

***To Become an Emotional Person:
The Role of Emotion in the
Pre-Holocaust Hasidism of R. Kalonymus
Kalmish Shapira of Piaseczna***

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Abstract

Hasidism has often been defined as an emotional approach to service of the Divine. This emotional emphasis is particularly visible in the writings of the martyred Rebbe of Piaseczna, R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira [henceforth R. Kalonymus or R. Shapira] (1889–1943). Throughout his writings he refers overtly to the centrality of emotionalism to Hasidic service and states openly that Hasidism is entirely dependent upon the emotional state. R. Shapira utilizes sophisticated psychological descriptions of the centrality of emotion for human well-being and even discusses “emotion” and how it differs from “sensory perceptions” and “personal strengths.” In attempting to train his readers in achieving an advanced emotional state, R. Kalonymus offers numerous mystical and meditative techniques that are expressly designed to enable the practitioner to “reveal his soul.” The goal of this emotional state is to reach an even higher state of spiritual ecstasy leading to mystical union and the attainment of prophecy. In addition to his theoretical writings, which include numerous discussions regarding emotionalism, many of the passages in his own mystical diary, *Tzav Ve-Ziruz*, offer a unique window into his own spiritual-emotional matrix.

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In the last several decades much has been written about R. Kalonymus. Biographical studies have been augmented by works on his Holocaust theology, his educational theory, and his mystical practices. Several scholars have touched upon the topic of emotionalism as it relates to other aspects of R. Kalonymus's system.¹ The present study is an attempt to survey different aspects of emotionalism in the writings of R. Kalonymus as an independent area of study. I will focus on the topics of emotional education (*Hovat Ha-Talmidim*), the desired emotional state of the Hasid and triggers to achieve that state, such as music (*Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*), and R. Kalonymus's diary entries, especially regarding the third meal of Shabbat (*Tzav Ve-Ziruz*). This should serve as a case study of the use of emotional techniques by one religious thinker/leader both in his own community and as an author of spiritual handbooks addressed as well to anonymous readers. As the Holocaust opens an entirely new realm of emotional responses (*Aish Kodesh*), it deserves a separate study.²

Rabbi Shapira of Piaseczna

R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira of Piaseczna was born in Grodzisk, Poland, in 1889, to Rebbe Elimelekh and Rebbetzin Hannah Berakhah Shapira. On both sides he was descended from a long line of distinguished Polish Hasidic Rebbes, including R. Elimelekh of Lizhensk, the Noam Elimelekh; R. Israel Hapstein, the “Maggid” of Kozienice; R. Yaakov Yitzḥak, the “Seer” of Lublin; and R. Kalonymus Kalman Epstein, the author of the Hasidic work *Ma'or Va-Shemesh*, after whom he was named.³ His father died when he was three and he was educated

¹ Notably, James Maisels, in his 2014 PhD dissertation, devoted much space to the concept of emotionalism as it applies to the topic of “self-transformation.” Also, regarding the “self,” see David Maayan, “Self-Creation through Texts: Kalonymus Kalman Shapira's Incarnational Theology” and Zvi Leshem, “Mystical fraternities: Jerusalem, Tiberius, and Warsaw: a comparative study of goals, structures, and method” in Don Seeman, Daniel Reiser, and Ariel Evan Mayse (eds.), *Hasidism, Suffering and Renewal: The Prewar and Holocaust Legacy of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira* (Albany, 2021), 131–152.

² Not surprisingly, the Holocaust-era writings focus largely upon painful and “dark” emotions, such as suffering, fear, anxiety, hopelessness, depression, and despair, and how to engage positively with them.

³ Regarding R. Shapira's biography and writings, see Aharon Suraski, *M-Toldot Ha-Admor*, 1–28; Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, 1–14; Zvi Leshem, *Between Messianism and Prophecy: Hasidism According to the Piaseczner Rebbe*, 10–11; Ron Wachs,

largely by his older nephew, R. Yerahmiel Moshe Hapstein of Kozienice, who later became his father-in-law.⁴ In 1909, R. Yerahmiel Moshe died and, at the age of twenty, R. Kalonymus became the Hasidic Rebbe of Piaseczna, a suburb of Warsaw, a few years later becoming the town's official Rabbi as well. After the First World War, the Rebbe moved to Warsaw, although he continued as the Rebbe of Piaseczna, where he spent several months each year.

Polish Jewry in the interwar period was faced with a spiritual crisis of massive proportions. Economic and demographic factors, combined with the influx of modern trends, contributed to a radical process of secularization, especially among the youth. Even Hasidic communities found themselves threatened by alienation and defection.⁵ The Piaseczner Rebbe sought to combat these trends on a wide variety of communal and educational fronts. One of his strategies was the organization of secret societies for the elite of the Hasidic community. Devotion and service to God, experienced in a group setting, would enable each individual to reach spiritual heights he could not attain on his own. Perfecting their own relationship to God, the participants would eventually create a ripple effect revitalizing the Hasidic world. In 1923 R. Kalonymus founded Yeshivat Da'at Moshe in Warsaw, and it rapidly became a leading Hasidic yeshivah, educating thousands of students until the outbreak of World War Two.⁶

Flame of the Holy Fire: Perspectives on the Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira of Piaseczna; Daniel Reiser, *Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira: Sermons from the Years of Rage*, vol. 1, 13–80. On emotionalism in his writings, see Zvi Leshem, *Between Messianism and Prophecy*, 66–67; Ron Wachs, *Flame of the Holy Fire*, 95–102; James Maisels, *The Self and Self-Transformation in the Thought and Practice of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira*, 383–484. Regarding the influence of *Ma'or Va-Shemesh* on R. Kalonymus, see Zvi Leshem, “From Krakow to Piaseczna: The Influence of *Ma'or Va-Shemesh* on the Thought of R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira of Piaseczna” (Heb.) in (Levi Cooper, Ariel Evan Mayse, and Zvi Mark, eds.), *Ma'or Va-Shemesh: History, Philosophy, Lore, and Legacy* (Ramat Gan, 2024), 333–357.

⁴ For more on the influence of R. Yerahmiel Moshe on R. Kalonymus, see Zvi Leshem, *Hasidic Mystical Fraternities*, 107–130.

⁵ Moria Herman, *Ha-Yahas L-Bnei Noar Be-Hasidut* (Heb.), 7–22. See the pertinent chapters as well in Seeman, Reiser, and Mayse (eds.), *Hasidism, Suffering and Renewal*. There was also, however, a sort of Hasidic “renaissance” in Poland as well. See Glenn Dynner, *The Light of Learning: Hasidism in Poland on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Oxford University Press, 2023); David Biale, et al., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 597–621.

⁶ Shaul Stampfer, *Hasidic Yeshivot in Inter-War Poland* (Heb.) 365, n. 46.

At the beginning of the Nazi attack on Warsaw (September 1, 1939), most of R. Kalonymus's immediate family were killed. Throughout the war, in the Warsaw Ghetto, he continued to give clandestine sermons to strengthen the religious faith and resolve of his Hasidim. Eventually his writings were buried in the ground as part of the Emanuel Ringelblum *Oneg Shabbos* Archive. After the liquidation of the ghetto, he was deported and murdered in the Trawniki labor camp in November 1943. After the war, his writings were discovered and published in Israel.

