

הוצאת הברנדיס  
האוניברסיטה של ניו אנגלנד  
האנובר ולונדון  
1973

Published for Brandeis University Press by  
University Press of New England  
Hanover and London

# The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars

Edited by  
Yisrael Gutman,  
Ezra Mendelsohn,  
Jehuda Reinharz,  
and Chone Shmeruk

Assistant Editor  
Sylvia Fuks Fried

David E. Fishman

## The Musar Movement in Interwar Poland

To date, the study of Jewish Orthodoxy in interwar Poland has focused on the ideology and activity of its political organization, Agudat Israel, whose primary function was to represent Orthodox Jewish interests in public forums such as the Sejm (House of Deputies), local municipalities, and *kehillot* (Jewish community councils).<sup>1</sup> The religious life and thought of Orthodoxy—its Hasidic courts and Lithuanian *yeshivot*; its synagogues, *khevres* (fraternal societies), and the rabbinate; developments in mysticism, messianism, and talmudic learning—have yet to receive scholarly attention. This essay attempts to sketch the portrait of one Orthodox religious current in interwar Poland, the Novaredok Musar movement.<sup>2</sup> The discussion will focus on the structure and scope of the Novaredok movement and on certain new developments in its religious ideology and practice during the interwar period.

The name Novaredok is usually associated with an anecdote about *yeshivah* students entering an apothecary to ask the clerk for nails or, more happily, with Chaim Grade's great novel *Tsemakh Atlas* (published in English as *The Yeshiva*) (1967–68), which revolves around the figure of Tsemakh Atlas, a tormented Novaredok Musarist. Both the folklore surrounding Novaredok and Grade's monumental writings in prose and poetry offer vivid images of this

1. Ezra Mendelsohn, "The Politics of Agudas Yisroel in Inter-War Poland," *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1975): 47–60; Gershon Bacon, *Agudat Yisrael in Poland 1916–1939: The Politics of Tradition*, forthcoming.

2. Although the study of Musar and the cultivation of religious-ethical sensibilities were pursued in most of the large interwar *yeshivot* (e.g., Mir, Raduń), only Novaredok can be considered a *bona fide* Musar movement. This point will be developed at length below. To date, the only survey of Novaredok in interwar Poland has been a rather uncritical overview by one of the movement's own adherents: Yehudah Leyb Nekritz, "Yeshivot Beit Yosef Novaredok," in *Mosdot Torah be-Eropah*, ed. S. K. Mirsky (New York: 1951), pp. 247–90. Rabbi Nekritz headed the Novaredok *yeshivah* in Brooklyn,

current in Jewish religious life, but neither takes the place of historical documentation and analysis. On the contrary, I would argue that the historical study of Novaredok has the added benefit of clarifying and illuminating Grade's unique personal vision of Novaredok Musarism.<sup>3</sup>

### The Novaredok *Yeshivah*: Basic Features and Institutions

The *yeshivah* in Novaredok (in Polish, Nowogródek; in Russian, Novogradok, Minsk gubernia) was founded and headed by Rabbi Yosef Yoizl Hurwitz, a former businessman who had been converted to Musarism by its founding father, Rabbi Israel Salanter.<sup>4</sup> Hurwitz, who studied extensively with Salanter's disciples in Kowno (in Russian and Yiddish, Kovna) and Slobodka, first achieved a measure of notoriety in the 1880s when for several years he secluded himself in a hut in the Zoshen forest. He refused to set foot outside the hut during that time and was fed by a kindly old woman who slid food into his hut through two holes—one for *milkhiks* (dairy) and one for *fleyshiks* (meat). While Salanter's major disciples dissociated themselves from Hurwitz's behavior and viewed him as a misguided eccentric, Hurwitz maintained that his extended isolation from society was necessary in order to combat his evil instincts and passions.<sup>5</sup>

In founding his own *yeshivah* in 1896, Hurwitz was following the lead of other disciples of Salanter who had established schools in Grobiņa (in Yiddish, Grobin), Slobodka, and elsewhere, where the study of religious-ethical texts was incorporated into the daily regime alongside the study of the Talmud. These schools also featured a new type of religious mentor, the *mashgiekh*, who presented periodic *Musar shmuesn* (discourses on religious ethics) to the students and supervised their religious-ethical growth. The latter might divide responsibilities with a *rosh yeshivah*, who presented the traditional *shiurim* (talmudic discourses). Hurwitz built on the model of the Musar *yeshivot* in Grobiņa and Slobodka, a model that would

3. I hope to follow this line of inquiry in a separate paper.

4. On Salanter's life and thought, see Immanuel Etkes, *Rabi Israel Salanter ve-reshitah shel tenuat ha-Musar* (Jerusalem, 1982).

5. The major works on Yosef Yoizl Hurwitz are Dov Katz, *Tenuat ha-Musar*, vol. 4 (Tel Aviv, 1963), pp. 179–351; M. Gertz [Gershon Mowshowitz], "Der alter fun Novaredok," in *Musermikes* (Riga, 1936), pp. 21–37; Esriel Karlebach, "Mussar," *Jahrbuch der Jüdisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft* 22 (1931–32): 374–86.

soon spread to *yeshivot* in Telšiai (in Yiddish, Telz), Slutsk, Łomża, Mir, and Raduń as well.<sup>6</sup>

From the very outset, Hurwitz's *yeshivah* in Novaredok differed from the other Musar *yeshivot* in one important respect. There was no *rosh yeshivah* in charge of its talmudic studies. Hurwitz devoted himself to guiding the students' religious-ethical growth through private meetings with them and weekly *Musar shmuesn*, but he did not give *shiurim*. The students studied the Talmud informally, in pairs and small groups. When formal *shiurim* were eventually instituted during the early 1900s, they were delivered by a number of senior students. There was no mentor-model in talmudic learning.<sup>7</sup> This fact, coupled with Hurwitz's dominant presence as mentor in religious-ethical perfection, signaled a clear shift in the traditional scale of values, with religious-ethical perfection taking precedence over the mastery of Torah knowledge.

The *yeshivah's* curriculum and regime evolved over the years, and became increasingly distinct from those of other *yeshivot*. By the eve of World War I, the differences between Novaredok and Slobodka were substantial. The time formally allotted for the study of Musar was an hour and a quarter<sup>8</sup> (rather than the half hour in other Musar *yeshivot*), and a range of unique Musar activities were conducted regularly. These included:

1. The *birzhe* (literally, stock market), a daily hour designated for the free-wheeling peripatetic exchange of Musar insights. The students would "stroll in pairs across the length and breadth of the hall, full of enthusiasm and lively gesticulation," discussing matters of Musar.<sup>9</sup>

2. The *vaad* (committee): "All the *yeshivah* students were divided

6. Shaul Stampfer, "Shalosh yeshivot litaiyot ba-meah ha-19" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1981); and, generally, the essays in Mirsky, ed., *Mosdot Torah be-Eropah*.

7. Katz, *Tenuat ha-Musar*, 4:197–198, 329; Joshua Uvsay, *Reshimot ve-maamarim* (New York, 1946). Uvsay, who studied in Novaredok in 1900, relates: "It was estimated that Hurwitz's level of Torah knowledge was that of an average rabbi. I say 'estimated' because he rarely spoke words of Torah and never stressed his learning" (p. 123).

