⁸⁰ Jacob Isaac, Zikaron Zot (Israel, 1973), p.119, Parshat *Korah*.
- ¹⁸¹ Jacob Isaac, Zot Zikaron (Israel, 1973), p.15.
- ¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p.150.
- ¹⁸³ Natan Nata Kronenberg, Shmen Ha Tov (Petersberg, 1905), "Stories," no.26, p.66.
- ¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 25, p.65.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no.153, p.118. cf. Nezir HaShem.
- ¹⁸⁶ Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," p.118.
- ¹⁸⁷ Nahman of Braclaw, Shivhei ha Ran: Sihot ha Ran (Lemberg, 1901), p.60b no.166. Trans. by Rapoport Albert, *op. cit.*, p.114-5.
- ¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Hayei Moharan: Nesiato le Erets Yisrael (Jerusalem, 1962), p.61 no.1. Cited in *ibid.*
- ¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Avaneihah Barzel (Jerusalem, 1961), p.17 no.15. Cited in *ibid.*, p.116.
- ¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Hayei Moharan: Makom Yeshivato ve Nesivato, p.61 no.1.
- ¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Shivhei HaRan, p.7b
- ¹⁹² In Shivhei HaRan, *Sihot HaRan* 68b, "a certain old man from Slapkowitz who knew his grandfather, the holy R. Nahman Horodenker, of blessed memory, stood before our rabbi of blessed memory. He answered and said, 'They say that my teaching is from my grandfather, of blessed memory. If my grandfather R. Nahman himself heard my teaching, it would also be an innovation (*hidush*) for him.'"
- ¹⁹³ Avaneihah Barzel, p.19. Cited in Green, Tormented Master, p.111.
- ¹⁹⁴ Green, *op. cit.*, p.105.
- ¹⁹⁵ Hayvey Moharan, 3:11. Cited in Green, *op. cit.*, p.166.
- ¹⁹⁶ Likkutei Moharan, II, 100. Cited in Green, *op. cit.*, p.145-6.
- ¹⁹⁷ Hayvey Moharan, II, 1:6-7. Cited in Green, *op. cit.*, p.170.
- ¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 4:13; II, 2:34; and Yemey Maharnat, p.31. All cited in Green, *op. cit.*, p.189.
- ¹⁹⁹ Green, *op. cit.*, pp.196-7. Green reasons that making an outright messianic claim for himself would be overly audacious for a "blemished" soul like his.
- ²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.208.
- ²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.211.
- ²⁰² Hayvey Moharan 6:1; and Yemey Maharnat, p.31. Both cited in Green, *op. cit.*, p.227.
- ²⁰³ Biber, Menahem Mendel, Mazkeret Li Gedole Ostraha (Berdichev, 1907), "Phineas of Korzec."
- ²⁰⁴ Hanokh Hanikh Zilberschatz, Shemen HaTov (Petersburg, 1905), p.84.
- ²⁰⁵ Nahman of Braclaw, Likutei Halakhot, *Geneivah*, 5:7, on Genesis 12:1 (Jerusalem, 1985), p.207. Referred to, albeit in a misleading manner, in Ozer Bergman, ed., Esther, With Commentary Based on the Teachings of Nahman of Breslav (Jerusalem/New York, 1992), p.25.
- ²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, *Netilat Yadaim*, 5:69, p.62.
- ²⁰⁷ Nahman of Braclaw, Likutei Moharan, I., 97.
- ²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, II., *Torah* 7, p.13.
- ²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.
- ²¹⁰ Rabinowicz, Encyclopedia of Hasidism, p.451.
- ²¹¹ Tsvi Elimelekh of Dinov, Responsa Bnei Yissakar (Jerusalem, 1978), *Hodesh Nissan* 4:10, p.94.

Chapter III: *Yikhus* in Practice

Here lies the *Rav HaMedina* and *Rav Av Bet Din* of our community, the genius, righteous one, famous in piety, the great kabbalist, of a chain of *yikhus* possessors, our teacher and rabbi Shmuel Shmelke HaLevi, son of the rabbi, the famous genius, our teacher and rabbi Hirsch, of blessed memory, the man of Horowitz.

-inscription on Shmuel Shmelke's tombstone¹

Here is buried an anonymous man (*ish ploni*) born of an anonymous woman, one who was an anonymous man, son of an anonymous man...

-inscription on Aaron of Karlin's tombstone²

Rapoport-Albert has drawn our attention to the fact that early Hasidim possessed nothing akin to rabbinical office confined to a specific local, and no formal system (such as Kahal elections) for determining leadership. Furthermore, while a certain hierarchy might exist amongst Zaddikim, especially between teachers and disciples, disciples could function as full-fledged Zaddikim during the lifetime of their masters. "Succession," taken literally, therefore, is inapplicable in at least the first two generations. How, then, did a Zaddik come to power? The answer, according to Rapoport-Albert and others, is personal charisma. A Zaddik such as the Great Maggid commanded tremendous (although never absolute) authority due to his own marvelous charisma and not to any definitive appointment or election.³ And that authority could not be simply bequeathed to an heir of his choice.

Reasoning of this kind created a scholarly consensus that charisma was the sole, defining characteristic of a Zaddik. After exploring both the family backgrounds and marital strategies of the pre-dynastic Zaddikim, however, it will become apparent that the vast majority had a second characteristic in common: *yikhus*. Most either came from a handful of the most illustrious families in Eastern Europe, or were the sons or descendants of prominent men. These scions of the elite, in turn, sought to assure their children and grandchildren's place in the elite through careful matchmaking choices. This evidence will, in addition, sustain the current scholarly rejection of previous attempts to explain rise of Hasidism in terms of its alleged

progressivity or social rebelliousness. Finally, it shall become clear that the significance of *yikhus* did not flag during the onset of Hasidism; nor did it in any way assure the institution of dynasty in later periods, two ideas which recent scholars have proposed.

Few Zaddikim possessed *yikhus atzmo*, or self-produced *yikhus*. The most glaring exceptions, of course, are the Besht and probably the Great Maggid, figures of tremendous stature. This should not, however, blind us to the fact that nearly every other Zaddik of the first generations possessed *yikhus*. The Besht, Great Maggid, and a small number of other Zaddikim from humble backgrounds were exceptional. Amongst the Hasidim, members of Jewish society's lower echelons rose to positions of leadership with no greater frequency than they might have in the parent society. And those leaders like the Besht and Great Maggid, who did manage to penetrate the elite almost always sought to maintain their family prestige through the same shrewd and deliberate marriage calculations that their *yikhus*-possessing colleagues engaged in. This means that almost no one challenged *yikhus* in practice.

We may surmise, through intuition alone, that *yikhus* contributed significantly to a Zaddik's perceived self-worth and, therefore, ability to lead. It also must have bolstered his charisma, providing further reason for his followers to be in awe of him. This had been true before Hasidism, as well, which is born out in the resulting concentration of leadership in the hands of members of certain families. A more systematic type of analysis is, however, also possible. In the following pages, I will demonstrate through genealogy and marriage strategies that, contrary to suggestions in the older historiography, spiritual leadership never ceased to be the preserve of the elite during Hasidism's rise, save relatively few exceptions. In the process, it will become evident that *yikhus*, alongside personal charisma, remained a primary characteristic of a Jewish leader. If Torah scholarship had been displaced by the charisma of Zaddikim, *yikhus* remained an unshaken ideal.⁴

In the first chapter, we arrived at a basic definition of *yikhus*, which was found to be a type of prestige emanating from various accomplishments of one's forbears and living relatives, especially in the

realms of scholarship and mysticism. It is possible to go one step further, however, and distinguish between the varieties of *yikhus*. Three categories of *yikhus* are discernible amongst the first generations of Zaddikim:

1) *Yikhus Atzmo*, or possessors of self-achieved, honorary *yikhus*, and their descendants. This category, described briefly in the first chapter, includes descendants of the Besht, Dov Ber of Miedzyrzecz, and several other self-made Zaddikim, whom we shall soon enumerate. Traditionally, *yikhus atzmo* was achieved by scholarly attainment or the acquisition of wealth, both which would facilitate entry into the social elite through marriage. However, with the rise of Hasidism, *yikhus atzmo* came to include the rare mystic-leader who erased the stigma of low birth by acquiring a significant following. This latter type of *yikhus atzmo* became superior to other types amongst Hasidim, as mysticism became the supreme ideal. Wealth apparently maintained its traditional place in society, easing but not guaranteeing of itself penetration into the upper social strata. *Yikhus atzmo* was a type of honorary *yikhus*, acquired through the above attainments, and there is no reason to believe that it was considered less prestigious than normative *yikhus*.

2) Aristocratic family *yikhus*, that is, membership in a family with a surname that had been retained for several generations and marked "aristocratic" membership. Little has been written about the significance these families. As discussed in the first chapter, Hundert has demonstrated the vast influence of the Landau family in the Jewish social and political realm. Hundert remarks elsewhere⁵ that certain family names denote aristocratic membership. Ben Zion Dinur acknowledges the prevalence of specific families, especially the Ginzburgs and the Halperins, amongst the leadership in eighteenth century Poland, Ukraine, and Galicia.⁶

Recent compilations of East European Jewish surnames have shown that rabbinical surnames are unique, in that they existed long before the mass adaptations of surnames of the late eighteenth century. Alexander Beider provides what he considers to be an exhaustive list, and claims that all but two (Gordon and Zak) originated in Central and Western Europe.⁷ Beider, however, makes a blatant error in one case, stating that "in other regions the role of bearers of rabbinical surnames was less important, since these areas were largely Hasidic, and most Hasidic dynasties were not related to the rabbinical families discussed

above.”⁸ Many of the rabbinical families (Horowitz, Margalio, Shapiro, etc.) on Beider’s list indeed provided several Zaddikim. Overlooking this one shortcoming, however, Beider’s dictionaries are a substantial contribution.

Beyond these works, little progress has been made toward identifying, systematizing and determining the precise nature and extent of the predominance of certain families in Jewish communal and spiritual leadership. For our purposes, it is enough to recognize the various statements of pride about membership in certain families (see above, chapter 2), which confirm the tremendous prestige entailed in that type of *yikhus*.

3) *Yikhus* derived of descent from a prominent scholar, rabbinical or lay office holder, or wealth, absent an aristocratic family name. To this category, we should add anyone who descended from a Zaddik, whether self-made or aristocratic. However, for simplicity’s sake, I have considered the children of Zaddikim within their parents’ and (grandparents’) respective categories, in order to map out marriage strategies. For example, Nahman of Braclaw was a descendant of the Besht, and therefore actually belongs to this third category. But in order to illustrate his connection to the Besht, I have included him under the Besht’s category, *yikhus atzmo*. And so it is with other sons and grandson’s of Zaddikim. It can be taken for granted, however, that any child or grandchild of a Zaddik possessed this “Zaddik *yikhus*.”

