Lelov: cultural memory and a Jewish town in Poland. Investigating the identity and history of an ultra - orthodox society.

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Investigating the identity and history of an ultra - orthodox society.

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Abstract.

Lelov, an otherwise quiet village about fifty miles south of Cracow (Poland), is where Rebbe Dovid (David) Biederman founder of the Lelov ultra-orthodox (Chasidic) Jewish group, - is buried. His grave is now a focal point of the Chasidic pilgrimages. The pilgrims themselves are a Chasidic hodgepodge, dressed in fur-brimmed hats, dreadlocked, and they all come to Lelov for the same reasons: to pray, love, and eat with their brethren. The number of pilgrims has grown exponentially since the collapse of Communism in Poland in 1989; today about three hundred ultra-orthodox Jews make a trek. Mass pilgrimage to *kevorim* (Chasidic graves), is quite a new phenomenon in Eastern Europe but it has already became part of Chasidic identity.

This thesis focuses on the Chasidic pilgrimage which has always been a major part of the Jewish tradition. However, for the past fifty years, only a devoted few have been able to undertake trips back to Poland. With the collapse of Communism, when the sites in Eastern and Central Europe became more open and much more accessible, the ultra-orthodox Jews were among the first to create a ‘return movement’. Those who had been the last to leave Poland in search of asylum are now becoming the initiators of the re-discovery of Jewish symbols in this part of the world.

Aknowledgments.

Completing a PhD is truly a marathon, and I would not have been able to complete this journey without the aid and support of countless people over the four seven years. I must first express my gratitude towards my supervisors Doctor Martyn Housden and late Professor John Hiden.

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I also would like to thank the people of Lelov, both Polish and Chasidic Throughout the years I have heard ideas and have been inspired by a number of people and feel indebted to them for their existence and their contribution in moulding me, even if they themselves have not known this. Their experiences and memories provided me with many details that unquestionably helped to create this work.

Finally, I would like to express gratitude to my family, for their continuous encouragement, especially my late grandmother Zofia who has supported me over the years believing that education is the first step on the way to human perfection. Through the colourful memories of the pre-war Poland, her Chasidic neighbours and their encounters, she had inspired me to research this subject.

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Preface.

Lelov is, arguably, one of the least known Chasidic forces in Judaism today. Its history indicates, however, that it should be otherwise. Understanding how the past, leadership and a social dynamic can contribute to discovering why a once illustrious dynasty has been gradually vanishing into the Chasidic melting pot of Israel and America is crucial. Historic experiences of *aliyah*, the immigration of Jews to Israel, followed by establishing a first Chasidic 'court' in Jerusalem and, later, in America as well as renewing a Jewish pilgrimage movement in Poland, put the Lelov dynasty back on the Chasidic map. This drew the attention of ordinary, local people to traditions and customs that otherwise might have been forgotten long ago.

This contribution is particularly timely today, as many contemporary ultra-orthodox groups, for example Braclav or Ger (Gora Kalwaria) are becoming involved in regular pilgrimage movements rediscovering their European roots.

I began this work in 2008 with two goals in mind: to look for traces of Jewish life in a rural district of Lelov and to examine the origin of modern Chasidic pilgrimage movement in Eastern Europe. I wanted to understand how Jewish history started in Lelov, but perhaps more importantly, how it continues to be written today. Therefore, I undertook my field research in the region of Lelov, in the Polish Upper Silesia County.

My research relied heavily on the Chasidic sources, some never published. These key internal documents, among them 'The Lelov Tribe', provided crucial historical data as well as helped to shed light on the state of internal

Chasidic affairs. Extracts from those documents are provided in appendices. Moreover, much of my study of Dovid Biederman and his son Moshe is based on 'Sefer Kodesh Hilulim' published by Yair Weinstock in Hebrew in 1949 (extracts available in appendix 2). This work, although slightly edited by the author was, however, based on '*Pri Kodesh Hilulim'* by Rebbe Tzvi Hirsh of Ziditshoyv (Ukrainian: Zhydachiv; Polish: Zydaczow), and was first published in Lelov in 1865. Like any other Chasidic sages, both 'Sefer Kodesh Hilulim' and 'Pri Kodesh Hilulim' are the mixtures of biographical data and mythologized or exaggerated testimonies.

My archival research also served for the preparation of this field work. The historical part of the dissertation is based mostly on archival sources, including early censuses.

As the historical sources available in the local archives are scarce and more fragmented, so the settling history that I could draw is less detailed. Many crucial documents were destroyed during the Nazi invasion in early September 1939. Moreover, there had not been a separate Chasidic census conducted under the tsarist governance in the nineteenth century so it was hard to conclude how many Chasidic Jews actually lived in Lelov prior and after Moshe Biederman's relocation to Israel. However, some Old Russian maps of Lelov survived. I used one of them to conclude that the Jews of Lelov were not segregated in the settlements. There were neither Jewish quarters nor Jewish streets. A copy of the 1825 Russian map is available in appendix 4.

Some information included in this dissertation is a part of so called 'oral tradition' reflecting the Chasidic custom of story-telling. As a result, there

may not be any apparent proof or published documents to validate it.

This work, however, aims above all to examine the Chasidic oral tradition in order to create a larger picture of a particular community. Interestingly, certain quotes from the interview conducted in Lelov in January 2010 seem to confirm that Chasidic stories were included in 'Sefer Kodesh Hilulim'. Whilst the story-telling emerging from the interviews might sometimes appear fanciful, it could, nevertheless, complement other, more established sources.

In addition, excerpts from the informal interviews with the Polish inhabitants of Lelov are also quoted and available in appendix 1. The latter, in conjunction with extensive press releases published by the Polish newspaper '*Dziennik Zachodni'* since the early 1990s sheds light on how the renewal of a Chasidic pilgrimage is perceived locally.

Finally, a number of photographs and videos were taken during my visit in Lelov in January 2010. I attach them separately hoping that these materials can illustrate Chasidic pilgrimage perhaps even better than words.

In sum this work aims to provide an historical summary of Lelov's dynasty. It draws on unpublished primary and secondary sources as well as on literature which has never been translated into English. In addition, it also contains information which is not widely known regardless of a rapidly growing scholarly interest in Chasidic matters in Eastern Europe.

Some of the subjects, including pilgrimage, have few scholarly references. This work therefore presents original material and analytical insights in the English language. It is hoped that my research can provide a basis for further academic studies.

Introduction.

Those, who fall into the category of the Orthodox, are often seen as the followers of tradition and ancient rituals, scrupulous in observance. Ultra-orthodox Jews do not pretend to be as flexible as any other modernised Jews in their approach to religion and customs, do not hide the external signs of their Jewishness such as a yarmulke or dietary laws Those, who we will be turning our attention to, may not be simply called the Orthodox Jews but the ultraorthodox Jews assuming that they maintain stricter standards of faith and observance (Hellman, 1999, p.12). They are also known under the biblical term *haredim* or singular *haredi* those, who keep the law and observe it. In Israel, haredi are recognised as the adversaries of modernising Judaism, living in insular communities sometimes with limited contact to the outside world. Although the word haredi can be derived from the biblical Hebrew term: *harada*, which means 'fear', following this haredi can be seen as "one who trembles in awe of God", (Isaiah 66:2, 5) many actually think, ultraorthodox Jews tremble in fear of external world.

Orthodox Jews often argue that Judaism as a religion and the only truthful way of life cannot be exposed to the temptations of a secular society hence they discard or suspend the use of television, internet, irreligious or non-haredi publications or at least that is how some of the rebbes behave. Undoubtedly some of the groups do follow those rules word for word, seeing themselves either as the fighters against the birth of new liberal forms of Judaism or deliberately ignorant of non-haredi society. Ultra-orthodox Jews such as the Chassidim do not generally use the term: haredi. They are more

likely to call themselves the pious Jews or virtuous Jews, or simple *Yidn*, a Yiddish term for a Jew.

This brings up another connotation which reveals that the haredi do not consider the ultra-orthodox group that they belong to as a separate sect or a subgroup. This means to them there must be something essentially haredi about being Jewish as such. There is also an influence of a traditional Jewish society seeing its members' humanity always through the prism of belonging to a Jewish community. A Jew is a Jew not only because the *halakha* states so, but most of all because he intentionally or unintentionally becomes a part of particular community by adapting the Jewish Past, its history of struggle and salvation, and Jewish Heritage. The latter being (among many), a combination of lineage, ethnicity, religious rites and sacred texts. The past and heritage seem to be the most significant in the traditional Jewish mentality. Hence, traditional Jewish society is based on knowledge and values of the past; the future is important only as a hope for the restoration of past values or as a repository of a messianic redemption (Furman-Kerner, 1998, p.75). The Chassidim are in a sense preoccupied with the past, but their perception of history differs from the Western one. The past serves as a powerful myth that helps to develop their contemporary sense of identity. Like many conservative religious communities, the ultra-orthodox Jews tend to use history to invoke a better, purer, mythical time.

Chasidic men, for example, dress as in eighteenth or nineteenth century Poland to associate themselves more closely with this time.

At some point, traditional Jewish society (and this includes ultra-orthodox

communities) can be seen as an example of ‘postfigurative culture’. According to Margaret Mead (1970), this type of culture primarily allows younger generations to learn most of all from the collective experiences and history of their forebears. *Yiddishkeit* needs agents of history to be preserved and passed down the generations. It demands transmission but it also presents a sense of changeless continuity where some attempts at modernisation can be seen as rebellion. Rites, customs and their observance should be strictly imitated and repeated for the sake of a pure Jewishness. Those, who continuously duplicate traditional behaviours, speak of the voices of past and holiness. The figure of a *tzadick* plays a significant role in giving voice of the heritage and will of God expressed in the past and repeated in presence.

Chasidism teaches that mystical notions and the pursuit of holiness should be related to every action and every deed of ours as Holy Sparks are to be found in all creatures:

‘Holy Sparkles, fell down when God was creating and destroying the worlds, a human being should purify and lift them: from a stone to a plant, from a plant to an animal, from an animal to a talking creature; he should purify the Holy Sparks surrounded the shells (*kellipot*) . This is the main obligation of every Israelite. ‘(Buber, 1993, p.13)

When a Chasidic man dresses in the morning, he also fulfils his religious obligation to look modest. Before eating even a tiny bite of food, he says a prayer thanking God for his meal. By doing it, he also helps to raise fallen Sparks as long as his intentions remain pure. Seen from this perspective,

a simple intention to travel to the places where most of modern Jewry originate from, also takes a new shape.

Pilgrimage has always been a major part of the Jewish tradition but for the past fifty years, only a devoted few have been able to undertake trips back to the historical heart of the world's Jewry.

With the collapse of Communism, when the sites in Eastern and Central Europe became more open and much more accessible, the haredi were among the first to create a 'return movement'. Those, who had been the last to leave Poland in search of asylum, were now becoming the initiators of the re-discovery of Jewish symbols in this part of the world. For them, these European sites, once the outposts of exile for the wandering Jewish people, have now been transformed by history and the Holocaust into signs of a Jewish past (Heilman, 1998, p.75).

Is it happening because haredi Jews still consider themselves as existing in Exile? Is it because the State of Israel is sometimes seen only as a temporary solution until all Jews will be released from the trouble of wordily life by the arrival of the Messiah? Or maybe curiosity is involved, a natural thirst for visiting places once crowded with flourishing Jewish culture, giving birth to the greatest teaching and spiritual masters.

Although there are many publications analysing the problem of memory and the construction of identity among Jews living in countries formerly located behind the Iron Curtain, very few, for example Ari Goldman's "Rosh Ha-Shanah Journey to Hasidic Master's Tomb," (1998) or Steven M.

Lowenstein's 'The Jewish cultural tapestry: international Jewish folk tradition' (2000) mention the reconstitution of a pilgrimage movement among ultra orthodox groups known as 'Chassidim'. The journeys to Lelov that were initiated in the early 1990's (currently being recognised as a pilgrimage movement typical of the activity of Chasidic communities before The Second World War), should be seen as a strong factor in creating a common memory for the group and thus helping to shape its identity and to reunite those living in Diaspora all over the world.

In this project, I will therefore explore how members of self-managing groups, living independently in the State of Israel and the United States of America, enact identity in their regular pilgrimage meetings in Lelov (Poland). The pilgrimage movement is an important factor that enables individuals to be recognised as members of this particular group.

I have chosen Lelov (a little town in southern Poland) as an example that provides historical frames of reference and for the discussion of interactions between the haredi (ultra-orthodox) and Polish gentiles.

This thesis explores the establishment and development of the Lelov ultra-orthodox group. Consequently this work could well be seen as one element in a wider 'programme' of re-discovering the Jewish history of Central and Eastern Europe, and hence of re-defining in more general terms how the region is understood.

I have chosen to focus primarily on the history of the community from its foundation by the first Lelover tzadick- Rebbe Dovid Biederman of Lelov.

The dissertation falls into five main chapters.

Chapter One sets the scene referring to the pilgrimage performed by the Chassidim in January 2010.

It is mainly dedicated to Chasidic returns to Lelov. It is important to examine what the presence of orthodox pilgrims brings into the landscape of this small town, if it shapes and re-news the idea of multiculturalism

Chapter Two refers to historical aspects of Jewish settlement in the former town of Lelov (currently without municipal rights), in southern Poland.

It defines the historic platform and dynamic of an early Jewish settlement in the land that eventually became home to the largest and perhaps, the most diverse Jewish community before the Second World War world.

This chapter also provides information about the emergence of the Chasidic movement.

Chapter Three outlines the life and teaching of the first Lelover Rebbe and explains the historic circumstances under which this initially marginal movement became one of the most influential spiritual powers of Judaism.

It also gives a brief overview of the rebbe's biography, which concentrates on the growth of his tzadick consciousness. It refers to written sources and Chasidic testimonies to interpret his teachings. This chapter also reveals the circumstances under which the pilgrimage movement in Lelov was revived.

Chapter Four is an examination of the continuity of the Lelov court in Israel and the difficulties that the first Lelov rebbe of Israel - Moshe Biederman - faced on his journey to and settlement in *Eretz Yisrael.* This chapter also surveys the conditions under which the first Chasidic settlers lived.

Chapter Five discusses the lives and doctrines of the later Lelov rebbes based both on Chasidic and historic sources. It also draws some general

conclusions from the material, and in particular tries to assess the extent to which, the ultra-orthodox leaders of the Lelov dynasty encouraged and supported the growth of Chasidism in Israel.

I try to relate what is happening in Lelov to trends elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. That is to say, Ukraine and Hungary (for instance) are very much in the process of re-discovering their Jewish heritage.

Sections presented in Chapter Four, and partially Chapter Five, provide an historical and cultural analysis of first Chasidic settlement in Israel. This is particularly interesting because Moshe Biederman's aliyah was inspired and driven by messianic expectations rather than by social or political reasons, and inevitably changed the face of the Jewish community in Israel.

A series of appendices give samples of the Lelov's heritage and history.

Motives of this study.

My desire to write a dissertation was originally inspired by questions of growing interest in Jewish history, tradition and culture particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Chasidism, once a mystical religious revival movement, developed in early eighteenth century in Ukrainian Podolia and became fundamental to perceptions of Eastern European Jewry, hence it is essential to understand it components. This work intends to show the many manifestations of Chasidic traditions and answer questions such as, from where do ultra-orthodox Jews derive their identity? Does the renewal of a pilgrimage movement play a role in reinforcing Chasidic identity? How do certain leadership personalities influence particular movements? Personalities such as: Dovid Biderman of Lelov, Moshe Biederman and his

successors as well as one of the first Chasidic leaders in America - Pinchas Dovid Horowitz become the focus of this analysis, subjects of contrast and comparison with the aim of highlighting both commonalities and variations between them. This subject could be approached in an encyclopaedic manner, with several Lelov rebbes leading different branches of the movement, therefore, the process of selection had to be undertaken. As a result, the list of characters presented in this work, grew shorter.

The content of the study and its aims.

Although the contemporary Lelov group and its pilgrimage movement appears to be one of the most interesting episodes in Lelov's two hundred years history, it is, however, crucial to launch a study of the background and history of the development of this community in Europe as well as Israel and America.

In addition, the changes which have occurred in Poland and among Polish Chasidic communities in the mid-nineteenth century triggered the ultra-orthodox pilgrimage movement to Israel. Throughout the nineteenth century, Jewish life in Central and Eastern Europe continued to be increasingly difficult. The present work intends to refer to a set of personal, social and political circumstances which led to Rebbe Moshe Biederman's aliyah to Israel in 1856, which consequently closed the European chapter of Chassidim Lelov.

Lelov, as a Chasidic community divided across three continents, should be better understood in its historic context.

Biographical references to and analysis of the following rebbes of Lelov, coupled with insights into the strategies that were employed in order to develop and strengthen the dynasty are described and analysed in this work. In addition, the nature of Chasidic leadership is discussed as a supplement to the previous chapters.

This work records the various names and titles of people as well as Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish words, in literature often presented in various forms of transliteration. The writer employs a consistent spelling of her own, with preference given to Yiddish transliteration (for Yiddish-origin items and names), but also refers to various other ways of spellings, usually presented in brackets, for example ‘Lelov’ (Yiddish) and Lelow (Polish). Also, a table of toponymes is presented in appendix 8.

Some terms such as for example, ‘rebbe’ (Yiddish) are used in their Yiddish forms rather than the Hebrew ones (‘rabbi’) which cannot be used interchangeably. The term ‘rebbe’ (also spelled ‘rebe’) is used by the Chassidim to denote someone who is not only a religious leader (‘rabbi’- also a teacher of Torah) of their community but also a spiritual adviser, a guide. A rebbe is a person, whose advice often goes beyond the issues of religious dogma and practice but also extends to all areas of life, including social and political issues.

Moreover, when used with a proper name as in ‘Rebbe Dovid’ or, implicitly ‘the Rebbe/Rebe’, the author employs capitalisation.

This study faced various difficulties which ranged from accessing material and information to the wariness of Chassidim Lelov. Like many

other ultra-orthodox Jewish communities, Lelov Chassidim are particularly cautious when it comes to any encounters with the females, hence the difficulty with conducting formal interviews. Also, many details of the movement's history are altered or embellished by its followers whose perception of the past and communal history varies from the Western concept. In addition, much information is deemed esoteric and therefore, reserved only for the male followers holding a certain position within the movement, for example the rebbes. Furthermore, the few descriptive studies of Chassidim Lelov available to the wider public have been carried out mainly by its followers, members of the group or sympathisers which often results in the creation of a biased picture—hence this study.

Chapter One.

Le-dor va-dor – small returns.

This chapter considers social and cultural areas of the Chasidic pilgrimage movement and how it can help build bridges between Polish and ultra-orthodox Jewish traditions and customs.

In this respect, Lelov's pilgrimage movement appears to have an enlightened perception of the wider concept of Chasidic culture - recognising the inter-related and interconnected dynamics of religious identity. This, I would argue, is an important step forward.

The re-conceptualisation of Jewish orthodoxy in Poland is in line with ongoing debates giving new definition to the concept of the Jewish past and identity in Eastern Europe.

Whilst the purpose of this thesis is to analyse the rise of the modern Chasidic pilgrimage movement in Eastern Europe (after 1989), a brief overview of general, Chasidic and Lelov practices is offered. This is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of general, Chasidic pilgrimage, and lastly, its identity and the following section therefore, provides such an outline, covering various Jewish pilgrimage models throughout the ages. It also refers to a particular pilgrimage event that took place in January 2010 and argues that ultimately the pilgrimage experience contributes to our understanding of the Lelov history and identity.

To avoid duplication some subjects are only briefly mentioned in this section, but they are pursued in greater depth in later on in the dissertation.

1.1. The origins of Lelov's Chasidic pilgrimage.

Lelov, an otherwise quiet village populated by two thousands inhabitants, is where Rebbe Biederman - founder of the Lelov Chasidic sect, mystic extraordinaire, and guarantor of salvation to all those who visit him - is buried.

We arrived in the early hours of a Saturday, welcomed by late January snow and freezing temperatures. The former town of Lelov (lost municipal rights in 1869) is sinking in snow, sticking to winter boots and delaying our march. Although there is not much to see in Lelov anyway, its history is much richer than it seems at first sight. A market square with two streets joining at each corner is one particular sign of Lelov's former glory as is the Catholic church of Saint Martin dating back to the mediaeval period.

Several shops located around the main market square are already closed on Saturday afternoon. The local inn called '*Lelowianka*' appeared to be the only place to actually meet the locals and warm up. Frozen in time, still strongly influenced by once ever present social realism, it welcomes you with its 1970s tables, faux leather chairs and artificial flowers promptly placed on each table. The place smelled of homemade *bigos* (traditional Polish dish made of sour kraut, sausage and mushrooms, slowly cooked) and beer. The female bartender encouraged us to try the local *sliwowica* (very strong, traditional plum brandy) and *ciulim*, which is a vivid sign of Lelov's once Jewish past. Its recipe is based on a traditional Ashkenazi dish - *cholent*, the typical stew for the Sabbath midday meal and (traditionally) the only hot dish of the day - prepared on Friday and left to cook overnight.

The dish contains a mixture of beans, grains, potatoes and occasional pieces of meat. In the old days, many Jewish families could not afford meat even on the Sabbath; hence very often cholent was served in its vegetarian form. For many, cholent has had a deep emotional and even spiritual significance, bringing back memories of traditional family gatherings, the joy of the Sabbath and the old days of the *shtetl.* The Polish cohabitants of Lelov, have simply adapted this culinary idea naming it ciulim and adding pork ribs (banned in kosher cuisine) and grated potatoes (instead of them being sliced and chopped). As well as Jewish cholent, ciulim is slowly baked in a pot placed in the bread oven overnight.

To commemorate this unusual tradition, the local council organises 'The Feast of the Ciulim' which is held regularly on the first Saturday and Sunday of September. The main event takes place on the Sunday. It is then that the representatives of the Chasidic Jews prepare cholent, the inhabitants of Lelov ciulim and these are served together to the visitors who arrive for the feast.

Before the Holocaust, Lelov used to be a thriving shtetl with forty five percent of its population being Jews. Lelov's pre-war market square remained almost unchanged, with single storey back-to-back buildings, high entry gates purposely constructed to allow easy access during the weekly fairs and houses entered directly from the streets. Many buildings used to serve as living quarters as well as shops, so stripping their owners of their privacy. For the majority, business meant life and life meant business, so that the two spheres constantly permeated each other.

The Chassidim believe that history and human life is not static and to that extent therefore, life can even surprise the tzadick - the one who is supposed to be the most knowledgeable. Interestingly, these words proved to be true more than ten years ago, when after almost one hundred and fifty years of absence, the first ultra- orthodox Jews arrived in Lelov.

Through a detailed investigation, the location of the former Jewish cemetery finally was established and the mortal remains of Rebbe Dovid Biederman were found exactly under one of the local shops. A whole new chapter of Jewish history in Lelov was opened, or rather re-opened. This event is described more closely in the following chapter.

In 1989, a Chasidic representative supported by The Nissenbaum Foundation engaged in a series of talks with Lelov's municipal authorities in order to purchase the plot which had been identified as the grave of the tzadick. After the war, this area had been handed over to the local co-operative which instantly turned it into a business site, building stores and warehouses. Initially, only the grave of the tzadick was extracted and separated from the store. The negotiations proved to be lengthy and formally difficult as in 1989 there was still was a fully functioning shop on the site. Also, the sale of the property could only be finalised if all members of the co-operative agreed. It is worth remembering of course that in 1989 Poland was going through some major political changes which in many cases left local organisations in chaos and unable to reach decisions.

The co-operative demanded financial compensation but it is unclear how much. The whole project which included analysis and excavation work, the purchase and execution of a separate street-site entrance to the tomb of

Dovid and its preservation with a metal box cover was paid from the funds on The Nissenbaum Foundation. Later on, a new iron door with the Star of David on it was added and a special catafalque surrounded by a low iron fence installed. The place of the Biederman's tomb was finally designated and secured becoming the objective of the annual Chasidic pilgrimage. Pious Jews believe that a person's soul returns to the place where he or she is buried on the anniversary of his or her death, therefore making it crucial to perform a pilgrimage in order to sustain the connection and preserve the memory of the deceased. When it comes to the Chasidic Jews, this is also a mitzvah, a religious obligation.

Throughout history, Eastern European Jews have taken part in three types of traditional pilgrimages: pilgrimages to the graves of their ancestors to pray, Chasidic journeys to visit their masters either deceased or alive and finally, pilgrimages to Israel.

Jewish pilgrimages to graveyards have been practiced across Europe, with the aim of praying and petitioning on behalf of individuals or communities. This tradition was triggered by the belief that deceased relatives or the pious would act as agents between Heaven and Earth, and act as advocates on behalf of the living. Such practices would become increasingly popular in times of misery and trouble when people searched especially for divine protection.

One of the most practiced pilgrimages was a journey to the tomb of Moshe Isserles, the sixteenth century scholar who lived and died in Cracow. His grave still remains hugely important for many Jews who come to worship at the tomb of Moshe Isserles and who leave behind notes asking

him to intercede on their behalf with God. Traditionally, no candles are lit but small stones are placed on his tombstone.

In pre-war Poland, the rebbe's grave used to be attended by several thousand Chassidim as well as non-Chasidic Jews (Raffeld, 2010). Those pilgrimages were mainly attended by men, although women also took part, praying at the graves and performing their own rituals. The main purposes of their participation would have been linked to fertility prayers and blessing as well as to prayers on behalf of the sick and deceased. Visiting graves of the pious in order to bring fertility was also a long-established tradition of Judaism. Those, who lived in Israel traditionally travelled to the grave of Rachel outside Bethlehem, to ask for divine intervention but the majority of eastern European Jews could hardly afford to leave their village or town, never mind undertake longer expeditions. Therefore, the burial places of other deceased dignitaries, such as great scholars, rebbes and later, Chasidic master, were also sought out.

The second type of religious journey undertaken by Jews of Eastern Europe was the Chasidic pilgrimage. By the nineteenth century such practices were well established and commonly executed among Europe's Chassidim. After the death of Baal Shem Tov (also known as Besht) – the founder of an ultra-orthodox Jewish movement a dynamic and diverse world of numerous masters and their followers emerged. This phenomenon as well as the creation of the Chasidic movement will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

Many Chassidim – the followers of an ultra-orthodox rite lived far from their rebbes making occasional pilgrimages necessary if not obligatory.

Usually, ultra-orthodox men would embark on a pilgrimage journey several times a year, often travelling long distances on foot. Many would leave their homes for weeks in order to spend some time at their rebbe's court, to participate in prayer, kabbalistic rituals or simply to consult the master on religious and non-religious matters. Soon, a special term referring to 'ascending to the Temple in Jerusalem' or visiting the Holy Land was used, emphasising the importance of such practices. Jews would also come to ask their deceased spiritual leaders to help them with important life issues. Typically, the rebbe's grave would be covered in thousands of small pieces of paper with requests from the faithful, called *kvitleh* as well as with candles sent by those who could not come to the grave.

Modern Chasidic pilgrimages have also gained yet another dimension, especially following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, when visits to the sites of long vanished Jewish communities were once more initiated. These are usually associated with a reaffirmation of historical identity and ethnic roots and are fuelled by nostalgia for an often glorified and idealised past. The former Polish shtetls are pilgrimage sites of this type as well (Gitlitz and Davidson, 2005).

Finally there is pilgrimage to Israel, the Promised Land and historically, the centre of Jewish religious activity. Until its destruction in 70 A.D, The Second Temple in Jerusalem remained a focal pilgrimage point with Jews travelling from all over Israel, especially during *Pesach* (Passover), *Shavuot* and *Sukkot* - three pilgrimage festivals. The source of this tradition can be found in Deuteronomy 16:16 (The Torah):
'Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God

in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles'

However, once Israeli autonomy - albeit limited and often violently oppressed by the Roman ruling elites - had been suppressed all together, the traditional Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem became less regular. Romans eventually banned Jewish pilgrims from entering the city. Without Jerusalem, the Jews were again a scattered people with no real link to the past and only dim hopes for the future, most of them now living Diaspora, far from their holy sites.

The turbulent mediaeval period of the crusades brought temporary disruptions, but Jews continued to flow into Jerusalem to pray by the Kotel, the Western Wall. Throughout the centuries, Jews considered the Western Wall to be the holiest site. They would travel from afar just to write prayers on pieces of paper and place them in the crevices of the Wall, exactly as popular custom teaches.

Today, private Chasidic pilgrimages have been turned into a tourist industry, taken up by highly specialised travel agencies, offering all inclusive services. This is a sign of modernity, proof that even the Chasidic world is not completely frozen in time. Chassidim from Israel, America and Europe book their places on the charter jets taking off from Tel Aviv, New York, London or Amsterdam. They are organised groups of travellers all dressed in black, and all excited to embark on a journey to their roots. With them, hundreds of pounds of kosher food are transported from Israel. Apart from the usual prayer books, scrolls of Torah, thick clothes and boots (it is winter in Poland which means temperatures are likely to drop well below zero

degree Celsius) the pilgrims carry on average ten to fifty candles with them, to be lit on behalf of those who either cannot or are not allowed to travel (i.e. Chasidic wives). Later, Dovid's catafalque and the floor around it will be covered in flickering lights and stashes of *kvitleh*, prayers scribbled on little cards and addressed to the tzadick. To reduce the risk of fire, Mr Roman, who looks after the ohel, collects scattered papers and stores them away in the big bags. The candles combined with the number of people constantly flowing in and out of the ohel, poses a great risk especially since the visitors verge on the edge of an ecstatic state.

Prior to their arrival, the Chasidic coordinator, Simcha Krakowski president of the Chassidim Lizhensk (Leżajsk) Poland Foundation, which is the organiser of the pilgrimages, together with the Nissenbaum Foundation, sends a letter to the municipal government of Lelov informing it about how many visitors are expected to come. This gives the locals time to prepare facilities, organise the venue and respond to any specific demands. When in February 1989 The Nissenbaum Foundation finally secured the grave, there was nothing here except for the ohel. The burial ground had a fence, but remained an industrial site with heaps of rumble scattered around an unkempt warehouse, subsequently turned into a celebration hall. The pre-war *mikvah* - or ritual bathhouse - no longer existed, likewise the kosher kitchen and any other religious buildings. When, in 1990, the first group of pilgrims arrived, they were offered a hall in a local community centre which was used in the ensuing years (Strzelczyk, 2003).

In late 2001 the former ironworks warehouse serving as a synagogue before the Second World War was purchased by Mrs Malgorzata

Czwartkiewicz, who had leased the building to the Chassidim in 2002. (Strzelczyk, 2004).

Interestingly, during their first organised visit to Lelov, the Chassidim ordered from a local carpenter a number of sofa beds to be used whenever they return on their pilgrimage. The Lelovers would initially sleep and dine in the community centre turning the site into a temporary dormitory and kosher kitchen. The local government also allowed them to install a ritual bath-mikveh, a necessary religious establishment without which no Chasidic celebration can take place. Immersion in water is naturally associated with purity and in this case also with spiritual cleansing. Many Chasidic men use a mikvah before each Sabbath, holiday or celebration for example; a wedding, but many use it every day before morning prayers. During those two, sometimes three, days the community centre used to be totally at the disposition of the Chasidic group.

Admittedly, the rent and storage charges paid by the Jewish visitors would make up a substantial part of the community centre's annual income. In a letter to the village representative, the organisers would have announced the arrival of the total number of visitors, on average at least a hundred ultra-orthodox Jewish men and boys. In 2002, the numbers exceeded two hundred souls; far too many to be accommodated in the community centre alone. Since space was limited and not suitable for a continuously growing number of visitors, many decided to stay in private accommodation offered by the locals. This soon became a common practice. Today, many Lelovers book their rooms as early as in September to give their hosts enough time to arrange a room and to meet any special

requests. The cost of an overnight stay ranges between ten and fifteen dollars.

One of the locals, Mr Bronislaw admitted that he would not mind having the Chassidim as his guests more often. He laughingly explained that his house was big enough to accommodate their needs and he was even thinking about building a separate bathroom to meet their religious demands. When asked, he also admitted that Chasidic pilgrims are polite and easy to get on with although, they do not know Polish. They do however speak Yiddish which is similar to German so those locals who know it, try to communicate this way (see appendix 1, interview 7)

The Chassidim prepare kosher meals either in the community centre or in the celebration hall, a former workhouse. Sometimes, however they utilise facilities available in private homes.

The ultra-orthodox Jews buy only carefully selected produce, mainly local eggs and tomatoes. They examine each item scrupulously, so as not to violate the kosher rules. The remaining food, including fish, flour, meats and vines is brought with them, delivered by chartered planes and subsequently a couple of tonnes of food is loaded onto the lorries that deliver kosher products to Lelov.

The annual pilgrimage revives memories. An older inhabitant of Lelov remembered that Poles and Jews have always lived peacefully. The Jews had had their *boznica* (Polish term for synagogue) and Poles had their church. Just as it tends to be in a small locality, everybody knew each other. Jews celebrated on Saturdays, and the Poles celebrated on Sundays, and of course different holidays. She also recollects that there were no Chasidic

Jews in town any more. If there were, they must have come from different towns, maybe to pray by the tomb? She also admitted:

‘I am the prewar one. I remember the Jews. There were no Jews like this he re in Lelov, like them, well, the Chasidic, who dress like that. They had their own synagogue, across from where the tzadick’s tomb stood.’ (See appendix 1, interview 2)

The Chasidic pilgrimage thus awakens curiosity about a world that no longer exists and perhaps, encourages both sides to learn something more about their cultures allowing them to discover both the similarities and differences between the two groups. Revealingly, Osias (Ozjasz) Thon, an early Polish Zionist, activist and reformer, once concluded that Poles probably know more about the Japanese than the Jews.

And perhaps, this happens

to be the case in Lelov as well?

In Lelov, apart from traditional Jewish festivals, two other occasions used to be celebrated sumptuously, namely: the Catholic festival of Saint Sebastian, who according to the legend saved four Catholics and four Jewish families during the outbreak of cholera. Thereafter on the day of remembrance of Saint Sebastian, a mass would be celebrated, with both Catholics and Jews donating and contributing to the festival. (Galas and Skrzypczyk, 2006) On the other hand, Catholic inhabitants of Lelov often participated in the annual commemoration of Dovid Biederman’s death, also known as the Festival of Martins (Polish: *Swieto Jutrzne/ Jutrzni*). Their contribution must have been purely secular, but nonetheless the two communities could come together and unite in festivity. Tzadick Dovid with

his legendary healing and miracle performing-skills has been highly respected by the non-Jewish community of Lelov and remembered for his holiness.

He was also believed to have predicted the future of Lelov. Some older Lelovians recall that once he predicted that Lelov's market square would be covered by trees -which is now the case - and that the church would be burnt down but eventually rebuilt, although not in its previous glorious state. (Galas and Srzypczyk, 2006)

In sum, the Jewish presence in Lelov seems to be deeply anchored in memories of members of the older generation, who often recall it sentimentally. It is not however, based on any recollection of the Chasidic past in Lelov. Both for older and younger generations, Chasidic pilgrimage on a scale that can be observed today appears to be a novelty.

1.2. A day in Lelov. Lelov and Pilgrimage.

It was late January, Lelov sunk in snow. Streets were almost deserted since few care to walk in a temperature of minus twenty degree Celsius. Besides there is not much entertainment available on Saturday evening in Lelov. At the end of the day, this is only a provincial village, which lost its glory long ago.

On the icy road, a shabby half-frozen bus stopped. Passengers peeped curiously through the steamed up windows sticking their noses to the glass, they looked with amazement. On the street, frozen to the bone, a dancing group of men appeared. Dressed in sable hats, white socks and dark caftans (Polish: *kaftan*) with white fringes dangling down

from the underneath their overcoats, tightly twisted, over-the-ears side curls - they make a quite unusual sight. Their beards are long and curled up, as custom and tradition require. One might think this a theatrical happening, a weird and mysterious drama, or perhaps a scene from a historic film? But the locals know. This is the 196th Anniversary of the death of Dovid Biederman's - famous tzadick of Lelov - which today attracts on average four hundred pilgrims. They fly in from all over the world: snowy New York, the Netherlands, Ukraine and sun burnt Israel.

Several of the Chassidim started to walk around in the snow-covered town. They crossed the market square and passed by the church, a simple but somehow still sophisticated block rebuilt after the German attack in 1939. The church and synagogue perished in flames, the latter was never rebuilt. No one was looking in the church's direction, a silent witness of the Polish-Jewish past.

Many of the pilgrims have already visited Poland at least a few times. It was January 2010 and some of them have been coming over for twenty years now, usually on short pilgrimages, arriving by plane either at Cracow (Polish: Kraków; Yiddish: Kroke) or Warsaw (Polish: Warszawa; Yiddish: Varshe), subsequently taking a bus trip to the cemeteries. Among their destinations are Tchenstochov (Polish: Czestochowa), Radomsk (Polish: Radomsko), perhaps Sieniawa or Lancut and finally Lizhensk (Polish: Lezajsk). The scenario is usually the same: evening prayers at the cemeteries, and celebration in Lelov followed by more prayers in Lizhensk.

They are here to embark on a spiritual journey of devotion and

dedication leading to religious ecstasy and inner unity. They are here to marry their souls to God, experience Dovid's love and perhaps, experience a miracle as well. Who knows? On a night like this, heaven opens its gates and prayers are heard better.

A tall man in a white caftan, perhaps in his twenties, but his thick beard and glasses made it hard to judge, was walking on his own, smiling and looking intrigued. I sensed my chance and approach him with a simple: *shalom* (hallo), surprisingly he did not walk away but instead greeted me with 'ma shalom' as well.

Chasidic rules often discourage if not forbid any contacts between men and women who are not members of the same family, and the Lelov dynasty is no different. In fact it is well-known for its traditional life-style, its strict following of religious rules and a clear distinction between men's and women's worlds. You will not meet female pilgrims in Lelov hence I was even more surprised to discover that the young Jew was keen to talk. He told me his name is Avram (Abraham) and he was from Jerusalem but currently living in New York where he was a student. He has never been in Lelov before, actually, he has never visited Poland before so everything was surprising: from temperature to people. I asked Avram if he liked it there but he did not give a straight answer, instead he started talking about tzadick Dovid (see appendix 1, interview 4).

To him Lelov seemed very important because on a night like this, the Yortsayt, rebbe's soul comes down to Earth. That is why he was there. Avram's grandfather was born in Poland, but not in Lelov. He could not

remember where exactly. His grandfather used to visit Rebbe's grave, back in the days (see appendix 1, interview 4).

He chattered in heavily accented English. Many of the Chassidim never master any other language apart from traditional Yiddish, even if they were born or lived abroad for years. Their communities are close-knit and often do not interact with the outside world. The Torah is, or at least should be, a lifestyle for every Jew and the Chassidim observe it very conscientiously. It is widely believed that a person who lives by the Torah is a happy person, and a group of happy people make up a happy community.

To preserve this happiness and purity of mind and soul, many rebbes even suggest that it is necessary to keep the outside world at a distance which includes avoiding the mass media. It is uncommon to find a television set in an ultra-orthodox Jewish household. Television is regarded as being full of non-Jewish values, unnecessary brutality, violence and sex which contradict the teaching of the Torah.

It became obvious that Avram was in Lelov to fulfil the mitzvoth of pilgrimage. He did not know much about his Polish origins but seemed to remember many stories told him by his grandfather; and they were, as expected, about Dovid Biederman. Thus he told me that master Dovid was a great healer but also a very gentle man, who also played flute or a pipe? Even animals loved his music and they would gather around. Furthermore, Avram said that it has always been his wish to pray for love and peace between people, which also is the essence of Master's (Dovid's) teaching...(see appendix 1, interview 4)

Soon he rushed back to join the group at prayer crammed in the little ohel, I could see his white caftan illuminated by the candles and his young, kind face now focused on prayer.

With everything covered in snow, a crackling frost with the temperature still dropping, we moved towards a former workhouse, now turned into a Chasidic hall. This sad and scruffy-looking building once belonged to an employment enterprise controlled by the communist government. The main hall is long but cramped, painted green with an ill lamp-lit room in which a crowd of black-dressed men waves. Their hats and fur caps rock back and forth enhancing the religious experience. Many ultra-orthodox men wear glasses and it is rocking that is believed to be the cause of poor eye-sight among the Chassidim. Women cannot enter the building, a rule which also applies to the local on-lookers, including myself.
We remained glued to the window peeping through the steamed up and mucky glass standing on a heap of a frozen snow.

Slowly, some men in black and white caftans started to twirl; some grabbed their hands and rushed into a dance, a small ginger boy with curly side locks hopping next to an older man whose fur hat sat crookedly on his grey head. A few adults kept rocking in the corners of the hall, their eyes closed like they were asleep or trying to avoid a harsh fluorescent light. One may think that they are simply drunk with a sweet wine flowing generously during the feast or behave irrationally, lost in their mad dance. But at the commemorative feasts like this, the Chassidim aim to ascend to the highest reaches of heaven to worship God with pure joy and excitement.

The celebration traditionally starts with a quiet melody known as

nigun, which would slowly turn into louder singing accompanied by fervent dancing, with the atmosphere becoming increasingly ecstatic. In order to understand this unusual behaviour, one must refer to the sanctification of the traditional Chasidic rebbe's meal, known as tish.

The table of the tzadick is probably the most significant and consecrated public ritual which originates from the earliest Chasidic tradition. (Greenspoon et al., 2005). It is believed that it was Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chasidic movement who initiated regular communal gatherings of his followers held in the form of a public meal - *tish*.
The Chasidic tish evokes and emphasises the sense of community and identity. The intense interaction between the tzadick and his disciples that occurs at the tish and involves communal eating, drinking, singing and dancing but also discussing spiritual and religious matters, serves as a demonstration of the tzadick's origins.

The rebbe is from the masses and one of his roles is to remain as close to his disciples as possible, developing deeply personal relationships with the students. He not only knows their names and family history, but he can also see into his companions' hearts and read their thoughts. (Dynner, 2006)

The tish was also very often perceived as an opportunity to meet one's opponents who, despite theological and customary differences, would come to a tzadick with various issues. Both the opponents and the disciples ate and drank together, unified in the intimacy of this sanctified meal despite being divided by doctrinal differences. Those who won a special place in the rebbe's thoughts were sent a piece of food from his platter. This ritual is

also known as *shirayim*, which involved distributing the remains of the master's Sabbath meal (Greenspoon et al., 2005).

During this ritual of tish, the tzadick acted not only as a charismatic teacher equipped with great powers and wisdom but also as a monarchic leader, a substitute for a high priest. His extraordinary status was symbolised by his place at the top of the table and his seat on a throne-like chair often covered with gold upholstery and decorated with a carved headrest. The tzadick's priestly and monarch-like status was also manifested by distributing food leftovers, appointing speakers and disputants.

It was a common practice to serve just one meal, very often *kugel*, a baked casserole-like dish popular among Eastern European Jewry containing egg noodles or potatoes; or a fish. And it was indeed a smell of fish that welcomed us on our arrival at the celebration hall in Lelov. This custom was probably adopted by Dovid when he was a disciple of the Seer of Lublin.