Considering his Hasidic background, it would be incorrect to see his stress on emotionalism as an innovation, as his predecessors also put a strong emphasis on the emotional aspect of Divine service. However, the degree to which it permeates all his writings and numerous aspects of his system, including his pedagogic approach, as well as his occasional use of psychological terminology, would seem to be unprecedented in Hasidic literature.⁷ He also hints to a hierarchy of emotional states, from the “frivolous” to those that bring one close to exalted spiritual states bordering upon prophecy. It is interesting to note that about half the chapters of his educational work *Hakhshtar Ha-Avreikhim* contain some form of the word “emotions” (*bitragsbut*, *l-bitragesh*, *l-mitragesh*, *mitragesh*, *l-bitragsbuyot*) in the chapter headings.

Emotions

In 1884, the American psychologist William James published a short essay titled “What Is an Emotion?” This was a pivotal moment in the understanding and study of emotions, which has progressed intensively in the last 140 years. According to the late scholar Jan Plamper, one of the key questions in approaching “emotions” is which discipline we utilize in approaching the question. As he writes regarding James:

...it is significant that that both question and answer come from a psychologist. This leads us to the prior question of who defines what emotions are.... successive disciplines have addressed the issue.... it can be said that in the West, from antiquity until about 1860, it was primarily philosophy and theology that defined the thinking about emotions, together with rhetoric, medicine, and literature, and that after 1860 experimental psychology became dom-

⁷ Ariel Evan Mayes, “The Devotional Talmud: Study as a Sacred Quest” in Seeman, Reiser, and Mayse (eds.), *Hasidism, Suffering, and Renewal*, 83–98; Dorit Peretz, “Admor as Pedagogue: The Educational Theory of the Piaseczner Rebbe” (Heb.), *Mibol*, 34 (2021), 17–40.

inant, this dominance has shifted to neuroscience in the late twentieth century.⁸

The problem of understanding and defining emotions, however, runs deeper, as it is dependent upon the very definition of a very elusive word-concept. As Plamper continues:

Are we really talking about the same object when we refer to “emotion” as understood... in the neurosciences of 1996 and “emotion” as used... for experimental developmental psychology in 1979? Or Barbara Rosenwein’s use of the term for historical studies in 2002.... Or the use of the term “emotions” by Charles Darwin in 1872, and the entry “affection” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1910/11 which states that affection “does not involve anxiety or excitement, that it is comparatively inert and compatible with the entire absence of the sensuous element”?.... In brief: is there a unity of meaning sufficient to permit us to deal with these very different terms originating in very different fields, times, and cultures as “emotion”?

At first glance it certainly does not look like it. Even in such a limited field as English-language experimental psychology, ninety-two different definitions of emotion have been counted between 1872 and 1980. The sheer difficulty of defining emotion is often treated as its leading characteristic.... two psychologists... argued that “everyone knows what an emotion is, until asked to give it a definition.”⁹

In the context of this paper, it would be exceedingly difficult and problematic to provide a rigid definition of “emotion” (*regesh*), as used by R. Kalonymus. Instead, I prefer to allow the various texts that I will quote and analyze to speak for themselves. In doing so I will also follow Plamper’s lead, as he wrote, “I have decided to use ‘emotion’ as a meta-concept. As a synonym I will also use ‘feeling.’”¹⁰ In utilizing this somewhat fluid definitional approach to “emotions” in the writings of R. Kalonymus, I am also influenced by the approach of Moshe Idel, who, in characterizing Jewish mysticism in general, and Hasidism in particular, has shied away from overly rigid definitions, preferring instead a broad approach which incorporates “models” as opposed to “structures.”¹¹

⁸ Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2012), 9–10.

⁹ Ibid., 10–11.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹ See Moshe Idel’s methodological remarks in his *Kabbalah*, xvi–xvii, *Hasidism*, 20–24, and *Vocal Rites*, 4–8, 11.

For although on the one hand, R. Kalonymus was a very systematic thinker and writer in comparison with much of both earlier and contemporaneous Hasidic (mostly homiletic) literature, at the same time, I think that he himself would have hesitated to “define” “emotion,” and instead, preferred to “describe” it in the various contexts of different writings and circumstances. It seems to me that his words, “With our human intellect we are incapable of examining or understanding the nature of any spiritual matter,”¹² would apply for him here as well.

Emotionalism in Hasidism

The Piaseczner Rebbe did not appear in a vacuum. A descendant of the greatest Polish *tzaddikim*, he inherited their approach to Hasidic spiritual piety and expanded upon it. Additionally, he was imbued with a strong historical and messianic consciousness, and this propelled him to attempt to revive the original Hasidism of R. Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (the Besht), which he felt was in great decline in his day.¹³ Within the central ethos of this pristine Hasidism had been a strong privileging of *devekut* (cleaving to the Divine) and other emotional aspects of religious life over the intellectual, including the study of Torah.¹⁴ Additionally, the particular school of Polish Hasidism to which R. Kalonymus was heir and identified with, was the more populist, mystical and even magical strands associated with R. Elimelekh of Lizhensk and R. Yaakov Yitzhak, the “Seer” of Lublin, as opposed to the seemingly more elitist and intellectual school of Peshischa, founded by R. Yaakov Yitzhak, the “Holy Jew,” and continued by his disciple R. Simḥah Bunim and his

¹² *Hovat Ha-Talmidim*, 190.

¹³ This is a widespread view, expressed as well by such thinkers as R. Avraham Isaac Kook and Hillel Zeitlin, as well as academic scholars. For a summary, see Leshem, *Between Messianism and Prophecy* (Heb.), 15–32. However, recent scholarship has presented a more nuanced view and identifies a Hasidic “renaissance” as well. See Dynner, *The Light of Learning*; Daniel Reiser, *Twentieth Century Hasidism and the Beginnings of Neo-Hasidism* (Heb.).

¹⁴ Gershon Scholem, “Devekut or Communion with God,” *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality* (New York, 1974), 203–227; Idel, appendix to the Hebrew version of Scholem’s article; Assaf and Liebes (eds.), *The Latest Phase* (Heb.), 259–267. In this essay, I basically follow Scholem’s view of *devekut* as an intense emotional state.

students,¹⁵ a school whose impressive literary output is completely ignored by R. Kalonymus in his writings.

Let us begin with a crucial quote from R. Kalonymus's early work *Hovat Ha-Talmidim*:

This is the essence of Hasidic theory, that it is insufficient to use only one's intellect in serving God, for the connection through intellect is not a lasting one. One may know intellectually that one must serve God alone with all aspects of his thoughts, speech, and deeds; nonetheless, his heart and entire body remain distant. Rather one must connect his entire soul and bodily vitality, to penetrate one's soul, lift it, and arouse it to ecstasy in every *mitzvah*, in Torah and prayer. Then he will experience spiritual pleasure and happiness... Then, in addition to one's *mitzvot* and service being more uplifted and holier, he can also be more confident that he will not submit to his evil inclination...¹⁶

Here R. Kalonymus describes Hasidic Divine service as being holistic, including not only the intellect, but also the emotions and even the body.¹⁷ He speaks here in almost ecstatic terms of happiness, pleasure in Torah study, prayer, and the fulfillment of *mitzvot*. R. Kalonymus, in contrast to the classic Lithuanian ethos, will go further, granting full legitimacy even to the seeking of emotional religious experience.

The word *hitlabavut*, which I will translate as "ecstasy," is central to R. Kalonymus's description of emotional states and aspirations. This term was in wide usage in earlier Hasidic writings; its full range is beyond the scope of this article. It does, however, seem to me that a source of R. Kalonymus's definition of ecstasy can be identified in the writings of his great-grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Horowitz, the Seer of Lublin. The Seer writes, "And there is an even higher level, in which one does not think of himself at all, but rather with tremendous *hitpashtut ha-gashmi'ut* [divesting of the corporeal] and very great ecstasy (*hitlabavut*)."¹⁸ This is very close to R. Kalonymus's definition as well.

