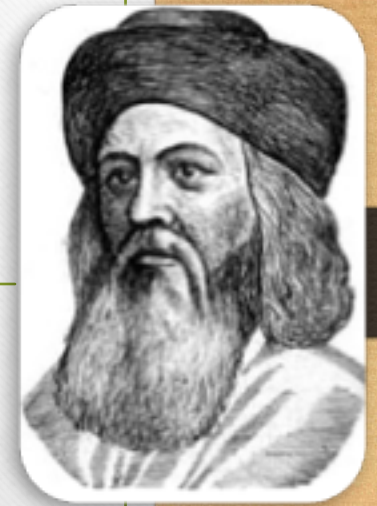


The Gaon of Vilna vs. The Chassidic Movement

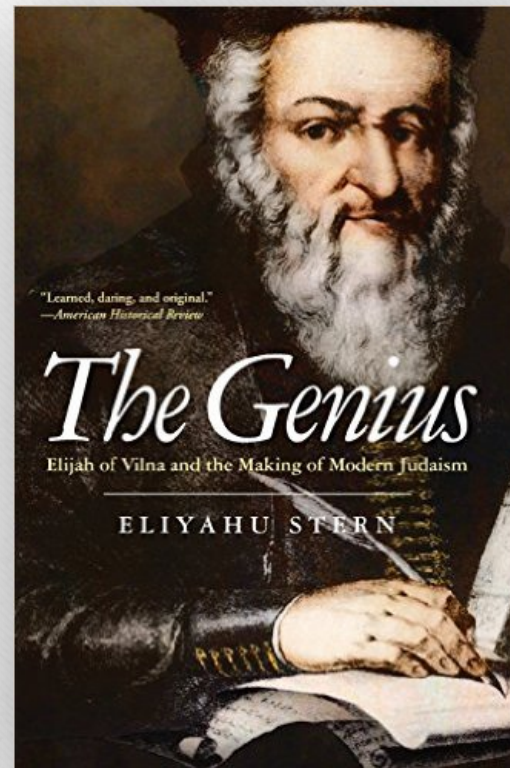
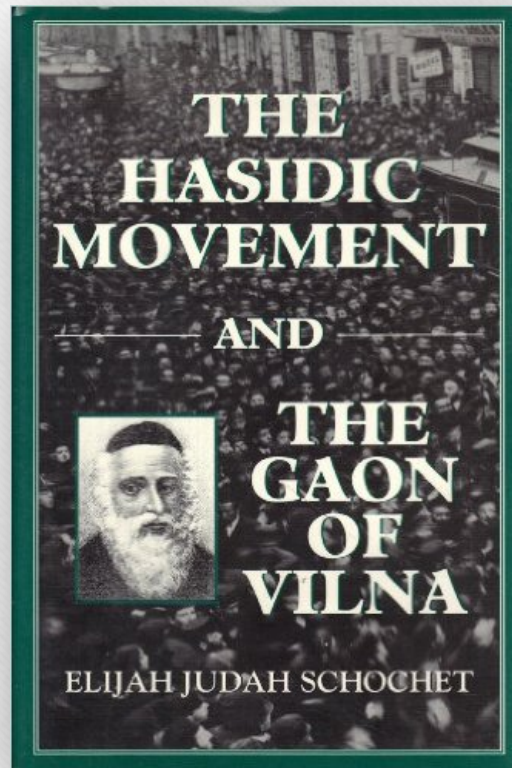


Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Great Rivalries in Jewish History

Boca Raton Synagogue

Additional Reading



Vilna Gaon: Birth & Childhood

- Know as...
 - GRA: **G**aon **R**abbeinu **E**liyahu
 - Vilna Gaon (Genius of Vilna)
 - The Gaon (He is the only one since 11th c. referred to this way)
 - R' Eliyahu ben R' Shlomo Zalman Kremer
- Born: April 23, 1720, 1st day of Pesach, in Vilnius (Vilna), Lithuania
- Died: October 9, 1797



Vilna Gaon: Birth & Childhood

- At three and a half, he was reputed to have mastered Chumash.
- At six and a half he delivered a Talmudic talk in the Great Synagogue of Vilna.
 - R' Yehoshua Heschel, the Av Beis Din was unimpressed with the memorialization and challenged the young Gaon to formulate an original discourse which he did later the same day. (GRA's sons in their introduction to his commentary on Shulchan Aruch – see handout)

Vilna Gaon: Birth & Childhood

- By age seven the GRA had memorized numerous tractates
- By age nine he knew all Tanach and Shas with commentaries
- By age ten he completed studying the Zohar
- By age thirteen he had mastered all Kabbalah as well as the seven secular wisdoms.
- By the time he was the age of Bar Mitzvah he was known as the Gaon.

