

Uncovering Mussar's and Chassidus' Divergent Approaches toward Enlightenment

By: MOSHE MAIMON

Prologue

Nineteenth-century Eastern Europe was witness to the proliferation of three movements vying for the hearts and minds of its Jewish citizens. On the one hand there was the Haskala with its emphasis on secular knowledge and culture, which, together with its proselytizing atmosphere, was influential in initiating a widespread breakdown of traditional religious values and observance. On the other hand, two distinct movements arose that sought to bolster general adherence to piety and Torah observance. One was Chassidus, which actually became a prominent movement a half-century earlier in south-eastern Poland and quickly spread throughout the Ukraine, Galicia and parts of Hungary. Then there was the Mussar movement which originated in Lithuania and eventually became dominant in the Lithuanian-based yeshivas. This article will attempt to chart the complex attitudes at play in the relationships among these varying movements.

It should be stressed, however, that whereas the Mussar movement was comprised of many schools, it may be assumed there was sufficient overlap in basic areas to speak of the Mussar movement as a unified whole. Similarly, all references to Chassidus are to be understood in a global sense, despite the great diversity among its various factions.¹

Attitudes towards Modernity

It is commonly assumed, and for good reason, that the Mussar movement was founded to counter the spread of Haskala.² Indeed, it has been suggested that the reason R. Yisrael Salanter spent much of his later years in

¹ For the purpose of this discussion this generalization follows the Mussarites' own perception of Chassidus as reflected in their comments analyzed below.

² This view is explored at length by Immanuel Etkes in his book *דברי ישׂראל*

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close proximity to the German centers of Enlightenment was because he intended to learn how to engage and influence those progressive Jews with his vision for individual religious perfection.³ The timing of his foundation of the Mussar movement, coming as it did just as the influence of Enlightenment was beginning to peak in Eastern Europe, would certainly seem to bolster this argument.

Since Mussar was the Lithuanian counterpart to Chassidus in this effort to stem the tide of secularization, a view that has lately gained traction sees the spread of the Mussar movement as the mitigating factor in the traditional Lithuanian *hitnagdut* or opposition to Chassidus.⁴ This view, which has gained wide currency of late, while not untrue, belies the true nature of the Mussar approach and its own view of how it distinguishes itself from Chassidus.⁵ It also simplifies Mussar's approach towards the

סאלאנטר וראשייתה של המוסר (Magnes 1982)[and in English translation: *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement* (JPS 1993); all citations are from the original Hebrew edition unless otherwise indicated (further: Etkes)]. See especially chapter 9 pp. 147–164. This perception was common among many Mussar adherents too. See for example *המאורות הגדולים* (New York 1953), a mussar compendium by R. Chaim Zaitchik arranged according to various important Mussar personalities, p. 93 section 149.

³ This unusual move still remains somewhat of a mystery. This reason was first postulated by Jacob Mark in his biography of R. Yisrael in *Gedolim Fun Unzer Tzeit* (New York 1927) pp. 86-87, and conforms with R. Yisrael's own statements on the matter quoted in *המאורות הגדולים* p. 53. Various other reasons have been suggested as well; see *The Making of a Gadol* (second ed. 2004) p. 365 and p. 383 for a few of them.

⁴ See R. Dov Eliach *Hagaon* (Jerusalem 2000) vol. 3 p. 930 where this viewpoint is cited and dispensed with.

⁵ It is not unreasonable to credit the acceptance of the original viewpoint to R. E.E. Dessler, who postulated that there are really no major fundamental differences in the ideologies of the Chassidim and their opponents, with the furthering of this notion. The Chassidim, for their part, also saw in R. Yisrael Salanter a Chassidic Rebbe prototype. There is an aphorism repeated in Chabad circles to the effect that “after many generations Hashem finally had mercy on the Misnagdim and sent them a ‘Rebbishe’ soul in the person of R. Yisrael, but that too they forfeited.” See R. A.E. Kaplan's *שתי דרכים* in his *מבחר כתבים* p. 14. (See also *Gedolim fun unzer Tzeit* p. 95 for a more incendiary version of this quote where it is attributed to the Rebbe "מהר"ש.)

R. Yisrael for his part seemed to have an ambivalent attitude towards Chabad as evidenced by the following quotation found in a rare approbation by R. Yisrael for an equally rare work entitled *יד אהרן* by *מוויטבסק* *ר' אהרן יחיאל קראל* to wit: "להחזיק דרכו בעבודת ה' כדרכו, ואף כי דרכו נמשך מהחב"ד, אע"פ כן ישרה היא, כי

Enlightenment by lumping Mussar together with Chassidus despite their divergent approaches in dealing with Haskala.