¹⁵ Michael Rosen, *The Quest for Authenticity: The Thought of Reb Simḥah Bunim*. For a different view, see Tsippi Kauffman, "For Ecclesiastes all is vanity, but the *Song of Songs* is the opposite: Towards the way of R. Simḥah Bunim of Peshischa (Heb.), *Tarbitz* 82/2 (2014), 335–372.

¹⁶ Shapira, *Hovat Ha-Talmidim*, 21–22.

¹⁷ On the centrality of service through corporeality in the writings of R. Kalonymus, see Zvi Leshem, *The Light in the Wall* (Heb.).

¹⁸ Yaakov Yitzhak ha-Levi Horowitz, *Zikaron Zot* (Heb.), 114. Elijah, *Changes in the Religious Thought* (Heb.), 386. Although it may appear that the Seer's emphasis

R. Kalonymus uses several technical terms to describe various levels of spiritual emotionalism. The first is *bitragshut* [emotionalism] and the second is *hitlabavut* [ecstasy]. Ron Wachs, in a seminal article,¹⁹ writes, “*Hitlabavut* stands on a higher level than *bitragshut*. A person can feel very emotional but at the same time can remain conscious of and concerned about his personal worldly issues... in the state of ecstasy, one is given over totally to the object of that ecstasy until he completely forgets his own needs.” This description is strikingly like that of the Seer: “one does not think of himself at all.”

It is also important to note that R. Kalonymus occasionally uses the term *bit'orerut* (arousal) as a synonym for *bitragshut*, “arousal and emotionalism, in truth both are one and the same.”²⁰ It is important to point out that in the early work *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah* (pp. 20–21), R. Kalonymus does not clearly define the terms *hitlabavut* and *bitragshut*, and he uses them somewhat interchangeably. Only in the later *Hakhshtar Ha-Avreikhim* does R. Kalonymus clearly define them. I believe that this reflects a sharpening of terminological clarity and not an actual shift in his viewpoint. Similar is his use of the word *bitpa'alut* (wonder) as in *Hakhshtar Ha-Avreikhim*. “Wonder is the same as emotionalism, even the lowest a person experiences... it is the beginning of revealing one’s soul.”²¹

Regarding the hierarchy of spiritual states, R. Kalonymus writes as follows in *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*: “When the Lord helps you at holy times of emotionalism and even ecstasy.”²² Here we see clearly that *hitlabavut* is a higher stage than *bitragshut*. It is also significant that the transition from

of divestment from the corporeal might contradict my claim above that R. Kalonymus advocates for an embodied spirituality, this is not the case. We need to distinguish between the general preference of holistic service and the occasional peak spiritual moments which require one to partially “leave one’s body” on a temporary basis.

¹⁹ Ron Wachs, *Emotion and Ecstasy in the Educational Theory of R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira of Piaseczna* (Heb.), *Hagut Ba-Hinuch Ha-Yebudi* 4–5 (2003–2004), 71–88. Regarding the use of the term *hitlabavut* in early Hasidism, see Safran, *Maharal and Early Hasidism*, 136–137. See also Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* (Heb.), 131–134.

²⁰ Ron Wachs, *Emotion and Ecstasy* (Heb.), 78–79, based upon Shapira, *Hakhshtar Ha-Avreikhim*, 7a–7b, points out that another sign of achieving *hitlabavut* is that “at that time one is unable to refrain from it, or to desist from being affected by love and fear [of God].”

²¹ Pp. 6a–7a.

²² P. 49.

bitragsbut to *bitlahavut* is described as one of self-annulment (*bitul*): “as *bitragsbut* and *bitlahavut* intensify, more personal power and senses are annulled, and if they reach the point at which one burns ecstatically like a flaming fire the more one’s entire being is annulled and this is *bitlahavut*.”²³ From all of the above it is clear that for R. Kalonymus *bitragsbut* and *bitlahavut* are central and crucial facets of Ḥasidic service, and he therefore devotes so much of his writing to instructions as to achieving them. “The holy service of *bitlahavut*... even though this does not constitute the entirety of Ḥasidism, nonetheless Ḥasidism cannot exist without it. The service of *bitlahavut* is indispensable, and this is because Ḥasidism follows in the path of the Prophets.”²⁴ Here we see that the goal of *bitlahavut* (and the preceding stage of *bitragsbut*) is the attainment of a spiritual state akin to prophecy.

Torah Study and Ḥasidic Emotional Education

R. Kalonymus’s educational approach is an integral part of his Ḥasidic-spiritual worldview, part of his project of rejuvenating Ḥasidic society,²⁵ and not only a response to the crisis of secularization in interbellum Poland. In this context we will briefly touch upon his approach to Torah study. He writes: “Torah study in and of itself is not sufficient, rather the most important point is to be a Ḥasid. And what is Ḥasidism dependent on—the heart. Hashem demands one’s heart, with self-sacrifice.”²⁶

²³ *Hakhsarat Ha-Avreikhim*, pp. 6b–7a. Regarding the Ḥasidic concept of *bitul* [self-annulment], see Rachel Elior, *Unity of Opposites: The Mystical Theosophy of Ḥabad* (Heb.), (Jerusalem, 1993), 131–139. See also Idel, *Hasidism*, 114. The word *bitlahavut* comes from the Hebrew *lahav*, “flame.”

²⁴ *Hakhsarat Ha-Avreikhim*, p. 7b. Prophecy receives considerable attention in the writings of R. Kalonymus. See Wachs, *Prophecy and Ḥasidism* (Heb.), 39–51, and Leshem, *Between Messianism and Prophecy* (Heb.), 76–88; Daniel Reiser, *Imagery Techniques in Modern Jewish Mysticism* (Boston and Berlin, 2018), 83–96. The connection between ecstasy and prophecy in Judaism was contested by Abraham Joshua Heschel and Benjamin Uffenheimer. See Leshem, *Between Messianism and Prophecy* (Heb.), 66.

²⁵ Zvi Leshem, *Emotional Ḥasidic Education* (Heb.). See Mayse, above n. 7. For an analysis of Ḥasidic educational programs in general in interbellum Poland, see Dynner, *The Light of Learning*.

²⁶ *Hakhsarat Ha-Avreikhim*, p. 22b.

It would be incorrect to deduce from here that R. Kalonymus does not demand great diligence [*ḥatmadah*] in study, for the opposite is true, as we can see from this example in the passage from *Bnei Maḥshavah Torah*:

Be very careful not to waste even a moment... ten wasted minutes should be to you as a serious transgression, God forbid, for any wasted time is like a capital crime, for the time you waste is part of the years of life that pass by, never to reappear... when it is impossible to study... Torah... and Ḥasidism... and certainly when you walk in the market, focus your thoughts and heart upon a Torah idea.²⁷

It is also important to note that R. Kalonymus emphasizes in-depth study as a tool to achieve *devekut*: “One who studies in depth... this is the essence of Torah study through which one merits to cleave to the Lord.”²⁸

Considering the above, what is the main role of the educator (or parent) in raising a Ḥasidic youngster? To empower the student to truly internalize the Torah that he studies, Ḥasidic education must place great stress upon emotional education and emotional intelligence.²⁹

The Desired Emotional Stance of the Ḥasid

We will now explore the introduction to R. Kalonymus’s first work, *Bnei Maḥshavah Torah*, composed in the early 1920s for his most elite followers. As this book is in a sense a blueprint for his later spiritual writings, it is of crucial importance in understanding his system. Here as well, emotion is a central theme, beginning in the introduction *Seder u-Matarat Ha-Ḥevrah* [the Order and Goals of the Fraternity]:

... Our Father, Compassionate Father, have mercy on us. Awaken within our heart a spark of desire and awareness so that we will know that it is not enough to be like a mere slave, the son of a maidservant. It is true that he too serves the King, but he works behind the millstones, far from the King. He does not hear the King’s words, nor does he ever experience any satisfaction or pleasure from the King’s radiance. Instead, he serves the King with a closed mind and a dull heart. But our desire and longing are to be among those who are called “the children of the Lord your God,”

²⁷ *Bnei Maḥshavah Torah*, 53.