8. Katz, *Tenuat ha-Musar*, 4:217.

9. The descriptive quotations are from Moshe Silberg, "Kat ha-novardokaim," *Haaretz*, December 26, 1932, p. 2, December 28, 1932, p. 2, published in Yiddish as "Di novardoker," *Yidisher kemfer*, September 1985, Rosh Hoshanah 5746 no., pp. 30–35. Silberg studied in the Novaredok *yeshivah* in 1916, shortly after its relocation to Homel.

into various groups that met once a week to discuss matters of Musar. Each *vaad* was headed by one or two students . . . who were its spiritual guides and main speakers."<sup>10</sup>

3. *Protim* or *peules*, exercises designed to cultivate certain positive character traits or eradicate negative ones. Students were expected to engage in acts that would forge those moral virtues in which they found themselves lacking.<sup>11</sup> The proverbial asking for nails in an apothecary was an exercise in modesty or alternately in developing the inner fortitude to withstand ridicule.

4. *Asiri koydesh*, a day devoted by the individual student to introspection and self-criticism in seclusion, observed every ten days. This practice, although not mandatory, was viewed as a sign of one's devotion to religious-ethical improvement.<sup>12</sup>

Taken together, the expanded time for Musar study, the daily *birzhes*, the weekly *vaad* meetings, weekly *Musar shmuesn*, the *asiri koydesh* once every ten days, and the involvement in *protim* constituted a structured and highly demanding program of Musar activity that was unparalleled in any other *yeshivah*.

The religious-ethical ideals Hurwitz inculcated in his students were in themselves quite traditional—kindness, humility, love and fear of God, and so forth. His novel contribution was a philosophy of moral extremism. Hurwitz was convinced that the improvement of one's religious-ethical character could be achieved and sustained only through radical and extreme acts, not through gradual moderate change. The forces of evil in the human soul were too strong to allow for any accommodation, no matter how minimal or temporary. Evil traits must either be crushed and uprooted entirely, through acts of moral heroism, or they would reign supreme. There was no in-between.<sup>13</sup>

Hurwitz's philosophy of moral extremism guided and permeated the life-style of the Novaredok *yeshivah*. Its students, taking various religious and ethical ideals to unrestrained extremes, behaved in an unconventional manner viewed by outsiders as bizarre, if not insane.

10. Ibid., December 26, 1932, p. 2.

11. Katz, *Tnuat ha-Musar*, 4:255–58.

12. Ibid., p. 219.

13. Ibid., pp. 231–40, 252–61, and passim. I have argued elsewhere that these Musar activities and the ideology of moral extremism that accompanied them were adaptations of practices and ideas found in the Jewish labor and revolutionary movement about 1905. See David E. Fishman, "Musar and Modernity: The Case of Novaredok," *Modern Judaism* 8, no. 1 (February 1988): 41–64.

For instance, they adhered to Hurwitz's doctrine of *bitokhn* (confidence in God), which called for *bitokhn le-lo hishtadlus* (confidence in God without any human effort) regarding the satisfaction of material needs such as food, clothing, and lodging. Consequently the students pursued a life of poverty, economic inactivity, and indifference toward material needs. They wore tattered and torn clothes and ate extremely sparse meals, since devoting attention to acquiring money, fine clothing, or food would have indicated a lack of *bitokhn*. The *yeshivah's* poverty was perpetuated by Hurwitz himself, who was reluctant to engage in active fund raising, since this, too, would have reflected a lack of *bitokhn* on his part.<sup>14</sup>

The ideal of *prishus* (aloofness from the world) was also taken to a new extreme, and contact with the world outside the *yeshivah* was reduced to a minimum. Outsiders were viewed as being utterly immersed in sinfulness, since they did not devote themselves totally to the study of Musar and the improvement of their religious-ethical personality. Hence interaction with them could have a harmful influence on the aspiring Musarist. Religious Jews were no better than heretics in this regard; they, too, were unwittingly enslaved to their evil passions. Hurwitz publicly praised those students who refrained from leaving Novaredok to visit their parents and siblings. He viewed them as having reached a higher level of devotion to Torah and Musar, since even home visits could prove harmful to one's religious-ethical growth. As a result, "All notion of father and mother, wife and child, relatives and family was alien to the Novaredok students."<sup>15</sup>

At this juncture it should be noted that the Novaredok *yeshivah* in many ways resembled a religious sect. It consciously withdrew itself from the world and from society in order to pursue its unique religious agenda; its attitude toward the external world was hostile and uncompromising; it demanded a high level of devotion and involvement from its members—all features characteristic of sectlike religious bodies.<sup>16</sup>

14. Silberg, "Kat ha-novardokaim," *Haaretz*, December 28, 1932, p. 2; Katz, *Tnuat ha-Musar*, 4:336.

15. Katz, *Tnuat ha-Musar*, 4:206; Avrohom Joffin, *Ha-Musar ve-ha-daat*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1973), p. 1; quotation from Silberg, "Kat ha-novardokaim," *Haaretz*, December 28, 1932, p. 2.

16. J. A. Winter, *Continuities in the Sociology of Religion* (New York, 1977), pp. 105–16.

### Development and Change: 1915–1922

The years of and immediately after the First World War were a period of important institutional and ideological change for Novaredok. Decisions made at that time, in reaction to the war crisis, had an enduring impact, and they determined basic features of Novaredok Musarism in interwar Poland.

As for the *yeshivah* itself, Hurwitz and the majority of its estimated three hundred students fled from the war zone in 1915, resettling in the Belorussian city of Homel. Shortly thereafter, the *yeshivah* was divided into four groups, three of which were sent on to other cities, where they were headed by Hurwitz's foremost disciples—in Kiev, by Rabbi Dovid Bliacher; in Kharkov, by Rabbi Yisroel Yankev Lubchansky; and in Rostov, by Rabbi Avrohom Zalmanes. The decision to disperse was a tactical necessity. Many of the students were subject to the Russian military draft, and a large assembly of young men would have been conspicuous, prompting repeated searches, arrests, and forced inductions. The dispersal was viewed as a temporary measure, and it was understood that the *yeshivah* would be reunited following the end of hostilities.<sup>17</sup> In fact, however, the division into four “central” *yeshivot* remained intact until 1939.

Meanwhile, a related change occurred in Hurwitz's Musarist ideology. Sensing that the war threatened utterly to destroy the remaining vestiges of Torah and Musar in Jewish society at large, Hurwitz abandoned his doctrine of aloofness and isolation, transmuting it into a doctrine of extreme aggressiveness in the dissemination of Musarism throughout Jewish society. This radical break in Hurwitz's thinking was recalled by his son-in-law, Rabbi Avrohom Joffin, in the following terms:

What is most wondrous is that at the beginning of the first [world] war, he “altered his order of study.” . . . He spoke to [the students] and emphasized to them, that besides their desire and devotion to raise themselves higher in Torah and *yirah* [piety], the time precipitated, and the hour demanded, that they consider themselves men of responsibility and stand in the breach with great courage. And he explained to them, based on the Talmud and common sense, that the fate and survival of the Torah lay in their hands. Most, if not all of them volunteered, and undertook to do all in their power, even to risk their lives, for the sake of the eternal survival of Torah and *yirah*.<sup>18</sup>

17. Katz, *Tnuat ha-Musar*, 4:211–12, 218.

18. Avrohom Joffin, introd. to Yosef Yoizl Hurwitz, *Madregat ha-adam* (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 3–4. The introduction was first published in the New York, 1947 edition of Hurwitz's book.