Vilna Gaon: Birth & Childhood

- The GRA's formal education concluded when he was 6 years old. He had study partners after but no teachers. He was an autodidact.



Personal life

- Married twice
 - Chana and Gittel Bas Meir Luntz
- Children –
 - Had a daughter who died young and several other children including sons who were scholar
- Died – October 9, 1797
- Buried in Vilna
 - <http://seforim.blogspot.com/2012/09/who-is-buried-in-vilna-gaons-tomb.html>



Contribution to Scholarship

- The GRA authored over 70 books and commentaries though none of them was written to be published and none were printed during his lifetime.
- He stopped writing at age 40 and thereafter, what we have is notes others took during his lectures.
- He once offered 150 interpretations for a pasuk in Shir Ha'Shirim, but nobody was fast enough to record them all.
- Many of his manuscripts were lost.



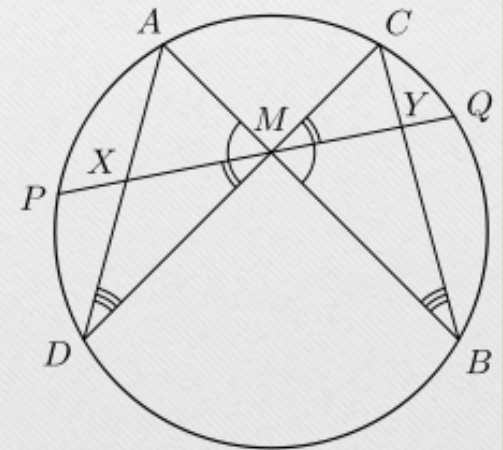
Contribution to Scholarship

- Shnot Eliyahu – Mishna
- Mechilta, Sifra and Sifrei
- Tosefta
- Shas Bavli and Yerushalmi
- Avos D' Rebbe Nassan, Pirkei D' Rebbe Eliezer, Pesikta, Seder Olam Rabbah, Seder Zuta Rabbah.
- Commentary on Shulchan Aruch



Contribution to Scholarship

- Dikduk Eliyahu – Hebrew Grammar
- Tzuras Ha'Aretz: Biblical geography, cartology and chronology
- Wrote on trigonometry, geometry, algebra and astronomy
- He instructed his student R Baruch of Shklov (1740-1810) to prepare a Hebrew translation of Euclid's six books of geometry, because:
 - "If one is ignorant of the secular sciences in this regard, one is hundredfold more ignorant of the wisdom of the Torah, for the two are inseparable."



Contribution to Scholarship



- He studied music
- Had a great interest in medicine. Considered pharmacological medicine but his father talked him out of it as it would take too much time away from Torah learning.
- He encouraged his students to master the seven secular wisdoms, not for their own sake but as a tool to learn and understand Torah.

Kabbalah

- The GRA wrote more on Kabbalah than all of his Chassidic contemporaries combined.
- He was the premier Kabbalist of his generation
- R' Avraham Danzig (Chayei Adom) in his eulogy said that the GRA composed 35 separate works on Kabbalah.



Recognition and praise

- When R' Yaakov Emden accused R' Yehonsan Eibshitz in 1756 of being a Sabbatian, he turned to the young GRA for support and guidance.
- See story of Abba of Glusk (in handout)
- His primary student, R' Chaim Volozhiner described his unique memory in which he pictured every letter of every word of Torah simultaneously and could do searches virtually in his head.

Recognition and praise

- See praise of R' Chaim Volozhener (in handout).
- The Maggid of Dubnow describes the GRA, “We can sense that he is not of our times, but rightly belongs to earlier generations.”
- The Chazon Ish writes, “We deem the Gaon of Vilna to be in the direct line of succession beginning with Moshe, Ezra, Rebbe Yehudah HaNasi, Rav Ashi, Rambam and the Gaon of Vilna. He is regarded as one of the Rishonim.”

