‘A Thread of Blue’: Rabbi Gershon Henoch Leiner of Radzyń and his Search for Continuity in Response to Modernity

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Historians of eastern European Jewish culture have for the most part viewed hasidism as a response to crisis. Following Dubnow, many scholars have conceived of the late eighteenth century, up to 1815, as the great period of hasidic creativity. Hasidism in the inter-war period has also attracted scholarly attention recently, specifically with regard to traditional responses to Zionism and the infiltration of modernity into hasidic communities. But the majority of studies on hasidism overlook a fertile period of hasidic thought in the mid- to late nineteenth century, viewing this period as a time of stagnation for hasidism precisely because of the movement's success, and implying that hasidism could only be a creative force in the face of crisis and opposition. Only a few studies, like that of Raphael Mahler, take the nineteenth century seriously as a creative period in the history of hasidism.

This essay will argue that the mid- to late nineteenth-century hasidic dynasty of Izbica Radzyń constitutes an intellectual renaissance in hasidic creativity. Its originality was much more subtle than simply being a critique of non-haśidic rabbinic culture. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century Polish hasidism was speaking to an educated audience which looked for its spiritual sustenance to the rich literary tradition of medieval Jewish mysticism and pietism. Its

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2 See e.g. Mendel Piekarz, Biyomei ismihat haḥasidut: Megamot rα'ayonyot bein shevet haṭamekhot (‘When Hasidism was Flourishing’) (Jerusalem, 1978).


In order to bring the intellectual biographies of hasidic thinkers out of the realm of hagiography and into the domain of history, biographical details have to be set in a multiplicity of contexts. Previous works on Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica have largely viewed the Izbica tradition as an extension of the Przysucha-Kotsk (Kock) tradition from which it emerged. When speaking specifically about Mordecai Joseph Leiner, this is largely correct. However, Gershon Henoch represents a shift in this hasidic community, shared by his contemporary Rabbi Zaddok Hacohen Rabinowitz of Lublin among others, whereby the hasidic master began to engage with the broader intellectual environment. Although these masters were unique individuals in their own right, they were also products of a changing Poland, an environment which was being inundated with modern ideas and technology. Gershon Henoch could not have educated himself so widely in modern languages and natural sciences, for example, if he had not been the product of a Poland where cultural persecution was abating and economic barriers against Jews were being removed. His concern with unifying diverse traditions of Jewish learning was equally a response to trends in the wider Jewish world outside his hasidic community. Setting Gershon Henoch in these contexts—the secular history of Congress Poland and the wider intellectual history of contemporary Polish Jewry—enables us to achieve a new appreciation of nineteenth-century hasidism.

Gershon Henoch is particularly interesting because of the way his thought combined messianic and mystical strains with a sophisticated understanding of science and medicine. He is best known for his discovery and advocacy of a species he claimed was the *hilazon*, or 'tint-fish', for making the blue dye called *tekhelet* described in Numbers 15:38 as the colour of one of the ritual fringes worn on the corners of garments, and especially of prayer-shawls. However, his work on reinstating this ancient lost custom is not distinct from his other literary projects; all his efforts were driven by an underlying messianic impulse founded on his family's tradition that his grandfather had initiated the beginning of the messianic era. Before developing these points further, two issues need to be addressed. First, briefly to survey the political and ideological changes that were taking place in the Kingdom and which affected its hasidic communities in the mid-nineteenth century. Second, to consider more closely the split between Rabbi Menahem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotsk and Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica in 1839, which resulted in the birth of Zibicer hasidism.

The province of Radom, where the Przysucha hasidic tradition developed, was part of the Russian-controlled Kingdom of Poland. At the Congress of Vienna in

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1. See Rabbi Gershon Henoch of Radzyń, *Hahakdamah ve-shopenpah*, repr. as *Sha'aret emunah ve-yizvand ha-kadosh* (Hensi Iberak, 1996). In this lengthy introduction to his father's treatise *Bet Ya-lekot*, Rabbi Gershon Henoch attempts a synthesis between Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and the *Zohar*, respectively the classic philosophical and kabbalistic texts of the Middle Ages.

2. See Morris Faierstein, *All is in the Hands of Heaven* (Hoboken, NJ, 1990), 78–84. Faierstein's treatment of Rabbi Gershon Henoch's messianism does not focus on his notion of unity.


1815 the major European powers had divided Poland amongst themselves, and the central part of Poland, called Congress Poland, was controlled by Russia. While we often think of Congress Poland as culturally backward compared to other regions, Romanticism took hold there in the 1820s and 1830s as it did in the rest of Europe, and both the movement for Polish independence and the hasidic movement were based on Romantic ideology. Just as literary figures like Ksawery Bronikowski and Maurycc Mochancki looked back to an independent Polish past, young, enthusiastic hasidic leaders looked back in their critique of the structure of the east European kohiiah (community). In this and in other respects hasidim were affected by both intellectual and social trends in Polish society.

The Polish rebellion against the Russians in November 1830 ushered in a new era of qualified Polish tolerance towards Jews, partly because Polish nationalists became aware of the widespread Jewish support for Polish independence. Although the Jews were not integrated into Polish society, it appears that many wanted to take part in the 1830 rebellion and even more in the rebellion of 1863. In 1830 a fair number of Jews wanted to join the National Guard set up to keep order in Warsaw. A compromise was made ‘that they could enlist provided they shave their beards’. Although this may appear unimportant, the mere fact that the nationalistic Poles would permit Jews, who were not yet Polish citizens, to take part in their national rebellion represents a significant move towards what would later become Jewish emancipation.

Even though the hagiographies of the hasidic leaders neglect Polish politics, there is some evidence that hasidim supported the 1830 revolt. We have an account that Rabbi Menahem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotsk and his pupil Rabbi Isaac Meir Rothenberg Alter, founder of the Ger dynasty, actively encouraged the Jews to aid the Poles in their rebellion and that after the Russian victory both were killed in demonstrations in Feb. 1863 (ibid. 17, 167 ff. For the 1863 rebellion, see Hemlock p. 177). Although this may appear unimportant, the mere fact that the nationalistic Poles would permit Jews, who were not yet Polish citizens, to take part in their national rebellion represents a significant move towards what would later become Jewish emancipation.

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Because of the backward- and inward-looking nature of hasidism, there are few primary sources that deal directly with hasidic responses to the 1830 rebellion. Only after the migration of the hasidic communities from rural areas to Warsaw just before the First World War did their leaders feel compelled to address the problems of modernity systematically. This initiated the formation of hasidic political organizations, which ultimately led to the creation of Agudas Yisro’el in Warsaw in 1916. Other hasidic institutions also formed in the urban centres to deal with security issues and to establish a policy on Zionism and secular Polish Jewish culture. These new conditions explain the (rather limited) attention to political life in hasidic biographies published in the inter-war period. It is from these biographies that we gain an impression that hasidim, like other Jews in Poland, supported the 1830 rebellion.

