

PIETY AND SOCIETY

THE JEWISH PIETISTS OF MEDIEVAL GERMANY

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CHAPTER SIX

THE POLITICS OF PIETISM

Sefer Hasidim reflects the different ways that the sectarian fellowship of Pietists tried to deal with the fundamental problem of how to treat the non-Pietist "world." They resorted to the three basic strategies.¹ If practicable, they preferred either to dominate the Jewish community and thereby impose the will of the Creator on all Jews; or, they sought to withdraw from the Wicked and form utopian communities set apart from the influence of the ungodly.² Failing both of the alternatives of ruling or separating from the world, they realized that they would have to live in it but tried to do so on their own terms by insulating themselves as much as possible from the influence of the non-Pietists. It is these three strategies which we are calling the "politics of pietism."

The three strategies which the Pietists collectively adopted towards non-Pietists can be described as political action in the sense Peter Worsley gives it:

Insofar as the believer acts at all, and not only where he tries deliberately to influence others, he is acting politically, not just religiously. Insofar as he does deliberately seek to influence others, he acts 'politically,' whether he is propagating his religious beliefs as theology or challenging the secular authority of the State. No matter how spiritual his goals, he will produce political action simply through acting, even if as unintended consequences. Political action is thus an immanent dimension or aspect of all social action....³

The criteria by which the Pietists decided which of the three postures to adopt towards the world were practical: if likely to succeed, they tried to rule over or withdraw from the rest of the Jewish community. If not, they settled for living in, but not of, the non-Pietist majority. Their flexible, practical orientation is reflected in the interpretation which Judah gave to the religious commandment of chastizing the sinner, understood here as the Pietist's obligation to influence non-Pietists to follow the will of the Creator.

Haym Soloveitchik has pointed out that unlike Maimonides, for example, who interpreted "Reprove your neighbor..." (Leviticus 19:17) as applying absolutely, under all circumstances, *Sefer Hasidim* generally takes a more moderate attitude. Only if the critic will be obeyed, is he obligated to tell the sinner about his error; if not, the critic should not interfere. To be

sure, there is a basis in Jewish law for the second position: if an inadvertent sinner [*shogeg*] is told about his sin and still persists, he then becomes a conscious sinner [*mezid*] and deserves a greater punishment than one who sins inadvertently. Since the unheeded critic contributed to the wilfulness of the sin, futile criticism should be avoided: the verse concludes "and incur no guilt because of him." Nevertheless, Judah's position is also motivated by the practical politics which characterizes *Sefer Hasidim*. His moderate position towards the commandment of the chastizer [*mokhiah*] is based on the consideration of whether or not doing so is likely to be successful. If the Pietist has the power to influence the non-Pietist and make him stop sinning, he is obligated to criticize him; if not, he is not so obligated.⁴

The practical attitude Judah takes in *Sefer Hasidim* towards applying the commandment to rebuke the sinner is consistent with his generally practical orientation towards a number of other situations as well. In deciding whether or not Pietists should come into contact with non-Pietists or Christians, the practical outcome is all-important. Thus, Pietists are told that they should debate with non-Pietists about the merits of pietism only if they are likely to win the argument.⁵ Similarly, Pietists should avoid contacts with Christians unless from a position of relative strength, such as by being creditors.⁶ Of course, the Pietists had to treat Christians properly: it is simply dangerous not to do so.⁷ Practical considerations also dictate how the Pietist is to educate his son or how a Sage should administer a penance. The curriculum will depend on the child's intellectual ability: he should not be forced to study Talmud, for example, if his ability and interest lie more in studying Bible.⁸ Similarly, when a non-Pietist approaches a Sage to confess his sins and receive a penance, the Sage should give him a penance which he is likely to carry out.⁹

The evidence in *Sefer Hasidim* that Judah was a practical and politically adept advocate of a reformist religious group also suggests that we ought to reconsider characterizing European Jewry as 'quietistic' in contrast to the militant messianism of Muslim-Sephardic Jewry prior to Sabbetai Zevi.¹⁰ To be sure, the German-Jewish Pietists seem to have had little concern about active messianism and were not even oriented towards world events and cosmic history which active messianism presupposes. But they did not express their regional, even local, interest as a passive acceptance of all things as the will of God. Rather, their various active strategies suggest that they occupied a third position, different from either active messianism or quietism, and tried to adopt different political strategies, depending on circumstances. When likely to succeed, they tried

to rule the Jewish community or to withdraw from it entirely. Even when faced with the alternative of living in the Jewish community of the Wicked, they avoided contact as much as possible unless from a position of relative strength.

Instances of community control¹

Far from being quietistic in their posture towards exercising political power in the Jewish community, the Pietists in *Sefer Hasidim* show a considerable interest in trying to achieve and enjoy it in order to bring about the will of the Creator, when possible. The book reflects the ups and downs of the Pietists both as self-righteous, sometimes devious rulers (according to non-Pietists) and as powerless victims of those they formerly sought to dominate (the Pietists' own self-image).