In fact, a variety of clues from among the main proponents of Mussar who made statements distinguishing the Mussar movement from Chassidus indicate a fundamental divide between the two approaches. Additionally, statements from great expositors of Mussar demonstrate that Mussar was willing to acknowledge certain positive aspects of modernity such as the emphasis on intellectual pursuits and progressiveness (*yishuv ha-olam*), even as Mussar opposed the deterioration of religious values these forces engendered. Chassidus, in stark contrast, brokered no compromise with anything seen as Haskala-tainted.

The nuanced attitude of the Mussar movement towards both Haskala and Chassidus needs to be reexamined and reappraised in light of the statements made by the main proponents of Mussar, especially as some of these statements have been ignored and even covered up (quite literally, as we shall see).⁶

Censored statements of Ba'alei Mussar on Enlightenment

In 1970 the late R. Shachne Zohn published a volume entitled *פרקי תשובה וגאולה*, a three-part ethical work, with the *haskamot* of R. Yechezkel Levenstein and R. Avrohom Yaffen⁷ among others. Here is the title page:

"דרך אמת לכת"ר. A copy of this *haskama* has been posted at the following internet address: <<http://www.otzar.org/forums/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=16225>>.

⁶ To be sure, a comprehensive treatment of this topic would require an in-depth study of each of the three movements individually, as well the historical context of their interaction, which is beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is hoped that this article can shed light on a critical distinction between the two movements vis-à-vis their approach to Haskala that is often blurred or ignored completely, and contribute towards a fuller understanding of the underlying issues.

⁷ These two *haskamot* are noteworthy as they reflect contrary opinions regarding the need for rabbinic approbations on Mussar works. R. Levenstein writes in his *haskama*, which was initially given in 1953 for an earlier work (in the present *sefer* the date "ג' לסדר ויגש" is recorded but the year is omitted), that in his opinion there is no need to seek a *haskama* on a work of Mussar that has no halakhic ramifications. On the other hand, R. Yaffen, possibly in response to this remark, commends R. Zohn for seeking his *haskama*, specifically citing R. Yisrael Salanter as arguing that halakhic works require no *haskamot*, because they are intended for scholars who are capable of determining for themselves whether the conclusions of the author are reliable. Mussar works, on the other hand, are intended for the general populace and therefore require rabbinic certification to ensure that they contain only proper guidance. [In light of this, one wonders if perhaps it may be assumed that R. Yaffen had a hand in the self-censorship of

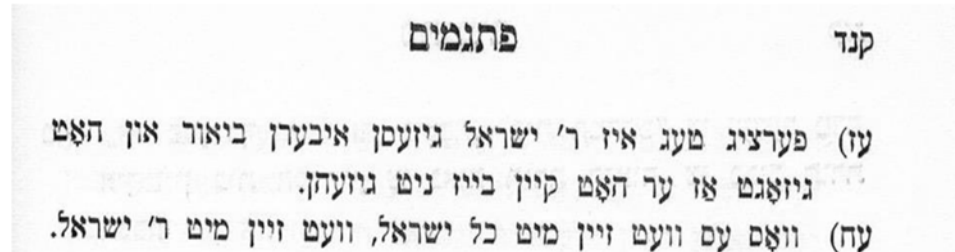


One of the books sections is a collection of (mostly Yiddish) quotes from some of the great Mussar giants from R. Yisrael Salanter onwards. Apparently, some of these printed quotes were deemed problematic and, as is evident from the more than half-dozen copies I have examined,⁸ before it even left the printer offensive words or statements were inked over or pasted over, and in some especially problematic passages both processes were utilized.

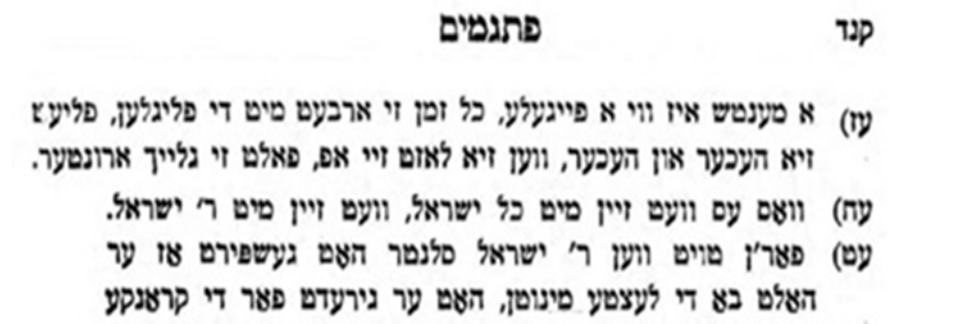
Page 154 no. 77 at first reads like this (from an uncensored copy): "פערציג טעג איז ר' ישראל גיזעסן איבערן ביאור און האט גיזאגט אז ער: האט קיין בייז ניט גיזעהן"

this *sefer*]. Incidentally, in a new biography of R. Aharon Kotler called *אש התורה* by R. Aharon Surasky (Jerusalem 2013) on p. 427 R. Kotler is quoted as holding a position similar to that of R. Yaffan regarding approbations for Mussar works.

