

## *Esh Kodesh*: A New Evaluation in Light of a Philological Examination of the Manuscript\*

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**T**he *Rebbe* of Piaseczno, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira (1889–1943) (the *Rebbe*) is undoubtedly one of the central personalities in the research on Orthodox Jewish thinking during the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> This is primarily due to the sermons that he delivered and wrote in Warsaw from September 14, 1939 – two weeks after the German invasion of Poland – to July 18, 1942 – several days before the onset of the Great *Aktion* in the Warsaw ghetto. Given the paucity of works in rabbinical philosophy that were written

- \* This study was conducted by the author as a post-doctoral research fellow at the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem and, subsequently, as a Saul Kagan Post-Doctoral Fellow in Advanced Shoah Studies of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany. I thank Professors Dan Michman, Steven T. Katz, and Havi Dreifuss for stewarding the research, offering comments and critiques, and adding numerous insights.
- 1 For extensive biographical details, see Aharon Suraski, “The Late Martyred Grand Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira,” printed at the end of *Esh Kodesh* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Committee of Piaseczner Hassidim, 1960), and Mendel Piekarcz, *The Last Hasidic Literary Document on Polish Soil: Writings of the Rebbe of Piaseczno in the Warsaw Ghetto* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), pp. 8–14. For biographical details about the *Rebbe* with emphasis on the Holocaust era, based on testimonies and archive materials, see Esther Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder: Perspectives on Faith, Halachah and Leadership during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2007), pp. 479–488. See also Itzhak Hershkowitz, “Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, the Piasechner *Rebbe*: His Holocaust and Pre-Holocaust Thought, Continuity or Discontinuity?” (Hebrew) (M.A. thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 2005), pp. 17–18; Zvi Leshem, *Between Messianism and Prophecy: Hasidism According to the Rebbe of Piaseczno* (Hebrew) (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2007), pp. 1–5; Ron Wacks, *The Flame of the Holy Fire: Perspectives on the Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapiro of Piaseczna* (Hebrew) (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2010), pp. 21–33; Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira: the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994), pp. 1–14.

during the Holocaust itself, *Esh Kodesh* has become a canonical text, if not the central work, on Orthodox thinking at that time.<sup>2</sup>

*Esh Kodesh* is the title of the book published in 1960, which is a collection of the *Rebbe's* sermons; these were found after the Holocaust along with other writings that he had produced before the war.<sup>3</sup> The *Rebbe* delivered these sermons orally on the Sabbath and committed them to writing after the Sabbath was over.<sup>4</sup> They were written in rabbinical Hebrew but were probably delivered in Yiddish.<sup>5</sup> The written

- 2 For other well-known books, see Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal, *Em ha-Banim Semeha* (Hebrew) (Budapest: no publisher noted, 1943); Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, *Questions and Responsa from the Depths*, vols. 1–5 (Hebrew) (New York: privately published, 1959, 1963, 1969, 1974). For a very abridged English edition of this work, see Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, *Responsa from the Holocaust* (New York: Judaica Press, 1983). On other Orthodox writings from the Holocaust, see Farbstein, *Thunder*; idem, *Alei Merorot: Holocaust Diaries, Responsa, and Philosophy: The Writings of R. Yehoshua Moshe Aaronson* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2014); and Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, Gershon Greenberg, eds., *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Without diminishing the value of these books, it should be noted that *Em ha-Banim Semeha* was written mostly in Hungary before the Nazi invasion of that country, whereas *Questions and Responses from the Depths* was redacted after the Holocaust and concerns itself mainly with Halakhic rather than philosophical aspects. *Esh Kodesh* is unique in that it was written in the very midst of the inferno and is wholly dedicated to an investigation of the meaning of the suffering and torment.
- 3 The focus in this article is on *Esh Kodesh*. For the *Rebbe's* other writings, see my introduction to the new critical and annotated edition of the Holocaust sermons of the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno (forthcoming). All quotations from *Esh Kodesh* are taken from the original manuscript in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (ŻIH), Ring. II/370.
- 4 The fact that he gave these sermons orally on the Sabbath and committed them to writing afterward from memory, in an attempt to reconstruct his remarks, is evident in the contents of the sermons themselves. See his *Shabbat Shuva* 5702 (September 27, 1941) sermon, “We said on the holy Sabbath at the *Kiddush*”: “Now as I write this, I can add that others also told me so”; *ibid.* In his sermon for the Portion of the Week *Mishpatim-Sheqalim* 5702 (February 14, 1942), he wrote, “As we said last week.” For Portion of the Week *Bo* 5700 (January 13, 1940), he remarked, “I do not remember the rest of what we said about this.”
- 5 On this diglossia — presenting Hasidic teachings in Yiddish for a listening audience and in Hebrew for a readership — see Zeev Gries, *The Book in Early Hasidism — Genres, Authors, Scribes, Managing Editors, and Its Review by their Contemporaries and Scholars* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1992), pp. 27–31, 49–50; Daniel Reiser and Ariel Even-Ma’ase, “The Last Sermon of R. Judah Leib Alter of Ger and the Role of Yiddish for the Study of Hasidic Sermons” ,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, 30 (2013) (Hebrew), pp. 127–160; idem, “*Sefer Sefat Emet*, Yiddish Manuscripts and the Oral Homilies of R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib

sermons make no direct reference to political or historical events. The *Rebbe* never mentions Germans or important ghetto personalities by name and does not relate directly to specific events. However, the sermons do refer frequently to the “evildoers,” the suffering, the physical and psychological torments and distress, the agony over lost loved ones, and the crisis relating to religion and faith.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the phenomenon of suffering and its religious significance is the core issue of the book.