There were times when the Righteous were in control of the Jewish community.¹¹ Despite temporary setbacks which they encountered, there were places where "most of the communal leaders were Good" [rov roshe ha-qahal tovim] and, as we would expect, "they wanted to enact the will of the Holy one, blessed be He" [u-vi-rezonam le-taqen rezon ha-QBH].¹² Although even when they ruled, a wealthy layman [*parnas*] might try to keep them from doing so, there is no doubt that their intention was to impose their Way on the community which they temporarily controlled.¹³

Given the power to do so, the Pietist communal leaders used every opportunity to carry out the will of the Creator. For example, if a person was goaded by his relatives to harm a neighbor, the Pietist rulers insisted that the victim be compensated by the instigator if the guilty relative lacked the means to make payment himself.¹⁴ Then there was the case of a criminal [*avval*] who tried to take advantage of a Pietist because Pietists are not supposed to take any kind of oath. The criminal took the Righteous to court by claiming that the latter owed him money, thereby forcing him to take an exculpatory oath that he did not owe the plaintiff anything. In such a case, the Righteous judge is to determine the degree to which the Righteous defendant was responsible for initiating an association with the criminal and decide the case accordingly. If innocent of any wrongdoing, the Righteous defendant does not have to swear and thereby violate the will of the Creator.¹⁵

When the Righteous are in control and serve as religious judges or other communal leaders, the measures they impose are simultaneously measures of communal as well as religious discipline. Thus, when two are caught fighting on the Sabbath, the Good who are in control are to impose

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a fine (or penance) on them for desecrating the Sabbath and then settle their dispute.¹⁶

There are times when a Pietist was also a communal servant, and this dual status might result in conflicting obligations between one's duty to the larger community and to pietism. When that problem arose the Pietist was to consult the Sage. Thus, in a certain town, men were suspected of shirking their responsibility to pay their full share of taxes voluntarily, despite the existence of a ban which required them to do so. A Pietist was therefore appointed as a tax assessor who would determine himself how much each should pay and collect it for the community. But the Pietist tax collector was concerned that if he should enforce the ban, he might inadvertently require some individual to pay more than he actually should. The Sage advised him that it was better for some people to violate the ban of not giving the correct amount rather than that the Pietist be responsible for making others give more than they should. The latter would, in effect, be robbery.¹⁷

Pietists understood well that wealth is power, and they tried to influence society by using it to accomplish their goals.¹⁸ Unlike many of the Christian revivalist movements of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which sought to revert to an early Christian ideal of apostolic poverty, the Jewish Pietists of Germany considered wealth not an evil but a potential opportunity to serve God. They espoused a theory of noblesse oblige according to which they associated wealth and power with each other as means for effecting God's higher will on earth. Like power, which is to be used to check the Wicked and Bad persons in society, wealth is to be employed to sustain the poor, especially, we shall see, the Righteous poor.

The Pietist should do what he can to see to it that the wealthy Pietist, not a poor one, becomes a communal leader because the former will be better able to implement the will of the Creator and check the ways of the non-Pietists. Thus, if the community should want to appoint a poor Pietist to be its leader [*rosh*], he should yield to a Good person who is wealthy. Exegetical support is mustered to extol the value of the wealthy Pietist in effecting the will of the Creator:

It is written, "The poor supplicate but the rich answer impudently" (Proverbs 18:23). Does (the verse mean that a poor man tries to) teach the Wicked how to behave (and that it is the Wicked who "answer impudently")? Rather, (the verse means the following:) a rich (Good) person who is able to protest (against wickedness) and be heeded should "answer" the Bad [*hara'im*] "impudently." And when a Righteous man who is rich goes to rebuke (the Wicked), then a poor man who is Righteous will entreat the Holy One,

blessed be He, that the rich man be heeded. If you should object that (the poor man) should pray that his own words be influential, it is written, "The poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard" (Proverbs 9:16).¹⁹

Or, again:

"The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are true, they are righteous altogether; (More) to be desired [on account of] (than) gold, yea, (than) [because of] fine gold,..." (Psalms 19:10-11). (This means that) when "the ordinances of the Lord" come from a man who has gold and much fine gold, then they are desired.... That is to say, when you have rich Sages who are Guides and who are filled with erudition of Torah learning and who are wealthy besides, then they are heeded....²⁰

Communes

II

To be sure, the times when the Pietists were able to assume control of local communities in Germany were few and far between. There are only a few references in *Sefer Hasidim* to such a situation, and it represented an aspiration most of the time rather than a reality. A second alternative was also attempted for a brief period of time. In addition to dominating the non-Pietists by ruling over them, the Pietists also seem to have tried to separate themselves completely from the non-Pietists to avoid being dominated by them. There are signs in *Sefer Hasidim* that the Pietists tried to create a utopian community which failed.²¹

In the best of all possible worlds, if Pietists could not rule over non-Pietists, they would try to live in their own towns free from non-Pietist influence; marry only within the holy circle of fellow-Pietists; and live out their lives in total dedication to searching out and fulfilling the infinitude of religious obligations demanded by the will of the Creator. Given the vulnerability of even large Jewish communities in the Rhineland and the persistent antagonism which the non-Pietists expressed towards fellow Jews, it is not surprising that the Pietists had to compromise almost from the very beginning of their brief experiment of living in splendid isolation. The ideal of creating a separate commune is mentioned in the context of its failure:

In certain places, Pietists who had Pietist leaders assembled by themselves. One of the elders said: What good is it if we intermarry with non-Pietists and our children end up following non-Pietist ways? Let us enact (a communal decree) that unless a majority of Sages agree that a person is Proper [*hagun*] that no one (of us) marry his daughter to someone from out of town even if he moves here, for he might ruin the rest of us. The same (applies) to a woman from out of town. Only if the Sages say that she is Proper may she settle here.