⁸ These include copies in private collections as well as some found in Yeshiva libraries, such as that of Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, and even the copy digitalized on *Otzar Ha-chochma*. It seems, however, that some copies have escaped the purge, and the relevant passages from one such copy, from Dr. Shlomo Sprecher's personal library, were used here to draw a comparison.



Later a sloppy insert was appended to read like this (from the *Otzar Ha-Chochma* database copy):



The original contains the deeply controversial statement attributed to R. Yisrael Salanter saying that ‘after spending forty days looking over [Mendelssohn’s] *Bei’ur*, [he] could find nothing wrong with it’. This was later replaced with an innocuous remark equating a person to a bird that can fly only as long as he keeps flapping his wings, but once he stops flapping he drops down.

Considerable attention has been given to the rabbinic consensus to the *Bei’ur* with the general conclusion being that the opposition to the *Bei’ur* was based not on what was contained therein but on what it represented—namely the fostering of assimilation of Yiddish-speaking Jews among a secular German-speaking populace.⁹ Perhaps that is all R. Yisrael

⁹ On this point it would be instructive to read the excellent article by Dr. S.Z. Leiman on the topic of the Chasam Sofer’s attitude towards the *Bei’ur* in *Tradition* 24(3) pp. 83–86. See also the classic responsum of the Lithuanian great R. Yosef Zecharia Stern to answer the calumny leveled against him by the Galician great Maharsham of Brezhan pertaining to his use of the *Bei’ur* פּאַת כּללים פּאַת (שדי חמד כללים פּאַת (שדי חמד מערכת א אות סד).

It is interesting to note that in recent times even R. Moshe Feinstein remarked once in the context of a *shiur* given to students in the Staten Island branch of

meant as well, but it would be difficult to imagine him making the above-mentioned comment had he been as uncompromisingly opposed to *Haskala* as his Chasidic counterparts.¹⁰ Indeed, the very fact that it was censored indicates that R. Yisrael's statement suggested a stance that is untenable in contemporary Chareidi society.

Another quotation found on p. 170 no. 177 from R. Yoizel Horowitz (the Alter of Novarodok) finds in the "פילאזאפן," by which he almost certainly means the secularly trained academicians, those who are capable of acquiring true knowledge although they are often led astray, whereas among בני תורה, who possess an abundance of knowledge, one finds those incapable of ingesting it. Here is the original (covered over with a blank adhesive in most copies):

קעז) די פילאזאפן האבן גיהאט מיט וואס צו קויפן, האבן זיי אבער
ניט גיהאט „וואס" צו קויפן, די אנשי התורה האבן וואס צו
קויפן, האבן אבער ניט אלע מיט וואס צו קויפן.

This quotation is indicative of R. Yoizel's willingness to recognize the benefit afforded by the enlightened critical approach practiced by those far afield from his worldview, even though they use their ability to their detriment and fail to acquire true knowledge.

This is consistent with the understanding that Mussar was willing to acknowledge the good in the *Haskala* and channel that good towards the betterment of religious observance, and, in the process, rectify the negative aspects of *Haskala* itself. This may be what R. Yoizel meant in his distinction between Chasidus and Mussar as originally quoted on p. 165 no. 93: "חסידות פערדעקט דעם שמעטניק, מוסר ראמט אויס" = "Chasidus only covers over the dung heap while Mussar cleans it out."

Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim that he personally had seen the *Bei'ur* and considered it to be "א פייע פירוש" and in his estimation the main problem with Mendelssohn was to be deduced from the effect generated on his students rather than on anything in Mendelssohn's personal conduct. (I heard this from R. Eli Meir Cohen of Lakewood who was in attendance at that *shiur*.)

¹⁰ By way of comparison, consider the statement attributed to R. Yechezkel Halberstam of Shinava to the effect that one should disable the popular Mishna commentary *Tiferes Yisrael*, by binding both of its edges together, on account of his "maskilic" leanings as evidenced by his citation of Mendelssohn. See R. Abba Leiter's preface to *Sbem M'shimon* (R. M.S. Zivitz memorial volume—Pittsburgh 1965) p. 48. I dare say that there are none who would consider the *Tiferes Yisrael* to be more dangerous than the *Bei'ur* itself.

צב) „החכם הולך והכסיל מטייל” ווייל ער איז צוגעבונדן.
צג) חסידות פערדעקט דעם שמעטניק, מוסר ראמט אויס.
צד) א גאנצן לעבן דארף מען זיך פירן אין חדר.

In some copies, such as this one from *Otzar Ha-chochma*, this line is simply covered over:

צב) „החכם הולך והכסיל מטייל” ווייל ער איז צוגעבונדן.
צג)
צד) א גאנצן לעבן דארף מען זיך פירן אין חדר.

In other copies the offending statement was replaced with a different one reading “די גרעסטע חכמה איז 'ואני בתומי אלך'” “the greatest wisdom is [the fulfillment of Psalms 26:11] ‘I shall walk in innocence.’”