Position

- The GRA never held any official communal office or position.
- Yet, he was supported by the community of Vilna with a larger stipend than the Av Beis Din or Rav.

GRA's Principles



- The GRA believed in the primacy and supremacy of Torah study above all else. He interpreted the entire world through that prism.
- “It is well known that the one mitzvah greater than all other mitzvos is the study of Torah.” GRA on Mishlei 1:23
- Mitzvos involve actions of the body but Torah study involves the soul.
- Prayer is limited to this world, but Torah is eternal.
- Just as a fish separated from water will surely die, so too a Jew separated from Torah study.
- Additionally, doing mitzvos is not enough to defeat the yetzer ha'rah, Torah study is necessary.

GRA's Principles

- Righteousness is not just about performance of mitzvos but is predicated on Torah scholarship.
- The GRA gave a metaphor of a large vessel surrounded by smaller vessels. Only when the large vessel is overflowing can the smaller ones be filled.
- Emphasis on Torah Lishma

GRA's character

- Extremely generous – gave 20% to charity and instructed his family to do the same.
- He had ascetic tendencies
- The Gaon's son testified that for fifty years his father did not sleep for more than two hours in a twenty-four hour period.
- Didn't socialize or participate in communal events that took away from study of Torah.
- In his eulogy, R' Chaim Volozhiner said, “while our great teacher was the most illustrious of all the great Torah scholars, he was even more modest and humble than any upon the face of the earth.”



GRA's character

- The GRA encouraged his wife to daven at home because, “In the synagogue it is impossible to escape envy and the hearing of idle talk.”
- For many years the Gaon desired to travel to the land of Israel and settle there. He began traveling at one point but was unable to complete the trip. It was during this trip that the Gaon wrote his famous letter back to his wife (see handout) instructing her on various ethical issues such as educating their children during their separation.
- Ten years after the Gaon passed away, many of his leading students followed in their master's footsteps and settled in the land of Israel.



Israel - Hurva

- The GRA believed that the long awaited redemption depended upon positive steps being taken. He encouraged his disciples to move to the land of Israel.
- One hundred years before the advent of modern Zionism, many did and a number of them settled in Jerusalem.
- Basing himself on the GRA's mystical teachings, his most accomplished student, and leader of the Jerusalem community, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Mishklov, was of the conviction that the completion of a certain Jerusalem synagogue, known as the Churva, was an essential road mark on the path toward redemption



Besht – Ba'al Shem Tov

Birth and childhood

- R' Yisroel (Israel) ben Eliezer
- Born 1700
- Married to Chana, had two children, R' Tzvi of Pinsk and R' Udel.
- Died May 22, 1760 in Mehzbitz
- Called the Ba'al Shem Tov or the BESHT



Ba'al Shem Tov

- In 1703, the BESHT became an orphan and was adopted by the Jewish community of Tluste.
- When he finished cheder, he became an assistant melamed and later a shamash in the local shul.
- He married in 1716 but tragically his wife died soon after.
- He traveled throughout Eastern Galicia and taught children in various communities.

Ba'al Shem Tov

- He was a leader of the movement to care particularly for the poor and ignorant. He encouraged Jews to leave the chronic poverty of the city and choose an agrarian lifestyle.
- Recognizing they would need education for their children, he himself went around teaching.
- The Mezritcher Maggid, the Baal Shem Tov's successor, would later say, "If only we kissed a Torah scroll with the same love that my master [the Baal Shem Tov] kissed the children when he took them to cheder as a teacher's assistant!"
- The BESHT himself said, "The most joyous time in my life was teaching the small children how to say Modeh Ani, Shema Yisrael and Kametz Alef Ah"



Ba'al Shem Tov

- The BESHT married Chana, daughter of Ephraim of Brody and they moved to a village. They had two children.
- He later took a job as a shochet and then a businessman.
- He spent years in the woods with the peasants and learned how to use plants for healing purposes.
- He wrote amulets and prescribed cures.