In practice, Hurwitz called upon his students in all four centers “to create . . . *yeshivot* and *kibutzim* [study collectives] everywhere—in the cities, the towns, and the villages; to bring the entire younger generation under the banner of Torah and *yirah*.” “At this hour,” he wrote, referring to the time of war and pogroms, “it is impossible for a person, no matter who he may be, to look only after his own soul.”<sup>19</sup>

In response to their master's orders, the Novaredokers threw themselves into an active campaign to recruit students for the four central *yeshivot* (through door-to-door canvassing, public addresses, and so forth) and to establish new *yeshivot* throughout Belorussia and the Ukraine. The Kiev *yeshivah*, for instance, established “branches” in Pereyaslav, Belaya Tserkov, Nezhin, Konotop, and Zolotonosha. According to one estimate, thirty Novaredok *yeshivot* were established in Belorussia and the Ukraine (including a few east of the Volga) between 1915 and 1921.<sup>20</sup> In this period the name Novaredok became synonymous with evangelism for the cause of Torah and Musar. Previously an isolationist religious sect, it now became an aggressive, expansionist religious sect. As one of Hurwitz's disciples put it, “Before the world war, the *yeshivah* was in a period of seclusion, as he [Hurwitz] had been in his first period. . . . But with the outbreak of the world war, it [began] to perform marvels in order to turn the many unto righteousness.”<sup>21</sup>

In December 1919, Hurwitz died, and the leadership of his *yeshivah* network was assumed by his scattered disciples, with the Homel *yeshivah* coming under the direction of his son-in-law, Rabbi Avrohom Joffin. In 1921 Soviet authorities initiated an exerted campaign to close the Novaredok *yeshivot*. After consultation, the *yeshivot* decided to cross over into Poland. In the winter of 1921–22 approximately six hundred Novaredok students, from all four centers, smuggled themselves across the Soviet-Polish border—roughly twice as many students as had evacuated to the Ukraine some seven years

19. The quotations are from Hurwitz's letter “to all the Novaredok *yeshivot*” entitled “Mezake et ha-rabim” (To Turn the Many unto Righteousness), which he wrote in 1919. It was subsequently included as the final section in his collected *Musar shmuesn: Madregat ha-adam*. See *Madregat ha-adam*. (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 235, 237.

20. Y. Shayn, “Yeshivat Mezritsh ha-merkazit ba-tekufah bein shtei milhamot ha-olam,” *Kol Israel* (Jerusalem), April 26, 1946, p. 2. The series of articles under this title deal mainly with the history of the Międzyrzec *yeshivah*'s forerunner, the Novaredok *yeshivah* in Kiev.

21. *Or ha-Musar* (reprint, Bnei Brak, 1965), 1:172–73.

earlier. The very last Novaredok stronghold in the Soviet Union, the Berdichev *yeshivah*, crossed over to Poland in 1925.<sup>22</sup>

### From *Yeshivah* to Movement

Following their border crossings into Poland, the Novaredok central *yeshivot* did not reunite but remained separate and autonomous institutions. The Homel *yeshivah*, headed by Joffin, settled in Białystok, and the Kiev *yeshivah* reestablished itself in Międzyrzec (in Yiddish, Mezritsh). A third center was created in Warsaw by Rabbi Avrohom Zalmanes (formerly head of the Rostov *yeshivah*), and a fourth, led by Rabbi Shmuel Weintraub (formerly head of the Berdichev *yeshivah*), wandered from one city to another until it settled in Pinsk in 1928. All four named themselves Beys Yosef after their master Rabbi Yosef Yoizl Hurwitz.

It is interesting that no serious consideration was given to returning to the prewar structure of *one* Novaredok *yeshivah*. Several factors rendered such reunification extremely difficult, if not impossible. First, the financial burden of maintaining a single *yeshivah* with six to seven hundred (nearly twice the size of the renowned *yeshivah* in Mir at its peak), would have been formidable. Furthermore, there was no clear-cut agreement as to which of Hurwitz's sons-in-law (Joffin, Lubchansky) or disciples (Bliacher, Zalmanes, and others) should succeed him as the spiritual leader of "all Novaredok." Institutional rivalry and inertia favored the perpetuation of the existing *yeshivot*, with their separate leadership structures. Finally, Novaredok's ideological commitment to "turn the many unto righteousness" seemed to be best served by maintaining a decentralized structure.

In interwar Poland, the name Novaredok referred not to a single *yeshivah* in the town by that name but to its heirs, the four central Beys Yosef *yeshivot*, each in a different province and with its own satellite *yeshivot ketanot* (junior *yeshivot*) under its supervision. Each center was essentially autonomous and self-sufficient, caring for its own financial needs and setting its own institutional policies.

Nonetheless the *menahelim* (educational and administrative heads) and students did feel bound to each other by virtue of their common master and his teachings. Their shared aloofness from the world

outside their *yeshivot* also helped preserve their sense of cohesion. It is therefore not surprising that the four central *yeshivot* maintained ties with each other after their resettlement in Poland.

The most important forum for contact between the four central *yeshivot* and an affirmation of their spiritual unity were the periodic Novaredok conventions. These events, ten of which were held in the interwar years, were attended by the *menahelim* of the central *yeshivot* and Hurwitz's other major disciples. The idea itself was not new; Hurwitz had convened a similar gathering in Homel in December 1917 in order to bring together his dispersed disciples. But in interwar Poland the Novaredok convention became a regular institution.<sup>23</sup>

A Novaredok convention was more than a great big *birzhe* at which Musar insights were exchanged among those in attendance. Its programs consisted of more than a series of *Musar shmuesn* by the *menahelim*. (Needless to say, both such events were featured as well.) It was the forum at which the Novaredokers attempted to set a common spiritual agenda: what religious-ethical characteristics required special attention; where, when, and how the study of Musar should be conducted; where new branch *yeshivot* should be set up; what sort of ties should exist between the branch *yeshivot* and their centers; and so on.

In many respects the conventions bore an uncanny resemblance to the conventions of modern Jewish movements and organizations. Each *yeshivah* was represented by its own official delegates. The gathering featured deliberations and debates that culminated in the passage of resolutions. The Novaredok Musar calendar, for example, discussed at length below, was passed as a resolution at the March 1925 convention. A *vaad ha-poel* (executive committee) was appointed to supervise the enactment of decisions, and specialized *komisyes* (commissions) were formed to deal with particular problems.<sup>24</sup> These formal and procedural elements vividly reflected the transformation of Novaredok into a religious *movement*, with the trappings of a modern movement or political party. But unlike Agudat Israel, the Novaredok movement restricted itself to questions of religious-spiritual life as it was to be lived by its members.

23. For a report on the first convention in Poland in the summer of 1923, see *Or ha-Musar*, 1:52–53. On the 1917 convention, see Katz, *Tenuat ha-Musar*, 4:216–19; Silberg "Kat ha-navardokaim," *Haaretz*, December 28, 1932, p. 2.

24. *Or ha-Musar*, 1:167–70.