צב) „החכם הולך והכסיל מטייל” ווייל ער איז צוגעבונדן.
צג) דיא גרעסטע חכמה איז „ואני בתומי אלך.”
צד) א גאנצן לעבן דארף מען זיך פירן אין חדר.

The original comment seems to be indicative of a trend in some Mussar circles to disparage Chassidus for its unwillingness to tackle the problem head-on, instead just covering it over. What is the ‘dung heap’ referred to in this quote? It does not seem too far-fetched to assume that it refers to the lure of assimilation and progression brought on by Haskala. According to such a reading, R. Yoizel is classifying the difference between Mussar and Chassidus precisely on the basis of the former’s ability to contend with the new reality versus the latter’s inability to do so.

In this context, it is interesting to note the remarkable comments of R. Simcha Zissel Ziv (the Alter of Kelm) who, upon hearing of the day of fasting and prayer observed by German Jewry on behalf of their Russian brethren who were suffering under a series of pogroms, contrasted their sympathetic behavior with that of Lithuanian Jewry from whom he could not expect a similar reaction. To explain this phenomenon he wrote the following in a letter to his son:

ומהו הסיבה לזה? האם הם יראי אלקים יותר מאחינו דפה, זה לא! אבל סיבת הדבר... במדינתנו אינם למודים ומורגלים בבחינת ישוב העולם... וחסר מפני זה מעשה הישוב הארצי... משא"כ במדינות ידועות, ראיתי בעצמי, כי למודים המה בחכמת ישוב העולם ונקל להם לבוא להרגש הזה... ויתדבק בו הרגש דאגת זולתו, כי זה מענין הישוב... וע"כ ראינו בעינינו מי

שהיה מחוכם יותר במוסר אנושי (כי מוסר הוא ג"כ בחינת דרך ארץ
כידוע אצל הפילוסופים) היה קרוב יותר לדעת התורה.¹¹

Essentially, R. Simcha Zissel sees in the דרך ארץ of German Jewry a step in the direction of proper עבודת ה' which is built on the solid foundation of ישוב העולם.¹² This step he finds lacking among his fellow countrymen, in particular those who have not adopted the Mussar approach, which he considers to be a form of דרך ארץ in accordance with the view of the 'philosophers.'

This view is consistent with R. Simcha Zissel's earlier attempt to create a yeshiva in Grubin where the students would receive training in the Russian language along with rigorous Mussar-based *limudei-kodesh* instruction.¹³ This bold step was not necessarily representative of tendencies to be found in other factions among Mussar adherents,¹⁴ but it does demonstrate a degree of willingness to embrace the new modes and work with them that characterized one feature of R. Yisrael's approach in founding the Mussar movement.

In a sense, this approach was natural for the Mussar movement, which of necessity required a degree of intellectualism for its successful application. Careful introspection and unwavering commitment to perfection of the mind are hallmarks of the Mussar approach, and it is therefore to be assumed that it would naturally follow the course of intellectual

¹¹ אור רש"ז בראשית סי' לט p. 51-52. Part of this letter was translated in R. E.M. Klugman's biography *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Brooklyn 1996) p. 196 from where I first learned of its existence.

¹² Amazingly, this sentiment almost exactly mirrors the statements made by Wesely in his work *דברי שלום ואמת* where, in calling for reform in the Jewish educational system, he made his infamous distinction vis-à-vis תורת האדם and תורת אלקים explaining that it is necessary for one to first master the basic level of דרך ארץ before proceeding to master the religious precepts that make up תורת אלקים. For such statements he was severely censured by the Noda B'yehuda. See the latter's "דרושי הצל"ח" chapter 39.

¹³ This included classes in *Tanach* given by R. Nosson Tzvi Finkel, later known as the Alter of Slabodka.

¹⁴ The school was eventually forced to close due to lack of support. See *The Making of a Gadol* where the issue of R. Yisrael's refusal to visit the school is discussed extensively on pp. 620–634 (see also pp. 505–515). R. Avigdor Miller explained in a recorded public lecture on the Mussar movement (Tape #537) that R. Simcha Zissel had his master's full support, but his refusal to visit was out of concern of creating a storm of protest were it to be known that he supported the venture.

progression taking place all around it to some extent. This is in contradistinction to Chassidus, which was a movement geared toward capturing the heart and enthusiasm and as such was more preoccupied with the external than the internal (at least according to the perception of the Ba'alei Mussar¹⁵).