Ba'al Shem Tov

- After his reputation grew, the BESTH began to share his teachings publicly in the shtetl of Mezhbizt and people from all over came to hear him.
- He garnered a large following that developed into a movement.
- The Baal Shem Tov wrote to his brother-in-law in the Holy Land, Rabbi Gershon of Kitov, in which he describes his encounter with the soul of the Mashiach, the latter giving him instructions as how to hasten his coming. (See handout)



BESHT - Legacy

- He didn't leave any published works but his teachings are recorded by his students.
- 18th century Podolia and Ukraine was devastated one generation earlier by the Khmel'nitsky Massacres.
- The area was highly influenced by Shabtai Tzvi and later Jacob Frank.
- The BESHTS new approaches and ideas were greatly welcomed and needed by this population.

Ba'al Shem Tov

- The BESHT was a mystic. He interpreted the world through Kabbalah and emphasized the redemption of the soul as a requirement for the redemption of the world.
- “For before one prays for general redemption one must pray for the personal salvation of one’s own soul” (*Toledot Ya’akov Yosef*)
- Dveikus – a core principle of the BESHT is the pursuit of dveikus, the ability to connect with and cling to God through all activities, including the mundane.
- A core principle of the BESHT and Chassidus is immanence, that Hashem can be found in everything.

Ba'al Shem Tov

- The BESHT opposed asceticism and thought by engaging the physical and material world we can elevate it and make it into spiritual and religious experiences.
- Torah, tefilla and mitzvos are all there as platforms to achieve dveikus.
- "According to what I learned from my master and teacher, the main occupation of Torah and prayer is that one should attach oneself to the spirituality of the light of the Ein Sof found in the letters of the Torah and prayer, which is called study for its own sake" (*Toledot Ya'akov Yosef*, p. 25)
- The BESHT emphasized the spirit of mitzvos as much as the form.
- He also focused joy, happiness and meaning in the fulfillment of mitzvos.

Tzadik - Rebbe

- The BESHT introduced a doctrine of the Tzadik, a spiritually superior individual who is outstanding in achieving d'veikus.
- These individuals are role models, teachers and their merit can help those around them.
- He himself was considered a Tzadik who enabled miracles.
- The Rebbe, Shlomo of Rodomsk declared, "Whoever believes all the miracle stories about the Baal Shem Tov in *Shivbei HaBaal Shem Tov* is a fool, but whoever denies that he could have done them is an apikores [a heretic]."



Students of the Ba'al Shem Tov

R. Dov Ber of
Mezeritch
1704-1772

R. Pinchas of
Koretz 1728-
1790

R. Menachem
Nachum of
Chernoblyl
1730-1797

R. Yechiel
Michel of
Zlotchov
1721-1784

Ba'al
Shem
Tov

R. Boruch of
Medzhybizh
(GRAndson)

Chasiddus

- A movement that developed in the Western Ukraine during the 18th Century inspired by the students of the BESHT.
- The appellation Chasid goes back to a description of the early pious ones from the Talmud who would mediate and hour before and after prayer.
- It was later adopted by students of the Ari and this new movement took on this name to describe someone who follows a particular leader or Tzaddik.

The Rivalry

- Amazingly, the GRA never once denounced Moses Mendelssohn, Naftali Herz Wessely or any other leader of the Haskalah, Enlightenment movement.
- Yet, he unequivocally and repeatedly condemned leaders of the Chassidic movement and put them in Cherem, excommunication.
- Indeed, he led a movement in opposition called Misnagdim, opponents.
- Why the difference?

Rivalry

- First public opposition came in a 1772 letter issued by the Vilna community with his signature.
- An anonymously written pamphlet called Zemir Aritzim v'Chorvos Tzurim, “Song of the Ruthless and Sharp Knives of the Flint” was published at the same time.
- It was a polemic circulated by the political leadership of Vilna and Brody.
- It was issued in response to the growing popularity among Vilna youth of R' Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk (1730-1788) combined with rumors about bizarre Chasidic behavior growing across eastern Europe.