22. Katz, *Tenuat ha-Musar*, 4:221–29.

The transformation of Novaredok from a *yeshivah* into a movement was also reflected in the creation of an internal hierarchical structure. The leaders and activists of the Beys Yosef *yeshivot* were now formally organized in *agudot* (councils) beginning with the Agudah Merkazit (Central Council) or Agudah Rishonah (First Council), which consisted of the *menahelim* of the central *yeshivot*. Further down the line, each individual *yeshivah* had a council made up of its faculty (the *menahel*, *rosh yeshivah*, and so forth), and a second council for its senior students. All such councils, whether central or local, held periodic meetings to examine their personal spiritual conditions as well as the spiritual state of their *yeshivah* or *yeshivot*. The meetings routinely ended with the passage of resolutions concerning its members as individuals and their respective *yeshivot*.<sup>25</sup>

Besides adopting certain institutional and structural features of a modern movement, Novaredok also adopted the standard medium of internal communication for a modern movement—the official organ or in-house journal. Entitled *Or ha-Musar* (The Light of Musar), the Hebrew-language journal presented itself (on its title page) as the “organ of the holy Beys Yosef *yeshivot* of Novaredok in Poland; devoted to matters of piety, Musar, and work among the public; edited by the Central Council of the Novaredok *yeshivot* . . . Warsaw.” Fifteen issues of *Or ha-Musar* appeared between 1922 and 1933.<sup>26</sup> They featured Musar discourses by the *menahelim* of the central *yeshivot*, writings by Rabbi Israel Salanter and other founding fathers of Musarism, and—last but not least—Novaredok news. *Or ha-Musar* regularly reported on the latest convention, printed the text of its resolutions, noted the meetings of the Central Council (and other high-level councils), and announced the establishment of new *yeshivot*. It was succeeded by another in-house journal of similar content, *Hayei ha-Musar* (The Life of Musar) (1935–39).

The creation of conventions, officers (for that is what the council members were), and in-house journals transformed Novaredok into a modern organization. One need only compare the Novaredok Musarists to the numerous Hasidic groupings in interwar Poland to appreciate the novelty of such practices. With the exception of Lu-

25. See the report of the meetings of the Central Council and other councils in *Or ha-Musar*, 2:54, 99–100.

26. The first seven issues of *Or ha-Musar* were in hectograph and are rare collectors' items. Numbers 14 (April 1931), 15 (1933), and 16 (September 1938) were published by the Beys Yosef center in Palestine.

bavitch, no Hasidic group, no matter how numerous or scattered its Hasidim, resorted to such modern tools as conventions or in-house journals to unify its adherents. It is striking that Novaredok, a stridently sectarian group that kept the outside world at a distance and viewed it with hostility, imitated—whether consciously or unconsciously—the organizational structure of worldly movements and political parties. This feature suggests the pervasive influence of modernity in Polish-Jewish society in the 1920s, even in its most “unworldly” corners.

### Expansion and Growth

The new generation of Novaredok leaders who crossed over into Poland held fast to the ideology of aggressive evangelism that Hurwitz had embraced in 1915. There were apparently no voices in favor of returning to the isolation and introversion of prewar Novaredok. The sense of crisis regarding the survival of Torah and Musar that had become an ingrained feature of Novaredok thinking during the years of war, pogroms, and Soviet rule did not dissipate following the migration to Poland. In fact, the tenor of Polish Jewish life that the Novaredokers discovered in 1922 may only have intensified their sense of crisis. The secular currents in Jewish politics, culture, and education had grown by leaps and bounds between 1915 and 1922, owing to the relative freedom afforded Jews under the German occupation and the new Polish state. Most ominous from the Novaredokers perspective were the secular Jewish schools—Tarbut, Tsentrale Yidishe Shul Organizatsye (TSYSHO, Central Yiddish School Organization), and others—which now openly competed with traditional forms of Jewish education. The latter may have come to the Novaredokers as a jolting shock, since they had been cut off from Poland and its Jews during the years when these new educational institutions had come into being and multiplied. To their minds, the mortal danger to Torah and Musar had not subsided at all but had assumed a new and more treacherous form. Writing in 1937, Joffin recalled: “We saw that the education of the youth had fallen greatly. The old *heder*—where Jewish children were raised on the Bible, Talmud, and commentaries, and aspired to go to a *yeshivah*—had become a forgotten word. In its place came the schools of the secularists, which do not teach the Bible or Mishnah, and, furthermore, stuff [the children] with deceitful opinions and

secular views." The only proper Novaredok response was the one practiced in Russia. "The hour has come," an early issue of *Or ha-Musar* editorialized, "to build and plant *yeshivot* in all the dispersion of Israel . . . and to save from death, God forbid, the youths who are caught in the trap of the secularists."<sup>27</sup>

The *menahelim* of the four central *yeshivot* used *Musar shmuesn* and other public appearances to energize their students into action. They portrayed the creation of *yeshivot* as an act of salvation, which had the power of rescuing whole communities from spiritual destruction and damnation.

If a *yeshivah* had been founded in the city where the boy named Trotsky grew up—may his name and memory be erased; his political machinations have caused the destruction of a third of the world's Judaism—then perhaps we would not have reached such a state of devastation. And if this is so, then those who could have built a *yeshivah* there and did not do so will be judged for the consequences of their laziness. For perhaps the *yeshivah* would have saved that boy.

We must not be satisfied with rescuing the individual, just as he [Hurwitz] was not satisfied with "working on himself." He did not seclude himself, for he saw that the hour was not suited for it. He devoted himself tirelessly [to rescuing others] in his old age. . . . How much more so should we, in our youth, awaken our souls to work endlessly, to stand in the breach and bring benefit to others. For he who rescues them is likened to one who rescues a person from the lion's mouth.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the interwar years, the Novaredok centers expended strenuous efforts on establishing Beys Yosef *yeshivot ketanot*, for boys between thirteen and seventeen years of age, in towns across Poland. The foot soldiers in this campaign were the older students of the central *yeshivot*, who set out on missions to various destinations, either individually or in groups. Some of them were designated by the centers as the future *menahelim* or *rashei yeshivot* of the schools they would found, while others assisted in the initial stages of the schools' formation and then returned to their *yeshivah*. According to one memoirist, the central *yeshivot* were abuzz with students coming and going to and from various towns, and it was virtually prohibited

for an older student to remain in the *yeshivah* without interruption, even if he so wished.<sup>29</sup>

The efforts of the four central *yeshivot* to "turn the many unto righteousness" through the establishment of new *yeshivot ketanot* was spurred on by a healthy measure of institutional rivalry among them. Each branch *yeshivah* (called a *snif*) remained under the close supervision of the center that founded it and was required to send its most advanced students to the center for further study. Thus the establishment of new branch *yeshivot* served as the means by which the *menahelim* in Białystok, Międzyrzec, Pinsk, and Warsaw broadened their respective spheres of influence and enlarged their pools of potential students.

The manner in which the Beys Yosef *yeshivot* were established and maintained and the relations between them and the local Jewish communities are complex subjects that cannot be examined at length in this context. Here I will touch on only a few salient points.