Censored statements of Ba'alei Mussar on Chassidus

Some other quotations in this book also highlight fundamental differences between Chassidus and Mussar, emphasizing the intellectual superiority of the latter, such as the following two quotes from R. Yisrael on p. 151 no. 37, "חסידים זאגן אז זיי האבן א רבי, מתנגדים זאגן זיי דארפן ניט קיין רבי, "The Chassidim say they have a *Rebbe* and the *Mitnagdim* say they don't need a *Rebbe*, however both are mistaken these [*Mitnagdim*] need a *Rebbe* and these [Chassidim] don't have a *Rebbe*"; and no. 38 "חסידות כאשר'ט בראנפן, און = מוסר פסל'ט טרערן" "Chassidus renders whiskey kosher [i.e. holy] while Mussar finds fault even with [insincere] tears):

לז) חסידים זאגן אז זיי האבן א רבי, מתנגדים זאגן זיי דארפן
ניט קיין רבי, און ביידע האבן א טעות, די דארפן א רבי, און
די האבן ניט קיין רבי.
לח) חסידות כשר'ט בראנפן, און מוסר פסל'ט טרערין.

This page was later fixed to look like this:¹⁶

לז) „מסירת נפש“ מיינט אז מען זאל אמאל אוועק נעבען נפשיות פאר
אהבת השם.
לח)

¹⁵ This theme is central to R. Kaplan's discussion of the differences between the two movements. R. E.E. Dessler also uses this distinction to characterize their differences in his *מכתב מאליהו* vol. 5 p. 35–39. See also vol. 4 p. 278 where Musser and Chassidus are juxtaposed as *יראה* and *אהבה*. Of course there is a large amount of generalization in this classification and it should be pointed out that there exists an abundance of parallels between basic Mussar teachings and ideas formulated in classic Chassidic texts. R. Dessler in particular was known to synthesize the two disciplines in his own teachings. See especially an interesting article on the topic of "החסידות ושיטת המוסר מבית מדרשה של קלם" in *היכל הבעש"ט* no. 33 p. 233.

¹⁶ The first of these quotes is reported in other sources as well, for example in R. A.E. Kaplan's essay *שתי דרכים* reprinted in his *מבחר כתבים* p. 14.

And another quotation from R. Yoizel on p. 166 no. 105 has him saying "חסידות שניידט אפ פון העכערס ווי מיט א מעסער" = "Chassidus cuts a person off from growing higher as if with a knife":

חסידות שניידט אפ פון העכערס ווי מיט א מעסער. (קה)

Which today looks like this:

(קה)

Or in some copies covered over with the added message "ס'איז נישטא לעבלעך אין רוהניות אדער הייס אדער קאלט" = "There is no 'lukewarm' (i.e. mediocrity) in spirituality, rather it is either hot or cold":

ס'איז נישטא לעבלעך אין רוהניות אדער הייס אדער קאלט.

The distinction between Mussar and Chassidus is further discussed by a leading student of the Mussar school, R. Avraham Eliyahu Kaplan, in an essay called *שתי דרכים*. First published in German in 1923, it was later published in a collection of his articles called *בעקבות היראה*. It has since been reprinted in his *מבחר כתבים* pp. 11–21. This unique article addresses many of the fundamental differences between the two movements with a variety of anecdotal illustrations¹⁷ and should be the point of departure for any further discussion of this topic.

Additionally, any such discussion should also pay close attention to the difference in attitude regarding the new reality brought about through the rapid spread of Haskala, with Chassidus attempting to block it out or cover it over, so to speak, and Mussar attempting to harness its creative power to transform it from a destructive force to a constructive force.

Mussar's historical and geographical context

This may be better understood when viewing the Mussar movement within the context of the traditional Lithuanian society that spawned it

¹⁷ Amazingly, many of these same stories with the accompanying analyses and remarks are found in Jacob Mark's *Gedolim Fun Unzer Tzeit* in the section on R. Yisrael Salanter. The similarity is too striking for coincidence. Compare in particular pp. 14–17 in Kaplan with pp. 95–100 in Mark, especially those dealing with R. Yisrael's encounter with the Rebbe of Chabad. (See also above fn. 3.) Mark's work, published in 1927, also consists of articles that had previously appeared in print, so while it's tempting to assume he was 'influenced' by what he had read from R. Kaplan, who does cite (anonymous) sources for his information, it would be instructive to determine when and where his essay on R. Yisrael first appeared.

and understanding that society's perspective with regards to Haskala at that time. It may be contrary to the contemporary notion prevalent today that views all Haskala, be it religious or irreligious, as detrimental to traditional Jewish observance and hence all proponents of Haskala as being beyond the pale, but in Lithuania of old many from among the rabbinic elite were not so unfavorably disposed to those of maskilic bent, in particular those who were known to be scrupulous in their personal religious observance.

To be sure, the term "Haskala" maintained its negative association with an assault on the traditional mode of observance and on rabbinic authority, but there existed a wide range of degrees with which to measure adherents of Enlightenment, and the bar for exclusion was much higher in Lithuania than in Chasidic Hungary, Galicia and Poland.¹⁸ It may be that the natural inclination of Lithuanian Jewry as a whole towards intellectual Torah study made them more tolerant of an intellectual movement such as Haskala.