I must insert here a word about methodology. In many cases, biographical information is lacking. This hinders the study to a degree: however most of the Zaddikim whose biographies are lost were minor figures. Notable exceptions, unfortunately, are Abraham of Kalusz (1741-1810), Menachem Mendel of Witebsk (1730-1788) and Solomon of Karlin (1738-1792). Each were influential Zaddikim whose biographical backgrounds are relatively obscure. We know that Abraham of Kalusz, son of Alexander, married the widow of Solomon Zalman of Vilna, who was, as well, the daughter of a certain Moses Segal of Horoka. Of Menachem Mendel of Witebsk, we know only that his father, Moses was a follower of the Besht, and that his son and successor Moses married a Sephardic woman in Safed. Finally, regarding Solomon of Karlin, son of a certain Meir Halevi Segal of Karlin, we at least are privy to his lucrative marriage strategies.

His son, Dov of Tulczyn married the daughter of Baruch of Miezyboz; while his other son, Moses of Ludomir, married the daughter of Leib Kohen- *maggid measharim* in Annopol and disciple of the Great Maggid- and succeeded Solomon in Ludomir. Solomon's daughter Yuta married Israel Hayyim of Ludomir, son of Abraham "the Malakh." Another daughter married Dov Moses, grandson of the author of *Ha Hakham Tzvi* (Amsterdam, 1702).

Another problem is that of contradictory accounts. Dov Ber of Miedzyrzecz's ambiguous lineage receives contradictory treatment by biographers,⁹ as does that of Aaron of Karlin. The case of Hayyim Haikel of Indura is also problematic, as we are largely dependent upon the testimony of his arch-enemy, David of Makow, for clues about his status. David's testimony does not always jibe with other evidence. In the face of conflicting views, one can only choose the most likely one, and be sensitive to probable biases, without entirely ruling out the other traditions.

In each of these cases I have usually resisted the temptation of arguments *ex silencio*, but such reasoning is sometimes justified. When dealing with a matter such as *yikhus*, which would only serve to edify a Zaddik, we must inquire why biographers would neglect to mention forbears. It is possible that biographers found them unflattering and therefore not worthy of remark. The opposite also occurs. Certain biographers will sometimes fabricate a Zaddik's lineage, for example, casually crediting him with a descendant like Rashi or even King David, without providing even a bit of evidence. Those assertions must be dismissed.

1) *Yikhus Atzmo*

The most prominent member of this category was undoubtedly the Besht, who appears to have lacked *yikhus* derived from anyone but himself, for reasons discussed above (ch.2).¹⁰ The manner by which he had to acquire his bride, which appears to initially have aroused the ire of his brother-in-law, Gershon of Kutny, illustrates the inherent difficulty of such a social climb. Gershon's father, Hayyim, was rabbi of Kutny,

and, according to a tale in *Shivhei HaBesht*, quite famous.¹¹ The Besht, upon improving his social station by both unique talent and auspicious marriage, then consolidated his standing through shrewd matchmaking practices for his own children. He married his son, Tzvi Hirsch, to Malka, daughter of Samuel Hasid. Although precise information about Samuel is lacking, the name "Hasid" denotes an old-style mystic; and he was probably a member of the Besht's elite circle. For his daughter Adel, the Besht secured a match with a member of the aristocratic Ashkenazy family, Jehiel Michael, son of Baruch Ashkenazy. Although details of Jehiel Michael's past are lost, save his German origin, the inclusion of his teachings in an entire section of his son's work, *Degel Mahane Ephraim*, suggests a scholar of uncommon stature.

Tzvi Hirsch and Malka had three sons. The first, Israel the Silent, is a mysterious figure whom we know of only through legends. The other sons were Dov Ber of Ulanow and Aaron of Titov,¹² both Zaddikim in their own right, unlike their father. Dov Ber of Ulanow married a daughter of the Zaddik R. Zusya of Annapol; and their daughter married Moses Zvi, son of Abraham Dov Urbach, who was son-in-law of Jacob Joseph of Polonne. Aaron of Titov's wife is unknown to us. However, we do know that he married two of his children into the Chernobyl dynasty: his daughter, Simha Husha, to Aaron of Czarnobyl; and his son, Naftali Tzvi of Skwira, to the daughter of Mordechai of Czarnobyl.¹³ Finally, another daughter was married to Baruch of Miedzyboz, grandson of the Besht.

More famous are several of the descendants of the Besht's daughter, Adel, and Jehiel Michael Ashkenazy. Moses Hayim Ephraim, author of *Degel Mahane Ephraim*, was matched with Esther, daughter of Gershon of Kutty, the Besht's brother-in-law. One of their children, Ethel, married David Horowitz, of another aristocratic family. (The matches of their other children, Jacob Jehiel, Isaac of Kalusz, and Joseph are unknown.)

Another son of Adel and Jehiel Michael, Baruch of Miedzyboz, was married first to the daughter of the wealthy Tuvia Katzkish of Ostrog. His second marriage was, as noted above, to his cousin, the daughter of Aaron Titov.¹⁴ Baruch had no sons through which to pass on his legacy. However, he married his daughters shrewdly. Adel was matched with Jacob Phineas Urbach, son of Abraham Dov, Jacob Joseph of

Polonne's son-in-law. Hanna was married to Isaac of Kalusz, son of Joseph of Jampol, son of the Besht's prominent disciple Jehiel Michael of Zloczow. Baruch married his third daughter, Raizel, to Dov Ber of Tulczyn, rabbi of Czarny Ostog and son of the Zaddik Solomon of Karlin.

Adel and Jehiel Michael's only daughter, Feige, was married to Simha, son of the Besht's disciple Nahman of Horodenka. Nahman was of splendid *yikhus*, having descended from the Judah Loewe, the Maharal of Prague, and purportedly Rashi.¹⁵ His son Simha was not a scholar; apparently he was married for his *yikhus* alone. The child of this union was the famous Nahman of Braclaw. He was married first to Sosha, the daughter of a lessee of villages named Ephraim ber of Zaslav (Podolia). It will be recalled that he appeared conflicted over his great *yikhus*, feeling that it both uplifted him (to messianic heights) and compromised his uniqueness. In the practical matter of marriage, however, Nahman was more decisive. He hoped that the messiah would come from the union between his daughter Sarah and Isaac, son of the wealthy Leib Dubrowner.¹⁶ Immediately after the death of Nahman's wife Sosha, he arranged for himself a second marriage, to the daughter of a rich community leader in Brody, Ezekiel Trachtenburg.

The marriage strategies of members of the Besht's family appear to have been deliberate consolidations of power. It is difficult to know how many marriages were arranged by the Besht himself. But we may assume that the Besht had a hand in the matches which occurred during his lifetime. His interest in his grandchildren, as portrayed in his letter to Gershon which described the progress of Moses Hayyim Ephraim, was keen.¹⁷ Eventually, as noted above, Moses became Gershon's son-in-law.

The sources afford us some insight into the motivations behind various marriages in the Besht family. Those include the traditional considerations of scholarship, wealth, and *yikhus*. In 17 of the above 23 marriages, we may decipher the motivations behind the matches. By far, the greatest motivation is *yikhus*, which appears to be a factor in at least sixteen of the cases. Four of the matches are apparently motivated by wealth, and three according to the groom's scholarly ability. The picture which emerges is a deliberate attempt by the Besht and his descendants to consolidate their *yikhus*, and hence their position in society.

Another extraordinary Zaddik who probably acquired *yikhus atzmo* was Dov Ber of Miedzyrzecz. As discussed in the previous chapter, the evidence for his father Abraham's purported greatness, a claim no doubt intended to ease the minds of later generations of Hasidim, is scanty. Little is known about Abraham, "a poor Hebrew teacher,"¹⁸ and his wife, Havah. Dov Ber himself, however, was apparently quite a student, meriting a teacher as great as Joshua Falk, author of the talmudic work *Penei Yehoshuah* (Zolkiew, 1742).¹⁹ His scholarly diligence earned him a father-in-law by the name of Shalom Shakhna, *av bet din* of Tulchin. In spite of his lack of *yikhus* through his parents, Dov Ber nevertheless eventually came to command an enormous following, among them the most extraordinary Zaddikim of the next generation. The number of his immediate descendants, however, was limited to his only son, Abraham "Ha Malakh," and his two grandsons, Shalom Shakhna of Probst and Israel Hayim of Ludomir.

Despite his own apparently unaided rise into the elite, however, Dov Ber secured a prestigious match for his son, Abraham, with Henya, daughter of Meshullam Feibush Halevi Horowitz of Krzemniec. Meshullam Feibush not only belonged to the aristocratic Horowitz family, he was also author of *Mishnat Hakhamim* (Ostrog, 1796) and thus a scholar. Dov Ber sought to shore up his social position, and that of his family, by connecting his son with an established *yikhus* possessor.

Abraham "Ha Malakh" did not become a Zaddik himself. Rapoport Albert has argued quite convincingly that he was in no way a rightful heir, an idea which would only come into existence at a later stage of the movement. The Great Maggid, like the Besht, commanded no permanent, definitive circle of disciples who might suddenly switch allegiance to his son upon his death; nor could he simply hand his "crown" over to his son.²⁰ The only way in which Abraham might have won the allegiance of his father's disciples would have been to become, like his father, the greatest Zaddik of his time. Instead, he appears to have been more reclusive and less inclined toward that role. His memory, nevertheless, is preserved in a positive light. In *Shivhei HaBesht*, he appears as one too holy for such a mundane task as leadership, embodying an old-style hasid.²¹ His name "Malakh," meaning "angel," also reflects a remarkable character. The question must be asked, however: how could such a person- who produced no major works, commanded

no following, shunned participation in the new Hasidic movement, and persisted in the ways of an old-style hasid- have merited such a legacy of legends? Apparently, it was due in no small part to the *yikhus* which Abraham inherited from his father, the Great Maggid. That the same cannot be said of Besht's son Tzvi Hirsch confirms the latter's mediocrity, which even eclipsed the radiance of his great *yikhus*.²²

Abraham's sons' marriages reflect a continued effort to consolidate the family's social status. However, it is doubtful that either Abraham or his father, Dov Ber, themselves arranged these marriages directly. Both passed away when the sons were young, and at least one son, Shalom Shakhna of Probst, was raised in the house of Dov Ber's disciple, Solomon of Karlin. In any event, the marriages were auspicious. Shalom Shakhna married Hava, daughter of Abraham of Korostyszew, a son-in-law of Nahman of Czarnobyl, and *rosh yeshivah* and *rosh medinah* in Korostyszew. (Shalom Shakhna was father of Israel, founder of the Ruzhiner dynasty.) Abraham's other son, Israel Hayyim of Ludomir, was matched with a daughter of Solomon of Karlin. In his second marriage, Israel Hayyim secured a marriage with a daughter of his father's disciple Gedalya Rabinowitz of Liniec. As in the case of the Besht's family, the marriage arrangements of Dov Ber's descendants were unmistakably with possessors of *yikhus* (Horowitz, Rabinowitz, etc.), and scholars.