This is the way it was for a while. But soon afterwards, the following generation did not want to follow that enactment. Although the Sages did not want to rescind it, they were pressured (to do so) until they finally agreed. That generation married their children to outsiders who then settled down with them and ruined the town on account of their sins, lying and non-Pietist ways.²²

III

Pietism and Piety *sectarian fellowships in non-Pietist community*

The two ideal political situations of Pietists ruling over non-Pietists or over themselves failed. Instead, the most frequently mentioned case in *Sefer Hasidim* is of non-Pietists ruling the Jewish communities in which Pietists live as members of a sectarian fellowship, under the guidance of the Sages, persisting in their Pietist way, but living among non-Pietists. As Simhoni and Soloveitchik have correctly noted, the Pietist is usually described as a victim of ridicule and mockery, if not of outright persecution by fellow Jews.²³ This tension was partly the result of the Pietists' self-righteous and cocksure attitudes which they assumed towards non-Pietists who were frequently perfectly conscientious and punctillious religious Jews. In part, however, one wonders if another source of the hostility which the Pietists experienced was not the result of the probability that they once enjoyed the power to impose their will on the non-Pietists. When the Pietists were out of power, it was only natural for the non-Pietists to get even, and with a vengeance.

Whatever the complex causes which led up to the situation of this tense co-existence, it is clear that *Sefer Hasidim* portrays Jewish society most of the time as divided into circles of Pietists who are living among the non-Pietists, even while they try to insulate themselves from the influence of the Wicked. The Pietists made a virtue out of necessity. For by finding that they could not rule over or withdraw from the non-Pietists, the Pietists rationalized their subjection as a trial which God designed in order for them to earn merit in the next world:

It is better for one who lives among non-Pietists and does not follow their ways than one who lives among Pietists and does not sin; it is worse for someone who lives among Pietists and sins than someone who sins when living among non-Pietists.²⁴

This dictum is inconsistent with the Pietists' ideal of living only among Pietists, an experiment which failed, and reflects their coming to grips with a new reality. They would have to live among non-Pietists, and they interpreted that reality as the will of the Creator.

How could the Pietist exert his sense of communal responsibility for checking the sins of non-Pietists if he lacked the power to stop them? One way was for the Pietists to serve as vicarious atonements for the sins of the Wicked:

The Righteous are punished on account of the Wicked....(and) "All of Israel is responsible for one another" in order that (the Righteous) warn (the Wicked) and try to stop them, thereby fulfilling (the verse), "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Moreover, it is a religious duty for the Righteous to fast and inflict pain on themselves on account of possible (divine) retribution (incurred by the sins of the Wicked). Thus (God) forbade Noah and his sons to have sexual intercourse at the time of the Flood, and Ezekiel suffered, as it is written, ["Then lie on your left side,...] and so you shall bear the punishment for the House of Israel...and for the House of Judah" (Ezekiel 4:4-6)...For when the Righteous man is afflicted on account of his generation's sins, (God) checks the punishment which should have happened to them.²⁵

A graphic example of the idea of vicarious atonement is found in *Sefer Hasidim*:

It once happened that a Pietist [hasid] used to sit on the ground among insects in the summer, and in the winter, he would put his legs into a container filled with water until his legs became stuck in the ice. His friend asked him: "Why do you do that? Is it not written, 'For your life-blood, too, I will require a reckoning' (Genesis 9:5)? Why, then, do you jeopardize your own life?"

[The Pietist] said to him, "I myself have not sinned that much, but it is impossible that I have not committed minor sins. For those, I would not have to undergo such acts of suffering. But the Messiah suffers because of our sins, as it is said, "But he was wounded because of our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5). Also, the perfectly Righteous bear suffering. I do not want anyone but me to suffer for any of my sins. In addition, I will do good for many others; when the Righteous endure suffering, many benefit....²⁶

Such behavior, however, was not for every Pietist. What was needed was a practical guidebook for the Pietist who wanted to avoid being influenced by non-Pietists, if he could not control them. *Sefer Hasidim* is just such a book: it is code of pietism, a handbook for the godly. For the alternative to dominating over or withdrawing from the Wicked, was for the Pietists to avoid unnecessary contact with them. *Sefer Hasidim* offers the Pietist advice about how he should conduct his life while living in, but not of, the non-Pietist Jewish community. Now choices had to be made throughout the Pietist's life in answer to the question: How can I insulate myself and fellow Pietists from the influence of the Wicked? We will briefly look at how these conflicts were supposed to be resolved in the areas of childrearing, marriage, and burial, and then explore in more detail the

interactions anticipated during times of public worship and in connection with philanthropy and Torah learning. In all of these areas, as well as in many others, Judaism imposes on all Jews an elaborate set of norms and religious obligations. The Pietists superimposed upon the requirements of Jewish *piety* an additional set of demands which they understood to be derived from the larger will of the Creator, i.e. from *pietism*. But by expanding and transforming piety into pietism, Judah the Pietist stimulated religious and social tensions between Pietists and non-Pietist Jews who continued to follow Judaism as they knew it.