In Lelov, long tables covered with a white plastic table cloth were remarkably empty. One would expect a feast, a flamboyant celebration with tables overflowing with food and drink. But instead it was difficult to spot anything more than the fish, golden baked bread rolls and bottles of red wine distributed between the tables in a sparse manner. But this is 'holy eating, a mystical meal that sanctifies all the Chassidim had eaten during the Sabbath. It is also a celebration of the material world in which divine powers dwell, hence the dancing and singing which accompanies the Chasidic tish.

According to Martin Buber, an Austrian born Jewish philosopher and Chasidic theologian who approaches Chasidic matters which a romantic traditionalism, pilgrimages to Lelov used to be regularly conducted during Dovid's lifetime. Buber's vision might have been the product of a vivid imagination, a sentimental and artistic reconstruction of what was really taking place in Lelov; nonetheless, his writing allows us to get an insight into Chasidic rituals and customs. In his essay 'My road to Chasidism' (in: Friedman, 1958, p.55) he describes how as a child, he accompanied his father on a visit to Sadogora in Galicia and became fascinated with exuberant Chasidic celebrations. Thus his stories of the tzadickim are based on Chasidic teaching and personal observations.

Furthermore, Buber claims that for many years preceding Dovid's departure from this world, Chassidim from Western Galicia and the Russian annexation area would travel to Lelov shortly before Shavuot - The Festival of Weeks, a two-day holiday historically linked to agricultural offerings, traditionally associated with the receiving of the Torah. In ancient Israel, Shavuot was also celebrated as one of three pilgrimage festivals.

In his 'Gog and Magog' Buber (1966, p.232) writes:

'For many years it had become a custom for scattered Chassidim who adhered to Rebbe Dovid (...) to set out to Lelov prior to Shavuot, to assemble about a mile outside of the little town and to proceed by foot, headed by a few musicians.'

What happens in modern Lelov certainly resembles Buber's romanticised tale: the noise of chatter interweaves with loud Yiddish singing, expressive gesticulation with the constant rocking back and forth

adding to an overwhelming impression of an ecstasy-fuelled state. Squalor is also present everywhere around the shrine in Lelov. An elderly man accompanied by a ginger boy squatted by the entrance to the celebration hall singing a song under their breaths, a grandfather and his grandson perhaps, generations united in religious elation. A few yards away, on the stairs covered in dirty snow, a group of men in their twenties sweated over the word of God reading out loud from their black unbound books. There were surrounded by abandoned plastic plates, fish left-overs and burned bread rolls dumped lazily by one of their companions. No-one seemed to care about the surroundings: the local journalist snapping the pictures or the curious residents of Lelov now gathering in bigger groups. Inside the hall, where the Chassidim were preparing for the end of the Sabbath, looked like a busy buzzing beehive.

We took a prime spot on a pile of icy frozen snow. The crowd gathered inside was even bigger than the one grouped around and in the shrine. Everyone wanted to be close to the top of a festive table so men were pushing and shoving, all dressed in black with either velvet black or big fur, toque-like hats on. Chasidic dress is a sign of the affinity, which aims to distinguish them from other ultra-orthodox groups. Ultimately, it is also a symbol of unity and social and religious identity. Chasidic fur-trimmed hats refer to the law of *shaatnez* (Verthaim, 1992) which prohibits Jews from wearing clothes containing both wool and linen but it is believed that its purpose was to keep warm during the harsh Eastern European winters without wearing wool-knitted head covers.

The windows were fogged with white praying robes known as *tallis* and prayer books piled up on the parapets. A man in a white caftan sat at the top of the table, his eyelids drooping heavily, but his still face focused, his lips moving fast in prayers that cannot be heard from the outside. I was told that this was the new rebbe, just selected that evening. The previous leader, Shimon (Simon) Natan (Nathan) Biederman, the Great Rebbe of the Lelov - Bnei Brak and Karlin died suddenly in September 2009. At the long table covered with white cloth three of the late Rebbe's sons were sitting, one of them, dressed in a white silk caftan, was a great tzadick of Lelov: Rebbe Aharon (Aaron) Biederman who has just been appointed officially.

It used to be a custom that on the Sabbath, the Chasidic tzadickim traditionally wore a white caftan also known as *a bekhishe* to distinguish it from the ordinary day-to-day robes (Skolnik et al., 2007). This practice has been gradually abandoned except for a minority of groups including the Lelov one. .

The new tzadick of Lelov, a man with a long grey beard, probably in his sixties recited the blessing over the candle and a crowd of Chassidim stretched their hands to the flame. They wanted to be as close to their rebbe and his holy aura as possible. Next, the tzadick extinguished the flame with a little plate onto which some sweet red wine has been poured. Many eager hands - so eager that they nearly turned over the saucer - instantly dipped in the wine. It is not only the rebbe's food that is believed to be sanctified but also any artefact on which his holy hands rest. Many Chassidim rubbed the wine drops onto their eyelids and foreheads as it is

believed that miraculous healing or blessings of wealth and fortune can be conferred when one comes into contact with the rebbe's leftovers.

By the early evening the prayers seemed to be over and in a midst of a sudden motion with long tables being shoved towards the wall, a man with long black side locks and a silk, golden caftan emerged from the crowd, pushing through the tight circle of his fellow Chassidim; he started to dance. In the background, hardly visible from behind the sea of the black caftans, a joyful and rhythmic melody started to flow; a band made of a clarinettist and pianist who was gambolling by his electric piano was soon in full swing.

Rebbe Nachman of Braclav, Dovid's contemporary once said that it is a great mitzvah to be constantly joyful and encourage the joy (Buber, 1988) He has also associated melody and music with joy by referring to the Biblical passage: 'On the ten-stringed instrument...You have given me joy with Your acts, Oh God' (The Torah, Psalms 92:4-5). Consequently it is a good Chasidic duty to engage in music and dance in order to bring down the Messiah and to gather divine sparks lost in the material world. Whenever sadness and misery enter one's heart, the divine presence is expelled and rejected, which is a grave sin. Therefore, the emotional and exuberant experience of prayer and joy becomes an important element of Chasidic ritualism (Dynner, 2006).

It is also believed that music and dance can heal both broken bodies and souls. According to Chasidic tales, Dovid of Lelov was lame, but during a dance he was able to regain his full bodily powers, stretch out his ill leg and swirl in an ecstatic dance. Moreover, dancing and music were also perceived as mystical acts in which, through immersion in melody and

fervour, souls rise to a higher spiritual level and reunite with God's presence, *Shechinah*. For all those reasons, music quickly became an integral part of Chasidic culture, merging elements of religious beliefs and spiritual experiences with a common need for expression and performance. Anyone could participate and enjoy it whether poor and uneducated or wealthy and regal.

Inside the hall a crazy dance already started to take place. A bearded man was rotating and throwing his hands in the air, jumping back and forth. 'A Jewish break dancer' – laughed an older local man standing next to me, and he was not far off, as the leading dancer behaved rather erratically. Under his feet, a scruffy, grim room transformed into a theatre with the Chassidim clapping, cheering and some starting to join in. The Rebbe was also watching, the fist rhythmically dropping on his lap, the elders respectively gathered around, but their knees too weak to dance anymore. Someone lost his shoe which did not come as a surprise as on the Sabbath, the Chassidim wear slip-on moccasins to avoid tying laces. It is forbidden to do so.

When a tired Chasid could not dance anymore, his comrades grabbed him by the arms and pulled him back into the dancing circle. The procession of dancing Chassidim moved towards the exit to suddenly emerge into an incredibly cold, starry night. The shrine built over tzadick Dovid's grave was only a few yards away but ecstatic men took their time to get there, twirling in the snow. There was no room for quick movements and running as the crowd suddenly grown very dense. They only parted at the entrance to the ohel to let Rebbe Aharon approach the iron fence that

encloses the grave of Dovid. Every second, one of the followers was coming up to him and kisses his hand. Some men still danced, some move rhythmically in a trance whispering their prayers, some tired of prayers wandered around in the snow, their silk caftans too thin to give them any shelter from the freezing temperatures of this Polish night.

I spotted an opportunity and approached one of the younger Chassidim who seemed to be taking his time off praying and dancing. To my surprise, he welcomed my '*shalom*'. His name was Mordechai and he was from Bnei Brak although he has now been living in America, in Boston where he was studying at the local yeshiva. It was his first time in Lelov and he liked it a lot. I would like to know what had attracted him to Lelov, whether it was the town and its Jewish, Chasidic past, or perhaps it was only the pilgrimage that he was interested in. He told me that he has seen some old pictures of Lelov shown to him by another member of the group. His parents used to live nearby but left shortly before the war. His colleague claimed that it was the holy Rebbe Dovid who told his father to leave. He made a pilgrimage to his tomb and heard a voice advising him to escape Poland, almost at the last moment (see appendix 1, interview 1).

I thought about the millions of Chassidim who perished in the Shoah, who have prayed and cherished their tzadickim, and struggle to make sense of what I have just heard from Mordechai. Nevertheless, I decided not to press on that matter, at the end of the day, he was in Lelov to immerse himself in joy and happiness. He explained that the current economic climate made many Chassidim abandon their pilgrimage plans and only the rich or the closest members of the court could afford to travel to Poland (see

appendix 1, interview 1). A pilgrimage like this, although only performed once a year, put a noticeable strain on the already limited family budget of ultra-orthodox Jews. Their families are usually large and men tend to study the Torah rather than work, very often making their women the sole breadwinners.

As a woman I was not allowed inside the celebration hall but Mordechai offered to smuggle in my male companion. He suspected that some older Chassidim might still not have been happy, as they tend to be pretty apprehensive when it comes to outsiders. At the end of the day, they experienced many atrocities and prosecutions during their lifetime. They want to spare themselves having to repeat stories about the nightmare of the war so we promised not to mention this touchy and delicate subject. The memories of the Holocaust are still alive, and even on an occasion like Yortsayt, full of joy and celebration, the past emerges; Poland is still perceived as a Jewish graveyard, although not many graves can now be found.

As we walked back, I noticed a police van circling in Lelov. The local authorities take security very seriously although no major disruptions have ever been recorded during the pilgrimages. Regardless of freezing temperatures, the area around the shrine was patrolled by local guards and policemen from the prevention section, accompanied by a dog. A few years ago, some unidentified vandals scrawled an abusive inscription: *Jude raus* - Jews out!-a phrase shouted by the Nazis throughout the ghettos - and added a swastika. Later, Jehuda Widawski, the honorary member of the Auschwitz - Birkenau Memorial and State Museum board, who usually

also looks after the group, concluded that it must have been done by some fools as a cruel and highly inappropriate joke rather than an organised group of neo-Nazis or local Jew-haters.

Over the years of the Chasidic presence in Lelov, its inhabitants have proved to be friendly and supportive (Strzelczyk, 2001a).

Many Jewish pilgrims admitted that before visiting at Lelov, they had heard bad things about the Poles, about how anti-Semitic and rude they tend to be, but those accusations appear mainly to have been created by the people whose feet have never touched the Polish ground. At the same time, when pressed, Chasidic Jews often confess that Jerusalem and Israel are not necessarily the safest places on Earth, therefore once settled, they feel relatively undisturbed in Lelov and Poland in general. Mordechai explained, for example, that whereas on their arrival at Cracow (Krakow) - Balice airport, they were discretely guarded by a small bunch of policemen in Tel-Aviv, a special anti-terrorist unit had to be employed: a praying crowd is an easy target (see appendix 1, interview 1.) There was also an ambulance on duty in Lelov, from time to time local paramedics have to deal with major cases of fainting, slips or burns. It is not rare for a Chasidic beard to catch a fire from the votive candles.

We finally arrived at the celebration hall and my male colleague was successfully smuggled in. I could only watch him settling in a small and grim kitchen, yet again through the steamed and half-frozen window. He was asked to follow the set of questions previously prepared by me but, later admitted that it has proved to be extremely challenging as the Chassidim would shout over each other, clearly intrigued by his presence. Some older

men would even be hostile, struggling to understand why one might be interested in their celebration, history and customs. As already stated, the Chasidic community is an extremely private world where strict rules must be obeyed and faith is taken seriously. Outsiders are often perceived as intruders who can have no understanding and consequently, respect for its values.

Modern technology is also viewed as a potential danger exposing one's soul to the impurities of modern, western society. It is especially threatening to the innocent and inexperienced minds of Chasidic children who often grow up isolated from the media. Older participants made sure the visitor did not have a camera or video recorder and they secretly looked over his shoulder and peeped into his pockets. Along with those strict religious rules, the desire to shelter Chasidic privacy and scepticism about the external visitors' intentions makes it very difficult to speak to anyone.

1.3. Chasidic tales: Lelov's stories and Martin Buber's literal interpretations.

What was one of the most famous Polish tzadickim, Biederman, like? 'Wise, yet childlike. Honest with everyone' - writes Buber (1966, p.32). For a long time he did not want to be considered a tzadick, even though he had many supporters following and praising his spiritual powers, he remained a simple Jew who refused to accept his regal status.

A young Avram (Abraham) who has been living in New York for a couple of years confirmed Buber's words. To Avram, Dovid's love was almost boundless, remarkable, an unconditional adoration of a human

being, not just his fellow Chassidim. Dovid has also loved the non-Jews. He would often see Christian men and women and hear their cry for help. Tzadick Biederman would never reject anybody, not even an animal, yet very often he refused to accept any form of gratitude, therefore he remained physically poor but his soul grew rich. (See appendix 1, interview 4) Perhaps, in his approach to people, religions and nations, Dovid was ahead of his time, praying for reconciliation between Christians and Jews?

Another Chasid recalled how Rebbe Dovid had redeemed a merchant from life- long misery and death although; the man had previously insulted him. Dovid's love for people was so great that he would pray for the merchant and beg the Heavenly Court to lessen his sentence. He made every effort to do the man a favour in return for his wickedness.

Chasidic stories lead in many directions and allow travelling to many spiritual destinations. There are those that reveal God’s greatness and omnipotence, often through the hands of the pious men. Others solely concentrate on the mystical and earthy adventures of the Chasidic masters, concealing moral teachings and spiritual sophistication. They exist even in an adapted form as presented in Martin Buber’s writing, who re-interprets them to fulfil the needs of a wider audience than quoting exactly. Martin Buber was the first to bring the Chasidic world to the modern readers.

To popularise Chasidic teachings and to praise the Jewish virtues of its masters as well as those simple Jews who play an equal role in the process of redemption, many ultra-orthodox books have been published in Hebrew and later in Yiddish. Since the eighteenth century, when the very first Chasidic work was published, printed stories about Chasidic masters

and their miraculous acts have enjoyed growing popularity and eventually became favourite readings of Jews. Rejected and ridiculed by the misnagdim opponents, often banned by traditional rabbinic communities, nonetheless the legends of the tzadickim remained the backbone of the Eastern European haredi. They strongly believe in the literal truth of the tales. This tradition continues among modern Chasidic groups. When times are hard, it is sometimes difficult to remember that the things that really matter are not necessarily material and visible; not everything can be understood and explained in a way in harmony with the modern, scientifically orientated world.

The Chasidic stories included in this chapter are only a mere sample of thousands of oral tales circulating within the communities. In the past, those oral versions have reflected Chasidic ideology. Thanks to them, Jewish women and uneducated men could learn about their masters and their sagas. Oral story telling does not require even a simple level of literacy or analytical skills. The ethos is simple and based on traditional biblical motives which would be taught in Jewish primary schools called *cheders* or disputed in *shuls* (a Yiddish word for synagogue). The story tellers (that very often were the tzadickim themselves) have been well aware of the fact that, if their often complicated and discursive messages were woven into relatively simple tales that appealed to the imagination, they could attract a wider spectrum of followers. Perhaps it is no accident that élitist motives are almost absent in Chasidic stories: created for men of labour and about the men of labour, the stories would bring the divine and miraculous to the masses, reinforcing the sense of unity and identification

among them.

Chasidic stories also incorporate elements of Slavic folk culture. Vicious demons lurk at the crossroads (Polish: *upór*) or by the springs, woodland phantoms attack lone travellers (Polish: *poludnice*) or female demons kidnap newly born babies - these are only a few themes present both in Slavic and Chasidic tales. This was not however, a sign of assimilation but rather, a form of cultural hybridisations when non-Jewish elements were adapted to accommodate Jewish, often religious content. The recitation of the tales was, in fact, elevated to a spiritual imperative. (Dynner, 2006)

The Chassidim promote and continue to engage in storytelling because they appreciate its inspirational power. Chassidim believe that hearing such tales can inspire one to better one's life and bring a person closer to God (Schachter-Shalomi and Miles-Yepez, 2009). And those stories are perceived as real, truthful and alive.

A listener must be able to visualise himself as taking part in the action, living in a story and believing in it. Chasidic stories also preserve what has not necessarily been preserved in writings and sermons, embody the past and history which, perhaps, would be lost otherwise.

One of the Chassidim was asked whether he knew when Rebbe Dovid Biederman of Lelov was born. He looked baffled not being able to recall any precise date, but instead he offered to tell us how Dovid became a Chassid. Thereafter his story flowed undisturbed, full of details: names and places that matter in the Chasidic world (see appendix 1, interview 4).

The Chasid who recounted this story dressed it in simple words but

his transmission was full of the pathos and spirit that actuates his beliefs and customs. He may have not known when it happened but he was convinced this is not just a legend or yet another bed-time story. He had heard this tale from his grandfather and then, when he became man enough to participate in communal gatherings, from his rebbe.
How could he doubt it had really happened?

This story is alive at the moment of telling. Its aim is to awaken joy that will eventually reach one's heart and bind together the past and the present, the reality and imagination, an individual with a community. And although the oral tales are less structured and permanent than written sources, they still preserve the identity and integrity of Chasidism.

1. 4. Polish - Chasidic relation in Lelov.

After transcribing the interview conducted by my male companion, I realised how fragmentary Chasidic testimonies were. The clamour of a busy Chasidic celebration roared in the background. At some point, the small back kitchen accommodated as many as fifteen men and boys - some still singing and dancing in religious ecstasy, some mumbling prayers and some answering questions, shouting over each other in Yiddish. They were convinced that on a night like this, the rebbe's soul is with his Chassidim. If not physically, his spirit is certainly is their hearts, minds and voices. When asked if Lelov means anything to them, they simply repeated: 'tzadick, tzadick'.

Lelov exists in their common reflection as long as the rebbe's bones are there, without those, it would be any other Polish town. A middle-aged

Chassid admitted that his family used to live in nearby Przyrow but he did not know much about it, he had never been interested in this area until Dovid's grave was excavated. To him, Lelov was pretty much just like Warka, Ger or Lizhensk, all known as pilgrimage centres

Dedicated travel agencies book package tours months in advance. The administrative division of the Chassidim Lizhensk - Poland Foundation, which is the organiser of the pilgrimages, together with the Nissenbaum Foundation, sends a few Chassidim to supervise the preparations.
In a newspaper interview, Reb Simcha Krakowski commented:
'Polish people are very good, very helpful. They organise a lot. The head of the town is here to greet us, supervise so we get what they need. Do not get me wrong, but our presence helps Lelov. People learn about it which makes it easier to promote the village. This is all good; we can meet here in Lelov' (Strzelczyk, 2002)

Today, not a single Jew lives in Lelov. Older residents remember their pre-war neighbours pretty well; they also recall Chasidic pilgrimage. Many welcome the renewal of Chasidic tradition in Lelov with sentiment and warmth. When asked, they express their regrets over the fact that this world had disappeared so suddenly. One of the older residents of Lelov admitted that he still could not get used to seeing so many Jewish pilgrims in his village.

He has been coming to watch praying Chassidim from the very beginning (see appendix 1, interview 5). Another older man commented that he did not oppose Chasidic visits, quite the opposite. When in the middle of winter Lelov is filled with bearded men in black coats, he experiences a strange joy

(see appendix 1, interview 6). Could it be nostalgia for the old times? He could not tell, but suspected many older people yearn for those years, when the streets were filled with life and bustle.

Like many older Poles he talked about the Jewish past of his village with sentiment and was not scared to admit that his heart longs for those old days when every morning, in the market one could catch extraordinary blend of words spoken alternately in Polish and Yiddish. He was only a boy when it all abruptly came to an end. Strangely he felt that people were more understanding and open-minded back then, perhaps less educated but living together, Poles and Jews, often equally poor but also equally proud of their little town. This testimony seems to contradict commonly accepted perception of the Polish-Jewish relations before the Second World War. Polish people, often living under the influence of the Catholic Church and for centuries fed with negative stereotype of a Jew, passed down from generation to generation, in fact knew very little about their Jewish neighbours. Complex historical conditions resulted in deep resentment and prejudices especially accumulated over the decades directly preceding the outbreak of the Second World War. Both Poles and Jews living with accordance with tradition and religion did not try to change it. They existed in their closed, hermetic world, a microcosms which did not demand acceptance of fellow inhabitants (Orlicki, 1983).

For a long time the youth of Lelov has had a very unclear perception of Lelov's Jewish past not even realising that the old workshops once belonging to the Co-operative, were in fact a former synagogue and that a small tenement was once a ritual bath. Now, even the youngest children

actively participate in re-discovering the once multi-cultural character of their municipality. There are a number of competitions organised by local primary and secondary schools for example, drawing and painting competitions for the younger ones and history research papers for the teenagers. Municipalities see Chasidic pilgrimages as a great opportunity to promote their village (see appendix 1, interview 3).

The lack of Jewish presence during most of the year remains in gross disproportion to their overwhelming presence as symbols. The collective imagination of the locals is much more populated by Jews than the streets of Lelov. Those perceptions are like the shadows of the past, spirits revived and returning often in a fantasised form. While the Polish side is well defined, it is a Jewish entity that remains unclear, foggy, half real and half mythological. Not so much a set of specific people, a tangible demographic, social, economic or religious category, but rather a phenomenon living its own life as a product of symbolic culture.

Mr Roman was one of the first people I bumped into on my arrival in Lelov. He saw me through the window and rushed out asking if I would like to get inside the shrine. He talked to me in an old fashioned way, informing me that since he had a key he could let me in. He proudly admitted that he looked after the shrine when the Chassidim were away. Once Mr Roman had opened the heavy, metal door marked with the Star of David, for the first time I was able see the tomb in its quiet and humble form.

The grave of the great tzadick looked rather inconspicuous, no candles or kvitleh, just a few prayer-books and a big black bin bag which my guide pulled out. He encouraged me to have a look inside revealing a sea

of paper – Chasidic prayers, letters to God. Mr Roman assured me that he has never thrown anything away (see appendix 1, interview 5).
Perhaps the Chassidim pray for the locals as well.

When asked how he felt about the Chasidic pilgrimage he spoke eagerly. He has lived in Lelov all his life, in a close proximity to the ohel. Mr Roman proudly reported that his garage has been used by the Jews as storage, whenever they are back in Lelov, however, he would not take money for it. He wanted to be absolutely clear. Furthermore, he told me that he liked the visitors. To him, they seem to be happy and joyful but perhaps, a bit cautious at first. Mr Roman was aware of Chasidic Jews having their own customs, Sabbath, which he compared to a Christian Sunday; they would eat dance, drink and smoke. He struggled, however, to understand why it is only men, who celebrate in Lelov and wondered if they ever got bored with their own company (see appendix 1, interview 5).

Virtually every local who owns a property around the shrine rents it out for the occasion, sometimes squeezing as many as eight people into what are rarely more than two rooms.

The testimony of Mr Roman seems to be simple perhaps even simplified but gives lie to what is often known as a Polish stereotype of a Jew. Even before the Second World War, the Polish - Jewish community had become an aggressive target of propaganda fuelled by right-wing nationalist groups that were growing in strength. Very often, these have presented the Jews as a mortal threat to the Catholic people, ‘the element’ hostile to Polish state, corrupting cultural, political and economic spheres, a branch of Freemasonry and world financiers, and also the fifth column of

Bolshevism. The modern perception is still very anachronistic, because it has been created without any social references, a reflection of those times, when deformed collective memory was constructed from the scraps of family remittances. This ‘knowledge’ is usually compiled with generalisations, distortions and omissions.
The PRL (Peoples’ Republic of Poland) has not taught in schools or written in the press about the history of Polish Jews.

Nevertheless, it is hard not to notice the growing renaissance of interest in Jewish themes. Lelov’s pilgrimage and the annual Festival of Chulent (cholent) are some of its manifestations. After a weekend of concerts, promotions, discussion meetings, workshops, music, dance, paper cut-outs and Jewish cuisine, a large crowd of people celebrated merrily into the night to the sounds of the klezmer music. And among Lelov’s Catholic population, it is believed that those prayers to tzadick Dovid Biedreman raised by the Chasidic pilgrims will continue to bless his city.

The dialogue of two once co-existing cultures continues. Both sides say there is a growing need to repair Polish-Jewish relations. But where would this dialogue take place? Who, in fact, would this process involve? Perhaps, the Jews from Israel? Or maybe the Diaspora in New York? Those very few Polish Jews, a handful of the "real" ones who cultivate ancestral rites and customs, adhering to the Sabbath and attending synagogue, or perhaps generations of assimilated Poles of Jewish origin?

The number of Chasidic pilgrims in Poland has grown exponentially since the breakup of the Soviet Block in 1989. Every year thousands of ultra-orthodox Jews make the trek, and the infrastructure keeps pace.

Flights are mainly chartered from Tel Aviv to Warsaw or Cracow where coaches or minibuses await the Chassidim on their arrival.
The municipalities do what is in their power to be as welcoming as possible. After all, locals understand the economic benefits of the pilgrimage.

Today, the Chassidim live mainly in Israel and the United States but the cradle of this ultra-orthodox movement was in Polish lands. Before the Second World War, the sight of bearded men with side curls dressed in long black robes and sable hats, once belonged to Polish landscape. The pilgrims, who visit the land of their ancestors, reunite with places that once thrived with Chasidic culture. The Holocaust brought an end to this, but Chasidic dynasties began to revive through their holly descendants who survived the Holocaust and then emigrated to the United States and Israel. There, they were able to stop time, so to speak. Meanwhile, Eastern Europe has seen an increased interest in mysticism and rich Chasidic culture and the pilgrimage movement in Lelov is one of the certificates.

If we assume that Lelov pilgrimage model is an amalgam of differing influences, then it would be appropriate to look at past experiences of the Jewish community in Lelov. For a Lelov Chasid reference to the communal history is commonplace, this is reinforced by the movement's mystical tendency and Chasidic teachings, particularly the emphasis on the divine presence in every aspect of life, behaviour and history. It does not, however, put any particular emphasis on historical events. Nevertheless, these seem to be crucial for our understanding of the group. Therefore the following chapters and sections describe the emergence and development of the Lelov Chasidism.

Chapter Two

Historical aspects of Jewish settlement in Lelov.

The following discussion intends to present historical insight into history of Jewish community of Lelov as well as brief history of the town. Chapter Two contextualises Lelover's community within a wider movement of the local Jewish population. Taking on Jewish identity since the eighteenth century explains how the initiation of the Chasidic movement has influenced a regional minority. It also provides a historical frame and background for further discussion of the interactions between haredi, non-haredi Jews and Polish gentiles in Lelov. To understand the character of this unique phenomenon, we have to go back in time and trace the very first movement of Jewish incomers at Lelov. For that reason it is necessary to examine any available references both through analysing historical facts and verbal intergenerational transfers. To reply, it should be noted that this section does not intend to deal with all events related to Jewish past of Lelov and the region but rather offers a background for further, more specific enquiry. Hence images of important Chasidic figures and selected events.

2.1 The Jews and the challenges of a mediaeval community.

There is much dispute among historians about the circumstances surrounding the actual founding of Lelov. The precise date seems to be lost in the less than objective mediaeval history this region called Western Little Poland. We could deliberate about the very early history of the capital of

Little Poland and previously Poland- Cracow (Krakow) because quite a number of important documents have survived. This is even more true if we take the stormy and highly disturbing history of Poland into account. But Lelov has always been only one town among many, not a gem in a crown, not even a grindstone, more like a seed thrown into the marshy fields of this border region.

Alongside the *Bialka River* the tributary of *Pilica* spreads boggy and marshy water-meadows which in earlier times provided some means of defence. On the other hand the land offered relatively low soil fertility. Even so, the first settlers decided to take up the challenge and build the early Slavic burgh probably as early as the ninth century. Some historians even suggest that Lelov is named after one of the burgh's chiefs called either *Lel* or *Lelistryj.* Be that as it may, in the early mediaeval period, by the springs of three rivers: the *Pilica, Warta* and *Liswarta*-thus where Old Lelov lies, the three Slavic tribes lived: *Wislanie* (Vistulans - named after the Vistula River), *Polanie* (Poles), and *Slezanie* (Silesians). As a result of archaeological research and later reconstruction, it is known that the grounds belonging to Lelov's Decanate had been initially been part of *Mstow* burgh. In the East its territory was situated alongside Bialka River nearby Lelov as far as Liswarta in the West. In the ninth century the burgh of Mstow had been captured by the Great Moravia Kingdom, then in 906 A.D handed over to the Czechs and finally in the late tenth century annexed by Mieszko I, the Prince of Poles. As a result, the burgh of Mstow lost its importance and became part of the Lelov's district.

All and all it would be hard to indicate when and from where precisely the

first Jewish settlers had come. Maybe they picked this place because of an abundance of deer (old Polish - *lel[un], jelen*) or because of its strategic importance? The only thing that we can say for sure is that the history of Lelov starts with Christianity as with many other towns and cities in Polonia. Obviously, the presentation of the events in the early parish of Old Lelov is full of ambiguities. It is hard to indicate when the actual parish was organised. The visiting protocol of the Ecclesiastic Delegates of 1711 quotes (presumably relying on some earlier sources) date of AD 1080 as a year of the foundation. According to the 'Description of the Church' from 1798, mentioned date is actually the date of a church erection and does not mention a parish at any point (Anon., 1080). The 1080 date was said to be engraved in the coal stone that has never been found although sought for in 1961-1972. As we do not have any earlier historical records and none of the modern inhabitants of Lelov has even come across the date stone, we have to accept it as no more than a hypothesis. Nevertheless, it is known for sure that Lelov was already in existence at that time. Whether as a parish, seat of the local power, local spiritual headquarters or none of these it had already established itself in the urban landscape of Western Little Poland.

The region between Upper Silesia and Little Poland, later called Galicia, has always been a crossing point for many different cultures. Its geographical position attracted throughout the centuries not only Poles or the wider spectrum of Slavic tribes, including Czechs and Moravians, but also Germans, Scots, Italians.

All of these nations consequently tried to put their own mark on the region.

In the meantime this economically attractive area with a fast growing trade infrastructure, easily accessible both from the west and south, and perceived as an interface between East and West, became interesting for the new incomers to the region, namely, the Jews. Through Germany and Bohemia, at first gradually but then in increasing numbers, Jewish settlers fled to this unknown land with its difficult terrain and impenetrable virgin forests. They brought silk and ground spices; cut amber and light armoury pieces and developed a flourishing trade. Not only this, they brought their own exotic culture, customs, religion and language. Attracted by these opportunities but also fleeing to save their lives as the crusaders carried out mass slaughters of Jewish communities in Germany and northern France, many decided to make the move east. The crusade movement of the eleventh century, ideologically initiated by Saint Bernard, turned out to be fatal for many Jews of Western Europe. Created to liberate the Holy Land from the hands of infidels, the crusades also targeted flourishing Jewish communities, attempting to eliminate any non-Christian group under the flag of religious purity and unity. Was it caused by greed or religious zeal? The answer to this question is less clear. Jonathan Riley-Smith believes the latter:

‘The Hebrew accounts ascribe greed more to local bishops, their officials and townspeople than to the crusaders, who seem to have been more interested in forcing conversions. Everywhere Jews were offered the choice of conversion or death, and synagogues, Torah scrolls and cemeteries were desecrated. The Jews feared that the crusaders intended to wipe Judaism out of the regions through which they passed. There is overwhelming

evidence that uppermost in the crusaders' minds was a desire for vengeance. They found it impossible to distinguish between Muslims and Jews and if they were being called upon, as they saw it, to avenge the injury of Christ's honour of the loss of his patrimony to the Muslims, why, they asked, should they not also avenge the injury to his person of the crucifixion ?' (Riley-Smith, 1990, p.17)

But there must have been strong financial motives involved as well. Many crusaders had sold their own properties and cashed in their inheritance in order to pursue their sacred mission but still being short of funds they spotted an excellent opportunity to make good their losses in robbing non-Christians, the Jews. Money was needed to meet the demands of the journey and who had it if not merchants, Jewish merchants to be precise? Either to avoid or escape upcoming pogroms some of the Jews decided to move further east leaving their German and French settlements behind along with well developed mercantile networks. Some of them even had links with dukes and kings. Once again Jews became immigrants looking for a relatively safe place to settle in and they seemed to find it in the Slavic civilization. Running away from the slaughter, Jews initially moved to the western parts of Poland and slowly within a few generations travelled further east preferring towns and cities above rural sites.

Jewish refugees left their previous countries hoping to be able to rebuild their wealth and networks, but most of all to improve their everyday lives. Because this wave of immigration was caused by a great emergency, both poor and wealthy - who usually were not keen to re-settle unless there was a need - made the journey. This time they were forced to find their new

homes in twelfth century Eastern Europe.

The first historical records about Lelov and its Jewish inhabitants date back to 1193. Pope Celestine III's bull tells us that in the late thirteen century there was an inn located in the oldest part of the town of Lelov, known as Old Town (Polish: *Staromiescie*). This inn, it has been argued, was owned by a Jew. However it is more likely to have belonged to the Augustinian convent in nearby Mstow. According to some of the historical sources this particular monastery had been established before year 1145 so nearly fifty years before the papal edict. Its construction was initiated by Peter Wlast (Piotr Wlostowic), the castellan of Braslau (Polish: Wroclaw), a ruler of this part of Silesia and approved by Prince Wladyslaw II (son of Boleslav III Wrymouth (Polish: Boleslaw III Krzywousty) - last Polish king before the 1148 Division).

Moreover, in a copy of this document dated 1435 we find a phrase *tabernae* instead of *tabernam* (inns instead of an inn) that gives us a clue it might have been more than one inn in a neighbourhood of Lelov (Zaborski, 1998). What did it mean for the Jewish settlement? The above mentioned papal bull, although it may have been issued fifty years later, makes a reference to the Jews. Produced precisely for the Canons Regular of Lateran based in *Piasek*, (Braslau district) it mentions a Jew as a person linked to an inn.

It is commonly known that the monasteries used to operate a brewery, producing and selling various spirits and furthermore owning inns and taverns. To avoid burdens and protect their reputations those last mentioned used to be rented out on lease. The lessee very likely might have been a Jew. It is not clear whether this would have been an isolated

case or indicative of a larger settlement, but it would be very unlikely for a Jewish man (there is no mention of a woman) to migrate alone. We can be fairly sure it would have involved at least a family re-settlement if not a small community migration. We can also be quite certain that the first Jews of Lelov were those escaping the Second Crusade pogroms which were burning vibrant Jewish communities down to the ground in Germany, Bohemia, France and Austria between 1147 and 1149.

At the turn of the eleventh and twelfth century, as a result of Czech - German influences stemming from Silesian principalities an old trade route leading from Cracow (Little Poland) to the Greater Poland (Polonia Maior) towards Opole (Lower Silesia boarder) was redirected to the territory of so called *Jura Krakowsko-Czestochowska* (Jurassic Highlands, geographically located between Silesia and Little Poland). A new route was then formed, still leading to Poznan and the Greater Poland, but this time taking in Lelov. What was the consequence of such restructuring?

In the eleventh and twelfth century when the Polish state was still being formed, at the point of the sword and with much shedding of blood, populations were sparse, towns small. Cities and burghs on this eastern border of European culture were surrounded by wild forests rather than lush pastures and fields. Political power had not yet been solidly centralised but was even more fragmented in 1138 by the Testament of King Boleslaw the Wrymount. Having thirteen children including eighth sons, he decided to divide his lands between four senior successors with the superior ruling power for the eldest. The principle of seniority was soon broken leading to almost two hundred years of feudal fragmentation of Poland.

Moving or rather reconstructing a trade route was therefore also a reflection of constantly changing political fronts and alliances. This new high road also brought a degree of prosperity into the region and of course encouraged some local trade development.

The nearby town of Mstow had been known as a ford on Warta River for centuries before the route was moved. The freshly created trading opportunities opened some new windows.

First of all, it meant that a custom - house had to be built so passers-by and those using local bridges could not avoid tax. As the only local bridge intersected Warta somewhere between Lelov and Mstow, there was no way to go round without adding miles on. Fully loaded wagons simply could not turn back in search of a freer passage because, as always, wasting time meant wasting money.

Where there was a ford, there had to be an inn to host and entertain transient visitors. As we mentioned before, leasing inns to Jews used to be a common practice if a property belonged to monks or local governors. This was not just because Jewish incomers had a wider knowledge of trading acquired from Arabic or Western merchants but also because their appetite for strong spirits was much weaker than that manifested by their Slavic neighbours.

It is also known that some of the Jewish merchants who survived eleventh and twelfth century pogroms travelled across Europe to trade in the Principality of Kiev or Russia. German rabbis of that period occasionally referred in their writing to the journeys of German and Bohemian Jews travelling with merchandise to Sclavonia (Slavonia, Slav countries)

(Balaban, 1914). Some of them decided to settle there in the hope of finding new business opportunities. Lelov's Jews might have been among these. Whether as opportunistic merchants or fleeing pogroms immigrants, Jewish people entered into the landscape of the flourishing mediaeval town of Lelov.

Where there was an inn, there was must have been a market. The changes to the trading routes made it even more necessary to have a regular market in a neighbourhood close to the town or in the town itself. Many of the itinerant merchants stayed in to take some rest before heading for Breslau or even Posen. Some of them also traded in the town, selling or buying in useful equipment, food, spirits and fodder for their horses. The earliest mentioned market located close by Lelov's inn dates back to 1250 A.D (Maleczynski, 1926).

On the marshy grounds on the banks of the Bialka River, Conrad I of Masovia had ordered the erection of a fortress that was finished shortly before his death in 1247. Upon the same hill where a wooden-earthen castle existed formerly, the indirect successor of Conrad, king Casmirus the Great, built a modern, stone made castle. This was one of many fortresses on the route to Silesia. The fortress comprised two tower residential halls with an adjacent circular wall. A long, wooden bridge was the only way into the castle, otherwise guarded by the marshes and boggy grounds.

During the feudal partition of Poland, before Casimirus the Great successfully reunited the country, Lelov castle had changed hands many times, possessed in turn by the fighting Piasts and even Czech troops.

It was also appointed as a seat of the Lelov's castellany until 1370 when

Vladislavus II, the Duke of Opole, captured and re-organised the district. In the fourteenth century (most probably in 1340 - based on the Magdeburg Law) Lelov was finally granted municipal status and could now move into a new era as one of the fortified towns of the Polish western border (Flaniowska-Gradowska and Rychlikowa, 1963). Without a doubt, the ambitions of Casimirus the Great and his plans for building as many castles as possible along the western border played a key role in establishing Lelov as a town. To leave Lelov as an open town just a few miles away from the international border would have been very risky, particularly in view of the presence of German neighbours just across the Warta River. But on the other hand, it would have seemed a pity and a loss not to use this location for purposes of trade. Therefore Casimirus the Great singled out Lelov with its early built wooden castle dating probably back to the twelfth century to expand and consolidate his power but also to support international and local trade. In the context of his political strategy towards Silesia, to have yet another fortified town along the border could only be of benefit. Both Janko of Czarnow and Jan Dlugosz - two leading Polish chroniclers of those times mentioned Lelov among many other towns besieged by John of Bohemia (also known as John of Luxemburg) on his way back from the Krakow defeat.

As legend has it, King Casimirus the Great - in the history of Poland recognised as a great friend and supporter of Jewish settlement in his land, had accommodated his Jewish mistress Esterka Malach precisely in the castle of Lelov (Stronczynski et al., 2009). She was said to have resided in Krakow previously but her presence there became uncomfortable. Whether

the legend is true or false is a matter of argument. But what is indisputable, Casimirus (Kazimierz) the Great not only set aside a community for Jews, but also gave the Jews of Poland extensive rights and privileges.

Jan Dlugosz, one of the first Polish annalists, remarked:

'The Polish king Casimirus deeply loved his mistress, Rokiczanka, by whose beauty he was charmed. But when he was told by one of his domestic servants that she was bald and had scabies and not trusting this witness, wished to make a judgment with his own eyes, he confirmed it in person and immediately had her removed. He thereupon took a new mistress of Jewish origin. Her name was Esterka, chosen because of her incredible beauty. He had two sons by her, Niemierza and Pelka. Also, at the request of his mistress, Esterka, in a document stamped with the highest authority, the king granted numerous privileges and liberties to the Jews in the Kingdom of Poland which was an abuse of God's Majesty (although some maintain that it was fraudulent from beginning to end). This bad odour has persisted to the present day. It was also felt to be disgusting, the king allowing his daughter of Esterka to stay in the Jewish faith' (Dlugosz, 2003, p.435).

Mythological or not, the story of Casmirus and Esterka has great symbolic value when it comes to the relationship between Poles and Jews. Moreover we know that probably due to the king's wish, towns like Lelov had never been granted the *non tolerantis Iudei* privilege - a regulation banning Jews from settlement within the municipal borders. This probably helped Jews to settle and trade within the town's walls freely.

The award of municipal freedom attracted even more Jewish merchants

wanting to trade their goods on the way to and from the big world outside Lelov. The first firm records of the Jewish settlement in Lelov come from the sixteenth century and are detailed in The Inspection of Krakow Voivodeship in 1564 (Zaborski, 1998).

As the townspeople testified, the Jews of Lelov were obligated to pay the so called *stacja krolewska* - a tribute 'in nature' paid directly to the king in the amount of one red zloty (zloty czerwony) from each Jewish household (Galas and Skrzypczyk, 2006).

In 1598, the visiting envoy of the Ecclesiastical Superior of Bishop Bernard Maciejowski expressed his high concern and indignation that part of the hospital's grounds has just been transferred to the Jewish community for its burial place (Anon, 1598). It was accepted and signed by the staroste of those days, *Szafraniec*, called the Heretic presumably because he supported the developing reform movement. All and all, it is clear that the Jews of Lelov had to be quite a significant group and to have played an important role in local life if they were able to receive a burial ground within the town's walls. Not having their own graveyard had been fairly common. Some of the Jewish councils might have been too poor to buy a plot of land or they were not allowed to do so because of the non tolerantis Iudeis law; others were simply too small to organise the *kahal* (Jewish council) or even *Chevra Kaddisha* (Jewish burial society controlled by a strict system of rites and customs imposed and accepted by the society). The nearby town of *Myszkow* may serve as an example: although containing a number of Jewish inhabitants, it had no burial ground at all. The Jews of Myszkow therefore had to travel approximately six miles to *Zarki* (Zarki town also

known as the Jewish Zarki).