Several other Zaddikim appear to have also hearkened from humble backgrounds and achieved *yikhus atzmo*. Aryeh Leib Sarahs, of whom we know little else, was the son of Joseph, a Hebrew teacher, and Sarah, whose name he inherited. Only legend explains his use of his mother's name.²³ We may only guess that either his father was rather undistinguished, if the son took his mother Sarah's name, or that his mother was extraordinary. Aryeh Leib had no children through whom we might measure his feelings about *yikhus*.

Another Zaddik who belongs to this category is Israel Hapstein of Kozienice, son of Shabbatai, a poor bookbinder. Of his mother Perl, we know nothing. Nor have we discovered the family background of Israel's wife, Raizel. Israel, it will be recalled, turned his humble background to his advantage in several of his teachings (see Ch. 2). However, he desired no such humility for his children. He married his son Moses

Eliakum Beriah to the daughter of Judah Leib Hakohen, *maggid measharim* in Annopol. In his second marriage, Moses wed the daughter of Eleazar Weissblum, son of the Zaddik Elimelekh of Lezajsk. By this stage of the movement, a form of succession must have begun to materialize, for Moses succeeded his father, giving rise to the following interpretation of the verse "And it came to pass when the Ark set forward that Moses said..."(Num. 10:35): " 'When the Ark set forward' (i.e., when Israel of Kozienice died), 'Moses said,' he was succeeded by his son Moses."²⁴ Israel married his daughter Perl to Abbi Ezra Zelig Shapiro rabbi of Magnuszew, son of Moses Isaac Shapiro. Another of Israel's daughters was married to Ezekiel Halevy, son of Ariel Judah, *av bet din* of Zevalin. Israel's son Motel died young. We may conclude that Israel, like other self-made Zaddikim, married his children in a manner which consolidated his place amongst the elite, seeking matches with the daughter of a son of a Zaddik who was also a Weisblum, a son of an *av bet din* who was also a Shapiro, and a son of another *av bet din*.

A possible exception to this pattern is Aryeh Judah Leib, the Grandfather of Shpola. His father Baruch Gerundi was a tax collector, originally from Bohemia, who settled in Poland. His mother, Rachel, is unidentifiable. Aryeh seems to have done absolutely nothing to gain membership to the elite, save establishing a following of Hasidim. He apparently refused to serve as rabbi in a formal capacity, and to be called "rebbe;" and he required the same of his sons.²⁵ Legend has it that Aryeh was ordered by his master, Phinehas Shapiro of Korzec, to marry the daughter of a kosher slaughterer in Mydowdikow.²⁶ This seems plausible. It would be no coincidence that a person of humble origin like Aryeh be matched with the daughter of someone of similarly humble stature, especially by a Zaddik like Phinehas who appreciated the importance of *yikhus*. We do not know how Aryeh married his children, but the very lack of information about his sons' spouses, added to what we know about his character, might imply that Aryeh refused to use their marriages as a tool for social advancement. His sons, in accord with their father's demand, did not serve in the rabbinate. On his tombstone, only his name and date of death were written.²⁷ The picture which emerges is an exceptional one: a Zaddik who achieved renown and yet refused social advancement. This is a truly defiant personality. Aryeh's apparent failure to secure a place within the elite left him

vulnerable to the scorn of other Zaddikim, some of whom regarded him as an impostor. In particular, Baruch of Miezyboz and Nahman of Braclaw, the quintessential *yikhus* possessors, singled out Aryeh for attack.²⁸

Yet there is reason to doubt Aryeh's inclusion in the category of *yikhus atzmo*. His father's surname, Gerundi, may signify membership in an old Spanish family of the same name. The Gerundi family is described in the work *Tiferet Bet David* as "...of the descendants of the Exile from Jerusalem, who live in Spain."²⁹ From the Gerundi family came ancestors of both the Horowitz and Epstein families.³⁰ Although Aryeh and his descendants did not retain the "Gerundi" surname, the fact that his father possessed it is reason for caution.

Another Zaddik who may belong to this category of self-made men is Hayyim Haykl of Indura. The precise identity of his father, Samuel, is a mystery. Regarding Hayyim himself, we know the following: David of Makow, a ferocious enemy of Hayyim and the entire Hasidic movement, states derisively that "Heike of Indura used to teach small children, by which he earned a bare living. What did this needy man do? He went to the holy community of Karlin and there learnt the Hasidic form of worship."³¹ David describes Hayyim's father-in-law as "an ignorant man, as the whole town knows," who makes his living cooking gruel for Hayyim's Hasidim.³² Such a precise statement cannot be entirely disregarded. If true, it means that Hayyim did not marry the daughter of a prominent man, which suggests that he himself lacked *yikhus*. The image of Hayyim, presented by an enemy is hence one of a lowly children's teacher who exploited the new movement for social mobility.

However, several facts conflict with this assessment. First, Hayyim's name appears in the Indura communal register as a member of the burial society, the most prestigious society in any community.³³ Elsewhere, he has been described as the town cantor in his youth, a position of at least some distinction.³⁴ Thus, Hayyim's possession or lack of *yikhus* can not be absolutely confirmed. In any event, his son Samuel filled his place in Indura, and married the daughter of Aaron "the Silent" of Zelechow,³⁵ a disciple of Elimelekh of Lezajsk, both of which reflect Hayyim's positive regard for *yikhus*.³⁶ Hayyim's daughter married Nathan of Makow, a disciple of the Seer of Lublin.

One last possible case of *yikhus atzmo* is that of Aaron Perlow “the Great” of Karlin. His placement in this category is also questionable, however, for two reasons. First, his possession of a family name, Perlow, presents the possibility of noble descent. “Perlow” is probably a calque of the name “Margalioth.”³⁷ This is not enough proof, though, for we know of no forbears by that name. It may be one which Aaron himself created. The second discrepancy is the fact that at least one biographer, Isaac Alfasi, alludes to Aaron’s descent from King David, rabbis and “hidden Zaddikim”. Yet his claim is unsupported; he does not list any of those allegedly prominent forbears.³⁸

Alfasi does, however, record an order by Aaron himself regarding the inscription he wished his tombstone to bear, quoted at the beginning of this chapter: “Here is buried an anonymous man (*ish ploni*), born of an anonymous woman, one who was an anonymous man, son of an anonymous man...”.³⁹ This inscription, reminiscent of a similar request by the Besht recorded in *Shivhei Ha Besht*, might simply reflect Aaron’s modesty.⁴⁰ It certainly illustrates his attitude toward *yikhus*, namely that it is not something about which one should boast. But, as in the Besht’s case, we cannot rule out the possibility that this was a clever way of avoiding embarrassment about his own lack of distinguished lineage.

One fact appears to support this latter theory: Aaron was the son of Jacob, a beadle in a *bet midrash* (house of prayer and study) in the small town of Janowo. The position of synagogue beadle, entailing only a modest degree of power, does not seem to have been coveted by the elite. The beadle “carried out the orders of the warden, tended to the stove during the winter, went about collecting for the charities on weekdays, and kept order during services at all times. If educated, he also led the congregation in certain ceremonies during services, and where there was no *baal kore* on hand, he read from the scroll and inspected it on the eve of Sabbath.”⁴¹ It is unlikely (but of course, not impossible) that a member of a line of great rabbis would occupy such a position.

The identity of Aaron’s wife is unknown. Of his children’s marriages, however, at least several were in keeping with considerations of *yikhus*. His daughter Hayya Sarah married Mordechai of Czarnobyl. Another daughter, Ribla, married Israel, author of *Ohale Shem*.⁴² In her second marriage, she was matched

with Shalom Shakhna, son-in-law of Shneur Zalman in his first marriage. Another daughter married Aaron of Lachowicze, son of Mordechai of Lachowicze, a prominent disciple of Solomon of Karlin. These were top-notch matches in the Hasidic world. The spouses of his other children are more difficult to identify. Aaron's son Jacob married the daughter of a certain Abraham Karliner.

Unfortunately, it is also difficult to identify the wife of Aaron's most famous son, Asher of Karlin-Stolin, beyond her name- Feige-Bathyah. It is possible that she was another daughter of Aaron "the Silent" of Zelechow.⁴³ We do know, in any event, that Asher filled his father's position as rabbi of Stolin, and that many of his father's followers eventually attached themselves to him upon his father's death- both of which imply the latter's esteem for *yikhus*. In conclusion, if Aaron of Karlin did, indeed, possess *yikhus atzmo*, he appears to have nevertheless created auspicious unions for his children, as did the vast majority of self-made Zaddikim.

2) Aristocratic Family *Yikhus*

The next level of *yikhus* was that which had previously held the top position: membership in a certain aristocratic family, such as Horowitz, Shapiro, Ginsberg, etc. It was no accident that the Besht sought colleagues and disciples from these families, for each contained descendants of many generations of scholars and leaders. Their names alone inspired awe. One such as the Besht, who wished to spread his teachings "throughout the world,"⁴⁴ would have required that prestigious backing.

The Horowitz family originated in the fifteenth century, deriving its name from Horovice, a small town in Bohemia. Isaiah ben Moses Ha Levi (d.1517) of Prague, who backed the 1514 publication of the Pentateuch, is regarded as the family's founder. Of his sons, three rose to prominence: Aaron Meshullam Zalman,⁴⁵ Israel,⁴⁶ and Shabbetai Sheftel.⁴⁷ Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, members of the family served as rabbis and judges in various towns in Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, and Germany.⁴⁸ Prominent members of the Horowitz family have

been noted in the previous chapter, for several of them, it will be recalled, commented on the concept of *yikhus*. Perhaps the most famous Horowitz before the rise of Hasidism was the Kabbalist Isaiah ben Abraham (1556-1630), author of *Shnei Luchos HaBrit* (Amsterdam, 1649).

The first members of the Horowitz family to become Zaddikim (or at least, to be leaders identified with Hasidism) were the brothers Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsburg (present-day Mikulov) and Phineas. Their grandfather, Meir of Tykocin, was *av bet din* in Lenow, Zloczow, and Tiktin. Their father, Tzvi Hirsch, was a renowned *av bet din* in Czortikow. Both brothers became disciples of Dov Ber of Miedzyrzec. Shmuel Shmelke married the daughter of Joshua, a communal leader of Rzeszow, son of Mordechai, *rosh medinah* of Tysmienica. The marriages of his own children appear equally calculated to sustain the family *yikhus*. Shmuel Shmelke married their son, Tzvi Joshua of Tarnow, to his brother Phineas' daughter Miriam. He married their daughter, Tova, to Jacob Horowitz, *av bet din* Katelburg-Karlsburg.