A potential or real conflict developed between the Pietists' obligations *qua hasid*, and the demands of piety of the larger religious community, i.e. non-Pietist Jews. From the clashing perspectives held by the Pietists and non-Pietists flows a series of questions as to priorities. On the one hand, what are the obligations of non-Pietists who regard the Pietists as insufferably self-righteous? On the other, the focus of this study, how must the Pietist treat non-Pietists, including members of his own family, when he regards all non-Pietists as the Wicked, who are, in some respects, to be equated with Gentiles? Does a Pietist Jew have the obligation to honor his father and mother even if they are non-Pietists or if they want him to marry a non-Pietist? Does the Pietist insist on proper, i.e. pietistic, rituals in the synagogue, and even risk wars of words or worse or does he draw back from the brink of social conflict and find other ways of serving the complete will of God as he understands it? Does the Pietist have to give charity to his needy family first, if they are non-Pietists, or pass them over in favor of needy Pietists who are not related? Does a scholar who is not a Pietist deserve respect? In short, when pietism and piety clash, what is the Pietist to do?

These tensions were an unexpected but real outcome of the "politics of pietism" and this disruptive force probably was responsible for the disappearance of the Pietist fellowship within not much more than Judah's own generation and its neutralization into Eleazar's personalist, non-social mode.

A. Separation: In, But Not Of

Rabbinic Judaism records a teaching ascribed to the first-century Rabbi Hillel, that a Jew should not separate himself from the community,²⁷ but Pietists held to different considerations. In view of the strength which the Wicked commanded, it was necessary to build strong social safeguards or risk being influenced by the ungodly. In general, Pietists are taught not to

live near non-Pietists, nor celebrate religious meals together with them. Social contact was dangerous and to be avoided, and Pietists should try to convince non-Pietists not to settle in town. Even to take in a non-Pietist lodger was unwise.²⁸

Childhood, marriage, and death were times to be especially concerned about keeping the proper company, and "proper" meant with Pietists. When the time came for a son to go away to school, it was better for him to remain among Pietists in a small village than to risk being influenced by non-Pietists in the larger town:

For it is difficult for someone who wants to be a Pietist to see someone his own age in town pursuing a different way of life. If he does not also follow the others, he will be embarrassed, and he would be better off living in a different town.²⁹

a) childrearing

Children were to be protected from playing with non-Pietist children because of the risk involved:

A [Pietist] said to his son: Why have you taken up with Violent boys [bahurim perizim]? He replied: I have used my wits to attract them to Torah study. For when I saw that they wanted to gamble, I taught them to play a game with biblical verses. The first person says a verse which ends with the letter *alef* [= A], the next says a verse which begins with *alef*, and so on, through the alphabet. Whoever cannot think of the next verse is the loser. Look what I have done: They are (still playing but are also) studying Torah.... His father replied: You wanted to attract them (to Torah) but you have ensnared yourself. You have taught them Torah, all right, but to fool around with it, to be a game. For each and every letter of Torah they uttered, you must fast or give charity to the poor who lack a teacher and make sure that they learn (Torah properly).³⁰

b) marriage

As careful as Pietists were to insulate their young children from non-Pietist teachers and companions, they were even more persistent in trying to find Pietist marriage partners for their daughters and daughters of Pietists for their sons. Although the experiment of living in Pietist communes which practiced endogamy failed, efforts were made to avoid "intermarriage" between Pietist and non-Pietist when both groups lived together. The values of the Pietist way of life are reflected in the priorities they assigned to finding an appropriate marriage partner. According to *Sefer Hasidim*, it is preferable to marry a convert to Judaism who is a Pietist rather than a native Jew who is not.³¹ One should not marry a woman from a non-Pietist family because of her money or beauty,³² and daughters of Pietists should not marry non-Pietists.³³ Only if one is choosing between two pietistic women may one marry the one whose pietism is inferior but

who is wealthier. This is advised in order for the Pietist to avoid destitution and the temptation to sin.³⁴ But if no moderately pietistic woman of means is at hand, a Pietist should take public charity rather than marry the daughter of a non-Pietist.³⁵ In extreme cases, when there are no suitable women, one is to leave town rather than marry into a non-Pietist family at home.³⁶

The issue of whom to marry created tensions between parents and children, and *Sefer Hasidim* indicates that the Pietist's obligation to marry only another Pietist takes precedence over the commandment to honor one's father and mother.

There are local women who are Good and their brothers are Good³⁷ and there also are Bad women whose brothers are Bad. The latter want to pay a boy's parents to arrange for their son to marry one of their daughters, but the Good do not intend to pay the boy's parents anything. If the parents order their (Good) son to marry the daughter of the (Bad) people who are paying them, but the son only wants to marry one of the Good, he should not obey them, even if his parents get aggravated over his refusal. (He should do so) because they treat him improperly [lo ke-hogen i.e., contrary to pietism].³⁸

The author argues further against such marriages by adding a warning: marrying the daughter of wealthy non-Pietists because of their money, instead of Pietist's daughters, will not be beneficial. Not only will the couple's children turn out as badly as the wife's brothers, but even their wealth will not last. When such a Pietist's own sons reach marrying age, he will not be able to marry them to members of his own family who are Pietists [le-hithaten be-ṭovim].³⁹

Marriage should revolve around the fellowship needs of the Pietists, and the Sage plays an important role in counseling Pietists about how to marry when choices must be made from among the godly. The initiative of finding a marriage partner can come from the woman as well as the man and either can approach the Sage for advice. Suppose a young woman tells the Sage that she wants to marry a handsome young widower who has no children, is from a Pietist family, and is himself a scholar and a Pietist. But the Sage, here as a matchmaker, also knows of another widower who is not so handsome but who has children. If the woman's father urges the Sage to marry his daughter to the second widower, despite the father's desires, the Sage is to ignore the parents so as not to violate the verses: "...you shall not place a stumbling block before the blind..."; ["Do not degrade your daughter, making her a harlot..."] (Leviticus 19:14,29).⁴⁰ Given the fact that the daughter's choice is for a Pietist, her wishes should be honored.