Same protocols excluded from Holy Communion services those who worked, or served in Jewish houses or who cooperated with them in other forms. As we can imagine that was wishful thinking on the part of the ecclesiastical representatives and in practice no-one could really control or prevent occurrences of this kind. The obvious reason for this was that it provided bilateral benefits: an additional or regular income for the Gentiles and a workforce or Sabbath servants for the Jews.

The Inspection of Cracow Voivodeship in 1564, mentioned earlier, refers to six (male) Jews living in Lelov at that time (Zaborski, 1998) but it was more likely to be six families. With only six male fellow-believers, the Jews of Lelov would have had no purpose to insist on setting up a burial site especially on highly controversial land. For centuries this had been a thorn in the Catholic community's side, so it is hardly surprising that each single ecclesial visitation kept reminding people about the unlawful use (from their point of view) of hospital grounds. They also exhorted Catholics to desist from tightening already existing bonds. From the perspective of the mediaeval church, Catholic-Jewish coexistence might have led to some unwanted forms of a religious indifferentism, and therefore participation in either social or religious activities with the Jews had been strictly forbidden. Moreover, providing either permanent or occasional services (including Sabbath servile work) was banned due to a risk of proselytism.

Yet, in the sixteenth century, the Polish Commonwealth was known as *Paradisus Iudaeorum* - Jewish paradise and attracted hundreds if not thousands of Jewish refugees once again. It provided a unique shelter for

persecuted and expelled European Jews and a home to one of the world's largest and most vibrant Jewish communities. Why then should we assume that Poles and Jews in towns like Lelov always lived separately, avoiding each other and building up mutual hatred?

It can be argued that, indeed, Jews were not isolated from their Christian neighbours, especially in those little towns like Lelov where there was no room for a separate Jewish quarter and where no ghetto area could be designated. They lived and shared the same geographical space and a common cultural and historical landscape shaped both by periods of prosperity and decay. This even extended to marriage.

Even if only contracted as a marriage of convenience between independent parties, it was still likely to occur, and as many cases demonstrated, a marriage of convenience does not have to be synonymous with unhappiness. Such relations might have been encouraged by strong elements of mutual and highly beneficial interaction in each and every sphere of life. It would be hard to imagine the Jews and Poles of Lelov treading out their own paths only, without any interest and involvement in the other party's intellectual, cultural, economic and social landscape. Jewish experience had been the experience of Lelov and in Lelov we are faced not with a depressing social life confined to Gentiles but rather with a satisfying spectacle of coexistence.

Yet in the late sixteenth century other documents presented in The Inspection count Jews of Lelov only in the teens. It may be suspected that shortly before the conflagration of 1574 there had not been that many of them in the town, maybe enough to constitute a *minyan* – the quorum of ten

Jewish males required to conduct certain religious obligations i.e. Sabbath prayers. But this is not something that can be entirely certain. It is even harder to assume that the available records are really accurate and one could easily conclude that there must have been a somewhat larger community. Regardless of the numbers, Jews were still mentioned as town dwellers and presented as actively taking part in a historical event of the town by helping out to rebuild an urban structure.

It was the time when the first self constituting body of Polish Jewry, the *Vaad Arba Aratzot* (The Council of Four Lands), was formed,
a development that is symbolic of the independence and political power given to the Jews of Poland by its kings and rulers. As the Talmud is the foundation of Jewish faith and practice, so The Council of Four Lands became the guarantee of a Jewish autonomy in Poland. For nearly two centuries it served as a judicial, religious, and charitable tool to constitute the basis of their self-government.

The sixteenth century changed the face of mediaeval trade as well. As we mentioned before, Jewish merchants from all over the world started to visit Slavic lands in the pre-Christian era. But the real efflorescence came with the waning of the Middle Ages when merchants headed East seeking new business opportunities. Among the other countries affected, the Polish Commonwealth grew in prosperity…

It is worth mentioning that by expelling the Jews of Prague in 1541, Ferdinand I also contributed to developing trade in Little Poland in particular. Those who fled chose to settle mainly in Kuzmir (Polish: Kazimierz) just a few miles away from Cracow's market (now within Cracow

city centre). Maintaining close ties with Bohemia and setting up new connections with Prussia helped Jewish merchants to establish strong economic bonds with the local powers as well. It also led to the territorial expansion of Jewish trade along with its volume increase.

Lelov, located within easy reach of the well - known merchants' route, had its own traders regularly attending the big fairs. The sixteenth/seventeenth custom duty documents indicated that the Jews of Lelov used to buy and sell in Krakow among the whole international group of merchants.

The custom registration from 1593 made a note of five Lelovers regularly participating in Cracow's fairs, selling mostly wax and honey, sometimes salt and fruit from local orchards, and buying in various goods, principally leather, glass and utensils (Kazusek, 2005).

A variety of commercial activities flourished and consequently played a substantial role in increasing Jewish wealth not only that classified as material wealth but also spiritual, intellectual and social. Jewish merchants trading local agricultural produce in exchange for imported luxury goods also participated in the Europeanisation of many little towns like Lelov. Many of the town folk had never been able to set their feet further than a few miles away from home but the clothes, armour, spices and quality wines brought regularly back from Cracow by Jewish merchants gave them at least a taste of foreign places..

However, although commerce was undoubtedly the most significant element of the late mediaeval urban landscape, it was Jewish involvement in craft production that has mostly been seen as competing with the city economy. Unfortunately, there is not much known about the financial

operations of the Jews in Lelov and the crafts they used to be engaged in. The main guilds in the town, by which we mean shoemakers, butchers and bakers, were predominantly Christian, and comparatively closed to Jews. For instance in 1566, the shoemakers guild reserved the exclusive right to sell shoes and accessories on the fair day along with the exclusive right to buy leather (Link - Lenczowski, 1991). The purpose of these protective measures was to increase their share of the market and establish a solid opposition against the slowly expanding, monopolising Jewish trade. In the first half of the seventeenth century the Jews of Lelov had accumulated in their hands a whopping ninety percent of the commerce between Lelov and Cracow (Malecki, 1991). Consequently, the guilds, bringing together gentile merchants and craftsmen, for the time being were given more autonomy by the ruling powers. They were also favoured by the Catholic authorities as one of those bodies which consolidated faith with work.

But even if some protective measures had been taken in the highly competitive milieu of the late mediaeval towns, Jews could still find their niche, obtain new licences and get involved in some very beneficial businesses. Look no further than a taproom. Brewery and distillation, always regarded as dangerous enterprises, were especially profitable for those, who by law and custom consumed much less than locals. The Jews of Lelov therefore stood to gain considerably from meeting the needs of a regional liquor market, proceeding cautiously at first , taking care not to expand this activity beyond a certain geographical point, a rural decanate from Lelov.

As it has already been mentioned, some important trade routes led via

Lelov. Like any other crossroads along these routes, there was one maybe two inns, as early as the late twelfth century. Whether leased or owned by Jews, the premises had to be supplied with various liquors. The Jews of Lelov seemed to be in the right place at the right time to assuredly use this niche. But manufacturing and trading in alcohol had always been one of the targets of the local gentile merchants. Some of them even attempted to blame Jews for the impoverishment and intoxication of the peasants and Christian passers-by. This was a rather common but not harmful accusation which can be explained in terms of the competitive nature of the economic relations between Jews and Gentiles as well as simple human jealousy.
A typical example of this occurred in 1652 when Johannes Casimirus, the king of Poland, granted to David (Dawid) Lazarowitz of Lelov the right of ambulant brewery, thereby initiating some minor problems and vocal protest from the town folk (Falaniowska – Gradowska and Lesniak, 2005).

Before the Council of Four Lands had been established, it was the custom that internal issues of the Polish Jewry were discussed on the occasion of local fairs. So it was in Cracow, the royal city with an international profile. Even after 1581, when Jews started to attend the Council's disputes in Lublin and Jaroslav (Jaroslaw), some merchants coming to Cracow continued to debate affairs. Thus, Jews like Dawid (David) who traded wax and honey, or Marek of Lelov who used to buy glass, could also freely participate in resolving Jewish issues, whether those of an everyday nature or of longer term importance.. Under the influence of Moshe (Moses) Isserles and Yaakov (Jacob) Pollack - the greatest Jewish

teachers and scholars of that time, simple Jews from local townships could rise above their immediate material concerns and bathe themselves in the light of Torah Knights as they were called. With warmed up hearts and fully loaded wagons slowly coming back to the stone baileys of Lelov, they would bring a hint of the wider world to this essentially provincial town.
A legal site of the Jewish existence had been regulated by general rules obligating in royal towns. Thus the rights and duties of Jewish community organised and represented by the kahal (a local Jewish council) used to be given and executed by the royal representatives: starostas.

2.2 The lights of a modern era. Lelov in the seventeenth to nineteenth century.

In the seventeenth century Poland was the biggest European country, extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea in the south, and from Silesia to the Dniester River and ever further east. In this condition it was not surprising that in as much as sixty percent of Poland's territory the population was not ethnically Polish. With its almost one million square kilometres, the Polish Kingdom was home to Slavic and non-Slavic inhabitants. Among those last were Jews, representing up to eighty percent of the world's Jewry. Two major influxes of the Jews resulted from religious prosecutions and expulsion during the period of the Reformation in Western Europe. The exodus of the Jewish Ashkenazi (the Jews descended from the mediaeval Jewish communities of Germany) community lasted through the fifteenth and sixteenth century bringing more incomers than ever before or after in the history of Polish lands. Most of the incomers had some

knowledge of the positively defined status of Jews in Poland, dating from as early as 1264 in the Statue of Calissia (*Statut Kaliski*) and followed by numerous privileges and special rights traditionally confirmed by each newly reigning king.

Also because of the subordination of most Polish towns to the nobles, the Jews of Poland were generally free to perform and cultivate their customs along with undertaking social and economic functions. Polish nobles invested in their towns and properties by endowing them with trade privileges and protecting them from legal sanctions. All of those factors combined resulted in the rapid economic development and demographic growth of the autonomic and self-constituted Jewish communities. However, the legal position of Jews was still regulated by royal and princely privileges and by the Seym (parliament) statutes, with this difference that in 1539 Polish Jews from private towns and villages became subordinated to the judiciary and administration of the owners (Link-Lenczowski and Polanski, 1991). In some cities Jews were even granted municipal citizenship but in most cases royal towns tried to minimise the role of the Jewish community and its participation especially in local trade and crafts. Without a doubt, the expansion of Jewish trade troubled the burghers, but on the other hand royal starosts encouraged Jews to develop business contacts and continue to trade widely. Simultaneously, the Polish Seym pushed by the ecclesial representatives juggled with pro- and anti - Jewish decrees and behind the scenes either royal representatives such as starosts or the town's owners kept distributing new privileges and liberties. Along with many others, the Jews of Lelov were granted some important rights, including: equality of

status with other Lelov inhabitants.

Stanislaw Branicki, the starost of Checiny (Yiddish: Chentsin) and Lelov, concluded that, if Jews paid exactly equal taxes both to support the Starost's Office and the magistrate, they should have equal rights, not just obligations (Zaborski, 1998). They were also allowed to trade freely and to be involved in alcohol distillation under the protection of the starost's office. Next to crafts, trading and financial activity, distillation has become an increasingly important source of income for the Jewish population. The liquor rights were usually leased for a period of less than three years to avoid monopolisation but covered a very wide spectrum of activities including involvement in tenancies, leasing inns and pubs, selling self-produced liquors and finally

sub-leasing of liquor rights. Although, the Diet of Piotrkow (Yiddish: Piotrkov) in 1538 forbade Jews from taking lease of freeholds including lease of taverns and inns, it applied only partially. As we will see later on, in the case of Lelov the enforcement of administrative decisions turned out to be selective.

The Jews of Lelov, then, were free people with a status similar to that of the burghers, and personal rights equal to those of the nobility (Zaborski, 1998). Treated as an independent social, religious and finally economic group, Jews living in towns like Lelov up to the end of the seventeenth century could flourish only rarely facing false accusations and manifestations of gentile anger. Laws protecting Jews confirmed their alliance with subsequent kings.

Ideally, the co-existence of Poles and Jews in the seventeenth century

Lelov could be seen as symbiotic. Of course in a relatively small society, conflicts have always been hard to avoid, especially in times of economic changes. The biggest conflict appeared in years 1651-1652 when a Jewish representation from Lelov unsuccessfully demanded to be exempted from paying unlawful taxes and contributions. They argued that the city council had no right to exact contributions with the use of force or cause damage to the property of those who refused to pay. The representative of kahal contended that the Mandate of King Johannus Casimirus (Jan Kazimierz) from the 31st of August 1651 granted them the right to be exempted from the town magistrate's jurisdiction and yet despite that the municipal authorities had made regular efforts to extort outstanding taxes. In revenge, the Magistrate of Lelov sued the Jewish council for corrupting Christians by employing them in Jewish households, buying properties off the Gentiles 'and burning vodka' (which was an ancient Polish practice of distillation) for the temptation of vulnerable Christians' souls (Falniowska-Gradowska and Lesniak, 2005). In addition, representatives of Lelov's municipality accused their Jewish neighbours of lending on security especially to tramps who were more likely to trade with stolen goods (Galas and Skrzypczyk, 2006). Such tumults were only echoes of the response to the anti-Jewish legislation approved by the Seym (parliament) of Piotrkov some hundred years earlier. Most of the laws agreed in 1565 agitated against the Jews employing Christians. The 1565 legislation clearly states:

'No Christian should act as servant to a Jew! The penalty for this offence will be a hundred *grzywna* paid by the Jew. No Jew should take Christians of *uturus sexus* (both genders) into service, and any Christian who serves

a Jew will face imprisonment.' (Woszczynski and Urbaniak, 2001, p.24)

At the time, a hundred grzywna equalled four hundred and eighty groshes (Polish currency, also *grosz*); for example, in the fifteenth century Poland a horse cost forty groshes, a canon at the Cathedral of Saint John in Breslau earned (in the sixteenth century) eleven groshes per week, so a penalty of a hundred grzywnas had to be seen as incredibly high.

It must have been a common practice to mutually employ neighbours of different faiths especially in some smaller communities where no official ghetto existed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Jewish quarter was an open borough. Nevertheless, in 1652 the Magistrate of Lelov complained to the Court of Assessors - a royal court presided by the chancellor as a king's nominee and his representative, that Jews were violently abusing Christians by employing them, taking them into service or re-possessing their properties. Christian town folk calculated that Jewish estates exceeded twenty houses which was considered to be a significant growth.

Yet in 1660 the conflict around Christian-Jewish relations was still being analysed and consequently remained unresolved.

The burghers of Lelov continued to raise numerous complaints against Jews, for example, for buying up houses and demolishing them for the purpose of creating a new graveyard (*kirkut*) and a synagogue (boznica). Moreover, no taxes had ever been paid for sites acquired in this way and Christians argued and as a result of such practices only gentiles were being surcharged.

The formal structure of the Jewish community must have been fully

established by the late sixteenth century, but it is only in documents drawn up by the commissioner of the next lustration from 1789 that the character of the Jewish settlement is revealed in specific figures.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, shortly before the second partition of Poland (1792), Lelov had its own kahal employing a dozen or so permanent staff. Among them we hear of the rabbi, religious teacher (*malmed*), cantor, cantor's assistant, cashier or bookkeeper, scribe, the hospital housekeepers, synagogue guardians and grave-diggers - all, in total, earning six hundred and sixty Polish zloty. As for the independent, religious unit, the kahal, had its own communal budget, planned and amended annually and supported both by the obligatory and optional contributions of the Jewish residents.

The kahal main sources of income were social events occurring on the occasion of weddings, divorces, births, deaths, *bar mitzvas* -
a religious transition from childhood to adulthood, traditionally celebrated when boys reach the age of thirteen.

Some income was also generated by the communal levies raised by leasing rights to ritual slaughter, kosher flour and vine, slivovitz (plum brandy) and finally kosher dairy. The total income of the Synagogue in Lelov over the period of four years, between 1807-1811, came to one thousand four hundred and ninety two Polish zloty and twenty one groshes and spending was calculated on the exact same level (Zaborski, 1998).

On the top of their own communal expenses, Jews were legally obligated to participate in municipal expenses; hence they had to pay all the civic and national taxes equally with the Gentiles.

To secure their fiscal position and avoid abuses, the representatives of Lelov's kahal protested that in 1766 they had been granted privileges by King August Poniatowski which guaranteed them equal fiscal treatment.: 'The Synagogue of Lelov then renewed the pact between themselves and the burghers, confirmed by the decree of His Royal Highness, which we also confirm. Therefore we keep the Synagogue within its rights, recommending as follows: neither burghers nor the magistrate to call for any new donations. If any money is to be collected if it is for army or civil taxation, we require receipts addressed to the Synagogue and guaranteed by the mayor or provost'. (Falniowska-Gradowska and Rychlikowa, 1963, p.521)

Lelov like any other little town of Central Poland had to face upcoming political, social and economic changes and find its way through the challenges brought by the new ruling powers.

Initially incorporated by the Prussian Empire (1793), in 1807 it became a part of the Duchy of Warsaw and an administrative district of Czestochowa. (Tchenstochov), and in 1814 Russian-controlled Congress Poland (also known as The Kingdom of Poland).

As we have already mentioned, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Jewish community of Lelov had its own independent structure represented by the rabbi and kahal working within a catchment of twenty nine villages: (Zaborski, 1998) with only thirty four families living actually within the rural area .

The Jewish kahal in Lelov was also responsible for communities in nearby Zarki, Janow, Pilica and Szczekociny hence holding periodical assemblies

of the Jewish Land Seym. This body has been administratively and legally subordinated to the regional self-government structure with its seat in Cracow called *ziemstwo* (colloquially: the Cracow - Sandomierz diocese, in Polish: Diecezja Krakowsko-Sandomierska).

In Lelov itself, Jews were mainly concentrated around the town market (Polish*: rynek*). According to the registration documents from 1827, the Jews of Lelov owned as many as seventeen plots off thirty five building parcels in the immediate neighbourhood of the market and further properties on *Czestochowska, Poprzeczna* (Cross), *Kacza* (Duck's), *Zatylna* (Back) and *Za Placami* (Behind the Plots) Streets (Zaborski, 1998). Over all they made up thirty nine percent of the total population in 1827, increasing to sixty percent by the end of the nineteenth century (Gawron, 2006). Ownership by the Jews of most of the central properties in town had always been an issue for the gentile part of the society and initiated local disputes in the course of the centuries. At the beginning of the nineteenth century a dispute over a Jewish graveyard set up in the town centre on land previously belonging to the Order of the Friars Minor was finally resolved in favour of the Catholics. The old kirkut was then liquidated and a new plot obtained for the purpose, this time located outside the town, half way between Lelov and *Biala* (Bialeh) *Wielka* (Great) village.

The exact date of relocation cannot be confirmed but according to Chasidic sources it happened after the death of tzadick Biederman in 1814 and his ohel was found on the sidewalk of *Ulica Ogrodowa* (Garden Street) where the old cemetery had been located. Yet, a map drawn up in 1825 by the government of *gubernya* (province) in Petersburg for administrative

purposes indicated that the old burial site was still squeezed between the Talmud Torah (Jewish school) on *Ogrodowa* and *Ulica Zydowska* (Jewish Street) (see appendix 4)

Even if centrally located, the majority of Jewish properties in town still remained wooden or thatch - covered clay huts, only rarely built of stone or brick. Usually, houses had gates at the front through which loaded wagons could enter the inner yard. Most of the residents still earned their living by farming and among the latter the majority traded with horses and cattle. Some of the Jews had their own minor trading businesses including the wholesale and some textile warehouses, others were small artisans: shoemakers, bakers, tailors. In the field of agriculture, liquors continued to be a main industrial product. But things were about to change as a recent decree of the government of the Duchy of Warsaw (1812) prohibited Jews in the cities and villages from being tavern-keepers and liquor-makers.

In the cities, the purpose of this decree was to transfer the liquor business from the Jews to the Polish townsmen. Even so, inconsistence in the enforcement of such regulations allowed Jews to continue some of their inn-keeping businesses and as Zaborski (1998) counted, in the years 1810-1816, Lelov's Jewish community had as many as ten tavern-leases, eleven inn-keepers and two minor liquor salesmen.

According to the Chasidic sources, Lelov's Jewry even had its noble representative in the Council of the Four Lands: It was said that in 1737 Lelov Icek (Isaac) of Lelov had been chosen delegate for the Council of Four lands in Poland" but in fact, it was a first Chasidic rebbe who extolled the town:

‘Lelov used to be a little town in the county of Lublin. It had been known for nearly six hundred year, as a village in the ownership of the Polacks (Poles). In 1351 Lelov had laid the foundations for and around it, expanded its urban settlement. Previously, Lelov had been known as a centre of agriculture and weaving. But Lelov became better known after Rebbe Dovid Lelover, student of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk (Lezajsk) and Rebbe of Lublin (Isaac Horovitz of Lublin, the Seer) had settled over there” (Anon., 2005, p.7).

But these periods of greatness already belonged to the historical past and with the collapsing State, polish municipalities started to decay. When the Commission of Lustration of Cracow Voivodship entered Lelov in 1789, they were greeted by the sight of deserted properties, shattered baileys and the partially demolished *Brama Nakielska/Krakowska* (The Nakielska/ Krakowska Gate).The fortified character of Lelov must have been abandoned not long after the Swedish Deluge (1655-1660) when most of the towns in generic Poland suffered defeat and destruction, often being burnt down to the ground. Previously surrounded by the mediaeval walls, Lelov now lost its protective belt and was partially opened up.

Two remaining watchtowers were ordered to be pulled down along with Brama Nakieleska/Krakowska and any stones obtained from the demolition used for paving the main route towards Lelov. The commissioners concluded that both towers and the gate were hazardous and could potentially cause fatal accidents to passers-by:

’ And we recommend that this debris alongside the bailey, be laid on the road leading towards Czestochowa and also on the high road towards

Cracow. Also when we were coming into Lelov, we straightaway experienced the emptiness and desolation. We were greeted by the abandoned town hall and unoccupied mill.' (Falniowska – Gradowska and Rychlikowa, 1963, p.519)

Dominating the town, the castle was still in a decent condition although it no longer served as a land's court quarter. It had been relocated a couple years before, with new accommodation in Zarki. Economic meltdown also had a destructive influence on the social structure where deepening poverty led to partial relocation. Newly developed industrial centres, for example, Tchenstochov, where cotton textiles production had flourished since the late eighteenth century, attracted poverty-stricken burghers and peasants. The majority of them unintentionally became cogs in the wheel of the recently powered industrialisation. From the nationwide perspective, between 1816 and 1855, urban population of Poland more than doubled, springing from over five hundred thousand to over one million persons. The percentage of the total of population of the country rose from nineteen to twenty four (Mahler,1985). In the same period, the Jewish population in Lelov increased, mainly because of governmental attempts to limit Jewish influx into bigger urban centres like Cracow or Warsaw. The idea of *revirs* - ghettos (first in Warsaw, 1809) was introduced for the first time in Poland. The ban on Jewish settlement in the cities privileged the policy "not to tolerate the Jews". In search of new opportunities, many Jews decided to change direction and seek their chances in the smaller towns. An initial explosion of capitalism in Central Poland caused deepening social polarisation between the Jewish population and the general population.

The rapid accumulation of wealth by the owners of large factories, for instance in Lodz, Czestochowa or Warsaw, eventually led to a decrease in minor trade. Big scale merchants, and bankers also contributed to the growing misery of the Jewish shopkeepers, traders, and artisans of small towns. They were no longer able to trade in bigger urban centres as they used to do for the centuries, pushed out by mass production and wholesale monopolisation. Although the Jews of Lelov constituted as many as twenty nine percent of the total population in 1808, growing up to thirty nine percent only nineteen years later, with the minor exception of a few with greater means, they usually lived in two or even one room accommodation. Those, who kept shops customarily lived at the back of the premises, saving both time and rent money.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Lelov was still one of the smaller Jewish communities in Poland although the Jewish presence gradually increased again especially over the period of the first three decades. But the fact that the Chasidic sect had already struck roots in this community in the closing years of the eighteenth century, gave it a prominent place in a history of Chasidism in Poland. Chasidic pilgrims started coming to Lelov from far and near on festival days and sometimes on the Sabbath, attracted by the teaching and devotion of Dovid Biederman. Many of his followers continued to visit after his death, disturbed by the desolation of the Second World War just to come back forty five years later. To understand the phenomenon of this pilgrimage movement we need to have a closer look at the history of Chasidism in general and the history of Chasidism in Lelov.

2.3 The historical and social facts about the development of the Chasidic movement. From a general to a local landscape.

In the seventeenth century Chasidism was and still is a religious-mystical movement initiated in the former territory of Eastern Poland (today's Ukraine). The events of that century prepared the ground for Chasidism to emerge. It mainly attracted Jews of the Austrian and Russian annexed lands: Galicia, Central Poland, Podolia and Belarus.

When in the seventeenth century, as a result of various western reforming tendencies, voices of change in Judaism were raised, no-one thought it might have the potential to disturb the unity of the religion itself. Challenges thrown by Luria, Sabbatai Zevi (Tzvi), (1626-1676) and Jacob (Jakub, Yaakov) Frank (1726-1791) – both claiming to be the Jewish Messiah, exposed tensions between the emotive experiences of the Diaspora and the categorical imperatives of a collective body of Jewish religious law, customs and traditions known as halakha . Chasidism came to European Jewry when it was most needed. The devastating advance of the bloodthirsty Cossacks rising up against Polish magnates and nobles in 1648 almost erased the majority of the Jewish communities. The Chmielnicki Uprising initiated a series of campaigns led by military bands of Cossacks – Zaporogians. The Little Russian peasants also used insurrection to invade, rob and cruelly torture both Jewish and Polish inhabitants. These bandits, called the *Haidamaks* were wont to hang a Pole, a Jew and a dog on the tree often with the following inscription: 'a Lakh (*Lach* –term *lakh [lach]* traditionally used in relation to Poles, whose mythical funder had been a

tribal duke named *Lech-Lekh*), a *Zhyd* (a Jew) and a hound-all with the same faith bound! (Dubnow, 1916, p.89)

Many were not murdered for their religion but simply to gain their wealth. Undisciplined Cossack bands quickly transformed fertile regions of the Ukraine into deserts and flourishing Jewish communities into burnt-down ruins.

Only those who fell into the hands of Tatars or decided to undergo conversion escaped certain death.

The kabbalistic sages had even speculated that the year 1648 would have brought the apocalyptic end of the world whether it meant the Jewish world or the end of humanity in general. Overwhelmed by those prophetic predictions and their sorrow and mourning, many Jews poured their hearts out in search of hope and relief. As it had been over the millennia, they rested their expectations upon religion and their Jewish heritage. But the face of Judaism which had successfully offered protection, wherever and whenever Jews lived, was about to be transformed.

Under the impact of pogroms and massacres, Eastern European Jewry slipped into the direst poverty. One victim of this situation was Jewish scholarship, with only elite few studying in the yeshivas while the rest eked out a meagre living.

As a result of the decrease in scholarship, Jewish religious life suffered - with the average Jew not connecting either intellectually or spiritually with God. For many Jews in Poland, the situation seemed to be hopeless, and the complete disintegration of Judaism in the eyes of many seemed

unavoidable. After the massacres, pogroms and banishment, after the delusive promises of messianic redemption announced by Shabbatai Zevi and Jakub Frank of Karolevka, the traditional system of religiosity and schooling were brought into question.

But at the same time, three places in Europe almost simultaneously produced movements to oppose the destructive process (Eliasberg, 2005) In Berlin, the Jewish Enlightenment - *Haskalah* - was initiated by the philosopher Moses Mendelsohn in the first half of the eighteenth century with the purpose of modernising and assimilating the Jewish masses into the larger Polish community. Vilnus gave birth to the modern Talmudic master-Eliyah Zalman, the Gaon of Vilna, who was a conservative opposing innovations in their Chasidic form.

And finally, in the remote little towns and villages of Podolia (Ukraine, formerly part of the Polish Commonwealth), the Chasidic movement was brought to life by the unknown, folk miracle-maker and vagabond healer, Yisrael ben Eliezer, known as Baal Shem Tov (the Master of the Good/Divine Name, 1698-1760). He has recently been acclaimed by Moshe Rosman , as not necessarily a revolutionary leader, faithfully following the basic principles of established Jewish values:

'I have come into this world, to show man how to make an observance of three principles his aim in life, namely: love of god, love of Israel, and love of the Torah' (Rosman, 1996, p.89).

The movement was not an entirely new form of a religious manifestation but rather a revival of the original Judaism. Led by Besht (an abbreviation of the Baal Shem Tov), his closest circle counted no more than a few dozen

members at the moment of his death in 1760. By the end of the 1820's, the movement had already spread far behind the borders of Podolia, reaching southern and central Poland. The Chasidic phenomenon exceeded and outnumbered all the followers of the remaining movements together. Seen not only as a movement of religious revival but also as a manifestation of social protest and recent post - Chmielnicki struggle, Chasidism offered an alternative based on a simple way of life. It especially appealed to those who had either lost everything or never had anything.

Many scholars have concluded that the main discovery of Chasidism was the figure of the tzadick: a spiritual and formal leader whose main role is to mediate between his followers and God. Moreover, Chasidism confines the possibility of a direct approach of God to a specific group of chosen men represented by the tzadickm who becomes in fact the axis mundi of their times. The term tzadick is indeed used in rabbinic literature throughout the ages to describe someone righteous (in opposition to *rasha* –a wicked, evil person) but also to indicate an individual possessing a unique value, a wonder-man from birth, the sustainer of the world.

In relation to Besht there is reason to conclude that unlike the *baal shems* of Jewish folk culture, he was indeed recognised as the tzadick of the generation (*Tzadick ha-Dor*), representing the highest degree of 'righteousness'. The tzadick has the ability to do everything and even to bring forth the Messiah. More than that, the tzadick himself can be the Messiah; therefore clinging to the tzadick of the Generation is seen as mitzvoth (Verthaim, 1992).

Although Baal Shem Tov is commonly recognised as a founder and the

most important figure of all Chasidic masters, his initial outreach was limited to his native land of Podolia where he travelled around as a part of the healing business. He probably had no intention to expand his teaching beyond the locality or of being a formal leader of any Jewish community and therefore he left no writings or testimonies. It was Rebbe Yaakov Yosef of Polonne (Jacob Joseph of Polonoy) who decided to record early Chasidic teachings in the name of the Besht (‘*Toldeot Yaakov Yosef*’) and subsequently came to be seen as one of his closest disciples. By creating a visual copy of Besht’s oral transmissions, Yaakov Yosef introduced his teachings to a wider audience but was also responsible for the elite character of Eliezer’s ideas.

In the times of Besht, the majority of Polish Jewry was concentrated in central Poland.

The Jewish community was one of the largest in the entire Diaspora, second only to that in the Ukraine. There were almost twice as many Jews in central Poland as in nearby Galicia (Mahler, 1985).

Since 1795, when Poland was ultimately partitioned by Prussia, Austria and Russia, Jews of the former Polish Commonwealth and Great Duchy of Lithuania fell under the legislation of different invaders, legislation sometimes oppressively harmful towards Jews but most of all, inconsistent. The rising Chasidic movement had to come to terms with some challenges posed by changing political and economic conditions and made use of various administrative structures implemented by the new powers. Moreover, as Adam Teller suggested there was also a problem of geography: how to spread the word of a new movement outside its

immediate environment in such hard condition involving the newly established national borders? (Teller and Goldberg, 1998)

There had to be only one way, also used by the missionary religions i.e. Christianity and Islam: to distribute emissaries and subsequently build numerous centres outside the sphere of immediate influence of Mezirech (Miedzyrzecz). By replacing a single centre with a widespread network, more followers could be approached and canvassed. By the time of Lelov's Chasidic dynasty, most of the settlements had became increasingly successful to the point where they could independently decide about the fate and future of a particular community with no need for previous consultation with Baal Shem Tov's descendants. Although, the assumption was to maintain a strict connection and loyalty to the centre, many of the new adherents to the movement set up their own filial courts, initiating the exponential growth of disunity.

In the Congress Kingdom of Poland, formerly known as the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, established as a consequence of the Napoleonic Wars, Chassidim managed, by the turn of the nineteenth century, to organise their own communities, developing separate religious associations and even infiltrating existing structures in order to gain formal leadership. On the other hand, this did not mean that in the late eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth century, Chasidism had already become a mass movement. From the social perspective, existing groups in central Poland, were still in their infancy, scarcely noticed by the local Jewish and government authorities. Nevertheless, the extraordinary attractiveness and magnetism of the tzadickim initiated a pilgrimage movement and hence the need of for

a firm structure. Both Shiper (Schiper and Targielski, 1992) and Dubnow (1916), referring to the celebrity status of the tzadickim, assumed that Chasidism very rapidly conquered most of the communities in Central Poland when in fact, since the first documented settlement in Ryczowol in 1754, and although increasingly in influence over the next five decades, Chassidim had not yet outnumbered their Talmudic brothers.

In the first decades of the Duchy of Warsaw (1807), and then the Kingdom of Poland (Congress Kingdom 1815), the Chasidic case seemed to be very marginal and furthermore three successive wars absorbed the majority of attention. It is not without significance that in comparison to traditional, Talmudic Jews, Chassidim remained a minority (Wodzinski, 2005), although in some of the places, for example, Polaniec, they indeed became numerous.

It is also worth mentioning that the Polish government, periodically falling into disarray (the abdication of last king, followed ultimately by partition, the Napoleonic Wars, and then rule by Prussia followed by Russia and tsarism and the November Uprising of 1830), demonstrated deep inaction regarding the Jewish issue in general and new sects in particular.

Lack of interest and coyness on the part of government bodies during the first decades of Chasidic presence in Central Poland might also be explained by confusion or inadequate knowledge with regard to the nuances of Jewish religion. Polish documents of that time abound in various terms related to Chassidim for example: *hasydymy, hussyty (hussity), huzyci, hassidei, kitajowcy (kitayowcy* – men of silk), *Michalki* (named after Michal*,* who supposedly was a Chasidic leader in Olkusz, Southern Poland)

and many more variations (Wodzinski, 2008). Yet in 1818, the Polish Chief Ruling Body could not establish the difference between ordinary and ultra-orthodox Jews. In 1824 the Government Committee for Religion and Public Enlightenment (*Komisja Rzadowa Wyznan Religijnych i Oswiecenia Publicznego*) issued a document concluding that there were no formal differences between the traditional Jews of Poland and the newly arisen sect of Chassidim and the only real dissonance was of a customary nature: 'There is no significant difference in the faith background of ordinary Jews and Chassidim although the latter sect is more bonded to the mystical and kabbalistic practices. That they do not have regular rebbes, hence no obligations towards them, their trust lies upon certain leaders whom they see as holy and god-fearing, believing in their connection with the celestial spirits and angels. Therefore, the opinion of the Commission is as follows: there is neither need to oppress nor to accept them as a separate creed but to remain entirely indifferent so far as Government is concerned. Furthermore, they are allowed to praise God as they have been accustomed to do until now but exaggerated cries, noises, drunkenness and night trysts are forbidden.'(Wodzinski, 1994, p.241)

From the above we can conclude that the Commission, tasked by the General Government to advise on this case had a clearly ambivalent approach to so called Chasidic affairs and recommended maintaining the status quo for as long as possible.

Nevertheless, in 1834, the Jewish Committee representing non-Chasidic Jews of the Kingdom of Poland had to clarify the main doctrinal disagreements between themselves and Chassidim. It was finally concluded

that *chassydymy* (Chassidim) was one of the four major faiths among Israelites not only in former provinces of Poland but also in the Kingdom of Poland.

The exact number of Chassidim cannot be told but at a rough estimate, it could be said they definitely represented less than one twentieth of all Jews in the Kingdom of Poland, although there had been a significant increase in numbers noted lately. There are no permanent leaders for them and the leadership depends entirely on communal support. Nowadays Mendel of Kotzk (Kock) and Jerachmiel of Pshishke (Son of the Holy Jew of Pshishke) are perhaps the most popular. Regarding the rising popularity of the sect of Chassidim, the Committee sees it as extremely difficult if not impossible to stop them spreading. Freedom of faith and religion are guaranteed by the Organic Statute (an equivalent of a constitution) so they can always rely on it as on a firm shield. (Borzyminska, 1994, p.53)

In the end, the Chasidic movement did not result in a separate religion and while it developed its own customs, it did not cause a great or long-lasting split. Nevertheless, many at that time believed it could only serve to deepen a break within the Jewish religion. The government of the Polish Kingdom, representing the intentions of tsarism, could not agree about the best politic tactics to adopt towards the Jews not to mention the Chassidim who were intentionally put outside the margins of normal policy. Only occasionally coming to public attention in the first half of the nineteenth century, Chassidim could win favour and support in Imperial Russia by the use of bribery. The kingdom's policy openly recommended accepting and not rejecting these 'gifts' and was actively promoted by Count Novosiltzev,

a brother of the tsar and the imperial commissioner attached to the Provincial Government in Warsaw. It allowed means testing by the Jews in order to overcome decisions affecting the more disadvantaged. Also general religious policy aiming to support traditional values and faith in order to build a barrier against Enlightenment ideas pouring into the Kingdom from the West helped the Chasidic movement to grow in strength and benefit from a period of peace.

Some of the haredi masters even supported the Imperial Government at the time of the Polish national uprisings in 1831 and 1863.

From the economic point of view, the unregulated case of Chassidim had its fiscal implications as well. Not knowing how to classify these sects, whether they should be recognised as separate religious associations with own houses of prayers or forced to join existing, traditional structures, the Polish government struggled to execute outstanding taxes and duties imposed on the Jewish faith believers in general. Around 1815, Chasidism had already marked its presence in most of the Central Polish towns but the main concentration was stretched between Lelov towards Apt (Opatow), Kozhnits (Kozienice), and Lublin up to Sheps (Sierpc) in the north.

Among them Lelov was indeed the farthermost settlement in the West, bordering the annexed Prussian territories and influences of the Haskalah.

In the first years of the Kingdom of Poland, during the reign of tsar Alexander I, most of the urban centres were hard to recognise as such even in their external appearance, being more like villages. In the era of galloping capitalism, most of the minor towns still languished in the Middle

Ages, slowly losing their urban status, finally to have it taken away by the administrative reforms.

The increasing presence of the Jewish population in Lelov has also been influenced by the dynamic of social changes introduced by Chasidism. Newly set up Chasidic centres in Congress Poland, predominantly represented by young and enthusiastic pioneers, adopted patterns of activity that had never been experienced among traditional Judaism on that scale. It is enough to mention a pilgrimage movement initiated by a young man deciding to travel to their rebbe's court in order to pray and share their religious and social experiences.

After 1815 the dynamic centre of Polish Chasidism underwent a process of atomisation.

More leaders rose to prominence and more and more Jews were attracted by its doctrines, frequently themselves becoming zealous Chassidim who spread their Masters' teaching both by the word of mouth and printed stories. So it happened in Lelov.

Chapter Three

Emergence and Growth. Rebbe Dovid of Lelov (1745-1814) and the foundation of the Lelov dynasty.

This chapter continues previous historic research but also attempts to explain the roots of a Chasidic movement in Poland as a background for further analyses related to the Jewish orthodox community of Lelov. I also argue that Dovid's own idea of Judaism has not grown in separation from his masters but rather developed and followed previous ideas while giving them its unique mark. Those ideas are still seen as vivid and feeding religious identity, distinct from that of many other Chasidic groups.

I suggest that perhaps historic facts and dates play in this case a secondary role, or rather that at the very least, that the cultivation of customs and verbal tradition are major factors in the bonding of identity, alongside the emergence of the pilgrimage movement after Dovid's death. Bearing this in mind we can now ask who and why made an attempt to revive some Jewish life in this provincial town in Poland.

3.1 A hidden past. The discovery of tzadick's grave in Lelov.

In front of the eyes of those, who arrive into Lelov appears a Jew carved in varnished wood. The history of the Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth century Russian Empire makes depressing reading but it also brings to the life Chasidic figures such as Tevye, a progenitor of the Fiddler on the Roof character.

A repressive and unfair treatment of consequent tsars introducing for example the Pale of Settlement, beyond which Jewish settlement was

generally banned, resulted in emergence of one of the most pictorial and characteristic element of Jewish culture in Eastern Europe - *shtetl* also known as *miasteczko* (small town).

This term has been in common use for the centuries in Polish Commonwealth applying to non-town, non-village status of a settlement that had a ruling body consisting of local dwellers. But it was only the tsarist Senate that related miasteczko to its Jewish character, at the same time forcing more Jews to settle in *shtetleh* (plural for shtetl). The tsars had never been prepared to tolerate Jewish independent establishments including councils, governing bodies or schools tightening a loop of repression and pushing community into deeper poverty and neglect.

When the first group of the Lelovers arrived into Lelov their eyes were welcomed by the cemetery scribbled only on the old maps, hallowed pavilions that were supposed to hide holy graves and centuries of Jewish history underneath their foundations. As Rebbe Krakowski described, their hearts shuddered and sunk at the sight of such ruined sites but also trembled with the excitement of returning after long years of absence.

The Tribe of Lelov had left almost hundred and fifty years before following Moshe Biederman on his aliyah to Israel.

It happened to be in January, usually the coldest month of the year in Poland and Lelov looked even more deserted in its white mantle of snow. The strange figures of Jewish visitors shyly moved across the landscape, attracting the attention of the locals whose eyes were not used to such travellers.

Rebbe Moshe of Lelov, son of the great Master Dovid Biederman of Lelov had left Poland towards the end of his life being age of seventy four. Although destined to live in Israel for over seventy days only, his children and grandchildren fulfilled his wishes and continued to settle in the Holy Land. Rebbe Moshe never had any intention of coming back, having dreamt all his life about settling in Israel. Over the years his Chassidim kept following Moshe's steps of the aliyah and multitudes also relocated to Israel eventually leaving Lelov - a Chasidic shtetl without the Chassidim.
A large number of Rebbe Moshe's adherents were to accompany him on the journey of his life and tried to prepare themselves for the settlement.

The Land of Israel was not a land of milk and honey, those days facing constant financial and racial struggle, there was a lack of work, the economy was undeveloped, with no consistent governments, or laws and poor agriculture. Prices were high and extended droughts compelled a high level of imports. Those, who heard such stories frequently, remained reluctant to leave everything behind in Poland. Many did not own enough to raise the funding needed to relocate although the perspective of leaving under a spiritual leadership of Rebbe Moshe to finally settle in the land of their Prophets, kings and ancestors must have been indeed very tempting. However, in 1850s the ultra-orthodox settlement in Israel was still rare.
At that time, the Chasidic community of *Eretz Yisrael* was based mostly in Safed (Hebrew:Tzvat) and Tiberias (Teveryah) and for the next few decades, the sole Chasidic court in Jerusalem was that of Lelov. Although Moshe's son Yitzchock Dovid returned to Poland only many years later to bring his mother back to Israel, neither he nor his descendants decided to

move back. Nearly hundred and fifty years had to pass and an entire community had to perish in the flames of Shoah. Thus Dovid's brood would be able to open this totally new chapter in the history of Polish-Jewish coexistence in Lelov.

