

Hasidic Judaism

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Hasidic Judaism (from the Hebrew: חסידות, Sephardic pronunciation: [hasiˈdut]; Ashkenazic pronunciation: [χaˈsidus]), meaning "piety" (or "loving-kindness"), is a branch of Orthodox Judaism that promotes spirituality through the popularization and internalization of Jewish mysticism as the fundamental aspect of the faith. It was founded in 18th-century Eastern Europe by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov as a reaction against overly legalistic Judaism. His example began the characteristic veneration of leadership in Hasidism as embodiments and intercessors of Divinity for the followers.

^[1] Contrary to this, Hasidic teachings cherished the sincerity and concealed holiness of the unlettered common folk, and their equality with the scholarly elite. The emphasis on the Immanent Divine presence in everything gave new value to prayer and deeds of kindness, alongside rabbinical supremacy of study, and replaced historical mystical (kabbalistic) and ethical (musar) asceticism and admonishment with Simcha, encouragement, and daily fervor.^[2]

Hasidism comprises part of contemporary Haredi Judaism, alongside the previous Talmudic Lithuanian-Yeshiva approach and the Sephardi and Mizrahi traditions. Its charismatic mysticism has inspired non-Orthodox Neo-Hasidic thinkers and influenced wider modern Jewish denominations, while its scholarly thought has interested contemporary academic study. Each Hasidic dynasty follows its own principles; thus, Hasidic Judaism is not one movement but a collection of separate groups with some commonality. There are approximately 30 larger Hasidic groups, and several hundred smaller groups. Though there is no one version of Hasidism, individual Hasidic groups often share with each other underlying philosophy, worship practices, dress (borrowed from local cultures), and songs (borrowed from local cultures).



Hasidic Jews praying in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, by Maurycy Gottlieb

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History

Prelude



Mystical movements appealed outside Rabbinism. The heresies of Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676) and Jacob Frank (1726–1791) distorted Lurianic Kabbalah and led to the Emden-Eybeschütz Controversy. Their Sabbatean legacy contributed Rabbinic opposition to legitimate Hidden Mystics and emergent Hasidism

Yisroel (Israel) ben Eliezer, most commonly known as Baal Shem Tov, founded Hasidic Judaism in the 18th century.

In Poland, where the bulk of Yiddish-speaking Jewry had established itself by the 18th century, three branches of Yiddishkeit (i.e. Jewishness) emerged: the first were those against the predominant study of Kabbalah (i.e. Jewish mysticism); the second were those supportive of the study of Kabbalah; and the third was the secular Yiddish theater culture originating in Lithuania but eventually spreading across the whole Yiddish speaking world. This schism became particularly acute after the Messianic movement of Sabbatai Zevi in the 17th century. Leanings to rigid mystical doctrines and sectarianism showed themselves prominently among the Jews of the south-eastern provinces of Poland, while in the Lithuanian and Estonian provinces, anti-kabbalistic (mysticism) orthodox leaders held sway. In part, this division in modes of thought reflected social differences between the northern (Estonian and Lithuanian) Jews and the southern Jews of Poland and the western Russian Empire. In Lithuania and Estonia, the Jewish masses lived mainly in densely populated towns where anti-kabbalistic (mysticism) rabbinical academic culture (in the yeshivot) flourished based on just the simple understanding getting deeper from there. In Poland itself, the Jews tended to live scattered in villages far removed from intellectual centers. In these villages, the influence of the kabbalists (mystics) prevailed; while other communities of Yiddish speakers were becoming completely secular and creating an identity in the Lithuanian, Belorussian, Ukrainian and Polish Yiddish theater separate from any serious mysticism, finding commonality with the Haskallah taking place within the Austro-Czech Yiddish speaking regions. This should be viewed in the context that there is really no form of original Judaica which does not believe in daily miracles and mysticism, a Jew's whole life technically speaking has always related to mysticism and the Ruach Hakodesh. One view of Judaism is that it is just an ethnicity, with cultural ritual and mystical spiritualism. The schism was between the various 'group thinks' within the kabbalistic mystical communities of the descendants of the French and German Jews called at some point Ashkenazi, but more accurately should be described as the diverse Yiddish speaking world.

Pessimism in the south was more intense after the Cossacks' Uprising (1648–1654) under Chmielnicki and the turbulent times in Poland (1648–1660), which violently ruined the Jewry of South East Poland, but did not much affect that of Lithuania and Estonia. The general population of Poland itself declined and economic chaos reigned, especially due to these events and the subsequent Turkish Invasion which left this region depopulated and barren. After the Polish magnates regained control of southern Rus in the last decade of the 17th century, an economic renaissance ensued. The magnates began a massive rebuilding and repopulation effort while being generally welcoming and benevolent towards the Jews. A type of frontier environment ensued where new people and new ideas were encouraged. The state of the Jews of what would later become southern Russia created a favorable field for mystical movements and religious sectarianism, which spread in the area from the middle of the 18th to the middle of the 19th century.

Besides these influences, deep-seated causes produced among many Jews a discontent and a gravitation toward mysticism. Rabbinism, which in Poland had become transformed into a system of religious formalism, no longer provided a satisfactory religious experience to many Jews. Although traditional Judaism had adopted some features of Kabbalah, it adapted them to fit its own system: it added to its own ritualism the asceticism of the "practical kabbalists" just across the eastern borders in the ancient Greek and Anatolian Jewish communities under the Ottoman Empire, who saw the essence of earthly existence only in fasting, in penance, and in spiritual sadness. Such a combination of religious practices, suitable for individuals and hermits, did not suit the bulk of the Jews. Many of these Jews would live in mountainous regions to get away from any non-Jewish influence.

Mystical individuals arose, outside the Rabbinic establishment, called Nistarim or Baal Shem ("Masters of the Name" of God, used for practical kabbalistic intervention and miracles), who sought to offer the downtrodden masses spiritual and physical encouragement, and practical healing. The image of these charismatic figures, often wandering among the people, became shaped by the Kabbalistic legend of the Lamed Vav Tzadikim (36 hidden righteous people who sustain the world). From these circles of spiritual inspiration, the early Hasidic movement arose, led by Israel ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov, in 18th century Podolia (now Ukraine). He attracted to his cause the preceding followers of the ways of the Nistorim, who saw in his teachings a new direction in reviving and consoling the masses.

At the time in Jewish Eastern Europe were also public preachers ("Maggidim"), who would visit the shuls (synagogues) of the shtetls (towns and villages). During their Sabbath sermons, they would sometimes seek to encourage Jewish observance with ethical promises and warnings of Heaven and Hell. In their addresses, they also supported the communal Rabbi in helping to teach those who could not learn the spiritual and practical life of Jewish learning, and offered personal examples of Jewish conduct. The Baal Shem Tov opposed their use of ethical admonishments of punishment, which lacked love and inner spiritual values. Under the Hasidic movement, ideas of reward and punishment were avoided, and were replaced by the spiritual life of *dveikus* (cleaving) to God in all daily conduct. The Baal Shem Tov, and Hasidism, also opposed the earlier mystical and ethical ascetic paths of fasting and self-mortification, seeking to serve God by infusing physical activities with new spiritual inspiration.

Israel ben Eliezer



Wooden synagogue in Zabłudów, Poland, from the late 17th century. Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem of Worms founded the 17th-Century "Macheneh Yisrael-Nistarim" Hidden Mystics movement to bring encouragement to the Jewish masses. Tradition records the young Israel ben Eliezer joining their ranks under Rabbi Adam Baal Shem and guiding their outreach.^[3] The circle of Hasidism grew from its members.

The founder of Hasidism, Israel ben Eliezer (1698–1760), became known as the *Baal Shem Tov* (the "Master of the Good Name", abbreviated "Besht"). Following on from the earlier communal tradition of Baal Shem, his fame as a healer spread among not only the Jews, but also the non-Jewish peasants and the Polish nobles. The hagiography of oral stories about his life, that were posthumously compiled in writing by his disciples, describe his spiritual powers and knowledge, miracle working, and ability to predict the future. In turn, these notions were passed on to his saintly students and successors, and shaped the Hasidic doctrine of the Tzadik or Rebbe (righteous leader who channels Divine sustenance to his followers). The particular Hasidic emphasis and interpretation of this earlier Jewish and Kabbalistic concept, became one of the ideas that singled it out from non-Hasidic Judaism. The Hasidic concept of a Rebbe also combines their role as a teacher of Judaism and as a charismatic spiritual example. To their followers they teach Hasidic mysticism and interpretations of Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism.

The traditional accounts of his biography describe the beginnings of his life as a public teacher and leader of the Jewish people from his 36th birthday. His role and unique talent as a teacher and communicator of mystical revival began a new era in Jewish mysticism. To the common people, the Besht appeared wholly admirable. Characterized by an extraordinary sincerity and simplicity, he sought to meet the spiritual needs of the masses. He taught them that true Divine service consisted of not only religious scholarship, but also a sincere love of God combined with warm faith and belief in the efficacy of prayer; that the ordinary person filled with a sincere belief in God, and whose prayers come from the heart, is more acceptable to God than someone versed in and fully observant of Jewish law who lacks inspiration in his divine service. This democratization of Judaism attracted to the teachings of the Besht not only the common people, but also the scholars whom the rabbinical scholasticism and ascetic Kabbalah failed to satisfy.