²⁸ Shapira, *Hovat Ha-Talmidim*, 58.

²⁹ Leshem, *Between Messianism and Prophecy* (Heb.), 66–67; Wachs, *The Flame of the Holy Fire* (Heb.), 95–123.

so that in our service of God, whether in learning Torah, prayer, or other commandments, we feel our closeness to God. We wish to be like the son rejoicing to greet his father after an absence of years and after having suffered in his great yearnings for his father. When we serve God, we should also feel our soul racing to greet its father, our soul that has yearned for Him all day and all night. Now it races and melts as it is poured onto the lap of its Father (*beik aviv*) in Heaven.

And not only at times of prayer and other service should we feel close to God and take pleasure from the radiance of His glory, may He be blessed. Rather, our thought should always be so clear, strong, and connected to His holiness that it can overwhelm our senses. Then our senses will be unable to confuse our thoughts and turn them astray and tell us that “this world you see is everything, and this physicality that you sense is everything.” And even more, our senses will be subjugated to the thought of our heart, so that they themselves will perceive God’s holiness permeating all being. Then, with our own eyes, we will see that we are in God’s Garden, Eden, standing before God’s Throne of Glory...³⁰

This remarkable passage is a clear statement of R. Kalonymus’s vision of the spiritual life based upon the traditional Hasidic dichotomy between the slave boy and the prince.³¹ In this allegory both serve the King. However, whereas the slave may perfectly obey the royal decrees, he does so only out of fear, without any emotional connection to his service. What he lacks is the emotional content of feeling connected to the King whom he serves. The prince, on the other hand, serves out of a deep emotional bond with his father. He feels closeness, yearning, and rejoicing. He takes pleasure from the “radiance of His glory.” Here we have a clear statement of the legitimacy, even the necessity, of the seeking of emotional religious experience. This is vastly different from the ethos of the classic Lithuanian approach in which perfection in *mitzvah* observance is the goal of Jewish spirituality.³² Accordingly, any emotion-

³⁰ Shapira, *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*, 7. The translation is from Shulman, *Experiencing the Divine*, 3–4.

³¹ See, for example, Elimelekh Weissblum, *Noam Elimelekh* (Jerusalem, 1999), 84; Moshe Haim Ephraim, *Degel Maḥaneh Ephraim*, 30–31.

³² On the Lithuanian approach see Norman Lamm, *Torah Lishmah in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries* (New York, 1989). See, as well, Allan Nadler, *The Faith of the Mithnagdim: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rapture* (Baltimore and London, 1997). Zvi Enfeld, *Torat Ha-Gra u-Mishnat ha-Hasidut: Elu v-Elu Divrei Elohim Hayyim*, (Jerusalem, 2010). See also, Joseph B. Solove-

al experience is at best a side benefit and at worst an ego distraction or perhaps even a form of idolatrous self-worship!

The second point worth noting is the description of the soul's complete melting into the bosom (literally "the lap," *beik avin*) of the King. Not only is the sentence fraught with strong anthropomorphic cargo, but it also expresses a clear aspiration for an extreme form of mystical union which seems to call for the annihilation of the individual as he melts into the Divine. Unlike in the usual Hasidic trope of *ratzo va-shov* [running and returning],³³ here there is no mention of the devotee's return from this extreme mystical state. Although it would be wrong to assume that R. Kalonymus is advocating for actual death in mystical union, he seems to want to bring his followers to the very edge.³⁴ Lastly, the juxtaposition of emotions ("thoughts of the heart") with sensory

itchik, "A Theory of Emotions," in David Shatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky, Reuven Ziegler (eds.), *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition* (New York, 2003), 179–214. I would also argue that the Hasidic model of education and piety that R. Kalonymus promulgates in his writings should be seen as a softer, more circular model of religious fraternity than the standard "Lithuanian" *yeshivah* model. I refer here to the "classic" model. The situation in the "Mussar" ("ethical") *yeshivot* was different, with a much stronger emphasis on emotions in Divine service. See Immanuel Etkes, *R. Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement: Seeking the Torah of Truth* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem, 1993), and Benjamin Brown, *Lithuanian Musar Movement: Personalities and Ideas*. For a comparison of R. Kalonymus's spiritual system with that of the "Mussar Movement," see Reiser, *Imagery Techniques*, 318–342. The "classic" Lithuanian model, which privileges intellectual achievement over emotions, tends to a more rigid hierarchical model, in which the leadership rests in the hands of a learned aristocracy and an overly emotional approach is at best bemusedly tolerated, at worst suspect of constituting a potentially dangerous distraction from one's studies. For a forceful statement of this position, see Aaron Lichtenstein, "Law and Spirituality: Defining the Terms," in Robert Hirt, Adam Mintz, and Lawrence Schiffman (eds.), *Jewish Spirituality and Divine Law* (New York, 2000), 3–33.

³³ Ezekiel 1:14.

³⁴ Of course, given the nature of this inspirational text, it is possible that R. Kalonymus is making use of rhetorical hyperbole. If, on the other hand, his words are meant more literally, then they should be analyzed in the context of the debate between Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel regarding *unio mystica* in Jewish mysticism. See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1941), 122–123; Idel, *Kabbalah*, 59–73. See also Adam Afterman, *And They Shall Be One Flesh: On the Language of Mystical Union in Judaism* (Leiden, 2016); Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle, 1994).

perceptions is also significant. Here, and in later passages in *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*, R. Kalonymus strives to reframe the Ḥasid's emotional/intellectual balance. Instead of the rational model in which one's worldview is based upon the sensory intake and subsequent analysis of data from the outside world, one endeavors to reach the opposite. By living a mystical spiritual life in which closeness to Divinity is palpably real and experienced in all aspects of life, one transforms the entire way sensory data is received. Instead of determining one's perception of reality, sensory information will automatically be received into a framework in which faith is not open to question as it is inherently experiential. As faith is paramount and palpable, challenges to it from the outside world are simply not feasible. Nothing is more real than God Himself and all new information is filtered through that lens.³⁵

Revealing One's Soul

Another major theme in *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah* is the need to, and the techniques for, "revealing" or "opening" the soul. R. Kalonymus writes:

We might say that it is insufficient to speak of expanding one's thought, we must also discuss how to arouse the heart's ecstasy.... If we begin with a holy arousal this is difficult for one [to understand]. So, we return to our method of uplifting a person from a lower physical aspect. We will begin with a physical arousal, since every arousal, even the physical, is a key to the soul.

He illustrates this concept with a parable:

³⁵ On the interplay of sensory perceptions and spiritual reality, see as well Shapira, *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*, 7, 30–31. On the interface between mystical experience and its interpretation by the mystic himself, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, (Princeton, 1994), 52–58. Wolfson's discussion is against the background of the scholarly debate regarding universalism vs. contextualism in the understanding of mystical traditions in differing religious traditions. Wolfson himself, following Scholem, leans towards a contextual approach while at the same time moderating it to consider the possibility of some universal aspects of mystical experience. For a similar discussion regarding emotions and practice theory, see Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History?): A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History and Theory*, May 2012, vol. 51, No. 2, 193–220. Following Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "habitus," Scheer discusses the significance of social setting on the practice of emotions.