R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi

-
- Born 18 Elul 5505 – September 14, 1745 in Lyozna, White Russia, now Belarus
 - His father is R. Baruch, a descendent of the Maharal (R. Yehudah Loewe of Prague 1520-1609)
 - Recognized as a child prodigy and genius
 - After a few years of marriage, decides he needs to move to a great Torah center and grow further. Two choices:
 - Vilna – home to R. Eliyahu Kremer, Vilna Gaon
 - Mezherich – Home of the great Maggid, R. Dov Ber
 - Feeling he knew little about how to study Torah but even less about how to pray, he decides to go to Mezherich, a decision that would have a huge impact on Jewish destiny.

R' Schneur Zalman of Liadi

- Arrives in Mezherich in 1764 and quickly enters Maggid's inner circle of disciples.
- 1767, R' Shneur Zalman becomes Maggid in his hometown of Liozna and attracts followers who want to study with him.
- 1772 while forming three chadarim, groups of students, he develops his philosophy of Chabad. 1772 is celebrated as the founding year of Chabad chassidus.

Meeting that Wasn't

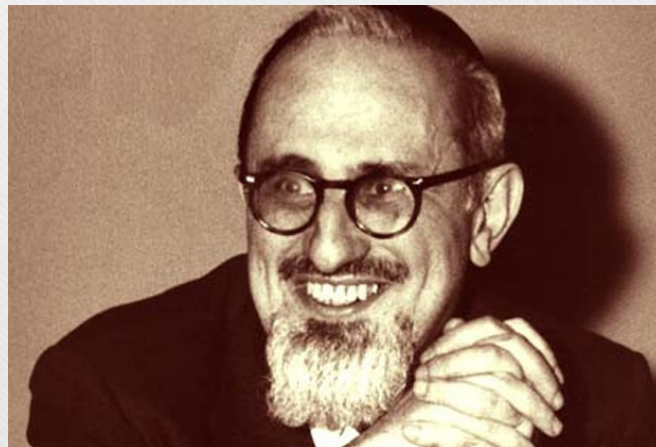
- The pamphlet describes how in the winter of 1772, R' Menachem Mendel attempted to visit the GRA to calm his fears about the new group.
- R' Shneur Zalman was with him and in 1797 wrote a letter to his Vilna followers describing that attempt.

they are heretics and must be brought low. Additional information that supplements and clarifies the picture is found in a passage from the letter of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady: We went to the Gaon he-Hasid, may his candle burn brightly, to his house to debate with him and to remove his complaints from us, while I was there with the Hasid rabbi our late teacher Rabbi Mendel Horosener of blessed memory, and the Gaon closed his door before us twice. And when the great people of the city spoke to him, [saying]: Rabbi, the famous rabbi of theirs has come to debate with his venerable, holy Torah, and when he is defeated, certainly thereafter there will be peace upon Israel, he put them off with delays. And when they began to implore him greatly, he left and went away and traveled from the city, remaining there until our departure from the city. Afterward in our country we traveled to the holy congregation of Shklov also to debate, and we did not succeed. And they did something to us that was not right, they broke their word and the promise they had given us at first not to do anything to us. Only when they saw that they had nothing to respond to our words did they come with a strong arm and suspend themselves from a high tree, ha-Gaon he-Hasid.

Etkes, I. Gaon of Vilna : The Man and His Image.
Ewing, NJ, USA: University of California Press, 2002. p 80-81.

Tradition about the Meeting

- Rav Soloveitchik had a family tradition the Gra was afraid that if he met the Baal HaTanya he would be so overwhelmed by him that he would stop the cherm



Heretics

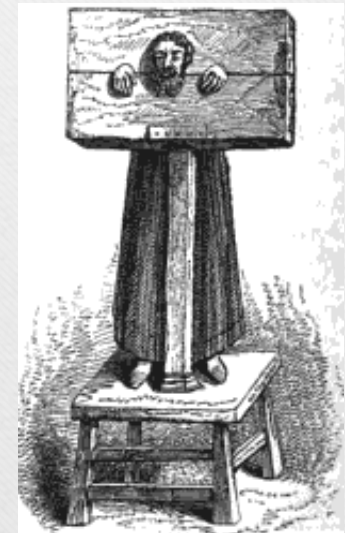
- The pamphlet added that in the course of these events, the GRA labeled R' Shneur Zalman and his peers, “heretics, deserving the rabbinic punishment of death.”
- Additionally, the Vilna leadership’s letter to Brody asserts that the GRA instructed his followers to, “catch them, run after them, minimize their influence, and banish them with full vigor.”