About 1740, the Besht established himself in the Ukrainian town of Mezhebizh. He gathered about him numerous disciples and followers whom he initiated into the secrets of his teachings not by systematic exposition, but by means of sayings and parables that contained both easily graspable insights, for the laymen, and profound Kabbalistic depth, for the great scholars. These sayings spread by oral transmission; later the founder's disciples set them in writing, developing the thoughts of their master into a system. The Besht himself wrote nothing.

The seminal teachings of the Baal Shem Tov captured new ideas and interpretations of Judaism, and were articulated and developed by his students and successors. These ideas offered the unlearned a folk spiritual revival, while also giving the scholarly elite a new depth and approach to mysticism. Hasidism gave a ready response to the burning desire of the common people, in the simple, stimulating, and comforting faith it awakened in them. The scholars attracted to Hasidism, also sought to learn selfless humility and simple sincerity from the common folk. In contrast to other sectarian teaching, early Hasidism aimed not at dogmatic or ritual reform, but at a deeper psychological one. It aimed to change not the belief, but the believer. By means of psychological suggestion, it created a new type of religious man, a type that placed emotion above reason and rites, and religious exaltation above knowledge. Traditional devotion to Jewish study and scholarship was not replaced, but was spiritualised as a means to cleave to God. The unlearned common folk were given spiritual enlivenment, as their sincerity also made them close to God.



Ohel over the grave of the Baal Shem Tov in Medzhybizh



The Baal Shem Tov traveled throughout Jewish life in Podolia Ukraine, and surrounding areas, with his close circle, or amidst the common folk. Other Masters such as the brothers Elimelech and Zushya continued the earlier practice of concealed wandering on behalf of mystical cause.

Spread of Hasidism



Grave of Elimelech of Lizhensk, whose influence in Poland was compared to the Baal Shem Tov's in Ukraine, due to many dynasties from his disciples. After Dov Ber in Mezhirich's passing in 1772, he began Hasidism in Poland with the Chozeh of Lublin. Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk and Schneur Zalman of Liadi began Hasidism in Russia. Hasidism was brought to Hungary later, in early 1800s, by Yitzchak Isaac Taub of Kaliv and Moshe Teitelbaum of Ujhel

Israel ben Eliezer's disciples attracted many followers, who established numerous Hasidic courts across Europe. After the Besht's death, followers continued his cause, under the leadership of the Maggid, Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch. From his court students went forth; they in turn attracted many Jews to Hasidism, and many of them came to study in Mezritsch (Mezhirichi) with Dov Ber personally. By the 1830s the majority of Jews in Ukraine, Galicia, and central Poland were Hasidic, as were substantial minorities in Belarus, Hungary, and Romania. Hasidic Judaism began coming to Western Europe and then to the United States during the large waves of Jewish emigration in the 1880s.

After the passing of Rabbi Dov Ber, his inner circle of followers, known as the "Chevraya Kadisha," the Holy Fellowship, agreed to divide up the whole of Europe into different territories, and have each one charged with disseminating Hasidic teachings in his designated area.

Hasidism branched out into two main divisions: (1) in Ukraine and in Galicia (Central Europe) and (2) in Litta (Greater Lithuania from the time when it encompassed Belarus). Three disciples of Dov Ber of Mezritsch (Elimelech of Lizhensk, Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, and Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl), besides the grandson of the Besht, Boruch of Tulchin (later R' Boruch of Mezhibizh), directed the first of these divisions. Elimelech of Lizhensk fully developed the belief in Tzaddikism as a fundamental doctrine of Hasidism. In his book *No'am Elimelekh* he conveys the idea of the Tzadik ("righteous one") as the mediator between God and the common people, and suggests that through him God sends to the faithful earthly blessings in the three traditional categories: health and life, a livelihood, and children, on the condition, however, that the Hasidim support the Tzaddik by pecuniary contributions ("pidyonos"), in order to enable the holy man to become completely absorbed in the contemplation of God. Lithuanian Hasidim followed Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who founded Habad Hasidism, and Rabbi Aharon of Karlin. The intellectual Habad method of Schneur Zalman, developed the mind, in contrast to general Hasidism, as the fundamental route to Hasidic spirituality. This articulation can therefore fully incorporate the other dimensions of Judaism, such as Jewish philosophy and Rabbinic Judaism. The Maggid directed Schneur Zalman to spread Hasidism in Belarus, as his intellectual articulation could appeal to the Rabbinic opposition in Vilna.

Consequently, it posed more of a threat to the Mitnagdim, and Schneur Zalman was arrested and imprisoned in Saint Petersburg by the Tzarist government on false charges, instigated by some of the Jewish opposition. Habad tradition sees the reason

for the imprisonment as a result of Heavenly opposition to his new, broader, intellectual dissemination of Hasidic thought, and his exoneration as vindication from Heaven to begin fully spreading the teachings of Hasidus.

Subsequent influential and famous Hasidic thinkers and leaders include Nachman of Breslov, in Ukraine, Menachem Mendel of Kotzk in Poland, and Israel Friedman of Ruzhyn in Russia. Nachman of Breslov is seen as the most imaginatively creative Hasidic thinker, while Menachem Mendel of Kotzk overturned the traditional view of the Tzadik, in pursuit of truthful introspection and integrity. The spiritual meaning of Tzadikic grandeur reached its fullest form in the regal majesty of the court of Yisroel Friedman. In the 19th-century flourishing of Hasidism, leadership succession usually became dynastic, rather than inherited by the greatest or most charismatic student. Each Hasidic court established itself in the scattered shtetls across Eastern Europe, and adopted their names, often in Yiddish form, for their approach to Hasidic thought and life. Where the Hasidic approach of a group was profound or influential, the spiritual vitality of their leadership remained charismatic or great, such as in the Polish dynasty of Ger (derived from Menachem Mendel of Kotzk), or the Belarusian dynasty of Lubavitch (the intellectual branch of Hasidism founded by Schneur Zalman of Liadi). In these examples, often their leaders combined Hasidic spirituality with traditional Rabbinic greatness of scholarship in Talmud. This synthesis helped dissolve much of the early opposition to Hasidism by the Rabbinic civilization of Lithuanian Jewish Orthodoxy.

Opposition

Beginning at the founding of the Hasidic movement, a serious schism evolved between Hasidic and non-Hasidic Jews. Those European Jews who rejected the Hasidic movement were referred to as *misnagdim* (from the Hebrew נגד, literally, *against* or *opponents*). Critics of Hasidic Judaism:



Hasidic immigration to the Land of Israel began in the early movement, including in 1777 the Hasidic leaders Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, Avraham of Kalisk and their followers



Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia brought the first inroads of Western Europe to Hasidism. Hasidic leadership divided in mystical interpretation of events. In Poland the Chozeh of Lublin, Maggid of Kozhnitz and Menachem Mendel of Rimanov saw Messianic potential in the turmoil. Seeking to hasten Redemption they differed over support or opposition to Napoleon. Schneur Zalman of Liadi in Russia saw physical improvement but long-term spiritual danger and opposed, and died on the flight

- decried the apparently novel Hasidic emphasis on different aspects of Jewish law.
- found problematic the overwhelming exuberance of Hasidic worship and outward dress.
- expressed concern that Hasidism might become a deviant messianic sect (similar to what had occurred among the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, Sabbatai Zevi, and Jacob Frank).
- non-Hasidic Yiddish Jews at the behest of the Vilna Gaon were no longer dressing differently from non-Jews for the first time in centuries, and from the anti-Hasidic perspective this was a large sticking point, i.e. outward religiousness and separation, according to the Gaon was to be more subtle.

Some other important differences between Hasidim and *misnagdim* included:

- Hasidism believed in miracle workers, namely that the *Ba'al Shem Tov* and some of his disciples literally performed miracles. Stories of their miracles became a part of Hasidic literature. The Misnagdim held such views as heretical, based on classical rabbinic works such as Saadia Gaon's *Emunoth ve-Deoth*. (Ultimately, their descendants were to regularly tell similar stories about respected Misnagdic leaders.)
- Hasidic philosophy (*chasidus*) holds as a core belief that God permeates all physical objects in nature, including all living beings. According to the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, Baal Shem Tov used to say, that *God is all and all is God*. In opposition, many Jewish religious rationalists misunderstood this seemingly pantheistic doctrine as a violation against the Maimonidean principle of faith that God is not physical, and thus considered it heretical. In fact, Hasidic philosophy, especially the Chabad school, views all physical and psychological phenomena as relative and illusionary; God, the absolute reality in itself, is beyond all physical or even spiritual concepts and boundaries.
- Hasidism teaches that there are sparks of goodness in all things, which can be redeemed to perfect the world. Many held such a view to be false and dangerous.