Otherwise, the woman will not honor the marriage and the Sage will be contributing to the woman's downfall.

The matter is much simpler for the Sage if one woman asks the Sage to arrange a marriage with a young man who is handsome, but not a Pietist, and a second woman wants a man who is a Pietist. If there are two young men, one of whom is handsome and a Pietist and the other is a Pietist but is not handsome, the Sage should give the handsome Pietist to the woman who asked only for the Pietist: "give her better than she herself requested."⁴¹

As with childhood and marriage, so even with death and burial, the Pietists were to avoid contamination by non-Pietists. Thus, *Sefer Hasidim* makes it clear that a Pietist is not to be buried next to non-Pietists:

It once happened that a Righteous scholar [talmid ḥakham zaddiq] was buried next to one who is not Proper [mi she-'eno hagon]. The Righteous [ha-zaddiq] appeared in a dream to the townspeople saying: You have caused me harm because you buried me next to an outhouse. The stench is foul and the smoke bothers me. They placed stone partitions between the grave of the Righteous [ha-zaddiq] and the Wicked [ha-rasha^c] and he no longer appeared to them in a dream.⁴²

In addition to devising specific ways of insulating themselves as much as possible from non-Pietists, the Pietists persisted in applying their programmatic interpretations of Judaism in sectarian ways. They restricted a number of religious obligations to apply only to fellow Pietists, instead of to all fellow Jews, and this sectarian focus resulted in social tensions with neighbors and even with family. In particular, they demanded that Pietists pray and give charity and study Torah in such a way that only Pietists and pietism define the applicability of these obligations. Only Pietists' prayers can reach God. Hence, ever practical, the Pietists reasoned that they alone should serve as cantors. True to their principles that pietism is Judaism, they held that only needy Pietists should be supported by the commandment to give charity. Pietists should study Torah only with Pietist scholars. Their stipulations about how Pietist Judaism should be lived led to hostility from other Jews who were offended by the Pietists' exclusiveness.

The clash between the values of pietism and non-pietistic Judaism led to other kinds of conflict as well. For in trying to follow the will of the Creator while living among non-Pietists, the Pietist always faced choices between values of their fellow Pietists and those Jews whom they regarded, in some respects, as no better than Christians. Symbolic of their sectarian zeal is the following indication of their priorities:

c)
burial

It is preferable to provide essential clothing for the wife of a Fellow [ḥaver] than to save the life of a non-Pietist. This holds so long as the wife is as pious as the husband, acts piously towards God, her husband, and other Pietists.⁴³

B. Public Worship

One area which led to a great number of tense confrontations between Pietists and non-Pietists was the area of prayer and other rituals associated with public worship. Whenever possible, Judah required that Pietists be in charge of religious services and other rituals because non-Pietists would not be effective petitioners for the community. Always practical in their thinking, they argued that it would be of no purpose to pray to God if God was not listening.

But one knew a Pietist by his appearance even before he entered the synagogue. The Pietists apparently ^{sartorial signs} attached ritual fringes [zizit] to the four corners of an outer garment, thereby making it into a four-cornered prayer shawl [taliṭ] which they wore, not only during the morning prayers, but "all day."⁴⁴ In a *responsa* collection of Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg [d. 1298], we find the following in the name of R. Samson b.R. Abraham:

And I have heard that taliṭot made like c[h]aperons are like the taliṭot of ḥaside ashkenaz. It has four corners and when it is removed, one folds it and then wraps oneself in it. There are those who say, however, that a garment is not a (proper) taliṭ unless it is like ours, that is, made (not to wear) but (solely) to be wrapped in and covered with.⁴⁵

From this indirect evidence, the Pietists of Germany may have appeared to wear prayer shawls all day because they made cape or poncho into one by tying ritual fringes on each of its four corners. But since the prayer shawl worn in the synagogue requires that one recite the blessing "Who commanded us to *wrap ourselves* in fringes," they removed the cape, folded it, and wrapped themselves in it when about to pray in the synagogue in the morning.

More reliable is the following report taken from Judah the Pietist's Commentary to the Pentateuch:

Rabbi J[udah] the Pietist rendered the following decision [pesaq] to those people who wear a taliṭ all day: when entering the synagogue, they should put on an additional taliṭ which they should wrap around themselves and then recite the blessing a second time (over that taliṭ).⁴⁶

Whether or not the cape was removed and temporarily made into a conventional prayer shawl or a second one was worn on top of the fringed cape, the sources agree that some German-Jewish Pietists did wear ritual

fringes on an outer garment. This practice evidently accounts for references in *Sefer Ḥasidim* that the Pietists wore a prayer shawl all day, and it was this peculiar type which did not go unnoticed by non-Pietists.