The revolt had effects beyond the change in Polish attitudes towards Jews. It marked the beginning of a fundamental change in the Polish agrarian system that was completed after the revolt of 1863. Polish farmers supported the largely urban rebellion because they did not want to pay Russian taxes or observe Russian quotas on their produce. After the rebellion was quelled, the Russians lifted some of the harsh restrictions on peasant and Jewish society in an attempt to win the loyalty of these two groups, which had supported but not participated directly in the rebellion. This lifting of economic restrictions resulted in greater prosperity for both groups.

In 1843, as part of the same pacification effort, the Russians attempted to Russify Polish Jews by conscripting them into the Russian army. The conscription decree was largely ineffective because of widespread resistance among traditional Jews, especially hasidim. Nationalist Jews and proponents of the Haskalah welcomed the opportunity to show Jews as modern people, and even went so far as to denounce the ways in which traditional Jews evaded the draft.

In February 1846 as a consequence of the outbreak of revolution in the Free City of Kraków, just south of the Kingdom, Jews were granted citizenship there, a move which paved the way for the legal framework for Jewish emancipation in the Kingdom. Traditional Jewish communities were sceptical of the words of tolerance and liberalism that emanated from the same people who had persecuted them for centuries. Many of the Jews in the province of Radom remembered the decrees of the Emperor Joseph II against the Jews, forcing them to abandon traditional clothing, and the many taxes which were levied on the Jews for innocuous items such as candles. The Polish nationalists fighting against the Russian authorities wanted to create a more tolerant society, but the traditional Jews were not used to making distinctions between one Gentile society and another.

In any case, even the most tolerant Polish nationalists had underlying problems of modernity systematically. This initiated the formation of hasidic political organizations, which ultimately led to the creation of Agudas Yisro’el in Warsaw in 1916. Other hasidic institutions also formed in the urban centres to deal with security issues and to establish a policy on Zionism and secular Polish Jewish culture. These new conditions explain the (rather limited) attention to political life in hasidic biographies published in the inter-war period. It is from these biographies that we gain an impression that hasidim, like other Jews in Poland, supported the 1830 rebellion.

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assumptions which implicitly threatened traditional Jewish ways of life. The newspaper Trzeci Maj, the organ of the national government of Kraków, published an editorial on 12 September 1846 saying, "No country can tolerate a nation within a nation, a separate estate within a collective estate. If the Israelites want to have Polish citizenship, let them be Poles of the Mosaic faith, but they must stop being Israelites." The opportunity to assimilate implied by this article was welcomed by many of the enlightened Jews in the cities of Warsaw and Kraków, but the hasidic communities, still primarily based in the small towns, viewed this 'new' attitude as a dangerous development.

Accompanying the dangerous possibility of assimilation, which the hasidim deplored, was a concomitant expansion of economic opportunity. For generations Jewish occupations and financial opportunities had been limited by law. Even though Jews had long constituted a sizeable part of the Polish population, they had no presence in local or national government with which to voice their concerns and lobby for their communities. The sweeping societal changes in the Kingdom, even as they were rooted in the principles of modernity which threatened the cohesion of any traditional society, were none the less beneficial to the hasidic communities.

The oppressive conditions which had plagued the Jews in Poland for centuries began to change considerably in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1846 Pius IX, who held many well-known liberal views regarding the Jews, was anointed pope, and many Jews in Poland hoped that papal influence would now dispel some of the long-held negative attitudes of the Church towards the Jews. This optimism was further enhanced by Jewish participation in the revolution of Kraków in February 1846 and the famous 'Springtime of Nations' revolts in 1848–9. The loyalty displayed by these Jews assuaged some of the deep-seated suspicions many Poles felt towards their Jewish neighbours. Enlightened Poles, including the poet and émigré leader Adam Mickiewicz, began to argue that Polish independence was linked to Jewish liberation. These events culminated when Alexander II came to the Russian throne in 1855. The emancipator of Russia's serfs also initiated a period of liberalization towards the Kingdom of Poland which included the extension of greater tolerance towards the Jewish population.

The 1850s and 1860s were boom years in the Kingdom of Poland, and Jews reaped considerable benefits. As compulsory peasant labour dues were replaced by rent, farmers were able to move to a more capitalist form of agricultural production. Peasants began to leave the land for the cities, and land-owners embarked on industrial ventures, including building textile factories. This increased Polish exports, which necessitated expansion of the railways. From 1862 to 1887 Poland increased its railway network from 635 to 2,084 kilometres of track, and established railway links between Warsaw and the major cities in Russia and the Ukraine, and isolated rural areas were given greater access to the cities as well as to other provinces and countries. In addition to these general benefits of modernization, Polish Jews were permitted to purchase land in 1859, which brought them a previously unattainable level of financial security.

For hasidim, these benefits had specific cultural repercussions. Like the rest of rural Polish Jewry, they began a slow urban migration. Warsaw's Jewish population more than tripled in the period between 1864 and 1897, and more than two-thirds of the 300 synagogues in Warsaw were hasidic at that time. Railways enabled hasidim to choose their rebbes more easily, as they were more able to travel from one hasidic court to another. Opportunities for secular and scientific knowledge, though generally shunned by most hasidim, were also unprecedented.

In addition to the benefits of greater mobility, the 'Era of Great Reforms' also brought a flourishing of Polish Jewish culture through the publication of government-sanctioned Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish Jewish newspapers. Literature, theatre, and music began to develop in all three languages, and by the 1880s there was an expanded state-sanctioned Jewish school system, including an academy for religious studies. Emancipation also brought with it an onslaught of modern Jewish ideologies: the Haskalah and modern Zionism. Progressive Jews applied Moses Mendelssohn's framework of German Jewish identity to their own sense of Polish nationalism, even as they disliked Mendelssohn's negative attitude towards eastern Europe and east European Jews. Nationalist fervour in Polish society also turned Polish Jews towards Zionism in the 1860s, with the publication of Moses Hess's Rome and Jerusalem and Zevi Kalischer's Seeking Zion in 1862. In the 1880s Zionism gained further momentum with an influx of Lithuanian Jews into the Kingdom who saw it as a new progressive Jewish identity.