On a more prosaic level, other *misnagdim* regarded Hasidim as pursuing a less scholarly approach to Judaism, and opposed the movement for this reason. At one point, Hasidic Jews were put in *cherem* (a Jewish form of communal excommunication); after years of bitter acrimony, a rapprochement occurred between Hasidic Jews and their opponents within Orthodox Judaism. The reconciliation took place in response to the perceived even greater threat of the *Haskala*, or Jewish Enlightenment. Despite this, the distinctions between the various sects of Hasidim and other Orthodox Jews remain, although now, there is almost no conflict between these two groups.

Vilna Gaon and Chabad Hasidism

Dispute and resolution

The most notable disputant of Hasidism was the Vilna Gaon. Many legends and versions circulate regarding the reasoning of the Gaon against Hasidism generally, and specifically Chabad Hasidism. In 1774 the Baal Hatanya, and Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk traveled to Vilna in an attempt to create a dialogue with the Vilna Gaon who led the Misnagdim and had issued a ban against the Hasidim, but the Gaon refused to see them^[4] It should be noted that the Gaon wrote prolifically on mysticism as often as any Hassidic leader, unlike others against the Hassidic dynasties. He too, had made himself a homeless wanderer for many years, similar to the Baal Shem Tov and far before them.

Scholars and historians note the philosophical idea of "tzimtzum" as the core of their argument. The Vilna Gaon rejected the Baal Hatanya's ideas as heresy. In 1797 (during the lifetime of the Vilna Gaon) the Baal Hatanya wrote a lengthy responsa explaining his view on this matter to his Chassidim in Vilna. Despite the dispute, he requested his Hasidim to respect the Gaon and not to engage in arguments with the misnagdim.^[5]

Much has been written on this fundamental debate. It has been addressed by the Vilna Gaon's disciple and successor Rabbi Chaim Volozhin,^[6] the Baal Haleshem,^[7] Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler and others. The Lubavitcher Rebbe divides the debate to four schools of thought.^{[8][9]}

The Hasidim revered the Gaon during his lifetime and thereafter. They believe he acted out of good faith and was misled by the slander of the misnagdim. This could be seen in the wording of the ban he signed excommunicating the Hasidim.^[10]

An unfortunate chapter in history is the 1798 incarceration of the Baal Hatanya in St Petersburg Jail. The Misnagdim falsely accused the Hasidim of subversive activities – on charges of supporting the Ottoman Empire, since the Baal Hatanya advocated sending charity to support Jews living in the Ottoman territory of Palestine. He was arrested on suspicion of treason and brought to St. Petersburg where he



The Vilna Gaon (1720–1797), head of Lithuanian centred opposition to Hasidism

was held in the Petropavlovski fortress for 53 days, at which time he was subjected to an examination by a secret commission. Ultimately he was released by order of Paul I of Russia. The Hebrew day of his acquittal and release, 19 Kislev, 5559 on the Hebrew calendar, is celebrated annually by Chabad Hasidim.

In 1800, The Baal Hatanya was again arrested and transported to St. Petersburg. He was released after several weeks but banned from leaving St. Petersburg.^[11] The elevation of Tsar Alexander I (Alexander I of Russia) a few weeks later led to his release; he was then "given full liberty to proclaim his religious teachings" by the Russian government.

These events occurred four years after the death of the Gaon.

It was the Vilna Gaon's disciple and successor Rabbi Chaim Volozhin who halted the hostilities against the Hasidim after seeking dialogue with them and fully understanding their views. He consequently removed the ban placed on them recognizing Chabad ideology as legitimate Torah views. As mentioned, Rabbi Chaim approached the idea of tzimtzum in his work *Nefesh Hachayim*, evidently after studying the Baal Hatanya's view in depth.^[12]
[13]

This reconciliation continued between their descendants. Reb Itzele of Volozhin had a close relationship with the Tzemach Tzedek and attended the Petersburg conference together in 1843.^[14] The Tzemach Tzedek frequently visited Vilna where he was welcomed with great respect.^[15]

The Rashab and Reb Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk had a close relationship,^[16] and was held in high respect by the Chafetz Chaim.^{[17][18][19]}
[20]

The Rayatz received Rabbinical Ordination (Smicha) from Rabbi Chaim Brisker.^[21]

Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik referred MK Menachem Porush to the Rayatz in order to influence the Israeli Government to grant Charedim autonomy on their education.^[22]

Reb Yosef Ber Soloveichik had a longstanding relationship with the late Lubavitcher Rebbe.^[23]

19th century consolidation and changes in Jewish society

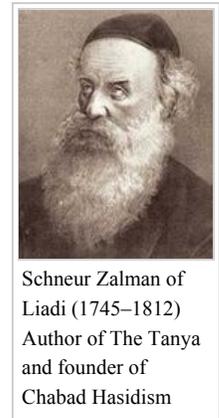


Joseph Perl (1773–1839)

The mid-19th century saw the founding burst of Hasidic leadership and innovative spirituality channeled into consolidated Hasidic dynastic courts. The original founding figures of Hasidism reinvigorated traditional Jewish society by charismatic example and teaching. Under the Maggid, leadership became organized into a structured movement. The subsequent leadership, now dispersed across Eastern Europe, became most often passed down through select family descent. Each court became known after the shtetl of origin, encapsulating the thought and style of Hasidism of each group. This focus could allow deeper development of each distinctive path in Hasidism, while alternatively diminishing the founding revolutionary impulse. In the organized Hasidic society, the Rebbe superseded the traditional legal authority and influence of the Beth din and Rav that had formerly led communal and personal welfare.

In the mid-19th-century the influence of modern changes in Jewish society arrived East from the Western European secularising *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) movement. While the unsuccessful 1812 French invasion of Russia by Napoleon had sought to bring Jewish emancipation from the non-Jewish political structures of Poland and Russia, Haskalah sought to reform and rationalize Jewish thought and life from within the Jewish community, to form an image of Jewish observance in the character of non-Jewish modernity. In this respect, it differed from the Deist philosophical impulse of the European Enlightenment. Haskalah focused special hostility to the mysticism of Hasidism, publishing critiques and satires of Hasidic fervour. The emergent early

Reform movement in Judaism rejected traditional Halachic methodology of Talmudic thought, and dismissed Kabbalah. Later 20th century non-Orthodox Jewish denominations would rediscover value in traditional thought and observance, and a Neo-Hasidic adoption of Hasidic mysticism. When the attempts of the Maskilim in influencing Hasidic and Mitnagdic pious thought in Eastern Europe met with little success, they sought to enlist non-Jewish governmental decrees in their educational aims. To the intensely inward focused spiritualities of Judaism in Eastern Europe and its leadership, the campaigns of the Maskilim represented the antithesis of their fervour, thought and societies. In Germany, an Orthodox synthesis between the best of Western thought and committed Jewish learning was developed by Samson Raphael Hirsch. The Eastern Judaisms of Hasidic and Lithuanian leadership saw his proposition as possible only as a last resort in



Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745–1812) Author of The Tanya and founder of Chabad Hasidism

the already assimilating environment of Germany. The threat of Haskalah helped heal the division between Hasidism and Mitnagdim, as they saw a common goal in protecting sincere Jewish observance of the common folk, and the elite traditional thought and learning of the great Yeshiva academies and Hasidic courts.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, more radical secular ideologies reached traditional Jewish society in Eastern Europe. These Jewish political movements sought to replace adherence to Judaism with beliefs in Jewish socialism or nationalism. Here too synthesis could sometimes be made from radical aspects of Hasidic thought, or from the later development of Religious Zionism. However, mainstream Hasidic and Mitnagdic leadership was opposed to any replacement of Talmudic and Hasidic thought and fervour from its centrality in Eastern European Judaism. The development of Hasidic philosophy in its diverse expressions offered consolation to the unlearned, while satisfying the mystical thirst and theological depth of elite students. Its inner spiritual concepts underscored the Rabbinic rejection of secular ideologies.^[24] Orthodoxy responded with political organisation under the Agudah, while the ethical Mussar movement among non-Hasidic Lithuanian Jews offered spiritual psychological development as an alternative to outward political involvement, and allowed a bridge to the mysticism of Hasidic thought.^[25]



Hasidic boys in Łódź in the 1910s

In the Soviet Union and the Holocaust



Statue of settlers on the railway station in Birobidzhan, centre of the Communist Jewish Autonomous Oblast. In Communist Russia, Hasidim worked underground to continue Jewish observance. When caught, they were exiled to Siberia or killed

The Bolshevik revolution and the rise of Communism in Russia saw the disintegration of the Hasidic centers such as Lubavitch, Breslov, Chernobyl and Ruzhin.

Many Hasidim, primarily those following the Chabad school, but also the Tshernobler Rebbe and the Ribnitzer Rebbe, remained in the Soviet Union (primarily in Russia), intent on preserving Judaism as a religion in the face of increasing Soviet opposition. With yeshivos and instruction in Hebrew outlawed, synagogues seized by the government and transformed into secular community centers, and Jewish circumcision forbidden to all members of the Communist Party, most Hasidim took part in the general Jewish religious underground movement. Many became so-called "wandering clerics", traveling from village to village and functioning as chazzanim, shohtim, mohels, and rabbis wherever such services were needed. These figures were often imprisoned and sometimes executed.