From the initiative of Rebbe Simon Anshin and Simcha Krakowski the group of Lelov Chassidim began to raise funding for the purpose of exploration. They managed to convince the Nissenbaum Foundation, Poland's first post-war Jewish private foundation, stressing the mission to restore remaining Jewish cemeteries, synagogues and other cultural sites to their original state in order to support their case. With the blessings of Natan Noton of Lelov, Krakowski travelled first to Vienna, where he looked for further backing from the local Lelovers and thereafter to Warsaw and Gdynia to discuss matters with Sigmund Nissennbaum in depth (Anon, 2005).

Born in Poland and saved from annihilation, Sigmund (Zygmunt) Nissenbaum used his Poland- based 'vodka business' (Nissenbaum established first in Poland kosher vodka factory) to initiate and support various restorative missions. Upon arrival to Lelov, the representatives of the Nissenbaum Foundation accompanied by Chasidic emissaries, quickly realised that their hopes had been probably too high. What used to be a lively shtetl, had now become a sleepy town from, all that remained of its former glory being the market streets The synagogue had been burnt by Germans, both cemeteries razed to the ground and its grave slabs (*matzevot*) used to pave local streets.

The so called Old Graveyard where the tzadick had been buried was totally demolished in the late seventies to serve as a commercial centre. On the

place of a holy tent (ohel) traditionally built over the tzadick's grave, a warehouse was erected, becoming part of a co-operative supermarket called 'Spolem' - an equivalent of a supermarket's chain established by the communistic governments to trade various goods, owned by a cooperative society. Half of the properties belonging to the cooperative society had been located on the graveyard's grounds: square shaped pavilions stretched along ulica Kacza and Ogrodowa (Duck and Garden Streets) formerly owned by the Jewish kahal now filled with sparse shelves. (Historyczno-Kulturalne, 2002)

No signs of Jewish presence survived in a post-war Lelov as both the Synagogue and Talmud Torah had been completely burnt down in 1939 and replaced by more workshops.

Faced by such devastation and neglect, Jewish visitors could not even clearly establish where tzadick Dovid had been laid in 1814 and where his ohel eventually stood. The visitors were told by the local elders that Dovid's tomb used to be where the hardware shop was, which meant in one of the pavilions or rather underneath. Without wasting any more time, Krakowski and his companions rushed off, only to discover that the probable burial site has now been used as a potato pit. Surrounded by empty shelves, rusted nails and potato bags, this shallow pit might indeed conceal a holy grave located beneath concrete foundations. The Lelovers did not want to rely solely on gentiles' testimonials. They might have been close to the truth but not close enough to satisfy the requirements of a Jewish law.

Although many Polish people lived in Lelov for a significant period of time, their disengaged interest in Jewish matters and time that passed made their

testimony even less trustworthy, therefore Chasidic representatives also looked for living Jewish witnesses. Only after comparison of the two sources, further conclusions could be driven out and actions properly taken. Following the instruction of the current tzadick of Lelov, Reb Simcha Krakowski began his crusade to find living Jewish witnesses who would be able to confirm the above revelations. Lelov might have been a vivid Jewish community over hundred and fifty years ago but with the passage of time significant numbers had moved to Israel or America. Those who decided to stay behind perished in the flames of Shoah. According to post war records only very few survived to escape abroad and their whereabouts remained unknown since and they were not even members of the Chasidic group. Hence Krakowski decided to try his luck in the States where many of the Lelovers had emigrated before 1939, hoping that some of them maintained links with the Old Country. He eventually found one person who had some knowledge of the Jewish past in Lelov. (Anon, 2005).

Also known as Father Lelover, Yael lived in Chicago and despite his advanced age still remembered Lelov of his youth. He immediately described where the old graveyard used to be, confirming that it was located exactly by the town's market and in the heart of the Jewish borough in accordance with the custom of Polish Jewry. The cemetery, with the Talmudic school (Talmud-Torah), poorhouse and mikveh, was opposite (after the war transformed in to the iron-carving workshop). The precision and liveliness of Yael's memories surprised but at the same time gladdened Krakowski who immediately offered to take Father Lelov back to Poland in order to show the places accurately. Yael nevertheless refused, scared that

the trauma of those days of annihilation would come back to him, reviving the horror and despair of Holocaust. He could not face the place where his parents were killed, but recommended that Krakowski get in contact with Abraham Yaakov Klobotski (Abraham Jakub Klobucki) who lived in Israel but also originated from Lelov.

Klobotski's father was the head of the community in Lelov before the war, and was personally involved in the project of renovating the ohel. In 1936 new foundations were laid in attempt to prevent tzadick's grave from sinking in to a marshy ground. Although some blocks of concrete had been used, the construction remained wooden, the pine-tiled roof as it used to be over all those years (Anon, 2005).

In the mean time another living witness has been brought into the light: Hayim Meir Szaniawski also known as Henryk Sroda. He was one of the few survivors who managed to escape Treblinka and later immigrated to Canada. Treblinka was one of the Nazi extermination camps located north of Lelov, about fifty miles away from Warsaw. Most of the Lelov's Jews were murdered in Treblinka Camp after being removed from Radomsk (Radomsko) and Tchenstochov (Czestochowa) (Rola, 1984).

Szaniawski had continued to visit Poland and Lelov over the years following the Second World War, motivated by gratitude for the saving of his life. Szaniawski was saved by the combined effort of families of: Jura, Utracki, Pokorski, Jedrusik, Swiątek, Rylko and Skrzypczyk who provided him with shelter and food provisions after he had escaped from the German concentration camp. Years after, he confirmed that although tzadick's tent had been destroyed during the Holocaust, the grave slab had stood the test

of time and storms of history only to vanish not long ago, probably in the early eighties.

Accompanied by Klobotski (Klobucki) and Mendel Tsishinski (Cieszynski) who had previously worked on the excavation of other Polish tzadickim graves, Rebbe Krakowski arrived in Poland during the Jewish month of elul (August/September). His delegation met Szaniawski and Nissenbaum in Warsaw and their combined team set out for Lelov. Rebbe Krakowski was hoping to hear confirmation of the previous revelations but as much as he wanted it all to be true, he also knew the highest level of prudence was needed. As years had gone by both monuments and humans' memories rusted leaving wider margins of doubts. Simcha Krakowski as a direct representative of the Lelover tzadick concluded that he would debrief everyone separately so nobody could influence another man's memory and reflections.

Upon arrival at Lelov, Krakowski asked Avram Yaakov Klobotski to lead him to any Jewish sites that he was able to recollect. In response he was immediately taken to the former Talmudic school (Talmud - Torah) building and shown the wall that separated current warehouse from the actual ohel (Historyczno-Kulturalne, 2002). When Szaniawski's turn came, he independently confirmed where the holy grave used to be pointing out former Talmud-Torah as being in the closest neighbourhood of an old cemetery. Both Klobotski and Szaniawski indicated Rebbe Dovid's burial place and confirmed that there used to be three steps descending to the ohel - a pre – war addition. In order to get to the ohel one had to step down and pass a pear tree that used to fruit 'twin fruit': two heads for all pears -

a visible sign of Dovid Biederman's holiness. As excitement was growing, more and more miracle stories started to emerge overshadowing historic facts and recollections. But Rabi Krakowski had to stick to the facts. He was asked to confirm provisionally a burial place in order for the excavation work to be arranged. But there were also formal obstacles to be overcome, among many: land and property ownership or access problem. It was 1990 and Poland's newly gained independence had to resolve problems of more urgent matter than four Jews wandering around a provincial town. Local officials were only able to shrug their shoulders helplessly, promising to make things easier soon.

Thanks to Sigmund Nissenbaum good offices and connections, access to the actual burial places at the back of the shop was eventually achieved and some initial work permitted. Rebbe Simcha happily reported the result back to Jerusalem, hoping to find not only some old foundations and grit but to confirm oral testimonies with physical proof. At that stage they found only a pit that served to store potatoes over the winter and some remains of potato bags. Because they arrived in winter time, the ground was frozen and hard to dig. Further actions had to be postponed, partly due to unfavourable weather conditions, partly because of the delays that occurred in the process of obtaining permission from the municipality.

Immediately on his return to Israel Simcha hurried to see the Rebbe of Lelov to report on the evidence that he had already collected. Equally exited but still pleading cautious approach, Natan Biederman requested that more tests be carried out in order to eliminate any potential errors and misinterpretation. In the mean time, Sigumund Nissenbaum managed to

achieve the impossible by obtaining unconditional permission to enter the site and proceed with the tests inside the '*Spolem*' shop at his own convenience. The permission was granted by the Minister of Justice in the Polish government (Anon, 2005, p.7). Nissenbaum spread the news as quickly as he could and urged Simcha Krakowski to gather his team of experts immediately. They realised that after over hundred and fifty years no further delay could be accepted over a mission of such high importance. The eyes of thousands of Chassidim were upon them and, praying for success.

As luck would have it, some of the world's best Jewish excavation experts were at that time visiting Poland and on the point of finishing work at another location. Krakowski's private investigation helped him to locate and approach this team, whose members were staying in one of the Warsaw's hotels. Eventually he managed to convince them, to join his project and within a few days they were on their way to Lelov again. With Hayim Meir Szaniawski, Sigmund Nissenbaum and the team of international experts, Rabi Simcha was pretty sure that this time they would come back with more than just a potato bag in their hands.

As we have already mentioned, the graveyard had been initially destroyed by the Germans occupying Lelov from September 1939 and more demolition followed with the disappearance of the last Jews.

The government of post war Poland had no particular interest in the preservation of Jewish heritage as its main effort has been concentrated on rebuilding what had been destroyed by constant bombing or intentionally burnt to the ground by Germans. For long years nobody cared and nobody

protected Jewish cemeteries, allowing them to slip into oblivion. Although Szaniawski, who grew up in Lelov and kept visiting for many years after the war, could recollect where both the holy tomb and the graveyard itself used to be, he was not able to describe its boundaries. We have to remember that when the war broke out, this site has not been in use for over a hundred years.

When the team of experts arrived with their magnetic equipment they could tell straight away where the dense burials used to be located, even though having no visual indications of remains. Despite the general congestion of the graves they were still able to find an empty plot with further burials located within the respective radius. Only one grave was found exactly where both Szaniawski and Klobotski had previously indicated that of Dovid Biederman. Wasting no more time Simcha's people started to dig carefully, not knowing what might await them down in the assumed grave. Barely beneath the surface of a frozen ground, the sand began to change colours which meant that some of the layers were heaped up later than the others Szaniawski quickly provided an explanation once again recalling the renovation works carried in 1936 when a whole truck of sand was brought to level the ground and to stop process of subsidence. This thrilling find also made it possible to understand how it happened that the graves under the building and sidewalks remained untouched in spite of the 'Spolem' shop being situated directly above. The graves avoided destruction because the construction was laid on grit and sand in some places over a meter deep. Although overwhelmed by excitement Krakowski's comrades continued to dig to finally get to the foundations. Again as Szaniawski previously testified,

they were comparatively new and only repaired three years before the Second World War. Further geological inspections confirmed that the grave had indeed been centrally located and surrounded by wooden-concrete construction. This was confirmed both by Szaniawski and some pictures discovered later. Simcha Krakowski needed no further reassurances. From his experience in excavation works and from what he had just seen and heard he was entirely convinced that they had finally found the holy grave! He rushed out to inform tzadick Biederman and pleaded to announce such findings to the wider Jewish community. Although sharing his joy and excitement, Rebbe Biederman wished to see the remains with his own eyes before spreading the news. He requested the grave be left open but secured until his arrival.

In the beginning of the Jewish month nisan, which is usually Gregorian late February or early March, Sigmund Nissenbaum welcomed tzadick Natan Biederman in Poland, and immediately led him from Warsaw to provincial Lelov which had now become an axis mundi of the community. In the meantime Rebbe Biederman asked for the assistance of the excavation experts once again so that they could explain all the details directly to the leader of the Lelovers. They had begun another assignment by this time, searching for the remains of Rebbe Joseph Teomin in Frankfurt on Oder. In spite of this they decided to make the eighteen hour journey to deliver direct confirmation and reassurance. On yet another day of late winter snow they arrived in Lelov once more to visit the grave, this time under the watchful eye of Rebbe Biederman. He was shown all the discoveries and given explanations of the different layers of sand, the

foundations of the ohel and the half exposed limestone that seemed to be part of the actual tomb. Sigmund Nissenbaum managed to obtain permission to secure the site and mark it with a new tombstone (Strzelczyk, 2003). A strong sarcophagus was erected over the grave and short inscription prepared:

'This is a tomb stone, of a pious Rebbe who loved Israel; of our Master Dovid from Lelov. Son of our Master and teacher Rebbe Solomon. May the memory of the righteous and holy one be blessed! He was buried in this cemetery on the seventh of shevat year [5]574 (1814) May his merits protect us and all Israel. Amen'

Although at this point the Lelovers could not take proper care of the entire cemetery, they had initiated some negotiations with the Polish government that eventually nineteen years later led to the final reclamation. As Krakowski recalls, for a long time the Polish government remained reluctant, mainly due to lack of adequate legislation and problems with establishing ownership. On the other hand, local government officials became more excited about the opportunities arising from the renewal of a pilgrimage movement. By observing similar initiatives taking place in Lizhensk – a burial place of Elimelech of Lizhensk, Dovid's teacher and one of the best know tzadickim, they learned that Jewish pilgrimage tourism could indeed be extremely beneficial to the local economy. It also promised to bring together cultures that had been separated for over sixty years. For the Jewish visitors it was yet another opportunity to experience the Land of their Forefathers, the place that had given birth to numerous tzadickim, thereby establishing perhaps one of the most significant and revolutionary

Jewish movements ever. We should also not forget that from the Chasidic perspective among the many benefits of visiting kivrei (graves) of the tzadickim has been the chance to experience a spiritual renewal, to discover the desire to do repentance – *teshuvah.* Teshuvah literally means 'return' and aims to restore balance in a relationship between God and human beings by atoning the sins. Because of their special spiritual meaning and status, graves of the holy masters are often perceived as ideal places to conduct the teshuvah.

As time passed by a group of pilgrims in Lelov has grown from a dozen of faithful followers to eventually reach over two hundreds visitors of the day of the Yortsayt – a religious commemoration of the anniversary of the death.

3.2 The first tzadick.

Rebbe Dovid (David) Biederman (sometimes spelled as 'Bidermann') of Lelov was in fact born in a neighbourhood village of Bialeh (Biala) in 1745 into the family of Shlomo (Solomon) Tzvi, a respected and modest householder and Rebekha (Rebecca) of Bielsko Biala (Polish; a city in southern Poland). As with many Chasidic masters, his early years are shrouded in mythical stories and legends to emphasize his extraordinary character from the very beginning. He came from poor but religious and reputable family that was able to prove its lineage back to King David himself (Weinstock, 1949, p.45)

In his article about rabbinic genealogy David Einsiedler (1988) refers to '*Tiferet Beit David'* ('The Glory of the House of David') revealing genealogy of the family of Dovid Biederman, master of Lelov, purportedly dating back

to Adam. It includes a list of hundred and fourteen generations and notes corresponding to the names. It is nothing unusual in so far as many Chasidic and non-Chasidic families claim to have their roots anchored in King David whether through Rashi (1040—1105), a medieval French rabbi famed as the author of the first comprehensive commentary on the Talmud, or Jehuda Loev the Elder- Mediaeval Jewish mystic and philosopher also know as a creator of Golem (an animated being made of clay brought to life by kabbalistic incantation inserted under his tongue). Many of the tzadickim, mainly those, who were recognised as the Masters of the first three generations, simply lacked *yihus*, had no scholar background, rabbinic genealogy or prominent connections. For this reason, their immediate disciples and followers had to enrich the past by adding some colourful details here and there. Chasidic movement not only adapted but also re-created traditional Jewish attitudes towards yihus- a priestly lineage and aristocratic concept of the leadership.

As already mentioned, tzadickim tended to be the charismatic leaders not only originating from the masses but also scions of the old Jewish aristocracy (Dynner, 2006), the offspring of the noble scholars or Talmudists. Those, who would not be physically able to prove their noble lineage, have always had their own yihus, albeit produced by adapting King David's heritage or developing a spiritual mandate. The Seer of Lublin even insisted that disciples could be seen as a tzadick's spiritual sons, hence were able to inherit their master's yihus as the sons took over fathers' pride and respect through the blood ties.

Dovid Biederman of Lelov belonged to the rare mystical leaders who had to overcome the stigma of low birth by acquiring a substantial following (Dynner, 2006). His yihus had no hereditary background and could be accepted subsequently by communal approval (on the basis of the miraculous deeds and extraordinary piousness), as well as prominent marriage. As Glenn Dynner suggests (2006), among Polish tzadickim only Dovid of Lelov and Israel the Maggid ((Hebrew: preacher; a traditional Eastern European Jewish religious preacher), of Kozhnits (Kozienice) formally lacking yihus and familiar credentials and were made to acquire it by marrying their children off to the well established families. As a child of a minor shopkeeper selling everything from a soup to nails Dovid seemed more likely to become at the most a prosperous merchant. No-one really suspected that he might become a spiritual leader whose reputation and good name transcended geographical and time barriers, despite having to hide his holiness his entire life.

As with many other tzadickim, however, both those who were born equipped in yihus and those who had to earn it through holy deeds and blessed connections, Rebbe Dovid had been chosen from the very beginning. The stories told about the rebbe's early life seem to be almost symbolic of everything that was to follow.

For example, as early as six years old he met two holy men on his journey: Rebbe Zusya of Hanipol (Annopol) and Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk (Lezajsk)-of whom he became a disciple later on in his life. They almost immediately recognised the highest holiness in him. Alarmed by such uncommon spiritual power, the two men simply followed the boy to his

house in Bialeh (Biala) only to find that he was a son of a poor and humble Jew. Yet after questioning his mother they confirmed that indeed from his early childhood Dovid displayed a prodigious mental acuity and deep devotion in prayer.

He was also said to be a miracle-maker even though still only a child and not fully aware of his deeds. Thus Dovid once blessed a local baker who offered him a free bread roll and to his amazement he could not bring enough pans to catch the dough that rose as rapidly as multiplied by the touch of a magic wand (Anon, 2005, p.9).

By the time he reached his bar mitzvah, Dovid was considered an *illuy,* a young Talmudic scholar of extraordinary ability but also, most importantly, someone of unusual kindness and humility expressed by the extent of his love. He had the ability to love all Jews, even the wicked and sinful ones, always finding ways of defending them. Reb Dovid of Lelov used to say:

'How can you claim that I am righteous, when I know that I still love my children and grandchildren more than I love my other fellow Jews?' (Valakh, 2002, p.28)

Soon, regardless of his young age and modest background, Rebbe Dovid of Lelov became a disciple of the Seer of Lublin, who was a disciple of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk, who was a disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch (Miedzyrzecz), who was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidism. He entered the world of the biggest Chasidic masters. Surprisingly, one single statement enables us to realise that the first rebbe and the founder of Chassidut Lelov, Rebbe Dovid Biderman was indeed

a follower of the Seer (*Chozeh*) of Lublin (Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, 1745 – 1815). Rebbe Horowitz stated that he and some other tzadickm lived in two different worlds: our lower material world as well as in the upper spiritual space. For that reason, they would have an insight into divine and probably the most secretive matters. This ability clearly puts Chasidic masters not only above ordinary Jews, but also distinguishes them from traditional Jewish spiritual leaders.

Furthermore, each tzadick has been endowed with the *Ruach HaKodesh* – a certain ability of prophecy. For instance, the Seer used to judge and decide on many halachic matters according to his ability of prophecy.

He believed to be equipped in extraordinary powers allowing him to reach beyond classic Jewish interpretations (derived from Talmud) and foresee the judgment.

But such statements eventually evoked religious and intellectual opposition of not only misnagdim – a group of orthodox Jews of Lithuania strongly opposing Chasidic movement led by the Gaon of Vilna (Rebbe Eliyahu of Vilna), but also fellow Chassidim represented for example by Rebbe Simcha Bunim of Pshishke (Przysucha) (1767 – 1827), who loudly questioned the Seer's ability and founded his own movement. Dovid's teaching would then develop in a climate of fierce religious dispute, often attacked ridiculed by traditional Jewish circles. Obviously attracted by the Seer's extraordinary spiritual power and his almost missionary approach to Chasidism, Dovid joined a wide circle of disciples who after Seer's death initiated their own chains of the dynasties and schools. Yaakov Isaac's (the Seer) abilities of 'seeing' divine and sinister thinks along with oracle skills earned him the

reputation of a prophet, many comparing him to the prophet Isaiah, except for living in the Holy Land. But for others, Lublin was known as the Polish Palestine, so from this perspective even the location seemed to be appropriate. Seer's authority was than derived from his supernatural abilities not from learning and piety although indisputably he was a person of a great knowledge, never allowing himself to neglect Torah or Talmud. Many of his contemporaries saw him even as a powerful leader periodically overwhelmed by either madness or religious ecstasy, which only evoked and exaggerated Seer's divine profile.

Yaakov Isaac Horovitz and his school particularly stressed the important role assigned to the tzadick, and his extraordinary power to speed up the Redemption process. This eventually led to the worship of the tzadickim, who were believed capable of drawing down the soul of the Messiah to the world and acting as the extended will of God. Through complicated kabbalistic rituals, florid sermons and miraculous deeds they were also offering hope of salvation to the mass of Polish Jews.

However, Rebbe Dovid had studied not only under the Seer but also under Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk.

Moreover, it was Rebbe Elimelech who improved and expanded the Baal Shem Tov's concept of the tzadick (righteous person). In his book '*Noam Elimelech'*, Rebbe Elimelech makes his new ideas about the tzadick very clear. For him the personality of the tzadick becomes a focal point which should always be the core of every Chasid experience. He also believed that as an accomplished righteous man, the mission of tzadick is to give life to all the worlds by virtue of his Divine soul (Eisenberg, 2006).

The ideas of Elimelech of Lizhensk also resulted in introducing new social elements to the Chasidism. His centralised idea of the tzadick ultimately underlined the necessity for a physical relationship between the followers and their rebbe. As a result, frequent visitations were now declared to be a sacred obligation that every good, pious Jew had to fulfil on a regular basis. As we will see later on, such practice within Chasidic circles acquired special significance eventually becoming crucial part of an ultra-orthodox life.

Following on from such innovations, tzadickim and their closest disciples have grown in power, literally reigning over the masses of Jews. Rebbe Elimelech for example managed to build a quite impressive mansion and gather many people to work for him on a daily basis. This phenomenon is also described in terms of a 'court of tzadick'. Giving financial support to the rebbe has developed into a mitzvah of the greatest magnitude and a system of *pidyon* - an act of donating money to the tzadick who then prays in the name of a donator or his/her family. Since it was believed or rather taught by various rebbes that money and the soul share the same spiritual root, the practice of bringing pidyon has an ability to change one's life fundamentally bringing new spiritual and material wealth.

The actual pidyon used to be (and still is) a piece of paper with a name written on it, accompanied by a variously calculated sum of money.

Such practices have been obviously widely criticised not only by the usual opponents- misnagdim – but also by other tzadickim for whom the wealth accumulation and dynastic approach were a denial of the key principles of chassidut: piety, humbleness and devotion. On the other hand, supporters

of the pidyon have been providing many justifications. One that is frequently used of the pidyon practice emphasises the beneficial aspects provided in turn to the donors; in other words, that the value of the spiritual support given in return greatly exceeds the value of the material offerings (Schochet, 2009).

There were many individuals who had been born tzadickim, although the Talmud seemed to suggest that being tzadick was not a matter of predestination. Each individual had to rather attain holiness through his own efforts, overcome sinful side and dedicate himself to a virtuous life.

As every rule has exceptions so also has tzadickism.

Since Chassidim believe that both great and small things are of God's creation, perfectly in accordance with His plan, the tzadick may be shaped as a holy man before his birth. Even so, the 'natural tzadick' is an exception among ultra-orthodox masters. From birth such a tzadick is predisposed to a life of holiness who barely regards sin is a viable option (Weiss and Rapoport-Albert, 1996). From an early age he remains resistant to sinful urges and earthy temptations, finding desire only in attachment to Divinity. As his soul lacks pride, he may not be able to see himself as a chosen one, merely urging the immersion in Torah and good deeds. Nor is he afflicted with the struggle between lust and conscience. From the first sight he seems to separate good from evil, while remaining humble and devoted. The soul of tzadick by birth has the potential of the greatest holiness upon which rest the world (Schochet, 2009). The '*Tanya*' – an early Chasidic work by Shneur Zalman of Liady teaches that many souls do not

have the potential of reaching such heights of ‘tzadickhood’. However, all souls can attain great spiritual levels (Shneur, 1998).

In point of fact, Polish institution of tzadickim seemed to be opting for creating circles of students bonded by the ideas and religious philosophy rather than dynastic principles. The hereditary route to wielding spiritual power over a multitude of Chasidic souls never fully triumphed since many masters genuinely believed that holiness and devotion, along with the ability to pray, was never a matter of ‘seed and blood’ alone (Klepfisz, 1983). It seemed rather to be the case that charisma could, sometimes be passed on as part of a genetic endowment.

As we have already mentioned in the case of Dovid Biederman, the egalitarian character of his movement has never been an issue. It rather tended towards inclusivity allowing the poorest and the richest to participate on the same level. In fact, Rebbe Dovid has always had a special place in his heart and prays for those, who lacked wealth, since he too had been born into a family of limited means. He had never gained any personal wealth himself, maintaining only his small shop that could barely provide for the family. Moreover, his unique approach to trading hardly helped increase any income. If a customer entered his little grocery shop asking where to buy salt, Dovid eagerly listed all the other stores in town, where customers could buy goods if they so wished.

As a person truly committed to Jewish and Chasidic commandments of a pious and humble life, he probably never had an intention to become rich from his business. On one occasion he even confessed, nagged by his wife: ‘Even if we do not have enough silverware for the guests, you should know

that we could have golden spoons if we wanted-but it is better not to want!' (Valakh, 2002, p.27)

His shop was yet another way to serve God and spread the love of Israel. When Dovid concluded that he had already done what was in his power to make life better for his Jewish brethren, either by giving out his stock or sending customers to buy, elsewhere, he finally closed the grocery completely:

'When I see a customer go to my competitor's store, I'm delighted that he is making a living. But I recently realised that not everyone feels this way. Whenever a customer comes into my shop, I may actually be causing my competitor anguish!' (Valakh, 2002, p.29)

His son, Moshe, who owned a shop in Lelov before his aliyah to Israel also, had to learn that making money was not necessarily the priority; that from the Chasid's point of view seeing your neighbour making wealth, even at the cost of yourself, is a greater good and a real pleasure. Admittedly, not all of the tzadickim of those times would be happy to adopt such an approach, rather making fortunes and spoiling themselves in a very regal way. Lacking yihus and wealth Dovid could not aspire to become the loudest voice of his generation nor did he want to. He wished to be perceived as a simple Jew trying to conceal his wisdom and greatness at all the time. But as Chasidic stories have it, his unusual spiritual power, extraordinary kindness and love of Jews could not remain hidden forever. This wonder child-*yenuka* had been instantly revealed by his later master-Elimelech of Lizhensk and the Seer of Lublin. As a child, Dovid became not only an eager and bright student but most of all an affectionate boy. Having so little

himself we could always spot somebody who had even less:

‘Once his father bought him a winter coat. Rebbe Dovid was very excited to receive but then the very next day, on his way to school, he saw a small boy in torn clothes standing in the cold and crying. Reb Dovid immediately took his coat off and gave it to the boy. When he returned home, his mother asked him: Dovid, what happened? Where is your new coat? I gave it to a poor boy, he replied. Run back to school then before your father comes back home! Without the coat, he will give you quite a beating-said his mother.That is all right, Mother.If beating me would make Father feel better, then let him-responded young Dovid’ (Weinstock, 1949, p.46; see appendix 2).

The picture of Dovid emerging from the legends cited above creates a perfect visualisation of how the figure of tzadick in Central Poland has been perceived. For the multitudes of Chassidim, facing the political and economic chaos of the nineteenth century, a tzadick with his regal entourage would have seemed distant and strange. Those who lived in big Jewish clusters such as Warsaw (Yiddish: Varshe) or Lublin were more likely to accept splendour and power generated by the courts; people of small towns sought empowerment between themselves, regarding the tzadick as a figure who could ease their rough and poor life in the provinces. Hence some of the tzadickim were praised for their kindness and piety rather than for being Talmudic masterminds or regents of God on Earth. Often they became the Davids of their generations, armed only with simple Yiddish words, devotion and charisma, fighting the Goliaths of their times, namely, the hosts of misnagdim and the machinery of the Russian Empire.

Bombarded by vitriolic pamphlets and edicts from Chasidic opponents, Chasidism triumphed in numbers. Its power emerged, not as a “sect” nor as an underground movement but rather as a significant part of a socio-religious landscape of Poland.

This phenomenon of the ‘simple folks’ becoming spiritual leaders ought not to come as a surprise. It was founded in the same traditional eschatological sources that present us with royal prophets such as Samuel, Isaiah (a Levite of noble birth) or Ezekiel, who came from the priestly family of Zadoks, as well as those born into totally different background like Amos, who used to be a farmer raising livestock and growing fruit in Tekoa before he heard God’s call. Nevertheless, all of the Jewish prophets had spoken on behalf of God and their attributes were also known as: the chozeh –seer, and *Ish ha Elohim*- the man of God. Chasidic masters refer to both traditions. Some like Dovid Biederman attempt to conceal their powers and status, some, like Nachman of Braclav or the Seer of Lublin adapt lifestyles bespeaking material wealth and opulence.

The analogy between Chasidic masters and biblical prophets goes even further. We have already discussed tzadick as a cosmic facilitator and the intermediary who sustains the whole world and the process of redemption; we have also recalled his extraordinary magical and visionary skill, ability to see through the time and people. The same skills had characterised the prophets of Torah, whether they were priests or ranchers. Gifted in *Ruah ha Kodesh* (the Holy Spirit) once they had frequented Palestine, latterly Poland, calling upon conversion and bringing their visions to the poor and wealthy.

Sometimes Chasidic paths crossed with the powerful of the times, as in Reb Dovid's case when he faced Emperor Napoleon on his crusade to Russia in 1812.

When the conquering army of Napoleon was passing through Tchenstochov (Czestochowa), he heard about a holy man (Rebbe Dovid) who could tell the future. Tempted by the possibility of having his triumph revealed, Napoleon went to visit Rebbe Dovid Biederman in Lelov and asked him if he would be able to conquer Moscow. Dovid remained quiet, scared by the consequences of his oracle. He had already heard of the Emperor's temper combined with his desire to be victorious at all times. Tzadick Biederman finally agreed to answer the question providing Napoleon promised not to hurt him if he did not like the response. Only then Rebbe Dovid prophesied that Napoleon would suffer a crushing defeat and would not be able to realise his plans. Alerted by the prophecy Napoleon reneged on his promise and announced that Rebbe would be safe only if his vision proved correct. Otherwise he would suffer a bitter end.

As we all know, Napoleon failed awfully and as a result of the defeat his reign was about to come to end. The crushed and outnumbered army marched back though Lelov once again bringing the Emperor in front of the Rebbe. At the sight of Dovid, Napoleon bowed down, admitted Dovid was right and gave him a royal, purple velvet cloak.

Lelover Chassidim say that Rebbe Moshe of Lelov, the son of Rebbe Dovid, took the cloak to Jerusalem with him, and made the cover for the Holy Ark in his synagogue from it (Anon, 2005, p. 10).

Rebbe Dovid was not only highly respected by Jews but also gained wide

recognition among gentiles, many of whom even travelled from afar desperate to receive some support. Childless Jewish and Christian women who struggled to conceive queued up to be awarded Rebbe's blessing; the blind and paralysed hoped to gain their strengths back-Jews as well as Gentiles, unified by faith in the extraordinary power of the holy man. From town to town, from village to village, eventually from across the Polish-Russian border, wonderful stories and examples of salvations were being delivered by word of mouth. People kept flowing into Lelov, lured by the fame of a miracle maker.

Among them were those desperately trying to avoid conscription into the Russian army. Those incorporated into the Russian Empire had been charged with heavy army duty, involving twenty five years of military service.

Until 1827 Jewish communities were charged with a special payment for recruits if they could not deliver them, *in natura* (in various goods). In 1827 rules were slightly changed and the real recruitment began. From then on the Russian army could not only demand the services of adult recruits but also boys under the age of twelve. Some of them had been called up even before the bar mitzvah, when under Jewish Law, a male reaches religious adulthood.

The boys were usually taken to the canton schools and trained there for service in the Army and furthermore received obligatory education in Christian style (Avrutin, 2010). Some of them had even been forced to convert to the Russian Orthodox Church under the punishment of death.

Technically, recruitment of the fellow Jews was a duty of kahals but obviously it was a heavy and truly hated weight of responsibility:

‘The responsibility for fulfilling the military obligations falls upon the Jewish community themselves. They shall follow the dictates of the appropriate provincial authority.’ (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1995, p.534)

The major problem for a Jewish community was that Jews practically could not practice their religion during the military service, to say nothing about the living conditions in the Army. All recruits, both Jews and Gentiles, had to serve twenty five years in, and, if they married, their offspring, as children of the Russian soldiers, became the patrimony of the military and were destined to attend schools for soldiers (*cantons*) –something that every religious Jews desperately tried to avoid (Veidlinger, 2009). In practice it meant progressive secularisation.

Some differences persisted, however, between Jews and non-Jews most of them applying to the conscription age. As already mentioned, Jews could be called up between the age of twelve and twenty five whereas a non-Jew had to join army only after reaching eighteen. This system attempted to drag children out of their communities before they had become influenced by the Jewish culture and tradition. Conscriptions rules thus became the threat to the traditional status of their society. Accordingly, Jews flocked to the tzadickim in search of intercession with the Almighty.

Dovid Biederman had become one of those who were believed to have a power effectively to withdraw a recruit from the service list. According to the testimonies of many, it used to be an open secret among Jews in Poland that young army recruits could be freed from the services if they

visited the shrine of the Lelover Rebbe (Anon, 2005). Those, who were not able to make it in person could always designate their emissaries in order to deliver a kvtlech. Since Rebbe Dovid promised celestial support for every Jew who approached him or his tomb and prayed fervently and honestly for survival and redemption, many have turned their steps to Lelov sometimes in an act of desperation.

By partitioning Poland, the Russian Empire not only gained a large territory in the West but inherited a Jewish population of some nine hundred thousand (around seven percent of the population). Although since the sixteenth century onwards different Russian rulers looked either to expel or bar the Jews from Russia, this approach could no longer be seen as achievable. Jews of Poland were mostly concentrated in towns and their re-settlement to any other distant territory could potentially result in an economic chaos. The army with its twenty five years of service seemed to be a perfect solution. It could also generate additional income for the Treasury as the wealthier Jews were simply able to buy their dispensation while the most intelligent students could be paid off by the Jewish Council. Later legislation equally aimed to solve the Jewish problem through coerced and intensified assimilation or Russification by alienating Jewish youths from their families, communities, native Yiddish and religion; they were forbidden to practice Jewish rituals and obliged to attend Christian classes. (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1995)

Rebbe's fame as a teacher, tzadick and miracle-maker was never reflected by such personal wealth. Although both himself and his eldest son later tzadick Moshe owned a grocery shop, they remained much poorer

than any other tzadickim of their era. Rebbe Dovid was known to live in one room only which served as a kitchen, bedroom and a study chamber. It was not unusual for the Jews of Lelov to accommodate whole families in a very limited space of mostly wooden properties. Great fires were then the biggest threats and could destroy an entire quarter within a couple of hours, leaving people in even deeper poverty. Nonetheless, at every property's heart used to be a multi-functional stove to provide warmth, cooking and bread baking facilities. Sometimes a purpose built bed was located behind the stove. Rebbe Moshe Biederman used to recollect that his household conditions were so tough that very often it was impossible to afford to buy wood during the winter time, so that Rebbe Dovid placed him in a barrel of feathers. He could spend hours being covered in it up to his neck to keep him warn and learn some new *Gemara* passages at the same time (Weinstock, 2007).

Life in the Jewish town of Lelov was not then as idyllic as it has been portrayed by Mark Chagall's images of his Belarusian town of Vitebsk. The stereotypical, imaginary shtetl inhabited by the poor but pious men humming *klezmer* songs and practising bottle-dancing was indeed a little town without proper roads, occasionally sinking under the seasonal floods, interrupted by the repressive policies of the Russian government, with very few stone or brick built properties. Shtetl's buildings were then usually wooden, although the local *gvir* (a rich man) might occupy a *moyer* (a brick house) (Katz, 2007) at the market square.

The heart of a town was always a market that served as a place of business and socialising. Lelov with its municipal character intact used to hold weekly markets that not only provided opportunity to trade or exchange goods but

also, for example, chance to be seen by a doctor or a folk healer if no permanent medic was available at the time.

Like most of the communities, Lelovers were also able to set up necessary social institutions, for example a group to visit the sick and elderly, a women's organisation or a study group. Alongside the synagogue and Talmud-Torah they aimed to support the poorer elements and those in need. However, lack of resources and a constant struggle with the bureaucracy significantly reduced their possible outreach. According to statistics, the Jewish population of Lelov almost doubled over the period of forty years (between 1808- 1857) growing from twenty nine to fifty three percent of the population (Zaborski, 1998), while in the same period the Russian edict of 1823 limited the area of Jewish settlement exclusively to the previously occupied quarters. From then on, Jews could only own or rent properties within the designated streets around the central part of Lelov and were banned from owning any lands or properties including leases outside the town. This act formally introduced the ghetto to Lelov although it still remained an open borough with no travel or trade limitations.

As for the Chasidic community there are no records confirming how many ultra orthodox Jews lived in Lelov either during the life of Dovid or before Moshe's aliyah. Referring to the situation in other Yiddish towns of Central Poland such as Pshiskhe (Przysucha), Kozhnits (Kozienice), Lublin or even Piotrkov (Piotrkow Trybunalski), it may be assumed that the substantial increase of Chassidim has been recorded. Although Russian officials had heard about the Chasidic movement before, they were mostly reluctant to

recognise it or to give formal acknowledgment that might allow Chassidim to constitute separate synagogues.

It was 1823, when general Zajaczek - the Governor of the Polish Kingdom received a report of the gendarme of Parczew, Dulfus, who described the new Jewish sect of *Hussyty*, (Wodzinski, 2008).

This formal 'discovery' initiated one of the public discussions about Chasidism which formally involved representatives of the Russian government. It is important to stress that by 1823 and the dispute of 1824, Chasidism had already been established as a structured and rapidly growing movement. Ignorance and indolence represented by the officials of the tsarist government was not, however, surprising. After all shtetl and Polish Chasidism were foreign to Russian experience and to Russian law, which for centuries had aimed either at assimilating or alienating Jews but certainly not at becoming familiar with them.

In sum, the Jews of Poland were an uncomfortable inheritance hence the Russian government for a long time tried to avoid any contact that was not absolutely necessary. Legally and politically, there was no such thing as shtetl .The legal status of 'small town' known as *miasteczko* (which did not have to be occupied by Jews to be recognised as such) was only established by the Russian rulers in 1875. Lacking official municipal status but still not classified as a village, miasteczko used to attract Jews mainly because of the Russian ban forbidding Jews from living and settling in rural areas. (Katz, 2007)

By the time of Dovid's death, about ten percent of the Jewish population in Central Poland admittedly participated in the Chasidic movement

(Wodzinski, 2008). Still not formally recognised by the government, ultra – orthodox Jews kept establishing new shuls (synagogues) and *shtybles* (singular: *shtybl*) – their own type of a synagogue, combining functions of a prayer, study and social centre.

As for Dovid, it transpires that he never held any function within Lelov's kahal. Nor was he ever nominated as an official rabbi; a leader of the community. His activity as a tzadick and teacher must have then existed as part of the official Jewish council in Lelov. This does not necessarily mean that he and his followers were excluded from the synagogue. In the early stage of Polish Chasidism, members of the community used to participate equally in the life of a synagogue and Chasidic shtybl having no separate Chevra Kadisha (burial society), a graveyard, mikveh or women's group.

As time has passed by, larger and more developed Chasidic centres such as Warsaw (Warszawa), Lodz or Tchenstochov (Czestochowa) loudly opted for exclusive facilities, arguing that since Chassidim applied stricter laws and followed their own rebbes, separate buildings should be used to avoid any potential difficulties between the communities. Those occurred, for example when the Jews of Tchenstochov barred Chassidim from using community baths (Wodzinski, 2005a). The Jewish council of Tchenstochov stated that although, the bath was available for every Jew, Chassidim significantly overused the facility, preventing other Jews from using it.

As a result of the extended arguments, a new Chasidic bath was built and the communities formally separated.

Nevertheless, the big impact of tzadickim's charisma and legendary healing skills managed to attract the masses, who-magnetised by the stories about those spiritual leaders-travelled miles to be illuminated by their pious powers. Salezy Majmon, a Jewish journalist from the nineteenth century, basing his assumption on peoples' testimonies, estimated that on average between five to six hundred pilgrims travelled to their tzadickim on peak days (Majmon, 1894). This seems to be confirmed by the memories of Rebbe Menachem Ben Zion Rotenberg, who recalled the big rise of a pilgrimage movement in Lelov after Dovid's death in 1814 (Anon, 2005). According to Rotenberg, on the anniversary of Dovid's death the whole town (Jewish town) used to be in an excited mood, awaiting prayers and celebration. One could indeed imagine himself having travelled to Jerusalem rather than the Polish town of Lelov, given the arrival of so many Jews. Dressed in the white garments that traditionally symbolise spiritual purity they travelled to the ohel of Rebbe Dovid, often dancing in the middle of the market. The pilgrims believed that an annual celebration and prayers at tzadick's shrine would bring them a good, prosperous year, such as promised by Dovid shortly before he passed away:

'Those, who pilgrimage to my grave will receive blessings that will go through ten generations.' (Anon, 2005, p.27)

This anniversary has also been acknowledged among the Christian population of Lelov who used to call it the Lauds Day, probably because the pilgrims were starting their prayers early in the morning in order to open festive celebration by the time dusk came. Older inhabitants of Lelov also recall that on his death bed, tzadick Lelover predicted that the anniversary

of his demise-Yortsayt -would never be on Saturday (Sabbath) so the Jews could celebrate freely (Galas and Skrzypczyk, 2006). So far it has never been on a Saturday.