Dissent

- Despite the GRA's prominence, not everyone agreed. R' Chaim of Vilna, respected authorities in their own right, charged that, "the Gaon was a liar, his Torah is full of lies and his belief system is a lie."
- This reaction was not greeted warmly by the people of Vilna who had awe and reverence for their Gaon.
- A Beis Din was convened against R' Chaim and the Karlin Chassidim with whom he was associated.
- The Karlin Chasidim were forced to shut down their private minyan and R' Chaim made to come before the Aron Kodesh in the main Shul and publicly beg forgiveness.
- The GRA forgave him for the personal slight but wouldn't forgive his Chassidic leanings.

Dissent

- A certain Issar was part of the dissent. His punishment was to be locked in a kune, a shaming device like a pillory. With his head locked in place, he was whipped and then made to stand before the community and ask forgiveness.
- A follower of R' Chaim of Amdur, R' Yitzchak Manishes, the Sar Shalom, said if he saw the Gaon, he "would stab a knife into his stomach."
- Additionally, a letter was sent around saying that the polemical pamphlet had been burned.



Excommunications

- In 1781, the publication of 'Toldos Yaakov Yosef' by R' Yaakov Yosef of Polonne, set off more conflict, book burnings and excommunications.
- Again, the GRA issued a letter calling on Jews to “uproot the proliferating Chasidic ideas.”
- These excommunications had only a short term effect.
- Chassidic leaders were not dissuaded, they were energized to grow their movement.

New Strategy

- R' Schneur Zalman, the Ba'al Ha'Tanya, had a new tactic. He acknowledged that the Gaon was one of a kind, *yachid b'doro*, and because of his uniqueness he couldn't understand what the masses need.
- He compared the Gaon to R' Eliezer who was excommunicated for refusing to follow the majority.



Rumors

- Another strategy was to spread rumors that the GRA had withdrawn the cherem and had apologized.
- One such rumor disseminated even said that the GRA begged forgiveness from R” Chaim of Amdur.
- In 1784, the GRA and leaders of Vilna issued a letter clarifying that the excommunication remains in effect and nothing has changed.
- However, the rumors persisted. One imposter even went town to town claiming to be the GRA’s son and saying he has first hand knowledge that is father now embraced the Chasidic movement.



-
- In 1797, the GRA signed two documents denying the claim he had softened his position and detailing his objections to Chasidus including theological heresy and lasciviousness.
 - By this time, many volumes of Chasidus have been produced so the GRA is specific in his criticism.
 - He reiterated, “it is binding upon everyone who feared God to chase after and catch the Chasidim. With any means available, they should be brought before Jewish authorities who have the capacity to deal with them.”
 - However, he stopped short of involving state authorities in pursuing Chasidim as it went against his core principles.

GRA Death

- The GRA died 19 Tishrei, October 9, 1797, on Chol Ha'Moed Sukkos.
- Many Chasidim expressed happiness at the news of his death including with special banquets and music.
- R. Shneur Zalman issued a public letter forbidding such statements and requiring his followers to speak of the greatness of the Gaon.

Others Who Protested

- The Noda B'Yehuda (1713-1793), R' Yechezkel Landau declared that Toldos Ya'akov Yosef should be burned and he allegedly once threw the volume to the earth and trampled it beneath his feet.
- Yet, Chassidim admired him nevertheless for his greatness:
 - Ba'al Shem Tov said he was a “new soul.”
 - R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Ba'al Ha'Tanya said he had no equal in deciding halacha and had never made a mistake in his decisions.
 - Years later, R' Chaim of Sanz, the Divrei Chaim wrote:

“If R' Yechezkel were still alive, I would climb under his table to serve at his feet, because his intentions were all for the sake of Heaven. He was an extraordinarily holy and pious man.”



Other Opponents

- R' Yechezkel issued many rulings disputing Chassidic practices.
- For example:
 - No l'shem yichud formula before a mitzvah (1:y.d.93)
 - No visiting one's Rebbe on holidays (2.oc.94)
- R' Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) also condemned Chassidim vigorously as well as many others.