The Nazi invasion into the interior of European Soviet Union in 1941 destroyed the remaining Hasidic communities in the former Pale of Settlement under the first mass destruction of the Holocaust. The Hasidic communities were therefore disproportionately decimated. Subsequently, the Hasidim of Central Europe were transported to the Nazi camps in occupied Poland. Some Hasidic leaders, reluctant to leave their followers, found late exit to safety. Some survived in the camps,

personifying spirituality against the adversity. The Jewish photographer Mendel Grossman came from a Hasidic family and captured some of the life and struggle within the Łódź Ghetto (renamed by the Nazis Litzmannstadt), and, together with the accounts of others in the ghettos and on the way to "sanctifying God" through their martyrdom, their stories form a new literature of Hasidic Holocaust tales. Hasidic mystical perspectives on Holocaust theology are less well known than more Westernised Jewish theologians.



Kraków market and Old Synagogue in 1941. Recently, Holocaust studies has given attention to religious dimensions, previously overlooked. Among these are the Hasidic thought of the Piaseczno Rebbe in the Warsaw Ghetto, and the flight and survival of the Belz and Klausenberg Rebbes

Contemporary demographics

Today there are over one million Hasidic Jews worldwide.

Extinction in Eastern Europe

The Holocaust brought total destruction to the Hasidic centers of Eastern Europe. At least 500,000 Hasidim were killed^[26] and most survivors moved to Israel or to America soon after the war and established new centers modeled on their original communities.

Some of the larger and more well-known Hasidic sects that still exist include Belz, Bobov, Breslov, Ger, Lubavitch (Chabad), Munkacs, Pappa, Sanz (Klausenburg), Satmar, Skver, Spinka and Vizhnitz.

United States



Inward Hasidic expression: Joel Teitelbaum of Satmar led among post-War rebuilding of Hasidism. Satmar seeks insular communal piety, outside the influence of secular trends. He extended previous theological anti-Zionism, based on Talmudic interpretation, rather than Hasidic mysticism

The two main Hasidic communities in the United States, where 180,000 Hasidic Jews live,^[27] are located in New York City and Rockland County, New York.^[28] In New York City, the neighborhoods include Borough Park, Williamsburg, and Crown Heights in the borough of Brooklyn. However, the most rapidly growing community of American Hasidic Jews is located in Rockland County and Orange County in the western Hudson Valley of New York State, including the communities of Monsey, Monroe, New Square, and Kiryas Joel. There is also a sizable and rapidly growing American Hasidic community in Lakewood, New Jersey, which was once a center of mainly Litvish and Yeshiva Orthodox Jews, as well as other areas of the U.S. state of New Jersey, including Teaneck, Englewood, Passaic, and Fair Lawn. Other American Hasidic communities also exist in Pikesville and Northwest Baltimore, Maryland; the Fairfax neighborhood of Los Angeles; the Sherman Park neighborhood of Milwaukee; and St. Louis Park, a Minneapolis suburb. A Canadian Hasidic population can be found in the Outremont borough of Montreal.

According to *The New York Times*, the high fertility rate of Orthodox Jews will eventually render them the dominant demographic force in New York Jewry.^[29] A 2009 article published by the University of Florida stated that the growth of Hasidic Judaism may cause Jewish politics in the US to shift towards the political right.^[30]



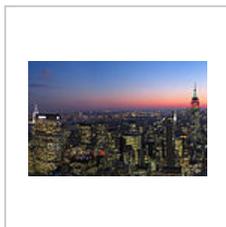
Outward Hasidic expression: Chabad Lubavitch and Breslov dynasties are part of the Baal teshuva movement revival. Menachem Mendel Schneerson led post-War Hasidic outreach. Pilgrimage to the grave of Nachman of Breslov, and Breslov mystical creativity, attracts bohemian spiritual seekers

Chabad is a global Hasidic movement that is based in New York. According to The Orthodox Union, "The most visible expression of this flourishing is the steady growth in Chabad's outreach efforts. Currently, 4,000 shluchim, emissaries, are scattered across the globe".^{[31][32][33]}

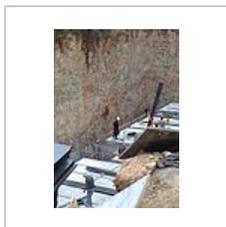
Israel

Outside of the United States, the largest Hasidic community is in Israel, located mainly in Jerusalem and its adjacent areas, such as Ramat Beit Shemesh and also the religious city of Bnei Brak. Smaller communities are scattered across Europe, most notably in and around Stamford Hill, north-east London.

The largest groups in Israel today are Ger, Chabad, Belz, Satmar, Breslov, Vizhnitz, Seret-Vizhnitz, Nadvorna, and Toldos Aharon. In the United States the largest are Satmar, Bobov, Ger, and Lubavitch all centered in Brooklyn, New York City, USA. Reb Aharon's Satmar camp is centered in Kiryas Joel, New York, while Reb Zalman is in Williamsburg, Brooklyn and Skver (New Square) in Rockland County, New York.



The New York City Metropolitan Area is home to the largest American Hasidic population, with new towns in the Hudson Valley along with the original Brooklyn centers.



A Hasidic Jew supervising a construction site in Israel, where Hasidic groups differ over involvement in politics and society



Jewish district in Antwerp Belgium. Since the War, Pshevorsk leadership there remain the only major Hasidic dynasty in Europe



Former Bostoner Rebbe, and the mid-West USA Hornsteipl dynasty are examples of leadership in wider Jewish communities, like in the early Hasidic movement

Hasidic thought



Interior of the rebuilt synagogue of the Baal Shem Tov in Medzhybizh, Ukraine. The diverse streams of Hasidic thought trace from different adaptations of the Baal Shem Tov's Torah. Hasidic historiography depicts other great Hasidic figures variously similar in holiness and spiritual perception.^[34] Where the Baal Shem Tov began spiritual innovation, later shapers of Hasidism applied the teachings in diverse schools of focus, or sought to renew Hasidism from becoming stultified

Beginning in 12th and 13th century Provence and Spain, Kabbalah (the main Jewish mysticism) began to be taught to small circles of advanced students. This metaphysical theology and exegesis, offered an esoteric, imaginative, spiritual alternative to mainstream Rabbinic Judaism and Jewish philosophy. Its greatest expression was in the Scriptural commentary, the Zohar. Medieval Kabbalah taught new doctrines of the ten *sefirot* (emanations that reveal and mediate the unknowable Divine essence), the identification of the last sefirah with the earlier Rabbinic notion of the *shechina* (Divine presence) as a feminine aspect of God, and the harmonious *shefa* (subsisting flow of Divine creation through the Heavenly realms until this world) that is dependent on each person's righteousness. In 16th century Safed, a special community of great Jewish thinkers developed, which brought new synthesis to Kabbalah. Above all, Isaac Luria taught new and radical doctrines of the primordial process of creation, which became accepted as the complete structure of traditional Jewish metaphysics. These ideas described an initial *tzimtzum* (constriction of the Divine Infinity that allowed creation to take place) and its cosmic purposes, a subsequent catastrophe called "Shevirat Hakelim" (the "Breaking of the Vessels") that resulted in the present unredeemed world, and the messianic process of Tikkun (metaphysical rectification) of this, that each individual helps complete in their spiritual life. While these notions were esoteric, they also deeply supported mainstream Rabbinic Judaism, as the *shefa* and the *tikkun* were automatically fulfilled by all Jews through normative Jewish observance, whether they were aware of their deeper significance or not. As a result, and especially in reaction to the sufferings and exiles of Jewish history, the Kabbalah became the mainstream traditional Jewish theology, and inspired a hold on wider Jewish cultural imagination. While its terminology entered the daily liturgy, its subtle and advanced concepts, that could be misunderstood by spiritual novices, kept its committed study to a scholarly elite. The mainstream acceptance of Kabbalah, can be seen by the mass following that the false messiah Shabbetai Zvi gained. His mystical heresy and apostasy, awakened a Rabbinic restriction on Jewish mystical activity for the wider population.