After Dovid's death, Moshe Biederman became personally responsible for the visiting masses. Born, as was noted earlier, in 1777 in Lelov, Moshe was immediately recognised as a yenuka (genius) child and assigned to continue Dovid's mission of spreading the love of Israel. As time would show he followed his father's wishes both spiritually - becoming another great tzadick of the generation- as well as physically when he decided to move to Palestine. His marriage to Rivkah Rachel, the daughter of Yehudi HaKodesh of Pshishke also known as the Holy Jew not only secured him a male offspring but most of all added to his yihus status. Unlike his father, Moshe did not have to build his position as a spiritual leader from scratch. He was born into the family of an already recognised tzadick and married into the family of Chasidic nobles. His mission as a head of the community would soon change both the character and outreach of the Lelovers.

Chapter Four.

Moshe Biederman and his journey to Israel.

Like many Chasidic leaders, Moshe's historical personality is cloaked in legends based at most on internal Chasidic traditions, and we possess relatively poor extra-Chasidic documentation. Even when it comes to his date of birth, we stumble across at least two dates: 1776 or 1777. It is, however, believed that 1777 was most likely the year of a formal registration of his birth, with him perhaps having been born in 1776. For Chasidic sources it is significantly less important than the year of his aliyah to Israel. Lives of the great Chasidic masters are marked by their great achievements and miracle acts rather than by precise dates. Even now, in times of computers, widely available calendars and clocks, when interviewed, some members of the Chasidic community actually argue whether Dovid passed away two hundred and eighty or two hundred and fifty years ago (died in 1714). But for them, it does not really matter as long as they remember it was on the seventh of shevat.

This chapter discusses Moshe Biederman's development as a Chasidic master, his succession of the Chasidic throne of Lelov and finally his pilgrimage to Israel which changed the character of the group forever. This chapter also surveys the conditions under which the first Chasidic settlers lived

4.1 Moshe Biederman. Early years and his Chasidic succession.

Chasidic sources claim that Moshe of Lelov had been born as a genius and that as he grew older he continued to present extraordinary skills and exceptional hunger for the Torah and learning. He had to wait almost seven decades, however, before he was able to realise these dreams and finally settle in the Holy Land. His tzadick father used to say: ' I was not worthy of travelling to the Land of Israel; but you, my son, will be worthy'. Perhaps, he felt that as a minor trader he would never be able to secure enough resources to make a move; moreover, he perceived himself as being ' too small in the eyes of God', achieving so little in terms of teaching His wisdom to be allowed to make aliyah.

Rebbe Dovid reaffirmed these words years later, on his deathbed. He left two of his three properties to his other son, saying to Moshe*:* 'Do not worry you have your home waiting for you in Jerusalem. (Anon., 2005, p.9)

Like his father, Moshe opened a small shop in Lelov, to make his living but deep in his heart he knew that one day, he would have to leave Lelov and head east to the unknown but holy lands. For many years, Dovid remained Moshe's teacher and spiritual guide resulting in Moshe wanting to emulate his father in almost every way.

He married, as his tzadick parent wished, Rivkah Rachel, the daughter of The Holy Yid of Pshishkhe and in 1814 experienced the birth of his first son .Moshe's future then had been sealed a long time before he grew to his adult life. He was to become his father's successor, marry into a well established Chasidic dynasty, bring a handful of children to the world and

eventually move to the Land of Israel. In a society that considered lineage a prerequisite for leadership, he was a member of a highly respected élite,

With his father dying in 1814, Moshe faced the dilemma of choosing a new master and teacher for himself. Although, by then he was almost forty years old, it was a Chasidic tradition to study under an older master especially when it came to learning Kabbalah. Even in the Chasidic tradition of the nineteenth century, studying Kabbalah was discouraged as being dangerous for one's soul if embarked on without being supervised by an experienced scholar. It was often suggested that a student had to be at least forty years old to be allowed to immerse himself in the 'kabbalistic arcana'. At about this age, Moshe Biederman turned to his father-in-law for guidance, but within the year, Yehudi HaKodesh also passed away.

Yet again Moshe was made to go on a quest in search of a new master. For a Chasidic Jew it literally meant leaving his home town and hitting the road, wandering from one Chasidic court to another, practicing sermons with a different group, eating alongside various Chasidic disciples and listening to the teachings of the tzadickim. Moshe's first stop was the court of Rebbe Moshe of Apt (Opatow) who had once been the disciple and continuator of the Seer of Lublin but he advised him to go elsewhere. Nevertheless, Moshe maintained his strong connections with the Apt court with Yaakov Biederman succeeding in the rabbinate of Apt.
According to Chasidic sources, Moshe continued his journey as far as Chernobil (Chernobyl) in the Russian Empire (today's Ukraine) but still could not find himself a suitable teacher, although those he met on his way were probably the greatest Chasidic figures of that time. He finally returned

to Pshishke where Rebbe Simcha Bunim had taken over the court after the diseased Yehudi HaKodesh. Only then, was he able to make his way back to Lelov to continue the life of a simple and poor Jew. Rebbe Moshe has never established a large and wealthy court, but his fame spread and Chassidim from all over Poland continued to come to Lelov for his healing and magical powers. Despite this, he was said to live a life increasingly distanced from the external matters, in Lelov.

In the course of its dynamic growth over the centuries the Chasidic movement redeveloped strong messianic inclinations. It was no coincidence that Chasidism came into being in the eighteenth century preceded by Sabbatai Zevi (Tzvi), who had claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah and Yaakov (Jakub) Frank, the contemporary of Dovid Biederman, who perceived himself as the reincarnation of Sabbatai Tzvi and yet another 'true' messiah. For Gershom Sholem (Scholem and Manheim, 1965), Chasidism arose as a reaction to those messianic expectations and focused on the simplicity of life and fulfilling the Torah, which would potentially lead to redemption rather than the revival of messianic beliefs. But for many simple Jews, The Era of Redemption as it was once known was the only source of hope. With the appearance of the Messiah, Jews would finally be allowed to come back home (to Israel) and their millennia of suffering would come to end. During the eighteenth century, many kabbalistic scholars extensively studied ancient sources in a search of a definite messianic date but the higher the hope, the deeper was the despair. The Italian rabbi and Immanuel Ricchi (1688–1743) concluded that the time of redemption would be in the eighth month, iyyar, in the year 5541 (April–

May 1781) (Altshuler, 2006), whereas messianic expectations among Eastern Europeans peaked in 1777. Coincidently, this was the year of Moshe's birth on Lelov, as claimed by Chasidic sources.

Fuelled by rising hopes of forthcoming redemption and the messianic teaching of kabbalah many Jews actually started to set off for the Land of Israel. In the month of adar 5537 (1777), a group of Chassidim left for the Holy Land under the leadership of Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk and Rebbe Abraham of Kolyshki. (Altshuler, 2006) Their goal was to establish themselves in the Land of Israel just in time to greet the Messiah when he arrived as anticipated, in iyyar 1781. It was not the only group whose members sought to ensure redemption by means of human action—primarily aliyah. Their pilgrimage was the fulfilment of the commandment to dwell in the Land of Israel, but also an effort to renew classical rabbinic ordination in Jerusalem.

Katz determined that:

'In all the Balkan lands, and so, too, in all the lands of Eastern Europe, the opinion was widespread that the approaching year 5600 was the year of redemption.' (Katz, 2007, p. 85).

The belief in 5600 as a possible time for the Messiah's advent spread among the Chassidim as well. Like Richi and other kabbalists, Chasidic scholars practiced many methods, also used *gematria*, a system of assigning numerical value to words and, to determine the time of the redemption. The gematrist would derive a word from a certain passage of the Torah, calculate its numerical value accordingly and comment, thereby revealing its inner meaning.

An examination of the Hebrew word *Chai* (meaning 'life') illustrates how Gematria works. Chai is composed of two letters which numerical value adds up to eighteen (Hebrew letter 'ח' [Chet] is worth 8 and 'י'[Yod] is worth 10). This has made eighteen a 'lucky number' among Jews, and gifts in multiples of eighteen are very common. Gematria has been one of the commonly accepted practices within the traditional Jewish world and served to as a tool for a prediction and prophecy. It also shows some incredible features of the Hebrew language. Letters are no longer just visible signs but also hold individual numerical values that can be used to uncover secrets of the Universe and the meaning of life.

After establishing their court in Israel, Chasidic pilgrims under the leadership of the rebbe were finally able to immerse themselves in spiritual practices that would eventually, as they believed, lead to a messianic appearance. Based heavily on kabbalistic sources such as *Zohar* – the foundational work of Jewish mysticism, and the *Heikhalot* literature ('The Palaces' – one of the earliest collection of Jewish mystical texts), Chasidic leaders were expected to redeem the Messiah and serve as the bridge between heaven and earth, between human and divine.

In order to achieve it, they would perform various rituals that were part of the *tikkun* ('repairing the world') process. Lurianic kabbalah (developed by Isaac Luria, 1534-1572, a Jewish mystic considered the father of contemporary kabbalah) perceived the human being as a focal point of the redemption cycle. According to this, prayer and the contemplation of various aspects of divinity have an unusual power to release divine sparks and rejoin them with God's essence. These sparks had been imprisoned in

material things as a result of ‘shattering the vessels’ - *kellipot*, which turned out to be too weak to hold divine light. The world is thoroughly comprised of these kellipot, some of which are completely dark and ‘unclean’ and thus irredeemable by man, other's of which are ‘translucent’ and thus subject to human restitution. (Drob, 2000). The task of humans is nothing less than to support the Messiah. The task of this Messiah is nothing less than to repair the cosmos and bring about the end of time.

Conducting all these rituals and procedures in the Land of Israel would hold an extraordinary meaning. It would not only be the act of physical reunion with the Holy Land and ancestors but more importantly spiritual unification. Those, who made it to Israel, would carry on their shoulders the hopes and prayers of the millions of European Jews living in Diaspora. But soon, Jewish communities were about to be divided, this time over the act of aliyah and messianic expectations. To understand it fully, we ought to refer to the messianic doctrines in Chasidism yet again.

There are two major schools of thought concerning the affiliation of Chasidism with the messianic movement—one represented by the previously mentioned Gershom Sholem, claiming that Chasidism, derived from messianic fervour (Werblowsky et al., 1967) ; the other viewing tzadickism as one of the strongest messianic doctrines. It is valid to say that Chasidism moved away from promoting redemption and the Messiah as the most crucial eschatological figures. Redemption almost lost its universal character and started to exist on a more individual level where every (Jewish) human being was allowed to participate in the process.

Apocalyptic universalism has been replaced by Chasidic localism where each shtetl could have a messiah of its own. According to Harris Lenowitz (1998) the shtetl locale became the Jerusalem of the Chasidic following, the primary pilgrimage site; there, the faithful brought their offerings, heard prophecies, gazed upon, ate at the table with, and actually had audiences with, the rebbe or tzadick. Jewish towns with their tzadickim became new Jerusalems, places of pilgrimage, spaces of spiritual and bodily salvation. Both Eastern European Shabbataism and Frankism – Jewish religious movements centred around the figure of the Messiah, as well as Chasidism continued to emphasise Poland as the place of the Messiah. On the other hand, the 'aliyah for redemption' which remained concern with bringing the Messiah by settling in Israel and was tied to a messianic awakening continued and strengthened over the course on the eighteen century.

The division between those, who believed that only communal work and the spiritual effort of the Diaspora could guarantee the messianic appearance and those, who tried to reinforce religious commandment of aliyah and its power to bring down redemption, grew quickly. In Chasidism the pluralism of tzadickim and their individually tailored programmes strongly contributed towards increasing divisions between different groups of followers.

The Chasidic link with the Land of Israel has always been strong.
One of the Sabbath customs practiced before the kindling includes dropping a few coins in a collection box known as *Kupat Rebbe Meir Haness*. This custom has its roots in the Talmud. Prior to Rebbe Meir Baal Haness', passing he observed the terrible situation that resulted from the hunger in Eretz Yisrael. He proclaimed that he would intercede to God on a behalf of

whoever gives *tzedakah* (donation, offering) for his soul. Money should be distributed to the poor of Eretz Yisrael .Even the poorest of the poor felt the need to donate money. It was perceived as a mitzvah, religious obligation to support those suffering hunger in The Land of Israel. This way everyone identified with the Holy Land. In the Israel of the 1830s, the groups known as *kollelim* were brought into life.(Rabinowicz, 1970)

The Ashkenazi community which was undergoing the renewal decided to formalise the support of Jewish communities in Israel and considerably expanded its scope. Groups of Jews from the same town or country would organise themselves into a *kollel,* a centre of sacred Jewish studies for married men, such as the 'Varshe (Warsaw) kollel' or the 'Hungarian kollel', and most of their income came from their fellow Jews in the cities and lands of their origin. The word kollel – which stems from the Hebrew root *klol*, meaning a 'collective' – was initially applied to a communal body. (Rabinowicz, 1970)

As time passed by, the term was also applied to the small groups of Jews themselves, who moved together from specific European towns to the Land of Israel.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, kolellim were split into at least twenty five different groups not necessarily cooperating. Each kolellim stood as the independent organisation with its own president and of course Chasidic rebbe who acted as the spiritual leader, guardian and administrator responsible for distributing the funds. Many organisations now suffered a depth of poverty even greater than in their countries of origins. The tension between dedication to theoretical study and a focus on more

practical endeavours, such as providing for the families, was a core issue for kollel life from its inception. Not all of the new settlers spent their days in spiritual acts and studying Torah, however these remained the most respectful and anticipated occupation. Kolellim also gave a new, well organised learning framework, which involved extended Talmudic studies, and a slightly more practical approach than the one offered by traditional Eastern European *yeshiva* (traditionally Jewish educational institution).

This seems to have been part of an overall effort to create hosts of the new Chasidic rebbes in Israel. It was also hoped that the kollel would become a breeding ground for the next generation of rabbinic leaders. These aims could only be achieved by founding an institution that drew financial support from a wide geographical area. The demographic mix of the immigrants indicated yet a high degree of motivation. They were a heterogeneous group, encompassing not only prominent scholars but also common folk and tradesmen (especially among the immigrants from Russia and Poland), wealthy individuals with considerable property, and young families with numerous children and infants.

The costs of the journey eastwards were such as to be within the means of only a few. All this suggests that in most instances the immigrants were moved by a profound messianic faith and sense of mission; only that sort of motivation could have impelled them to undertake the effort. As early as 1777, which, as we have already mentioned was supposed to be the Year of Redemption, the first major aliyah of more than three hounded people lead by Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, was arranged. The writer, Benjamin Redler-Feldman who participated in the Second Immigration,

compared the Chasidic immigrants to the pilgrims who came to America aboard the Mayflower:

‘Hundreds of years ago, on 5 August 1620, a ship called the ‘Mayflower’ reached the shores of America and a band of English Puritans disembarked. They had left their native land, where they were targets of religious persecution, and came to America to live there in freedom. To this day, Americans revere the memory of that ship, and descendants of that band are regarded as having the highest pedigree. Had we a profound sense of history, we would relate in the same manner to the Chasidic aliyah of 5537 (1777), for the ship that brought them to the Land of Israel was our ‘Mayflower’. (Redler-Fieldman, 1927 cited in Altshuler, 2006, p. 165)

Of course Feldman’s picture is highly exaggerated and Chasidic immigration of that sort could not be compared with that of the American settlers. Nevertheless, it highlights how significant for the Chasidic community this immigration was. Rebbe Menachem Mendel did not travel on his own. In fact, he was accompanied by yet another well known and respected Chasidic master, Abraham of Kalisk (Kolyszki) of the Belarus, followed by Yehiel Mikhel who led the Chasidic-messianic group from Volhynia. The two letters of Meshullam Feibush Heller, a close disciple of Yehiel Mikhel are perhaps the most important sources of information about life and conditions in the Land of Israel. Although his letters as well as any other letters sent from Israel back to the Russian Empire were heavily censored, we still manage to learn some interesting facts both about the messianic programme and everyday existence.

Their immigration to the Land of Israel was to serve as ‘an arousal below’ which had the potential to bring about ‘the arousal above’ and stimulate the coupling in the supernal worlds (Altshuler, 2006). In other words, Chasidic pilgrims were on a mission to hasten messianic redemption by awaking religious fervour. It is actually difficult to explain what made tzadick Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk move to Israel. We know from the footprints of his activities in Russia described both by the Chasidic and non-Jewish sources that at the time of his migration he was at a peak of popularity. He was certainly perceived as one of the most important student of the Rebbe Dov Ber of Mezeritch also known as Maggid, a successor of Baal Shem Tov

Menachem Mendel had already managed to wield great influence and recruited significant numbers of followers. According to Chasidic sources, his authority was so great that even the leading students of the Maggid, themselves fit to be great spiritual leaders, would bow to him. Then, when he was about the age of thirty nine, he decided to gather a group and travel to the Land of Israel with no intention of returning. Practically, it meant abandoning his flock and starting life anew in the unknown lands. Chasidic sources claim that it was the ongoing persecution and mockery of the misnagdim circles that pushed him towards aliyah. Menachem Mendel was said to be extremely tired of the growing rivalry and of constant accusations so that, that in order to distance himself from the quarrelling, he decided to leave Russia forever.

In fact, intellectual disputes between the followers of the Vilna Gaon and Chassidim as well physical attacks and denunciations were signs of the

times. The Russian imperial government, with its imperialistic approach and strong dislike of novelties, remained very suspicious and was often oppressive when it came to Jewish matters affairs. Jewish life in the Empire had been complicated and miserable enough without adding yet another problem. Created in 1791 by Catherine the Great, the Pale of Settlement included the territory of present day Belarus, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine. Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement was very unstable, poverty-stricken and exposed to pogroms, therefore social issues should not be ruled out when analysing migration motives.

Public denunciations and excommunications of the Chasidic groups and their leaders issued both by the government and rabbinical authorities, must have been a source of burden as well. They would not necessarily be specifically against particular tzadickim but rather against the movement in general. Nevertheless, under growing scrutiny and due to increased persecution many were forced to leave their homes. All the same, it is difficult to accept that such a mighty tzadick as Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk would be deterred by such things. He was without a doubt succeeding and his influence was forever expanding. Rebbe Menachem Mendel was believed to be endowed with meta-rational knowledge grounded in deity and by many perceived as a prophet or ‘the seer’, although he would always deny possessing such extraordinary skills. Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk moved to Israel when he was just thirty nine accompanied by Rebbe Abraham Katz of Kolyshki. In the eyes of many Chasidic Jews, the immigrants were perceived as the élite group endowed with the Holy Spirit and supernatural skills:

‘And the whole ones who went were very renowned, possessors of the Holy Spirit, great ones of the revealed and hidden Torah, and with them the heads of the Israelites from the poor of the holy flock, the lamb of Israel’s dispersion.’ (Alrshuler, 2006, p.170)

By settling in the land of Israel, Rebbe Menachem Mendel wished to transcend all factional differences, and map out a path for mending the whole Jewish people. It was believed that his companions were chosen according to their devotion and humbleness, not necessarily physically poor, as the text may suggest. In the year 5537 (1777) Mendel took three hundred of his followers and set out for the land of Israel, setting the example for future Chasidic migrants.

4.2 The Aliyah. Moshe Biederman and his journey.

Today, Jerusalem is a thriving centre of Chasidic wisdom, home for numerous groups with innumerable Chasidic prayer houses and yeshivot, but until the outbreak of the Second World War, only a few Chasidic masters actually resided in the Holy City. For various spiritual and administrative reasons, the first Chasidic settlers preferred to establish their courts in Tzvat (Safed) or Tiberias. Traditionally, Tzvat was perceived as the spiritual capital and the centre of mysticism. Over the centuries many great rebbes and kabbalists found their way to this Galilean town, among them, one of the greatest kabbalists, Isaac Luria known for his extensive analysis of the origins of Creation. Some rebbes also believed that Jerusalem did not need a Chasidic leader since redemption could be brought down to Earth wherever one prayed. Many did not even visit Jerusalem, the explanation

for this hypothetical neglect rooted in Chasidic eschatology (Rabinowicz, 1982).

Moshe Biederman had longed for Israel for sixty three years of his life. His father urged him to go to hasten the Redemption and Moshe could not wait to fulfil his father's dream of standing before the Western Wall (*Kotel*) and vigorously praying for the Messiah. He felt, that his journey had to made be on behalf of all Israel. After the death of his first wife, he married Rivkah (Rebecca), the daughter of the Holy Yid (Jew) and it was his father-in-law who strongly encouraged Moshe to undertake the migration. The only obstacle was money. Each Chasidic court had to be self-sufficient, relying o exclusively on voluntary donations. Many tzadickim managed to gather extraordinary wealth and establish themselves as the Jewish princes, for example Israel of Ruzhin (who was told to live in great luxury and unusual splendour. His dwelling place was more extravagant than that of a nobleman with an army of servants. He was never seen walking, but only riding in a splendid carriage with silver handles. (Assaf, 2002)

Moshe Biederman never looked for splendour and fame. Like his father, he was trying to conceal his greatness and live a simple life of humility. Chasidic sources such as *Sefer Kodesh Hilulim* (Weinstock, 2007) claim that over the years of his existence in Lelov, Moshe remained unconcerned with the external world and, as a result, his family lived in bitter poverty. He is often portrayed as wearing patched clothes with a belt made of straw rather than leather. 'A person, who cares the slightest bit for this world, has not even begun to serve God'- he used to say (Valakh, 2002, p.78).

It was once believed that a universally recognised authoritative *tzadick,* acclaimed child - genius and miracle-maker would suffer such misery to enrich his already pious existence. By the time he married the Holy Yid's daughter, he must have been a respected and therefore eagerly visited leader receiving regular donations and financial gratifications for the services. These would usually involve: praying on behalf of someone who was ill, dead, infertile or affected by any other misfortune; preparing talismans, miraculous healing, advising on marital matters, solving arguments and law-related issues. Additional income would usually be generated on the occasion of burial or a wedding.

Tzadickim could also count on donations received from non-Chasidic or even non-Jewish pilgrims. Their fame and seemingly superhuman skills kept attracting the neediest from different religious and cultural backgrounds as well as from distant regions. Even today, among Polish residents of Lelov, belief in the magical and healing powers of the tzadick seems to be fairly strong. For example, it is believed that as long as the tzadick's grave stands in Lelov, no misfortune will ever befall its inhabitants. A figure of a tzadick with his extraordinary powers has certainly become anchored in the consciousness of the town folk.

In order to gather resources, Moshe was eventually made to embark on the journey across Poland to visit his wealthy followers. At first, he remained very reluctant and overwhelmed by embarrassment, having his trust in God rather than people, but as conditions worsened he realised that without donations, no journey could ever be organised. Soon he announced that whoever was able to donate money to this cause should do so.

With his faithful disciple Rebbe Shlomo of Radomsk, who also became Moshe's successor in Poland, he travelled across the Polish countryside, visiting Jewish towns and villages, spreading his teaching and collecting funds. Rebbe Moshe was not only trying to secure funding for his aliyah but also to gather finances for the Jews in the Land Of Israel as was customary.

The financial condition of the old Jewish inhabitants of Israel (the Old Yishuv) could have been described as desperate, suffering as they did great poverty and overcrowding. By 1844, the Jews were the largest single minority in Jerusalem, all crammed into the narrow confines of the Jewish quarter of the Old City. The Ashkenazi population was experiencing significant growth but the space was very limited, hygiene conditions extremely poor with no stable source of water, almost all processed products imported and very few jobs available. It was not a surprise that many Chassidim became reluctant to leave their homes to embark on a journey to the unknown. Perhaps their lives in Poland, Russia or Ukraine had not exactly been a bed of roses, facing persecutions, oppression and ghetto existence, but at least it was something that they managed to get used to over the centuries of exile.

Even Moshe's second wife refused to follow the Rebbe. She was profoundly sceptical of the purpose of the planned migration. At the end of the day, Moshe's position within the Chasidic movement was fully established; he became not only the leader of the Lelov dynasty but also the Rebbe of Pshadburz (Przedboz). (Valakh, 2002, p.90). To leave his wedded wife behind was just unthinkable and raised great controversy among the Chassidim. Rebbetzin Rivkah Rachel stood her ground and continuously

rejected Moshe's pleading. Having no other choice, Rebbe eventually arranged an assembly of the leading tzadickim to resolve the issue, but even then she refused to co-operate (Anon, 2005) It was said that a Jewish husband should never be allowed to abandon his wife. The family and the wedded one should stay together for life. But Moshe's case was exceptional, indeed. He was convinced that without his aliyah, the Redemption would be delayed, therefore his personal circumstances could not be seen as obstacles. Shortly before Rebbe's departure, Rivkah finally overcame her anger and blessed him with the following words:
'Before my wedding, your holy father, Rebbe Dovid of Lelov, warned me: My son is like a beautiful mezuzah. I am turning him over to you, make sure you keep him kosher. Until today, I have done so, and my father would not be ashamed. You certainly will not be spoiled now.'(Valakh, 2002, p.92)

Instead, Moshe insisted on taking his youngest son Eleazar Menachem Mendel and his young wife to re-settle with him. After securing enough financial support, Moshe Biederman travelled across Poland bidding a final good-bye to his fellow Chassidim. Everywhere he went, he would say: 'My children, look at me well, engrave me in your minds. It will be good for you.' (Weinstock, 2007). He had no intention of coming back and some even claimed that he knew his days on earth were already numbered.

At that time, the usual route for emigration to the Land of Israel comprised four segments: southward, overland, via Ukraine and Podolia to the River Dniester, beyond which lay Wallachia, under Ottoman rule, and on to the city of Galati (now in Romania); from Galati, down the River Danube to the Black Sea estuary, a distance of about hundred and fifty kilometres;

by ship on the Black Sea to Istanbul, a distance of about four hundred and fifty kilometres; and from Istanbul, by ship on the Mediterranean to the shores of the Land of Israel, usually to the port of Acco, a distance all told of about seventeen hundred kilometres

The pilgrims' ships left Istanbul twice a year, in the month of Nisan, in anticipation of Passover, and at the start of the month of elul, in anticipation of Rosh HaShanah (Jewish New Year), as well as the other holidays of tishri (the most holiday-intensive month of the Jewish year). The entire journey, from the Polish border to the Land of Israel, took thirty or forty days, excluding delays and necessarily longer stays in one of the ports—in Galati, at the Black Sea estuary (apparently in the port of Solena), or in Istanbul—because of adverse weather conditions

The hardships suffered by the pilgrims were enormous. It was not unusual for vessels to sink claiming the lives of many migrating Jews. The majority of the Ashkenazi pilgrims, upon their arrival in Israel would settle in Tzvat but as the Ottoman persecutions increased, many would eventually leave the city and move to Tiberius. Yet, they were not permitted to settle comfortably in that new setting. There was a great shortage of income; most of the pilgrims possessed no skill with which they could earn a living.
As a result, many rebbes were forced to ask the European Jews, time and time again, to send donations in order to support the Chasidic community in Eretz Yisrael.

On top of all of these difficulties, from time to time epidemics would break out, taking lives. Poor hygiene conditions and overcrowding contributed to

such disasters. Yet, despite everything, Rebbe Moshe Biederman remained convinced that staying in the Land of Israel was the only right choice.
It would have been easy for him to return to Lelov with his wife and family still living in Poland. Many of his followers also longed for him to rejoin them. But, he had decided to stay and continue to build and support the Chasidic settlement in Israel.

As a result of his move to the Land of Israel Moshe forfeited his central position in the Chasidic arena. His younger students and friends became the leaders of the movement, and founders of dynasties, while he never managed to make a name for himself in Israel. According to Chasidic legends, he died seventy four days after his arrival, leaving the youngest son with the burden of organising and supporting the community. Yet, it would appear that, thanks to Moshe, Jerusalem became engraved in the consciousness of the Chasidic movement. Leading Chasidic sages, his students and his friends, were appointed with the task of collecting donations in order to support the Jewish settlers in the Old City. They would eventually erect the first Chasidic shul in Jerusalem. The personal example of the greatest Chasidic sage in that generation giving up a comfortable life and, with great self-sacrifice moving to Israel was more effective than thousands of sermons. Slowly, little by little, the Chasidic community in Jerusalem began to sprout and grow.

It was this community that would serve as the foundation upon which Chasidism was rebuilt after the terrible Holocaust destroyed European Jewry. We may well credit Moshe's self-sacrifice for Eretz Yisrael with having helped to preserve Chasidic Jewry in the face of mass destruction,

giving it the strength to rise up from the dust and continue in the service of God in the land of Israel.

4.3 The Jerusalem of Moshe Biederman.

In the nineteenth century only a few Chasidic families decided to make the difficult but exciting journey to the Holy Land of Israel. Their resources were very limited as well as their knowledge of the place. The inclement climate, oppressive Turkish taxation, diseases and lack of infrastructure as well as poor and undeveloped agriculture were among the difficulties that the newly arrived migrants had to face after landing in their Promised Land. Nevertheless, those few who accepted the challenge remained determined to make it work. Many of them were inexperienced idealists who had no clue how to establish settlements, make their living and survive harsh conditions of daily life in nineteenth century Israel. Traditionally, the Jews of Europe had not been farmers. For centuries, they had been excluded from agricultural activities, owning lands and living off them. Since early mediaeval times, Jews had been settled in towns, eventually becoming involved in trade, craftsmanship or professional occupations such as medical doctors, pharmacists, bankers to the kings or scribes. Many opted for a strictly religious education or lifelong study allowing them to enter the world of the rabbinate. Learning had always been more than means to an end; rather a way of life with boys starting education as early as the age of four. But the very same boys, whose knowledge of Torah and Jewish Law has been trained to perfection, would struggle with shovels and rakes. Married off very young, living off their in-laws as long as they were keen to continue with a study, Chasidic men- cocooned in the life

of an Eastern European ghetto - had very little knowledge of the external world,

The first wave of Eastern European Jewish migration is usually associated with the growing hostility and oppressive laws that were introduced under the centuries of Tsarist rule. After The Third Partition of Poland, the Russian Empire became not only the biggest country in the world but also the state most densely populated by Jews in history. The main Jewish migratory movements were not merely prompted by spiritual needs, historic attachment and economic reasons but (perhaps mainly) by a general lack of fundamental stability and security.

In the nineteenth century, Israel was like many other countries of the region only a small, very poor and largely deserted country with no major infrastructure, its inhabitants mainly backward and wedded to their agricultural life style. The Ottoman Empire was slipping into chaos with its rulers caring little about economic activities and general development. Robbery and crime were common, painfully destabilising everyday existence. Only Gaza and Jerusalem could be recognised as cities with their populations of more than ten thousand and, in comparison to other towns of Israel-reasonably developed infrastructure and governance. But even there, people continued to earn their living from agriculture and minor trades, constantly battling corrupt governors and local unrests. The sights that met visitors would be totally different from those seen today. Towns like Gaza, Acco (Acre), Hebron or even Jerusalem were very densely built and unable to expand beyond their walls due to restrictive Turkish regulations. It was prohibited to construct any building within eight hundred and fifty

meters of the city boundaries. A slightly more liberal approach was introduced only after 1840, when security improved and western influences began to enter the Holy Land.

Most of the towns had no structured planning, with both single and multi-storey houses built along the main arteries. Unpaved and sludge-polluted alleys, open canals and crammed shops contributed to an overall sight of neglect and backwardness. The majority of buildings were made of sun dried clay or mud with exception of those in Jerusalem where poor quarters and shabby bazaars bordered upon impressive antiquities and splendid mosques. Despite its important religious role, Jerusalem did not occupy an important place in Turkish politics. Incorporated into the larger province of Damascus, until the mid nineteenth century Jerusalem remained yet another city of the Empire. Its transformation came during the later period of Ottoman rule, when the city gradually grew outside the walls, opened up for new economic possibilities and experienced increasing masses of pilgrims and tourist.

Still, by the end of the nineteenth century, Jerusalem was inhabited by fewer than fifty thousand permanent citizens with Jews, despite two major waves of immigration, regarded as minority:

‘The Jews have many synagogues but very small and filthier than those I have seen in other parts of the East. Although they are oppressed and treated with more contempt at Jerusalem than elsewhere, they still flock to it. To sleep in Abraham’s bosom is the wish of the old; the young visit it in the hope of coming of the Messiah; some are content to remain, for the commerce they carry on. They pay a heavy tax to the Turkish governor at

Jerusalem. The Jewish quarter, as in all Eastern towns, is separate from the rest.' (Light, 1818, p.184)

However, it was the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem who moved beyond the old walls first. With hefty donations from wealthy European Jewish philanthropists, such as Sir Moses Montefiore (the Sheriff of London) and Baron Edmond de Rothschild, two new areas, *Mea Shearim* and *Yemin Moshe*, were established west and northwest of the city (Nassar, 2006). Mea Shearim was founded in the 1873, initially with only a hundred families choosing it for their new home. Today, it is recognised as a symbol of Chasidic tradition in Israel with its unique neighbourhood where strict interpretations of Judaism rule and people still dress in a manner they used to in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Eastern European ghettos.

The Jews of Israel were mainly concentrated in the four holy cities: Jerusalem, Tzvat, Tiberias and Hebron. Their life, taxed and discriminated against was of an even poorer quality than ever, with Jews often regarded as second-class citizens. Their lives, possessions and properties remained unprotected by laws, exposing them to abuse and interference with no right of appealing to the courts of justice.

M. Reisher, who lived in Jerusalem, wrote in 1866:

'When a Jew walked among them in the market, one would throw a stone at him in order to kill him, another would pull his beard, and a third his ear-lock, yet another spit on his face, and he became a symbol of abuse.' (Hershkowitz, 2009)

During the second part of the century the situation of the Jewish inhabitants

of Israel began to improve mainly due to the protection granted to them in the years immediately preceding the Crimean War (1853-1854).
But Jerusalem remained a place of great contrasts, where heaven would meet earth, the Orient, the West, and the three great religions would interact and contradict each other.

The contrast between the heights of holiness and the earthly day-to-day existence was stark. Poverty and oppression, however, motivated many to participate in the experience of striving toward holiness. This made Jerusalem even more attractive for those, who sought to hasten the Redemption. Although Jerusalem never earned a reputation for excellence in study of the Torah, its sanctified aura and historical meaning attracted those whose lives were truly devoted to their beliefs and hopes, among them Moshe Biederman.

Moshe's road to Jerusalem was not meant to be easy. His court was rather poor, although recognised in the Chasidic world. Chasidic stories picture Rebbe Moshe as a humble and just character who would always refuse to take money from his followers, but the reality was otherwise. 'More money needs to be donated'- Rebbe Biederman announced and accompanied by his trusted student, Shlomo (Solomon) of Radomsk (Polish: Radomsko), who had been appointed to continue Rebbe's teaching in Poland after his departure, embarked on a fundraising journey. Rebbe and his cohort would travel across the country visiting their wealthy followers in bigger Chasidic centres such as Warsaw or Lublin but also stopping in smaller towns where simple folk would eagerly await his teaching. Chasidic sources such as *Sefer Kodesh Hilulim* (Weinstock, 2007) claim, Rebbe's visit to Lupshneh

(Lopuszno), near Keltz (Kielce) attracted all the inhabitants who came out to greet him. The news of Moshe's imminent departure fuelled peoples' minds and hopes of Redemption. Many believed the Rebbe received a messianic calling and his devotion to the case would eventually result in restoring God's presence on Earth. Neither Moshe's advanced age nor his rebellious wife, who refused to move to Israel, could stop him.

He left Lelov in the summer of 1850 heading for Apt (Opatow) to say farewell to his followers, disciples and fellow tzadickim who gathered in nearby Chentsin (Checiny) to bless the departing Rebbe. He officially appointed Shlomo of Radomsk to lead and supervise the abandoned flock as he suspected, his journey to Israel would be final. Rebbe Shlomo HaCohen Rabinowicz became the founder of the Chasidic dynasty of Radomsk which remained strongly linked both with Lublin and Apt.
Upon Moshe's departure from Poland, Shlomo was believed to have remarked:
'He said (Moshe Biederman) that he will bring the Messiah,
but I doubt it. He has merited to move to Eretz Yisrael and to be buried there' (Valakh, 2002, p.88).
How true these words were, Chassidim were yet to learn.

After crossing the border from Poland (a Russian protectorate territory) to Austrian Galicia, Moshe, his son Eleazar Menachem Mendel, his wife Matil and the Rebbe's followers stopped in Belze and Sadigera (Ukrainian: Sadhora; Polish: Sadagora), both being homes of the most recognised and admired Chasidic masters. Their courts were much larger and wealthier then the Biederman's, however Ruzhiner Rebbe (Rebbe of Sadigera) also

longed for Israel but his wish was not meant to be fulfilled. Rebbe Yisroel (Yisrael) of Ruzhin even asked Moshe to postpone his journey so they could travel together once his successor was appointed. Moshe, however, felt like he had been waiting too long anyway, being now in his seventies, he had no more time to waste. He left with Yisroel blessing, only to learn the Ruzhiner Rebbe passed away only two months later.

Before heading further South for Romania, Moshe decided to send his final farewell to his fellow Chassidim who were staying behind. In his last letter from Europe, Rebbe says: 'I have left my land, the place of my birth, and the house of my forefathers. Although the separation is painful, my great love of the Holy Land, and certain secrets known only to me, have strengthen me to throw all this way. My God help me in the path of truth, and help to accomplish my vision.' (Valakh, 2002, p.91)

What his secrets were, nobody knew. Was it his *mesira nefesh*, a conviction that pure and devoted prayers whispered by the Kotel (The Western Wall) would eventually bring the Messiah or perhaps an urge to fulfil his father's wish of aliyah - Moshe never revealed it; either to his closest disciples or to his two sons who accompanied him on this journey. Moshe's commitment and desire to settle in Israel, amazed and equally shocked many. His following was ever-increasing, his teaching known and admired nationwide, his linkage with the biggest Chasidic dynasties of the time, sealed by his own and his children's marriages. Those who opposed as well as those who supported Rebbe Biederman's pilgrimage had not believed at first that he would ever be able to raise enough funding to make his dreams come true.

Even Shlomo of Radomsk once admitted, he was sure Moshe would never gather enough resources to finance the journey. (Rabinowicz, 1982)

In the Jewish month of elul (July/August) , Moshe Biederman, his two sons with their families and ten closest disciples finally boarded a ship in Romania and sailed across the Black Sea to Istanbul (Constantinople), the capital of the Ottoman Empire. It was certainly the most dangerous part the journey. It was not unusual for ships to be overcrowded and therefore more likely to sink even during a lighter storm. The path to Israel was far from smooth and it would be two months before the Rebbe and his loyal followers arrived in Acco (Acre). The voyage usually involved a few days stay in Istanbul, where pilgrims decided whether they wanted to travel overland with one of the caravans or sail across to the Holy Land. Moshe chose to sail yet again; this was not only a faster way of reaching Israel but also less exhausting, especially for a now elderly master. Even so, the voyage took as long as two months, but finally on the eve of *Rosh Hodesh Cheshvan* (beginning of the Jewish month cheshvan - September/October) of 1850, Rebbe Biederman descended the gangplank in the port of Acre (Acco). As Moshe walked down, he was said to have muttered to himself*:* *'*One day, one year' (Valakh, 2002, p.93).

No one really knew what those words meant but it was soon to be revealed. He had previously celebrated the High Holidays which included Yom Kippur (The Atonement Day), Rosh HaShanah (The Jewish New Year) and Sukkoth (the Booths Holiday) praying for the safe arrival and successful mission. The Rebbe and his companions travelled as simple Jewish pilgrims relying on their limited resources and the kindness of the local communities.

Moshe had nothing like the wealth and splendour of the Vitebsk tzadick who had moved to Israel in a more fashionable way. His first destination point was Tzvat famously known as the city of mystics. Over the centuries, Tzvat experienced the drift of exiled Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews and eventually the growth of the kabbalistic studies of which the school of Isaac Solomon Luria had probably the biggest impact of Jewish spirituality. His only known book was a commentary on *Zohar* (the kabbalistic bible) but his teaching had a mesmerising effect on the wide circle of students who would popularise it after his death.

Lurianic kabbalah introduced intense meditation techniques concentrating on the letters of the Divine Names. Like many mystics, Luria believed that Hebrew letters of the Torah contain concealed meaning offering direct access to God. He also developed a deep messianic theory of redemption closely linked with divine cosmology. Lurianic theology had a massive impact on Chasidic beliefs and customs. It is still regarded as a normative part of Chasidism ranging from the highbrow mysticism and piety to common superstitions. It would be hard to imagine a Chasidic master not visiting Tzvat. Moshe Biederman travelled to Tzvat by a mule train and remained there for a short time, although the sages of the city wished him to stay and even take up a rabbinical post. Moshe's eyes, however, were only fixed on Jerusalem. His long-cherished desire of praying by the Western Wall drew him towards the Holy City like a magnet. No matter how much his family pleaded, he would not slow down:

‘As soon as I get to Jerusalem, I will run to the Western Wall. I will raise my voice in prayer. The Heavenly Assembly will shake, and the Messiah will come.’ (Weinstock, 1999 p.223)

Nevertheless, fulfilling his dreams came at a price. When Moshe finally arrived in Jerusalem, he was exhausted and his health was rapidly deteriorating. His age combined with the strains of a long journey and the harsh conditions of Israel resulted in failing health, to the point, where he was not even able to walk to his beloved Kotel.

Moshe was one of the first Chasidic masters who intended to settle in Jerusalem. Many tzadickim had travelled to the Holy City before, even Baal Shem Tov himself, but they had remained there on a temporary basis only, either embarking on a return journey or settling down in Tzvat or Hebron. Small wonder that the Jewish leaders of the city welcomed Moshe with enthusiasm and curiosity. Rebbe Moshe and his family rented a small apartment in the heart of the Jewish Quarter where he hoped to regain his strength and eventually, initiate his pious plan. But it was not meant to be. Instead of bowing before of the Western Wall, praying for the Messiah, Lelover was losing his bodily powers, soon becoming bed bound. He realised his earthly days were numbered and begged his sons to take him to the Wall immediately so that he could fulfil the promise given to his followers upon his departure. His devoted offspring carried Moshe, still lying on his bed- through the narrow alleys of Jerusalem exposing themselves to the disapproving eyes of their Arabic neighbours. Chasidic sources even claim that the Rebbe’s procession was attacked by bands of Arab youths standing on the rooftops and hurling stones at them.

It is important to stress that Chasidism strongly opposed the growth of Zionism and the idea of Zionistic settlement in Israel which became one of the sources of mounting atrocities between the Jewish and Arab residents of Jerusalem .The ultra orthodox Jews argued that Zionism was the outcome of Satan trying to seduce and mislead the Jews of Europe and pushing them towards an idolatrous scheme.(Domb, 1958). Initiated by the movement of the Hungarian Jew - Theodor Herzl - based on the principles of Jewish Enlightenment, Haskalah, and fuelled by an increasing mood of despair among assimilated Jews, Zionism promised to recreate a Jewish state in Israel. Herzl strongly believed that in the climate of growing persecution and reinforced by anti-Semitic penetration of politics. (Johnson, 1988) Jews could neither fight nor accept threatening conditions. Therefore, it was argued, they should pin their hopes on creating a new state.

