

107

Teveth 18, 5708

To the Editor of the
JEWISH SPECTATOR,
New York, N.Y.

My attention was drawn to an article entitled TWO HUNDRED YEARS HABAD HASIDISM, by Jacob S. Minkin, that appeared in the JEWISH SPECTATOR of March, 1947.

Without touching upon the various inaccuracies of the author's description of the Hasidic theory of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, since this would require too much space, I wish to make several observations on points of fact, in order to correct some errors in the historical phase of the article in question.

1. According to the tradition of the family, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was born in the year 5505 (1745), and not 5507 as the article implies.

2. Rabbi Shneur Zalman married at the age of 15, not 18.

3. The author states that 'it was by sheer accident that he (Rabbi Shneur Zalman) was drawn to the new movement that went by the name of Hasidism.' As a matter of fact, however, it was no accident. Although not generally known, it is recorded in the family chronicles that in his youth Shneur Zalman received his education from secret followers ('Nistarim') of the Baal Shem Tov, namely, his father Baruch, his teacher Rabbi Issachar Baer of Kobilnik and his uncle Rabbi Joseph Itzhak of Vitebsk. (Cf. 'Yed-Kislev 5705' and 'Sefer Hazichronos' by Rabbi Joseph I. Schneersohn, published by KEHNT Publication Society, Brooklyn, 5706/7)

Chai Elul 5705

Furthermore, the study of Kabbalah is irrelevant here, as witness the well known fact that the Gaon of Vilno deeply delved into Kabbalah, without it affecting his attitude towards Hasidism.

4. Rabbi Shneur Zalman left no 'diaries.'

5. The relationship between the 'Angel' and Rabbi Shneur Zalman, during the life of Rabbi Dov Baer, was on an equal footing, the former instructing the latter in Hasidism and being reciprocated in the study of Halachah. After the death of Rabbi Dov Baer, Rabbi Shneur Zalman accepted his son (the 'Angel') as leader and spiritual master ('Rabbe').

6. Rabbi Dov Baer's successor after death was his son the 'Angel,' and only years later was Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk appointed to the leadership of the Hasidic community of Lithuania. (Cf. letter of

allegiance by representatives of Rabbi Dov Baer's disciples to his son, on which Rabbi Shneur Zalman is a signatory, in HATOMIM, Vol. VII, p.28. An account of the events that took place after the death of Rabbi Dov Baer may be found in a letter of Rabbi Joseph I. Schneerson under title 'Fathers of Hasidism', ch. 8, published in HATOMIM, Vol. II, p. 48).

7. Opposition to and persecution of Hasidism began before the death of Rabbi Dov Baer, and not after.

8. The Gaon could not have seen the Tanya before its author together with Rabbi Menahem Mendel attempted to see him, for Rabbi Shneur Zalman began writing the Tanya about the year 5550, thirteen years after Rabbi M.M. had already left for the Holy Land. The Tanya was published for the first time in the year 5556.

9. The purpose of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's journey was not to familiarize himself with the progress of the movement as the author states; he undertook the extensive tour on a mission of mercy in behalf of the Jews who were hit by the decree of Czar Alexander I in 1807, by which the Jews were banned from engaging in breweries and distilleries in rural areas, and all Jews not directly engaged in farming were expelled from those areas.

I trust you will find space in your worthy magazine for the above notes.

Very truly,

Rabbi Mendel Schneerson.
Chairman, Executive Committee.

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