Marriage strategies in Shmuel Shmelke's brother Phineas' family were executed equally effectively for the maintenance of family status. Phineas himself was married to Rachel Devorah, daughter of the Besht's disciple Joel Halpern, *av bet din* of Leszno. The Halperns were another aristocratic family. Phineas married his daughter Miriam to his brother's son, Tzvi Joshua, as stated above. His other daughter was married to the Zaddik Abraham Hayyim of Zloczow, son of Gedaliah, rabbi of Zolkiew. Abraham Hayyim was a disciple of Dov Ber, Jehiel Michael, and Shmuel Shmelke, who authored several prominent Hasidic works.⁴⁹ Phineas' son Tzvi Hirsch, who filled his place in the Frankfort rabbinate, married first Sarah, daughter of Abraham Yekutiel Zalman Rapoport, and then Tovah Landau (both of aristocratic families of great influence). Another son, Jacob Meir, was married to Nehama, the daughter of Saul, *av bet din* of Amsterdam.

Another renowned Zaddik of the Horowitz clan was Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin. His father, Abraham Eliezer Halevi, was *av bet din* of Jozefow and Shvyerzhen.⁵⁰ His mother, Meitel, was daughter of Jacob Koppel of Lukow, who was purportedly offered the position of *av din* of Amsterdam, but turned it down.⁵¹ According to *Otzar HaRabbanim*, Jacob Isaac first married the daughter of Meir Halevi, *av bet din*

of Most.⁵² His second wife, Tehila Sprinza, was daughter of Tvi Hirsch of Lancut. Unfortunately, information on the marriages of Jacob Isaac's children is scanty. We know that he married his son Israel of Lublin to the daughter of David, brother of Moses of Przeworsk, a disciple of Elimelekh of Lezajsk. His daughter Czirly married a certain Samuel of Rzeszow; his son Tzvi Hirsch married the daughter of a certain Aryeh Leibush of Bialystok; and his son Joseph of Tulczyn married the daughter of Mordechai, *av bet din* of Korzec. Without more information, a definitive conclusion about Jacob Isaac's marriage strategies is not possible. However, that both he and at least two of his sons received socially advantageous unions is revealing.

A third Horowitz amongst the early Hasidim was Aaron of Starosielce, disciple of Shneur Zalman and rival for the latter's succession. According to *Bet Rebbe*, Aaron was an eight-generation descendant of Isaiah Horowitz, author of *Shnei Luhot HaBrit*.⁵³ Aaron's father was Moses Horowitz of Starosielce. This distinguished lineage bears upon our understanding of his controversy with Dov Ber, son of Shneur Zalman, for it forces us to acknowledge the conflict as one between two members of the elite. This is worth emphasizing, because the quarrel has been portrayed in terms of hereditary vs. non-hereditary succession. Aaron, too, had a form of heredity on his side, even if it was slightly inferior. Regarding the marriages of Aaron and his children, however, we must remain silent. His spouse and that of his son Hayim Raphael are unknown. Hayim did succeed Aaron as rabbi of Starosielce, a fact which alone might suggest that *yikhus* was important for Aaron.

Another aristocratic family that managed to conquer a large number of leadership positions in Jewish communities across Europe was the Shapiro family, which claimed descent from Rashi.⁵⁴ The family derived its name from the German city Speyer, in memory of martyrs of that city from Crusades (1096) and the Black Death (1348) massacres. Perhaps the most famous Shapiro was Nathan Nata (b.1585), author of the first extensive mathematical interpretation of the Scriptures, *Megale Amukot* (Cracow, 1637). The first Hasidic leader from this family was Phineas Shapiro of Korzec, a colleague of the Besht.⁵⁵ Phineas' father, Abraham Abba of Szklow, a Lithuanian scholar, was an itinerant preacher. His grandfather, known as

Phineas Shapiro the Elder, was *magid measharim* of Reisen.⁵⁶ His mother, Sarah Rachel Sheindel, was a descendant of Eliezer bar Nathan, known as "Raban" (c.1090-1170). Phineas first married Treina, daughter of Jonah Weill of Slawuta, descendant of many other prominent scholars bearing the name "Weill."⁵⁷ His second marriage was to a woman named Yuta. Phineas was exceedingly proud of his family, signing his letters "Shapiro" and ordering that his tombstone be engraved with that name.⁵⁸

Phineas' marriage strategies for his children were as follows: 1) Judah Meir of Szepietowka married Sarah, daughter of the Zaddik Jacob Samson of Szepietowka, a disciple of Dov Ber of Miedzyrzecz, and a descendant of Samson of Ostropole; 2) Moses of Slawuta married Rachel, daughter of Isaac, a rabbinical judge in Prague, son of Saul, *av bet din* of Cracow. Rachel was sister of the Zaddik Gedalya of Liniec, another disciple of Dov Ber of Miedzyrzecz and, allegedly, a descendant of Rashi; 3) Jacob Samson of Zaslav married the daughter of Dov, rabbi of Zaslav, whose position Jacob Samson inherited; 4) Ezekiel married the daughter of a certain Joseph of Polonne;⁵⁹ 5) Joseph married the daughter of a certain Joseph of Wisniowiec; 6) Rezel Sheindel married Samuel, *av bet din* of Kaniow and Zwenigorodka.⁶⁰ An unmistakable pattern of *yikhus*-preservation emerges from most of these matches.

Another prominent Zaddik from the Shapiro family was Mordechai of Neskhez,⁶¹ a disciple of Jehiel Michael of Zloczow. Like Phineas, his lineage can be traced to the author of *Megalleh Amukot*. Mordechai's father, Dov Ber, was a scribe of the *vaad* of Tulczyn and *av bet din* of Lesznaw and Neskhez. Mordechai married Reiza, daughter of Joseph of Lesznaw, son-in-law of Jacob of Ludomir, *av bet din* and *rosh yeshivah* in Ludomir. Mordechai served as *av bet din* of Ludomir, Neskhez, and Kowel. The first two positions were doubtless received due to family connections. His son Jacob Leib served, not coincidentally, as *av bet din* of Neskhez and Kowel; and also of Trisk. Mordechai married a second time, to the daughter of the Zaddik Samuel Ginzberg of David-Gorodok, disciple of Jehiel Michael of Zloczow.

Regarding his marriage strategies for his children, we know: 1) Joseph of Ustilla married the daughter of Judah Meir of Szepietowka, son of Phineas Shapiro of Korzec; 2) Isaac of Nieswicz married the daughter of Michael of Kaszowka, husband of the daughter of Moses Halevi Ephrati- *rosh yeshivah* of

Berdyczew and Batoshin,⁶² and father-in-law of Israel of Ruzhin; 3) Zartel married Meir Shraga Reivel, rabbi of Rzeszow; 4) another daughter married a certain Joseph of Lesznow. Most of these marriages reflect, as well, a concern for family and ancestral background.

The third family which the Besht purportedly admired was the Margalioth family. Deriving its name from the Hebrew *margalit*, meaning "pearl," this family traced its descent to Rashi. Jacob of Regensburg (d. between 1499 and 1512), rabbi of Regensburg, is the earliest identifiable member. The family spread throughout Eastern Europe. One distinguished member of this line was Ephraim Zalman Margalioth (1760-1828), who authored many books and responsa.⁶³ The most prominent Margalioth among the Hasidim was Meir of Ostrog, author of *Meir Netivim* (Polonne, 1791-2) and *Sod Yakhin u Voaz* (Ostrog, 1794). Meir, it will be recalled, encountered the Besht with his brother, and they both became immediate followers. In the tale (recounted in *Gedole Maase Zaddikim*) their father Tzvi Hirsch expresses surprise that "ones such as yourselves," i.e., his sons, would be attracted to the apparently humble Besht. He is probably alluding to his sons' *yikhus*.

Their grandfather was rabbi of Jazlowiec.⁶⁴ Their father, Tzvi Hirsch, succeeded his father in Jazlowiec; and then served in the district of Podolia. Their mother, Shayntzya, was sister of Aryeh Leib Urbach, *av bet din* of Stanislaw, and daughter of Mordechai Merdosh of Krzemieniec, *av bet din* of Jazlowiec and Bomberg. Meir himself served first as rabbi of Horodenka, before filling his father's place in Jazlowiec. Meir would subsequently receive appointments in other cities, as well as over the entire Ostrog district. His first marriage was to Hayya, daughter of a certain Hayyim Katz of Horodenka; and his second was to Reizel, daughter of Meir's uncle Aryeh Leib Urbach, *av bet din* of Stanislaw, and widow of Meshullam Zalman Ashkenazi, *av bet din* of Pomerania.

About Meir's children's marriages, we can say the following. Bezaiel, who succeeded his father in Ostrog, married the daughter of a certain Joshua Rishver. He also wed the daughter of Hayyim Hakohen Rapoport, author of *Zekher HaHayyim* (Lemberg, 1865).⁶⁵ One daughter married Naftali Hertz, *av bet din* of Szarograd. Another daughter married Simha, son of Nahman Katz Rapoport. Meir's daughter Hayya, of his

second marriage, married the wealthy Judah Leib of Pinsk. The matches of Meir's other children- Saul, Joseph Nahman, and Naftali Mordechai- are unidentifiable. From those we have been able to identify, there seems no reason to suspect that Meir deviated from traditional matchmaking considerations- rabbinical office, *yikhus*, and wealth.

In addition to the Horowitz, Shapiro and Margalio families, we find prominent Zaddikim of the first generations from other old and prestigious families, among them Leiper, Ginzberg, Hager, Rabinowitz, Katzenellenbogen, Heller, and Weisblum.⁶⁶ From the first family on this list, Leiper, came the Zaddik Meir of Przemyslany (1780-1850), an early disciple of the Besht and son of Jacob "the Innocent" of Przemyslany. Wunder describes his forbears as "fifty generations of possessors of holy spirits from him, until R. Jacob Mervish of Korvil, author of the responsa *Min Shamaim*."⁶⁷ Meir's son Aaron Aryeh Leib married Yenta, who appears to be unidentifiable. The wives of Meir's other sons, David of Kalusz and Pesah Hasid, are unfortunately elusive, as well. Without more information, we cannot gauge Meir's attitudes.