A common tactic employed by the Novaredokers in the establishment of new branches was to simply "occupy" one of the town's study houses or synagogues, often in the middle of the night, without consulting community members or requesting their permission. Congregants might arrive for the regular morning services to find a group of youths occupying some of their seats or benches and announcing that this was the place of a new *yeshivah*. The town residents were usually extremely reluctant to evict youths engaged in Torah study from a study or prayer house. Once the Novaredokers felt that the "captured" position was secure, members of the group would go out to recruit students for the *yeshivah*. With the *yeshivah* firmly in place and local youngsters in attendance, the *menahel* would proceed to seek out local financial support.<sup>30</sup>

The quality of the relations between the Beys Yosef *yeshivot* and their host communities varied considerably, depending on a range of factors (e.g., the personalities of the *menahel* and the local Ortho-

29. Mordkhe Shtrigler, "Farshverer," *Yidisher kemfer*, no. 1551 (April 10, 1964): 8–9. This unfinished historical novella, based on Shtrigler's experiences as a student in the Beys Yosef *yeshivah* in Łuck during the 1930s, contains valuable information and insights on the Novaredok movement in interwar Poland. It appeared in serialized form in *Yidisher kemfer*, nos. 1550–58 (March 27–May 29, 1964), nos. 1572–80 (September 9–November 6, 1964).

30. For instances of such "occupations," see "Yeshivat Beit Yosef," in *Piotrkow Trybunalski ve-ha-sevivah*, ed. Yaakov Malts and Naftali Lavi (Lau) (Tel Aviv, 1965), pp. 329–30; A. Z. Tarshish, "Ha-yeshivah be-Pinsk," in *Pinsk*, ed. Nahman Tamir (Mirski) vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1966), pp. 259–60; Karlebach, "Mussar," pp. 384–86.

27. Avrohom Joffin, "Oz nidabru" (1937) in *El ha-mevakesh* (reprint, Bnei Brak, 1964), p. 136; "Me-hayei ha-yeshivot," *Or ha-Musar*, 1:54.

28. Dovid Bliacher, *menahel* of Międzyrzec center, quoted in Chaim Ephraim Zaytchik, *Ha-meorot ha-gedolim*, 3d ed. (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 382; David Budnik, "Yud-zayin Kislev," *Or ha-Musar*, 1:32–33. Budnik was head of the Warsaw center (with Zalmanes) until his departure for Latvia in 1931.



dox leaders), but on the whole the ties were either tenuous or strained. The Novaredok leaders usually spurned contact with local *balebatim* (leading citizens), and the *kehillot* generally did not support the Novaredok schools. The latter were usually dependent upon the aid of a few generous donors, and lack of local support appears to be one reason why so many of the *yeshivot* relocated from one town to another. In at least one instance, in Oszmiana, relations between *yeshivah* and community deteriorated so badly that residents informed on the *yeshivah* to the Polish police, contending that it harbored illegal immigrants from the Soviet Union. (The charge itself was most likely true, since the Novaredokers had crossed the border illegally in 1921–22.) The Beys Yosef *yeshivah* fled town shortly thereafter.<sup>31</sup>

Despite formidable obstacles, the Novaredok *yeshivah* network grew at a remarkably rapid pace between 1922 and 1939. According to figures cited in the movement's internal publications, there were eleven Beys Yosef *yeshivot* (the centers included) in 1924, thirty-five in 1933, and sixty in 1937.<sup>32</sup> The retrospective estimate of Rabbi Ben Zion Bruk that on the eve of the Holocaust the Beys Yosef network encompassed seventy *yeshivot* and three thousand students does not appear to be farfetched.<sup>33</sup> The total number of locales in Poland that housed Novaredok *yeshivot* at one time or another during the interwar years exceeds ninety (see table 1).

A cursory review of table 1 reveals two patterns in Novaredok's spread across Poland. First, Beys Yosef *yeshivot ketanot* were generally established in towns and not in larger urban centers. Notice the absence of Novaredok *yeshivot* in Cracow, Lublin, Lwów, Vilna, Grodno, Slutsk, and Brześć nad Bugiem (in Yiddish, Brisk). This tendency may be due to the fact that a Novaredok *yeshivah* was more capable of generating local support (from the rabbi and others) in

31. Shtrigler, "Farshverer," *Yidisher kemfer*, no. 1557 (May 22, 1964): 8. The hostile relations between the *menahel* of a Beys Yosef *yeshivah* and local *balebatim* are the focus of Shtrigler's story "Yeshivah baah la-ayarah," in *Hadoar* 35, nos. 36–40 (August 17–October 12, 1956). The story, based on events that occurred in Shtrigler's hometown of Zamość, culminates with a violent struggle between the two parties for control over a local study house. On Oszmiana, see Ben Zion Bruk, *Gevilei esh* (Jerusalem, 1973), p. 89.

32. "Me-hayei ha-yeshivot," *Or ha-Musar* 1:52–54, 2:145; Joffin, "Oz nidabru," p. 136.

33. Bruk, *Gevilei esh*, p. 17. Bruk, Novaredok *rosh yeshivah* in Jerusalem, died in 1984. Nekritz's estimate of one hundred *yeshivot* is exaggerated. "Yeshivot Beit Yosef Novaredok," p. 268.

TABLE 1  
Beys Yosef *Yeshivot* in Poland, 1922–1939

Place	Number of students	Year	Source
Białystok Center	187	1926	VH, no. 1115
	199	1929	VH, no. 1115
	230	1935	VH, no. 1104
	222	1938	VH, no. 1104
Bielsk Podlaski	60	1926	VH, no. 1116
	52	1929	VH, no. 1116
	44	1938	VH, no. 1104
Brańsk	106	1929	VH, no. 1104
	70	1935	VH, no. 1104
Brody	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Buczacz	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Bursztyn	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Ciechanowiec	—		OH, 2:99
Częstochowa	—		Joffin, 2:91
Grajewo	46	1927	VH, no. 1125
	50	1935	VH, no. 1104
	48	1938	VH, no. 1104
Horochów	36	1938	VH, no. 1104
Horodenka	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Jadów	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Kołki	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Kołomyja	—		Joffin, 2:91;
			Nekritz, p. 268
Kosów	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Krynki	60	1935	VH, no. 1104
Luboml	45	1935	VH, no. 1104
	43	1938	VH, no. 1104
	70	1929	VH, no. 1139
Łuck	85	1935	VH, no. 1104
	82	1938	VH, no. 1104
	—		OH, 2:145
Maków	—		OH, 1:107
Ostrów Mazowiecka	ca. 100	1925	OH, 1:107
Piotrków	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Przasnysz	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Puławy	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Rożyszcze	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Skidel	38	1929	VH, no. 1104
	40	1935	VH, no. 1104
Sokolka	—		OH, 2:53
Święciany	30	1934	DV, November 2, 1934, p. 4
	40	1935	VH, no. 1104
Świsłocz	35	1938	VH, no. 1104
	—		OH, 2:145
Szczuczyn	—		Nekritz, p. 268

TABLE 1 (cont.)