Such display could easily rub outsiders the wrong way, and not surprisingly this practice attracted the hostility of non-Pietists from time to time. For example, there was the non-Pietist who was politically well-connected, religiously observant and "ethical" but who terrorized Pietists by taking a Pietist's prayer shawl and giving it to a "fool" to wear in order to embarrass the Pietist publicly.⁴⁷

But the area in synagogue life which drove non-Pietists to distraction was the Pietists' peculiar way of reciting the prayers. *Ḥaside ashkenaz* were known for their penchant for counting the letters of the prayers in order to ruminate on special esoteric meanings associated with the numbers of letters and the numerical equivalents of the Hebrew letters of the words.⁴⁸ To be able to do this, they insisted that the prayers should be recited *be-meshekh*, in a drawn out or deliberate style,⁴⁹ and this practice was not conducive to speedy non-Pietist worship. Given their own needs, it would have been helpful if they had prayed in their own synagogues and they recommended this whenever possible:

If there are two synagogues in town, one of which is closer than the other and the Pietist synagogue is father away, it is better to go to the one farther away where they pray correctly.⁵⁰

Not to "pray correctly" meant to risk participating in prayer with the Wicked whom God would not hear; not to "pray correctly" meant rushing through the prayers without the time to pray *be-meshekh*. And yet, in the small Jewish communities of the Rhineland, there would probably be only one place for conducting public worship. Of necessity, Pietists would have to pray with non-Pietists and somehow co-exist:

If there is only one synagogue in town and it is known that the Jews there are not (Pietists) [lit., stand to pray in a boorish manner], and that it is impossible to pray (there) with concentration [be-khavanah], he should first pray at home with concentration and then go to the synagogue for the Sanctification prayer [qedushah] (which requires a minyan).⁵¹

Sefer Ḥasidim provides the Pietist with various techniques for praying with "deliberate concentration" even when sitting next to an unsympathetic non-Pietist worshiper. For example, the Pietist should close his eyes at various prescribed times, such as before each time a section of the Torah is read publicly, during the daily penitential prayers [taḥanun] and when reciting the prayers which mention the morning or evening. Im-

mediately afterwards, one should open one's eyes and look up towards Heaven,⁵² despite the talmudic dictum that one's eyes should look down and one's heart should be directed up.⁵³

Such practices appeared excessive to a non-Pietist, and earned the Pietist more than a little contempt and ridicule. Advice is also given for the Pietist to develop ways of achieving concentration while minimizing opportunities for others to ridicule him. Ribbing was not all a Pietist might get for his efforts to concentrate during prayer. That same well-connected non-Pietist who terrorized Pietists would also hurry the recitation of the service, thereby preventing the Righteous [*ha-zaddiqim*] from observing the commandments, and chasing out of the synagogue anyone he pleased, aiding "sinners" and insulting God-fearers [*yir'e ha-shem*].⁵⁴

Nor were the Pietists' preferences for exclusive control in conducting the service likely to win them any friends from non-Pietist Jews. One can imagine the lack of sympathy of those otherwise religious, but non-Pietist, Jews towards the Pietists who believed that they, and they alone, merited serving as cantors to conduct the public worship; sounding the ram's horn on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur; rolling up the Torah scroll before returning it to the Ark.⁵⁵ Again, the reason offered is practical: "when Righteous [*zaddiqim*] pray, prayer is heard."⁵⁶

For the same reason, the Pietists did not want to count non-Pietists in the *minyān*⁵⁷ and proscribed sitting next to one or even in a non-Pietist's empty seat because non-Pietists drive away the divine presence [*shekhinah*] on account of their improper thoughts.⁵⁸ Pietists also should avoid anything which a non-Pietist has made. Thus, they may not pray from a prayerbook copied by a non-Pietist scribe, and Pietists cannot use it even as recycled scrap paper but must burn it.⁵⁹ Liturgical poems which non-Pietists composed, we recall, are not to be recited even if they are superior to poems written by Pietists.⁶⁰

Yet, there were limits. For when Pietists confronted other Jews with such behavior in the same small synagogues, there was bound to be an explosion. For the sake of community harmony, Judah drew back from the full implications of his position when Pietist exclusiveness was likely to result in open dissension [*mahloqet*]. Thus, if non-Pietists did serve as a cantor or sound the ram's horn or read the Book of Esther on Purim, the Pietist is told to repeat these rituals after the non-Pietists leave the synagogue or at least recite the words of the prayer in private if doing them again in public will result in dissension.⁶¹ Similar restraint is reflected in the advice that a Pietist who wants to be seated in the synagogue near the Ark, a place of honor, should not argue about the seat if already occupied

but should take a different seat.⁶² The reason is practical: "For since the Bad [*ha-ra'im*] outnumber the Pietists [*ha-ḥasidim*]...",⁶³ they should let others do these things. Avoiding dissension takes precedence over pietism. The motivation of working to save the community would be undermined if the Pietists ended up destroying it.

C. Philanthropy

Giving charity [*zedaqah*] is still another religious obligation which Judah interpreted and applied in a sectarian fashion, despite the risk of creating tensions with non-Pietist acquaintances and even family. By indicating how a Pietist should give, *Sefer Ḥasidim* reveals the author's exclusivistic scale of values.