Herzl contended that it was not the masses of Eastern European Jews, who undoubtedly suffered great persecutions under tsarist rule, but the Western sages of ‘civilised’ and assimilated Jews of Western Europe who were most oppressed After centuries of sometimes turbulent coexistence, which despite this generated great cultural achievements - the Jews of Germany, Austria and France faced ever greater ostracism. Those, who decided to convert, were not be recognised as Jews by their own kind any more, yet nor were they welcomed by predominantly Christian society. Those who followed Haskalah and the process of assimilation trod a thin line, risking social and cultural ignominy, neither accepted nor respected. Even the greatest fortunes could not buy acceptance. Haskalah soon seemed hopeless in the face of new walls of prejudice and fear. Many felt that if the

Jew no longer acted as a Jew and tried instead to blend in and to adapt to modern society, he could not be classified and therefore seemed even more threatening, perhaps even conspiring against the Christian world.

Chasidism as well as western Christian societies furiously attacked the secular teaching of Zionism, but obviously, for different reasons. One of the Chasidic masters of Lublin, Rebbe Zadok wrote:
'Jerusalem is the loftiest of summits to which the hearts of Israel are directed...But I fear lest my departure and ascent to Jerusalem might seem like a gesture of approval of Zionist activity. I hope unto the Lord...the Day of Redemption will come. I wait and remain watchful for the feet of his anointed. Yet through three hundred scourges of iron afflict me. I will not move from my place. I will not ascend for the sake of Zionism.' (Domb,1958, p.192)

For many Chassidim, Zionism was even worse than a false Messiah offering the salvation and redemption of the Jewish nation, where it was believed, only God could achieve this. Others argued that Zionism was nothing other than a satanic religion where God was simply dismissed and replaced by politics and greed. Orthodox sages feared that the secular state proposed by Herzl and his supporters would not last and eventually would be destroyed like the Tower of Babylon, a biblical symbol of greed and blasphemy. When Herzl entered Israel, Chasidic Rebbe Joseph Hayim Sonnenfield exclaimed: 'Evil entered with him, and we do not yet know what we have to do against the destroyers of the totality of Israel!' (Johnson, 1988, p. 404).

Chasidic migrations of the nineteenth century were driven by spiritual urges, therefore for decades orthodox masters abstained from any form of political involvement. Even today many Chasidic groups oppose the State of Israel not only verbally, but also by excluding themselves from any direct interaction with the state, refusing to vote, serve in the army or accept state benefits. It is important to stress, that Chasidic families are predominantly nuclear often with as many as ten or more children, where the only source of income is generated by small businesses or a yeshiva scholarship. By rejecting financial help offered by the state, many families practically live below the poverty line.

Initial animosities between the Arabs and Chasidic Jews might have been triggered by the increased migration of both orthodox and Zionistic newcomers. Jews were no longer limited to the Old Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem but instead started to settle in new areas often historically occupied by their Arabic neighbours. Many pro-Zionists left the Old Continent with businesses on their minds and greatly encouraged by Zionist propaganda sensed new opportunities. Such expectations were clearly not welcome to the local inhabitants, who saw yet more Jewish invaders ready to take over their properties and businesses. To make matters even worse, those strange infidels wearing rustic clothes (including full length caftans, broad fur hats and long white socks in a baking Jerusalem sun) spoke a language that they had never heard before; Chasidic Hebrew was limited and barely comprehensible. To add to a general strangeness, Chasidic prayers and ceremonies used to be very noisy affairs. Chassidim would pray very vigorously, often shouting, singing aloud and clapping their hands.

They would also take pride in a group dance and indulge in wine and tobacco while celebrating. It must have been a shocking sight for their brothers in faith, not to mention the Arabs of Israel, who were more familiar with some Sephardic traditions rather than Ashkenazi customs.

The Chassidim of Lelov also placed great emphasis of their midday prayers which continued through the day until late afternoon hours. All these elements together must have created a strange and unusual picture.

The Chasidic way of life has always been visually and contextually arresting with unusual customs, strong bonds with their tightly organised communities and spiritual leader, as well as rich music and intriguing tales. Yet this world had been virtually unknown to outsiders and, as a result many false generalisations were made, for example: that Chasidic men only wear black; or that ultra orthodox Jews have sex through a hole in a sheet. The latter being probably a misinterpretation of strict sex separation practiced by the majority of ultra – orthodox Jewish groups. In some Chasidic sects, males over the age of nine cannot touch members of the opposite sex other than their wives and they are not allowed to show any affection in public. Furthermore, many even go as far as to avoid any eye contact with the opposite sex out of modesty. (Fader, 2009, p.194)

Some ultra-orthodox groups have a uniform dress code and others do not. Nor do their clothes have to be exclusively black as long as they are modest and conservative. This derived partly from a time when dark dyes where very expensive, therefore black was reserved for sacred days only. The Lelovers follow these traditions wearing dark garbs accompanied by a white shirt and a fur-brimmed hat (or a fur hat) and an obligatory garment with

fringes. Traditionally, the best clothes are worn on the Sabbath and include pure silk black or brocaded caftans and white socks, although in the presence of a rebbe and during public gatherings, black garb is preferred to avoid outshining the rebbe. Chasidic customs of modesty prohibit mixed social events, therefore women are excluded from any public gatherings. This subculture is primarily defined by male religious studies, rituals, and legal obligations establishing and preserving a masculine standard often incomprehensible to outsiders.

It was not meant to be for Rebbe Moshe Biederman to visit and pray at the Western Wall. Despite numerous attempts, it became obvious to his sons that they would not be able to pass through the Arabic Quarter and they eventually turned back. That very same day, Rebbe Moshe became even weaker and passed away at the age of seventy-four, exactly seventy four days after arriving in Israel. His followers believed he was allowed one day in the Holy Land for each year of his life. He too, had told his Chassidim in Poland: 'Days will speak...' (Ṿalakh, 2002).
Thus Moshe's plan to hasten Redemption failed. He fulfilled his dream of relocating to Israel but his abrupt death made it impossible to pray at the Kotel and to bring the Messiah down to Earth. Because of his short residency in Eretz Israel he neither had time to establish a Chasidic court nor to organise his little community.

Nevertheless, he was one of the first ultra - orthodox rebbes to settle in Jerusalem which encouraged many who followed to make their home in the Holy City. His determination and devotion gave a signal to the Jews of Eastern Europe and proved that Chasidic Jews could actually make

Israel their home and spiritual oasis. Moshe's two sons Eleazar Menachem Mendel and Yittzchok Dovid honoured their father by burying him next to what was believed to be the grave of the prophet Zechariach in Jerusalem. According to non-Chasidic sources, Moshe Biederman died on the 18th of December 1850, however, 'Sefer Kodesh Hilulim' which tells the story of Moshe's life and death claims he passed away in January 1852 (13th tevet 1851). It is important to emphasise once more that Chasidic sources pay far more attention to those days that can be linked to important dates from Chasidic or Jewish history in general, such as festive days, rather than precise anniversaries. These anniversaries are known in Yiddish as a 'Yortsayt' A Yortsayt:can be observed for any relative but it is usually primarily reserved for parents and its celebrations takes place at home, in a synagogue or at a cemetery.

It was Moshe's dream to be buried close to the tomb of prophet Zecharia believed to be built on the lower western foothills of the Mount of Olives, facing the old city of Jerusalem. In accordance with his will, Rebbe Moshe Biederman was buried in a large cemetery, in a prime location of Jerusalem, among thousands of ancient Jewish burials. As we can imagine, such an honour came at a price but Moshe had never accumulated great wealth. His journey to Jerusalem consumed the majority of his resources and both Eleazar and Dovid were very unlikely to have been able to afford the purchase of the plot single-handedly. Legend has it, the burial plot was donated to Moshe's sons by an unknown Sephardic scholar who saw

Rebbe Moshe in his dream requesting his very special burial site (Anon, 2005)

Although Rebbe Biederman did not manage to establish a Chasidic court in Jerusalem nor manage to hasten the Redemption, he left two devoted disciples – his sons. They would live a life of hardship, destitution and unwavering sacrifice as well as determination to strengthen the Chasidic community in Jerusalem. His descendants undoubtedly left their impact on the Old Yishuv (old Jewish community in Israel).

Chapter Five

Lelov-and its many branches.

The following discussion is intended to present an original but descriptive insight into the Lelov community in Israel. It draws attention to its social and religious dynamics but does not deal with the truth or falsity of the image of the community and its leadership created in Chasidic sources, often based on oral tradition and to some extent, mythologised.

The journey from theory and dreams to their practical realisation is not always smooth. Social and historic reality can impede and jeopardise the attainment of the desired goals. Rebbe Eleazar Menachem Mendel Biederman was born in 1827 and as a young man accompanied his father, Moshe, on his epic journey to Israel, where he soon faced great challenges. Moshe's early death and the lack of an established community proved to be a real test of faith and commitment for this young man with a growing family. At the time, Rebbe Eleazar Mendel's family had, perhaps, been the only strictly Chasidic community in Jerusalem. Atrocities between the Arabs and Jews were becoming more frequent as were attacks between Jews.

For centuries, Sephardic Jews had been arriving in Jerusalem, leaving their North African settlements to create new communities in The Holy City. From the very beginning of an Ashkenazi influx, the Sephardic Jews of Jerusalem seemed to be against their establishment there. One of their main concerns was that an Ashkenazi community might request a share of funds collected on behalf of Jerusalem and might even undertake

independent collection efforts, particularly in Western Europe, thereby reducing the income of the Sephardic community. (Morgenstern, 2006) Sephardic Jews also feared that increased numbers of settlers, especially Eastern European newcomers whose Hebrew and knowledge of local customs was limited, would trigger further anti-Semitic incidents.

This chapter will analyse the life and achievements of a newly established Lelov community in Israel. Through the historic materials and legends collated by the group over nearly two centuries of settlement in the Holy Land, their efforts to rebuild and redeem Chasidic community will be presented. The powerful sense of duty to migrate to the Land of Israel and firmly establish a new settlement there resulted in many personal self-sacrifices but the Chasidic community survived against all the odds and grew to become one of the driving religious forces of Israel.

5.1.Rebbe Eleazar Menachem Mendel and the Chasidic settlement in Israel.

Eleazar Menachem's father, Rebbe Moshe Biederman migrated to and settled in Israel for the purpose of redeeming the country. He regarded the rebuilding of Jerusalem as one of the most direct ways to achieve his goal. After many years of struggle he finally reached the Land of Israel but. Jerusalem was to be Moshe's home for fewer than three months.

Many Eastern European Jews before him had arrived and died in Israel, choosing Tzvat or Tiberias rather than Jerusalem because apparently the conditions in the city precluded settlement there. Even Rebbe Nahman of Braclav, one of the most prominent Chasidic rebbes of

all time, never visited Jerusalem. Chasidic eschatology was not so much concentrated on the Holy City since it perceived redemption as an act closely linked to the spiritual and communal leaders and their followers rigidly fulfilling the mitzvots, rather than to places.

Nonetheless, the descendants of Rebbe Moshe had an impact on the growing community and inspired some Chasidic settlement in Jerusalem. The Ruzhiner Rebbe once blessed Moshe, saying that his dynasty would never be extinguished and that glory would be brought to his name. This simple prediction was fulfilled in Rebbe Eleazar Menachem Mendel, who not only continued the dynasty in Israel, but also eventually became the rebbe of all the Chassidim in Jerusalem. Just like his father and his grandfather, Rebbe Eleazar was an incredibly eager and bright Torah student, who would learn and pray extensively from a very early age. According to Chasidic legends, little Eleazar would run to school (cheder) forgetting about his breakfast. He was married off young. His wife, Matil Feigeh, was the granddaughter of the Seer of Lublin who was chosen very carefully to strengthen the yihus. She would accompany Eleazar on his journey to Israel and for many years thereafter, still as a young woman suffering great poverty and hardship. For a long time, Chasidic fundraisers had concentrated their efforts on supporting ultra-orthodox communities of Tzvat and Tiberias, while Jerusalem was at the mercy of local Jews.

However, against all odds it was the Holy City that continued to attract an increasing number of the Eastern and Central European Jewish migrants. After the disappointment of 5600 (1840), a year by many

perceived as a time of Redemption, messianic moods seemed to be cooling down. The appearance of the Messiah, hugely anticipated especially among the Eastern European orthodox and ultra-orthodox circles of Israel, failed to in 1840 or in the ensuing years. As a result Jewish newcomers had to re-evaluate their positions. During the second half of the nineteenth century, a new wave of settlers emerged. Fuelled by different ideological causes, this time the migrants started deliberately to build their lives in Jerusalem.

For over a century, Chasidic followers of Eastern Europe had led the conservative front against Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah), secularisation, nationalisation and later, Zionism. It can be argued that Chasidic aliyah was one of the ways to preserve the ultra-orthodox identity as well as to escape inevitably approaching modernity. In 1848 many European countries experienced a series of political upheavals due to a widespread dissatisfaction with the political leadership combined with the upsurge of nationalism. The Spring of Nations as it is also known exposed a growing need for restructuring European societies. Although it only swept through the western borders of partitioned Poland, essentially it had a profound impact on both Polish and Jewish communities.

Regardless of advancing industrialisation and modernisation, Jewish society at large remained culturally foreign and linguistically separate from the Poles. The majority of Jewish inhabitants of Poland continued to live in shtetl which connoted Jewish settlement but also became a symbol of separation and traditionalism. For Chasidic Jews, shtetl was also an enclave of religious liberty, a place where one could live close to the master;

cultivate traditions and customs relatively undisturbed. However, at the dawn of modernity when many Jews were abandoning their standard way of Yiddish life, moving out from typical Jewish towns to join urban masses, Chasidism had to face changes in the dynamic of the shtetl as well. Moreover, in the regions incorporated into the Russian Empire Chasidism became the subject of either radical assimilation or complete separation aiming to limit any contacts with non – Jews. Although Jews in places like Lelov annexed by Russia after 1815 experienced perhaps less oppression than their fellow believers in the Pale of Settlement, they still had to battle against numerous attempts at 'civilising' and 'modernising' Jewish communities. For that reason, Israel seemed like the only place where traditionalism and Chasidic identity could be continued and preserved.

On the eve of modernity, under Ottomanian rule, the Jews of the Middle East remained generally poor, a community of minor traders, peddlers, bazaar-sellers, farmers and rebbes living off European support. Jews had also been involved in specific crafts and occupations as they were related to their religious activity and permitted under religious law.
As a result Jews continued to fill niches in the local economy and responded to the demands of the Ottoman authority. It was not rare to come across a Jewish butcher who would also act as a ritual slaughterer for his community. (Laskier et al. 2003) This ensured that the slaughter adhered to the rules of kosher-religious purity. For the same reason, many Jewish occupants of Jerusalem worked in all aspects of the food and textile industries.
They would serve their own community as well as the public at large.

Many Ashkenazi migrants, who had previously been textile mill workers either in Prussia or Russia, would continue to be involved in their chosen profession after settling in Israel. The demand for European style clothing among the Muslim population began to grow after the Crimean War (1854-1856) as did the need for European tailors. Jewish tailors grabbed this opportunity, soon monopolising the sector almost completely.

For the majority of Jews, their beliefs were a private concern not to be imposed on or ruled by any governments. In the Ottoman Empire which for centuries had been a multicultural melting pot, the Jewish community remained divided by cultural, ethnic, linguistic but also religious origins. The arrival of Eastern European Jewry at the beginning of the nineteenth century resulted in the continuous polarisation of Jewish community in Israel. Any efforts to settle in Jerusalem had met intense opposition from various groups which feared the political and economic consequences.

By the time the Lelov rebbes arrived in Jerusalem, another Eastern European group had already established itself there. Known as *Perushim,* the followers of the Vilna Gaon (Genius from Vilna) who strongly opposed the Chassidim, started to move to Israel in 1800, initially settling in Tzvat. However, following an outbreak of the plague and an earthquake which destroyed many properties, preceded by growing prosecution by the local Ottoman government, the Perushim relocated to Jerusalem.

Their persistence and determination eventually paid off and they were granted permission to settle in Jerusalem, becoming the city's first Eastern European community in centuries. The Perushim feared that all their efforts, financial sacrifices and still very uncertain future in Jerusalem

could be jeopardised by the arrival of yet another Ashkenazi group, a group which ideologically represented everything that their own leader had been fighting against. Besides that, in their minds they were concerned that the Ashkenazi Jews in general, would be made responsible for obligations that dated back to Judah Chasid. (Morgenstern, 2006).There was a rumour circulating the Arabic creditors would hold any Ashkenazi Jew responsible for those historic debts. The Perushim had therefore tried to draw ideological, ethnic and religious boundaries between themselves and any Chasidic groups arriving and living in Jerusalem.

For Chasidic circles, the situation continued to be difficult. The Jewish fundraisers of Europe sent the majority of their donations to either traditional rabbinic settlers like the Perushim, or to the Chasidic yishuv in Tzvat. Consequently, the first Chasidic families of Jerusalem including Rebbe Eleazar Mendel's relatives received no financial aid at all. According to Chasidic sources like *Tiferes Beis Dovid,* their poverty was so terrible that Eleazar and his wife Feigl would walk to the Jerusalem bazaar each night to collect scattered grains and fruit. Rebbetzin used to then cook these into porridge and serve it in the family's one bowl, with children often fighting over the bigger portion. The Rebbe's wife tried to conceal their difficulties as well as she could, never uttering a word of complaint and even pretending to cook hot food before the Sabbath so nobody felt pity for them. She was said to put a pot of boiling water on her stove to make it seem like they were cooking too. (Ṿalakh, 2002).

Despite such hardship neither Eleazar nor his wife ever complained but instead tried to pretend that their life was like the lives of many other

settlers. For the Lelover Rebbe the only type of poverty that he would not be able to accept was the lack of the Torah and Chasidic teaching. He perceived his personal suffering as a part of a divine plan and never doubted its sense and purpose, sometimes putting himself through ordeals that for many would be pointless. The Rebbe's house was small and lacking in basic facilities. Eleazar had never left the apartment that he had first settled in at the age of twenty four after arriving in Jerusalem. This small neglected flat, almost a ruin located in a dark alley of the Old City has become the centre of the Chasidic life in Jerusalem, against all odds.

Wherever an ultra-orthodox Jew had lived, he always prayed to return to Jerusalem and learnt the Talmud that originated from Palestine and Babylon. His identity was shaped by the 'here' - usually a small Jewish town, somewhere in Central or Eastern Europe and 'there' – The Holy Land. But when finally this symbolic 'there' (Yiddish: *dortn*) became a place of permanent settlement, the first Chasidic groups like the Lelovers attempted to recreate the only world they have even known – the world of the shtetl. The general reforms introduced by the Ottoman government in the second half of the nineteenth century encouraged further Jewish settlement. Between 1856 and 1880, immigration predominantly from Eastern Europe almost doubled, with the bulk of the new arrivals settling in Jerusalem (Abramov, 1976, p.27). Many Jewish migrants, especially Chasidic newcomers, felt a need to draw a clear line between themselves and any other Jewish groups in Jerusalem. With the arrival of the Eastern European ultra-orthodox elements, conflicts began to arise not only between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews but also between the Chassidim and their

greatest opponents – misnagdim, represented by the Perushim. This ideological battle pushed haredi Jews into further separation which aimed to sustain their social and religious identity.

In Palestine, followers of the first Chasidic rebbe of Jerusalem – Eleazar Mendel Biederman could finally ignore the external world. Unlike in Europe, where regardless of a fairly isolated position of the shtetl, Chassidim still had to cooperate (manly due to economic necessity) with non – Jews. In Israel their interactions could be virtually non – existent. By establishing independent kollel, Lelovers were also able to distinguish themselves from other orthodox groups. It could be argued that the Chasidic court of Lelov – Jerusalem set the pattern for the entire ultra – orthodox community of that city. Strict observance of the religious law, the obligatory study of the Talmud was almost exclusively confined to the members of the group, as was dress style and the exclusive use of Yiddish (instead of Hebrew). Such dominant features were distinctive for Chasidic Jews of an Eastern European shtetl and are still typical for the ultra – orthodox communities of Israel, including Lelov.

The first Polish haredi Jews of Jerusalem had been motivated by an intense urge to live in the Holy City in accordance with the rules of religion and fuelled by the dream of creating a perfect ancestral homeland. Since Israel was neither exposed to the challenges of modernity nor Jewish assimilation movements this allowed settlers to transfer features of the European Jewish town to Jerusalem. The kollel established by the Chassidim would take responsibility for supporting all his members and initially its funding relied almost exclusively on charity in the form of

European donations. Today, many kollelim of Jerusalem including Lelov own real estate such as residential properties, schools and celebration halls which generate substantial income. For example, the Lelov community owns properties in the Varshe (Warsaw) neighbourhood of Mea Shearim. Nevertheless, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Jerusalem Chassidim owned virtually nothing. Many had never had much before the aliyah, even the tzadick – Moshe Biederman who was believed, as we saw, to live a humble and poverty stricken life in Lelov. Jerusalem did not provide many opportunities for enterprise. Indeed, it can be argued that there were so few positions open to the Chasidic migrants that they did not even try to enter them. Moreover, this allowed the first settlers to keep their identity intact, even if at the extreme price of starvation and poverty.

It might well have been Rebbe's Eleazer Mendel devotion and traditionalism that eventually won him a circle of followers. His fame began to spread both in Israel and Eastern Europe, where he retained strong links. Although Eleazar lived in Jerusalem almost his entire life and strongly identified himself with the community, he remained very close to many Chasidic leaders of Eastern Europe such as Karlin and Sanz.

It can be argued that sustaining links with the European community played an important role in preserving Lelovers' identity in Israel. Even today, when asked, members of the group describe themselves as Polish Chassidim, members of Polish Kollel as distinct from the Hungarian or Russian ultra – orthodox Jews.

Rebbe's purity and knowledge of Torah was as great as his kabbalistic interpretations which quickly brought him unlooked for fame.

The Chasidic residents of Jerusalem began to turn to him for spiritual advice, as had been the case with his grandfather and father in Lelov. As one of the first Chasidic rebbes of Jerusalem, for many, he embodied the tradition of an Eastern European shtetl with its Yiddishness, customs and leadership style. Despite many changes in Chasidism in this period, including relocation, its Eastern European roots remained evident, if in the names of the various courts - which preserved the names of Polish or Ukrainian towns or villages (i.e. Lelov) – and in the style of everyday clothes, religious lifestyle and even culinary traditions. All of the above eventually became a keynote of Chasidic identity outside Eastern Europe.

Rebbe Eleazar died at the age of fifty-five as a result of various illnesses resulting from poor living conditions, as well as exhaustion from fasting to the point where he became visually and aurally impaired. His life had been marked by self-mortification and devotion but also a sense of mission to establish a Chasidic court in Jerusalem. Neither of the above infirmities ever stopped Rebbe Eleazar from praying at the Western Wall on a daily basis. Jerusalem, governed by the Turkish pasha, was a city of many cultures and religions, perceived as a legitimate spiritual capital both by the Muslims and Jews. For many newly arrived European Jews, the Kotel had a deep meaning not only as the last remaining section of the Second Temple but also a place where God's presence-Shechinah is guaranteed. The Ashkhenazi community was even prepared to pay for undisturbed access to the Wall.

In the 1850s, James Finn, the British Consul at Jerusalem reported

‘I have experienced many acts of kindness from Jews in the Holy Land. Among other affecting tokens of gratitude, individuals have on several occasions resorted to the 'Western Wall' of the Temple to pray for my children, and also for myself, in times of sorrow and sickness. . . .
The Jews are humiliated by the payment, through the Chief Rebbe pays pensions to Moslem local exactors, for instance the sum of £300 a year to the Effendi whose house adjoins the 'wailing place' or fragment of the Temple enclosure, for permission to pray there; £100 a year to the villagers of Siloam for not disturbing the graves on the Mount of Olives; £50 a year to the Ta'amra Arabs for not injuring the sepulchre of Rachel near Bethlehem, and about £10 a year to Sheikh Abu Gosh for not molesting their people on the high road to Jaffa, although he was highly paid by the Turkish Government as Warden of the Road. All these are mere exactions made upon their excessive timidity, which it is disgraceful to the Turkish Government to allow to be practised. The figures are copied from their public appeals occasionally made to the synagogues in Europe.’ (Finn et al., 1980, p.130).

Over time, increasing numbers of Jewish pilgrims flowed to the Wall entrusting their worries and prayers to the last standing symbol of the glorious Jewish past in Israel, which eventually resulted in growing tension between the Jews and Arabs. For Rebbe Eleazer Mendel Biederman, visiting The Wailing Wall meant fulfilling his father’s wish as well as hastening Redemption. Chasidic Jews explicitly grounded themselves in the past, through cultivating a traditional dress code and interpreting Jewish history literally. The Chasidic tradition put an emphasis on collective

experience anchored in the past; therefore places like the Kotel have always played a significant role in shaping Chasidic identity. For the first Chasidic groups settling in Jerusalem, The Wall had become a centre of gathering, learning and teaching as well as a place from which spiritual guidance and religious strength could be derived. An older citizen of Jerusalem Isaac Ezekiel Yehudah reported in the 1920s:

'Tables were there, upon which were placed large lanterns, belonging to the German Jews, lighted in honour of the Sabbath. If, at times, my father, because of his business, came late, we used to pray there with the German Chassidim, led by their rebbe, Eleazar Mendel Biederman, and we would finish the Evening Service late, when it was already dark. A non-Jew would carry the lanterns before us, to light the way for us' (Adler, 1930)

It had been a custom of the Lelover rebbes to pray for a long time in front of the Kotel, often extending their prayers into the night. They would gather at a nominated place, often joined by the non-Chasidic Jews who, like Isaac Yehuda, called the Eastern European Jews 'the Germans' due to their use of Yiddish. The ultra-orthodox women often went to pray separately, in an assigned enclosure, as many Chasidic Jews strictly objected their presence while praying.

For many years before the arrival of the Lelovers, it had been believed that Jerusalem did not need a Chasidic leader since it had the Wall. One could walk to the Kotel and entrust one's prayers to it (also by inserting the kvitleh) instead of turning to a rebbe. But for the Lelov dynasty, the Western Wall became not only a symbol of their successful settlement,

but also one of the principal themes of their lifestyle and identity. Rebbe Eleazar of Lelov who had been buried at The Mount of Olives in Jerusalem was succeeded by his eldest son, Dovid Tzvi Shlomo Biederman who was also born in Lelov. Dovid was a unique individual who not only developed the Lelov court in Jerusalem but also maintained strong links with Eastern European Chasidism.

5.2 The dynasty continued. Rebbe Dovid Tzvi Biederman and his successors in Israel.

The main sources for the history of the Chasidic settlement in Jerusalem and Palestine at large are several letters sent by the settlers to their donors and ultra-orthodox followers in Eastern Europe. These, however, are more concerned with the issues of funding and financial situation of the Old Yishuv than with social and religious problems. It can be argued that it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from these sources because the first rebbes like Eleazer Mendel Biederman or his son, Dovid Tzvi were mainly preoccupied with resolving institutional and organisational issues arising in the new settlements. Furthermore, there is no clear proof for the hypothesis concerning the desire to establish Chasidic centres in Israel. Both Eleazer and Dovid continued to view themselves as part of the Chasidic tradition of Poland strictly guarding their customs and language. Unquestionably, their efforts paved the road for further immigration of local Chasidic leaders from Eastern Europe. Moreover, it can be argued that the leaders of the Lelov dynasty actively contributed towards establishing new Chasidic neighbourhoods of Israel like Bnei Brak of Tel Aviv and Mea

Shearim of Jerusalem. They became one of the first ultra-orthodox Jewish groups to move outside the walls of ancient Jewish settlements, eventually creating a miniature Torah town.

Today, Bnei Brak and Mea Shearim are the greatest concentrations of Chasidic Jews in Israel, with over two hundred synagogues, almost as many yeshivots and numerous religious centres and institutions. A home of over forty Chasidic rebbes representing various dynasties from the numerically largest Ger (Polish: Góra Kalwaria) through media active and prosperous Chabad to smaller courts like Ozherov (Polish: Ozarow), Spinka (Russian: Sapanta) and Lelov. While there are no Chasidic communities left in Poland today, the relationships between the rebbes and their followers once forged in the Old World are carried on within contemporary Chassidim in Israel. The ultra-orthodox continue to live, fight their spiritual adversaries and marry their allies in a manner they used to do it over the centuries of their European existence. Mea Sharim (Jerusalem) and Bnei Brak are in fact pre-war Eastern European shetls transplanted to the modern Middle East, miniature towns almost entirely made of pious Torah scholars and their large families. The nineteenth century Chasidic lifestyle preserved by the descendants of pre-war Jews, the haredi world encapsulated and protected by strict laws and customs.

Dovid Tzvi Biederman was born in 1844 in Lelov into an established Chasidic court and migrated to Israel alongside his grandfather and father at the age of twelve. Traditionally, he got engaged at a fairly young age of

fifteen, to an equally young Miriam, the daughter of a pious Jew-Rebbe Pinchas Horowitz, who originated from the Galician town of Brody (modern Ukraine). It had taken the Biedermans a long time to agree to the match, which was finalised during Dovid's visit to Tzvat in 1859. On his first arrival at Biederman's household in Jerusalem, Rebbe Pinchas Horowitz realised how poor the family was. He found Rebbe Eleazer's children including young Dovid gathered over one bowl of bran soup too small and too thin to feed a toddler, not to mention two fast growing teenagers. But Dovid's yihus, noble lineage, which according to the family history could be derived from the King David, meant more than any material wealth.

Young Rebbe Dovid had spent several years in Tzvat studying and living off his father-in-law, as was customary among religious Jews, but as time passed he began to long to travel to Europe to find himself a Chasidic master and spiritual guide. His father, however, strongly opposed this idea and refused to give Dovid his blessing. Finally, in 1865 thanks to a joint financial effort on the part of his father-in-law - who under the Chasidic custom was obliged to support the young rebbe financially - and European donors, Dovid left for Vienna where he first met Aharon of Karlin. Thus, just like his grandfather years before, he embarked on a challenging journey to the court of his future master. Traditionally, a Chasidic man on a quest to find a teacher was expected to visit at least a few courts before choosing a master. During this time, he would live off the generosity and hospitality of his hosts often receiving further donations which guaranteed the continuity of the journey.

Once in Karlin, Rebbe Dovid spent many hours both learning in Perlov's shul and through private study with Rebbe Aharon, immersing himself in the secrets of Kabbalah and Chassidism. From his master, Rebbe Biederman adopted the habit of intense study and fierce, often loud prayers. His Chassidim used to say that the spirit of Dovid's prayers was from Lelov, but the force came from Karlin. Rebbe Dovid's study routine was so intense that he would hardly ever get time to go to bed, usually sleeping by his desk and waking up at midnight to continue with his kabbalistic studies. He was also committed to helping the poor and sick eventually becoming the chair of the Meir Ba'al Haness Charity Fund. This institution was first founded by the Galician Jews (Poland) who came to Israel to spend a lifetime chasing their dreams of becoming Torah scholars. Many of them, just like Dovid's family, suffered hunger and severe poverty, being solely depending on charity.

Around 1830 Meir Ba'al Haness began to distribute small yellow *pushke (*charity box) to all orthodox homes in Jerusalem hoping they would be filled with a few Polish zloty (Polish currency). Jewish families from Galicia would spare whatever money they had left to support their fellow Jews and this good cause, so fulfilling a duty of tzedakah (charity). A few times a year, a local representative of the charity would travel around the neighbourhoods in Poland collecting money and compiling a list of donors which later was sent to his headquarters in Jerusalem. In return, around Rosh HaShanah - the Jewish New Year - the Jerusalem office issued receipts that were sent to every Polish shtetl involved, also attaching small Hebrew calendars (*luach*). Such a calendar contained Hebrew dates,

holidays and halachic times also giving the exact time when the Sabbath started and ended. Although only simple and cheaply produced, the luach used to be hand-delivered along with the donation receipts by a nominated member of a community called *gabbi,* an honourable volunteer wearing a traditional pushka.

This custom survived among the orthodox Jews of Mea Shearim who traditionally gave to the Rebbe Meir Ba'al Haness's charity before the Lighting of the Sabbath candles. Perhaps it can even be argued that the halukah system helped to develop an awareness of the real life in Israel. Were it not for the Ashkenazi Jewish settlers' reliance of the European donations, sending letters either requesting further donations or thanking for those already received, Diaspora Jews would never have known very much about the lives of their fellow believers. Seemingly plain and official correspondence between the rebbes of Lelov and their European supporters reveal that in late 1880s Polish kollel in Jerusalem provided support for hundreds of needy scholars and their families and the community was expanding far beyond its financial capacity.

Traditionally, there had been a large correspondence concerning both religious and financial matters exchanged between the rebbe, his study partners and benefactors. A typical letter of receipt would be a printed Yiddish text blessing the benefactors and promising them the prayers recited in their name and favour at various holly sites (see appendix 3). Nevertheless, the signal sent from Palestine to Europe was essentially indicating that the Jewry and the ultra-orthodox Jews in particular could not only survive but also thrive in Israel. Far from Western modernity,

aggressive capitalism, pogroms and demands for assimilation, Chasidic life and identity could develop in its own pace.

For many years, tzadick Dovid Tzvi Biederman supervised the distribution of large sums flowing into Jerusalem from Polish towns and cities, yet he had never taken anything for himself or his family. By then, his position as a leader of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem was well established and respected, he was also known as a great scholar and healer, but that did not have a beneficial impact on his financial welfare. Rebbe Dovid constantly thought about his fellow Jews and his love of them was as boundless as his great great grandfather's - Rebbe Dovid of Lelov. His devotion resulted in the establishment of a new development, in the centre of the so called 'New City', close to Mea Shearim. Dovid Tzvi and his followers both in Europe and Jerusalem contributed towards designing and funding a group of hundred and fifty new homes, purposely designated for Polish Jews. Today, just as hundred and fifty years ago, they are situated in a long, two-story building on Mea Shearim Street also known as '*Hekdesh Biederman'* or '*Betei Varshe'*.

Betei Varshe (Warszawa, Warsaw) became one of the first large residential settlements of Jerusalem built outside the walls of the Old City. Scholars like Arie Morgenstern (Morgenstern, 2006) argue that the establishment of new strictly Ashkenazi communities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv went against traditional Chasidic ideology of 'unless the Lord builds the house' and generated new orientations, according to which a religious leader would become responsible for meeting the population's immediate needs. These included securing continuity of financial support for scholars

and the needy, providing housing opportunities as well as employment. This concept was welcomed by newcomers, for whom finding accommodation and relying exclusively on halukah was getting increasingly difficult but met fierce opposition from older Ashkenazi settlers. The protests were mainly compounded by concerns about modernisation, decentralisation and the loss of Chasidic identity.

Ironically, Mea Shearim developed to become an aggressive battle ground against all changes in the traditional structure of life and against the establishment of modern life which led to increased aliyah of the Chasidic Jews of Eastern Europe. Many feared approaching modernisation and, secular education in their lands of origins, which prompted immigration. Moreover, the Chasidic community demands the presence of a tzadick, a guarantor of religious stability and identity. After Rebbe Moshe departed from Lelov, his followers were left in a spiritual desert. Facing a choice between joining a traditional rabbinic Jewish community of Lelov and searching for another Chasidic master, many of Moshe's followers decided to move to Palestine. How many Chasidic Jews left Lelov during the second half of the nineteenth century is unknown. Doubts exist about the accuracy of Russian census data until the end of the nineteenth century.

Existing sources are also often ambiguous about the scale of the outward migration. Additionally, for a long time the Russian government refused to officially recognise any divisions within Judaism simply classifying them all as 'Jews'

Bettie Varshe eventually became one of the first large residential settlements of Jerusalem built outside the walls of the Old City. The original

building, which has been altered over the decades, had some sixty-five apartments and was built as a continuous wall, in the traditional urban style of Europe, with a tiled roof and entrances to the houses from inside an inner courtyard on the south side. (www.haaretz.com)

The neighbourhood was planned by German architect - Christian Schick and funded by Jerusalem's Chasidic groups. Betei Varshe is the authentic remnant of an Eastern European Jewish lifestyle which perished in the Holocaust or simply disappeared under the layers of modernity. Built to serve the community above any religious and ideological disagreements, Rebbe Dovid's establishment soon became the subject of a dispute between Ger Chassidim and Naturei Karta (Guardians of the City), the organisation of the anti-Zionist ultra-orthodox Jews who refused to recognise and support the State of Israel. Today, Hekdesh Biederman remains the battleground between the groups often resulting in extreme and vicious attacks.

Throughout his whole life, Rebbe Dovid Tzvi Biederman constantly sought to ameliorate the poverty and suffering of the Jews of the Old Yishuv, never distinguishing between its many groups. His aim was to rise above any divisions and bring Jews together. Unfortunately the Rebbe's wish was not fulfilled.

All his life he had lived and served the growing community of Jerusalem and although, over the years, many of the Rebbe's Chassidim who migrated to America in search of a better life continued to insist Dovid did the same, he never even considered it. The Lelover Rebbe believed the place for a Jew should be in Israel close to one's ancestors, community and the Kotel, even

if this meant suffering hunger and living in an unstable environment. To Rebbe Dovid, America appeared to be a spiritual wasteland, without the Chasidic leaders, schools, mikveh and other establishments that every pious Chasid considered essential for Jewish survival. Therefore, he adamantly refused to go. There was only one person who, in the eyes of the Lelover Rebbe would be able to cope with the spiritual insensitivity of the New World, his nephew - Pinchas Dovid Horowitz, the son of Shayna Elka (who was the daughter of Eleazar Mendel Biederman, the Lelover Rebbe) and Shmuel Shmelke Horowitz of Jerusalem. Against all obstacles and his personal reluctance to live outside Israel, Rebbe Pinchas Dovid eventually became one of the most renowned and influential Chasidic leaders, the first Polish ultra-orthodox tzadick in America.

Rebbe Dovid Tzvi Shlomo Biederman died in 1918 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Shimon Noson Nuta Biederman (1870-1929). He continued Dovid's charity work, gathering donations both from Europe and America. Traditionally, a large amount of correspondence concerning both religious and financial matters was exchanged between the rebbe, his halachic dispute partners and benefactors. It is, however, fairly rare to find letters bearing his signature, because most of his known letters were written by his son Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov. One of the reasons for this might have been the Rebbe's ill health which resulted in him trusting many of the administrative matters to his son.

Rebbe Shimon had also been considered a Torah genius and great kabbalist of the Kabbalistic Yeshiva- *Sha'ar Ha-Shamayim* (Gate of Heaven), established in Old Jerusalem in 1905. At this time he was only

twenty seven years old. This is considered young among ultra-orthodox Jews and as an indication of lack of experience both in spiritual and worldly matters. Despite this his father's followers behaved humbly before him. Still, Moshe refused to lead them and waited another four years before accepting the Lelov leadership. Rebbe Moshe Mordechai, named after his pious great great-grandfather, the first Lelover Rebbe in Israel, was raised and educated under the watchful eye of his grandfather, Rebbe Dovid Tzvi and was just like him; Moshe was determined to travel to Europe to find himself a master. At the age of fifteen he was ordained a rebbe and left for Poland in 1920. Rebbe Moshe decided to settle in Cracow one of the most thriving cities in the newly independent Poland, located fewer than sixty miles away from Lelov.

Before the Second World War, Jews accounted for around twenty-five percent of Cracow's population. It was a distinct community, yet very diverse. Contrary to popular stereotypes, not all of them lived in Kuzmir (Polish: Kazimierz - traditional Jewish quarter of Cracow) and not everyone spoke Yiddish. Nor did they all wear traditional garb. Chassidim, who prayed vigorously, dancing and singing loudly, did not immediately acquire full rights within the Jewish community of Cracow. Large intellectual centres were exceptionally reluctant to recognise a Chasidic right to become a part of the Jewish world and this often resulted in excommunication and condemnation. In Cracow, Chasidic groups had been officially cursed twice before Kalman Epstain, the student of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk, who was allowed to establish the Chasidic shtybl. The Chassidim of Cracow, however, were primarily supporters of the Bobova and Belze (Belz).

The same applies to the Belze Chassidim with whom Rebbe Moshe Mordechai established a close relationship, later also connecting with Reb Avraham Elimelech of Karlin, who died during the Holocaust.

Leaving Poland, Moshe Mordechai was still unaware that the world of the Chasidic masters in Europe was soon to be destroyed forever. Chasidic centres in Central and Eastern Europe were completely wiped out during the Second World War. The Holocaust ended the ultra-orthodox presence on Polish soil. The Nazi plan of extermination of the Jews first targeted Chasidic rebbes - the leaders of the communities, who were subsequently sent to death camps along with their families. Traditional religion, beards, side curls, and distinctive dress became the subject of ridicule and humiliation. Thousands of Chassidim perished during the Holocaust but their movement and deep spirituality survived and, even today, continues to flourish outside Europe. Many ultra-orthodox Jews marched to the gas chambers almost voluntarily, without any protests believing that their death was indeed *Kiddush Hashem* - sanctification in the name of God. Some of them, for example Braclav Chassidim faced their death sentence dancing and singing, so proving – according to Marc-Alain Ouaknin - that even in the midst of hell, they remained human, with faith and spirit which would not be broken (Ouaknin, 2002, p.13). Although the Biederman family relocated to Israel long before the Holocaust, many of their relatives stayed in Eastern and Central Europe and perished in the *Shoah*. Among them, Rebbe Mordechai Biederman, the son-in-law and successor of the Sosnovitza tzadick, and his son, Moshe Biederman of Sosnovitza, along with a thousand local Jews were transported to Auschwitz and gassed on arrival.

In 1927, after six years of intense and diligent studies under the renowned Polish Chasidic masters of that period, young Biederman finally returned to Israel where he served as a leader of the Lelov and Karlin community in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak (Tel Aviv). He was said to have had a keen interest in Kabbalah and in practicing self-mortification and long fasts which, he believed, would bring estranged Jews back to traditional Judaism. Moshe Mordechai known as 'Admor' – an acronym for *Adonainu Morainu V'Rabainu*, Our master, our teacher, and our rebbe- was also known for empathy and love of his fellow Jews. Because of his intense commitment to serve the community, many people in need knocked on his door to find comfort, physical and spiritual healing.

The Jewish masses flocked to Rebbe's home both during his life in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, searching for advice and to experience miracles that Moshe Mordechai was believed to perform. Just like his ancestors, Admor Biederman used those opportunities to bring the Jews closer to the Torah and to help them to become more involved in the Chasidic way of life. Contrary to other famous tzadickim, the Lelov Rebbe never established a wealthy court. Instead, sponsored by various local and European donors, he built his own humble *beit midrash*- house of learning in Bnei Brak. The life of a simple unknown Jew was his concern even if it meant compromising the welfare of the Rebbe's family. During the Jerusalem years, several children of Moshe Mordechai and his wife, Rebbetzin Chana Kopp died of hunger and poverty in their childhood years and the remaining nine siblings, (among whom were later successors of the Jerusalem court. Rebbe

Avraham Shlomo and Rebbe Shimon Noson Nuta of Bnei Brak) survived thanks to the charitable effort of local businessmen.