סימן צג

אם יאמרו נוסח לשם יחוד ושם תלונה על העוסקים
בנסתרות

ועל הרביעית אשר שאל בנוסח לשם יחוד אשר חדשים
מקרוז נתפשט ונדפס בקיודים הנה צוה אני
משיב עד שאתה שאלני נוסח אמירתו יותר ראוי לשאל
אם נאמר כי טוב באמירתו. ולדעתי זה רעה חולה
בדורנו ועל הדורות שלפני זמננו שלא ידעו מנוסח זה
ולא אמרוהו והיו עמלים כל ימיהם בחורה ובמנות הכל
ע"פ החורה וע"פ הפוסקים אשר דבריהם נובעים
ממקור מים חיים יס התלמוד עליהם נאמר תומת
ישרים תנחם והם הם אשר עשו פרי למעלה וגדול מעל
שמים חסדס. אבל בדורנו הזה כי עזבו את תורת ה'
ומקור מים חיים שני התלמודים בבלי וירושלמי לחצוב
להם צורות נשברים ומתנשאים ברום לצבס כל אחד
אומר אנכי הרואה ולי נפתחו שערי שמים ובעצורי
העולם מתקיים אלו הם מחריבי הדור. ועל הדור היחוס
הזה אני אומר ישרים דרכי ה' וצדיקים ילכו בהם
וחסידים יכשלו בס. והרבה היה לי לדבר מזה אבל כשם
שמנוה לומר דבר הנשמע כך מנוה שלא לומר דבר
שאינו נשמע וה' ירחם עלינו.

Why the Strong Protest?

- People mistakenly assume the GRA was a rationalist and Chassidim are mystics and that is source of debate.
- Absolutely not true! GRA was the biggest mystic of his generation.
- He had fundamental reasons for his strong protest.



Why the strong protest?

- Eliyahu Stern suggests that fundamentally, the GRA was vehemently opposed on theological grounds:

A more fruitful approach toward understanding the Hasidic-Mitnagdic debate within the larger framework of modern Jewish history begins by asking the same question about Elijah that Scholem posed toward Hasidism: Is there a central point on which his theology is focused and from which his worldview developed? Here I propose that the most outstanding feature of Elijah's doctrine is his conception of a world, humanity, and religion mediated by strict adherence to values contained in the Torah. Put in a modern idiom, Elijah's ideas are neither theocentric (focusing on the nature and role of the Divine) nor anthropocentric (centered on the human elements of religious life), but are focused on the Torah, the relational medium between these two poles. Like *dveikut*, Elijah's Torah-centric worldview did not sprout from barren ground. It has strong roots in rabbinic literature dating back not just to the medieval Ashkenazic rabbinic tradition, but even to Talmudic times.

Eliyahu Stern

Elijah vehemently objects to the Hasid who sees “*dvekut* [as] the starting point, not the end.”⁵¹ Holiness is not, as some Hasidic masters would have it, lying in the bushes waiting to be found. Rather, it is accessible only to those who have properly prepared themselves through study.

For Elijah, the Torah is the filter through which the materiality of the world must be passed. The world runs through the Torah, and in the process becomes more refined. The Torah relates critically to what it encounters, removing impurities. Likewise, the Torah’s call to transform the self and society leads human beings to a critical relationship with their surroundings.

For the Hasid, God was not to be found solely within the Torah but also in nature and in material objects. According to Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Torah is described as “water that falls from above to down below . . . reaching and infusing the material aspects of life.”⁵² For Dov Ber, the Maggid (preacher) of Międzyrzecz (1710–1772), “God has placed Himself in everything in nature, everything in one’s household which is both pure and impure.”⁵³ Seeing inherent spiritual value in material objects was a form of *unio mystica*, the absorption of God into this world, a position with distant echoes of ideas notably advanced

Elijah strenuously rejected the Hasidic notion that God could be found in all material things as they were. Elijah’s 1797 condemnation of the Hasidim, for instance, admonishes them for seeing God “in every tree and every rock.”⁵⁵

Elijah’s privileging of text and knowledge over theological communion contrasted not only with Hasidism, but also with prophetic models of authority. The Gaon famously rejected divine intermediaries, and his commentaries are based strictly on reason and interpretation. Consequently, he would have looked askance at the approach adopted by his Hungarian contemporary Moses Sofer, who invokes divine inspiration as a source of authority and legal justification.⁵⁶

At least two consequences flow from Elijah’s Torah-centric program. One was the shaping of a major tradition of hermeneutics as the study of principles of interpretation (notably of classical texts). The other was the insistence that access to the Divine, which comes about from understanding God’s word, is determined by one’s rational, interpretive abilities.