Hasidic communities in Poland during these decades were ambivalent in their stance towards Zionism. It was clearly preferable to the Polish nationalism which had become so popular as a result of Jewish emancipation, and much early Zionist propaganda was written by traditional Jews; Kalischer's work in particular was infused with rabbinic arguments. Messianism still played a role in Polish hasidic

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17. For a more developed discussion on the Polish attitude towards the Jews as reflected in the Polish press, see I. Oppenheim, 'On the Question of the Jews in the Polish Newspaper Gloz (the Voice)', in Bez Yeru Echad amod ('Between Israel and the Nations') (Jerusalem, 1987).
thought after emancipation. Many hasidic thinkers initially saw Zionism, in which messianic elements seemed strong, as a way of challenging the sweeping trend of assimilation in Poland, even though they rejected its secular ideology, which negated the basic tenets of traditional Judaism.

Polish hasidic communities benefited in the wake of modernization in Poland, even as they abhorred its principles and feared its implications. Religious reform, Polish nationalism among traditional Jews, and the growing influence of Zionism largely initiated by Jewish immigrants from Lithuania posed a serious threat to the coherence and stability of the hasidic community in Congress Poland. However, rather than totally rejecting modernity, as hasidic communities had done in Russia and Galicia in the late eighteenth century, the hasidic Jews of Congress Poland adapted by waging an ideological battle against the Enlightenment while becoming involved in the political process of Polish independence and taking advantage of modern technological advances. Rabbi Gershon Henoch Leiner represents this new breed of hasidic master, who was exposed to a much wider range of general knowledge.

In order to understand the ways in which Gershon Henoch responded to modernity, it is essential to see him in the context of his family dynasty. He was above all a follower of his grandfather, Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Tomaszów, later the hasidic master of Izbica. One of his descendants recounts an anecdote that Gershon Henoch began his obsession with tekiah (the ritual fringes on the prayer-shawl worn in devotional contexts). 21

Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s sense of himself as an embattled defender of true hasidism came primarily from the many splits and rifts among the Przysucha hasidim from which his dynasty sprang. Izibicer hasidism had begun with a rift between Gershon Henoch’s grandfather and his close friend and early mentor, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotsk, known as the Kotsker rebbe, on Simhat Torah of 1830 (5600). Both men were disciples of Rabbi Simchah Bunem of Przysucha. 22 Menahem Mendel was one of those who inherited his hasidic court after his untimely death in 1827. (Rarely in the Przysucha school did one individual inherit the entire dynasty. Usually a son inherited part of the court and one or two of the more important disciples inherited the rest.) When the founder of the dynasty, Rabbi Jacob Isaac ben Asher of Przysucha, the ‘Holy Jew’, died, part of his court went with his son Jerahmeel, while others went with Rabbi Simchah Bumem. Most of Rabbi Jacob Isaac’s hasidim followed Rabbi Simchah Bunem to Kotsk, although smaller courts began in Aleksandrow, Warka, and Sochaczew. These smaller courts remained devoted to Kotsk until Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotsk died and Rabbi Isaac Meir Alter (later the founder of the dynasty of Ger) took over. At that point, the school split up into many different factions, making up a large part of the hasidic community in Congress Poland until the First World War.

Rabbi Simchah Bunem’s influence on the Leiner family extended beyond Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner’s generation; Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s responses to modernity seem to have been framed by some of his decisions. Before he became a hasidic master, Rabbi Simchah Bunem trained as a pharmacist. Later he was involved in the logging industry and often travelled to Danzig and Germany on business, and stories of his participation in the cultural world of German ‘enlightened’ society, including going to the theatre, became an issue after he was chosen as the successor to Rabbi Jacob Isaac of Przysucha. Like Rabbi Simchah Bunem, Gershon Henoch had a scientific education, though no formal training. Since Rabbi Simchah Bunem was Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner’s teacher, and since Gershon Henoch modelled himself on his grandfather, the influence of Rabbi Simchah Bunem’s reputation for enlightened ways should not be underestimated, even though he never knew Rabbi Simchah Bunem and made no explicit reference to his influence.

The split between Rabbi Menahem Mendel and Rabbi Mordecai Joseph, the two inheritors of the Przysucha tradition, happened in a year fraught with both personal and general significance. Polish hasidism greeted the Jewish year 5600 (1840–41) with great expectations. Messianic fervour swept through eastern Europe as many mystically orientated Jews awaited the fulfilment of the promise stated in the Zohar, i. 116b–117a, 119a, that ‘the wellsprings of wisdom will be opened in the year 5600’. 23

In the final months of 1839 Rabbi Menahem Mendel began his thirteenth year as rebbe of Kotsk. The details of his life from 1827 until his death in 1860 are shrouded in mystery, 24 but some time between Simhat Torah 1839 and January 1840 he went into complete seclusion, which lasted for the last twenty years of his life. 25


22 There are many ‘accounts’ of Rabbi Menahem Mendel’s life, but almost all are written by students and descendants of students who are hardly objective in their research. The latest studies of this type are Yehudah Leib Levin, Beit Kots (Jerusalem, 1990), which is a collection of literary fragments and oral traditions about Menahem Mendel and his students, and Pinsas Sach’s, Esh beheder sugor (‘Man in a Closed Room’) (Jerusalem, 1991). In the scholarly world, A. J. Heschel’s Yiddish study Kotsk, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1973), contains some historical data but is primarily devoted to a presentation of the Przysucha–birk cabalist hasidic ideology. Morris Faierstein, ‘The Friday Night Incident in Kotsk; History of a Legend’, Journal of Jewish Studies, 34 (1993), 174–84; and a slightly revised version in his Ill Is in the Hands of Heaven, 89–98, attempts to gain some historical clarity on the incident that preceded Rabbi Menahem Mendel’s seclusion.
life. While he left no writings, it is clear that Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner’s sudden departure from Kotsk had a profound effect on him. Rabbi Mordecai Joseph had spent thirteen years in Kotsk, and that number was of great significance for the hasidim of both Kotsk and Izbica. Rabbi Mordecai Joseph had spent thirteen years in Kotsk, and that number was of great significance for the hasidim of both Kotsk and Izbica. Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai is thought to have spent thirteen years in a cave hiding from the Romans and developing the Zohar, so the hasidim viewed this as the necessary period of private preparation before revealing oneself as the Messiah. Izbica tradition thus had it that the thirteen-year period meant that for Rabbi Mordecai Joseph ‘the time had not yet come for him to teach Torah publicly’, and that his departure signified his emerging from ‘the cave’, as Simeon bar Yohai did. Certain Kotsk hasidim viewed Rabbi Menahem Mendel’s subsequent seclusion as the dissipation of the messianic hope of 1848 and held Rabbi Mordecai Joseph accountable.26

Accounts disagree over what caused the breach between Rabbi Mordecai Joseph and Rabbi Menahem Mendel.27 The later Izbica tradition interprets it to be the moment of Rabbi Mordecai Joseph’s revelation as Messiah. Rabbi Hayim Simchah Leiner writes in Dor yesharim that Rabbi Mordecai Joseph ‘began to awaken and illuminate a new and pure light, revealing the secrets of the Torah which had been hidden until then’.28 This appears to be a variation on the zoharic passage cited above regarding the year 5600, coupled with a common kabbalistic theme that is first found in the anonymous Sefer tumah (early fourteenth century), and which later appears in different forms in the Zohar and subsequent kabbalistic literature, that the messianic era would being forth ‘new’ Torah not previously revealed.