Rebbe Avram Shlomo Biderman, the Lelover Rebbe of Jerusalem (1927-2000) was born in Cracow. He was only four years old when his father decided to finish his study alongside Polish masters and once again settle in Jerusalem. His father, however, always dreamt about expanding the Lelov court and moved to Tel Aviv where he remained a rebbe for a while establishing the yeshiva. Although, the first years of the British Mandate were marked by high hopes and in a relatively conflict-free atmosphere, this situation soon changed in the face of numerous Jewish-Arab conflicts (Avi-Jonah and Peres, 2003). This, however, did not stop further Jewish migration to Israel during the inter-war period. Furthermore, the post-war poverty as well as radicalisation of the political climate eventually resulting in rise of Nazism and fascism in Europe which also contributed to the increased migration of the Central and Eastern European Jews. Among a large numbers of often wealthy and prosperous German Jews, the Chassidim of Poland, Ukraine and Hungary also arrived. Within the period of seven years (between 1931-1938), the Jewish population of Israel increased by two hundred and twenty five thousand, constituting more than thirty percent of the total population (Avi-Jonah and Peres, 2003). With courts established in Jerusalem (led by Rebbe Avram [Abraham] Biederman) and Bnei Brak-Tel Aviv (led by Moshe Mordechai's second son, Shimon Nosa Nuta) the Lelov group remained an influential and important community but its spiritual leadership gradually declined amidst so many other haredi sects, often representing different religious traditions.

It can be argued that it was the appearance of other, often more dynamic and wealthier European Chasidic groups that led to the further isolation of smaller ultra-orthodox communities. Because of the popularity of Jewish evangelism or fierce anti- Zionism, groups like Chabad and Satmar continued to attract masses of followers who longed for a strongly established social and political identity and the protection of a rebbe.
In order to preserve their unity, less influential communities began to close themselves off not only from the external world but also from the rest of the ultra-orthodox universe.

Whereas at one time a Chasid's re-location might have meant a change in rebbes, this was no longer the case. Wiesel argues (Wiesel, 1982, p.209) that thanks to Chasidism, it was suddenly easy to be a Jew, an ultra-orthodox Jew; one knew where to go, what to do and what to say. This can be extended to the Chasidism in Israel. Haredi groups would find solace in subordination to the rebbe's will and strict following of his teaching. Moreover, this would result in creating a very specific sense of identity shaped within the micro-cosmos of a particular group. Born a Lelov Chasid one remains a Lelov Chasid, even if that individual leaves the community. Marriages outside the group are strongly discouraged and perceived as a threat to communal identity. On the other hand, the rebbes are expected to strengthen their yihus by marrying women from other leading ultra-orthodox communities. Marriage is therefore not necessarily a romantic affair but rather a contract often arranged by professional matchmakers.
It is supposed to prevent both parties from entering the potentially

dangerous secular world (by marrying a non-Chasid spouse) or, abandoning specific religious identity

The traditions of Chasidic families are maintained by their eldest sons and the torch of Lelov is currently carried on by Aharon Biederman. The modern Lelov dynasty, however, has many branches, with rebbes in Israel and America. During the last fifty years, Jewish world has experienced an obvious revival and there has been a rapid growth of Chasidic courts, this time not in Israel but on the East coast of America. American Chasidism is often associated with the events of the Second World War which prompted many ultra-orthodox groups to seek new settlements. Removed from their ancestral lands and sources of religious life in Europe, the wandering haredi initiated new centres. This intense community-building practice has proved resistant to the forces of assimilation that characterised much of Jewish history in America (Heilman, 1982, 141). Today, places like Boro Park or Williamsburg remain thriving centres of Chasidic life, models for their followers worldwide.

5.3. Chasidic Pillars of Torah. The Lelov dynasty in America.

Historically, America has been built on the foundations of religious tolerance which allowed various groups to establish themselves away from pressures threatening the cohesion of their communities. The majority of American Chasidic communities developed dramatically in the late 1940s and early 1950s, often as a result of mass Jewish migration in the wake of the Holocaust. Today, it is estimated that nearly two hundred thousand ultra-orthodox Jews live in the New York area, mainly in Brooklyn. Modern

neighbourhoods of Williamsburg, Boro Park and Crown Heights are home to an estimated sixty Chasidic courts, among them, the Lelovers.

It is very hard to obtain an accurate number of the followers of the Lelov Rebbe. Traditionally, haredi Jews are reluctant to count themselves or participate in any form of census. According to one of the pilgrims who visited Lelov in 2010, there are around a hundred Lelov-Chasidic families in Boro Park. Nevertheless, it was not New York that became home to the first Lelov court but Boston where, a small community of Polish Chassidim resided leaderlessly.

Rebbe Pinchas Dovid Horowitz, the grandson of Eleazer Mendel Biederman, was born in 1876, in Jerusalem. He was educated and inspired both by his grandfather, Reb Eleazer and uncle, Dovid Biederman developing special devotion to the kabbalah studies which he continued after his marriage to Rivkah Felshiner of Tzvat.

For many years Pinchas' teacher and spiritual guide, Dovid Tzvi Biederman refused to leave Israel and travel with his fellow Chassidim to America. He was a third generation resident of Jerusalem who strongly believed that his duty was to remain and pray for messianic redemption by the Kotel, just like his father and grandfather before. However, in 1910 Dovid Biederman decided that someone should indeed travel to America in order to support growing Chasidic community of the New World; he has chosen his nephew – young Pinchas Dovid Horowitz. In an unusual sequence of coincidences Dovid finally travelled to America although, for a

number of years, he has tried to escape his uncle's command to take care of the Chasidic flock on the American east coast.

In those days, Galician Kollel, a Chasidic institution responsible for the education and distribution of bursaries, got involved in a lengthy and bitter dispute with their European fundraisers. The accusations were serious enough to reach a point when the fundraisers demanded photographic evidence of people who were receiving the aid. This problem was not, however, a novelty. For decades the Galician Jews had been sending money to support scholars and the needy of Israel but it was the residents of Jerusalem who had almost complete power to distribute it according to their priorities. Only on rare occasions could someone from Europe get a real insight into how the money was shared, which obviously raised many concerns among the European agents. The Galician collectors demanded more clarity and transparency so in 1913 the case was passed to the Jewish court, Din Torah in Poland to resolve the matter.

Known for his broad halachic knowledge as well as knowledge worldly matters, Rebbe Pinchas Dovid seemed to be the best candidate to represent the Galician Kollel. Apart from a great grasp of Torah and kabbalah, young Horowitz had a special talent for mathematics and sciences in general, however, as a Chasidic Jew, he had never received any formal education. Nevertheless, this did not stop him from becoming a skilled constructor and architect who contributed to an expanding Jewish neighbourhood of Mea Shearim in Jerusalem. It was pretty unusual for a Jew from an illustrious Chasidic family to take up a paid job and even more

unusual, to become a labourer. But perhaps, due to the controversy surrounding the distribution of the funds from the Galician donors, Pinchas decided to be self-supporting instead of relying on charity.

In 1913 Pinchas Dovid was sent by his uncle and guide to represent the Galicia Kollel and act as one of the judges defending the Jerusalemite side. The issues were very difficult and both sides refused to give in so the tribunal dragged on for almost a year. In the meantime, Europe became torn by the chaos and atrocities of the First World War. Most European ports were closed almost immediately, making almost impossible to travel back to Israel. Rebbe Pinchas Dovid was stuck in Poland. To make it even worse, as an Ashkenazi-Galician Jew, although he had been born and raised in Israel, the young rebbe was still an Austrian citizen. It was not unusual for the Ashkenazi Jews who settled in Israel to keep their European passports, which provided them with additional consular protection. The Ottoman Empire of the early twentieth century was in fact a giant on feet of clay, torn by ethnical and political problems which intensified the sense of insecurity especially, among the Jews.

Citizenship was determined by family origins; so Rebbe Pinchas whose forefathers came to Israel from Nikolsburg (today's Mikulov), region of Moravia in modern Czech Republic, was a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Therefore, when the Austrian government ordered an emergency call to arms to send more soldiers to the expanding European front, Rebbe Pinchas Dovid was called up. To make it worse, at the time he was still in Polish Galicia, also a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The number of Jewish solders enlisted in to the Austro-Hungarian forces during the First World War reached three hundred and twenty thousand (www.yivoencyclopaedia.org). Facing the alternative of prosecution, which practically meant the death sentence, Pinchas Dovid reluctantly gave himself up to the Austrian authorities. It is unclear how he managed to escape the service since he was never sent to the front. Chasidic sources suggest that he had offered his services as a spy and was eventually sent to Greece, then still neutral but providing various supplies for both sides. It is probable that as an Ashkenazi Jew born in the Ottoman Empire, Pinchas was probably fluent in German, Turkish and Arabic, making it easier to pass unnoticed but equally, to collect important information. It is also possible that as a prominent Chasidic rebbe, Pinchas Horowitz was simply bailed out from the military service which has been a common practice, especially among the ultra-orthodox Jews.

He eventually arrived in New York in late 1914, leaving his family and followers in Israel. In 1916 he accepted a position of a rebbe of an orthodox congregation in Boston. The Boston Jewish community was a thriving and diverse minority, with many rebbes and scholars but the majority of them were of Russian origins. They had migrated to America either to escape conscription to the tsarist army or to run away from the poverty and oppression of the Russian Empire. Many of them worked long hours in local sweatshops trying to make better lives for themselves and their families. The work was incredibly hard and the pay ridiculously low leaving no time or will to pursue traditional Jewish spiritual growth.

Some Chasidic Jews did not want to emigrate fearing that they would not be able to remain Jews once sucked in by the American culture and worried about sustaining their religious identity, as well as difficulties over buying kosher food, observing Sabbath and educating their children.
At the time, the Polish Chassidim in America constituted a small minority with Polish rebbes strongly opposing Jewish migration. Before the Second World War America was perceived as a *treyf* (non-kosher) land and only a few dared to come to the New World. Even those Chassidim, who like Pinchas Dovid arrived there before the 1920s, had not intended to stay there for long. America, therefore, was viewed as a temporary solution offering opportunity to make some money. Most Eastern European Chassidim left their native regions to find material prosperity, sailing to the thriving ports of America, especially New York which became home for estimated seventy five percent of the Jewish Eastern European migrants (Worth and Asher, 2005).

Some settled in Boston or Philadelphia occupying dark, dreary flats called ‘tenements’; large families crammed in cold and damp rooms, with no source of heating in winter and no windows to ventilate it in summer. Many poor migrants could not afford to take any time off work so they worked even on Sabbath and festive days which was recognised as gravely sin. This however, was not to become a permanent set up. Regardless of the worsening political and economic situation in Europe, the majority of Chassidim still preferred to live in the communities of their forefathers or like Pinchas Dovid, in Israel. This situation changed after the Holocaust when

ultra-orthodox Jews, like other Jews had no communities or families to return to.

Pinchas soon realised that by moving to America, he had taken on a tremendous task of bringing the Chassidim from various background together but especially, leading them back to the Torah. He bought a house on Barton Street in Boston's West End where he established a synagogue, Congregation *Machzikei Torah* and the New Chasidic Centre-an organisation supporting ultra-orthodox Jews from various backgrounds. In fact, Pinchas Dovid Biederman organised one of the first Chasidic courts in America, known as the Bostoner court. In 1939, following racial riots in the West End of Boston, Rebbe Horowitz left Boston for Williamsburg, New York.

The Boston – Lelov Chassidim are only one group among many religious minorities in the American cultural melting pot. Like their brethren in Israel, in a bid to save their identity, they attempt to isolate themselves socially from Western society but also from other Chasidic groups. Their fear of loss of group identity, values and traditions being diluted within the larger groups surrounding them, and gradual assimilation makes such isolation almost a necessity. Over the centuries of their existence both in Europe and America Chassidim tried to differ from other groups in several ways, also by creating various methods of social control and by developing economic self-sufficiency.

Thus as previously in Europe, so in the neighbourhoods of Boston and New York they soon established almost exclusively haredi shops and

businesses, all closed on Saturday (Sabbath) and thriving on Sundays making it the busiest shopping day of the week. Janet Belcove-Shalin (Belcove-Shalin, 1995, p.212) argues that this had a direct impact on the whole Jewish community. The strong Chasidic presence in the neighbourhoods of New York influenced relatively assimilated and modernised Jews, many of whom eventually adopted an ultra-orthodox life style. It can be argued that *ba'al teshuva,* a term often used when referring to Jew returning to Orthodox Judaism, became an American Jewish phenomenon. While usually it is a newcomer who is absorbed into the wider community consequently, moving away from the traditional way of life, the Chassidim reversed the process.

The Chasidic group cohesion is much more dependent on internal identity than upon outside pressure forcing solidarity (Poll and Helmreich, 1962). Unlike in Western cultures, where 'identity' often equals national identity, occasionally reinforced by patriotic appeals, participation in military conflicts or even Olympic Games, Jewish ultra-orthodoxy is almost innate. One is recognised and therefore, obligated to act as a certain Chasid all one's life. Conversion often means social death, exclusion from family and community circles to the point that a person should never be mentioned again. Moreover, it is the rebbe who is the bearer and essential continuator of a particular Chasidic tradition and his leadership is unique in many respects. His self-sacrifice, religious zeal and also his teaching and story-telling help to consolidate a community.

Chasidic sages usually told by a tzadick during the tishes uncover stories of a community, reveal hidden layers and meanings concealed within the words; serve as a tool of spiritual revival but also, to strengthen a sense of identity and unity within a group. In 'Untold Tales of the Chassidim: Crisis and Discontent in the History of Hasidism', David Assaf (2010) argues that in their attempt to protect ultra-orthodox society from foreign influences, Chasidic stories offer unrealistic portrays of their masters and sages. Neo-Chasidic romantics like Buber, on the other hand chose to ignore any historical facts and analysis. What has survived in the haredi community is often an idealised echo of actual events aiming to consolidate communities.

But perhaps, it was this idealised history and strong sense of religious unity that eventually attracted a wide spectrum of followers, many of whom had never come across ultra-orthodox Jews before. The first American Chasidic court established by Pinchas Dovid Horowitz continues the traditions of the Lelov Chassidim. At the same time, over the years of its development within a diverse and multicultural society, it had created a unique identity. Although, mainly made up of the descendants of pre-war ultra-orthodox Jews, it also continues to attract numbers of Jews returning to the Chasidic tradition. So today, in comparison to its Israeli branch, American Chasidism is based around so-called invented tradition, the 'tradition created'.

This is also known as Neo-Chasidism, which was revived after the Second War. Groups of ultra-orthodox Jews, refugees from Europe embarked on transforming traditional Judaism in America and consequently, reinvented themselves after the Holocaust. Although representing different Chasidic

groups, mainly Chabad and Satmar, they share the idea that without renewal and intense outreach work American Judaism would not survive. The movement offered new understanding of Chasidism based both around European heritage and traditionalism but also, American counter-cultural values and styles (Lange, et al., 2011, p.334).

Neo-Chasidic genealogy is not so much invented, as rather re-invented on a basis of European and Israeli Chasidic tradition for example, the Boston Rebbe Chassidim who was of the Polish origins, yet aimed to be the tzadick of all American Chassidim. It can be argued that Boston – Lelov was in fact, one of the fist neo – Chasidic communities of America. By its involvement in the Jewish outreach projects in Boston and New York, for example in working men's synagogues, helping Jewish children, tzadick Horowitz was in fact bringing hundreds of mainly young Jews to ultra-orthodox Judaism. Rebbe Pinchas Dovid Horowitz's legacy has been continued by his children – Moshe who was a Chasidic rebbe in Brooklyn until his death in 1986, and Levi Yitzchak, who returned to Boston to rebuild its ultra-orthodox community.

Today, Lelov - Nikolsburg Chassidim of America retain their identity and continue to contribute towards the growth of ultra-orthodox tradition, however, their initial supremacy as the first and therefore, the biggest organised Chasidic community of America, has now been lost. In the 1950s and 1960s the east coast of the United States became a scene of a clear revival and rapid growth of Chasidic courts. After the atrocities of the Second World War, many ultra-orthodox Jews who have lost their relatives

and spiritual leaders in the Holocaust, decided to re-establish new communities in America and give them the character of historical continuity. The Bostoners have eventually been outnumbered by perhaps, more expansive and sociality active groups like Chabad or Satmar.

5.4. Lelov today.

The situation of Lelov Chassidim in Israel seems to be very similar, although there are several Lelov institutions in Tzvat, Bnei Brak and Mea Shearim. It is estimated that over a hundred children study in established by Avram Shlomo Biederman school*Tiferet Moshe.* Until his death in 2000, there were at least two institutions for advanced Talmudic studies (Hebrew: kollelim): *Or Avraham* (The Light of Abraham) and *Zemah David* (The Branch of David), as well as a soup kitchen, serving on average, two hundred poor and needy.

Until 2009, the Lelov branch in Bnei Brak has been led by Moshe Mordechai's son. Rebbe Shimon Noson Nuta was the first Chasidic leader of the dynasty who had visited and participated in the excavation of Dovid Biederman's grave in Lelov. He has travelled to Poland on numerous occasions, initially accompanied by a small group of his followers which eventually grew to become one of the biggest Chasidic pilgrimage movements in modern Poland.

Since the late 1980s when rebbe's emissaries finally established the location of the grave of the tzadick Biederman, ultra-orthodox Jews from around the world, mainly from Israel, America but also Canada and

Australia have been coming to celebrate the January anniversary of his death. It was Shimon's dream to be able to make an annual pilgrimage to the site. Shortly before Rebbe's death, in January 2008, under the agreement signed by Shimon Noson Nuta Biederman and the Polish party, Simcha Krakowski offered a donation of two hundred thousand zloty (around fifty thousand pounds) to the Lelov Cooperative, the legal owner of property and land. Chasidic community also offered to pay for the project of a new shrine and any documentation needed for demolition of the shop where the grave was located. Meanwhile, more than six hundred thousand zloty (around hundred and twenty thousand pounds) has been secured from the Polish state budget.

On the 14th of December 2008, after six years of intense negotiation, the grounds on which tzadick's shrine had been built, were finally officially owned by the Chasidic community of Lelov (Strzelczyk, 2008).

Although Lelov's graveyard was completely destroyed by the Nazis during the Second World War, its special religious status has been retained out of respect for religious Jews. For an ultra-orthodox Jew, the most important factor is knowledge of where the bones had been deposited, where they are in the ground. A tomb is treated literally as a place of a final rest. But it is also a symbolic space, a place of memory, a symbol of religious identity and a place of pilgrimage. For these reasons, it was crucial for the Chasidic community of Lelov to regain control over the *ohel* and neglected Old Graveyard in Lelov.

When asked, Chasidic Jews admit that they would probably not travel to Poland if the cemetery and tzadick's shrine had never been found. Although for the centuries Jewish and later, Chasidic communities flourished here, without the shrine it would be just another Polish shtetl destroyed during the German occupation. The identity of Chasidic Jews is based around the figure of a Chasidic master who happened to live and die here, but not around the Jewish past of Lelov *per se*.

The revival of a pilgrimage movement in Eastern Europe can be seen as part of a wider phenomenon. What is happening in Lelov also takes place elsewhere, for example in the Ukraine, where, every year thousands of Chassidim visit the grave of Rebbe Nachman of Braclav in Uman. As was the case with Lelov, in 1989, with the fall of Communism, the opportunity opened up for Breclovers to travel to the Ukraine. Today, it is the biggest known Chasidic pilgrimage that attracts as many as twenty thousand ultra-orthodox Jews. The number of pilgrims has grown significantly since the breakup of the Soviet Bloc.

Like the followers of Dovid Biederman of Lelov, Nachman's disciples have been travelling to Uman since the early nineteenth century but the pilgrimage has boomed in recent years. Yet wider access explains the phenomenon only partially. It can be argued that it is in fact Chasidic ideology, with its emphasis on love and joy of observance that as in the eighteen century continues to attract even non-practicing Jews. The same applies to Lizhensk, a small provincial town in Poland, former shtetl, where one of the greatest Chasidic rebbes was buried. Many of those who come to Lelov, also visit Lizhensk for Rebbe Elimelech used to be a teacher of Dovid

Biederman.

On the Yortsayt of Rebbe Elimelech, traditionally celebrated on the 21st of adar (in Jewish calendar: April), the town turns into the centre of the world with crowds resembling the beehive. Many of the Lizhensk Chassidim had lived there until the break out of the Second World War. A few managed to escape the Holocaust and emigrated either to America or Israel. Their descendants pilgrimage to Poland. To them Lizhensk is a mythical space, home of the forefathers, tzadickim, roots of Chasidism but also, place of villainy and genocide.

The Lelovers had been spared from the experiences of Holocaust. It can be argued that their connection with the former shtetl of Lelov is therefore different, seen through the prism of Chasidic story-telling. Moreover, in Jewish tradition shared destiny is often a prerequisite for shared practice. According to Jackie Feldman (Feldman, 1998, p.33) 'common destiny is expressed through identification with an extended family, and shared through continuous acts of remembering, often in ritual context'. For Chassidim, tzadick and the community is in fact an extended family. Ultra-orthodox pilgrims who travel to Lelov and other Eastern European gravesites arrive from different destinations. Although they do not necessarily know each other, however, they celebrate, pray and dine (especially during a tish) together like one big family.

After Shimon's death, his legacy has been continued by Aharon Biederman who was appointed new leader in January 2010 while visiting Lelov. This had a symbolic meaning. During the annual celebration at Rebbe Dovid Biederman's shrine, among lengthy prayers and joyful dances, once again,

the new Admor of Lelov was chosen; a leader of a dynasty that survived outside its native land but returned to Lelov to ensure continuity. Like his father, Rebbe Aharon resides in Israel. And it is the Admor who has the final word. As a leader of the generation, the descendant of great tzadickim, he has power and authority to draw the boundaries and decide what is right for his community. Equally, he is personally responsible for its material and spiritual development and growth, creating a unique net of dependencies unlike that within any other non-Chasidic group. For many, the word of rebbe represents the sum total of community values and identity.
The rebbes establish and sustain communities with their own personal characteristics which secure their existence and continuity.

As we have already mentioned, after the Second World War many Chasidic groups needed to 'reinvent' their leaders, learn how to attach themselves to those leaders in this new reality. This has never been the case, however, for the Lelov community. Their identity was preserved in tzadickim who reside in America and Israel and their story of Lelov told around the festive table.

In conclusion, it can also be argued that the annual pilgrimage gives the rebbe a public relations advantage and creates attachment and familiarity with the communities abroad and those who are not in direct contact with the group in Israel. Announcements about the upcoming pilgrimage, exclusively written in Yiddish are regularly plastered on the walls of Bnei Brak, Jerusalem, Brooklyn and Williamsburg in the months preceding the Yortsayt. Chasidic travellers frantically book their flights mainly with agents recommended and approved by the rebbe. Within a

short time the word spreads so that all Chasidic neighbours talk about the pilgrimage. Designated individuals like Simcha Krakowski are made responsible for popularising the Lelov pilgrimage, both among the Chassidim and Polish authorities. This increases the following and secures the necessary funding.

The perpetuation of stories of miraculous events, the wild imagination of the Chasidic masses, the charismatic personality of the tzadick as well as complex religious rituals make ultra-orthodox Jewish pilgrimages to Poland one of the most intriguing events in the history of Eastern Europe after 1989. After over a hundred and fifty years of setbacks under successive Russian governments, and the Soviet Union.Chassidim are back at Lelov. And it looks like, there are here to stay.

Conclusion.

The past twenty years have witnessed profound changes in the paradigmatic viewpoints of the Jewish presence in Central and Eastern Europe. It is known that during the last sixty years Polish inhabitants not just of Lelov but many other former Yiddish towns, managed to get used to the absence of Jews, forget their former presence; however now the region is experiencing a rapid growth of Jewish pilgrimage movements. Lublin, Cracow, Sanz, for example, also become sites of Chasidic interest. Partly as a consequence of political changes initiated in the early 1990s, a real evolution got underway in Eastern European societies, particularly in the field of Jewish – Christian relations.

The renewal of Jewish culture in Poland observed in recent years brings up a need for the verification of former concepts and perceptions but perhaps even a re-thinking of Central European history and identity.

A Polish poet of Jewish origins Antoni Slonimski writes in his poem 'Elegy for the Little Jewish Towns':

'Gone now are, gone are in Poland the Jewish villages,

(...) you look in vain for candlelight in the windows and listen for song from the wooden synagogue. One moon shines here, cold, pale, alien,

my Jewish relatives, boys of poetics will no longer find Chagall's two golden moons.

Gone now are those little towns, gone like a shadow (...) and shadows between our words (...) before two nations for centuries immersed in tragedies come together again. (Slonimski, 1946)

It has been twenty years since Chasidic pilgrims arrived in Lelov. This phenomenon can equally be seen in other places across the region, that is to say, Ukraine Belarus or Lithuania (for example) also experiencing a renewal of Chasidic pilgrimage movements and re-discovering Jewish heritages.

It was here in the eighteenth century that the Chasidic movement once flourished, now reborn. The countries are visited by Jews from around the world and more locals become interested in Jewish culture.

Every year, thousands of Chassidim make a pilgrimage to Uman, the provincial Ukrainian town where the Braclaver Rebbe was buried. The number of pilgrims has grown greatly since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1989, eventually becoming probably the biggest Chasidic pilgrimage in the world.

Hundreds of ultra-orthodox Jews visit Lizhensk too, once home of famous Elimelech of Lizhensk. There are also other localities in the region where only small groups of the Chassidim, affiliated to local, less prominent tzadickim used to live. This however, does not downgrade the appeal of the relics of Jewish heritage located there.

A renewal of the pilgrimage movement as an Eastern European phenomenon in general, has an influence on the ethnical identity of Chassidim. The experience of a religious pilgrimage reinforces sense of belongness to a particular group, allows to practice specific rituals and customs. This, it can be argued, it is not incidental. Modern Chasidic groups can be counted in tens if not hundreds with some like Chabad or Satmar attracting a mass following where others are followed by ten to fifteen

people. It is then crucial to reinforce Chasidic identity by participating in mass pilgrimage. An individual Chasid can only survive and respond to the challenges of the modern secular era within the boundaries of the community. On the other hand, the community has to change as well in order to be able to accommodate to the needs of its members. Chasidic pilgrimages to the kevorim are 'in fashion', no wonder almost every group embarks on a journey to the places of their origin. In the divided and scattered world of Chassidim, communities and their leaders often have to convince their members that there is indeed a future for their group. Future can also be presented through the prism of the past. While the identity of the Western person is composed of many often contradicting factors and complex elements that reflect the diversity of the society, Chasidic identity is completely different. It depends on tightly knit communities, regional identities. Their names indicated where they came from, for example Belz, Ger or Yerushalami, but not only that. Today, they also attest to the regional Chasidic identities and traditions, including the pilgrimage to their places of origins. One of the major questions is how Chassidim manage to retain their identity in the modern world. As previously mentioned, many do it by isolating themselves from the wider society as much as possible, building modern' ghettos', avoiding unnecessary contact and going beyond the original requirements of the Jewish law. However, it is also important to remember that the Chasidic movement also has an international dimension, many groups remain in close contact with other Chasidic communities in other parts of the world. Modern Chasidic pilgrimage can be perceived as a way of popularising and retaining Chasidism. On a night of the Yortsayt

members of a particular group come together to pray, celebrate and re-live the Chasidic past through the story-telling, dancing and singing. There is no division between the Chasidim from Brooklyn, Jerusalem or Antwerp, they are all members of the group participating in a communal experience of the Chasidic pilgrimage. Some scholars even argue (Levy, 1975) that Chasidic identity is not fixed but 'floating', something that can be strategically activated and deployed by manipulating various Chasidic symbols, for example a symbol of the Messiah used by the Lubavitchers to reinforce their communal identity. During his lifetime Chabad Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson (who led the movement until 1994) had been considered by many of his followers as the Jewish Messiah. It can be argued that this belief helped to expand the group and build a worldwide network of Chabad institutions and organisations to reinforce and spread Chasidism. Similarly, modern Chasidic pilgrimage movement can be seen as a cultural and social form employed to create a strong sense of community and regional identity.

Many aspects of Jewishness and most of all, Chasidism are created out of the history of interaction with non-Jewish cultures including Polish culture. Partly from a sense 'Otherness', partly out of pride in Jewish difference, Jewishness – at least as conceived in European culture – is the cultural ambience, not just the laws, surrounding what makes a Chassidim different from a Gentile and a non-ultra orthodox Jew.

Because one's Chasidic identity is the product of how one is perceived; one must perform Chasidism, by strict adaptation of religious rituals and following a series of anticipated behaviours that signify esprit de corps.

The pilgrimage movement is one of those important factors that allow one to be recognised as a member of the one particular group.

The Chasidic pilgrimage may also become a key to understanding and changing the perception of both Jews and Poles.

Chasidic identity is rarely based around history and memory of historic places.

In traditional Judaism, historical memory, as Franz Rosenzweig – Jewish philosopher observed, is not a ‘measure of time’.To Jews, ‘the memory of their history does not form a point fixed in the past, a point which year after year becomes increasingly past. It is a memory which is really not past at all, but eternally present’ (Rosenzweig, 1970, p.304).

Thus, it can be argued that history and historical memory is not just series of events that happened in the past, a diachronic past, but rather ‘continuing past’. It is a cycle of ritualised commemorations, or liturgical anniversaries, such as Chasidic Yortsayt. Furthermore, ultra-orthodox Judaism draws a line between sacred history presented in the Torah, Talmud as well as Chasidic sages, and profane history, history with precise dates and times. Legends and tales as well as prayers and rituals including pilgrimage movements could, therefore, be seen as crucial repositories of Chasidic history. The secular details of history such as wars, politics, and dates are seen as unedifying, considered as gentiles’ affairs. (Mendes-Flohr, et al., 2009, p.379)

It does not mean that Chasidic pilgrims remain oblivious to secular Jewish history of Lelov. Recent renewal of the pilgrimage movement in Eastern Europe awakens interest in Jewish past of the region. Unlike in Lizhensk or

Uman, Dovid Biederman's burial place (ohel) had neither been commemorated nor visited prior to its discovery in 1989. As it has already been mentioned Chasidic emissaries had to refer to archival documents and maps as well as testimonies of the local Poles and Jews. These had been scrupulously studied and reviewed providing information about Dovid's tomb but also about Jewish history. The search of Chasidic past of Lelov is, however, not conducted in an emotionally detached fashion. It is also search for legendary Dovid Biederman, a figure that inspires so many to embark on this arduous journey for a brief period of prayer. Both the organisers and pilgrims acknowledge that the journey seems unusual if not crazy. Some pilgrims only get a few minutes to pray at the Rebbe's grave before turning around and getting back on flights to Israel or America.
To them, it is still worthwhile although the pilgrimage is costly and tiring. Chasidic beliefs seem unshakable and nobody questions the purpose of a journey. Mass aliyah to kevorim (Chasidic graves), is quite a new phenomenon but it has already became part of Chasidic identity.

Zygmunt Bauman (1994) calls modern life (fast flowing, stormy, full of phenomena) a pilgrimage. He also writes about the fact that all phenomena in life are episodic, and thus man lives in constant inconsistency - because there is nothing stable enough to become absolutely certain of. This inconsistency also determines the absence of a specific identity, which is characteristic of the postmodern world, where everything is flux (Bauman, 1994).
Interestingly, Chasidic pilgrimage can be seen as the contrary. Based

around traditional principles and figure of a tzadick, Chasidic pilgrimage has been a constant event since the collapse of the Iron Curtain uniting not only Chassidim from different countries, but also worlds which have not met for long decades and in case of Lelov, for nearly a hundred and sixty years.

This work aims to become a sustained inquiry into the specific cultural practices of this particular community at one historical juncture - Lelov.
It also demonstrates how observation provides an interpretive methodology that allows understanding history of this place and those people better.
However, this has not been free of limitations and obstacles.
This subject is encyclopaedic and was soon understood to be a difficult undertaking. The decision to focus on a main lineage of the Lelov dynasty and its history became evidently sensible.
Additionally, during the process of research it became apparent that the wariness of the group would be one of the most difficult obstacles to surpass. Many Chasidic Jews met in Lelov struggled to understand why one would like to conduct research concerning their affairs. However, for those who live it the Chasidic world, their community is neither unique nor eccentric, hence their bewilderment. Furthermore, there is a tacit policy amongst some Chassidim postulating suppression of some especially sensitive aspects of the past and present for example, anti-Zionism, attitude to Gentiles and the Holocaust, and prohibiting those matters from being discussed publically; hence the difficulties in accessing information. This work however refers to a variety of sources also non –Chasidic ones in order to provide a wide perspective on the subject.

Finally, there is still a question of whether what is reported in this work can be recognised as an indication that the relationship between Chassidim and Pole site continues to develop and what (if any) potential limitations may occur. Perhaps, at least one of the parties at the time sees itself as an observer disabled from fuller engagement by independent conditioning for example, the language barrier, lacking knowledge about local customs and religious rites etc, and if that is the case, what can be done in order to achieve even closer cooperation. Twenty years of Chasidic (and Jewish at large) presence in Lelov still seems to be undermined by over a century of absence and historical turmoil that swept through the region, hence the need for further study.

Perhaps, both Chasidic visitors and Polish inhabitants of Lelov caught up in this process of re-discovering their past; seek to maintain their distinctive identity while still functioning effectively in an increasingly globalised world - challenge which is faced by many modern nations and societies. What seems to be important is that the two communities that once lived, worked, laughed and cried together in Lelov, meet under Chagall's two moons – shining above and mirrored in a frozen snow. On that night of Dovid's Yortsayt Lelov becomes *Lo Lev.*

Glossary.

Aliyah: literally, ‘Ascending’; emigrating to Israel.

Ashkenazi (m): German Jews; west, central and east European Jews

Baal Shem: ‘master of the Holy (Good) Name’; a kabbalist who knew how to use the power of the Holy (God’s) Name, also a learned Chasidic man.

Bar-mitzvah: initiation of a thirteen-year-old Jewish boy into the community

Bet din: Rabbinical law court.

Cholent (Chulent): traditional Jewish stew simmered overnight for twelve house, served during Sabbath. Similarly, ciulim, is a non-kosher (Polish) alternative traditionally served Lelov.

Court: term often use in relation to Chasidic community lead by a tzadick.

Diaspora: collective term for the dispersal and Jews, living outside Israel

Eretz Yisrael: Land of Israel, the Promised Land.

Exile: emigration of the Jews initially, from the Kingdom of Judah and Roman Judea, and later emigration from wider Israel.

Gabbi: person who assists in running the congregation services.

Gaon: head of Babylonian academy; in pre-modern Eastern Europe also head of a community opposing Chasidism, i.e. Gaon of Vilna.

Gvir: literally: rich (Jewish) man.

Gematria: system of assigning numerical value to a word or phrase

Halakha: a generally accepted ruling in rabbinical law; part of Talmud dealing with legal matters.

Halukah: charity.

Haskalah: Jewish Enlightenment developed in the eighteenth century

Europe.

Heder (or cheder): Jewish primary school.

Kabbalah: Jewish mysticism.

Kahal: served as a Jewish council or, as a decision making committee

Kellipot: In the Lurianic Kabbalah the Kellipot (singular: Kellipah) ate the ‘shells’ imprisoning the sparks of divine light exiled from God

Kevorim: Chasidic graves.

Kiddush Hashem: literally: ‘The sanctification of the Name’; it refers to sanctification of God’s name (Hashem) by being pious or, by giving up one's life, if necessary, rather than submit to the betrayal of one's belief in God.

Kirkut: cemetery.

Klezmer: musical tradition of the Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jews.

Kosher: food conforming to Jewish dietary laws, or kashrut.

Kotel: The Western Wall; the only remained wall of the Second Temple of Jerusalem.

Kugel: baked Ashkenazi pudding or casserole, most commonly made from egg noodles or potatoes.

Kvitleh: written petitionary prayer given to a rebbe or disposed at his grave.

Luach: calendar that shows the dates of festivals and, usually, the times of start and finish of the Sabbath.

Maggid: popular Chasidic preacher.

Maskil (im): member of the Jewish Enlightenment, or Haskalah

Mezuzah: small pieces Torah verses fixed to doors of Jewish houses.

Mikveh: ritual bath.

Mineg: custom

Mitzvah (mitzvoth): commandment; a moral deed performed as a religious duty.

Minyan: quorum; ten adult Jews required for community prayers.

Ohel: literally: tent; a structure built over a Jewish grave

Pale (Pale of Settlement): the twenty five provinces where Jews were allowed to settle in Tsarist Russia.

Perushim: disciples of the Vilna Gaon, who left Lithuania at beginning of the nineteenth century to settle in Israel.

Pidyon: traditional donation of money.

Pushka (pushke): (Yiddish) a little can or jar or box often kept in the kitchen to collect money for charity.

Rebbe (Yiddish: sometimes: rebe): literally ‘master’, religious teacher. The term ‘rebbe’ is often used by Chasidic Jews to refer to the leader of a Chasidic movement.

Rebbetzin: rebbe’s wife.

Sabbath (Shabbat, Shabos): dusk Friday till darkness Saturday; Jewish holy day.

Sephardim: Spanish Jews; Jews of Italian and North African origins.

Shechinah: literally: ‘dwelling’; the presence of God in the world.

Shul: Yiddish word for synagogue, a place of Chasidic gathering.

Shtetl: little town in central and eastern Europe, predominantly Jewish.

(Shtibl): (in Yiddish: little room); a place used for communal Chasidic prayers, usually less formal and smaller that a synagogue.

Starost: (Polish: starosta); a title for an official or unofficial position of leadership that has been used in various contexts through most of Polish

history. It can be translated as "elder".

Sukkot: Festival of Tabernacles

Tikkun Olam: literally: ‘repairing the world’; a belief that every Jew has a power to ‘repair the world’ by performing certain rituals and prayers.

Treyf (Treif): (Yiddish); non-kosher; impure.

Torah: The Pentateuch, the entire body of Jewish law and teaching.

Tzadick (tzadickim): a Chasidic leader or holy man.

Tzedakah: literally ‘righteousness’; commonly used to signify charity

Vaad Arba Aratzot: The Council of Four lands (in Polish: *Sejm Czterech Ziem*); the central body of Jewish authority in Poland from 1580 to 1764

Yortsayt: anniversary of the day of death of a relative or a tzadick.

Yeshivah: Rabbinical academy.

Yiddish: language of Ashkenazi Jews. It developed as a fusion of German dialects with Hebrew, Aramaic, Slavic languages.

Yishuv: a settlement; the Jewish community in Israel before the state was created; Also, Old Yishuv: Jewish community in Israel prior to mass migration of the nineteenth century.

Zloty: literally ‘golden’; since 1496 official Polish currency.

Zohar: the principal work of kabbalah, a mystical commentary on the Pentateuch.

Appendix 1.

Extracts from the informal interviews conducted in on the 24th and 25th of January 2010 in Lelov, Poland.

Interview 1.

LM: Hello, Sabbath Shalom. Do you mind introducing yourself?

MW: My name is Mordechai.

LM Where are you from?

MW: I am from Bnei Brak [Tel Aviv], Israel.

LM: Do you live there currently?

MW: No. I live in Boston, in America.

LM: What do you do there?

MW: I am a student at the local Lelov yeshiva.

LM: How long have you been there for now?

MW: Around three maybe four years, I cannot remember. Not too long.

LM: When did you come to Lelov for the first time?

MW: A couple years ago. This is my second visit but my family and friend have been coming to Lelov since the beginning.

LM: What was it like when you first came here?

MW: Hmm...Pretty much the same.

LM: Has it changed since you first came a couple years ago?

MW: I guess the number of pilgrims has changed. Somebody told me last year five hundred Chassidim arrived. I was not here though so I cannot be sure but it looks like this year less people came.

LM: Why is it?

MW: You know Admor Shimon [Noson Nuta] Biderman passed away on the

night of Yom Kippur [09/28/09] after leading our prayers? Because of that some people decided against coming to Lelov this year. Also, I think it is this economic crisis that makes travelling harder. Not everyone can afford to come. It is expensive anyway and we do not receive as much money as we used to. Less money is donated these days. This year two hundred people because the rebbe's death. Anybody who's male and a member of community is allowed to come. There is no requirement to do a pilgrimage however it is a great thing. You can pray anywhere on the night of the Yortsayt . And most people are from Israel.

LM: How do you get to Lelov?

MW: I came from Tel Aviv. I fly from New York to Tel Aviv, stay day for a while, pray, visit my family and fly to Krakow with my group.

LM: What about other pilgrims? Where do they come from? How do they get to Lelov?

WM: I know some people come from America, some come from Israel but do not go to Lelov straight away. Some Chassidut come from Amsterdam as well. And Ukrainian pilgrims visit too.

LM: So some pilgrims also visit other places in Poland?

MW: Yes. Places they go to are: Warka, Ger, Lublin, Pshishke. They ate going to pray. Main reason is Lelov but in a meantime they are going to different places. We usually come for four to five days like Wednesday to Saturday. Some have their own bus or a mini-bus. Did you know there was an accident on the way to Lelov?

LM: No, what happened?

MW: The driver lost direction and went on an unmarked path and fell into a

ditch. Due to the snow piled up in place, the truck was turned on its side. Eight pilgrims were in it but nothing happened to them, they are all safe. And after several minutes, a local goy came in a big jeep and pulled them out.

LM: That is lucky. Since you have just mentioned Polish people, how would you describe your contact with them?

MW: Polish people are very good, very helpful. They organise Cholent feast. The head of the town was there to greet pilgrims, supervise if we get what we need. I stay at the local house. They do not charge a lot and it is close to ohel. I do not have to walk a lot. We cannot walk a lot on Shabos [Sabbath]. Yes, it is all okay.

LM: Have you heard anything about Lelov and Polish people before your first visit?

MW: My friend has shown me some old pictures of Lelov. His parents used to live somewhere close to Lelov, I cannot remember where but they left shortly before the Shoah. He told me that it was the holy Rebbe Dovid who told his father to leave. He made a pilgrimage to his tomb here in Lelov. He heard rebbe's voice to leave Poland. He did almost at the last moment. So the rebbe saved him and his family. He is a miracle-maker that is why so many people visit his ohel today.

LM: What about Polish people? Have you been told anything about them prior your arrival?

MW: Uhmm....yes. Some Chassidut were saying that Polish people are anti-Semitic; they do not like Jews and can be dangerous. Like, they can attack us, the pilgrims but I do not think it is true. They come to watch us, take

pictures maybe we are weird to them? I think they are very interested in our culture and customs. And I feel safe here. Look, there is a police patrol there to protect us if anything happens. Jerusalem, Israel is not any safer. Bomb attacks are common as well as fighting between Jews and Arabs. People die there, you know. There was a big anti-terrorist Police group at Tel Aviv airport when we were leaving, to protect us. And a small Police group in Krakow when we get here. I do not think we will be attacked here.