The Baal Shem Tov and his successors, inherited this Rabbinic suspicion of their teachings, as they sought to awaken a popular, mystical revival for the simple Jewish folk, as well as offering scholarly mysticism a new soulful direction. The new teachings of Hasidism left aside the abstract, subtle, advanced focus of Kabbalah on the Divine manifestations and Heavenly realms. Kabbalah describes the full, esoteric, complicated structures of the interaction of God and Creation. Among its traditional names is the "Chochma Nistorah" (hidden wisdom) of the Torah. Kabbalistic terminology is necessary to describe the traditional Jewish processes of metaphysics. It is used extensively in the more involved Hasidic writings, but the aim of this is different from in Kabbalah. The new teachings of Hasidism look to the simple, inner Divine soul, which it sees as permeating all and also transcending all. Hasidic thought bases itself upon earlier Kabbalistic theology, but relates its ideas to the psychology and experience of man, so that Jewish mysticism can awaken a personal experience and perception of the Divine. Gershom Scholem, who established the 20th century academic study of Jewish mysticism, describes Hasidism as the "internalization of Kabbalah". The Baal Shem Tov and his successors saw Divine immanence in all Creation, that gave a full expression to pantheistic traces in earlier Kabbalah (Pantheism teaches that "All is within God". This is different from Pantheism, which is heretical in Judaism, as it denies a personal God, and Divine transcendence outside Creation. Pantheism sees Creation as Divinity, but only the immanent revelation of a transcendent, infinite God). This encounter with God could be found by all Jews, as Hasidism elevated sincerity and soulful *devekus* (cleaving to God), as the most direct path to spirituality. Traditionally, Jewish study, especially of Talmud, gives the main route to Jewish spirituality. Hasidism did not seek to replace the essential endeavour of study, but rather to infuse and connect it with *devekus*. Common folk, to whom study may have been inaccessible, found spirituality and joy in Hasidic mysticism, while great scholars of Talmud and Kabbalah, were also attracted to its new depth and interpretation.

The Baal Shem Tov spread Hasidism by means of simple, soulful teachings, parables, and stories. These offered Jewish mysticism to the unlearned, while the close circle of saintly followers around him understood their deeper, profound significance. The Baal Shem Tov was a man of the people, while his successor Dov Ber of Mezeritch devoted himself to creating the third generation of great Hasidic leaders. As the theological and sociological architect of the Hasidic movement, Dov Ber elucidated the underlying profound meanings of Hasidic thought and its theological contributions to Judaism. He appointed his students in the "Hevra Kaddisha" (Holy Society) to become the future leaders of Hasidism in the different regions of Eastern Europe. Alternative interpretations of Hasidic thought arose, centered in schools of Hasidic dynasties. Hasidism stressed the new doctrine of the Rebbe or Tzaddik (saintly leader), through whom Divine influence is channeled. In some Hasidic paths the Tzaddik elevates his followers through charismatic conduct, while other groups emphasize his role primarily as teacher. Many creative thinkers of Hasidic mysticism established the variety of Hasidic approaches. Because the Tzaddik offers to his followers a microcosm of the Messianic redemption, mainstream Hasidism toned down the Messianic elements to Jewish mysticism, that had endangered Shabbetai Zvi. Nonetheless, infusing Hasidism from the time of the Baal Shem Tov onwards is a Messianic self-understanding that has come to the fore on some occasions, and in more ideological circles. These include Hasidic activity around the 1812 French invasion of Russia and responses of Menachem Mendel of Kotzk and Mordechai Yosef Leiner to Messianic speculation concerning 1840. Hasidic dynasties coexist in the principle that each Tzaddik's leadership does not overstep into another's court. In the early 19th century, Nachman of Breslav led his marginal circle in the most distinctive veneration in Hasidism, arousing hostility from other leaders. This Messianic drive was paralleled on a mass scale by Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Chabad in recent times. Through its emotional and intellectual aspects, Hasidism offered Jewish life a new spiritual revival. Within Jewish study, Hasidic philosophy gave

earlier Jewish thought new interpretations, that can synthesize and spiritualize the other dimensions of Judaism. In its intellectual articulations, Hasidic philosophy can bridge Jewish mysticism with mainstream Jewish philosophy. It enabled the mystical dimensions of Judaism to be articulated in a form that was accessible for the first time to the whole Jewish community. Hasidic spirituality and thought has also had appeal and influence outside the Hasidic movement, and outside of Orthodox Judaism. In the 20th Century, the academic interest in Jewish mysticism, and Neo-Hasidism have offered spiritual contributions to many Jewish denominations. With the encounter of Judaism with Modernity, different philosophical and denominational views emerged on the meanings of Judaism and Jewish identity. It has been said that the three figures of the Baal Shem Tov (Hasidic spirituality), the Vilna Gaon (Lithuanian Jewish Orthodox scholarship), and Moses Mendelssohn (founding influence on the Haskalah movement), have together shaped the diverse Jewish articulations today.

The Hasidic Tales

"The Hasidic Tales", as they are known en masse, are a collection of Hasidic stories and anecdotes collected from the late eighteenth century onward that deal with a variety of topics having to do with Hasid culture. Touching on issues such as proper worship of the Torah, the place of the Rebbes or Tzaddikim in Hasid society, or the importance of certain virtues, The Hasid Tales have been studied as a supplement to conventional historical works. Some of the tales are short anecdotes uttered by one Rebbe to explain a point about a specific theological matter while others are conversation between either two Rebbes or a Rebbe and a loyal follower. Regardless of how they are formatted, the tales with the most longevity and influence all share a couple of traits in common besides an appreciation of spontaneous worship and joyous celebration. For one, they are terse and compact, never being terribly excessive in length. And secondly, they tend to carry a strong and obvious point, with little extra information.^[36]

A great portion of these tales have to do with the Zaddikim, or leaders of the Hasidism movement. As the Baal Shem were the heart of Hasidic Jewish communities and shtetls, the tales written about them were a reflection of the admiration and love that they were held in.^[37] Initially these tales, characterized by things like vivid metaphors, unbelievable occurrences, and fantastic holiness were about the Baal Shem Tov and his lessons but soon took on the characteristics of their time and place. Each set of Hasidic tales within a certain time period or about a certain Rebbe, is known to reflect what they focused on. Examples of dissenting opinions on issues may be in what is and is not acceptable to pray for, whether or not the common man can achieve complete oneness with God, or what it is to be wise. As the lineage of Baal Shem advanced through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from Baal Shem to disciple, so did the physical spread of Hassidism. And through this, legends and anecdotes about the Besht, along with common Hasidic sentiments, was able to spread from Poland to regions in like Ukraine and Lithuania.^[37]

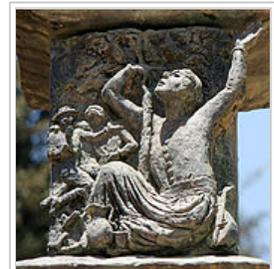
This is believed to have been because the Rebbes, who would use such tales and stories to inspire the Hasadim, were trying to convince the "simple man" of these ideas.^[36] Some of the more influential Baal Shems embraced this form of simple teaching for multiple reasons. The Besht, for instance, praised teaching the simple man because his ability to have strong communion with God could, at times, be stronger than that of his disciples. The Maggid of Mezritch preached Tzimtum, or contraction, as a way to make stories simpler to follow and, if there was a blaring message at the end, easy to take to heart.^[36] Regardless of the reasoning supported by the Rabbis, a clear template is set throughout the majority of the most circulated Hasidic Tales. It is also believed that because many of these tales were not written down until several years after their inception that keeping them brief made them easier to remember, both for the deliverer and the receiver. These tales have developed such a strong presence in Hasid culture that they are still referenced today.

Characteristic ideas

The teachings of Hasidism are founded on two theoretical conceptions: (1) religious Panentheism, or the omnipresence of God, and (2) the idea of Devekus, communion between God and man. The Besht (Baal Shem Tov) says: "Man must always bear in mind that God is omnipresent and is always with him; that God is the most subtle matter everywhere diffused... Let man realize that when he is looking at material things he is in reality gazing at the image of the Deity which is present in all things. With this in mind man will always serve God even in small matters."



Safed synagogue of Isaac Luria (1534–1572) who completed the esoteric theosophy of Kabbalah. Hasidism instead translates Kabbalah into direct psychological perception of divine immanence in this world, forsaking its transcendent focus, while adapting it to its own concerns. Founded upon the exile-redemption of Lurianism, reread metaphorically by Dovber of Mezeritch, it drew also from earlier mystical models, including Cordoverian panentheism and ethical equanimity^[35]



Sculpture of the Hasidic movement on the Knesset Menorah, shaped by the wide influence of its Tales on Jewish culture. Hasidic ecstatic prayer is shown as a candle surrounding the soul's wick, amidst Nature embodying the Shekhina divine presence

Deveikus (communion) refers to the belief that an unbroken relationship takes place between the world of God and the world of humanity. According to it, not only does the Deity influence the acts of man, but also that man exerts an influence on the will of the Deity. Every act and word of man produces a corresponding effect in the upper spheres. From this conception is derived the chief practical principle of Hasidism, cleaving to God for the purpose of uniting with the source of life and of influencing it. This communion is achieved through the concentration of thoughts on God, and consulting Him in all the affairs of life.