After a short stay in his home town of Tomaszów, Rabbi Mordecai Joseph Leiner settled in Izbica.21 His son Jacob had married quite young and lived with his wife, Hana, and his father-in-law, Rabbi David of Tishvits (Tyszowce), one of the better-known students of Rabbi Simchah Bunem of Przysucha. After his father moved to Izbica, Rabbi Jacob Leiner moved with his wife and their infant son, Gershon Henoch, to a house close to the beit midrash in Izbica.22 Jacob himself remained in Izbica with his father until Rabbi Mordecai Joseph’s passing on 7 Tevet 1854.

At that point, the Izbica community split again. Many of the older hasidim moved to Lublin, anointing Rabbi Judah Leib Eger their new rebe, while Rabbi Jacob Leiner remained in Izbica to maintain his father’s community. Rabbi Judah Leib Eger was the grandson of the illustrious talmudist and halakhist Rabbi Akiba Eger. At an early age he had run away from home and arrived in Kotsk, seeking out a spiritual path. The hagiographic literature is replete with stories of how he had been rejected by Rabbi Menahem Mendel23 and finally travelled with Mordecai Joseph to Izbica, where he became his devoted disciple and the close friend of another newcomer from Lithuania, Rabbi Zaddok Hacohen Rabinowitz. Later, when Rabbi Judah Leib Eger and Rabbi Zaddok Hacohen had become two of the most famous Izbica hasidim, they moved to I ulbin and set up a beit midrash there. The split between the Izbicer (later Radzyń) dynasty and the Izbicer disciples in Lublin was not characterized by the same severity as the split between Kotsk and Izbica, although friction emerged between Rabbi Zaddok and Rabbi Gershon Henoch in the late 1880s, specifically on the issue of tikkun. In large part both communities continued to interact with each other.24

Rabbi Jacob Leiner served as rebe for twenty-four years. Unexpectedly and for no known reason, before the completion of his thirteenth year in Izbica, Rabbi Jacob moved to Radzyń, a small city north-east of Lublin, outside the province of Radom. This enabled him to widen the gap between his hasidim and the other Kotsk schools of Ger, Sochaczew, and Aleksandrów, bringing them closer to the Lublin rebbe, with whom he had more sympathy. Rabbi Jacob lived in Radzyń for almost thirteen years until his passing on 15 Av 5638 (1878). Although his younger brother, Rabbi Samuel Dov Asher of Biskovitz (author of Ne’ot deshe) was well known for his piety and scholarship, it was Rabbi Jacob’s eldest son, that Rabbi Aaron ben Jacob of Karlin, while passing through Izbica, once said, ‘I feel here the air of Erets Yisra’el.’ Rabbi Jacob of Izbica replied to Rabbi Aaron of Karlin that the Seer of Lublin had once made a similar comment. See Lewin, Ha’adm ri gnei, 62. I zbica was indeed set on the top of a mountain surrounded by hills similar to the Judean hills outside Jerusalem. Still others suggest that it was chosen for its close proximity to Kotsk.

Leiner, Dor yesharim, 12; Faierstein, Illis in the Hands of Heaven, 79-84.25

Rabbi Hayim Simchah Leiner explains that Rabbi Mordecai Joseph chose Izbica to fulfill a prophecy made by Rabbi Jacob Isaac Horwitz, the Seer of Lublin, who once passed through Izbica and said that it would one day be the home of a great scholar (Dor yesharim, 34). Another tradition has
Rabbi Gershon Henoch Leiner, then 39 years old, who was chosen to become the next Izbica rebe.

Rabbi Gershon Henoch had been only a year old when his father moved to Izbica. He spent his childhood attending his grandfather’s lectures, apparently acquiring the reputation of a wunderkind at a very young age. As a young man, he attended classes with accomplished scholars like Rabbi Judah Leib Eger and Rabbi Zaddok Hacohen, with whom he maintained a relationship long after Rabbi Zaddok’s departure for Lublin. He is known to have had a photographic memory and a unique talent for languages. According to Shlomo Zalman Shragai, Henoch spoke Yiddish, Polish, German, Russian, some French, and, after his first trip to Naples in search of the Zohar, Italian. He may also have read Spanish, since he records in Ḥahadadnu vehaḥepṭṭīḥah that he obtained a copy of Abraham Kohen de Herrera’s Puerta del Cielo (She’ar hashamayim) in the original Spanish. There are also extant handwritten documents of medical prescriptions he wrote in Latin. A modern Israeli historian of medicine has written of Gershon Henoch’s medical knowledge:

Gershon Henoch Leiner did not study in primary school, secondary school, or university. He acquired his knowledge of medicine from other sources, using among other things a Polish and Latin dictionary. ... Rabbi Gershon Henoch had a brilliant mind. He was able to accomplish this through self-instruction, perseverance, and a superhuman devotion to the study of ancient Hebrew texts as well as texts in other languages without previous knowledge of any other language. In this the self-taught healer Gershon Henoch succeeded, as if to prove that one need not attend university to become a competent doctor. He was known among those of his generation as a ‘good doctor’.

From the sources, a picture emerges of Rabbi Gershon Henoch as a widely educated person, but the basis of his education was a traditional grounding in Talmud. His father, Rabbi Jacob, was quite strict about his young child’s attention to Talmud and the legal codes before beginning a systematic study of the Zohar and Lurianic kabbalah. Gershon Henoch’s knowledge of Talmud was demonstrated by his ambitious work Sidrei tohorot. In a ten-year project Gershon Henoch gathered all the relevant material scattered in the Babylonian Talmud and Palestinian Talmud that might throw light on the tractates of Mishnah Tohorot, for which no talmudic commentary is extant. This work also includes Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s Rashi-like marginal gloss on the passages he collected. This controversial undertaking was completed and published when he was only 29 years old.

The polemic waged against the hasidim in Izbica–Radzyń by the remnants of the Kotsk dynasty, as well as by supporters of the growing Jewish Enlightenment in the 1860s and 1870s, became Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s major preoccupation. His father was more even-tempered and sought to avoid the growing conflict rather than confront it. Gershon Henoch, however, modelled himself on his grandfather, whose fiery personality and sharp tongue were well known in the hasidic communities in the Kingdom.