Place	Number of students	Year	Source
Tomaszów Lubelski	ca. 80	1925	<i>OH</i> , 1:107
Włodzimierzec	143	1926	VH, no. 1164
	155	1932	VH, no. 1104
	120	1938	VH, no. 1104
Wysokie Mazowieckie	ca. 100	1925	<i>OH</i> , 1:107
	57	1926	VH, no. 1167
	55	1929	VH, no. 1104
	70	1935	VH, no. 1104
	40	1938	VH, no. 1104
Międzyrzec Center	150	1926	VH, no. 1141
	187	1929	VH, no. 1141
	220	1935	VH, no. 1104
	219	1938	VH, no. 1104
Biłgoraj	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Chmielnik (formerly in Radom)	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:53
Dęblin	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Kałużyn	ca. 100	1928	<i>OH</i> , 2:54
Kielce	ca. 100	1928	<i>OH</i> , 2:54
Kińsk	ca. 100	1928	<i>OH</i> , 2:54
Końskie	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Kowel	45	1938	VH, no. 1104
Łęczyca	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:145
Libawno	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Łódź	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Łosice	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:54
Lubartów	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Ostrowiec (formerly in Biała Podlaska)	ca. 100	1925	<i>OH</i> , 1:107
Paryśów	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Piaski	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Siedlce	ca. 100	1925	<i>OH</i> , 1:107
Staszów	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:145
Szydłowiec	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:99
Tomaszów Mazowiecki	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Włodawa	ca. 100	1925	<i>OH</i> , 1:107
Żelechów	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:146
Zwoleń	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Pinsk Center	ca. 200	1930	VH, no. 1146
(formerly in Iwia, Siemiatycze)	125	1935	VH, no. 1104
	130	1938	VH, no. 1104
Aleksandrowsk	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:145
Brasław	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Dąbrowica	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:99
Dawidgródek	—		Wischnitzer, p. 28
Gorlice	—		Nekritz, p. 268

TABLE 1 (cont.)

Place	Number of students	Year	Source
Janów Poleski	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:99
Kałuż	—		Wischnitzer, p. 28
Lachowicze	33	1938	VH, no. 1104
Lida	—		Wischnitzer, p. 28
Olkieniki	—		<i>OH</i> , 1:108
Ożarów	—		Wischnitzer, p. 28
Pinsk ( <i>yeshivah ketanah</i> )	70	1929	VH, no. 1104
	45	1935	VH, no. 1104
Poczajów	—		Wischnitzer, p. 28
Prużana	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:145
Raków	—		<i>OH</i> , 1:108
Sambor	—		Wischnitzer, p. 28
Siemiatycze	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Tuczyn	35	1938	VH, no. 1104
Wiśniowiec Nowy	—		<i>OH</i> , 1:108
Wołkowysk	70	1938	VH, no. 1104
Zamość	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Zdzięcioł	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Warsaw Center	—		—
Będzin	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Falenica	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Izbica Kujawska	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Lubcz	—		<i>OH</i> , 1:145
Mława	—		<i>OH</i> , 2:54
Nowogródek	87	1929	VH, no. 1104
	55	1935	VH, no. 1104
	52	1938	VH, no. 1104
Ostrołęka	ca. 100	1925	<i>OH</i> , 1:107
Pabianice	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Płońsk	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Pułtusk	ca. 100	1928	<i>OH</i> , 2:53
Sandomierz	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Skierewice	ca. 100	1926	<i>OH</i> , 1:169
Węgrów	ca. 100	1928	<i>OH</i> , 2:54
Włocławek	ca. 100	1925	<i>OH</i> , 1:107
Wołomin	—		Nekritz, p. 268
Wyszków	ca. 50	1925	<i>OH</i> , 1:169

## SOURCES:

- DV*: *Dos vort*, a Vilna Orthodox weekly  
 Joffin: Avrohom Joffin, *Ha-Musar ve-ha-daat*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1973)  
 Nekritz: Yehudah Leyb Nekritz, "Yeshivot Beit Yosef Novaredok," in *Mosdot Torah be-Eropah*, ed. S. K. Mirsky (New York, 1956), pp. 247–90  
*OH*: *Or ha-Musar*  
 VH: Vaad Hayeshivot Archives, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York  
 Wischnitzer: Mark Wischnitzer, "Di banayung fun di yeshives in Mizrekh Eyrope nokh der ershter velt-milkhom," *YIVO bleter* 31–32 (1948): 9–36

locations where there were no existing *yeshivot* for boys between thirteen and seventeen. Since a good number of *yeshivot* were situated in Poland's larger cities, the Novaredokers may have gravitated toward smaller settlements where they were, more often than not, the "only show in town."

Second, a surprisingly high proportion of Beys Yosef *yeshivot* were established outside the Lithuanian provinces, that is, outside the native territory of Salanterian Musar. (Note the proliferation of *yeshivot* in Galicia and central Poland.) This distribution may likewise reflect a tendency for Beys Yosef *yeshivot* to fill in preexistent voids. Jewish communities in central Poland did not have a strong tradition of maintaining formal *yeshivot* for teenage boys. Instead, they supported *shtiblekh* (prayer and study houses), where the hours and programs of study were flexible and set by each student independently. Thus there were few existing *yeshivot* in the towns of the central provinces. Novaredok's success in spreading throughout these heavily Hasidic regions may also owe something to certain phenomenological affinities between the Hasidic and Musarist brands of pietism.<sup>34</sup>

In Lithuania, on the other hand, the Novaredokers encountered a considerable degree of opposition, particularly among the rabbinical elite. The cities of Brześć nad Bugiem and Vilna were effectively closed to them because the leading rabbinical figures objected to Novaredok Musar as a perversion of Judaism and refused to tolerate Beys Yosef *yeshivot* in their midst. Elsewhere opposition was motivated by self-interest rather than religious principle. Existing *yeshivot* protested loudly whenever they felt that the Novaredokers were encroaching on their territory, claiming that the competition for students and funding would threaten their continued existence. When, for instance, a group of Novaredokers settled in Pinsk in 1922 (shortly after crossing over the Soviet border into Poland), they were brought before a rabbinical court by another *yeshivah* on charges of *hasagat gevul* (trespassing). The court ruled against the Novaredokers and ordered them to leave town. As a rule, Novaredok's expansion into Lithuania was modest and cautious.<sup>35</sup>

34. Compare S. Schachnowitz, "Zwei Erkenntnisse und Ein Bekenntnis," in *Festschrift für Jacob Rosenheim*, ed. Heinrich Eisenmann (Frankfurt a.M., 1931), pp. 126–30.

35. A. S. Hershberg, *Pinkas Bialystok*, vol. 2 (New York, 1950), p. 338; Shtrigler, "Farshverer," *Yidisher kemfer*, no. 1551 (April 10, 1964): 8, no. 1552 (April 17,

Taken as a whole, the growth of the Novaredok movement in interwar Poland as measured in the number of *yeshivot* (from four to seventy) and number of students (from six hundred to three thousand) is quite impressive. To appreciate the significance of these figures one must view them in their proper context and recall the following points: First, the Novaredok *yeshivot ketanot* were the rough equivalents of high schools, not elementary schools. The figure of three thousand students therefore compares quite favorably with the student figures at the high school level of the modern Jewish school systems. Second, the branch *yeshivot* received no direct financial support from the centers, and each *yeshivah ketanah* made its own financial arrangements. Third, the Novaredokers were total strangers and outsiders to the communities they "infiltrated" in order to establish schools. *A priori* they had no local members or supporters. The figure of seventy *yeshivot* is therefore all the more impressive. Finally, the Novaredok schools were sectarian religious institutions. Demands on students in terms of time and energy were very great. Enrollment in a Novaredok *yeshivah* involved considerable sacrifices, such as material impoverishment and dissociation from one's family and friends.

Much of the credit for Novaredok's growth must be attributed to the zeal and energy of its youthful vanguards, who resembled in this regard current-day Lubavitch *shelikhim* (emissaries). In fact, Novaredok in the interwar period may be viewed as the historical antecedent of contemporary Lubavitch, in that it was the first aggressively expansionist Orthodox movement in modern times.