The sermons were meant to infuse the audience with hope and self-respect, to offer counsel, to set forth a religious path, and to persuade listeners that spirituality and human dignity remained possible despite the Germans’ attempts to crush them.<sup>7</sup> As the war moved into a new stage in and after the summer of 1941, however, the *Rebbe* realized, as his sermons imply, that the prospects of survival — his own and of those around him — were dwindling.<sup>8</sup> He understood that the ravages of the war, including the spiritual and religious crises, could not be fully repaired even after the guns would fall silent:

Who would not be saddened upon seeing such physical and psychological miseries as have befallen the Jews? Whose heart would not ache upon seeing that there are neither *chadarim* nor *yeshivot*, neither a place of Torah nor a collective of Torah scholars? Not only have God’s abodes been destroyed at this time; it will also be seen henceforth. For young Torah scholars will be absent.

of Ger,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, 33 (2015), pp. 9–43.

- 6 Polen, *The Holy Fire*, pp. 17–20. The *Rebbe*, however, did make many indirect and unspecified references to the events. See Judith Tydor-Baumel, “*Esh Kodesh* by the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno and Its Place in Understanding Religious Life in the Warsaw Ghetto” (Hebrew), *Yalqut Moreshet*, 29 (1980), pp. 173–187.
- 7 Polen, *The Holy Fire*, p. 16. On the indignity and humiliation that the Germans inflicted from the very beginning of the war, see the sermon for the Portion of the Week *Toledot* 5700 (November 11, 1939): “Now [he] is trampled and crushed until he does not feel whether he is a man of Israel, whether he is a man or a beast who has no agency to feel.” The sermon continues with words of solace and encouragement.
- 8 See, for example, the sermon for the Portion of the Week *Shofetim* 5701 (August 30, 1941): “Observe, in all the woes one sees that if everyone knew that they would be saved right away, tomorrow, a large share of the despaired would yet be able to strengthen themselves. The trouble is that they do not see the end of the darkness and have little with which to strengthen themselves and, Heaven forbid, are despairing and their morale is declining.”

How many of them have been lost to bizarre deaths and starvation, Heaven forbid, and how many of them have been forced to set out in quest for food? Whence will we get young Torah scholars if they are not learning now, and how many of them will not withstand the ordeal and head to the market on the Sabbath to bargain due to hunger? Should we think that those boys and young men who have circulated for years in the markets and the streets, doing commerce or begging the generous for crumbs of bread on weekday and Sabbath, have forgotten the Torah and the Hasidism that they had acquired over several years in *chadarim* and *yeshivot*<sup>9</sup> and will return, once it becomes possible, to the *chadarim* and *yeshivot* as before?!<sup>10</sup>

The effort to commit sermons to writing in the midst of this extreme situation deserves to be valued, especially under the physical conditions in the ghetto at the time;<sup>11</sup> it undoubtedly reflects the existence of a larger and broader goal. The *Rebbe's* request in his will to have these sermons published<sup>12</sup> indicates his intent and proves that he considered them important not only as comforting messages for his unfortunate contemporaries but for posterity and for many people in various situations. The *Rebbe* appears to have avoided reference to concrete historical events so as not to limit the written sermons to a given circumstance unfolding in a specific context, time, and place. His will also indicates his wish to eternalize the sermons for the future.

The uniqueness of this collection of sermons is its focus, from beginning to end, on the theology of suffering from the author's personal experience:

When we learned the words of the prophets and the Sages from the troubles of the destruction [of the Temple], we thought we understood these woes in some manner; sometimes we even cried. Now we see how great the distance is between hearing

9 The clause "have forgotten the Torah and the Hasidism that they had acquired over several years in *chadarim* and *yeshivot*" appears in the manuscript but was omitted from the published edition.

10 Portion of the Week *'Ekev* 5701 (August 16, 1941); see ad loc. his remark in the summer of 1942, regarding the destruction of Judaism in Poland: "Almost to utter extinction did they obliterate the holy congregations."

11 Polen, *The Holy Fire*, pp. 23–24.

12 "Please make an effort to publish them," MSS, *ŽIH*, Ring. II/370, printed at the beginning of *Esh Kodesh* without a page number.

about woes and seeing them, and *a fortiori* suffering from them, Heaven forbid, up to almost nothing in common...No matter how much we talk about the woes, we cannot imagine them as they really are, because knowing and talking about the woes does not resemble witnessing [them].<sup>13</sup>

The *Rebbe* also shares his intimate vacillations and doubts with the reader,<sup>14</sup> thus blending these sermons into a uniquely moving document. After reviewing all the sermons, the impression is that Shapira has no explicit and unequivocal comment regarding the essence of the suffering or the purpose of the sermons. The sermons reflect a process; by following them one traces the personal change that the *Rebbe* underwent. In the first sermons the *Rebbe* expresses his purpose of giving strength and encouragement: “So that you, too, will find strength by my means”;<sup>15</sup> “When others see that I find strength even amid my immense troubles, *a fortiori* they too will find strength amid their troubles, which are not as bitter as mine.”<sup>16</sup>

