**Individualism, Truth, and Anti-Magic for *Tzaddikim* Only:**

**Peshischa-Style Elements in the Philosophy of R. Menachem Mendel of Kosov**

In one passage in his work *Ramatayim Zofim*, R. Shmuel Shinover describes his first meeting with his revered rabbi, R. Simcha Bunim of Peshischa (1765-1827).[[1]](#footnote-1) R. Shmuel had been a hasid of the Galician Admor R. Menachem Mendel of Kosov (1768-1825),[[2]](#footnote-2) and he notes: “When I appeared before him [R. Simcha Bunim] for the first time during Passover, I mentioned to him that on the previous holiday I had visited the holy Rebbe R. Mendele of Kosov *z”l.* [R. Simcha Bunim] said that his feet burned to go visit this Jew, and that he had never met that *tzaddik*.”[[3]](#footnote-3) From the context, the author clearly cites this incident as evidence of the ability of *tzaddikim* to know each other’s souls without any earthly connection. But the reader is moved to ask another question: what was the basis of R. Simcha Bunim’s admiration for R. Menachem Mendel?

To the best of our knowledge, the R. Simcha Bunim was a Polish *tzaddik* who created an elitist, individualistic, almost anarchist form of Hasidism, which reduced the status of the *tzaddik* and bolstered the status of the individual and his personal responsibility. This Hasidism emphasized the inner aspect of worshipping God, required the individual to be truthful with himself, and decried the performance of miracles. R. Simcha Bunim’s Hasidism also nurtured scholarship and demanded constant renewal in worship. R. Menachem Mendel, by contrast, is usually considered to be a Galician-style *tzaddik* who created a popular Hasidism that was replete with magic and that glorified the position of the *tzaddik* and reduced the status of the individual. This form of Hasidism espoused a material form of righteousness that centered on the Rebbe’s miracles. Most of the followers of this doctrine lacked Torah education, and R. Menachem Mendel encouraged his hasidim to pursue simple worship without demanding that they transcend everyday practice.

What, then, caused R. Bunim to want to “visit this Jew”? Of course, the simple answer to this question is that these are ordinary words of admiration expressed by one *tzaddik* for another. Hasidic literature is replete with such statements. Furthermore, admiration for an individual and his qualities does not necessary equal agreement with his ways. This answer certainly can serve as an explanation, or at least part of one. However, analysis of R. Menachem Mendel of Kosov’s book *Ahavat Shalom* raises another possibility, as it reveals a certain proximity between the Kosov method and the Peshischa way on more significant issues. Alongside characteristic formulations of the materialist theory of the *tzaddik* who influences his hasidim in their “lifespan, children, and livelihood,” some statements in this book express support for individualism, truth, and even a certain hesitation regarding the pursuit of miracles. But these elements are colored by one important difference: while the Peshischa method imposed this doctrine on every hasid, with Kosov it was the legacy of the *tzaddik* alone. The exception to this rule is the solid value of renewal, which both methods imposed on everyone. The difference between a requirement for the general public and a requirement for *tzaddikim* is a substantial one. But this proximity to the values of Peshischa, while subordinate to such differences, is difficult to find in other sources.

Could it be that R. Bunim heard that his Galician colleague followed this doctrine, and admired him for that reason? We cannot know. Either way, in light of the extensive interest that Peshischa has inspired both in the academic world and among spiritual seekers in the non-academic cultural space, *Ahavat Shalom* deserves a just reading, as it has never before been the subject of academic research. In the following study, I will analyze the Peshischa-style elements in the thought of R. Menachem Mendel of Kosov. Of these, the sole characteristic that is missing is the quality of Torah scholarship, for despite the fact that R. Menachem Mendel himself “knew how to study,”[[4]](#footnote-4) I did not find any evidence that he tried to develop a true educated elite.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Studies on R. Simcha Bunim abound, and here I will note only those that were published in the past two decades. In English: Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (Oxford :‎ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. R. Menachem Mendel of Kosov was the son of R. Ya’akov Koppel of Kolomei, who is considered in hasidic tradition a student of the Ba’al Shem Tov. He was a student of R. Zvi Hirsch of Nadvorna and R. Ze’ev Wolf of Czarny Ostrów, R. Meshulam Feivish of Zbarazh, and R. Moshe Leib of Sassov (Haim Kahane, *Even Shtiya*, Munkacs, 5690, ch. 2, par. 3-7, pp. 11-13). Some sources attest that he also studied with R. Elimelech of Lizhensk. He became Admor in 5562 (1802). His influence expanded rapidly and spread to the villages, and he subsequently became involved in a dispute with R. Yitzchak of Radwil, R. Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta and R. Chaim of Chernovitz. He was known for his prayer and fatherly concern for his Hasidim. R. Menachem Mendel was the father of the extended Kosov-Vishnitz dynasty. Most of his thought is found in the following books: *Ahavat Shalom* (Lemberg, 5564 [1802] [!] WHAT IS THIS EXCLAMATION POINT?; *Ratzon Menachem* (Marmarosher Publishing Akzion-Drokrey: Marmarosh-Sighet, 5634 [1874]); *Ahavat Shalom Tanina* (Chernovitz, 5644 [1884]). Regarding *Ahavat Shalom*, the catalog of the Israel National Library in Jerusalem notes that this is “One of the books that were falsely attributed to the publisher Jedes Rosanes. The actual year of publication is indicated by the notation in the preface: Menachem ben Ya’akov Kappel *li-prat katan*,” which is equivalent to 5593 [1833]. The references below are to these editions. UNCLEAR -WHERE IS THE PRAT KATAN DATE? [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. R. Shmuel Shinover, *Sefer Ramatayim Zofim al Tanna de-Bey Eliyahu* (Warsaw, 5641 [1882]), part I, ch. 3, par. 14 (p. 56). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We have only one passage in which R. Menachem Mendel shows his strength as a Torah scholar. This section was first published under the title *Parparet Na’ah* in a vastly neglected work: R. Aharon Moshe of Brad, *Seder Zva’ot* (Chernovitz, 1857), last page (unnumbered). At any rate, from the style of this passage, we may determine that R. Menachem Mendel was well-versed in scholarly discourse as a *zaken ve-ragil* [old and experienced man]. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Glenn Dynner indicates that for R. Simcha Bunim, the quality of scholarship served as a political tool, at least to a certain extent, and enabled his students to attain positions of influence in Polish towns (Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 55). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)