Like one whose son was falsely accused and imprisoned, and it is impossible to see him other than when the jailer enters the cell for interrogations. The foolish father, only allowed into the cell for legal matters, discusses only those with his son. However, the wise father says to himself, “even though the jailer opened the cell only for legal matters, nonetheless I am inside with my son. I will hug and kiss him, and speak to him words of love from father to son.”³⁶

In R. Kalonymus’s explanation we will be able to discern several distinct stages in the emotional/spiritual experience. First there is an emotional trigger which sets off the process by “opening the soul.” “Every emotional experience from worldly matters arouses a spark in one’s soul, however, the soul is now open slightly, we will try to reveal it more, speaking words of love and fear, with pure thoughts for God... we have something to begin with to knock on the door of our heart to call her to come out from behind the iron gates...” The message is clear; every emotional experience or emotional state is in fact a spiritual opportunity and must be nurtured accordingly, and not allowed to be lost. Once the soul has opened spontaneously due to an emotional response to some situation, the responsibility transfers to the devotee to take advantage of this new opportunity by intensifying the emotional response and guiding it in a spiritual-devotional direction.

The principle of soul-opening can be applied in a vast array of emotional settings, both spontaneous and artificial, as R. Kalonymus goes on to explain. Not only when one spontaneously remembers a personal event evoking sadness or personal concerns, but even as an artificially induced meditative experience, the emotional state can be transformed into religious emotion. “Why should I be broken-hearted and cry for naught? Behold, the Lord is in front of me, and I stand before the Throne of Glory, I will cry in front of the Lord who hears one’s crying.”³⁷ This is an example of a spontaneously induced emotional state of broken-heartedness, expressed through crying, which should be directed towards an encounter with the Divine.³⁸

³⁶ Shapira, *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*, 21. R. Kalonymus also stresses in this work the love between the members of the mystical fraternity; see Leshem, “*Hasidic Mystical Fraternities from Tiberius to Warsaw*,” in Seeman, Reiser, and Mayse (eds.), *Hasidism, Suffering and Renewal*, 107–130.

³⁷ Ibid., 21–22.

³⁸ On weeping as mystical practice, see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah*, 75–88; Elliot R. Wolfson, “Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth Century Jewish

In the same context of utilizing and empowering emotional states, R. Kalonymus recommends envisioning God's throne³⁹ or reciting Psalms.⁴⁰ He offers this in a situation in which one cannot focus properly or arouse oneself from a fleeting concern or a matter from the past. Here he also suggests one of his guided imagery exercises, to "imagine the day of your death."⁴¹ In his view, this will enable the practitioner to arrive at the proper emotional state for prayer, as well as to strengthen one's faith, love, and fear of God. This technique is thus particularly well suited as preparation for prayer. This is necessary since often "one's prayer and one's arousal are not simultaneous."⁴² Therefore, it becomes necessary "to arouse oneself with various strategies." However, "artificial" preparation for prayer is only one side of the coin. The other is to take advantage of the spiritual opportunities that arrive when one experiences a spontaneous emotional arousal: "Every type of arousal that arises within you during the day...do not let it go, rather use it as a key to reveal the soul...even if it is just about a business matter... [as it] contains an aspect of soul revelation which is covered by a worldly screen. One must take advantage of these opportunities."

R. Kalonymus goes on to reiterate his prior advice regarding the recitation of Psalms, and of envisioning the Divine throne. Following these contemplative or meditative exercises, one will experience a lingering feeling of "spiritual pleasure, the pleasure of purity, for his soul was in the Garden of Eden." Additionally, R. Kalonymus suggests ending such sessions with personal prayers of thanksgiving to God in one's own language,⁴³ which will lead to "bodily joy, to rejoice in the Lord." Here we discern not only instructions for entering and intensifying the emotional-

Mysticism," in John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (eds.), *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (Albany, 1995), 207–247.

³⁹ Shapira, *Bnei Mahshavah Tovah*, 18–20. See also Leshem, *Visualizing God*; Reiser, *Imagery Techniques*, 226–231. This meditation is part of a much larger one; that of guided imagery meditation in R. Kalonymus's system. See Leshem, "Between Messianism and Prophecy," 223–239; Wachs, "The Flame of the Holy Fire," 140–165; Reiser, "Imagery Techniques," 99–240; Leshem, "Guided Imagery Meditation in the Writings of the Piaseczner Rebbe and Rabbi Menahem Eckstein" (Heb.), *Asif*, 6 (2019), 600–628.

⁴⁰ On p. 23 of *Bnei Mahshavah Tovah* there are lists of Psalms to be recited depending upon one's emotional state.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 22. The same exercise appears in more detail in Shapira, *Hakhsbarat Ha-Avrikelim*, 38a–41a.

⁴² Shapira, *Bnei Mahshavah Tovah*, 24.

⁴³ Zvi Leshem, "Pouring Out Your Heart: Rabbi Nachman's *Hitbodedut* and Its Piaseczner Reverberations," *Tradition*, 47/3 (Fall 2014), 57–65.

spiritual state, but also the process of exiting such a state. Firstly, the devotee becomes aware of a blissful state of “spiritual pleasure” and “purity,” and lastly, he is to offer special impromptu “prayers of thanksgiving” in the vernacular, which results in a feeling of embodied joy.

In summation of this practice of utilizing emotional states as an opportunity to “unlock the soul” in Divine service, R. Kalonymus writes: “Thus you will not ignore even a sigh, for even a simple sigh... can create a great revelation of the soul bringing it close to the Lord. The soul is like a wellspring which has been stopped up, that one must dig to reach it, and every hole that is opened can bring forth great waters to water his own fields and even those of his friends.”⁴⁴ However, after a digression he again returns to this theme and describes the flow of emotions as the flow of water, and as “one of the limbs of the soul reaching out from you.”⁴⁵ These momentary emotional states are described as “births” that need to be actualized. If one does not do so, they are “aborted.”⁴⁶ (The path to actualization is to learn to observe one’s emotional states: “you must know how to observe everything that happens inside or out—know how to observe... to observe the form of your emotion.” R. Kalonymus calls here for a very high degree of self-awareness and mindfulness that encompasses the entire human emotional life. This, as we have seen, is the basis of achieving the Hasidic path in the service of, and the connection with, the Divine: “contemplate and observe all of the emotions that flow through you.”⁴⁷

Other Triggers of Emotional-Spiritual States

In several passages in various works R. Kalonymus discusses the power of the *nigun* [wordless Hasidic melody] to emotionally and spiritually impact upon the Hasid. One of these passages is found in *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah* in which he views music as an aspect of “revealing the soul and its

⁴⁴ Shapira, *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*, 24.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Literally, “a sort of abortion of fetuses of the soul” (*min hapalat nefilim shel ha-neshamah*).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 24–25, 30. Recently, an undated (pre-Holocaust) sermon of R. Kalonymus which deals with soul revelation in response to suffering was published for the first time. See Shalom (Matan) Shalom, “Sermon for Parashat Shelah” (Heb.), *Kovetz Bet Aharon v-Yisrael*, 39.4 (232) (2024), 44–50. Daniel Reiser has written of soul revelation and its relationship to prophecy. See Reiser, *Imagery Techniques*, 209–213. See also Wachs, *The Flame of the Holy Fire*, (Heb.), 100–102.