Thus we find among Lithuanian rabbis of that era those who refer respectfully to רנה"ו or R. Naftali Hertz Wessely¹⁹ such as this quote from "ויפה המליץ החכם מהרנ"ו ז"ל": עגת אליהו by R. Eliyahu Sarahson²⁰ p. 226: or the following quote from R. Yudel Epstein²¹ in his *מנחת יהודה* p. 430:

¹⁸ An interesting article by the author of the Onthemainline blog (<http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/2009/09/whats-maskil.html>) is a good starting point towards dissecting and classifying the various shades of European Haskala.

¹⁹ See R. Eliezer Brodt's comprehensive essay on the topic of Wessely and the various attitudes exhibited towards this man and his works on *The Seforim Blog* <<http://seforim.blogspot.com/2011/11/using-works-of-shadal-and-r-n-h-wessely.html>>. Note too R. Avigdor Miller's assessment of the man in *A Divine Madness* (Monsey 2013) pp. 71-72, to wit "a naïve and poetic man who dwelt in the clouds of emotion."

²⁰ R. Sarahson (Mikhailishok 1800 – Jerusalem 1879) was a popular Lithuanian Rabbi and *Maggid* in the middle part of the nineteenth century. He later immigrated to Jerusalem where he became one of the heads of the Ashkenazic community. (His son, Kasriel, was the editor of *Der Yiddishe Taggeblatt* in New York and was widely renowned as a community activist.) His work *עגת אליהו* was published in Amsterdam 1859 and republished in Jerusalem 2007. It was also reprinted in Jerusalem 1913 with 'הערות מדעיות מאת החכם היים מיכלין'. This *sefer's* star-studded list of *baskamot* includes those from R. Jacob Ettlinger (the Aruch la-Ner), R. Tzvi Hersh (Maharatz) Chajes, R. Yehoshua Leib (Maharil) Diskin, R. Yisrael Salanter, and R. Meir Leib Malbim (whose signature it mistakenly transcribed as *משה ליב* in place of *מאיר ליב*) among many others.

²¹ R. Yudel's personal encounter with Haskala has been described in detail by his daughter Pauline Wengerov in her *Memoirs of a Grandmother* (Stanford University

"ברם זכור הוא לטוב הרנה"ו ז"ל כי כן פירש כל הענין יפה יפה עד"ז בספריו הישרים". Both of these individuals, one a leading darshan and the other an important lay leader and scholar, are representative of the general fabric of the rabbinic elite, and these comments are indicative of Lithuanian rabbinic personalities' willingness to acknowledge the good to be found among the religious Maskilim. This was not always the case in the rabbinic elite of Chasidic-inclined Hungary or Galicia, where even religious Maskilim were completely shunned. An example of this is the backlash against R. Tzvi Hersh Chajes (Maharatz Chiyos).²²

Another example of the rabbinic tolerance of and appreciation for some aspects of Haskala can be seen from the approbations given for Isaac Ben-Jacob's *Otzar Haseforim* (Romm Vilna 1880). This work, while it is basically just a bibliography of all or most of the Seforim then known, is clearly a product of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school, and it was prepared and edited by definite Maskilic prototypes starting with Ben-Jacob himself (who together with Adam Hakohen Lebensohn²³ republished Mendelssohn's *Bei'ur* in Vilna). Yaakov Reifman in his letter of praise for the work (page corresponding to XXIX) actually sees the work as a boost for the beleaguered Maskilim for proving, by the mention of many works of general wisdom written by acclaimed Torah scholars, the need and ability to fuse together Torah with *Chochma*.

Yet, despite the gulf separating Vilna's prestigious heads of its rabbinical court, R. Shlomo Hakohen and R. Yosef b. Refael, from these Maskilim, they saw fit to grace the work with their approbation. Indeed, these two sages were effusive in their praise for the work and its author, even citing many examples to prove the necessity of such a work. To get an idea of how unlikely this would be in a country like Poland, contrast this with the report of many Chasidic personalities who distanced themselves from using the famed Vilna Shas on account of its having been published by the Romm publishing house, which also published Maskilic works.

Press 2010). See especially the analysis of that encounter in the introduction to that volume pp. 34–38.

²² See (Rebbetzin) Bruria Hutner David's thesis *The Dual Role of R. Zvi Hersh Chajes – Traditionalist and Maskil* p. 442. Her perception of R. Chajes as more of a Maskil than traditionalist is countered by that of Meir Hershkowitz in his biography of R. Chajes (*צבי הירש חיית*) Mossad Harav Kook 1972) where he is portrayed primarily as a traditionalist.

²³ See Onthemainline's interesting item on him at <<http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/2010/03/adam-hakohen-chafetz-chaim-and.html>>.