Approximately a year and a half later, however, the *Rebbe* admits that he no longer finds that the comforting and encouraging remarks that he has offered thus far are convincing:

13 Sermon for *Shabbat Hazon* 5702 (July 18, 1942).

14 Consider, for example, his guilt feelings over the very writing of these sermons! In his sermon for the Parshat Hahodesh reading (5702; March 14, 1942), he ponders: “Sometimes the man wonders about himself, have I not broken, am I not almost always in tears, and I too weep on occasion and how can I learn Torah, and with what do I find the strength to develop new interpretations in Torah and Hasidism? There are times when he beats his breast, to wit, Is it not mere heartlessness that I can gather strength and learn amid my woes and the so many [woes] of the Jews? Again, he answers himself, have I not broken, how many are my weepings, and is my entire life not dismal and dark? This man is confused about himself.” Who is it who “find[s] the strength to develop new interpretations in Torah and Hasidism?” It is none other than the *Rebbe*, speaking of himself in the third person. He attests to the guilt feelings that pound at his heart (“beats his breast”) over the possibility that by writing sermons he displays a degree of heartlessness to the dire situation; i.e., he continues his routine life of Torah and Hasidic studies and develops new interpretations in these fields as if nothing has happened.

15 Portion of the Week *Va-yeshev* 5700 (December 2, 1939). Even though he wrote this as a paraphrase of Biblical verses, plainly the *Rebbe* alludes in these remarks to his own situation and to his duty as a Hasidic *tzaddik* to inspire Divine mercy. See ad loc.: “The Lord said, ‘What is reserved for the righteous [*tzaddikim*] in the future is not sufficient for them; indeed, a good future is not sufficient; [the righteous] must awaken God’s mercy now, too.”

16 Sermon for Portion of the Week *Ki Tavo* 5700 (September 21, 1940).

Particularly as the woes continue, even one who has strengthened himself and the rest of the Jews from the outset tires of strengthening and comforting himself. Even if he wishes to strain and offer whatever comforting and strengthening words he may, he cannot find the words because during the lengthy days of woes he has already said and repeated everything he can say. The words have grown old and can have no further effect on him or his listeners.<sup>17</sup>

This is a statement of uncommon forthrightness in rabbinical literature. The *Rebbe* has been sermonizing, encouraging, and comforting for two and a half years. Now, as his sermons are about to end, and “as the woes continue,” he tells his public that he no longer has the ability to strengthen and comfort either himself or others. Furthermore, the *Rebbe* admits that his exhortations no longer affect him, and he is aware that they do not have an effect on his listeners either. Lest this be misunderstood, what we observe here is not a loss of faith — the continuation of this sermon and his ensuing sermons rule that possibility out<sup>18</sup> — but extraordinary candor and a sharing of his profound agony and personal vacillations with the reader.<sup>19</sup> This outcry (one of many), which erupts from his broken and harried heart, reverberates in the reader’s ears.

If so, what is it that this book can bequeath to posterity? What drove its author to strive so mightily to commit it to writing? What relevance does this book hold for post-Holocaust generations? Probing the essence of suffering, a central axis on which the book revolves, is a valid theme for any era. Evidently, however, the *Rebbe* felt that his personal experience of the inferno and the troubles of the “years of wrath”<sup>20</sup> gave him a unique and original aspect to illuminate. This book does not set forth a clear, unequivocal philosophy; the *Rebbe* does not flinch from admitting that he is confused. Indeed, his sermons attempt more to re-cast the “question of suffering” in phenomenological

17 Sermon for *Shabbat Zakhor*, 5702 (February 28, 1942).

18 See at length Esther Farbstein’s critique of Mendel Piekarz and Eliezer Schweid, *Hidden in Thunder*, p. 488, n. 29, and pp. 507–509, and n. 72.

19 For further on this, see Polen, *The Holy Fire*, pp. 25–31.

20 The *Rebbe* used this expression in the title of his collection of sermons: “*Hiddushei Torah from the Years of Wrath*, 5700, 5701, and 5702.”

terms, as a shaking religious voyage, than merely to launch a quest-for-“meaning” discourse.<sup>21</sup>

Nehemia Polen and Itzhak Hershkowitz dwell on the *Rebbe*'s theory of suffering, its developments and its changes, each in his own way. Both noted the evolution in this theory from year to year, from late 1939, to his last explanatory remark on November 27, 1942. At the beginning of the war, when Poland came under occupation, the *Rebbe* did not imagine that the Germans' policy would evolve into the comprehensive total extermination of Jews. In his pre-Holocaust perception of suffering, he regarded the agonies and torments as temporary blows from God that were meant to inspire the Jews to repent. In his thinking they were products of sin and distancing from God. Therefore, retreating from secularization and spiritual and cultural assimilation to traditional observance of Torah and the commandments would eliminate them. In the summer of 1941, however, after nearly two years of ever-rising waves of anguish and vicissitudes, the *Rebbe* reexamined the situation and understood that the ghastly torments, instead of inspiring the Jews to repent, were having the opposite effect — draining their faith and debilitating their religious and spiritual life.