emotions.” Thus, he states that it is not surprising that there exist singers and even cantors who are far from God. This is because the opening of the soul is a neutral act. What happens afterwards, what one does with this emotional power, is dependent upon several factors:

“Melodies, which are sounds of joy or bitterness, arouse one’s emotions, through which sparks and limbs of the soul are revealed, but this does not determine what one will do when emotional... like two happy people, one uses his joy to serve the Lord and the other engages in happy frivolity.” Nonetheless, in the context of the Hasidic fraternity, *nigun* should become a central spiritual practice, “since we are a group for the sake of God, and we wish to reveal our souls to rule over our bodies... we should accustom ourselves in song and *nigun* of Heavenly worship.” Lastly, R. Kalonymus encourages the Hasid to combine the technique of *nigun* with that of visualization for maximal impact: “Choose the melody of a *nigun*, face the wall, or close your eyes and imagine that you stand before the Throne of Glory, and with a broken heart pour out your soul to God with heartfelt song and *nigun*. Then you will feel that your soul is revealed in song. If initially you sang to arouse your soul from her slumber, little by little you will feel that your soul has begun to sing by herself.”⁴⁸

Another more surprising yet related technique that R. Kalonymus suggests for empowering one in revealing the soul is to contemplate the nature of children. He writes as follows: “in matters of soul-revelation one can often learn from a child, for his deeds are unintentional, his soul is automatically revealed in various ways, and his motions and actions are in accord with his revealed soul. Similar is his self-purification and pouring out of his soul to his father. You will also sometimes experience this cleansing and yearning in your song. Without speech or words and with no request, your soul sings, pouring out the words, ‘Master of the Universe, Master of the Universe.’”⁴⁹

Following his analysis of the child as spiritual and emotional role model for the Hasid, R. Kalonymus continues the theme of music as an

⁴⁸ Ibid., 41–44. On *Nigun* see also *Hakhsarat Ha’Avreikhim*, 46b–47b, *Tzav Ve-Ziruz*, 47; *Derekh Ha-Melekh*, 94, 406–407; *Esh Kodesh*, 153, and *Hovot Ha-Talmidim*, 179–229. See, as well, Leshem, *Between Messianism and Prophecy*, (Heb.), 188–194, and Nehemiah Polen, “Niggun as Spiritual Practice, with Special Focus on the Writings of Rabbi Kalonymous Shapiro, the Rebbe of Piaseczno,” in Shlomo Zukier (ed.), *Contemporary Uses and Forms of Hasidut* (Brooklyn and Jerusalem, 2021), 261–282.

⁴⁹ *Bnei Mahshavah Tovah*, 43. For a similar perspective, see Kook, *Ma’amrei Hara’aya*, 229–233. R. Shapira’s younger brother, R. Isaiah Shapira, immigrated to Palestine in 1920 and became a close devotee of R. Kook.

emotional key to unlock one's soul. This key is not located in one type of song or tune or in one specific type of emotional state. Rather, it is the very state of emotionalism itself that is key to unlocking the power of the soul: "And not only with a tune of broken-heartedness, but also with a joyous song, all of them can be used to reveal the soul. And this is the way of the Ḥasid: he sometimes cries during a happy tune, and when dancing, and sometimes dances to the tune of *Kol Nidrei*."⁵⁰ R. Kalonymus concludes this discussion by exhorting the devotee to join in communal Ḥasidic singing, "not just to add your voice... but to take out your soul and be uplifted, just 'as the singer sang the spirit of the Lord rested upon him,'⁵¹ just as the singing at the bridal canopy joins together the groom and the bride, and this is a sufficient hint." Similarly, the Ḥasid should also accustom himself to sing quietly by himself at home.⁵²

It is important to make note of several new elements in this last passage. Firstly, the clear reference to Biblical prophecy, in which music was used by student prophets to enter a spiritually heightened state of mind which helped to induce prophecy.⁵³

This is related to R. Kalonymus's view of Ḥasidism as a neo-prophetic movement and his clear interest in reviving prophecy in his day.⁵⁴ Secondly, the comparison with a wedding song and the unification of the bridal couple (which R. Kalonymus prefers to mention only as "a hint") has implications for his desire to achieve mystical union with the Divine. Despite his usual reticence in using erotic imagery, so common in earlier kabbalistic and Ḥasidic sources, here R. Kalonymus allows himself to do so, with a "hint."⁵⁵ All of the above clearly comes to empower the nature of the emotional experience that R. Kalonymus not only demands from the devotee but also trains him to achieve.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ See *Tzav Ve-Zimuz*, chapter 30, in which R. Kalonymus describes his own weeping while dancing on the Simchat Torah holiday in 1932.

⁵¹ II Kings 3:15.

⁵² Shapira, *Bnei Maḥshavah Torah*, 44.

⁵³ I Samuel, 10:5, and Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Yesodei Ha-Torah*, 7:6. On ecstasy and prophecy see the differing viewpoints of A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 419–450, and Benjamin Uffenheimer, *Ancient Prophecy in Israel* (Jerusalem, 2001), 63–79.

⁵⁴ On prophecy in R. Kalonymus's system, see above n. 17.

⁵⁵ On mystical union, see above, note 32. Regarding mystical union in the mysticism of R. Kalonymus, see Zvi Leshem, "Flipping into Ecstasy," *Studia Judaica*, (Heb.), 157–184.

⁵⁶ It is important to make mention as well of R. Kalonymus's meditative practices which I have discussed elsewhere. This is a large topic in R. Kalonymus's

Diary Notations

I would like to conclude with a brief examination of some of the entries from R. Kalonymus's personal (and largely undated) spiritual diary, *Tzav Ve-Ziruz*, which were penned mostly in the 1920s and 1930s and buried together with several other manuscripts that were discovered and published following the Holocaust. It is here that R. Kalonymus reveals most intimately his personal thoughts, experiences, and even struggles. Not surprisingly, the role of emotion and various comments regarding the nature of emotions are central to many of his discussions.⁵⁷

In chapter 6, R. Kalonymus discusses the futility of feeling guilty for one's misdeeds unless guilt is channeled into specific actions. In the context he notes, "It is human nature that a feeling will not remain within him for long."⁵⁸ Therefore, unless one can translate his guilt feelings into a practical program for repentance they will by definition fade away and, in their stead, one will actually feel a sense of spiritual pleasure from having rid himself of the unpleasant nagging feeling of guilt.⁵⁹ Similarly, he writes in chapter 23 that "Longing and desire are only valuable if one applies them and uses them to elevate himself. If not, a feeling of despair is born, saying 'for years I have been yearning and am not successful, I am stuck in my lowliness,' and then he will even forfeit his yearning, God forbid."⁶⁰ While at first glance the two passages seem to be oppositional, with the first discussing guilt feelings, "regret over a failure is only positive if one repents," and the latter emotions of spiritual desire, they are essentially the same. Both emphasize the futility of mere

writings in which he has numerous goals, which to some extent overlap with the emotional quest, but have other goals as well, including preparation for prayer, improving character traits and expanding one's imaginative faculty. The latter is related as well to the quest for prophecy. Briefly, his techniques can be divided into three: guided imagery visualizations on a wide variety of religious themes, personal informal prayer in the vernacular (which is similar, but not identical to R. Nahman of Breslov's *hitbodedut* meditation), and his technique of *hashkatab* (mind quieting). See Leshem, "Pouring Out Your Heart"; Leshem, *Guided Imagery Meditation* (Heb.).

⁵⁷ English translation: Starrett, *To Heal the Soul*; however, I have retranslated the passages here.