The conflict reached new heights in the summer of 1883 when Rabbi Gershon Henoch was arrested by the Russian authorities. The two hagiographic biographies disagree on why he was arrested and who informed on him. According to Judah Levin, he was arrested for helping young hasidic men avoid conscription into the Russian army. The draft instituted in the 1840s had met with little success, especially among hasidim. It is unclear who Levin believes informed on Gershon Henoch, but it seems unlikely that members of the Kotsk camp would have informed on a fellow hasid for a crime they also committed. Jewish supporters of the Enlightenment were known to have played the authorities against hasidic Jews in cases like this one. Gershon Henoch suspected, however, that rival hasidim were responsible.

During the three weeks of his arrest, Rabbi Gershon Henoch wrote three short commentaries: one on Orhot hayim, sometimes attributed to the medieval rabbi Eliezer ben Isaac Hagadol; one on the gaonic work She’ar iyyun; and one on the fifty disagreements between the rabbinic sages of Babylonia and Palestine. S. Z. Shragai, Gershon Henoch’s other biographer, makes use of one of these commentaries:

Most of the mishnaic order of Tohorot, with the exception of one tractate, Nezik, has no talmudic commentary (genara) in either the Palestinian Talmud or the Babylonian Talmud. Rabbi Gershon Henoch gathered comments from the rest of the Talmud that applied to topics in the tractates Kohan and Ohodot of Mishnah Tohorot and arranged them like a genara to the mishnaic material.

Shragai, Binovis haSidah Izbica–Radzyin, ii. 150 ff., and id., ‘Hasidut haBaal Shem Tov be’iftisat Izbica–Radzyin’, 175, 176. This work caused quite a stir in the hasidic community in Poland (Der yeshayim, 71). Prof. David Weiss Halivni pointed out to me that in the 2nd edn. of Sidrei tohorot, the publisher added the following words on the bottom of every page: ‘Gathered and collected from the words of our rabbinic sages (ḥazal)’. Halivni suggests that apparently this was a compromise between Rabbi Gershon Henoch and the publishers after the initial printing caused such controversy. The statement makes clear that this work is not an authentic piece of talmudic literature.
works to explain his arrest. According to Shragai, Gershon Henoch was in court rather than in prison during the period of his arrest, as one of his rabbinic decisions was investigated by secular authorities. Shragai quotes the preface of an early edition of Gershon Henoch’s work on Orḥot Ḥayyim:

I have written this book ... at a time of great pain to me. There arose from the ‘community of liars’ those who accused me, using lies and falsehoods. Many arose against me, both from numerous branches of hasidim and transgressors. Thank God ... who destined me for this investigation in the city of Radzyn these eight months in 1883. More specifically, the investigation was between 17 Tamuz and 9 Av. I was required to remain in court almost the whole day and was thus unable to continue my regular course of study. I said [to myself] that I would undertake to comment upon the holy book Orḥot Ḥayyim ... I was also able to find ten more sections of this work in the responsa of the geonim, in Tosafot, and in Orḥot Ḥayyim, vol. ii, which was attributed to Rabbi Aaron Hakohen of Lunev. Much of this work defied understanding and its source was concealed ... With the help of God I was able to find satisfactory explanations and interpretations in the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds and in midrashic literature. This was all completed during the three weeks [mentioned above].

Shragai adds that this arrest had nothing to do with the issue of tekhelet, which did not become public until 1860. Rather, it concerns an individual who accused Rabbi Gershon Henoch of sanctioning the drowning of a young girl found dead by a river near Radzyn. The girl was illegitimate, born of a mentally ill woman who had apparently been raped. If there were ideological reasons for a fellow hasid to inform on Gershon Henoch, they were connected to either the publication of the controversial Mei hashilo’ah, or the ongoing polemic between Kotsk and Izbica. Whatever the reason for his arrest, it is clear from this source that Gershon Henoch believed that other hasidim had been involved in informing on him. The arrest only contributed to his increasing sense of himself as an embattled defender of the true faith and strengthened his sense of mission as an ardent upholder of his grandfather’s work. It probably also contributed to his own attempt to revive the use of tekhelet.

Controversy arose over Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s publication of his grandfather Rabbi Mordecai Joseph’s work Mei hashilo’ah in 1860. Although the title-page says it was published in Vienna, Shragai theorizes that it was published in Józefów and that Vienna appeared on the title-page to evade Russian censorship, but this seems a little unlikely. By 1860 the Russian censors had become quite lax in the Kingdom, allowing a wide variety of Hebrew publishing-houses to be established in Piotrków, Warsaw, Lublin, and Józefów. Although in the first part of the nineteenth century members of the Jewish Enlightenment led by

Joseph Perl attempted to limit the publication of hasidic texts, by the 1860s this too had subsided.14

Joseph Weiss suggests that Gershon Henoch may have found it difficult to contract a Jewish printing-house to publish Mei hashilo’ah in Poland.15 One reason it may actually have been published in Vienna is that the various groups of followers of the Kotsk rebbe had become such a predominant part of Congress Poland hasidism that the Izbica court could not find anyone to print it, even among the hasidim. By 1860 the conflict between Izbica and Kotsk hasidism had become quite severe. Rabbi Isaac Meir Rothenberg Alter of Ger, who inherited the largest portion of the Kotsk community, became involved in political activity in Warsaw in the 1860s and 1870s. He wielded a strong influence on the chief rabbi, Dov Berush Meisels, and served the community as a base for the hasidic influx into the city.16 Meisels was quite sympathetic to the Polish fight for independence and was used on numerous occasions as a liaison between the government and the Orthodox community in Warsaw.17 As a result of Rabbi Isaac Meir Rothenberg Alter’s political activity and his reputation among non-hasidic Orthodox Jews as an accomplished talmudic scholar and legal authority, the Ger dynasty emerged as the most prominent hasidic court in the Congress Kingdom in the last decades of the nineteenth century. One can only imagine that the Izbica court, tucked away in a small outpost in Radzyn and the provincial medieval city of Lublin, could not have matched the political force and popular appeal of the Kotsk community in and around Warsaw. A popular legend asserts that some Gerer hasidim broke into the printing-press where Mei hashilo’ah was first being printed and changed the letters of the title-page from Mei hashilo’ah (‘Waters of Siloam [in Jerusalem]’) to Mei raglayim (‘urine’); supposedly, the first copies of the book came out with this title. If the story is true, Gershon Henoch’s remark about the hasidic community and the ‘transgressors’ may be aimed at the successors to the Kotsk dynasty (Ger, Aleksandrow, Warka), who had become quite powerful in the enlightened city of Warsaw.