When it comes to deciding which individuals should receive charity, the Pietist must try to give to other Pietists while at the same time balancing his religious obligation to his family. The ideal recipient in *Sefer Ḥasidim* is not one's family *per se* but a needy Pietist [*zaddiq ve-zarikh*].⁶⁴ If one's relatives are Pietists and in need, there is no conflict between giving to one's relatives and to fellow Pietists: Pietist relatives have priority over Pietists who are not related to the donor.⁶⁵

But when one must choose between poor relatives who are non-Pietists and those who study Torah for pietistic reasons, the Pietist is to ignore the relative. Even if they say that they will study properly in the future, they are not to be considered, because their motives for saying so are suspect: perhaps they are making the pledge to study, in order to get the charity.⁶⁶ Similarly, a father cannot favor one of several children in his will just because he loved that child more than the others but only if that child was more pietistic.⁶⁷

On the other hand, one is obligated to support one's own Pietist relatives even if funds from other sources become available:

A Sage was told: So-and-so died and told me to dispense so much money to poor Pietists [*le-aniyyim tovim*] according to your advice. To whom should I allocate it? Do you think that I can give it (to my relatives) so-and-so who are Pietists [*tovim*]? The Sage answered: If you are used to giving your money to your relatives anyway, and you now want to ease your own burden by using some of the money which he gave you to dispense for charitable purposes and you are wealthy (enough to help your family with your own money), realize that (using that money for your relatives) would be sin because you would be robbing the poor. But if you do not reduce the usual amount of your gift to your own relatives, we can allocate (the money your friend entrusted with you to your relatives); (if you do reduce your own family contribution), we cannot allocate it (for them).⁶⁸

When relatives are not involved, one is to give charity to Pietists in need.⁶⁹ One recipient may give a contribution to someone else, but only to another Pietist in need; money can be given to a needy Pietist either directly or indirectly but only by means of another Pietist or a Sage.⁷⁰

Moreover, giving money to a non-Pietist is a sin; not giving charity to a non-Pietist is itself an act of pietism.⁷¹ One should go to great lengths, even leaving town, to avoid supporting non-Pietists including one's own father.⁷² Unless a non-Pietist threatened to murder someone if a Pietist does not give him charity, a Pietist must not yield to threats to commit a sin. Even if he should threaten to apostatize, the Pietist is to resist helping a non-Pietist: "Let the non-Pietist go to Hell."⁷³

D. Torah Study

Although all Jews are obligated to study Torah,⁷⁴ Judah transformed the meaning of Torah study so that pietism, the will of the Creator, became the climax and highest expression of Torah. In *Sefer Ḥasidim*, the ideal Jew is not the rabbinic scholar *per se*,⁷⁵ but the Pietist scholar [*hasid ḥakham*].⁷⁶ It followed that when a Pietist seeks an answer to questions about Jewish law, an authority is defined not only by knowledge of *halakha*, but also by pietism as well.⁷⁷ Similarly, a Pietist is to send his child to study only with another Pietist: "If you find a logically gifted man who is not a Pietist, do not let your son study (Torah) with him."⁷⁸ Adults, as well, are not to study with non-Pietist teachers, and a good dialectical answer is not to be quoted in the name of a non-Pietist any more than if it were uttered by a "sectarian [min] or an apostate or a major sinner."⁷⁹

The critique in *Sefer Ḥasidim* is not, then, a blanket condemnation of the study of the Talmud or of the new dialectical activity which is associated with the northern French Talmud glossators [*ba'ale ha-tosafot*].⁸⁰ Rather, Judah insists that the highest value in Judaism is *hasidut*, pietism, and only if a talmudic scholar is a Pietist should he be respected; otherwise, "he is worse than an ignoramus."⁸¹ It is true, that some passages, taken out of context, can give the impression that there is a contrast in *Sefer Ḥasidim* between pietism, on the one hand, and scholastic erudition, on the other. Consider the following:

Whoever has money should not say: I shall support a synagogue or Jewish college. Rather, he should give (the money) to the Righteous [*zaddiqim*] who study Torah and not to those who belabor (legal) obscurities in order that everyone think that they know the entire Talmud. Such people have not really studied, but have merely focused on logical difficulties and variant readings in

order to show off their mental prowess. A person (with means) should give it to God-fearers who study (Torah) for the purpose of fulfilling religious commandments.⁸²

In view of such passages, Israel Tashema has recently argued⁸³ that throughout *Sefer Ḥasidim* there is a program and ideology of "ideal" or "utopian" Torah study. According to this view, *Sefer Ḥasidim* criticizes the theoretically oriented talmudic dialectics of the northern French Talmud glossators because their method leads to pride and self-serving intellectualism. Instead, Jews should return to the practical codes of Jewish law in order to learn how to behave. As a result of this conservative emphasis in *Sefer Ḥasidim*, Tashema continues, German Jewry produced a number of practical legal codes and handbooks in the latter half of the thirteenth century and after.⁸⁴ His conclusion:

Therefore, it is incorrect, from an historical standpoint, to regard the "ḥasidei Ashkenaz" as quasi-revolutionaries. On the contrary, one should regard them as extreme conservatives, who rejected the revolutionary intellectual and social ideas of the Tosaphists and sought to turn back to the old life-style and the established order.⁸⁵

Although this critique is partly correct, it errs by treating *Sefer Ḥasidim* as though Eleazar had written it, and not Judah. In the sections in *Sefer Ḥasidim* on Torah study, found not "throughout the book,"⁸⁶ but almost exclusively in two "books" on this subject,⁸⁷ there is opposition to boastful talmudic gymnastics and there also is an insistence that Jews should study the Bible, midrashic literature and books of Jewish law in order to find out how to behave.⁸⁸ In addition, it is also true that German Jewry set out to write books of applied Jewish law in the second half of the thirteenth century and beyond.⁸⁹

What is lacking in this analysis, however, is the proper perspective from which to appreciate why *Sefer Ḥasidim* (not Eleazar) criticizes what it does. First of all, as indicated earlier, the book's opposition to talmudic glosses by means of dialectic is not absolute. There is nothing wrong with being a talmudic glossator in and of itself.⁹⁰ The book's critique is levelled at talmudic scholars or rabbis who write synagogue poems or ordinary Jews, *who are not Pietists as well.*⁹¹ For *Sefer Ḥasidim*, dialectics, written or oral, should not be an end in itself, but a means to the end of promoting pietism. The object of criticism, then, is the non-Pietist talmudic scholar.