In the summer of 1942, after realizing the magnitude of the catastrophe, the *Rebbe* wrote that the afflictions could not be meant to inspire repentance, because there remained no one to be inspired: “The holy communities have been obliterated almost to utter extinction... There is no one to torment, no heart to awaken to service [of God] and to Torah.”<sup>22</sup>

Accordingly, by the autumn of 1940, the *Rebbe* abandoned the view of this suffering as Divine punishment for human sins. In its stead he developed the conception of faith in God despite the suffering, promoting a saying of the Sages that, at times of trouble, God suffers and His people suffers together with Him.

In the third stage, evident in the summer of 1942, the *Rebbe* developed an outlook of submission and acceptance. In this view one should justify neither the suffering nor God but should accept the torments as Divine will and something that is meant to be:

21 See Don Seeman, “Sacred Fire — Review,” *Common Knowledge*, 9, 3 (2003), p. 547; idem, “Ritual Efficacy, Hassidic Mysticism and ‘Useless Suffering’ in the Warsaw Ghetto,” *Harvard Theological Review* 101, 3–4 (2008), pp. 500–505.

22 Note on sermon for Portion of the Week *’Ekev* 5701 (August 16, 1941).

The Gentiles asked...look who controls whom and how they yet torture you. Accordingly, [the word] *'huqa* is written in [the Torah, to show that] even there one must not wonder but rather believe that since God so does, so should it be.<sup>23</sup>

In such a state of affairs, one epitomizes religious life by nullifying one's ego, accepting the torments, and submitting to God's will. The emphasis is on accepting evil, not on attempting to justify it. Evil is undoubtedly evil and should not be prettified in religious pretensions. Paradoxically, this outlook, as Hershkovitz astutely points out, absolves the Jews of responsibility for what is happening. After all, the agonies do not originate in the Jews' sins; responsibility for them is God's alone.<sup>24</sup>

It seems to me that, although different phases in the *Rebbe's* theory of suffering are discernible and have been clearly distinguished, this differentiation is not that clear cut, and each phase does not constitute a paradigm in itself. One may detect, for example, a "late" concept of suffering in the *Rebbe's* early sermons and an "early" one in later sermons. Nevertheless, this does not refute the thesis that his theory was of an evolutionary nature; it merely refines it.

As a rule consistent and clear philosophical developments in homiletic literature are difficult to detect. This tendency is intensified in the context of sermons that were delivered by an agitated and

23 Reading from *Para* 5702 (March 7, 1942).

24 On the phases in the evolution of the *Rebbe's* theory of suffering, see Nehemia Polen, "Divine Weeping: Rabbi Kalonymos Shapiro's Theology of Catastrophe in the Warsaw Ghetto," *Modern Judaism*, 7, 3 (1987), pp. 253–269; idem, *The Holy Fire*, pp. 36–105; Hershkovitz, "Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, the Piasechener *Rebbe*: His Holocaust and Pre-Holocaust Thought," pp. 63–126; see also pp. 21–62 on the *Rebbe's* perception of suffering preceding the Holocaust in sermons incorporated into *Sefer Derekh ha-Melekh*. For lack of space I have not discussed here the differences between Polen and Hershkovitz. For more on the *Rebbe's* concept of suffering during the Holocaust in comparison to Hasidic fundamentals in his pre-Holocaust teachings, see Don Seeman, "Ritual Efficacy, Hassidic Mysticism and 'Useless Suffering' in the Warsaw Ghetto," pp. 465–505. Seeman claims that the *Rebbe* refrained from seeking theological meaning in suffering because suffering is meaningless by definition. Instead, Seeman says, he turned to the ritual-theurgical plane. Avichai Zur proposes another approach: "'The Lord Hides in Inner Chambers': The Doctrine of Suffering in the Theosophy of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira of Piaseczno," *Dapim: Studies on the Shoah*, 25 (2011), pp. 183–237. Zur notes the paradoxicality of the *Rebbe's* faith and the theory of suffering that he derived from it. Zur uses the kabbalistic paradox of the "theory of contraction" and the "vacated space" to accommodate the paradox along the continuum of crisis and in the zone that separates meaning from non-meaning.



despondent speaker at such a fraught and tense time of troubles and agonies. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that the *Rebbe* developed a systematic, structured, and differentiated theory under these circumstances — at least not consciously. On November 4, 1939, in his sermon for the Portion of the Week *Chayei Sarah*, the *Rebbe* presents the “late” perception of suffering as originating neither in sin nor in Jews’ distancing themselves from God. A father torments his son as a punishment but does not kill him, reasoned the *Rebbe*; therefore, afflictions so extreme as to be unendurable are not intended as penalties for human transgressions and should not be probed for meaning.<sup>25</sup> Already at the end of 1940, the *Rebbe* professes acquiescing in and accepting suffering because this is God’s will:

As long as [the suffering] remains with us, we should accept it lovingly and when it seems to us that it will pass in another month and the month has gone and it has not passed, we should not grow angry on this account, Heaven forbid; instead, we should know that the Blessed One knows more than we do... [When Moses says] “But they [the Israelites] will not believe me” [Exodus 4:1], it is because they are so distressed and tormented by the exile that otherwise they would know that an act of God cannot be grasped. Indeed, His grandeur is such that neither He nor His actions can be grasped.<sup>26</sup>