The *tzadik* (righteous person) is in constant communion with God, even in their worldly affairs, since they also feel His presence in daily life. A special form of communion with God is prayer. In order to render this union complete the prayer must be full of fervor, ecstatic, and the soul of the person who prays must, during their devotions, detach itself from its material dwelling. For the attainment of ecstasy, recourse can be had to mechanical means, to enthusiastic bodily motions, to shouting and singing. According to the Besht, the path to God is in sincerity and fervour, rather than cold intellectual reasoning. Learning of Jewish texts and halakhic lore are important ways to approach God, but ultimately are useful as a means of producing an exalted religious elevation and communion. It is often more helpful to read books of moral and spiritual inspiration, than to engage in over-analytical approaches in study of the Talmud and Rabbinical literature. In the performance of rites the mood of the believer is of more importance than the externals, so therefore formalism and superfluous ceremonial details are an impediment. In later Hasidic articulations, a synthesis was made with the value of traditional, Lithuanian study and analysis. Many Hasidic Masters gained admiration from the non-Hasidic world, for being great scholars of Talmudic and Rabbinic works. The intellectual school of Chabad, founded by Schneur Zalman of Liadi, can be seen as a separate offshoot of general Hasidism. Mainstream Hasidism gives special emphasis to emotions, so that study of the "revealed" or "inner" dimensions of Judaism can inspire greater faith and emotional fervour, as well as knowledge of Rabbinic thought. In Chabad, Schneur Zalman emphasised the mind as the route to internalizing the emotions of the heart more fully. The systematic analysis of Hasidic philosophy in Chabad can integrate and synthesize "revealed" Jewish thought with the mystical.

Aims of Hasidic thought

Hasidic philosophy teaches a method of contemplating on God, as well as the inner significance of the Mitzvot (commandments and rituals of Torah law). Hasidic philosophy has four main goals:

1. Revival: At the time when Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov founded Hasidism, the Jews were physically crushed by massacres (in particular, those of the Cossack leader Chmelnitzky in 1648–1649) and poverty, and spiritually crushed by the disappointment engendered by the false messiahs. This unfortunate combination caused religious observance to seriously wane. This was especially true in Eastern Europe, where Hasidism began. Hasidism came to revive the Jews physically and spiritually. It focused on helping Jews establish themselves financially, and then lifting their moral and religious observance through its teachings.
2. Piety: A Hasid, in classic Torah literature, refers to one of piety beyond the letter of the law. Hasidism demands and aims at cultivating this extra degree of piety.
3. Refinement: Hasidism teaches that one should not merely strive to improve one's character by learning new habits and manners. Rather a person should completely change the quality, depth and maturity of one's nature. This change is accomplished by internalizing and integrating the perspective of Hasidic philosophy.
4. Demystification: In Hasidism, it is believed that the esoteric teachings of Kabbalah can be made understandable to everyone. This understanding is meant to help refine a person, as well as adding depth and vigor to one's ritual observation.

Hasidic practice and culture

Liturgy and prayer



Tosher Rebbe
concentrating on prayer

Most hasidim pray according to one of the variations of the nusach known as *Nusach Sefard*, a blend of Ashkenazi and Sephardi liturgies, based on the innovations of Rabbi Isaac Luria (also known as the *Arizal*). However, many Hasidic dynasties have their own specific adaptation of Nusach Sefard; some, such as the versions of the Belzer, Bobover and Dushinsky Hasidim, are closer to Nusach Ashkenaz, while others, such as the Munkacz version, are closer to Nusach Sefard of the Arizal. Hasidic Nusach is a very complicated study. Many Hasidic groups believe that their siddur reflects the wording and mystical intentions of the Arizal. Chabad-Lubavitch has a distinctive variant known as Nusach Ari of the Baal HaTanya. Other Hasidic rabbis from many other Hasidic camps have compiled authoritative "Nusach Ari" siddurim. One should not confuse the contents of the Lubavitcher siddur with the historical study of the Arizal's actual nusach.



Zidichover Rebbe
praying

The Baal Shem introduced two innovations to the Friday services: the recitation of Psalm 107 before Mincha (the afternoon service), as a prelude to the Sabbath, one gives praise for the release of the soul from its weekday activities, and Psalm 23 just before the end of Maariv (evening service).

In regard to dialect, Hasidim pray in Ashkenazi Hebrew, a form of Hebrew with many distinct features; for instance, the vowel tseris is pronounced [ej] instead of [e] like Sephardi Hebrew, and the vowel kamatz is pronounced [o] or [u] instead of [a] like Sephardi Hebrew. This dialect has nothing to do with Hasidism in its origins, nor was it chosen deliberately; it just happens to be the dialect of the places from which most Hasidim originally came, such as Galicia and Ukraine. Thus, there are significant differences between the dialects used by Hasidim originating in different places, such as Poland, Belarus, Hungary, and Ukraine.

Hasidic prayer has a distinctive accompaniment of wordless melodies called *nigunim* that represent the overall mood of the prayer; in recent years this innovation has become increasingly popular in non-Hasidic communities as well. Hasidic prayer also has a reputation for taking a very long time (although some groups do pray quickly). Some hasidim will spend seven seconds of concentration on every single word of the prayer of *Amidah*.

Hasidim have a reputation for having a lot of *kavana*, mental concentration, during prayer. Overall, Hasidim regard prayer as one of the most paramount activities during the day. In fact, one of the most controversial innovations of Hasidic practice as practiced in several courts involves the near-abolition of the traditional specified times of day by which prayers must be conducted (*zemanim*), particularly *shacharis* (the morning prayer service); the preparations for prayer take precedence and may extend into the allotted time. The Kotsker Rebbe allegedly originated this practice, which is prevalent to this day in Chabad-Lubavitch. It is controversial in many other Hasidic courts, who place more emphasis on praying earlier and not eating before praying, according to the interpretation of Halacha (Jewish law) which is followed by the vast majority of other Hasidic and non-Hasidic Orthodox Jews.

Daily immersion

Male Orthodox Jews customarily immerse in a *mikvah* (ritual pool of water) before major Jewish holidays (and particularly before Yom Kippur), in order to achieve spiritual cleanliness. Hasidim have extended this to a daily practice preceding morning prayers. Although daily immersion in a *mikvah* is no longer mandated by halacha, Hasidism places great emphasis on this practice, because the Arizal taught that each time one immerses in a *mikvah* he adds holiness to his soul. It is also taught by the Baal Shem Tov, that all his wisdom was given to him by God in merit of his immersions in the mikvah, and that no male should go three days without going to the mikvah. The Talmud records an enactment by Ezra that after a seminal emission one must immerse in a *mikvah* before studying Torah or praying; although this enactment was later repealed, Hasidim and some other Jews still follow it, at least for prayer, though the Code of Jewish Law rules that it is not mandatory.

Dress

Within the Hasidic world, one can distinguish different Hasidic groups by subtle differences in dress. Some details of their dress are shared by non-Hasidic Haredim. Much of Hasidic dress was historically the clothing of all Eastern-European Jews. From at least the sixteenth century, styles of Jewish men's dress in Eastern Europe were influenced by those of the *szlachta* (Polish nobles). While the *szlachta* abandoned certain types of clothing for newer fashions, Hasidim have preserved some of those older styles to the present day.^[38] Furthermore, Hasidim have attributed religious origins to specific Hasidic items of clothing.

The Tsarist edict of the mid-19th century banning Jewish clothing mentions the "Jewish kaftan" and the "Jewish hat" and, as a result of this edict, Hasidim modified their dress in the Russian Empire and generally hid their sidelocks. Modern Chabad Lubavitch wear the Prince Albert frock coat substitutes for the *bekishe* reflecting this change, while many Polish Hasidim do so by wearing a redesigned *shtreimel* sometimes known as a *spodik*.

Hasidic dress did change over the last hundred years, and became more European in response to the Emancipation Movement. Modern Hasidim tend to wear Hasidic dress as worn just prior to World War II. Numerous pictures of Hasidim in the mid-19th century show a far more Levantine outfit (i.e. a kaftan lacking lapels or buttons) that differs little from the classical oriental outfit consisting of the kaftan, white undershirt, sash, knee-breeches (*halbe-hoyzn*), white socks and slippers (*shtibblat*). This outfit allegedly had a Babylonian origin before its later adoption by Jews, Persians and lastly the Turks, who brought it to Europe. The Polish nobility adopted its 16th century outfit from the Turks, hence the similarity between the Hasidic outfit and Polish nobles' clothing. (Similarly, Hasidic dress has a vague connection with Shia Muslim clerical dress, the Shia clergy adopted this dress from the Persians.) One Hasidic belief (taught by the Klausenberger rebbe) holds that Jews originally invented this dress code and that the Babylonians adopted it from Jews during the Jewish exile in Babylon of the 6th century BCE. This belief is not widely held or even well known among Hasidim.



Hasidic family in Borough Park, Brooklyn. The man is wearing a shtreimel and either a bekishe or a rekel.

Hasidic men most commonly wear dark (black or navy) jackets and trousers and white shirts. They will usually also wear black shoes. On weekdays they wear a long, black, cloth jacket called a *rekel* and on Jewish Holy Days the *bekishe zaydene kapote* (Yiddish, lit. satin caftan), a similarly long, black jacket but of satin fabric traditionally silk. The preference for black comes from a decree made by community rabbis in the 18th century stipulating that black outer garments be worn on the Sabbath and Jewish Holy Days out of the home, as opposed to the shiny, colorful kaftans that were worn prior to that time. The rabbis feared that brightly colored clothes might arouse resentment among non-Jews thereby leading to violence. Indoors the colorful *tish bekishe* is still worn.