For the same reason, Judah does not oppose the Pietist's use of oral dialectical skills in debates with non-Jews or non-Pietists, if there is a good chance that the Pietist will win:

Suppose a monk or a priest or a learned and erudite sectarian or a non-Pietist talmudist who is busy chasing after his own reputation approaches a Pietist who is not as learned; or a learned person encounters a witch to debate Torah. If he debates them, they might persuade him to follow them. About such a situation it is written, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him" (Proverbs 26:4). . . . Even if you are more learned than he, do not permit a less learned person to listen to your debates [vikkuhin] because that person might be persuaded (by your opponent), since he does not understand (which position is) the true one. . . . But if you are so learned [hakham] that you are confident that you will win the argument [she-tenazhehu], . . . (then apply the verse), "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes" (*Ibid.*, 26:5).⁹²

It is also in the context of displaying the aggressive use of oral logic that Judah advises a Pietist "to be among the victors [ha-menazhim] and not among the vanquished [ha-menuzahin]." ⁹³ In applying polemical skills [*dialectica*],⁹⁴ the important thing is to win: the use of such rhetorical techniques themselves is not forbidden, only their abuse. Thus, whether it be used debating a Christian or non-Pietist Jew, or in the Pietist's continuous search to derive new prohibitions from the Bible or Talmud by logical inference,⁹⁵ intellectual prowess is an integral aspect of pietism provided that it is subordinated to serving the will of the Creator and not one's own ego.

Because of this misunderstanding about the book's attitude towards talmudic dialectics, Tashema does not appreciate why Judah advocates the study of practical law. Judah does not propose that Pietists study codes of Jewish law instead of talmudic *novellae*. Rather, he stresses codes of Jewish law as a concession for those who are intellectually incapable of studying Talmud and pietism together. The emphasis on law codes for the intellectually less gifted is but one more sign of the practical orientation of the book, not evidence of an ideology of popular Torah education for those with the ability to be learned Pietists.⁹⁶

The rationale for advocating the study of digests of laws, without the talmudic dialectical discussion, is reflected in the provision the book makes for women's education. They are not expected to study advanced talmudic or pietistic texts and traditions, but they are required to study the laws which they need to know in order to be proper Jews. The criterion for this distinction is practical, based on the presumption that women lack the ability to study the advanced curriculum, not an ideological program. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for men.⁹⁷

Finally, the inference Tashema draws about the conservative nature of German-Jewish pietism is characteristic, not of *Sefer Hasidim*, but of

Eleazar's writings. If there is influence from the Pietists on the formation of handbooks of Jewish law and custom in the thirteenth century, it is attributable to Eleazar's *Sefer ha-Roqeah*, itself a book of law, not to Judah's radical program in *Sefer Hasidim*, a book of *ersatz* law, a code of pietism which expands the demands of Jewish law. Despite our different readings of *Sefer Hasidim*'s scale of values as far as the ideal of Jewish education is concerned, our interpretation of Eleazar's work coincides with Tashema's understanding of German-Jewish pietism as a whole. As Haym Soloveitchik has noted, Eleazar's lawbook is filled with old-fashioned laws and could have been written in the eleventh century.⁹⁸

Sefer Hasidim proposes not a practical education of Jewish laws but an elitist path of instruction in which pietism as well as Jewish law must be mastered. One further sign of the elitist-pietistic focus of the book is its emphasis that the learned Pietist is uniquely capable of understanding the esoteric wisdom about God and His being as well as of perceiving the hints in Scripture about the will of the Creator. As is the case with several types of sects, we recall, the German *hasidim* claimed to possess a body of esoteric wisdom.⁹⁹ For Judah, the biblical phrase "sod ha-shem li-re'av" (Psalms 25:14) meant that only the Pietists are privy to the esoterically transmitted seventy-three modes of exegesis passed down from Sinai to Eleazar's generation.¹⁰⁰ These esoteric teachings were not communicated explicitly in Scripture "so that the Unworthy would not see them."¹⁰¹ In a truly sectarian fashion, this learning is to be kept only for the initiates:

A person who has Bad sons and has books of esoteric lore [sifre sodot] should give them only to God-fearers, as it is said, "the esoteric lore [sod] about the Lord belongs to those who fear Him correctly" (Psalms 25:14). But if he has Good grandchildren [i.e. Pietists], he can give them to them.¹⁰²

Far from being a conservative response to tosafist scholasticism, *Sefer Hasidim*'s educational program is as elitist as is its attitude towards marriage, worship or philanthropy. Being a Pietist need not be any more incompatible with being a talmudic glossator than it is with the religious obligation to give charity to one's relatives: the talmudist or needy relative must simply also be a Pietist. Then, and only then, the values of Jewish *piety* coincide with the values and priorities of *pietism*. When they do not, the Pietist is obligated to honor only Pietists and to treat non-Pietists, even talmudic scholars or relatives, as being among the Wicked.

The problems posed by the "politics of pietism" were resolved in two ways. On the one hand, people simply resisted following a program which