A member of the Ginzberg family who became an early Hasidic Zaddik was Samuel Ginzberg of David-Gorodok. A disciple of Jehiel Michael of Zloczow, Samuel was son of Michael Ginzburg of Kosow. He married the daughter of Aaron, *av bet din* of Turobin. Samuel married his daughter to the Zaddik Mordechai Shapiro of Neskhez, as remarked above.⁶⁸ The spouse of his son Ze'ev, who succeeded him, is unfortunately not known.

Another aristocratic family which provided a major Zaddik early on was the Hager family, of Menahem Mendel Hager of Kosow (1769-1826). Menahem Mendel's descendants included several who served as rabbis throughout Eastern Europe.⁶⁹ His father was Jacob Kopel Hasid Hager of Kolomyja, author of *Ahavat Shalom*. Menahem Mendel was married young to Sheina Rachel, daughter of his uncle, Samuel Simha Zimmel Kook of Kosow. They had two sons and a daughter, each of whom was provided with a distinguished spouse. David of Zabolotov married the daughter of the Zaddik Moses Leib of Sasow, a disciple of Dov Ber of Miedzyrzec and Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsburg. Another son, Hayyim Hager of Kutty, married Zipporah, daughter of Judah Meir Shapiro of Szepietowka, son of the Zaddik Phineas Shapiro

of Korzec. Their daughter Sarah Leah married a certain Israel Abraham of Annopol, and after their divorce, Gershon Ashkenazi, *av bet din* of Kolomaja.

The Rabinowitz family provided an early Zaddik, as well: Gedalyah of Liniec, (1738-1804) disciple of Dov Ber of Miedzyrzecz. (Jacob Isaac, the Holy Jew of Przysucha, was a Rabinowitz too; but he falls outside the purview of this study.) Gedalya descended from his father, Isaac of Liniec, a rabbinical judge in Polonne, and, ultimately, Rashi. His sister Rachel married Moses of Slawuta, son of the Zaddik Phineas Shapiro of Korzec. Gedalya himself married the daughter of a certain Moses of Chartorier. We do not know who was the wife of his son Samuel Judah Leib. His other son, Isaac Joel, was son-in-law of a certain Jacob of Lubartow. Amongst his daughters, two unquestionably advantageous matches can be discerned: one married Elijah Dov, son of Moses, *av bet din* of Iwanicze and student of the Besht; and another married the Zaddik Aaron of Czarnobyl, son of Mordechai of Czarnobyl. Of the other daughters, one married a certain Jacob Kugal, another married a certain Tzvi ben Joseph of Kamenka, and the match of a third, Hanna, is unknown.

Another old family, Katzenellenbogen, apparently provided a major Zaddik as well: Menahem Nahum of Czarnobyl (1730-1798). This Zaddik's family background has been hidden, due to the fact that his grandfather, for some reason, seems to have dropped the surname, being referred to simply as Nahum "Ha Gaon," *av bet din* of Norinsk. But this Nahum's father was Nathan Nata Katzenellenbogen, son of Nahum Katzenellenbogen, son of Meir Katzenellenbogen, son of Saul Wahl.⁷⁰

Menahem's family was therefore a model of *yikhus*. His father Tzvi, was Nahum "Ha Gaon's" successor in Narinsk. One of Tzvi's brothers, Aryeh Leib, was a friend and colleague of the Besht. For his talented and well-connected son Menahem, Tzvi was able to procure a match with Simha Sarah Shapiro-granddaughter of Isaac Shapiro, *av bet din* of Kowno and Lublin, son of Nathan Nata Shapiro, author of *Mavoh Shaarim* (1575) and descendent of the Nathan Nata Shapiro who authored *Megale Amukot*.

Menahem was the first Zaddik to institute hereditary succession, transmitting his office to his son Mordechai upon his own death in 1798.⁷¹ Mordechai married first Hayya Sarah, daughter of Aaron of

Karlin. A legend exists around this match, in which the Great Maggid himself acts as matchmaker for the pair.⁷² In his second marriage, Mordechai married Feigelah, daughter of the Zaddik David Leikas. Of Menahem and Simha Sarah's other children, it is known that one daughter, Malka, married Abraham, son of Tzvi Hirsch, *rosh yeshivah* and *rosh medinah* of Krzeszow; and that another daughter married Leib, *av bet din* of Bendery (in Bessarabia). The spouse of their other son, Moses, is unknown to us. The way in which Menahem, himself a possessor of great *yikhus*, further consolidated his family's *yikhus* by shrewdly marrying at least two of his children, adds an interesting dimension to his character. For legends tend to portray him as a humble, impoverished teacher of children, not as one ensconced within the elite.

Another Zaddik who was a member of an aristocratic family was Meshulam Feibush Heller (1740-1795), author of *Derekh Emet* (Lwow, 1830) and *Yosher Divrei Emet* (Munkacs, 1905), two works which are fundamental to Hasidic thought. He was a disciple of Jehiel Michael of Zloczow. Meshulam Feibush was a descendant of Yom Tov Lipman Heller, and son of Aaron Moses Heller, *av bet din* of Sniatyn. He married, first, the daughter of Mordechai Halpern, *av bet din* of Brzezany. From this union was born Moses Aaron. In his second marriage, he wed Yentl, daughter of Abraham Hayyim Shor, author of *Zon Kedoshim* (Wandsbeck, 1729). The children of this marriage were Baruch Isaac, *av bet din* of Zwiniacz, and Samson of Jezierzany.⁷³ Of the latter, it is known that he married Sheindel Leah, daughter of Joseph Joska Halevi Horowitz, *av bet din* in Jassy.

One last family worthy of note is the Weisblum family. This was the family of Elimelekh of Lezajsk and Zusya of Annopol (d.1890). Their father, Eleazar Lipman, was a wealthy landowner of noble descent (from Rashi and, it is claimed, Jochanan "Ha Sandlar.") Their paternal grandfather, Abraham of Tiktin, had married the daughter of Eliezer Lipman Halpern of Tarnograd. Eliemelekh married Shprintza, who, in Wunder's words, possessed "a *yikhus* written in gold letters," which included her father Aaron Rokeah, brother of Eleazar, *av bet din* of Amsterdam. One of her brothers, Moses, was *av bet din* of Bedzin.

Elimelekh, it will be recalled, emerged as the most vociferous critic of excessive reliance upon *yikhus*. It is therefore fascinating to note his behavior in matters which affected the *yikhus* of his own

descendants. Elimelekh does not appear to have diverged at all from traditional practice. There is an episode related in Aaron Walden's *Seder Dorot Mi Talmide Ha Besht*, in which Elimelekh entrusted his son with the task of curing an ascetic of his debilitating practices.⁷⁴ Rapoport-Albert, who can hardly be said exaggerate such matters, views the story as an example of Elimelekh attempting to groom his son for future leadership⁷⁵. Ironically, upon his death, Elimelekh's followers adhered to his teachings and not his wishes: the majority switched allegiance to one of his disciples, and not his son.⁷⁶

Elimelekh married at least several of his children due, in part, to considerations of *yikhus*. Elimelekh's son Eleazer married, first, the daughter of Israel Tzvi Hirsch Lipiner, *av bet din* and *maggid mesharim* of Grodzisk. Israel was grandson of Libush Dominitz of Grodzisk. The Dominitz family contained several renowned rabbis. In his second marriage, Eleazar wed the daughter of the wealthy "Nagid" of Sieniawa. Another son, Eliezer Lipa, married the daughter of Samuel "the Melamed" of Sieniawa, whose precise identity and descent are unknown. Elimelekh's third son, Jacob, who became *av bet din* of Mogielnice, married the daughter of a certain Reuven of Grodzisk. Of Elimelekh's daughters, one (Meirush or Meirel) married the Zaddik Elijah of Biala Cerkiew, son of Jacob Jokel of Lancut. Another married Israel, *av bet din* of Grodzisk.⁷⁷ What emerges is a Zaddik who, despite his reservations about the importance of *yikhus*, was not prepared to deviate from traditional matchmaking considerations. At least, that is the case with three out of his five children.

Zusya Weisblum, Elimelekh's brother, married a certain Hendel, with whom he had two sons, Tzvi Menahem Mendel and Israel Abraham Abba. Tzvi was married twice; first to the daughter of a certain Moses Ibenetzer, and second to the daughter of Dov of Olionow, descendant of the Besht. Tzvi's brother Israel married the daughter of the Zaddik Ze'ev Wolf of Czarny Ostrog, disciple of the Great Maggid, and was Ze'ev's successor.

It is evident that a substantial number of early Hasidim were members of aristocratic Jewish families, the type of *yikhus* which was traditionally considered the most exalted. The rise of Hasidism may be said to have moved this category down a notch, as descent from specific Zaddikim like the Besht and Great Maggid

gained the supreme position. But these families evidently lost little in the ascendance of Hasidism, for their own members succeeded in filling its top positions.

3) *Yikhus* by descent, lacking an aristocratic family name:

We shall now turn to the third, slightly inferior type of *yikhus*: descent from a scholar, rabbinical office holder, or possessor of wealth, absent a family name. It is clear that such *yikhus* possessors attained enormous prestige, even if they lacked a family name to attach it to. We are thus speaking of very slight inferiority. What follows is a survey of several early *Zaddikim* of this category, for whom substantial information is available. Many of them are among Hasidism's most eminent sages, as we shall see.

The first, Nahman of Horodenka (d.1870), has already been considered in the above discussion of his grandson, Nahman of Braclaw. He traced his descent back to Rashi. Nahman of Horodenka, of course, was able to achieve the supreme *yikhus*, attaching his family to that of the Besht by marrying his son Simcha to the Besht's granddaughter, Feige.

Another possessor of great *yikhus* was one of the Besht's most illustrious disciples: Jacob Joseph of Polonne. His father, Tzvi Hakohen Katz, was a descendent of Samson of Ostropol and Yom Tov Lipman Heller. We do not know to whom Jacob Joseph married his son, Abraham Samson. But, significantly, this son replaced him as rabbi of Breskow, in keeping with traditional practice. Jacob Joseph married his daughter to Abraham Dov Urbach, son of Abraham HaKohen Urbach, referred to as "Ha Rav" in various biographies. The Urbachs were a prominent Jewish family- the Besht claimed that Aryeh Leib Urbach (d.1750), uncle of Meir Margalioth, had the soul of the talmudic sage Abayye.⁷⁸ Abraham Dov published Jacob Joseph's masterpiece, *Toledot Yakov Yosef* (Miezyboz and Korzec, 1780) and succeeded him as rabbi of Polonne. He married his son, Moshe Zev, to the daughter of Tzvi Hirsch, son of the Besht. In this way, Jacob Joseph would eventually penetrate the Besht's family, as well, attaining the ultimate *yikhus*.