Viewed within its immediate historical context, Novaredok should also be considered one of the many youth movements that swept across Polish Jewry in the interwar years. Novaredok's activists were young men in their late teens and twenties; the four central *yeshivot* were their *lokals*, their movement meeting halls. The central *yeshivot* constituted a separate realm in which the activists lived, studied, debated, strived, planned, and built, far away from their parents and the older generation. Their sense of "chosenness" and of their mission to remake themselves, the younger generation, and eventually the world according to their shared vision was comparable to the

1964): 11–12. The historical veracity of this and the previously mentioned events, as well as the names of the places in which they occurred, were confirmed by Shtrigler in an interview with the author, New York, May 28, 1987.

*élan* that existed in the various Zionist and socialist youth movements of the period.<sup>36</sup>

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Rabbi Avrohom Joffin looked back nostalgically (and with some exaggeration) at the interwar years as the golden era of Novaredok: "All of Poland was in our hands, from Swienzian [Święciany] on the border with Lithuania, to Kołomyja on the Rumanian border, Pinsk on the Soviet border, and Częstochowa . . . And just in our last year there we had great success in our work of spreading Torah and Musar. But suddenly we fell from our high peak. The calamity is very great . . . our territory was taken from us."<sup>37</sup>

### Changes in Religious Life

To this point I have examined developments in Novaredok's structure and scope. I now turn to its internal religious life, which underwent changes of a more limited kind.

The regime of Musar activities followed in the Beys Yosef *yeshivot* was identical to the one established by Hurwitz in Novaredok—daily *birzhes*, weekly *vaadim*, work on *protim* or *peules*, *Musar shmuesn* twice weekly, and the *asiri koydesh* for those most totally involved. The work on achieving religious-ethical perfection continued along much the same lines as before the war.

But something important had in fact changed, at least for the upper echelon of students in the central *yeshivot*. The pursuit of religious-ethical perfection had become more difficult and problematic, because Musar activity had lost its exclusive pride of place. Many students at the four central *yeshivot* now divided their time between "working on themselves" and "turning the many unto righteousness," that is, establishing new *yeshivot ketanot*. There was a built-in tension between these two highly valued types of activity, and one necessarily took time and energy from the other. The interwar generation of Novaredokers had to struggle with reconciling and balancing these activities. According to Joffin:

36. Moshe Kligsberg, "Di yidishe yugnt bavegunen in Poyln tsvishn beyde velt-milkhomes: A sotsyologischeshtudye," in *Studies in Polish Jewry, 1919-1939*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (New York, 1974), pp. 137-229; Ezra Mendelsohn, "Jewish Politics in Interwar Poland: An Overview," in this volume.

37. Joffin, *Ha-Musar ve-ha-daat*, 2:91.

Our Master bequeathed to us his teachings and set down for us the path of our activity: to work on ourselves and to work on behalf of the many to the utmost. We always had a great struggle about how to join these two aspects, so that they could coexist as one. How can one fulfill the side of attaining high moral virtues, of being immersed constantly in examining one's deeds and the purity of one's soul . . . when at the same time he is obligated to engage in work on behalf of the many, which of necessity distracts him, particularly if he must leave and journey to outlying areas [to fortify the branches of the *yeshivot*]?<sup>38</sup>

The conflict between these two values was felt most acutely by the *menahelim* of the new branch *yeshivot*, who were burdened with considerable administrative responsibilities. Only recently they had been students in the central *yeshivot*, immersed in problems of Musar. Now they were preoccupied with problems of student recruitment, financing, room and board, relations with the local community and with the central *yeshiva*, and so forth. Their personal work on themselves decreased dramatically and they were acutely aware of the spiritual losses they had suffered because of their "public work." In order to address the need of the *menahelim* for spiritual growth and regeneration, a new Novaredok practice was instituted—retreats for groups of *menahelim*. Called *kolelim*, these gatherings lasted for a week's time, during which the participants focused together on "prayer, the study of Musar, and reviewing each and every one's [spiritual] condition" away from the pressures of their respective *yeshivot*.<sup>39</sup>

Another practice that may have been instituted in response to the new problem of sustaining both inner spiritual growth and public activity was the Novaredok calendar. The calendar, passed at the March 1925 convention, divided the year into six seasons, each devoted to working on a different moral virtue or vice: contentment with one's lot, confidence in God, consistency between thought and deed, kindness, pride, and repentance were the original six. In subsequent years the calendar was expanded to nine different seasons, with some minor differences instituted among the central *yeshivot*.<sup>40</sup> This calendar, which helped provide guidance and direction to the Musar activity in Novaredok *yeshivot*, had a number of positive results. It forged an additional link between the scattered Beys Yosef

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, p. 37; *Or ha-Musar*, 2:54.

40. *Or ha-Musar*, 1:167-69; Katz, *Tenuat ha-Musar*, 4:257-58; "Kuntrus Hasde Dovid," anonymous biography (by Aharon Surasky?), in Dovid Bliacher, *Divrei binah ve-Musar* (Tel Aviv, 1970), pp. 46-48.

*yeshivot* and ensured a certain sweep and comprehensiveness to each student's "work on himself." But it also assisted students and *menahelim* in employing their personal Musar time more effectively, since the theme for the month was set and well defined. It thereby helped ease their frustration that a portion of their time was being "swallowed up" by the work of establishing and maintaining *yeshivot ketanot*.

A third religious value, besides the cultivation of Musar and the establishment of new *yeshivot*, came to prominence during the interwar years—talmudic learning. As mentioned earlier, Talmud had not been a major concern in the original Novaredok *yeshivah*. Hurwitz's virtual disregard of this discipline, the core of the traditional *yeshivah* curriculum, had disturbed a great many Lithuanian rabbis and created tensions between Novaredok and the mainstream Lithuanian *yeshivot*. In the interwar years, the gap between the Novaredok central *yeshivot* and Mir, Kleck, and Raduń was narrowed with regard to the relative weight ascribed to talmudic study and the actual caliber of learning.

In the interwar years all the Novaredok centers had *rashei yeshivot* on their staffs, that is, scholars whose prime responsibility was to give *shiurim* and supervise the talmudic studies on the premises. This was a significant departure from the prewar practice in Novaredok, where senior students, without formal credentials or known reputations, had given the *shiurim*. The Białystok and Międzyrzec centers maintained two *rashei yeshivot* each and conducted *shiurim* on two and occasionally three different levels. Attendance was not compulsory, and only a small fraction of students "belonged" to a *shiur*. But the mere presence of a *bona fide* mentor in talmudic learning constituted an elevation of its status.<sup>41</sup> In most branch *yeshivot* as well, the staff consisted of both a *rosh yeshivah* and *menahel*.

The Białystok center, under the leadership of Rabbi Avrohom Joffin, broke most clearly of all with the Novaredok tradition of relegating Talmud to a secondary position in the curriculum. Joffin conscientiously strove to revive Talmud study in the Białystok *yeshivah* and succeeded in this endeavor to a surprising extent.<sup>42</sup> First

41. Vaad Hayeshivot Archives, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, folders 1115, 1141.

42. Joffin's talmudism should be seen in the context of his personal biography. He had studied in several prominent *yeshivot* (in Slutsk, Kobryn, Malecz) before he attended Novaredok and was introduced to its unique religious life-style. In Nova-

and foremost, he presented halakhic *pilpulim* (dialectical discourses) to the student body twice a week, while also offering two weekly *Musar shmuesn*.<sup>43</sup> This was an important symbolic act. Joffin was thereby combining the function of a *rosh yeshivah* and *menahel*, something Hurwitz had never done. He was serving as a model for the ideal of uniting a high degree of Torah scholarship and Musar sensitivity in one personality. Moreover, the fact that he presented both his halakhic and Musar discourses twice a week put talmudic and Musar activity on equal ground; it was an implicit argument for equilibrium between the two.