For whatever reason, the Izbica court had become a kind of pariah among many hasidic and non-hasidic Jews in the Kingdom. By 1877 Rabbi Gershon Henoch was the leader of the Izbica family and the most ardent defender of his grandfather, Rabbi Mordecai Joseph. Yet it appears that the most vehement

16 The relationship between Rabbi Dov Berush Meisels and Rabbi Isaac Meir Rothenberg Alter is well known. Some claim that Meisels was a hasid of Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, which would place him firmly within the camp of Rabbi Isaac Meir of Ger. Meisels was also close to Dr Mordecai Jastrow, who, as a Polish nationalist and an Orthodox Jew, attempted to convince Rabbi Isaac Meir of Ger to institute a new ultra-Orthodox school in Warsaw which would modernize the method of study and the selection of courses. Guterman, From Assimilation to Nationalism, 30 and n. 36.
attacks on him were not the result of the publication of his grandfather’s book, or even of Sidrec tohorot, but rather of the three short, primarily halakhic, works on the discovery of what he believed was the hilazon in an aquarium in Naples, and his subsequent mission to coerce Jewish leaders into reinstituting the wearing of tekhelet. As mentioned above, in the larger hasidic community Gershon Henoch is best known for this claim to have discovered the source of tekhelet, and for the controversy which this aroused. Anyone aware of the nature of traditional Judaism should not be surprised by this. Changes in practice, especially the reinstitution of a practice that probably had not been observed since late antiquity, would invariably evoke far greater controversy than would problematic ideological or theological positions. Moreover, the subtle messianic implications of the tekhelet, pointing towards the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, would be suspect in a Jewish community which still remembered the Sabattian heresy and its aftermath. By the beginning of the gaonic period, in the ninth century, the tradition of identifying the fish had been lost, obliging Jews to wear tsisit without tekhelet. The loss of the tradition of tekhelet came to symbolize the period of Jewish exile, when certain mishevet that had been current during the Temple period could no longer be performed. The rediscovery of tekhelet was viewed by many, including Gershon Henoch, as a sign that the time of redemption was at hand.

That Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s messianic yearnings prompted his interest in tekhelet is shown by his publications on the issue. His first essay on the subject, Seferu temunot hal, appeared a year before he first travelled to Naples. That work sets the stage for the journey and the subsequent attempts to prove the validity of its outcome. In it he argues two points. First, he suggests that the ge’onim and early rashonim may indeed have known of the hilazon, so the mitsvah of tekhelet was not dependent upon the Temple. Secondly, he uses responsa literature to describe the physical characteristics of the hilazon as a preparation for his trip to Italy.

In 1888 Rabbi Gershon Henoch travelled to Naples with a companion, Rabbi Isaac Kotsker. Though he describes the Naples aquarium in detail in Ma’amor petil tekhelet, he never states why he chose Naples. Obviously, if the hilazon was a fish known to the rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia, it must have lived in the Mediterranean Sea and not in the waters of eastern Europe. However, Gershon Henoch never explains whether he believed the aquarium in Naples to be the most advanced of its kind or whether it was merely the only place he knew of.

At the beginning of Ma’amor petil tekhelet, which appears to have been written at the time of his first trip and immediately after, he describes the aquarium as

being set under the sea with large glass windows where one could view the fish in their natural habitat. After locating the hilazon (which he says was known as the ‘tint-fish’ because it excreted a dark dye), he explains how he was able to obtain some of the dye:

I was there in the winter months in the place where they fished for it [the tint-fish]. However, because they fished for it only during certain months in the summer I was able to obtain a small amount of the blood for testing. However, in all of Italy I was never able to obtain a sufficient amount. The traders [in this fish] said to me that [during the fishing months] they send all of their catch immediately to Rome to the factory which makes it into dye for clothing.50

Apparently, the dye was used for expensive clothing and was immediately exported to Rome for the monarch’s clothes. Rabbi Gershon Henoch precedes this description with a historical account derived from traditional sources of how the tekhelet of old (in the days of Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire, and Titus) was used for royal clothing and thus difficult to obtain. He infers that the tradition of the Gentiles regarding the tekhelet supports the view that this fish is truly the hilazon. Although he returned with the blood of the tint-fish in 1888, he did not successfully colour tsisit with its dye until the first day of Hanukah 1889.51 By the end of 1890 the dye was being mass-produced and Rabbi Gershon Henoch claimed that up to 12,000 Jews were wearing tekhelet. Although it came almost four decades after the initial messianic fervour of 1830, the discovery of the tekhelet in 1888 and its reintroduction into ritual life in 1889 served to support the claim of Gershon Henoch’s family that Rabbi Mordecai Joseph’s emergence as an independent hasidic master in 1840 was the beginning of a new era of redemption.

Negative reactions to the tekhelet appear to have become quite pronounced in 1889 and 1890 in Poland, Lithuania, Galicia, and Germany. Rather than seeing this as a cause for concern, Gershon Henoch seems to have responded to each serious challenge in writing and stepped up his programme to spread tekhelet to Jewish communities in Europe and Palestine.52 After he successfully produced the tekhelet in 1889–90, he travelled three more times to Naples, each time visiting the same aquarium and apparently purchasing more of the dye.

In the preface to his last work on the subject, Ayin hatekhelet, Gershon Henoch summarized the responsa for and against the wearing of the tekhelet. His general challenge to the learned community, one which was met by very few halakhists, was to oppose him on the grounds of the particular nature of his findings as well as within the framework of halakhic discussion on the possibility of renewal of the

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50 Gershon Henoch Leiner, Ma’amor petil tekhelet (New York, 1952), 44.
52 For a 20th-century hasidic response to Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s position on tekhelet from the gth rebbe of Lubavitch, Rabbi Shalom Dov Bear Schneersohn, see his Ieruk kodshet rishah (New York, 1982), 351–4. I should like to thank my good friend Rabbi Lazer Lazeroff for bringing this text to my attention.
53 There are various opinions concerning when the hilazon disappeared. See Rabbi Gershon Henoch, Seferot temunot hal, 10, id., Ayin hatekhelet, 112b. Cf. Rabbi Isaac Heras, ‘When did tsiyit disappear from Israel?’ (Heb.), in Shnei le Yehudiyyim: Sefer voqel to Rabbi I. Wolfberg (Tel Aviv, 1957), Rabbi Menahem Bornstein, Sefer tekhelet, 133–5; and Rabbi Jacob of Kutno, She’elat neshiva ve-shita of mulhe, nos. 1 3.
54 According to Rabbi Isaac Luria, the entire mitsvah of tekhelet only applies when the Temple is standing in Jerusalem. See Rabbi Meir Poppers, Pen et ha-yaron (Jerusalem, n.d.), ch. 5.
tekhelet without the Temple. Most of the responsa he chooses to report challenged his position in very general terms, largely revolving around the quasi-doctrinal statement of the Hungarian talmudist and halakhist Moses Sofer that had become very well known in Poland at the time that hadash asur min hatorah (‘innovation is forbidden by the Torah’). Gershon Henoch responds to this as follows:

We read the Book of Ruth on the day the Torah was given [the Festival of Shavuot] to teach us that even a new thing (davar hadash), if it has foundation in the Torah, it is forbidden to challenge it even if the sages (gedolah) argue with you. This is the meaning of hadash asur min hatorah, i.e. something that is ‘new’ [or perhaps here, renewed], which is ‘from the Torah’ [here obviously regarding tekhelet] ‘it is forbidden’ (asur) to challenge it.53

The only other hasidim whom Rabbi Gershon Henoch persuaded to use his dye for tekhelet were the disciples of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav. On a trip to Uman, the burial-place of Rabbi Nahman and the place of pilgrimage for Bratslav hasidim since his death in 1810, Rabbi Abraham ben Nahman Hazan stopped in Radzyń, met Gershon Henoch, and decided to adopt the custom of tekhelet, taking dye back with him to his community in Jerusalem. It was Rabbi Abraham’s student Rabbi Israel Halpern who apparently brought the tekhelet to the Bratslav community in Galicia almost a decade later. However, Rabbi Abraham’s willingness to adopt this custom was not solely due to Gershon Henoch’s persuasiveness: the reappearance of tekhelet as a sign of the Messiah is rooted in both Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav’s Likutei Moharan and Rabbi Nathan Sternhartz of Nemirov’s Likutei Halakhot.

Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s work on tekhelet is part of a broader project of revealing the concealed unity in all Jewish literature. In his earliest work, Sidrei Torahot, Gershon Henoch gathered fragmented discussions on a single topic from talmudic and midrashic literature. In his later commentary on Orḥot Hayim, he uses the same method, which reflected his belief that the inauguration of the messianic era would be the result of uncovering the tradition of the Written Torah concealed in the Oral Torah. This act of literary reconstruction, which involved synthesizing apparently disparate literary traditions, was based on the common kabbalistic notion that gathering the fallen sparks of holiness was a prelude to the messianic era. Essentially, Rabbi Gershon Henoch wanted to show that esoteric, mystical traditions were buried in the halakhic discourse of rabbinic literature. In Ṣod yesharim and Ṣod yesharim inyanya, his collected commentaries on the Pentateuch, he consistently attempts to show how the Zohar and subsequent kabbalah illuminate classical midrashic literature, and to demonstrate the integral relationship between rabbinic literature and biblical verses. The tendency to unify the rational with the mystical is also exhibited in his works on tekhelet. The first part of Ṣefunot temune hol, for example, is devoted to showing the similarities between the gaonic, Maimonidean, and kabbalistic attitudes towards tekhelet, all of which he argues support his thesis that tekhelet is not dependent upon the existence of the Temple.

In his Ḥaḥakedmah veḥapetzah, Rabbi Gershon Henoch tried to prove that Maimonides’ philosophy is consistent with the classic work of Jewish mysticism, the Zohar. As well as demonstrating his messianic belief that unifying these traditions would bring us closer to redemption, this attempt to unify medieval mysticism and medieval rationalism also shows Gershon Henoch trying to expose the modern historicist attempt to deepen the bifurcation of these post-rabbinic ideologies. Finally, by responding to the way Jewish Enlightenment thinkers used Maimonides, he was attempting to find a unity between Haskalah rationalism and hasidic mysticism in order to invalidate the ways in which the Haskalah was built upon general Maimonidean assumptions. He was not the first hasidic rabbi to attempt to reclaim Maimonides for hasidism, but he is the only hasidic thinker systematically to read the Guide of the Perplexed through the eyes of hasidic thought.

The maskilim, or enlightened Jews, of Germany, Poland, and Galicia, viewed themselves as the rightful inheritors of the Maimonidean tradition. They found support from historians in the Wissenschaft des Judentums school, such as Heinrich Graetz, who placed Maimonides’ ‘rational’ philosophy against the mystical trend in Judaism, which they argued was largely the result of ‘external’ influences not compatible with ‘normative’ Judaism.56 Contemporary scholarship has both refuted the accuracy of this claim as well as uncovering its ideological bias.57 Nevertheless, Maimonides was used by the Enlightenment as the ‘gateway’ for liberal, rational Judaism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s reading of Maimonides was an attempt to turn the Haskalah view on its head. By claiming that Maimonides shared a tradition with the Zohar, he suggested that his ‘rationalism’ was merely a veil, covering a mystical tradition rooted at Sinai. This claim is not original to Gershon Henoch: its history goes back to at least Rabbi Abraham Isaac Ibn Latif (c. 1210–c. 1280) and Abraham

53 Shragai, Ḥibreto haḥidut izhur- ḥaduy, ii. 166. For two of the more supportive responses to Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s tekhelet, see Rabbi Beirish ben Alexander Turish of Warsaw in his Mozero tseḥek (1895), 228–238, and Rabbi Abraham ben Nahman Hazan (known as Abraham Bratslaver, d. 1918) of Jerusalem, in Shragai, Ḥasidut haḥidut Shem Tov beḥitfasat izhica- ḥaduy: 171–4.
54 Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, Likutei Moharan (Brooklyn, 1976), 2 vols., vol. i, lesson 18, para. 7, 254; 40, 37, 89, b.
Abulafia (1240-after 1291). Gershon Henoch’s reformulation of the idea is interesting, not so much for its substance, as for its appearance in nineteenth-century hasidic Poland. By this time, the controversy over the legitimacy of Maimonides had long been won: there was no need to defend Maimonides by making him a kabbalist, nor was there any need to legitimate kabbalah by making it square with Maimonidean ideas. Rather, this enterprise appears to have served a political, as much as a spiritual, purpose: first, Gershon Henoch attempted to expropriate Maimonides from the secularists and thus redeem him from the ‘transgressors’ against the Torah; second, he believed that unifying these disparate traditions would move the world closer to the messianic era. However, unlike many of his hasidic colleagues, he admitted that Maimonides was educated in philosophy, which required him to explain why, in his own day, the study of philosophy was considered unnecessary. Shragai summarizes his argument thus:

There is no reason in our generation to be involved in philosophical polemics. The reason is that, in our generation, those who leave the way of God do not do so as the result of being enticed by philosophy, but rather because of licentiousness and abandoning the yoke of Heaven. Therefore, what good would it do to argue with these transgressors about things that stand in the supernal world when they are [hopelessly] rooted in this [physical] world? Rather, we must turn our faces inward towards faithful Judaism in order to deepen that faith and to improve our actions with the joy of mitzvot, the love of Israel, and the love of creation. This is the true intent of kabbalah whose [true] inheritor is hasidism.35