Another disciple of the Besht who could boast of noble lineage was Jehiel Michael of Zloczow. His father, Isaac of Drohobycz, was a disciple of the Besht, about whom many stories are told.⁷⁹ Isaac was *maggid measharim* (official Kahal preacher) in Ostrog, Drohobycz and Kharkow. His father was Joseph Wirnik of Pistyn, known as "Joseph the Honest." His grandfather, Moses of Pistyn, *av bet din* of Swierze, became a famous martyr. The family ultimately claimed descent from Rashi.

Jehiel Michael might have been a member of the Rabinowitz family, because that name is attached to one of his descendants, Baruch Rabinowitz of Jassy. This cannot, however, be more firmly established. Regarding Jehiel Michael's marriage strategies, at least several auspicious unions are to be found amongst his sons. His first-born son Isaac of Radziwilow was married to the daughter of the Zaddik Moses Shoham of Dolina, a disciple of the Besht. In his second marriage, Isaac wedded the daughter of Tzvi Hirsch of Nadworna, and succeeded him as rabbi there. His son Joseph of Jampol married the daughter of a certain Menahem of Wigstahl. Another son, Mordechai of Krzemniec, married the daughter of Eliezer, a children's teacher in Kowsow, son of Ephraim Fischel, who is mentioned in the approbrium to the book *Zikaron Shmuel* and was the descendant of many famous rabbis.⁸⁰ Jehiel Michael's son Moses married the daughter of David, *av bet din* of Grabowiec. The wife of another son, Benjamin Zev Wolf of Zabarazh, cannot be identified. Finally, Jehiel Michael married his daughter to David Halevi of Stepan, a disciple of the Besht. David Halevi was grandson of the author of *Turei Zahav* (Zolkiew, 1754) of the same name.

Among the disciples of Dov Ber of Miedzyrzecz are found several other members of this third category. Abraham Abba-Joseph of Soroca, a relatively obscure disciple, was the son of Shemariah, *maggid mesharim* of Korzec. His better-known son, Shemariah Weingarten of Lyubashevo (d.1847), married a daughter of the Zaddik David Halevi of Stepan.

Abraham Hayyim of Zloczow (1750-1816), as mentioned above, was son of Gedalya, *av bet din* of Zolkiew, son of Benjamin Wolf, also *av bet din* of Zolkiew. In his first marriage, he wed the daughter of the Zaddik Phinehas Horowitz, also stated above. After her death, Abraham married a second time to the

daughter of Isaachar Dov Ber, *av bet din* of Zloczow and author of *Bet Eyni* (Dubno, 1781) and *Mevasser Tzeddek* (Lvov, 1850). He succeeded his father-in-law as rabbi of Zloczow.

Another disciple, Jacob Samson of Szepietowka, was the son of Isaac, rabbi of Slawuta, and a descendant of Samson of Ostropole. Jacob Samson married the daughter of Hayyim Jacob, *av bet din* of Polonne and grandson of Joel Sirkes, “the Bach” (1561-1640). He married his daughter, Sarah, to Judah Meir of Szepietowka, son of the Zaddik Phineas Shapiro of Korzec. The wife of his son Jacob is unknown.

One of the Great Maggid’s most prominent disciples of this type of *yikhus* was Levi Isaac of Berdyczew. His father Meir was *av bet din* of Gusakow, and according to several biographers, the sixteenth generation of his family to obtain an *av bet din* position (in various locales).⁸¹ His grandfather was Moses, *av bet din* of Zamosc, son of Tzvi Hirsch, *av bet din* of Lwow. Levi Isaac’s mother, Sosha Sarah, was also of an elite line: she was granddaughter of Moses Margaliot and a descendant of Samuel Eliezer Edels, “the Maharsha.” Levi Isaac was wedded to Pearl, daughter of a rich contractor named Israel Peretz, also of distinguished lineage.⁸² Levi Isaac married his son Meir to a woman who was the daughter of Eliezer, *rosh yeshivah* of Karlin, and sister of Moses, *av bet din* and *rosh yeshivah* of Botosani, father-in-law of the Zaddik Israel of Ruzhin. We do not know the identity of the wife of Levi Isaac’s son and successor, Israel of Pikov⁸³; nor of the wife of his other son, Dov Berish. He married his daughter to Eliezer Lipa, son of Meir, who is described as a “famous genius” by Friedman.⁸⁴ One more comment pertaining to Levi Isaac’s marriage strategies: the book *Zikaron Le Rishonim* states that Levi Isaac was (in some capacity) an in-law of both Mordechai Shapiro of Neskhez and Shneur Zalman of Lyady, neither of which I have been able to verify.⁸⁵

Finally, we shall illustrate the *yikhus* of a disciple of the Great Maggid whose star has never faded: Shneur Zalman of Lyady, author of what was the first attempt to systematize Hasidic thought, the *Tanya* (*Likkutei Amrarim*) (Slawuta, 1796). Heilmann, the author of *Bet Rebbe*, traces the descent of Shneur Zalman’s father Baruch back to Judah Loewe, the Maharal of Prague.⁸⁶ Baruch’s wife Rebecca, although her father’s name is not extant, must have been remarkable herself, for Shneur Zalman occasionally signed

his name as "son of Rebecca."⁸⁷ Baruch and Rebecca had, in addition to Shneur Zalman: 1) a son named Judah Leib, author of *Shaarit Yehudah*, 2) a son named Mordechai Posner, rabbi of Orsha (Witebsk), 3) a son named Moses, *av bet din* of Ajewa⁸⁸ and Rudnya, and 3) a daughter, Sarah, who married Israel Kozak, subject of at least one tale.⁸⁹

They married their son Shneur Zalman to Sterna, daughter of a rich businessman named Judah Leib Seigel of Witebsk. Shneur Zalman and Sterna had three sons- Dov Ber, Moses, and Hayyim Abraham- and three daughters- Debrah Leah, Frieda, and Rachel. Dov Ber married Shayna, daughter of a children's teacher who was one of Shneur Zalman's Hasidim. Moses married the daughter of a certain Tzvi Hirsch of Ulla. Hayyim Abraham's spouse cannot be identified. Regarding his daughters, Shneur Zalman married Debrah Leah to Shalom Shakhnah, son of Noah (father-in-law of Issachar Ber, *maggid measharim* of Lubavitch); Frieda to a certain Eliezer, son of Mordechai; and Rachel to Abraham Shaynas of Shklov, son of Tzvi. In *Bet Rebbe*, Heilman describes the latter, Tzvi, as a prominent man in Sklov who opposed the Hasidim. True to the pattern described in the majority of cases above, then, Schneur Zalman came from noble lineage, married well, and sought the same for at least several of his children.

Conclusion

In 1781, at the Fair of Selva, a ban of excommunication against the Hasidim was read which contained, among other severe proclamations, an explicit prohibition against marriages with the Hasidim. Rabinowitch suggests that Hasidism's opponents refused to intermarry with them in practice even earlier- following the bans of 1772.⁹⁰ The extent of the effectiveness of these bans is not known exactly, but it may be assumed that they affected the marriage strategies of Zaddikim to no small degree. This helps partly to explain the extent to which Zaddikim forged marriage alliances with other Zaddikim. Nevertheless, the bans could not have been the sole motivation for such marriages. For, as is borne out in the above examples, the

new Zaddikim possessed the greatest *yikhus* of all. Ban or no ban, they and their children were, for the movement's sympathizers, the most attractive matches.

29 Zaddikim from the first three generations of Hasidism have been considered in this study, on the basis of their importance and the availability of at least some information about their descent, marriages, and marriage strategies for their children. Of those 29, only 7, and probably fewer, might have lacked *yikhus* in the normal sense of the term, being compelled to obtain *yikhus atzmo*. 22 of those Zaddikim unquestionably had *yikhus*. Each descended from prominent scholars and were usually the sons of communal rabbis. Of those 22 Zaddikim, 9 were members of easily recognizable aristocratic families. The remaining 13 were by no means lacking in impressive pedigree, as well. The proportion of *yikhus* possessing Zaddikim to self-made Zaddikim was therefore more than 4 to 1, even according to a conservative estimate.

In marrying their children, all Zaddikim seem to have behaved similarly, with the possible exception of Aryeh Leib of Shpola. In the vast majority of matches, *yikhus* was a primary consideration. In 109 of the above matches, it is possible to discern motivations. *Yikhus* was apparently a factor in 79 of those matches. This extremely high number is due in part to the fact that a woman was primarily married for her father's merits, not her own. But were we to only consider the daughters' marriages, *yikhus* would remain a factor in a wide majority of cases. Among other motivations, I counted rabbinical or lay office (11), being a Zaddik (6), wealth (8) and scholarship (5). In two cases, Eliezer Lipa and Dov Ber of Lubavich, the bride's father is known to be a humble teacher of children, at least one of whom was a follower of the groom's father. And Aryeh Leib of Shpola married the daughter of a Kosher slaughterer. But these are aberrations; and we can not dismiss the possibility that those matches, too, had *yikhus*. It is plain that *yikhus* continued to be the most important consideration in matters of marriage amongst the early Hasidim, an indication of the enduring value of *yikhus*.

The above results point to two major trends regarding *yikhus* in the early stages of Hasidism. 1) The majority of Zaddikim (and companions of the Besht) had *yikhus* to begin with, often belonging to the aristocratic families which traditionally dominated Jewish communal and spiritual leadership. In only a few

cases can it be determined with a degree of certainty that a Zaddik altogether lacked it. 2) Nearly every Zaddik (and companion of the Besht), whether of *yikhus* or *yikhus atzmo*, acquired for his children spectacular matches, according to the societal standards. Usually, this meant matches with other *yikhus* possessors. The Zaddik who was possibly exception to this rule, although far from being confirmed, is Aryeh Leib of Shpola. In his case, we simply lack information and can only guess that such a defiant personality might also be defiant regarding his children's marriages. In the rare case that a Zaddik himself lacked *yikhus*, he usually made sure to compensate for that lack through scrupulous matchmaking strategies.

As far as ideals are concerned, addressed in Chapter 2, no Zaddik was prepared to criticize *yikhus* itself. The worst criticisms are really warnings against the dangers inherent in pride over one's *yikhus*. This type of criticism seems to have increased under Hasidism, revealing amongst some Hasidim a degree of discomfort over nepotism. The possible reasons for an increase in that criticism, as noted in that chapter, are as follows: 1) Such criticism may have been a reaction against the audacious claims of Zaddikim like Baruch and Nahman; 2) It may have been due to the fear that undue appreciation for *yikhus* might belie the movement's ideological foundations; 3) Zaddikim might have feared that undue allegiance to one's family would compromise allegiance to the Zaddik; and 4) It may merely reflect the Hasidic emphasis on humility. Whatever the reasons for that increase, however, no one, not even Elimelekh, was prepared to attack *yikhus* itself.

