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

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa (Przysucha) (1767-1827), was without a doubt a fascinating, and some say unconventional, figure in the world of Polish Hasidism. In his youth, he received a Jewish religious education and was greatly influenced by his father, Rabbi Tzvi, who was a well-known *maggid* and speaker with extensive knowledge in a variety of Torah subjects. In his adulthood, Rabbi Simcha drew close to Hasidism 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 hasidic 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 limited to the leaders of the hasidic groups, but also included contact with members of the Haskalah Movement, and even members of the Polish government. In addition to his study and internalization of hasidic values, Rabbi Simcha also attained a secular 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 sharp-mined hasidim who studied the esoteric meanings of the Torah. Stories of wonders and miracles were not characteristic of his hasidic court and he demanded of his hasidim what he demanded of himself – true introspective work without distractions. Things that are different tend to provoke opposition, as was the case regarding Rabbi Simcha’s court. His opponents came from within his court and from outside of it; however, Rabbi Simcha remained true to his path and shaped his court according to his unique world view.

Almost every academic or religious study describing Peshischa Hasidism has deemed the task near impossible, due to the dearth of material on this Hassidic sect. One reasons for this is the lack of written philosophical and historical material by the hasidim 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 Rebbe of Peshischa whose wish remained purely a thought. The present study, therefore also 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 few stories that we do have enable us to collate and compare different statements and stories; and from this create a biography of the colorful personality of Rabbi Simcha Bunim.

Unique qualities and characteristics have been attributed to the strength of the hasidic tale among both hasidim and their heroes. Researchers in recent generations have dealt considerably with the characteristics of this literary genre and but there is still room for further research. Reuven Haim Alexander, in his book – “The Wonders of the Holy Elder” – writes about the healing strength of the tale:

*“…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 God, even more than when I read books on ethics (*musar*) […]. In our time, a time in which people have less faith, and heresy and atheism grow stronger every day, it is the proper 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 God’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 hasidic movement, and over the years, people, both members of the movement and those who were not, have used it for various purposes in order to attain various objectives. The hasidic tale, which comprises a subcategory of hagiography, is but one hasidic literary genre among many that include homiletic literature (*drush*), customs (*hanhagot*) and letters (*igrot*). The relation of the researchers to the status and role of the hasidic tale is the subject of disagreement. Buber viewed Hasidism as a ‘way of life’; and consequently, thought the best way to learn about the movement was through hasidic stories. These stories reflect the hasidic way of life; and consequently, the initial source for becoming acquainted with the Hassidic Movement is through stories. In contrast, Scholem and Schatz-Oppenheimer suggested that the best way to learn about the hasidic world is first and foremost through homiletic literature; and the contribution of hasidic stories is minor. A lively debate among researchers of the hasidic tale revolves around the objective of the hasidic tale 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 hasidic tale to the understanding of the hasidic movement, no one disagrees that with the help of Hassidic stories told about or by the hasidic leader (the *tzaddik*), can reveal at least something about his characteristics and world view.

The goal of this study is to focus on the hasidic tales from the court of Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, and to use them to illustrate the relationship of Rabbi Simcha to others. An analysis of the stories indicates that Rabbi Simcha Bunim succeeded in helping many people he met on his journeys as well as those who came to his court to receive a blessing for ‘their children, lives, and livelihood.’ Rabbi Simcha Bunim showed empathy in its most basic, 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 – *Midor Le-Dor*: “*We are not dealing with history, rather with folklore, not with facts, but with 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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