LM: Does Lelov mean anything for you? What does it mean to you?

MW: Tzadick's ohel is here that is why so many people come. I do not think I would come if it was not for it. Without it is yet another Polish town. I know that Jews used to live here in the past but I do not think my family ever did. My grandfather and his father both lived in Jerusalem and never visited Poland. I am not sentimental about it. On the Yortsayt master's soul comes down to Earth, miracles happen so we come to pray here. It is our tradition and custom and belief which are important. We cannot move rebbe's tomb to Jerusalem so we come to Lelov.

Interview 2.

LM: How was Lelov like before the Second World War?

Maria: Well, a small town. The streets were narrow and cramped but there was a marketplace usually very busy on Wednesdays. It was the hearth of Lelov. Polish and Jewish people would come from the neighbouring villages to sell their goods there. Many streets were unpaved, and only had some sidewalks on the right side. Houses were rather small, one-story buildings some with high gates. Walled houses stood around the marketplace and there, to the right of the marketplace was the Jewish quarter. There houses

were mainly inhabited by Jews.

LM: Was there a synagogue in Lelov before the war?

Maria: Yes, there, when they celebrate now. Across from it was the graveyard and their school or something like this. Young Jewish students would come forth from there on their way home, usually shouting and laughing. It was adjacent to the synagogue. And the grave of the tzadick, looking like a little hut. You know, there were always little lights flickering inside. We used to go there as children just to peep inside.

LM: Were there any Chasidic Jews, like the one that come over these days, in Lelov then?

Maria: No. There were some Jews wearing long coats but nothing like this. I am the pre-war one. I remember the Jews. There were no Jews like this here in Lelov, like them, well, the Chasidic, who dress like that. They had their own synagogue, across from where the tzadick's tomb stood. I mean, yes, one would come across them every now and them but they were not local. I think they must have come from elsewhere. Sometimes Jews would set up their stalls along the path that led to the cemetery, surrounding the synagogue. I cannot remember exactly why they used to do that, because I was only a child but I think it was once a year. The path to the cemetery was filled people, and inside the hut too, with more crowds. I always ran to my father asking to take my there but he has never been keen. He used to say it was a Jewish festival, like our Christmas and as a Catholic I should not take part in it.

LM: From what you remember, did the Poles mingle with Jews on any occasions?

Maria: I do not think it mattered to me at the time. I was only a child but, hmm... I guess they did. We went to school together, I used to buy candies from their shops and we were always curious about them. I do not recall major problems between us and them.

LM: What do you think about Jewish pilgrimage in Lelov today?

Maria: Well, at first it seemed a bit weird. You know, they look different, we were not used to them but we are now.

LM: Do you know anything about Dovid Biederman, the tzadick?

Maria: Yes, to them [Jews] he is like a saint. Jews would come to his grave to pray or to be healed. As children we heard that he had predicted future of Lelov. Apparently, he said that the anniversary of his death would never fall on Saturday and it has not, so far. He also said that both the synagogue and our church would be destroyed, burned down but eventually restored but never to its former glory. Obviously he must be very important to the Jews if they still make an effort of visiting his grave all those years later.

LM: What about Polish-Jewish relations. Were there any Jews visiting after the war?

Maria: Well, Heniek [Szaniawski] used to visit for many years after the war. We heard that he escaped to Canada but it would not be possible if he was not helped by some people from Lelov. He was so grateful that he would come to visit them every time he came to Poland. We all knew him, I remember his as a child as well, his father worked as a mobile glazer and Heniek was helping

LM: What did you think when he visited after the war?

Maria: I do not know, I guess we were happy to see him. He was a nice guy

and brave as well. He was in the army, you know, he was a partisan. But I know some people were scared of Jews coming back to Lelov.

LM: Why?

Maria: You know, many properties in Lelov belonged to them [Jews) so maybe people were worried that they would want to claim it back but personally, I do not think they would, not now they have their synagogue and cemetery back.

LM: By 'they' you mean the Chasidic Jews?

Maria: Yes. We got used to them by now but I d not think they are as interested in us as we are in them. They just wanted to get their graveyard back, and that place where their synagogue stood. They come as pilgrims, we [Polish Catholics] go Tchenstochov sanctuary in August and they arrive here in January. If I was a Jew I would probably want to come to Lelov as well. And I understand why they do not necessarily bond with the locals. Just because I make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin Mary in Tchestokhov, it does not mean I have to befriend the locals. Yet, Chasidic Jews seem to be a very closely knitted community; they do not invite many local people into their celebration hall.

Interview 3.

LM: Tell me something about yourself. What do you do? How did you become involved in organising Chasidic pilgrimage in Lelov?

MS: I am a Polish language teacher and for the last two years the deputy head of the school; the vice-president of the Walenty Zwierkowski Cultural and History Society in Lelov. I have been actively involved in organising The Festival of Ciulim and Cholent in Lelov as well as annual Chasidic

pilgrimage in Lelov.

LM: Can you tell me something more about the beginnings of the Chasidic pilgrimage in Lelov?

MS: In 1988 from the initiative of the Nissenbaum Family Foundation Chassidim began to look for the grave of the tzadick of Lelov. They arrived in winter, a few delegates and representatives of the late tzadick Biederman of Bnei Brak, Israel. Poland was just about to start going through some major political changes, first democratic elections were coming up and everybody seemed to be more preoccupied with the later than the arrival of the ultra-orthodox Jewish emissaries. Nevertheless, Jewish delegates were allowed to go ahead with some initial excavation works. It turned out that Dovid Biederman's grave was hidden beneath the Cooperative pavilion, in a potato pit. After finding the remains of Dovid, Jewish representatives asked for permission to arrange a temporary shrine known as ohel. This was pretty much the beginning of the post-war Chasidic pilgrimage to the grave of the tzadick.

LM: Were you involved from the beginning?

MS: Indirectly but yes. I was a young man when the pilgrimage was re-established in 1989 but my family maintained close links with Jewish inhabitants of Lelov during and even the war. It has always been part of our personal and local history so naturally, I eventually got involved as well.

LM: How was the Chasidic pilgrimage like at the beginning and how is it like now?

MS: Well, as I said it started with a small group of the Israeli ultra-orthodox Jews. In 1989 about twenty pilgrims arrived. There were give a room in a

local cultural centre where they slept and eaten. I guess during those early days of the Chasidic pilgrimage in Lelov both sides, the Jewish and Polish one were a bit cautious. We simply did not know what to expect from them and equally, they did not know if they would be welcomed and eventually accepted in Lelov. Some older inhabitants of Lelov could still remember the Jews, mainly those who perished during the Holocaust but also those, who like Mr Henryk Szaniawski visited after the war. However, they have never seen or heard of Chassidim before. We need to remember that Jewish culture and heritage was not as celebrated as it now in Poland. They were not many books about it, not many people researched it, certainly not in a place like Lelov, a provincial village where people live at their own pace, far from cultural centres. People were naturally curious but I guess, to some extent suspicious as well. So were the Jews. They have heard so many bad things about Poland, Polish anti-Semitism, oppressions of the communist government, small wonder they were wary. When they first came, they just wanted to deal with the formalities and find the grave. In 1990 they purchased a pavilion in which tzadick's grave was discovered and consequently turned into a shrine. One hundred and twenty five bunk beds were also ordered from a local carpenter and later stored at the Cultural Centre. After a series of discussions a compromise was reached with the municipality Lelov that have allowed the store to be decorated as a chapel – ohel.

LM: Did municipality sponsor it or contributed towards the project?
MS: No. The whole project and the execution of a separate entrance to the tomb was paid from the funds of The Nissenbaum Foundation. It was a

difficult, transitional period in Polish history and we need to remember that Lelov is only a village operation on a small budget. However, later village-mayor Mr Janusz Szydlowski has made numerous efforts to support Chasidic visitors as well as to propagate Jewish culture in Lelov. Thanks to his initiative we now have a mini Jewish festival in Lelov [Ciulim-Cholent festival], in 2003 Chasidic pilgrims were granted a long term lease of the former synagogue building too. There have also been talks with the municipality to recover the old cemetery over which the Cooperative pavilions were built in 1970s. I know that the investigation undertaken by the Nissenbaum Foundation determined that there were numerous burials in a close proximity of the ohel.

LM: Will the graveyard be returned to the Jewish side?

MS: It is likely to happen but at the moment it is hard to say when. Both sides are currently conducting final talks. I know that the Chasidic party has already made some restoration plans. It will probably be fenced and a new shrine built over the old one.

LM: Can Chasidic pilgrimage in Lelov be seen as a unique event?

MS: Well, yes it certainly seen as such.

LM: Why?

MS: In 1988 when first Chasidic emissaries arrived there was hardly any interest in Chasidic matters in Poland. I would even dare to say there was hardly any interest in Chasidic matters in Eastern Europe. Nowadays we hear about different ultra-orthodox sects visiting Krakow, Warsaw, Lezajsk [Lizhensk] and many other sites in the Ukraine or Belarus and it does not sound like a novelty any more. But when over twenty years ago Sonia and

Sigmund Nissenbaum accompanied by the Chasidic guests and the only Holocaust survivor- Henryk Szaniawski stood before the Cooperative nobody expected it to turn into a mass pilgrimage. Lelov is not like any other Chasidic centre. There was not any Chasidic community before the Second World War, here in Lelov unlike in Lezajsk. If you go to Lezajsk and ask pilgrims if any of them or their relatives actually lived there, you are likely to get a positive answer. But not in Lelov. So perhaps, in a way it makes Lelov even more unique. Chasidic pilgrims come over not because of their sentiment for this place, they do not even know Lelov's history, but because their master is here. One of the pilgrims told me that Dovid's grave could be anywhere and he would still come.

LM: Do you think Chasidic pilgrims are interested in forging closer relationships with the locals?

MS: Hmmm...it is hard to say. I guess it is an individual thing. In some respect, those who have visited several times eventually build more informal relations with us. If they continuously stay at the same household they may become some sort of friends with the owners but there is a language barrier which makes forging such contacts harder. I have tried talk to the Chasidic leaders about the Jewish past of Lelov but they do not seem to be hugely interested in it. Sometimes they even ask why I am so interested in it. I give you an example. Once I asked for a copy of 'Migdal David' and they kept asking what I needed it for. They could not quite believe that I would want to read it, why somebody who is not a member of their community would want to read about their tzadick. Do not get me wrong, I did not have a problem with obtaining it, it is just to them it sounded like an unusual request.

LM: Do you think that the pilgrimage movement contributes towards popularising Jewish culture among the locals?

MS: No doubt about it. Although people are now aware that the pilgrims are not descendants of the Jews that used to live in Lelov before the Second World War, they still perceive the renewal of a pilgrimage movement as a local characteristic. It is still exotic but I have heard from many people, especially the younger generations that what is happening Lelov today helps them to imagine how Lelov might have been like before the war. Especially, that each year we get more Chasidic visitors. It is important to stress that thanks to the Chasidic pilgrimage many local institutions for example, schools have now introduced new initiatives aiming to popularise Polish-Jewish culture and heritage. There are local art competitions, like: 'Lelov-place of meeting cultures' or 'Children and Youth Jewish Song Contest' or The Festival of Ciulim - Cholent' which is always accompanied the festival of Polish – Jewish culture. Nowadays many locals perceive Chasidic pilgrimages as an inseparable image of Lelov which helps to make our small community famous.

LM: So what is the future of Chasidic pilgrimage in Lelov?

MS: We can only hope it continues and eventually becomes part of Polish and local history again. I do not think what happens in Lelov is so much about reviving the past. It is more about building our future together, remembering as well as educating future generations

Interview 4.

LM: *Sabbath Shalom*. Do you mind answering few questions?

AW: Yes?

LM: Tell me something about yourself.

AW: My name is Avram and I am from Jerusalem but I do not live there anymore. I am a student in New York now.

LM: Is it your first time in Lelov?

AW: Yes but my grandfather was born in Poland?

LM: Where about in Poland?

AW: Not far from Lelov, but I am not sure where from exactly. He left before the war.

LM: Did you grandfather use to visit tzadick's grave?

AW: Yes, he used to come regularly to pray at the rebbe's ohel.

LM: Have you heard any stories about Lelov from your grandfather?

AW: Yes. He told me that people would come to Lelov from all over. M' Lelov [Dovid Biederman] was known for his super powers. He could heal people that is why they were coming to see him even after his death.

LM: So Dovid was a miracle worker?

AW: Yes. Everybody would go to see him. People who struggled with their businesses, women who could have children, sick and poorly, Jewish and goys. He was a very gentle man and would never turn away a person. M' Lelov also used to play a flute or maybe a pipe. He liked music. He was lame but would get up and dance during a tish, on Sabbath. Even animals loved his music and would gather around. He was truly a saint.

LM: Do you know any historical facts about Rebbe Biederman? Do you know when he was born? Or when he died?

AW: Uhmm...I do not know exactly when he was born but I know it was here, in Lelov. I guess long time ago...When did he die? On the 7th of

shevat but I do not which year, to me it does not matter as long as I know when the Yortsayt is celebrated. Instead I can tell you how he became a Chasid. Once Elimelech of Lizhensk and Zusya of Hannipol visited Lelov and went to M'Lelov house in Bialeh. Dovid was only a boy then and his family was very poor and simple. They did not have yihus [lineage]. The travellers have been told that this boy [Dovid] once went to the local baker and asked for a bread roll on credit, because he had no money. He got the roll and when he left, the dough started rising fast. The baker could not catch it, that big it was. And it only happened because little Dovid blessed it. When Elimelech and Zusya heard it, they recognised a tzadick in him. And Dovid later became Elimelech's disciple.

LM: Why do you come to Lelov?

AW: It is our mitzvoth [obligation] to come during the Yortsayt. On a day like this, tzadick's soul descends from heaven and listens to our prayers. We pray for our families: fathers, grandfathers and kids and friends as well. We believe that our prayers are listened to. I have a list of names of people that want me to pray for them here at the ohel. They could not come so I have taken their prayers with me. They are written on little cards which I leave at the tomb.

LM: Have you been in Lelov before?

AW: No, this is my first time.

LM: Do you like it here?

AW: Well, it is an important place for me and my comrades because tzadick Biederman lies buried here. That is what matters to me. He is our great master so we follow his footsteps, we try to embrace his teaching.

LM: But what do you think of Lelov as a place?

AW: I do not know. Hmm... I was told that Poland is cold and it is, a lot of snow not like in Jerusalem. It gets cold in New York but not as cold as here. I guess Polish people are interested in our celebration as well. They come to watch like you. They seem to be fine but I do not talk to them a lot. I do not know Polish, they do not know Yiddish of Hebrew so it is hard.

LM: Are you planning to visit any other Chasidic sites this year?

AW: No. I am returning to Israel on Sunday morning and will stay there until Purim and then go back to New York. But I know some people are going to Lizhensk and Lublin, some are travelling to Cracow but I do not have time this year. Perhaps next time.

LM: So who pays for your trip?

AW: It is a joined effort of our kollel. We receive money from the donor and it helps to cover the cost of a pilgrimage like this.

LM: It is always just men travelling?

AW: Yes, men and boys.

LM: What about women? Are they not allowed to come?

AW: Well, they could come but what for? They would not be allowed to pray with us anyway so they do not come. Women stay home looking after the kids and businesses while their husbands are away on a pilgrimage. Women are distractions, they make too much fuss.

LM: Where do you stay while in Lelov?

AW: I stay at a private house, me and three other pilgrims, We rent a room.

LM: How long do you stay there for?

AW: Three nights.

LM: Do you mind me asking how much you are paying for it?

AW: Forty dollars each for three nights.

LM: Is food provided as well?

AW: No, we have our own kosher food but we drink tea and coffee there if we need it.

LM: How is your host like?

AW: An older guy, he is nice and helpful but we cannot communicate a lot. He does not our language. But he and his wife smile a lot so I guess it is all good.

LM: Are you planning to come back to Lelov then?

AW: Well, yes, why not, if I can afford it. I am just a student so I do not have a lot of money.

Interview 5.

LM: Hello, are you the keeper of the ohel?

RF: Yes Miss, are you looking for the Jews? They have not started praying yet but will be coming soon. If you interested...you do want to have a look, do not you? I can let you in, Miss. I look after the shire while they are gone. I live nearby, there in that house across the road. I could see you coming through my window and thought, this lady may want to have a look in so I came out.

LM: Yes, thank you.

RF: You know I have been looking after this place for more than twenty years, Look, they put the Star of David on this metal door to mark it as their own place. They called Chassidim you know, religious Jews. Come Miss,

come inside, have a look. There are some books there, there, up on a shelf, their prayers books.

LM: And what is in those black bin bags?

RF: Oh, these are their prayers miss. You know they come and leave those little cards around the tomb. But I pick them up and store in those bags.

I am always scared it would eventually catch the fire. But it is not only that...

LM: Why do you keep them then?

RF: I call them letters to God and never throw them away unless they burn it themselves. Sometimes they do, you know. They get a big barrel and burn those cards. I keep those prayers because who knows, maybe they pray for us as well?

LM.: It is very kind of you. Do you also clean up and maintain the place?

RF: Yes Miss. But I do not change anything inside. It is like a chapel, I would like anybody to come and change anything in my church. I do take some burnt out candles away though. And here, look, this big candle, it has a Jewish olive oil in it and supposed to be alit for forty days or something...Anyway, for a long time so I keep checking if it is still going.

LM: Do they stay in your house as well?

RF: Well, they used to but my wife has been ill so we do not take any guest in anymore. But they use my garage as storage. Their keep their clutter there, you know some pots and plates and chairs and take it out whenever they are back. But Miss, we do not take money for it. They can leave whatever they want and I will not charge them. It is just an old garage, why would I? But you know, some people think that we make a fortune here, but it is not true. We are honest people and we like our Jews.

LM: What do you like about them?

RF: Uhmm, well there are always polite and do not cause any trouble, well mannered. They always say good morning and good-bye, or thank you.

LM: In Polish?

RF: Yes, some of them, you know the older ones who has been coming to Lelov for a long time, they know some simple Polish words. Sometimes, I greet them: ‘Shalom’, it is like their ‘hello’.

LM: How are the Chasidic Jews like when they come to Lelov?

RF: As I said, they are generally nice, gentle. They do a bit of noise when they celebrate but I guess it is their tradition. You know, they celebrate Shabbos [Sabbath] and it is like our [Catholic] Sunday. They would have a festive dinner, drink a bit, smoke cigarettes and dance. They cook their own food, bake their own bread, all brought from Israel, but sometimes they buy local vegetables if they run out. They seem to be happy and joyful and we let them celebrate their own way, why not? No harm in it. But you know, the new ones are sometimes a bit cautious, they do not smile and nod as much as the other ones. But they will get use to us, I am sure.

LM: Is there anything unusual in their celebration?

RF: I am used to them now. I have lived in Lelov all my life and seen the Jews arriving from the very beginning so it does not surprise me anymore. It is still strange to see so many real Jews though. But I guess it is still a little strange to see just men praying, too. I cannot imagine Christmas or Easter celebration without my wife. It is a family time, we go to the church together and so on. You know Miss, I would get bored. But what can I say, it is their choice, so let it be.

Interview 6.

LM: Why you coming to Lelov to observe Chasidic pilgrimage?

KD: I am a retired teacher and have always been interested in local history. And this is no doubt part of our history.

LM: Did you grow up in Lelov?

KD: Yes, I have always lived in Lelov and remember how it was like before the war. I remember the Jews although I was only a boy when it all came to an end.

LM: How was it like back then?

KD: Well, different I guess. We had Poles and Jews living together. On the market days Lelov would be buzzing with a blend of Polish and Jewish words. People would put their stalls our selling everything from horses to laces. As children we were always excited. On a way to school we would come to have a look at animals: cows, pigs, chickens or horses sometimes, to buy some sweets for a couple of groshes. I do not know why but I feel like people were more open-minded back then. Some people could not read or write, we have no access to the television, radio sets were rare but somehow, we lived together. And then, the Germans came and it was over.

LM: How do you feel about Chasidic pilgrimages?

KD: I do not oppose them, quite the contrary. I am happy to see that in the middle of winter Lelov is filled with bearded men in black coats. I experience a strange joy, sentiment for those days of my childhood.

LM: Is it nostalgia?

KD: Hmmm...I do not know what it is. It is hard to describe...Maybe, we all long for those time when we were children? You know, older people have a

tendency to say how good it was before the war. It was not good, by anybody's standard. Majority of people in Lelov were poor, minor farmers or peddlers but somehow, I still miss it, the buzz, the liveness of our streets. So it is good to see the Chasidic pilgrims back in Lelov.

Interview 7.

LM: Hello, I have just seen some Chasidic Jews leaving your property, are they staying there?

BK: Yes, a couple of then is staying in my house. They had booked their rooms in autumn. They will be staying at mine again, next year. I have a big house, spacious but I guess I will have to build at least one more bathroom.

LM: What do you think about your guests?

BK: For me, they could even come every week. They are polite and easy to get on with although; they do not know our language [Polish]. Their language [Yiddish] is similar to German so we try to communicate this way. Sometimes they can be funny, like, hmmm...they try to say something in Polish or when they give us little gifts from Israel. But it is all nice, different but nice. They even get a bit tipsy sometimes, you know, when they celebrate on Saturdays, but I guess we also do the same.

Appendix 2.

Extract from ‘Sefer Kodesh Hilulim’ (Brooklyn, 1949) by Yair Weinstock based on ‘Pri Kodesh Hilulim’ by Rebbe Tzvi Hirsh of Ziditchov (Zydaczov), (Lelov, 1865)

פרק א

לידתו

א) ימי חיי זקני הקוה"ט מוהר"ר רבי ר' דודל מלעלוב זיע"א, מעולף מסתורין. חביון עצום אופף על פני כל מהלך החיים־חייו. אולם פה ושם מתנוצצים כמה ניצוצים, המגלים מעט על פני הלום הלום, איך שאחרי כל ההסתרות שפעל ועשה בכדי להסתיר את מעשיו ועבודתו בקודש, עם כל זה, פרץ משהו, והאיר על פני כל סביביו, ולאט לאט נתמלא כולו אורה. ושמעו הטוב הלך לפניו, עד שכל הגדולים והצדיקים העידו שמרום ונשא הוא מאד, ואחד מעמודי ויסודי התבל שעליו העולם עומד.

ב) נולד בשנת תק"ו לאלף הששי, לאביו הר"ר שלמה צבי ז"ל ולאמו מרת מלכה. ומתייחס עד דוד מלך ישראל חי וקיים.

מקום הולדתו, אומרים שהיה בכפר ביאלא הסמוכה לעירה לעלוב, ויש אומרים שנולד בכפר פראדלא הסמוכה לעיר שמעקעטשארן[1].

ג) ומספר, שכשהלכו השני אחים הקדושים, הרה"ק הרבי ר' זושא ז"ל והרה"ק הרבי ר' אלימלך זצ"ל מליזענסק, — בגלות, נתודע להם מהילד דודל. והלכו לכפר ביאלע, למקום דירת הוריו, נכנסו לפנים הבית, ולא מצאו את אבותיו, בלתי אם ילד נחמד זה מסתובב שם. שאלוהו בחיבה יתירה: קינד לעב, הלא תאמר לנו היכן הוא אביך? השיב: הלך העירה. — ואמך היכן היא? — חזרו שנית לשאלו, יחד עם לטיפה על לחייו, — אמי, מיד תבוא, היתה תשובתו.

חכו, עד שבאה האם.

האחים הקדושים פנו אליה בבקשה, שתאמר להם ההתנהגות של הבעל, האיך הוא נהג במשאו במתנו, באכילתו בשתיתו, וכן בכל הענינים השוטפים, כי על כן זכה להוליד בן קדוש כזה.

השיבה האם, האמת אגיד שאין אני רואה בו שום התנהגות מופרזה של קדושה וטהרה, כל עניניו הם פשוטים בתכלית הפשטות, אלא זאת היא

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1) מגדל דוד, אות קח.

ההבדל בינו לבין שאר פשוטי העם, כי בכל סעודת יום שבת קודש כשמשורר הזמר, ברוך ה' יום יום, וכשמגיע להחרוז „ויזכו לבנים ובני בנים עוסקים בתורה ובמצות לשמה", הרי הוא מתחיל לבכות בכי רב, והתלהבותו מגיע לדרגא כזו, עד שמכה את עצמו בכותל, ופוכר את ידיו ומבקש בתחנונים, מלפני אבינו שבשמים, שיזכה לבן הגון וכשר, ובכייתו הולך ונמשך, הולך ונמשך עד שמתעלף, ואני מוכרחת להקיצו לעוררו ולהשיבו לתחית.

כששמעו האחים הקדושים תשובה כזאת, אמרו: אם כן כבר ניתא מה שוכה לבן קדוש כזה?).

ד) „בוצין מקטפיה ידיעא", ככה אמרו חכז"ל. וכן נראה בו, אחרי שבתקופת בגרותו נתפרסם בגלל מדותיו התרומיות וביחוד במדת הרחמנות ואהבת ישראל, הרי עוד בהיותו ילד קטנטן כבר נתגלה בו מדה זו.

ומסופר, כשהיה הרר"ד עוד ילד קטן, ואביו הרה"צ ר' שלמה היה עני גדול, והלך הילד קרוע ובלוע, בבגדים מטולאים, כאחד מילדי העניים, ולא היה לאביו שום אפשריות לעשות לו מלבוש חדש. וכשהיה הקור גדול, ולהילד לא היה שום מלבוש חם נצטנן מאד וחלה. ודק בחמלת ה' עליו החלים.

עבודת האב, היה בתעשיית יין שרף, שהכניסה לו פרנסה בצמצום גדול. אולם גלגל הוא בעולם, ה' משפיל אף מרומם, ומאשפות ירים אביון. ואיתרחיש ניסא, שהשתכר פעם סכום גדול.

וכמובן שראשית פנייתו היתה קודם כל להלביש את הילד הנחמד במלבוש חדש חרפיי.

שמח הילד, שמחה גדולה. במלבוש יפה, חדש וחם.

אולם לא ארכה השמחה. היות שביום השני ראה איזה ילד קטן שהנהו הולך בבגד קרוע, ובוכה, וארכובותיו דא לדא נקשן, רועד מחמת הקור, — נכמרו רחמיו עליו, פשט מלבושו החדש שכל כך שמח עליו, והלביש את ילד העני.

וכשבא לביתו, ראתהו אמו והנה אין מלבוש החרפיי עליו, שאלה אותו „דוד לעבן" איפוא השארת את הבגד העליון? השיב, לא שכחתיו, אלא נתתיו במתנה לילד עני.

אמרה לו האם, בני בני, רוצה נא מהר, מהר מאד אל ה„חדר" וקח בחזרה את הבגד. הלא תדע, אשר אם יראה אביך שאבדת את הבגד, אזי יתכעס

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2) מ"ד אות ק"י בשם נכד הרר"ד הרה"ח ר' דוד בער ז"ל מלעלוב.

Appendix 3.

Donor's Certificate, Signed by Rebbe Moshe Mordechai Biederman:

‘To our friend Mr. Menachem Teichtal, for supporting our holy yeshiva three days a year’.

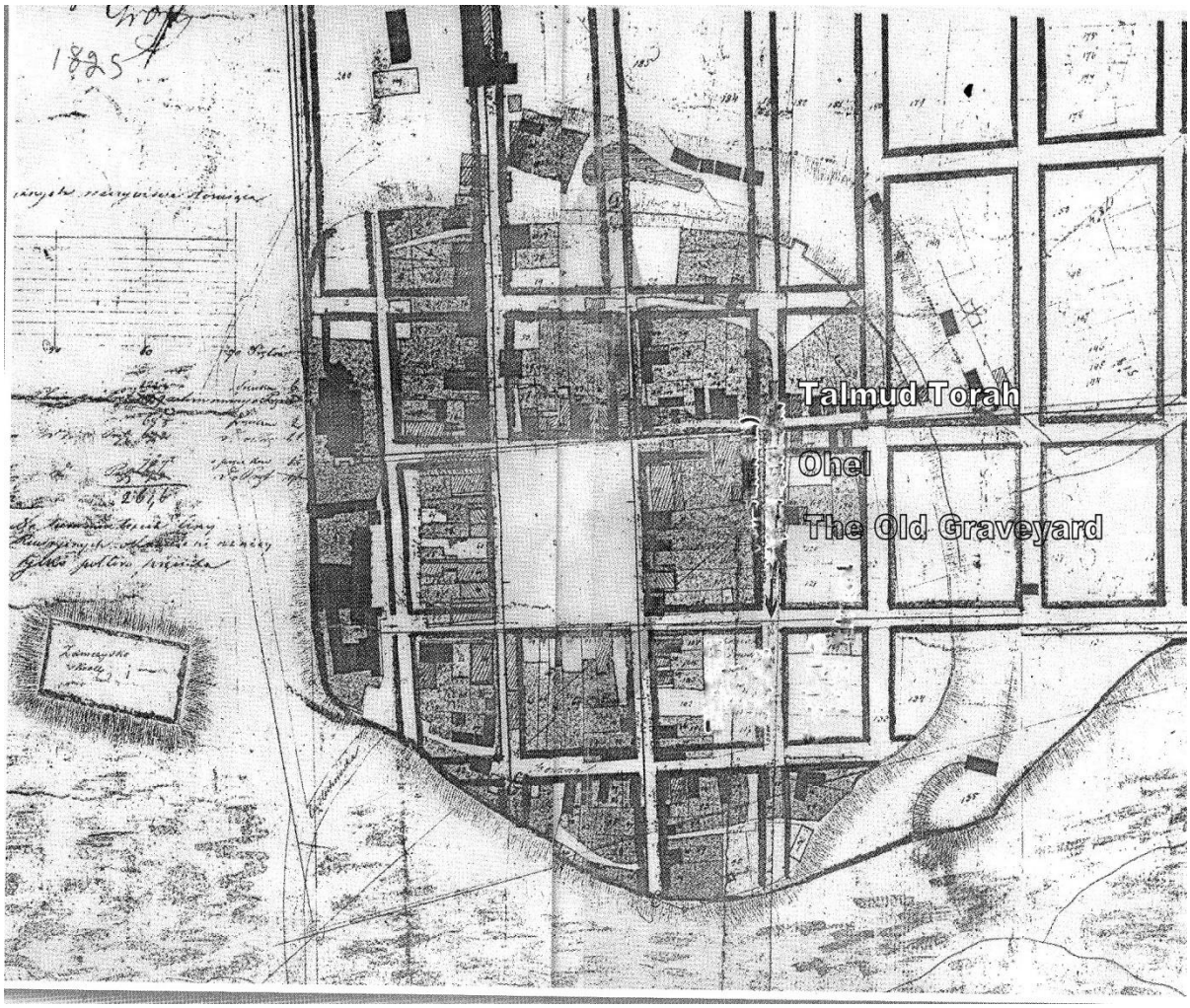
Printed by ‘Yeshivah Lelov’ Tel Aviv

Source: Kedem Auction House, Auction No 6 (425).

Appendix 4.

Map of Lelov, dated 1825, published in Saint Petersburg. Commissioned under the authority of the government of the Russian Empire in Kingdom of Poland.

Courtesy of ‘Chassidim Lelov’.



Appendix 5.

Extract from 'The Tribe of Lelov' describing the discovery of the tzadick Dovid Biederman's grave. The picture below shows the actual potato pit where his bones were found.

הבירור אושש את הידיעות המוקדמות על מיקום האוהל. "ידענו אפוא היכן אמור להיות המקום – נזכר ר' שמחה - אולם יצאנו משם בהרגשה נוראה: הרי בנו על השטח, ומן-הסתם חפרו יסודות, ומי יודע----"

רשיון חפירה

כמובן שהיה צורך חיוני לסלק את המבנים משטח בית העלמין, אך השגת היעד הזה נראתה רחוקה מאוד. בינתיים סוכם עם ר' שמעון ניסנבוים שיפעל אצל השלטונות הפולנים להפשיר את מקום האוהל.

מיד בשובו לארה"ק, דיווח ר' שמחה לכ"ק מרן האדמו"ר מלעלוב שליט"א על העדויות שגבה, והוא הורה כי הוא מעוניין שתהיה בדיקה יסודית על כל המשתמע מכך, ולא להגרר לפעולות סמליות.

בראשית חשון תשמ"ט, השיג ר' שמעון ניסנבוים את מה שנראה בלתי אפשרי: רשיון לחפירת-בדיקה בתוך בנין ה"כל בו", אשר ניתן על ידי שר הדתות של פולין. משניתן הרשיון, רצו לממש את הזכות מיד ולא להשהות את הענין אפילו שעה מיותרת אחת. בהשגחה פרטית נודע לר' שמחה כי ר' שמעון אנשין, העושה רבות לאיתור ושמירת בתי עלמין יהודיים בארץ ובעולם, נמצא בוורשה. חיפש אחריו בבתי המלון בעיר ומצאו במלון "פורום" הוורשאי. סיכם עמו שיצא מיידית ללעלוב, יחד עם חיים מאיר שנייבסקי וניסנבוים.

השדה המגנטי

היתה שמועה שלר' שמעון אנשין יש מיכשור לגילוי קברים. אולם לאמיתו של דבר מדובר היה בשני מוטות ברזל, בצורת ו', אותם החזיקו בשתי הידיים, ועברו עמם מעל לשטח הנסרק. במקרה שיש חלל מתחת לאדמה, הרי שבשל השדה המגנטי שנוצר, שני הברזלים מתקרבים ומתחברים אחד לשני, והם חוזרים ונפרדים במקום שהחלל מסתיים.

סוכם שחיים מאיר שנייבסקי לא יגלה לר' שמעון אנשין מראש את מיקום הקברים שעליהם הוא יודע, כשי שהבדיקה תהיה חופשית מדעה קדומה.

בהגיע ר' שמעון אנשין ללעלוב, התחיל להסתובב בשטח בית העלמין עם

כ"ק מרן אדמו"ר שליט"א מדליק נרות ליד מקום הציון הק'

Appendix 6.

'Strange world of the Chassidim' - extract from the local newspaper 'Dziennik Zachodni' (No 31, 06.02.2006) reporting Chasidic visit in January 2006.

► **Ponad dwustu ortodoksyjnych Żydów przyjechało do Lelowa z Izraela, USA, Europy Zachodniej i Ukrainy.**

Częst

Rozmodleni wpadają w ekstazę

Dziwny świat chasydów

LELÓW

Przez kilkadziesiąt godzin było jak na obrazach Chagala. Mężczyźni w pończochach, czarnych płaszczach, okrągłych sobolowych czapkach, dyskutujący w grupkach, gorączkowo gestykulując.

Od piątkowego poranka, do niedzieli takie obrazki znów można było zobaczyć na ulicach Lelowa.

PRZYJECHALI CHASYDZI. SPIESZYLI NA GRÓB CADYKA DAWIDA, świętego męża, uzdrowiciela. Według podań miał podczas rytualnych chasydzkich tańców odzyskać pełnię władzy w nodze. Od tamtej pory wyznawcy przypisywali mu moc uzdrawiania. W ciasnym pomieszczeniu, gdzie jest mogiła ich mistrza duchowego, nigdy nie mogą wszyscy się pomieścić. W tym roku było ich więcej niż w ubiegłym. Przyjechało ponad 200.

CHASYDAMI PRZEJEŻDŻAJĄCYMI Z RÓŻNYCH STRON ŚWIATA OPIEKUJE SIĘ FUNDACJA CHASYDÓW LEŻAJSK-POLSKA. Najwięcej przybywa ich z USA i Izraela. Ale są też z Europy Zachodniej i od niedawna z Ukrainy.

Wielu najpierw spotyka się w Tel Awiwie, skąd przylatują do Warszawy, następnie wynajętymi autobusami jadą do Lelowa. Są wśród nich młodzi mężczyźni, studenci, uczniowie. Wielu ma przodków urodzonych w Polsce.

Tradycyjnie zatrzymują się w Gminnym Ośrodku Kultury i w budynku, naprzeciwko grobu cadyka, który wykupiła fundacja chasydów. Tam jedzą przygotowywane przez siebie posiłki. Większość produktów przywożą ze sobą. W Lelowie nie ma gdzie kupić koszernej żywności. Może w przyszłości ktoś zajmie się sprzedażą choćby koszernych ryb. W GOK-u są przechowywane wersalki, na których śpią. Przed kilku laty chasydzi zamówili je u miejscowego stolarza.

Z Lelowa wyjechali do Krakowa, potem udadzą się do Leżajska na grób cadyka Elimelecha i wrócą do domów.

W OSIEMSETLETNIEJ HISTORII LELOWA PRAWIE OD POCZĄTKU ŻYŁY RAZEM SPOŁECZNOŚCI POLSKA I ŻYDOWSKA. Do drugiej wojny światowej. Dokładnie do 1943 roku. Wiosną 1943 r. hitlerowcy wywieźli wszystkich lelowskich Żydów do obozu koncentracyjnego w Treblince.

Do parterowych domków w lelowskim rynku wchodzi się wprost z chodnika. Tak jak przed kilkudziesięciu laty. Na framugach są dzwonki. Może w miejscach gdzie kiedyś były mezuzy, które pobożny Żyd przed wyjściem z domu zawsze dotyka i modli się o miłość.

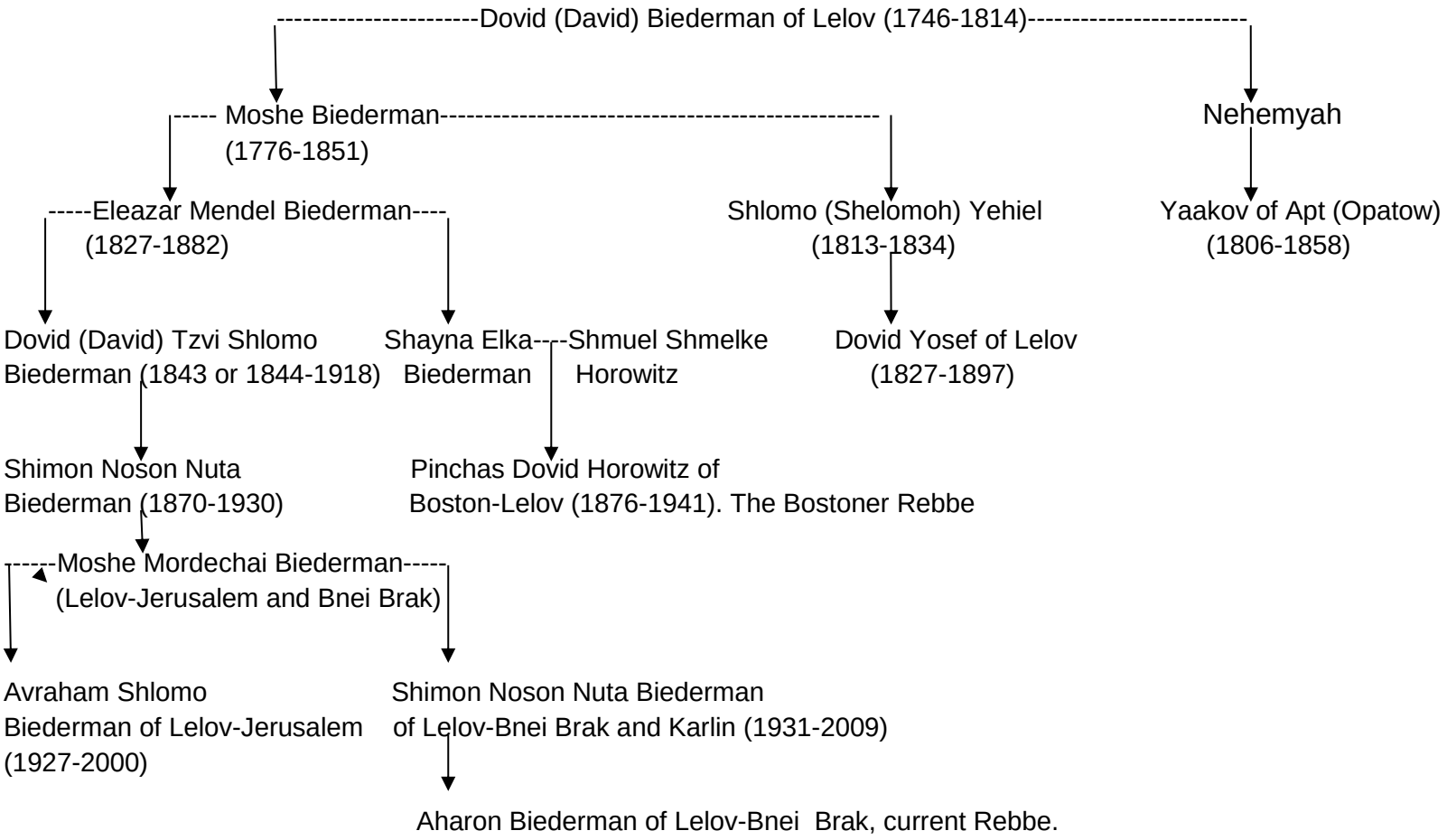
Ruch chasydzki narodził się w XVIII wieku na wschodnich ziemiach Rzeczypospolitej wśród niższych warstw ludności żydowskiej w opozycji do wykształconych Żydów, znawców Talmudu. Przez rabinów chasydzi byli pogardliwie nazywani amotracami, czyli prostakami, nieukami. Odrzuceni przez warstwy oświecone łączyli się we wspólnotach modlitewnych. Chasydzi od hebrajskiego słowa chasid - pobożny, bogobojny, skupiali się wokół cadyków (hebrajskie cadik - sprawiedliwy).

JANUSZ STRZELCZYK

JAKUB MORKOWSKI

Chasydzi modlą się przed Torą, rozłożoną na ścianie, która wskazuje kierunek do Jerozolimy.

Appendix 7. Selected genealogy of the Biederman Family.



Appendix 8.

Table of toponyms.

Yiddish name	**Alternative name (P) Polish, (U) Ukrainian**
Apt	Opatow (P)
Belze	Belz (P)
Bialeh	Biala (Wielka)
Chentsin	Checiny (P)
Ger	Gora Kalwaria (P)
Hanipol	Annopol (P)
Lelov	Lelow (P)
Lizhensk	Lezajsk (P)
Lupshneh	Lopuszno (P)
Kalisk	Kolyshki (U)
Keltz	Kielce (P)
Kotzk	Kock (P)
Kozhnits	Kozienice (P)
Kroke	Krakow (P)
Kuzmir	Kazimierz (P)
Mezeritch	Mezhirichi (U)
Mezhbizh	Miedzyboz (P)
Pshadburz	Przedboz (P)
Pshishke	Przysucha (P)
Ruzhin (Rizhin)	Ruzhyn (U), Rozyn (P)
Sadigera	Sadhora (U), Sadagora (P)
Sheps	Sierpc (P)
Tchenstochov	Czestochowa (P)
Varshe	Warszawa (P)
Ziditshoyv	Zhydachiv (U), Zydaczow (P)

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