On the Sabbath the Hasidic Grand Rabbis (*rebbe*s) traditionally wore a white *bekishe* rather than a black one. This practice has fallen into disuse except for a minority of *rebbe*s, such as Toldos Aharon and Lelov, and by Hungarian *rebbe*s such as Tosh and Satmar. Many *rebbe*s wear a black silk *bekishe* that is trimmed with velvet (known as *stro-kes* or *samet*) and in those of Hungarian lineage a gold designed or other coloured, *tish bekishe* or *khalat* (especially during the *tish* or during the prayers that come right before or after the *tish*).

Some Hasidim wear a satin overcoat, known among Hungarian and Galitsyaner Hasidim as a *rezhvolke*, over the regular *bekishe*. A *rebbe*'s *rezhvolke* might be trimmed with velvet. Some *rebbe*s wear a fur-lined *rezhvolke* known as a *tilep* (Yiddish: פּוּר־קאָט *fur coat*).

Most Hasidim do not wear neckties (with the exception of some Russian Hasidim, such as those stemming from Ruzhin, Karlin, and Lubavitch).

These are some of the religious aspects claimed by Hasidim of their dress code. The connections are quite tenuous and the real reasons for the Hasidic dress code are historical and sociological and not theological.

- *Bekishe* or *rekelech* serve as a sign of modesty and cover almost the entire body.
- The *bekishe* (*kapote*) is made of silk because of the Biblical prohibition of *shaatnez* (today it is common to make it out of polyester).
- The fur lined *shtreimel* alludes to the law of *shaatnez* and began as a way of keeping warm without wearing wool.
- Shoes worn on the Sabbath may be plain black "slip-ons" so as not to have to make a knot which is prohibited on that day and so as not to touch the shoes (which would ritually defile one's hands, requiring ritual purification through washing with a special vessel).
- A *gartel* divides the Hasid's lower parts from his upper parts and are mentioned in the Talmud and *Shulhan Arukh* as a way to "prepare to meet your God".
- For Kabbalistic reasons, Hasidim button their clothes right over left.
- The Sabbath dress of Hasidim resembles the description of the High Priest's dress in the Bible (this is particularly tenuous and the similarity is not apparent at all).
- Some Hasidim wear breeches tucked in white socks so the trouser-bottoms do not touch the ground (which in former times was likely to be a source of waste, which is a Biblical prohibition).



Dombrover Rebbe of Monsey with the Nadvorna Rebbe. Note the *pelts* (fur coat) worn by the *rebbe*s.

Headwear

Hasidim customarily wear black hats during the weekdays, as do nearly all Haredim today. A variety of hats are worn depending on the sect. Hasidim wear a variety of fur headdresses on the Sabbath:

- *Shtreimel* is worn by most Hasidim today, including those from Galicia and Hungary such as Satmar, Munkacs, Bobov, Breslov, and Belz, and some non-Galician Polish Hasidim, such as Biala, as well as some non-Hasidic Haredim in Jerusalem.
- *Spodik* is the name given by others to the *shtreimel* worn by Polish Hasidim such as Ger, Amshinov, Ozharov, Aleksander. It is narrower and taller than the *shtreimel* and is generally black.
- The *choibl* or *soyvl* was worn in Poland prior to the Holocaust, and has fallen into disuse.
- *Kolpik* (Polish: *kolpak*) is a traditional Slavic headdress, worn by unmarried sons and grandsons of many *Rebbe*s on the Sabbath. The *kolpik* is worn by some *Rebbe*s on special occasions other than the Sabbath and major Biblical holidays, such as Chanukah, Tu Bishvat, and Rosh Chodesh.
- The *kashket* (Ukrainian: кашкет) or *dashikl* was a peaked cap worn during the week, prior to the Holocaust. It was worn in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine, and was worn by poorer Hasidim on Shabbat. Its use began as a result of the Tsarist decrees banning other traditional Jewish headdress. In these geographic areas, generally only



Rabbi Moshe Leib Rabinovich, Munkacser Rebbe, wearing a *kolpik*

rabbis wore black hats. Today, some Hasidic children, under the age of 13, wear a *kashket* on the Sabbath. Amongst Belz, the *kashket* has been reintroduced for boys under the age of 15 to wear on weekdays.

- The black fedora, and less so the trilby, is worn by Lubavitch Hasidim. This hat is of the style of the 1940s and 50s. They are the same as the hats worn by many non-Hasidic Haredim, as well as by some more "modern" Hasidim who are followers of a particular Rebbe without being part of a Hasidic community. Chabad Hasidim often pinch their hats to form a triangle on the top, following the style of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. They wear their fedoras even on the Sabbath and Holidays. However, some Lubavitch Hasidim in Jerusalem wear a *shtreimel* on the Sabbath, if that was their family's custom for generations in Jerusalem.
- Various forms of felt open-crown (a type of hat with a rounded top) are worn by many Hasidim. Affiliation can sometimes be identified by whether there is a pinch in the middle of the top or not, as well as the type of brim. This is called a *shtofener* hat in Yiddish. Ger and Slonimer Hasidim wear a round hat, while Stoliner and Emunas Yisrael wear a pinched hat. Many Satmar laymen wear a type of open crown hat that resembles a bowler hat with rounded edges on the brim.
- *Samet* (velvet) or *biber* (beaver) hats are worn by Galician and Hungarian Hasidim during the week and by unmarried men on Shabbat as well. Some unmarried men wear a *samet* hat on the Sabbath and a felt hat during the week. There are many types of *Samet* hats, most notably the "high" ("*hoicher*") and "flat" ("*platshe*") varieties. The "flat" type is worn by Satmar Hasidim, and some others as well. Some Rabbis wear a "round" *samet* hat in a similar style to the *shtofener* hats, however made from the *Samet* material. They are called beaver hats even though today they are made from rabbit.
- A small fur hat called a *kutchma* (Ukrainian: ку́чма or кучма) is worn by many Hasidic laymen during weekdays in the winter. Today this hat is sometimes made from cheaper materials, such as polyester. This hat is referred to as a *shlyapka* (шляпка), by Russian Jews.

Other distinct clothing

Gerrer Hasidim wear *hoynzokn*—long black socks that the trousers are tucked into. Some Hasidim from Eastern Galicia wear black socks with their breeches on the Sabbath, as opposed to white ones, particularly Belzer Hasidim.

Many Hungarian Hasidic and non-Hasidic laymen wear a suit jacket that lies somewhere between a *rekel* and a regular three-quarter double breasted suit called a "*drei-fertl*" (Yiddish for "three-quarter"). It is distinct from a regular three-quarter suit inasmuch as the right side covers the left, like a *rekel*.

Many Skverer hasidim wear knee-high leather boots (*shtiff*) with their breeches on the Sabbath. This manner of concealing the stockings was introduced as a compromise prior to a family wedding when one side had the tradition of wearing white stockings and the other did not. The Skverer Rebbe and his family wear such boots every day, and so do some rabbinical families affiliated with other Hasidic groups.



The Dorohoi Rebbe in his traditional rabbinical Sabbath garb

Hair

Following a Biblical commandment not to shave the sides of one's face, male members of most Hasidic groups wear long, uncut sidelocks called payot (Ashkenazi Hebrew *peyos*, Yiddish *peyes*). Some Hasidic men shave off the rest of their hair. Not every Hasidic group requires long peyos, and not all Jewish men with peyos are Hasidic, but all Hasidic groups discourage the shaving of one's beard. Most Hasidic boys receive their first haircuts ceremonially at the age of three years (only the Skverer Hasidim do this at their boys' second birthday). Until then, Hasidic boys have long hair. Some non-Hasidic Orthodox (and even a few non-Orthodox) Jews have adopted this custom.

Tzitzis

The white threads dangling at the waists of Hasidim and other Orthodox Jewish males except for the strings that many leave hanging out; many Hasidim, as well as some other Haredim, wear the *tallis katan* over their shirt.

Women

Hasidic women wear clothing adhering to the principles of modest dress in Jewish law. This includes long, conservative skirts and sleeves past the elbow as well as covered necklines. Also, the women wear stockings to cover their legs; in some Hasidic groups, such as Satmar or Toldot Aharon, the stockings must be opaque. In keeping with Jewish law, married women cover their hair, using either a *sheitel* (wig) or a *tichel* (headscarf) which is sometimes used to cover a *shpitzel*. In some Hasidic groups, such as Satmar, women may wear two headcoverings – a wig and a scarf or a wig and a hat.