This concept recurs in a more developed and powerful form in the summer of 1942. In his penultimate sermon, in contrast — that pertaining to Portion of the Week *Matot-Masai* 5702 (July 11, 1942) — an earlier perception of suffering is offered:

There are woes that we suffer on our own account, for our sins, or sufferings of love so as to purify and cleanse us, and Blessed God only suffers with us. And there are woes that only His people suffer, as it were: woes of sanctification of His name...and in

25 On the *Chayei Sarah* sermon, see also Hershkowitz, “Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, the Piasechener *Rebbe*: His Holocaust and Pre-Holocaust Thought,” pp. 120–121; Zur, “The Lord Hides in Inner Chambers,” p. 205, note 37; Seeman, “Ritual Efficacy, Hassidic Mysticism and ‘Useless Suffering’ in the Warsaw Ghetto,” pp. 483–487.

26 Portion of the Week *Va-veshev* 5701 (December 21, 1940).

such suffering we become greater and more exalted, and perforce somewhat more able to marshal strength.

The *Rebbe's* theory of suffering definitely had its twists and turns. If we see in his sermons a phenomenological rephrasing of the question of suffering, however, we will not need to search for structured, explicit, stage-by-stage evolution. Instead, reading the sermons invites us to participate in a jarring spiritual journey.<sup>27</sup>

### Discovering the Writings of the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno

All aspects of research on the *Rebbe's* writings are shrouded in vagueness. Where were the writings concealed? In metal canisters?<sup>28</sup> In a milk can?<sup>29</sup> In milk cans?<sup>30</sup> Or perhaps under the floorboards of his

27 The *Rebbe* asked in his will (early 1943) to publish the entire book — twists and turns and all. Had there been a clear philosophical development and a change in his stance on the meaning of suffering, would he have asked to publish early and unrefined remarks on his theory after he retracted and disclaimed them? And why did he not erase them? His request to publish the book with all its levels and strata indicates, in my opinion, that the *Rebbe* saw no clear and structured developmental philosophy in his thinking. This is not to say that he never changed his mind and that one cannot find different perspectives in his theory of suffering. It appears correct to say, however, that he does not set matters in stone here. The uniqueness of *Esh Kodesh* is that its author shares with his readers his personal experience of writing and wrestling with the issues. The *Rebbe* takes one stance toward suffering, then a different one, and round and round throughout the book. He does erase comments and even entire sermons, as I show below, in which he does state, in one manner or another, that the suffering is the result of sin and distancing from God. Such a perception of suffering, however, appears in many other places without being erased. Accordingly, I prefer to see in the *Rebbe's* “philosophy of suffering” a description of an experiential process that includes doubts and confusion and would refrain from searching for a structured development of “meaning.”

28 Menashe Unger, *Rebbs Who Perished in the Holocaust* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1969), p. 247.

29 Baruch Duvdevani, “Unearthing the Writings,” in R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, *Esh Kodesh* (no page number noted); Tydor-Baumel, “*Esh Kodesh* by the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno,” p. 173; Farbstein, *Thunder*, p. 486–487; Hannah Gottlieb and Hannah Singer, *Sermons from the Ashes: The Rebbe of Piaseczno in the Warsaw Ghetto* (Hebrew) (Bnei Brak: Ginzakh Kiddush Hashem, 2004), p. 13.

30 Amos Goldberg, “The Rabbi of Piaseczno: Hero or Anti-Hero,” *Bishvil ha-Zikkaron*, 20 (1997) (Hebrew), p. 18. Ayala Friedman, *Encouragement in the Inferno: The Morale-Bolstering Remarks of the Rebbe of Piaseczno in the Warsaw Ghetto According to His Sermons in Esh Kodesh* (Hebrew) (Bnei Brak: Center of the Piaseczno Grozinsk Hasidim, no year given), p. 20; Zur, “The Lord Hides in Inner Chambers,” p. 188.

home?<sup>31</sup> Who found the writings and when? Was the discovery made in 1956,<sup>32</sup> or in 1950?<sup>33</sup> Did a Polish construction worker find them after the war while digging the foundations of a new building atop the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto,<sup>34</sup> or did a Polish boy come across them in the ghetto debris?<sup>35</sup> Who identified the writings? Was it Baruch Duvdevani, director of the Jewish Agency Immigration Department,<sup>36</sup> or Prof. Ber Mark, director of the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny) in Warsaw, who identified them and forwarded a photocopy of them to Jerusalem?<sup>37</sup> Had the *Rebbe* himself buried his writings, or had he passed them on to someone else? Are the original manuscripts in Poland today, or were they delivered to Israel through the intercession of the Government of Israel?<sup>38</sup>

Hagiographic literature insinuated itself into historical reality, and together they were carelessly mated with research. The *Rebbe* has occasionally been portrayed as having personally dug a hole in the ground and buried his writings there;<sup>39</sup> when the milk can was found,

