**The Relationship of Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa to His Fellow Man as is Reflected in the Hassidic Tales**

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa (1767-1827), is undoubtedly a fascinating, some say unconventional, figure on the landscape of Poland’s Hassidic Movement. In his youth, he received a Torah (Jewish religious) education and was greatly influenced by his father, Rabbi Tzvi, who was a well-known preacher and speaker with extensive knowledge in the various Torah subjects. In his adulthood, Rabbi Simcha became involved in the Hassidic Movement and was accepted and beloved by the righteous men of his generation. He was influenced by diverse sources and he successfully formed relationships with the leaders of the Hassidic sects of his time, including Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak- *The Seer of Lublin*, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak –*The Holy Jew*, Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov, etc. His relationships were not only restricted to the leaders of the Hassidic sects, but also included contact with members of the Enlightenment Movement, and even members of the Polish government. In addition to the study and internalization of Hassidic values, Rabbi Simcha also attained a general education as part of his involvement in trade with various European countries, and as part of his training and work as a pharmacist. All of the above earned him a reputation as an intelligent man with an understanding of the fields of economics and politics; and to a certain extent, Rabbi Simcha Bunim was a ‘man of the world’. During the last thirteen years of his life, he served as a *Rebbe* (*Admor*) who led a community of Hassidim with sharp minds who studied the inner essence of the Torah. Wonders and stories of miracles were not characteristic of his Hassidic courtyard and he demanded of his Hassidim what he demanded of himself – true introspective work without distractions. The way of the world, where things that are different provoke opposition, also influenced Rabbi Simcha’s courtyard. There were people who opposed him from within and outside his Hassidic courtyard; however, Rabbi Simcha remained true to his path and shaped his courtyard according to his unique world view.

Almost every research or religious Jewish studies that aims to describe the Hassidic sect of Peshischa has indicated that their mission was practically impossible, due to the dearth of material that exists on this Hassidic sect. One of the reasons for this is the lack of written philosophical and historical material by the Hassidim and righteous men of Peshischa. Rabbi Simcha’s saying “*I wanted to write a book … and call it man*”, is well known. Rabbi Simcha wanted to write a book, but his wishes did not materialize; and he is probably not the only Hassidic Rebbe whose wish remained purely a thought. This study begins with an apology with regard to the relative dearth of material that exists on Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa; however, one of the goals of this study is to prove that the stories that we do have in our possession enable us to combine line to line and story to story; and from this collection of stories, we can create a biography of the colorful personality of Rabbi Simcha Bunim.

Unique qualities and characteristics have been attributed to the strength of the Hassidic tale among both Hassidim and men of action. Researchers in recent generations have dealt considerably with the characteristics of this literary genre and have not left us a lot of room to make our mark. Reuven Haim Alexander, in his book – “The Wonders of the Holy Grandfather” – writes about the healing strength of the story:

*“…And the truth be told, when I was young and I read the stories of the righteous and holy men that were printed every day, my heart would become excited about serving G-d, even more than when I read books on ethics (*musar*) […]. Currently, in a time in which people have less faith, and heresy and atheism become stronger each day, it is the right time to read these stories, to preserve the faith in the hearts of the Children of Israel […]; and more people will buy and read them and find a cure for their souls, with G-d’s help….”*

The Hassidic tale, therefore, has a curative strength, an ability to bring Jews closer to their Heavenly Father, and strengthen their belief during a time in which heresy is on the rise. It appears that the tale has been given a place of honor in the Hassidic movement; and over the years, people, both members of the movement and those who were not, used it for various purposes in order to attain various objectives. The Hassidic tale, which comprises a subcategory of hagiography, is one literary genre among other Hassidic genres that include homiletic literature (*drush*), customs (*hanhagot*) and letters (*igrot*). The relation of the researchers to the status and role of the Hassidic story is the subject of disagreement. Buber viewed Hassidism as a ‘way of life’; and consequently, the best way to become familiar with it is through Hassidic stories. These stories reflect the Hassidic way of life; and consequently, the initial source for becoming acquainted with the Hassidic Movement is through stories. In contrast, Shalom and Schatz Oppenheimer suggested that the way to learn about the Hassidic world is first and foremost through the homiletic literature; and the contribution of Hassidic literature is minor. A lively debate among researchers of the Hassidic story revolves around the objective of the Hassidic story and the criteria which determine which stories are included in this literary genre and which are not. It appears that even if there is a disagreement regarding the scope of the contribution of the Hassidic story to the understanding of the Hassidic movement, no one disagrees that with the help of Hassidic stories told about or by the righteous man (*tzaddik*), can reveal at least something about the characteristics and world view of the righteous man.

The goal of this study was to focus on the Hassidic tales from the courtyard of Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, and to use them to illustrate the relationship of Rabbi Simcha to his fellow man. An analysis of the stories indicates that Rabbi Simcha Bunim succeeded in helping many people he met on his journeys in the world as well as those people who came to his courtyard to ask for a blessing for ‘their children, lives, and livelihood’, by using empathy in its simple and human form. He knew how to convey a person the feeling that he understood their subjective experience, thereby enlisting him and pulling him toward a better and healthier place. Not all the stories about Rabbi Simcha Bunim told by his followers serve as proof of an objective historical reality. Nevertheless, it appears that they can be used to understand what Rabbi Simcha meant to his students and acquaintances. As Lipson writes in this book – From Generation to Generation: “*We are not dealing with history, rather with folklore, not with facts, rather traditions*.” The traditions of the House of Peshischa succeeded in portraying Rabbi Simcha as a multi-talented man with a wide range of knowledge, who knew how to sensitively and intelligently pave a way into the hearts of many people and to rescue them from their distress.

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