Those critics only represented one camp. Other Zaddikim, most noticeably descendants from the Besht who stood to lose the most from such criticism, refrained absolutely from questioning even the pride of *yikhus* possessors. The only Zaddik of this latter group to occasionally dispute *yikhus*, Nahman of Braclaw, did so when he feared that his own dependence upon his forbears might compromise his perceived singularity. In principle, Nahman was as supportive of *yikhus* as anyone else, as his teachings and marriage practices prove.

When it came to marrying off their own children, members of both categories were loathe to violate traditional matchmaking practices. They almost unanimously sought for their daughters matches of wealth, scholarly attainment, and *yikhus*; and for their sons, matches of *yikhus* alone.

This analysis will correct four basic misconceptions of Hasidic historiography. First, the idea of a Hasidism that appealed to the Jewish masses because it promised a liberation from the prevailing oligarchic leadership is further undermined. The Zaddikim were rarely humble preachers, as Joseph Weiss portrays them, nor the “lowly folk” of Isaac Levitat’s description. They do not appear to have harbored the slightest democratic conviction, as Martin Buber and Harry Rabinowitch argue. Instead, they continued to inherit and bequeath rabbinical offices within their own families. They were not strangers to the aristocratic families, as Raphael Mahler implies; in fact they were usually members of those very families. Finally, the Zaddikim were not disgruntled members of a “secondary intelligentsia,” as Ben Zion Dinur would have it. To the contrary, we can safely place most Zaddikim comfortably within the elite of Jewish society.

Second, we must correct the simplistic characterization of a Zaddik as any member of the movement who, thanks to his great charisma, accumulated a following. Such a definition has been offered by Jacob Katz, Gershom Scholem, Ada Rapoport-Albert, and Mendel Piekarz. A Zaddik, we have found, also usually had to come from a specific background: one of *yikhus*. In turn, that *yikhus* no doubt enhanced his charisma to no small degree.

Third, the above study enables us to dismiss the possibility that any decline in the significance of lineage occurred during the rise of Hasidism. Although encompassing a very minor portion of their works, that possibility has been mentioned by both Gershon Hundert and, in a less direct manner, Arthur Green.

Finally, we must depart from the tendency to view the mid-nineteenth century Hasidic dynastic institution as a natural outgrowth. Such a view, offered by Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven Sharot, is unfounded. If there is no evidence for the diminishing significance of *yikhus*, there is also no evidence for its increase. Hasidic society, in matters of *yikhus*, seems to have merely gone on as before. The major change entailed the type of merit by which such *yikhus* was achieved. Descent from, or relation to, a Zaddik became

more important than descent from, or relation to, a scholar. We cannot explain dynasticism through the importance of *yikhus* in Hasidic society. It would be wiser to seek such an explanation in the implications of the loss of scholarship as an instrument of quality-control.

Appreciation for *yikhus*- which we have defined as prestige emanating from the scholarship, charisma, office, and (to a lesser degree) wealth of one's forbears and living relatives- therefore endured throughout the rise of Hasidism. The institution of Zaddik was as oligarchic as the leadership that preceded it. While it might have been rare in the parent society for *yikhus*-lacking individuals like the Besht and Great Maggid to rise to such enormous heights, this was probably due to a degree of volatility which is inherent in any new movement. Such figures, in any event, were not permitted to become the norm. They functioned solidly within an elite group, surrounded by *yikhus* possessors. And in marrying off their children they nearly always behaved according to the rules of that elite, seeking alliances with the *yikhus* possessing families. In practice, as in principle, the Hasidim continued to cherish *yikhus*.

¹ Nathan Nata Kronenberg, Shemen HaTov (Petersburg, 1905), p.152.

² Isaac Alfasi, Entsyklopedya Le Hasidut: Ishim (Jerusalem, 1986), p.169.

³ Rapoport Albert, "Hasidism After 1772;" and The Problem of Succession in the Hasidic Leadership, ch.2.

⁴ The twenty-nine Zaddikim or members of the Besht's inner circle of mystics have been chosen according to their influence in Hasidic thought and their (in most cases) ability to accumulate a substantial following. I have used, as a guideline, the chart provided in the Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. I, pp. 160-69.

⁵ Gershon Hundert and Gershon Bacon, The Jews of Poland and Russia: Bibliographical Essays (Indiana, 1984), p.66.

⁶ Ben Zion Dinur, BeMifne Ha Dorot (Jerusalem, 1954), p.108. Dinur must have failed to notice the sizable presence of members of these very families within the Hasidic leadership, for he put forth the unsustainable theory that Hasidic leaders rose from a "secondary intelligentsia" which was excluded from the elite. See Dinur in Hundert, Essential Papers, ch. 4.

⁷ Alexander Beider, A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland (New Jersey, 1996), pp.33-4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.34.

⁹ As we have seen, some wish to regard him as a self-made Zaddik, while others are apparently embarrassed by the notion, bestowing Davidic lineage upon him. The former seems more likely. This contradiction highlights a general indecisiveness about *yikhus* in eighteenth and even nineteenth century Jewish society. We sense that the biographers are torn between admiration of noble birth and admiration of pure merit.

¹⁰ The most blatant fabrication of the Besht's lineage occurs in Nathan Zvi Friedman, Otzar HaRabbanim (Bnei Brak, n.d.), a work which Wunder describes as containing "many mistakes in both content and arrangement." (*Avotaynu* 11:4, 1995). Friedman decides to identify the Besht's father, Eliezer, as Eliezer Isserles, a descendant of Moses Isserles! (p.52).

¹¹ See tale no. 8 in Ben Amos and Mintz.

¹² Possibly either Titov Veles, near Skopje, in former Yugoslavia; or (more likely) Tytuvėnai, in Lithuania.

¹³ Of their other son, Abraham, we know nothing.

¹⁴ Regarding this marriage, Arthur Green writes: "A marriage with the granddaughter of the Besht's only son seems like a move calculated to strengthen his authority, and perhaps to assure that male heirs from that line not serve as competitors to his own descendants. In fact Barukh had no male issue, and after his time the family lost its prominence in the Hasidic world." Tormented Master, p.125. If Green is correct, then this reveals the superior prestige of patrilineal descent. However, at least through Isaac of Kalusz, husband of Barukh's daughter Hannah, the line endured for many generations, including such Zaddikim as Barukh of Jassy, Eliezer Hayyim of Skole, Baruch Phineas, and Isaac Eizik. See chart in The Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol I, pp. 160-69.

¹⁵ Nahman of Horodenka was son of Hayyim of Horodenka, son of Saul, son of Hayyim, son-in-law of Isaac of Zolkiev, son of Samuel, son-in-law of Nafatali Katz (*av bet din* of Prostanycz and Lublin), son of Isaac, son of Samson Hakohen (*av bet din* of Prague), son-in-law of Judah Loewe, the Maharal of Prague. See Nathan Tzvi Koenig, Neve Zaddikim (Bnei Brak, 1969), p.9.

¹⁶ Green, Tormented Master, p.189. Nahman's purported descent from the House of David on both sides of his family (most doubtful!) bolstered his belief that this union would produce the messiah, according to Green.

¹⁷ See chapter 2.

¹⁸ S.D. Horodezky, Leaders of the Hassidim, (London, 1928), chapter on Dov Ber.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰ Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," pp.91-3.

²¹ Ben Amos and Mintz, Shivhei HaBesht, p.95, tale no.75.

²² The mediocrity of Tzvi Hirsch is not only attested to in Shivhei HaBesht. We also have a letter from his uncle, Gershon of Kutov, in which the latter urges Tzvi Hirsch to mend his ways and become serious about his studies. See Rabinowitz, Encyclopedia of Hasidism, "Tzvi Hirsch."

²³ Legend ascribes this to Sarah having married an elderly scholar in order to escape the advances of the local squire's son, an act which earned her an illustrious son bearing her name. See Harry Rabinowicz, The World of Hasidism, p.204.

²⁴ Ibid., p.99, uncited.

²⁵ Levi Halevi Grosman, Shem U-She'erit (Tel Aviv (?), n.d.), p.101.

²⁶ Probably Medwjedowka, in the Ukraine. The main source for these towns has been Gary Mokotoff and Sallyann Amdur Sack, Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust (New Jersey, 1991).

²⁷ Horodezky, Leaders of Hassidism, p.68.

²⁸ Regarding Nahman's attack on Aryeh, see the account of Green's analysis above, ch.2. Regarding Baruch's, see Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772," p.121.

²⁹ M.Y. Weinstock, Tiferet Bet David (Jerusalem, 1968). Cited in Neil Rosenstein, "Ashkenazic Rabbinic Families," Avotaynu III:3 (Summer 1987) 7.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ David of Makov, Sever Posheim and Zimrat Am Ha Arets, quoted in Simon Dubnov, Toledot Ha Hasidut, p.158. Cf. Rabinowitch, Lithuanian Hasidism (London, 1970), p.122.

³² Simon Dubnow, A History of Hasidism, Vol. I, trans. from German by Helen Lederer, ed. by Ellis Rivkin, unpublished, p.226.

³³ Rabinowitch, p.121. Cf. Dubnow, p.159.

³⁴ Rabinowitch, p.24.

³⁵ According to legend, Aaron was named "the Silent" because he never spoke a profane word. See I. Alfasi, Hasidut, p.115.

³⁶ In a letter to Asher of Karlin, Israel of Koziencie praises either the daughter or widow of Aaron the Silent, which reflects positively upon Aaron. For Rabinowitch's description of the letter, see below, number 33. Aaron was also a disciple of Uziel Meislisz, author of Tiferet Uziel (Warsaw, 1862). See Hayyim Haikel's Hayyim ve Hesed (Warsaw, 1790; rpt. Jerusalem, 1970), p.5.

³⁷ Beider, A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland.

³⁸ Isaac Alfasi, Entsykopedya Le Hasidut: Ishim (Jerusalem, 1986), p.169.

³⁹ Ibid. Cf. Rabinowitch.

⁴⁰ See above, ch.2.

⁴¹ Isaac Levitats, The Jewish Community in Russia, p.171.

⁴² I have been unable to confirm this. Notably, the book does not appear in Yehayahu Vinograd, Thesaurus of the Hebrew Book (Jerusalem, 1993).

⁴³ Rabinowitch, p.77. Amongst the writings found in Stolin is "a letter (dated the day after Sukot, 1801) from R. Yisrael of Kozhenits to R. Asher after the death of the latter's wife, in which the writer expresses a high regard for the widow of R. Aharon 'the Silent' of Zhelikhov (or for his daughter?)."

⁴⁴ See the Holy Epistle, in Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, p.106.

⁴⁵ Founder of the "Pinkas-Schul" in Prague. "Horowitz." Encyclopedia Judaica, p.984.