- 31 Henry Abramson, "The Esh Kodesh of Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro: A Hasidic Treatise on Communal Trauma from the Holocaust," *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 37:3 (2000), p. 321.
- 32 Dina Hershkowitz, "The *Rebbe* of Piaseczno, the Martyred Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapiro," *Netiv Merhavim*, 7 (Hebrew) (2001), p. 197; Friedman, *Encouragement in the Inferno*, p. 20.
- 33 Daniel Reiser, *Vision as a Mirror: Imagery Techniques in Twentieth Century Jewish Mysticism* (Hebrew) (Los Angeles: Cherub-Press, 2014), p. 110.
- 34 Duvdevani, "Unearthing"; Unger, "*Rebbs Who Perished in the Holocaust*," p. 247; Tydor-Baumel, "*Esh Kodesh* by the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno," p. 173; Wacks, *The Flame of the Holy Fire*, p. 38; Polen, *The Holy Fire*, p. xv; Abramson, "The Esh Kodesh of Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro," p. 321.
- 35 Shaul Magid, "Beginning, False Beginning and the Desire for Innovation (A Hasidic Master's Reflection on Beginnings: Translation and Commentary)," in A. Cohen and S. Magid, eds., *Beginning/Again: Toward a Hermeneutics of Jewish Texts* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002), p. xviii. See also Shlomo Carlebach, *Yahad Kulam Kedusha: Stories*, reworked by Yeroham Dan Cohen (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Kol Mevasser, 2013), p. 109; Wacks, *The Flame of the Holy Fire*, p. 314, note 9, concerning *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*. See report in *ibid.* by R. Kalman Menahem Shapiro in which a boy handed the writings to an American soldier, who passed them on to Rabbi David Hollander.
- 36 Duvdevani, "Unearthing"; Friedman, *Encouragement in the Inferno*, p. 20.
- 37 Unger, *Rebbs Who Perished in the Holocaust*, pp. 247–248.
- 38 Friedman, *Encouragement in the Inferno*, p. 20.
- 39 Polen, "Divine Weeping," p. 253; Abramson, "The Esh Kodesh of Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro," p. 321; Wacks, *The Flame of the Holy Fire*, p. 38; Zur, "The Lord Hides in Inner Chambers," p. 188.

it contained these writings and nothing more.<sup>40</sup> The reader who is exposed to all these sources is confused and cannot resolve the contradictions. Where are the writings? Where were they concealed? By whom? How were they found? How were they redacted and readied for publication in a manner that included errors that necessitate the preparation of a new annotated and accurate edition, as I show below?

Now for the facts. The *Rebbe's* writings were among the thousands of documents in the milk cans found in 1950, in the second part of the “Oneg Shabbat” (Ringelblum) underground archive.<sup>41</sup> The *Rebbe* deposited his writings with the archive and did not personally bury them in the ground. Israel Lichtenstein, principal of the Ber Borochov School, interred them afterward under his institution at 68 Nowolipki Street, together with many other documents.<sup>42</sup> The *Rebbe* did not stash his writings under the floorboards of his home at 5 Dzielna Street, nor were they found by a Polish boy who handed them on to an American soldier, nor as according to any other odd anecdote. The milk cans were found in December 1950, apparently by Polish construction workers,<sup>43</sup> who forwarded them to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. There the original writings remain at the present writing; they never made their way to Israel. They are in excellent condition and were privileged to have been treated by the Institute with commendable preservation work.<sup>44</sup>

So, how did the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno's writings find their way to the “Oneg Shabbat” Archives? Samuel Kassow surmises that Shimon Huberband, a member of the “Oneg Shabbat” board,<sup>45</sup> was responsible for this: “He was particularly close to one of the most important religious thinkers in the Warsaw ghetto, Rabbi Kalonymous Shapiro, the

40 So, for example, in Unger, *Rebber Who Perished in the Holocaust*, pp. 247–251, except for the swapping of one can for several metal canisters.

41 On the “Oneg Shabbat” Archives and its various parts, see Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum and the Oneg Shabbat Archive* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

42 *Ibid.*, p. 379.

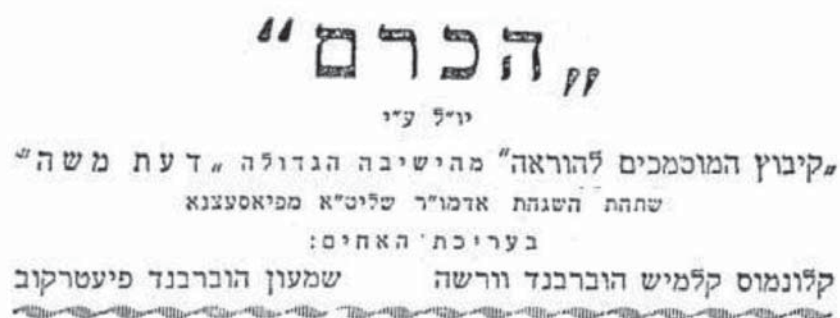
43 However this is not documented in any way.

44 I thank Prof. Paweł Śpiewak, director of the Institute, and Dr. Eleonora Bergman, head of the Ringelblum Archive Division, for kindly allowing me to examine the original manuscript documents; and Deputy Director Dr. Ryszard Burek and the head of the Institute's Archives Division, Ms. Agnieszka Reszka, for allowing me to do this at odd times of the day, even when the archives were closed to the public.

45 See Shimon Huberband, *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland During the Holocaust* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1987).