Elijah Judah Schochet

He suggests that the GRA's opposition can be summarized in four ways...

1. Separatism and schismaticism
2. Halakhic infractions
3. Ideational and theological infractions
4. Perversion of priorities

Separatism and Schismaticism

- The times were turbulent
- Abolition of authoritative Vaad Arbaah Aratzos left a power vacuum and instability
- Birth of Chasidism contained seeds of anti-establishment separatism and undermined Kehilla structure
- Separate Chasidic shuls were not just places for davening but were shtiebels with a full spectrum of social and religious functions
- Misnagdim opposed the separatism and breaking away of new movement

Halakhic infractions

- Bizarre prayers
 - Clapping, jumping, whirling, twisting, somersaulting and fervent dancing.
 - Shouting and shrieking ecstatically in Yiddish and mouthing unintelligible utterances during parts of davening that one cannot interrupt.



Halakhic Infractions

- See handout for comment of R' Yaakov Emden
- R' Shneur Zalman defended the new practices as the result of a generation that struggled to concentrate in prayer. (see handout)
- Misnagdim saw in the acrobatics in prayer arrogance and ostentatiousness.
- Also criticized for altering nusach ashkenaz to nusach sephard and nusach Ari.

Halakhic Infractions

- Problematic Shechita
 - There were halachik objections to the shechita of Chassidim
 - However, R' Chaim Volozhener explained that the edict forbidding consumption of meat from Chasidic shechita was meant more to create social ostracizing.



Halakhic Infractions

- Inappropriateness
 - Misnagdim accused the Chassidim of being obsessed with matters of intimacy and fantasizing of illicit practices
 - Chasidic literature depicts episodes of temptations and passion that results in self control.
 - Chasidic references even mention strenuous motion in davening and shukeling as a form of zivug, intimacy with Hashem.
 - The Chasidim took these references as metaphors and consistent with the vision of elevating the mundane but Misnagdim saw it as blasphemous eroticism.

Theological Infractions

- Early Chasidus shared similarities with Sabbatian and Frankists movements.
 - A full century after the Shabtai Tzvi controversy, suspicion and accusations continued
 - Frank born a century after, claimed to be a reincarnation of Shabtai Tzvi.
 - In 1756, Frank was put in cherem and a ban was made on studying Kabbalah of the Ari under 40 years old
 - Frank eventually converted to Christianity but even after his death he had followers who believed in him.
 - The GRA and R' Yaakov Emden detected Sabbatian elements in Chassidus like miracle workers, redemption and the focus on a Tzadik to solve one's problems



Theological Infractions

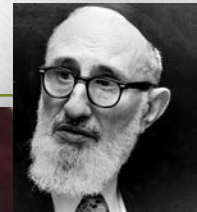
- Chasidic Joy
 - A principle of Chassidus is that sadness separates man from Hashem and one must always be joyous and happy.
 - Misnagdim saw the joy as frivolousness and a state of intoxication.
- Immanence
 - Misnagdim were suspicious of the Chasidic emphasis on finding Hashem in everything because it could easily cross the line of pantheism.
- Tzadik – Rebbe
 - Sounds like a form of idolatry

Theological Infractions

- Perversion of Priorities
 - Rather than prioritize talmud Torah, chasidim prioritize d'veikus, prayer, performance of mitzvos and devotional literature.

Who Won?

- Both!
- Who knows where Chassidus would have gone without the GRA opposition
- On the other hand, Hakadosh Baruch Hu has paskened that Chassidus is valid
- Today, Chassidim emphasize Talmud Torah
- World of Misnagdim looks like Chasidim



The Rebbe and the Rav

- Descendant of the Gaon and descendant of Alter Rebbe close friends.
- Rav taught Tanya



The Rebbe and the Rav



Neo-Chassidus