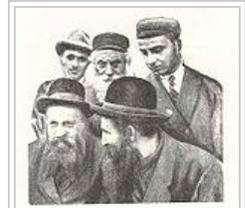
Families

Hasidic men and women, as customary in Orthodox Judaism, usually meet through matchmakers in a process called a *shidduch*., but marriages involve the mutual consent of the couple. Expectations exist that a bride and groom should be about the same age. Marriage age in Orthodox Judaism ranges from 18 to 25, with 18–21 range considered the norm among Hasidim. No custom encourages an older man marrying a young woman, but this is often considered the ideal nonetheless. Hasidic thought stresses the holiness of sex, and pious Jewish couples follow strict regulations in their sexual lives.

Hasidic Jews, like many other Orthodox Jews, typically produce large families; the average Hasidic family in the United States has 8 children.^[39] This is followed out of a desire to fulfill the Biblical mandate to "be fruitful and multiply".^[40]

Languages

Most Hasidim speak the language of their countries of residence, but use Yiddish among themselves as a way of remaining distinct and preserving tradition. Thus children are still learning Yiddish today, and the language, despite predictions to the contrary, is not dead. Yiddish newspapers are still published, and Yiddish fiction is being written, primarily aimed at women. Films in Yiddish are being produced within the Hasidic community, and released immediately as DVDs (as opposed to the Yiddish movies of the past, which were produced by non-religious Jews). Some Hasidic groups, such as Satmar or Toldot Aharon, actively oppose the everyday use of Hebrew, which they consider a holy tongue. The use of Hebrew for anything other than prayer and study is, according to them, profane. Hence Yiddish is the vernacular and common tongue for many Hasidim around the world. The use of Yiddish is a major difference between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Haredim. Sephardi Haredim usually do not know Yiddish (unless they were educated in an Ashkenazi yeshiva).



Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Elazar of Radzin (sitting first from left) in 1928. Hebrew was reserved for liturgical and textual use. Torah conversation, oral tradition and daily affairs were conveyed in the Yiddish vernacular

See also

- Hasidim and Mitnagdim
- List of Hasidic dynasties
- Kvitel

Footnotes

- ↑ "North Shore, Boston to join worldwide release of 'SoulQuest'" (http://www.jlicentral.com/news.php?task=fullstory&NID=151). Retrieved October 4, 2014.
- ↑ "A Synergized Summer With JLI" (https://www.jlicentral.com/news.php?task=fullstory&NID=144). Retrieved October 4, 2014.
- ↑ A traditional account of Israel ben Eliezer being accepted into the circle of Nistarim Hidden mystics when 11, his innovative proposals to them for reviving the Jewish people from age 14, and his receiving from them the title "Baal Shem Tov", is given in *The Great Mission – The Life and Story of Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov*, compiler Eli Friedman, translator Elchonon Lesches, Kehot Publication Society. It lists five "ingenious concepts" of his that became the new outreach directions of the group in their incognito travels to revive the populace, derived from his mystical teaching of the innate, concealed holiness of the common folk:

Concern for their welfare, rather than admonishment;
Encourage the inestimable power of their simple prayers and daily Divine praises;
Uplift the sincere simple folk by teaching them their spiritual value;

Practical bolstering of potential economic stability in shtetls left after the Cossak destructions;

Direct involvement and financing to improve the dire Jewish education in the villages;

- ↑ "Tzaddikim" (http://emet9.org/Tzaddikim.html). Emet9.org. Retrieved 2013-03-02.
- ↑ "אגרות קודש א – שניאור זלמן (אדמו"ר הזקן) דוב בער ב"ר שניאור זלמן (אדמו"ר הצמח צדק) (page 105 of 541)" (http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=31632&st=&pgnum=105). Hebrewbooks.org. Retrieved 2013-03-02.
- ↑ "נפש החיים שער ג פרק ז – ויקיטקסט (http://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%A0%D7%A4%D7%A9_%D7%94%D7%97%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9D_%D7%A9%D7%A2%D7%A8_%D7%92_%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A7_%D7%96) (in Hebrew). He.wikisource.org. 2013-02-24. Retrieved 2013-03-02.
- ↑ "Perceptions on the Parsha – Parshas Vaera, 5765" (http://www.torah.org/learning/perceptions/5765/vaera.html). Torah.org. Retrieved 2013-03-02.
- ↑ http://www.afn.org/~afn19926/dvar.htm
- ↑ Name (2013-02-03). "An analysis of different approaches regarding tzimtzum, the process of Divine self-limitation – Texts & Writings" (http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/92968/jewis

- analysis-of-different-approaches-regarding-tzitzum-the-process-of-Divine-self-limitation.htm). Chabad.org. Retrieved 2013-03-02.
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 11. ^ *On learning Chassidus*, Brooklyn, 1959, p. 24
 12. ^ *Triumph of Survival: Story of the Jews, 1650–1990 – Berel Wein – Google ספרים* (http://books.google.co.il/books?id=11f9xBbOBBEC&pg=PA119&lpg=PA119&dq=Rabbi+Chaim+of+FjyMznJh0zQYbRoJB2vs&hl=iw&sa=X&ei=eIwNT5O6FM_Nsgbcm20Chaim%20of%20Volozhin%20Shneur%20zalman&f=false). Books.google.co.il. Retrieved 2013-03-02.
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 24. ^ Amongst Hasidic theoreticians, Sholom Dovber Schneersohn established the Tomchei Temimim Hasidic yeshiva in 1896 to incorporate new systematic focus on daily learning of Hasidic philosophy. His founding talk related this new institutional development to the spiritual turmoil of the arriving secular Jewish ideologies
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Mumbai, Seoul and Kinshasa, and in thriving centers of Jewish life, such as Manhattan, Los Angeles, Jerusalem and Melbourne....Among the latter is the Jewish Learning Institute, the largest educational program for Jewish adults in the world (with the possible exception of the Daf Yomi enterprise), which currently enrolls over 66,000 teens and adults at some 850 sites around the world, each following a prescribed course of study according to a set timetable."

32. ^ Wertheimer, Jack. "The Outreach Revolution" (<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/the-outreach-revolution/>). Commentary Magazine. Retrieved April 2, 2013.
33. ^ Forde, Noelle. "Combating Apathy to Israel: Chabad's New Israel Awareness Course" (<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/124315>) *Chabad's new free program helps young Jews connect spiritually with Israel*. Israel National News. Retrieved November 21, 2007.
34. ^ Traditionally, Hasidic leaders of the latter generations are viewed as spiritually lower than the great early founding figures, with some exceptions that allow for the mystical continuation of supreme Tzadik in each generation, where Kabbalah describes the soul of Moses in every generation. This tendency is summarised by a renowned Hasidic tale: (Cited by Norman Lamm in *The Religious Thought of Hasidism-Text and Commentary* end of Introduction, and Gershom Scholem at the conclusion of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*)

When the Baal Shem Tov had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer-and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later the Maggid of Mezeritch was faced with the same task, he would go to the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers-and what he wanted done became reality. Again a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said: We can no longer light a fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayer, but we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs-and that must be sufficient; and sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel Friedman of Ruzhyn was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said: We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done. And, the story-teller adds, the story which he told had the same effect as the actions of the other three.

In contrast to this mainstream view of generational descent in mystical-charismatic leadership, the Habad school, which aimed instead for philosophical investigation of Hasidic thought, views its successive leadership as ascending intellectual articulation of the Divine essence of Hasidic thought. According to this view, mystical thought deepens by becoming more intellectually graspable

35. ^ In relation to historical Kabbalah, the development of Hasidism is seen in Hasidic theology as the third of three conceptual paradigms in articulating Jewish mysticism, each successively more advanced and inward than the previous. Articulated in *The Development of Kabbalah in Three Stages* (<http://www.inner.org/stages/stages.htm>) from www.inner.org (Habad systemisation approach). The three stages correspond to Cordoverian Kabbalah-Evolution of Worlds, Lurianic Kabbalah-Enlothement of Souls, Hasidic thought-Divine Omnipresence
36. ^ ^a ^b ^c Schacter-Shalomi, Zalman, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame* (2003) San Francisco CA, Jossey-Bass, ISBN 0-7879-6573-1
37. ^ ^a ^b Buber, Martin, *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters* (1948) New York NY, Schocken Books ISBN 0-8052-0995-6
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External links

-  Media related to Hasidic Judaism at Wikimedia Commons
-  "Chasidim". *New International Encyclopedia*. 1905.
- Lecture on Mitnagdim, Hasidim and Maskilim by Dr. Henry Abramson (<http://jewishhistorylectures.org/2013/04/23/mitnagdim-hasidim-maskilim-the-cultural-geography-of-jewish-eastern-europe/>)

Maps of the spread of Hasidism

- Map of the area of activity of the Baal Shem Tov, and the directions of the Maggid's students' dissemination (<http://www.routledge.com/textbooks/0415236614/resources/maps/map49.jpg>)
- Map of the spread of Hasidism from 1730 and 1760–75, and its encroachment on the Lithuanian centre of Rabbinic opposition (<http://www.routledge.com/textbooks/0415236614/resources/maps/map50.jpg>)
- Information on Orthodox Hasidic Jews (<http://www.orthodox-jews.com/>)

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