Piaseczner *Rebbe*. It was probably because of Huberband that the archive procured many of Shapiro's wartime sermons and writings.<sup>46</sup>

Huberband was a young rabbi and historian who had known Ringelblum from their work together at the Warsaw branch of YIVO (Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut — Yiddish Scientific Institute) before the war. When the Great Deportation began, Huberband found a job, with assistance from members of “Oneg Shabbat,” at Emil Weitz's brush factory. On August 18, 1942, however, the SS raided the workshop, and Huberband was taken to the *Umschlagplatz* and from there to Treblinka.<sup>47</sup> Notably, Huberband was also a relative of the *Rebbe's* — they were maternal cousins, as their mothers were the daughters of *Rebbe* Chaim Shmuel Halevi Hurvitz of Chęciny.<sup>48</sup> Huberband even edited *Ha-kerem*, a journal published by the *Rebbe's* *yeshivah* in 1933.<sup>49</sup>



It is unlikely, however, that R. Shimon Huberband deposited the writings of his cousin, the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno, with the “Oneg Shabbat” Archives. Huberband was murdered in August 1942, whereas the *Rebbe's* writings include later entries. While the *Rebbe* did deliver his last sermon on *Shabbat Chazon*, on July 18, 1942, a month before

46 Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?*, p. 167.

47 Ibid., pp. 165–169. See Josef Kermisz, “On the Unknown Grave of the Martyred Rabbi Szymon Huberband,” in *Zechor: Documentary Collection on Self-Sacrifice in the Holocaust*, Part 11 (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zechor Society in Israel, 1990), pp. 155–158.

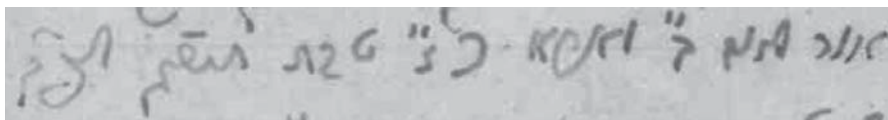
48 Huberband himself was born in Chęciny on April 19, 1909. For further biographical information see Yaakov Maltz and Naftali Lau, eds., *Piotrków-Trybunalski and the Vicinity: Memorial Book* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: no year given), pp. 287–290, and Huberband, *Kiddush Hashem*, p. xxi.

49 See editions 4–6.

Huberband was deported, he did not hand over his collection of sermons immediately. He apparently proofed them several times more later on. His last proofing was dated in his handwriting as Friday, November 27, 1942. Accordingly, the collection of sermons could not have been given to Rabbi Huberband, who had been deported to Treblinka three months earlier. The rest of the *Rebbe's* writings, including a letter of request and an instruction that he attached to his writings, most of which were produced before the war, shows that they had been handed over together with his ghetto-era sermons, and not separately, one by one:

I ask of you, my beloved and dear ones, that once God helps and the essays *Hakhsharat ha-Avreikhim*, *Mevo ha-She'arim* [an introduction to *Hovat ha-Avreikhim*], *Tsav ve-Zeruz*, and *Hiddushei Torah from the Years of Wrath*, 5700, 5701, and 5702, reach you, you deign to make an effort to publish them either collectively or singly, as your good judgment sees fit.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, this letter is dated and shows that all the *Rebbe's* writings were deposited in the archive no earlier than January 3, 1943: “Eve of Monday, [Portion] *Va-era*, Tevet 27,<sup>51</sup> 5703 by the abridged count.” On the basis of this date, January 3, 1943, Huberband, who had been murdered in August 1942, could not have placed these writings in the “Oneg Shabbat” Archives.



Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M.10.AR.2/370

Rabbi Huberband may have apprised the archive staff of the existence of the *Rebbe's* writings and sermons and their importance; he may even have persuaded the staff to obtain them. Obviously, however, it was not he who had placed these texts in the archive. If so, who did?

50 MSS, ŽIH, Ring. II/370, printed at the beginning of *Esh Kodesh*, unnumbered page.

51 Throughout the published edition, the date is reported as the 26th instead of the 27th; printed at the beginning of *Esh Kodesh*.

This cannot be answered with certainty, but another member of the “Oneg Shabbat” board who had been in contact with the *Rebbe*, Menachem Kon, should be considered.