Maskilic Mussar tracts studied in Slabodka

Consider also the case of *Toldot Adam*. This work was a widely cherished Lithuanian quasi-biographical work (on the life of R. Zalman of Volozhin) that also doubles as a popular ethical tract. It has been demonstrated that this sefer was greatly influenced by basic Haskala literature such as Wessely's *Divrei Shalom V'emet* and Mendelssohn's *Netivot Shalom* among others.²⁴ This work was authored by one of Vilna's leading Rabbinic elite in the early nineteenth century, and this may be indicative of the measure of acceptance and availability of these Haskala works even in Lithuanian rabbinic circles.²⁵

Against this backdrop it's not that hard to digest the fact that some of Slabodka's cherished Mussar tracts were in fact authored by Maskilim! One famous example is the popular Mussar work *Cheshbon Ha-nefesh*, which was written by a Maskil from Galicia, Menachem Mendel Lefin, and was based on material found in the writings of Benjamin Franklin.²⁶ There is reason to believe that Lefin intended for this book to counter the rise of Chassidus on ideological grounds²⁷ but, admittedly, it contains no overt anti-Chassidism and probably was not viewed as such by the Mussar proponents who later popularized its study.

What did R. Yisrael Salanter, who has been credited with initiating the republishing of the sefer,²⁸ know of Lefin's Maskilic background? It could be argued that R. Yisrael was not fully aware of Lefin's 'Maskil' credentials and was swayed by the fact that the sefer carried approbations of many

²⁴ See Edward Breuer, "The Haskala in Vilna: R. Yehezkel Feivel's *Toldot Adam*" in *The Torah U-Madda Journal* vol. 7 pp. 15–40.

²⁵ Investigation of the issue of the Lithuanian Rabbinic view towards Mendelssohn would be instructive in this regard. One erstwhile protégé of Mendelssohn, R. Shlomo Dubnow, enjoyed wide Rabbinic support when he abandoned Mendelssohn's project and sought backing for creating his own *Bei'ur*. The issue of his identification with Haskala has been hotly contested. See R. Yehoshua Mondshine's article in *אור ישראל* vol. 16 pp. 151–159, as well as the detailed response by R. David Kamenetzky in *ישורון* vol. 8 pp. 718–759 and vol. 9 pp. 711–755.

²⁶ See the interesting exchange of viewpoints on the topic of this work and its author/translator in *דגל מחנה ראובן - אליצור* (Bnei Brak 2003) pp. 329–335.

²⁷ Nancy Sinkoff elaborates on this point in an article called "Benjamin Franklin in Jewish Eastern Europe" in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61:1 (January, 2000) pp. 133–152.

²⁸ The source of this report is Steinschneider's *עיר וילנא* cited by Etkes (English ed. p. 86).

leading Rabbis into believing that Lefin was of mainstream Rabbinic persuasion. In my opinion, such a claim would be hard to accept considering R. Yisrael's widespread reputation as possessing an uncannily sharp perception and worldliness.

On the other hand, R. Yisrael may well have deliberately ignored Lefin's unsavory personal beliefs, subscribing instead to the view espousing קבל האמת ממי שאמרה.²⁹ If we are to believe that R. Yisrael deliberately ignored Lefin's background, choosing instead to separate the man's personal beliefs from the views expressed in his work, the application of this principle is in and of itself suggestive that Lithuanian-bred R. Yisrael Sallanter took a more tolerant view of Haskala and Maskilim than did his Chassidic counterparts. The latter party viewed making any such provisions as brokering compromise with the dreaded Haskala and was most unwilling to make such distinctions.³⁰

Be that as it may, although it may be assumed that not many in the Slabodka Yeshiva actually knew the true nature and association of its author, this would not appear to be the case with another sefer cherished by R. Aizik Sher. This is the work *Sefer ha-Middot* composed by R. Naftali Hertz Wessely (Veisel).³¹ This work, as well as his *Yein Levanon*, a commentary on *Pirkei Avot* authored by Wessely, was regarded as an excellent Mussar tract, and they were studied assiduously in the Mussar yeshivas.³² In fact, it is even reported that R. Simcha Zissel of Kelm referred to Wessely's Mussar works in his own Mussar writings only to have these references censored by the publishers many years later.³³ Conversely, it is difficult to imagine toleration of such works on any level in classic Chassidic circles.

²⁹ See Etkes pp. 135–146 for further elaboration on this topic.

³⁰ R. Yosef Zecharia Stern (above fn. 9) writes explicitly that matters of Mussar and *Chochma* (primarily secular disciplines) may be studied even from non-Jewish sources. R. Mondshine (above fn. 25 pp. 158-159) has demonstrated that this is a fundamental difference between Chassidim and 'the later Mussar scholars.'

³¹ On R. Aizik Sher's high regard for this *sefer* see *בית אהרן וישראל* issue 47 p. 149. See also R. Yechiel Perr's excellent biography of his father, *Tzidkus Stands Forever* (n.p. 2011) p. 35.