⁵⁸ Shapira, *Tzav Ve-Ziruz*, 7. See as well Shapira, *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*, 12–13, and Shapira, *Hovat Ha-Talmidim*, 37.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of Christian acts of penance as "a means of achieving an embodied experience of regret," see Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice," 210.

⁶⁰ Shapira, *Tzav Ve-Ziruz*, 16.

emotion when not harnessed for practical application in the realm of Divine service. Retaining them on the emotional level alone is not only ineffective, but is spiritually counterproductive, and this is a significant aspect of his entire emotional approach. This appears to be key to his program of emotionalism.

Chapter 9 contains a significant statement of R. Kalonymus's perspective on the centrality of emotions and the necessity of emotional experiences for psychological health and well-being. Let us quote it in full:

The human soul loves to become emotional. Not only in relation to joy, but it loves the emotional experience, even of sadness and crying. People love to see horrific sights and hear terrible stories to the point of tears—just to feel emotional. This is a law and requirement of the soul just like its other laws and requirements. Therefore, only one who fills this need for himself through Divine service and emotional Torah study and prayer is spiritually safe. This is not the case for one whose holy service is not emotional. He will either seek other cheap emotional thrills [*bitragsbut aberot zolot*] even via forbidden activities to fulfill his need, or eventually he will suffer some form of mental illness, due to this emotional lack.⁶¹

This is an important statement from R. Kalonymus insofar as he is providing ontological/psychological bases for emotionality.

The implications here are clear, both regarding the need for a strong emotional component in one's Torah study (see above) as well as regarding the need for an emotionally satisfying spiritual life for the adult. As emotional thrills are central for one's mental health, this need will somehow be fulfilled. This can take place in one of three ways—through holiness, neutral activities, or sin. The only other alternative is emotional illness.⁶² Thus, the emotional spiritual life is of paramount importance and must be cultivated in every aspect of one's spiritual life.

⁶¹ Ibid., 8–9.

⁶² R. Kalonymus was certainly aware of mental health issues in the Jewish community. In *Tzav Ve-Ziruz*, chapter 25, he discusses a wave of suicides in the Jewish community (apparently in the mid-1920s) as well as a phenomenon of “living dead.” Elsewhere he alludes to a Jewish propensity to “nervous conditions.” See his comments in *Hakhshtar Ha-Avreikhim*, 10a (note) and *Shalosh Drashot*, 24, “the fact is that among the Jews there is a high percentage of people with weak nerves and various forms of nervous diseases, which is not found among any other nation.”

In several places in his writings R. Kalonymus discusses the special holiness and emotional impact of *seudah shlishit*, the third Sabbath meal, known in Hasidism as a special gathering (*tisch*) of the *tzaddik* and his Hasidim. At this time, the *tzaddik* would generally recite his weekly sermon on the portion of the Bible that had been read in the synagogue. The transition from the holiness of the Sabbath to the mundane of the weekday provided for a special atmosphere of bittersweet longing for holiness.⁶³ For R. Kalonymus, it is such a central ritual that in *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah* and *Hakhsarat Ha-Avreikhim* R. Kalonymus transforms the *seudah shlishit* experience into a guided imagery meditation.⁶⁴ Here in *Tzav Ve-Ziruz* 17, he waxes eloquently regarding its spiritual emotional potency, revealing how it affects him personally:

A fear fell upon me yesterday [at *seudah shlishit*] as I thought, what would happen if my end were to come now?⁶⁵ The Mishnah⁶⁶ states “repent one day before your death”...and when I contemplate what would happen if I needed to present myself in the Holy World before the Lord with my stained soul I am seized with fear and paralysis. I was less frightened about dying... than by that vision. But why did I cry and was I so frightened to appear before the Lord in the supernal world and I am not afraid to appear before Him now in this world... I have no option but to cry out to the King, “Master of the Universe, save me from the swamp and do not let me drown—God forbid.”

In this piece, R. Kalonymus shares with the reader his own intense emotional reaction to the *seudah shlishit* experience. Feeling God’s acute presence, he is projected into an end-of-life vision in which his subjective sense of imperfection undergoes the ultimate scrutiny of Divine justice. From there R. Kalonymus returns to the present and realizes that Divine justice is a constant reality, also during one’s lifetime. Seized

⁶³ On the special position of *seudah shlishit* in Hasidism, see Aaron Wertheim, *Law and Custom*, 226–228; Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalistic Practices on Shabbat* (Heb.), 451–452. On eating in relation to religions and emotions, see John Corrigan, “Introduction: The Study of Religion and Emotion,” in John Corrigan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion* (Oxford, 2008), 3–13, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Shapira, *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*, 28–30, *Hakhsarat Ha-Avreikhim*, 16b–18a, 61b–62a.

⁶⁵ Death meditations and guided imagery exercises play a prominent role in R. Kalonymus’s spiritual regimen. See *Hovat Ha-Talmidim*, 89–90; *Bnei Maḥshavah Tovah*, 22–23; *Hakhsarat Ha-Avreikhim*, 38a–40b; *Tzav Ve-Ziruz*, 49.

⁶⁶ Mishnah *Avot* 2:10.

with fear that perhaps he has already been rejected by God, he cries out for salvation.

Seudab shlishit is the topic of chapters 26 and 47 as well. In chapter 26, R. Kalonymus opens (and concludes) with the rhetorical question, “I am amazed, how can it be that people go into *seudab shlishit* without the same emotional tumult with which they go into *Kol Nidrei* [the opening service of the Yom Kippur liturgy]?” This comparison is echoed in chapter 47, where R. Kalonymus writes that “the time of *seudab shlishit* on Shabbat is the Yom Kippur of the week. Just as Yom Kippur reveals and purifies the soul from the entire year, so too *seudab shlishit* reveals all of one’s desires and soulful groans that were hidden all week.” R. Kalonymus elaborates on this point, explaining how during the week, with its intense activities, one is unaware of the fact that one’s soul is “lovesick” with yearning for the Divine. This illusory state is shattered at *seudab shlishit* when

One leaves the world behind and gives himself over to the Lord, comes close and speaks to Him, then all the soul’s yearnings, sufferings and screams from the entire week are revealed. Sometimes one feels powerful desire...sometimes intense inner pain...then if one pays attention to the shock and cries of the soul, he will hear the cry of the princess⁶⁷ who struggles with her oppressors as she pursues her father crying “Father, Father, save me from them and bring me to you.”

The princess, of course, represents the soul itself, normally oppressed by the bonds of sin and suffering in bitter exile from God, her Father. Here, as in chapter 17, R. Kalonymus concludes with the soul’s crying out for Divine salvation.

In chapter 26, the longest of the three discussions of *seudab shlishit*, R. Kalonymus describes in detail his intense emotional experience of feeling God’s immanent presence at the meal. “Sometimes at *seudab shlishit* I cannot find my place; it seems as though until now I had been hidden, or I had hidden myself from before the Lord, but now He is present, in front of me, face to face... I feel the need to hide myself from the others, under the table, but where can I hide from Your spirit... wherever I hide is full of Your presence... the Lord’s eyes gaze up-

⁶⁷ R. Kalonymus’s allegories generally include the king and the prince, but it is unusual for him to mention a princess. Perhaps this reflects the influence of R. Nahman of Breslov’s tales, such as “The Lost Princess.” On R. Nahman’s influence on R. Kalonymus, see Leshem, “Pouring Out Your Heart.”

on me... piercing my heart and burning my entire body.”⁶⁸ There are a number of places where he refers to bodily experiences, which would seem to be a feature of his emotionalism.