⁴⁶ Martyr in Prague, 1568/9, in *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Communal leader, in *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Orah LeHayyim (Berdyeczow, 1817), Pri Hayyim (Lvov, 1873) on *Avot*, and a commentary on the Passover Haggadah (Lwow, 1873). Cited from Rabinowitz' Encyclopedia of Hasidism.

⁵⁰ Also known as Stolbtsy, in White Russia.

⁵¹ Shapiro, Jacob Leib, Mishpahot Atikot be Yisrael (Israel, 1981), p.182.

⁵² Friedman, p.269.

⁵³ Heilman, Hayyim Meir, Bet Rebbe, (Tel Aviv, 1902), p.133.

⁵⁴ A detailed exposition of this family, which describes the links to Rashi, is found in Jacob Leib Shapiro's Mishpahot Atikot Be Yisrael (Israel, 1981), pp. 19-47.

⁵⁵ Technically, Phineas should not be referred to as a Zaddik. Phineas and other intimates of the Besht's circle were not Zaddikim as the term came to be known. As explained in Chapter One, we have used the term "Zaddik" in reference to all early Hasidic leaders for the sake of simplicity.

⁵⁶ Also known as Rydzyna, south of Poznan.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.147. Jonah Weill's grandfather was Moses Meir Weill, known as the "Maharam of Shtinglen."

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁵⁹ I have been unable to determine if this is the daughter of the same Jacob Joseph of Polonne, author of Toldot Yakov Yitzhak, but it seems unlikely, as such a fact would have been publicized.

⁶⁰ Two more sons, Eliyahu and Mordechai, are listed by Friedman in Otzar HaRabbanim; but these cannot be corroborated. Notably, Wunder makes no mention of these sons.

⁶¹ Also known as Nesukhoyezhe, located near Rovno in the Ukraine.

⁶² Possibly Botosani, in Romania.

⁶³ "Margoliouth." Encyclopedia Judaica, p.963.

⁶⁴ Also known as Pomortsy.

⁶⁵ Again, we are relying upon Friedman alone.

⁶⁶ Zaddikim from two other aristocratic families- Halpern and Landau- will not be included, because they were minor Zaddikim. They are, however, worthy of brief mention. 1) Joel Halpern, *av bet din* of Leszniow, son of Israel Harif Halpern, *av bet din* of Zaslav and Ostrog, was a disciple/colleague of the Besht. He married his daughter to the Zaddik Phineas Horowitz. 2) David Halpern, another early disciple/colleague of the Besht, inherited his position of rabbi of Ostrog from his father, Israel (probably the same Israel in no.1, making him Joel's brother). David was a forbear of the Zaddik Menahem Mendel of Kock (d.1859). 3) Tzvi Aryeh Landau of Alik, son of Abraham Landau of Alik, was a disciple of Jehiel Michael of Zloczow. He married his son to the daughter of the Zaddik Mordechai of Krzemieniec, his teacher's son.

⁶⁷ Meir Wunder, Entsiklopedia Le Hahame Galitzya (Jerusalem, 1986), Vol. tet-ayin, p.531.

⁶⁸ I have not been able to confirm this, however. Some biographers describe Samuel as Mordchai's father-in-law, but the term is flexible in Hebrew.

⁶⁹ Wunder, *op. cit.*, vol. tet-ayin, p.46-60.

⁷⁰ Menachem Nahum's connection to the Katznellenbogen family is noted by Friedman in Otzar Rabbanim, which is reason for caution. Friedman identifies Nahum the Gaon of Norinsk as a son of Nathan Nata Katzenellenbogen, rabbi of Miedzyrecz. This would make Nahum the brother of David Katzenellenbogen, rabbi of Kotzk. I have yet to verify this.

⁷¹ Rapoport-Albert in "Hasidism After 1772," p.129.

⁷² Aaron David Twersky, Sefer Ha Yihkhus Mi Chernobyl (Lublin, 1908), p.18.

⁷³ Also known as Ozhiran, in the Ukraine.

⁷⁴ Aaron Walden, Seder Ha Dorot Mi Talmide Ha Besht (Jerusalem, 1965), p.58.

⁷⁵ Rapoport-Albert, The Problem of Succession, p.85.

⁷⁶ But see Ettinger, who claims that Elimelekh "himself acted on the principle of transferring authority to a disciple: there is a tradition that 'the rabbi Rabbi Melekh in his old age ordered all who were sick or embittered to come to his disciple R. Itzikel of Lancut (the "seer" of Lublin). Until he accustomed everyone to come to Lancut. And they ceased to come to him. And he waxed very wroth' (*Ohel elimelekh*, 165)." In Hundert, ed., Essential Papers, p.240. Both Ettinger and Rapoport-Albert base themselves on questionable sources. But judging by the additional fact that Elimelekh's son Eleazar succeeded him in Lezajsk, it appears that Rapoport-Albert's view is more likely.

⁷⁷ Probably her brother Eleazar's father-in-law from his first marriage.

⁷⁸ Wunder, op. cit., aleph-daled, p.33.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Heschel, Circle of the Baal Shem Tov, Chapter 4.

⁸⁰ Shapiro, Mishpahot Atikot be Yisrael, p.38. Ephraim Fischel was son of Samuel, *av bet din* of Indura, Minsk and the Galil, author of *Responsa Shmuel*. Samuel's father was Joseph, *av bet din* of Fiorda; and his grandfather, Samuel, was one of the greatest rabbinic legislators of the 17th century, author of *Bet Shmuel*.

⁸¹ See, for example, Rabinowitz, Encyclopedia of Hasidism, "Levi Isaac of Berdichev." This statement is probably more legend than reality, but I have been able to find *av bet din* members going back several generations.

⁸² See Tiferet Bet Levi, p.28.

⁸³ According to Mokotoff and Sack, "a number of towns share this name." See Where Once We Walked, p.260.

⁸⁴ Friedman, Otzar HaRabbanim, p.260.

⁸⁵ M.H. Klainman, Shem Ha Gedolim He Hadash (Israel, 1977), "Levy Isaac of Berdyczew."

⁸⁶ H.M. Heilman. Bet Rebbe (Berdyczew, 1902), p.17. Baruch was son of Moses of Posen, son of Yudel (author of *Kol Yehudah*), son of Moses, son of Tzvi Hirsch, son of Joseph Yoske (*av bet din* of Lublin), son-in-law of Judah Loebe, the Maharal of Prague.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.108.

⁸⁸ I have been unable to determine the actual name of this town. Perhaps it is Olejow.

⁸⁹ Heilman, p.111.

⁹⁰ Rabinowitch, p.24.

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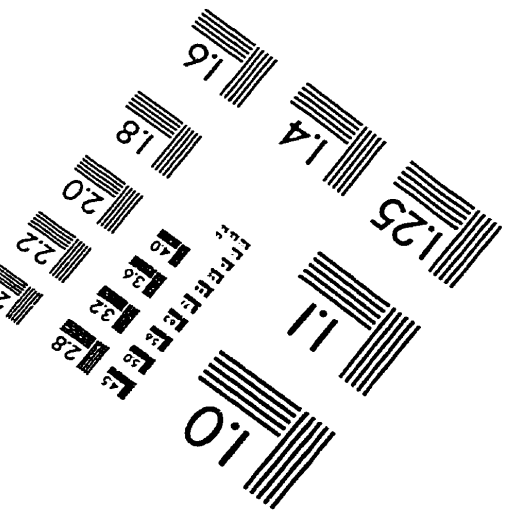
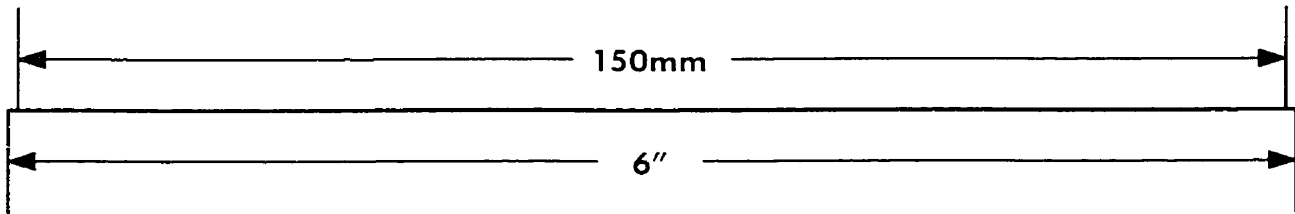
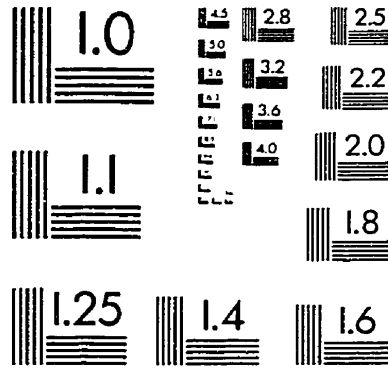
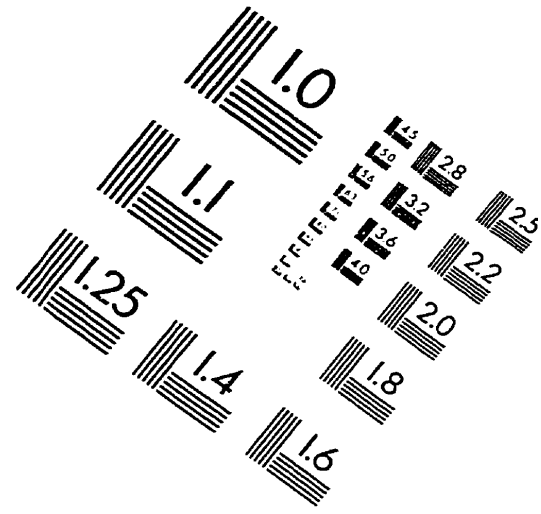
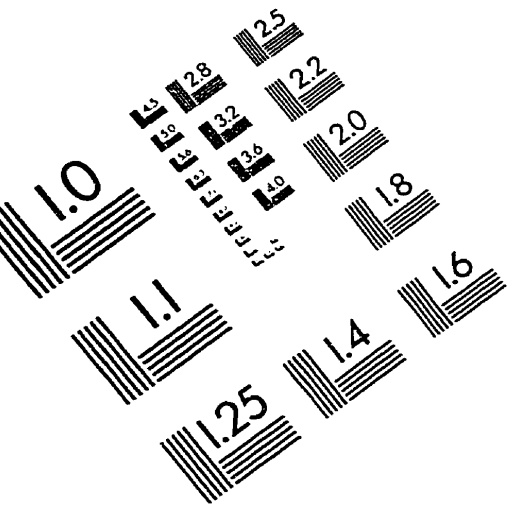
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