³² A recent reprint of *ספר המדות* in Jerusalem (2002) is accompanied by an introduction that seeks to rehabilitate Wessely's reputation in the contemporary Yeshiva world by proving his widespread acceptance among various Gedolim after his time. The publishers of a new edition of *יין לבנון* (Rishon Le-Zion 2003) build on this introduction and go one step further, emphasizing this work's acceptance and popularity in the pre-war Mussar yeshivas.

³³ Testimony of R. David Tzvi Hillman quoted in *בית אהרן וישראל* (above fn. 31) and cited in the preface to *יין לבנון* p. 28.

Summation

Whereas in the eyes of Chassidic leaders, Haskala was a dreaded foe to be completely minimized and eradicated, Mussar personalities did not view Haskala itself as public enemy number one. Surely, the deterioration of religious values and observance could easily be linked to the spread of Enlightenment and as such made Haskala the easy target for pro-Mussar advances, but, for the Mussar masters, the detrimental effect of Haskala, rather than Haskala itself, was the enemy. As such, Haskala was not singled out for eradication but rather the good in it was to be embraced and whatever evil it entailed was to be rejected.

R. Itzele Blazer (Peterburger) in his introduction to *Ohr Yisrael*, which can also be described as the movement's mission statement, makes no mention of the spread of Enlightenment as the cause for the urgent need of the adoption of the Mussar program, and neither does R. Yisrael himself in his famous *Iggeret ha-Mussar*.³⁴

The stated goal of the Mussar movement was to reinvigorate the increasingly uninspired masses with a heightened religious awareness, and to re-emphasize the importance and value of *middot tovot* and *yirat shamayim* among the learned elite. It seems that, if anything, the rapid spread of Haskala and its infiltration of yeshiva circles was garnered as proof of the necessity of Mussar but not as the *raison d'être* for the study of Mussar.

R. Yisrael was a proponent of Mussar in a way that even the enlightened intelligentsia could apply themselves to it and be better for it. This explains his great admiration for R. Samson R. Hirsch and his achievements, even going so far as to attempt to have his works translated into Russian and disseminated in Eastern Europe for the benefit of those Jews who couldn't read the German originals.³⁵ This is unlike the efforts of the

³⁴ Etkes (pp. 161–164) has demonstrated that anti-Haskala concerns inform many of the salient points stressed by R. Yisrael in his various Mussar letters, yet the fact remains that Haskala itself is never singled out and identified as the foe in any of them. Incidentally, it would seem that this is partially the reason that Maskilim were often wont to make the seemingly incredible claim that R. Yisrael was really one of their own. See Etkes pp. 341–342 for his summation of this interesting phenomenon.

³⁵ See the article by R. Naftoli Hertz Ehrmann detailing the meeting between these two Torah leaders (translated from the German original, which first appeared in *Der Israelit* 1906 47:12) in *Two Giants Speak* (n.p. 1994). Despite the high regard in which R. Hirsch was held by his Lithuanian contemporaries, his program of *Torah im Derech Eretz* was generally considered to be a less-than-desirable option, to be used only as a stop-gap measure in countries

Chasidic masters whose approach to dealing with the burgeoning Haskala was one of utter exclusion and intolerance. It appears that these distinct approaches stem from the different milieus from which they grew.

Conclusion

One can now ask, To what extent were the various approaches successful in mitigating the harmful anti-religious effects of Haskala? From our vantage point it is clear that both approaches have met with great success, and we can verily detect the hand of Providence in arranging their individual successes in their separate locales. Yet different social patterns have emerged of late that have essentially restructured the different Charedi camps of today. The lines that once distinguished *Mitnagdim* and Chassidim have been considerably blurred, and this has yielded some confusion regarding the historical realities that were once the hallmarks of their respective groups.

The point emphasized in this article is that the past must be understood according to its historical context if it is to be understood at all. All too often we attempt to explain the past according to our own current perspectives. Sometimes that is all we have to go by, but we should always be mindful of the fact that matters then were not as they are now. When we ignore that historical context and try to refashion history in our own contemporary image, we lose the true appreciation of the valuable lessons to be learned, and these are lessons that have much to teach us, even today. ❧

that suffered the effects of assimilation, such as Germany had, and was deemed inappropriate for Eastern-European Orthodoxy. See R. Boruch Ber Leibowitz's responsum on this matter in his (ה"א קידושין סי' כ"ז) *ברכת שמואל*. An alternative view was expressed by R. Dovid Freidman of Karlin in his *עמק ברכה* (Jerusalem 1882) p. 14b where he is critical of the Rabbis who had completely repudiated those who were drawn into Haskala, as opposed to the 'חכמי אשכנז השרידים אשר' ה' יקראו – עדת הארטעדאקסין' who had devised a strategy whereby 'one could have a profession as well secular knowledge in one hand, while the other hand partakes of the fruits of the tree of life and the tree of [divine] knowledge.' It would be instructive to determine where R. Yisrael himself stood on this issue.