By contrast, the *menahel* of the Międzyrzec center, Rabbi Dovid Bliacher, left the presentation of *shiurim* to *rashei yeshivot*, his subordinates in the *yeshivah's* hierarchy. This rendered Talmud symbolically subordinate to Musar, there being no individual in the *yeshivah* leadership who personified both values.

By all accounts, Joffin's halakhic *pilpulim* were impressive intellectual achievements and had an outstanding reputation in the Lithuanian *yeshivot*. Their fame, according to one former student in Białystok—Rabbi Aharon Surasky—had important consequences: "His *shiurim* in Halakhah attracted young scholars of great talent. [They] extricated Novaredok, to a great degree, from its isolation

redok he was recognized for his talmudic talents, and Rabbi Yosef Yoizl Hurwitz appointed him to give *shiurim*. Joffin developed a close relationship with Hurwitz and eventually married one of his daughters. During the war years he assisted his aging father-in-law in directing the *yeshivah* in Homel and assumed its leadership after the latter's death. Thus Joffin was uniquely suited to alter the position of Talmud study in the Homel *yeshivah*, in its subsequent incarnation as the Białystok center. He had a solid and impressive command of talmudic literature (unlike some of Hurwitz's other disciples), and, as Hurwitz's son-in-law and successor in Homel, he had the prestige and moral authority to institute changes without being accused of "betraying" Novaredok Musarism. The final impetus for Joffin's elevating the position of Talmud study was probably provided in Homel. There he developed a close friendship with Rabbi Borukh Ber Levovitz, head of the Kamieniec (in Yiddish, Kamenits) *yeshivah*, which had likewise fled from the war front. Joffin and Levovitz were neighbors in Homel and are reported to have spent much time together. Their relationship is particularly interesting because Kamieniec was, in a sense, the very antithesis of Novaredok. It was the one major Lithuanian *yeshivah* that refused to include the study of Musar in its daily regime. Levovitz was adamant that the Talmud could provide all the religious-ethical guidance and inspiration a *yeshivah* student needed. Joffin's interaction with Levovitz apparently led him to reconsider the generations' old issue of Talmud study versus Musar and to reassess their relative weight in the *yeshivah's* religious life. See Aharon Surasky, "Toldotav ve-kavim li-dmuto," in Avrohom Joffin, *Ha-Musar ve-ha-daat al ha-Torah*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 9–12. On the Kamieniec *yeshivah*, see Hillel Seidman, "Yeshivat Kneset Beit Yitzhak de-Kamenits," in *Mosdot Torah be-Eropah*, pp. 307–24.

43. Hershberg, *Pinkas Białystok*, p. 337.

and drew it closer to the mainstream of the *yeshivot*. People stopped saying that in Novaredok the study of Musar is preferred to the study of Talmud, or that the *yeshivah* values a student who fears sin more than a student who is learned.<sup>44</sup> Thus Joffin's *shiurim* had the effect of rehabilitating Novaredok's reputation in the Lithuanian *yeshivot*, and the Bialystok center began to attract a different sort of student— young capable talmudists who were interested in hearing fine *shiurim*. Their arrival undoubtedly altered the tenor of the religious atmosphere inside the *yeshivah*.

Joffin cultivated talmudic studies in the Bialystok center through other steps as well. He personally encouraged outstanding talmudic students to write down their *novellae* and publish them.<sup>45</sup> He chose outstanding young scholars to be his *rashei yeshivot* and helped advance their scholarly careers. Thus, shortly after the *yeshivah* settled in Bialystok, he appointed a young man who had joined Novaredok during the war years, Rabbi Yaakov Kanievsky, to deliver a regular *shiur* for the most talented students. Joffin also helped Kanievsky publish his first book, *Shaarei tevunah* (1925), with the title page prominently announcing that the author belonged to the Novaredok *yeshivah* in Bialystok. *Shaarei tevunah* launched Kanievsky's worldwide reputation as the Gaon from Horonstaypl or the Stappeler. After marrying the sister of Rabbi Avrohom Yeshaya Karelitz (the Hazon Ish) and emigrating to Palestine, Kanievsky became the foremost halakhic authority for non-Hasidic ultra-Orthodox circles in Bnei Brak.<sup>46</sup>

Kanievsky's rise to prominence was important in the history of Novaredok. For the first time a former student and now *rosh yeshivah* of a Novaredok *yeshivah* was recognized in Lithuanian rabbinical circles as an outstanding talmudic authority. The Kanievsky phenomenon played an important role in rehabilitating Novaredok's reputation among Lithuanian rabbis and *yeshivot*. This rehabilitation received its most concrete expression in the generous allocations given by the Vilna-based Vaad Hayeshivot (Council of *Yeshivot*) to the Bialystok center.<sup>47</sup>

44. Surasky, "Toldotav ve-kavim li-dmuto," pp. 8–9.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

46. Ben Zion Bruk, "Tzidkuto ha-niflaah," special appendix in memory of Yaakov Kanievsky, in *Yated neeman*, 29 Av 5745 (1985), p. 11.

47. The allocation to Bialystok was much larger than that to Międzyrzec, although the size of the two *yeshivot* was identical. See the Vaad Hayeshivot Archives, folder 1106.

In general, religious life in the Novaredok *yeshivot* became more variegated during the interwar years. While many students continued to immerse themselves in Musar, as had traditionally been the path of Novaredok, some were deeply involved in the creation of new *yeshivot*, while others delved into the pages of the Talmud. As a result of the modifications in Novaredok's value system and field of activity, its religious life was less uniform and cohesive in independent Poland than it had been in the prewar period.

Finally, a word about the position of the Novaredok movement within organized Polish Orthodoxy. On the one hand, Novaredok had virtually no political influence on the affairs of the Orthodox Jewish community. Joffin and the other *menahelim* were not active in Agudat Israel and its related bodies; they eschewed political activity as a dangerous diversion from what ought to be one's prime pursuit in life—the attainment of religious-ethical perfection.

But despite this aloofness toward the Orthodox community, Novaredok's prestige grew considerably in religious circles during the interwar years. Not only did Joffin hold a secure position on the executive committee of the Vaad Hayeshivot alongside other prominent *rashei yeshivot*—something that would have been inconceivable for Hurwitz before the war—but the Novaredokers were lauded for their steadfastness and devotion by the Gerer Rebbe himself—Rabbi Abraham Mordechai Alter (1866–1948)—the spiritual mentor of Agudat Israel.<sup>48</sup> This newfound respect and appreciation were due in no small measure to Novaredok's reputation for success in attracting young people to Torah and Musar. At a time when the younger generation was breaking with its parents, abandoning traditional Jewish patterns, and joining modern movements, Novaredok's aggressive efforts to "stop the epidemic"<sup>49</sup> were admired even in Orthodox circles that disagreed with Novaredok's religious outlook and way of life.

48. See the brief letter sent in the name of the Gerer Rebbe to the Novaredok periodical *Hayei ha-Musar* (reprint, Bnei Brak, 1963), 2:1.

49. The expression is that of *Or ha-Musar*, 2:96.