This statement reflects Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s position in Hahakdamah that the modern ‘transgressor’ does not leave Torah as a result of intellectual speculations. The medieval world, whose metaphysical construct is seen as a support for Torah, has, in Gershon Henoch’s mind, been replaced by a rationalism which has no base in any traditional theory of belief in God. As such, the modern ‘transgressor’ is not bound by intellectual barriers which would necessitate the development of philosophical theories to justify belief. Although Gershon Henoch makes this assertion as a polemical statement and not as a historical claim, his sentiments are reflected in various schools of thought which viewed modernity as the ‘age of unbelief’. While modern ‘transgressors’ are obviously not solely the product of their hedonistic desires rather than of philosophical speculations, it is arguable that the medieval theocentric world-view made heresy much more difficult to justify.36 Therefore, Gershon Henoch says, regarding the medieval Jewish philosophers, ‘the sages needed to embellish [their] words of truth with [philosophical] proofs and principles, to seek out, understand, learn and teach the way of faith and present their words according to philosophical principles in order that they be available to all’.37

37 Rabbi Gershon Henoch Leiner, Sefermitcum fil.

To a large degree, this reflects the more common theory among traditionalists that Maimonides was a ‘true believer’ and merely used philosophical garb to make Judaism an acceptable alternative to Jewish members of the philosophical renaissance in eleventh-century Egypt.38 However, Rabbi Gershon Henoch adds a new dimension by arguing that Maimonides’ ‘true’ opinion is not necessarily that of the rabbis, but rather that of the mystical doctrine of the Zohar. As such, he holds that, although the study of philosophy is not necessary in a world where religious choices are no longer rooted in philosophical speculation, this does not affect the continued study of Maimonides, who has a secret mystical subtext. Indeed, one is obliged to engage, as he does, in the philosophical sections of Maimonides’ corpus in order to reveal their mystical nature and redeem them from the problematic categorization of ‘rationalism’. This exercise is the unique vocation of hasidism because the revealed state of the Zohar, which is largely the product of Lurianic kabbalah and the Baal Shem Tov, makes the study of Maimonides more essential in that his esoteric doctrine can now finally be decoded. In Hahakdamah, the Zohar serves to decipher the true position of Maimonides as one who had a share in this ancient pre-Sinaitic mystical tradition.

Throughout his analysis of Maimonides in Hahakdamah, Rabbi Gershon Henoch believes he has transformed Maimonides from a philosopher to a mystic along the lines of the Zohar. The implications of such a position are significant in a world where the Jewish Enlightenment posed a serious challenge to the hasidic community, especially when it claimed to be rooted in a Maimonidean ‘method’. Gershon Henoch challenges the Enlightenment thinkers’ use of philosophy and unpacks their claim to root their ideology in Maimonidean thought. ‘Turning inward’, for him, meant turning away from the secular challenge as well as invalidating it by undermining its foundations in Maimonidean thought. To accomplish that he had to disengage Maimonides from the Enlightenment notion of philosophy. By making Maimonides a mystic, Gershon Henoch distanced him from the philosophical agenda of maskilim who saw no place for mysticism in the authentic history of Jewish thought.

Rabbi Gershon Henoch never explicitly stated his position on Maimonides as a model for his response to the Enlightenment. His primary intent was more focused on messianic expectations and the need to create a unity in the apparently disparate Jewish literary tradition. However, his analysis of Maimonides as part of the mystical tradition responded to the conditions of Jewish life during the reforms in Congress Poland. With growing acculturation, there was a need for a spiritual renewal in Judaism which could meet the challenges of modernity by satisfying the curiosity of young Jews who now had to choose between studying secular subjects in a gymnasium or the world of tradition and faith. Many scholars have described early hasidism as a populist attempt to create a spiritual renewal

38 The traditionalist school of Maimonidean scholarship is perhaps best represented by Marvin Fox, Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy (Chicago, 1990).
for poor Jews excluded from the elite world of Jewish scholarship. In some ways, Gershon Henoch’s project of integrating the spiritual and rational prefigured a similar challenge in a later period. The disfranchised were now not the impoverished masses but the emancipated, educated élite who felt excluded from the world of Jewish spirituality. By analysing Maimonides in mystical terms, Gershon Henoch was asserting a continuity between the rational world of the enlightened Jews and the spiritual world of hasidism.

After his discovery of *tekhelet*, Rabbi Gershon Henoch continued to lead the hasidic community of Radzyń until his death in 1891. He wanted to leave Radzyń after thirteen years there, probably because of the significance to the Przysucha tradition of the period of thirteen years, and he did attempt to leave, but always returned, even after a very successful year in 1886 as rabbi of Ostrów. He continued to live in Radzyń, responding to the many letters he received on *tekhelet* and doing other scholarly work which I have described.

Rabbi Gershon Henoch had no interest in transmitting the breadth of his knowledge to his students or his family. The Radzyń hasidic tradition which developed in Poland and Germany, and later in England and America, was not shaped by his attempts to unify philosophy and kabbalah. The only substantive thing which separates Radzyń from other hasidic courts is the wearing of *tekhelet* and perhaps a more intense focus on the study of the Zohar. While other Jews, such as Rabbi Abraham Kook and Rabbi Joseph Soloveichik, integrated their general knowledge into a new religious ideology, Gershon Henoch only used such secular knowledge privately. He did not advocate the acquisition of scientific knowledge as a religious imperative, even though he believed in the integration of all forms of Jewish study.

It is only through a close reading of Rabbi Gershon Henoch’s hasidic commentaries and halakhic works that we can see the profound effect of modernity on his thinking. As an individual, he took advantage of the new environment in Congress Poland, including opportunities for travel and increased availability of scientific publications and language dictionaries. His most famous work on *tekhelet* combined an esoteric hasidic messianism with scientific zoological detective work. He also responded to the increasing divisions between the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the mysticism of the hasidim by trying to find mystical meaning in the rationalist discourse of halakhic responsa and of Maimonides. Through his command of modern languages, his knowledge of science and medicine, and his study of classical Jewish texts which many hasidic masters had ignored, Gershon Henoch Leiner was responding to the conditions of modern Poland. His scholarship indicates that Polish hasidism was a vital and creative force in the mid-nineteenth century.

62 For further discussion of this appraisal, see H. U'niur, *Benufnat haburat* (Jerusalem, 1972), 83–227; and A. Rapoport-Albert, ‘God and the Tzadik as the Two Focal Points of Hasidic Worship’, *History of Religions*, 18 (1979), 296–324.

63 *Hatsufshah* (14 Adar 1886).
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