Here R. Kalonymus expresses a combination of shame and fear, or perhaps fear and pain that grow out of a feeling of guilt and inadequacy, which becomes apparent during a palpable experience of Divine closeness. This feeling of embarrassment must have been intensified by the fact that R. Kalonymus was himself the *tzaddik*, the “leader” of the community and of the fraternal repast and could hardly have hidden himself under the table when the eyes of all his Hasidim were upon him! He goes on to describe the intense pressure that he experiences, stating that “sometimes I am so shamed and pressured that I can barely maintain my spirit... now, at *seudah shlishit*, the Lord’s holiness closes in on me as though it is squeezing and crushing my entire being.”⁶⁹

Here, however, unlike in the other two pieces, the closing move is not one of desperate screaming out for salvation, but rather of cleansing and joy, reflecting the paradigm of the previously mentioned *Kol Nidrei* prayer which begins the Yom Kippur ritual. For this to take place, R. Kalonymus must undergo a radical emotional/spiritual shift in consciousness. He continues:

And from this place of self-effacement and nothingness, in which I have no existence, my soul strengthens and gathers strength, crying out, “Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will not fear, for You are with me.”⁷⁰ For even a foolish, blind and broken son calls to his father, the king, “you are my father”... for even if my soul is full of refuse in comparison to your pure holiness, will you not rush to bring me close?

Thus R. Kalonymus can redefine his emotional distress and sense of radical inadequacy and place his full trust in God, confident of his father’s love. He knows that no matter what happens, a father will never abandon his child in a moment of distress. This passage is also reminiscent of the discussion above in *Bnei Maḥshavah Torah* regarding the “service of the child” as distinguished from the “service of the slave.” One

⁶⁸ Regarding the role of the body in R. Kalonymus’s approach, see above n. 17.

⁶⁹ For background on the emotion of shame in Kabbalah, including in Hasidism, see, in this volume, Jonathan Garb, “Shame as an Existential Emotion in Modern Kabbalah,” *Jewish Social Studies*, 21/1 (2015), 89–122; Joel Hecker, “Shame in the Panoptic Culture of the Zohar”; Sarah Yehudit Schneider, *Dark Matters of the Soul: The Kabbalah of Shame* (Jerusalem, 2024).

⁷⁰ Psalm 23, traditionally sung at *seudah shlishit*.

who has been successful in cultivating this emotional connection, which in the son's perception, predicated upon his father's unconditional love, is always there to fall back upon, even in moments of great spiritual despair. Ultimately, while the Ḥasid as son experiences moments of self-doubt and uncertainty, his underlying trust in God can return him to a place of peacefulness and hope.

R. Kalonymus sums up his perspective on the emotional experience of *seudah sblishit* as follows:

Every *seudah sblishit* is its own unique situation; sometimes mere broken-heartedness, and sometimes strength within the broken-heartedness.⁷¹ But when I reach [the song] *Ein K'Elokeinu* my soul is always strengthened and happy... I have merited to serve God, been chosen to announce His greatness and unique holiness to all. From my broken heart I jump up with happiness and a mighty soul, announcing to the entire world, from the heavenly spheres to people and animals, and even to the grains of sand under my feet, and I announce to them, "none is like our God, none is like our Master." In my great happiness and strength, my soul is ecstatic and powerful and cries out to the Holy Majesty, "You are my God, You are my Master!"⁷²

Here we see R. Kalonymus's emotional fluidity and agility as he moves from fear, shame, and despair to vitality and joy. This is accomplished partially through the experience of song, which helps to enable this dramatic shift. R. Kalonymus sings to the rest of creation, urging it to also join in praise of God.⁷³ This emotional shift is intensified dramatically when the words of the song shift from third to second person. Now R. Kalonymus addresses God directly, as he palpably perceives His innate presence, "You are my God, You are my Master!"

⁷¹ The Ḥasidic tradition distinguishes between "sadness," which is defined as a depressive state and considered to be spiritually harmful, and "broken-heartedness," which is a state in which the devotee feels distant from God and experiences a powerful yearning to reconnect with Him. This is a very positive emotional state. See, for example, R. Shneur Zalman (Ḥabad), *Tanya*, chapter 31, R. Alter Tepliker (Breslov), *Hishtafchut Ha-Nefesh*, chapter 19. R. Kalonymus makes a similar distinction, using somewhat different terminology. See *Hovot Ha-Talmidim*, 36; *Hakhshevat Ha-Avreikhim*, 25a. See also *Hovot Ha-Talmidim*, 255, where this theme is discussed in conjunction with the themes of *seudah sblishit* and the son/slave paradigm.

⁷² These words are taken from the *Ein K'Elokeinu* prayer from the end of the morning service, which is also sung by Ḥasidim at *seudah sblishit*.

⁷³ Compare *Tzav Ve-Ziruz*, chapters 18, 48.

He concludes this entry stating, “And when they bring the candles [at the end of the Sabbath], I discover that I am a new person, everything was necessary and positive, both the initial broken-heartedness and the following joy, for together they provided purity and cleansing.” This cathartic and transformative process of purification, of course, harks back to the comparison between *seudah shlishit* and Yom Kippur, and R. Kalonymus adds a final line, returning to his opening, “I am amazed, how can it be that people go into *seudah shlishit* without the same emotional tumult with which they go into *Kol Nidrei*?”

Conclusions

As we have seen, R. Kalonymus clearly views a vibrant emotionalism as central to his definition of Hasidism and the Hasidic path in Divine service. He expresses this in numerous ways throughout his literary corpus and integrates it into numerous aspects of his project for Hasidic revival and rejuvenation. It is the most basic building block of his definition of Hasidism, and he went to great lengths to encourage his devotees to cultivate an intensely emotional inner life, and to strive for intensely moving religious experiences. This stress on emotions is also central to his educational system for teenagers, focusing on what has come to be known as “emotional intelligence” and as advocating for “the student at the center.”⁷⁴ It is equally prominent in his guidance for the Hasidic spiritual elite in which emotionalism is the gateway to the higher levels of religious ecstasy and self-annulment, and even to exploring the possibilities of attaining some level of prophecy⁷⁵ in modern times.

As we pointed out above, it was hardly a novel innovation by R. Kalonymus to highlight the emotional component of religious experience in the Hasidic world. Nonetheless, the extent to which it permeates all his writings, and finds expression for varied audiences in different

⁷⁴ The best-known work on emotional intelligence is Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*. See also Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, 1985) which influenced Goleman’s later work. Based upon psychologist Peter Salovey, Goleman sees five major aspects of “emotional intelligence”: knowing one’s emotions (self-awareness), managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships. The first three, which deal primarily with the self (as opposed to interrelationship with others), feature significantly (obviously with different terminology) in R. Kalonymus’s educational works, *Hovat Ha-Talmidim* and *Hakhsarat Ha-Avreikhim*.

⁷⁵ See above n. 24.

settings could be seen, if not as an “emotional turn,” certainly as a powerful revival of what was perhaps a central theme of earlier Hasidism.⁷⁶



⁷⁶ This is perhaps a partial explanation of the tremendous popularity of R. Kalonymus's works today across the spectrum of Orthodox Judaism, both in Israel and in the Diaspora (where there exist several synagogues with the name *Aish Kodesh*). In a post-modern (some would say post-post-modern) world in which a trend exists to privilege emotional experience over cognitive achievement, R. Kalonymus is seen by many as providing an emotionally inspiring and challenging path for religious meaning and growth. It is also noteworthy that in the last thirty years, his writings have been subject to a tremendous amount of academic research as well.