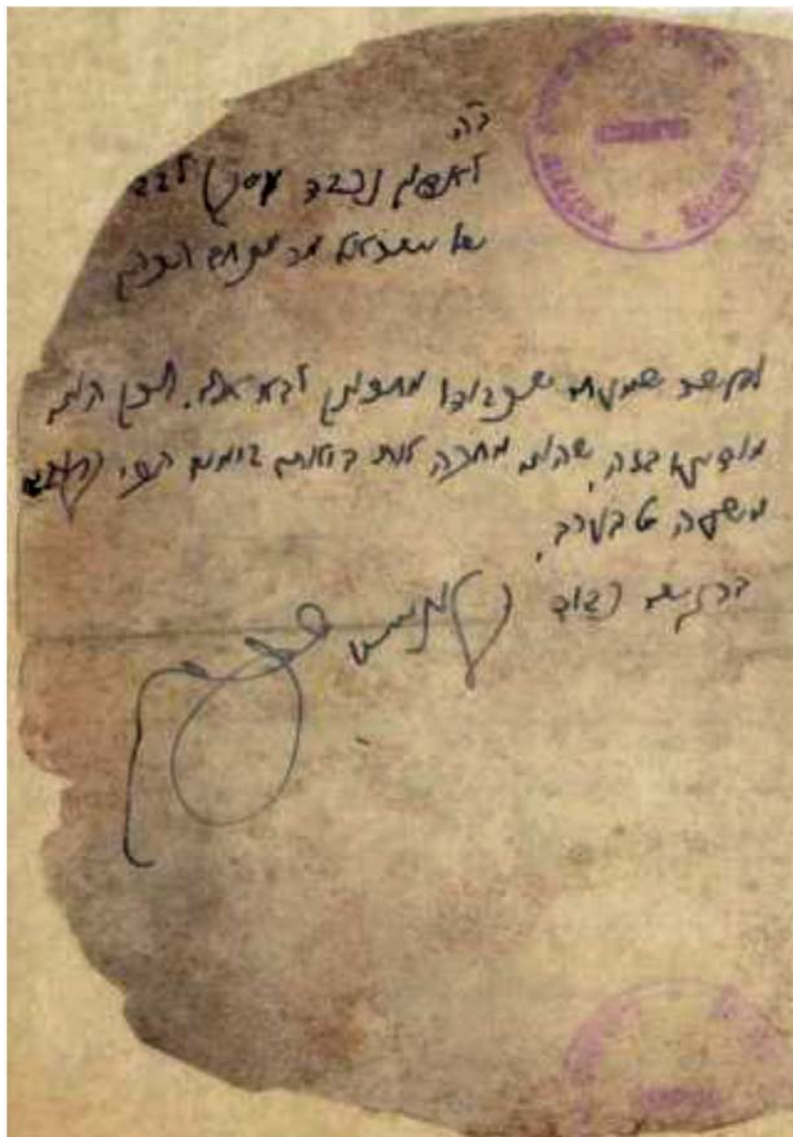
Menachem Mendel Kon (1881–1943) was a wealthy merchant who maintained good relations with the religious circles in the ghetto. In his diary, buried in the “Oneg Shabbat” Archives, he termed Rabbi Szymon Huberband his “best friend.”<sup>52</sup> Kon was elected treasurer of the archive and served as one of its principal fundraisers until his death in April 1943.<sup>53</sup> The first part of the “Oneg Shabbat” Archives contains an undated letter in the *Rebbe*’s handwriting and with his signature in which he accedes to Kon’s request to meet with him and sets a time for the get-together:<sup>54</sup>

With God’s help  
To the esteemed public servant of the heart of Israel,  
Mr. Menachem Hacoheh  
Hearing that you are preparing to visit me, I advise you herewith  
that I await your visit on the nearest days from 6:00 p.m.  
onward.  
Respectfully yours,  
Kalonymus Shapira

52 Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?*, p. 154. See Kon’s eulogy for Huberband: “In the Memory of our Beloved Friend and Member of Oyneg Shabes, the Martyred Rabbi Shimon Huberband,” in *Zechor: Documentary Collection on Self-Sacrifice in the Holocaust*, Part 11 (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zechor Society in Israel, 1990), pp. 159–160: “We, your friends at Oyneg Shabes, swear by all that is sacred that the day of liberation will come and that, if we should survive, we will all avenge your blood; we will remember and honor you forever.”

53 Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?*, pp. 153–155.

54 *ŽIH*, Ring. 1/593. Kassow (*Who Will Write Our History?*, p. 433, note 32) mentions this letter: “The archive also contains a friendly letter from the Piaseczner *Rebbe*, Kalonymous Shapiro, asking Kon to visit him.” To be more precise, it was not the *Rebbe* who asked Kon to meet but the other way around; this letter is the *Rebbe*’s response.



YVA, M.10.AR.1/593

The *Rebbe's* writings were given over to the “Oneg Shabbat” Archives between January 3 and February 1943, when the second part of the archive was interred. Kon was still alive then. Although it stands to reason that the *Rebbe* gave the writings to Kon, I must emphasize that this is purely a hypothesis — albeit the best one — until new evidence, if any, is found.

As stated, the second part of the archive was transferred to the Jewish Historical Institute in December 1950, at which time the



sorting process was begun. The Institute's in-house catalog of findings, of which there are several copies from early 1955, includes all the *Rebbe's* writings — identified, numbered, and cataloged.<sup>55</sup> Baruch Duvdevani, director of the Jewish Agency Immigration Department, visited the Institute in 1956, microfilmed the *Rebbe's* Holocaust-era sermons,<sup>56</sup> brought the film to Israel, and turned it over to the *Rebbe's* nephew, R. Elimelech Shapira.<sup>57</sup> It served as a basis for the published edition of the sermons that came out in 1960, under the title *Esh Kodesh*.

This book, however, is different from the other writings of the *Rebbe* that made their way to the Ringelblum archive. *Tsav ve-Zeruz* was typewritten, whereas in *Hakhsharat ha-Avreikhim* and *Mevo ha-Sha'arim* the body of the text appears in a copyist's handwriting along with several added comments and proofing marks made by the *Rebbe*, mainly in the margins of the page.<sup>58</sup> The sermons from 1939 to 1942, in contrast, are mostly in the *Rebbe's* handwriting; only a few of the

55 One copy of this in-house catalog exists in handwriting; five additional copies are typewritten. I thank Dr. Eleonora Bergman, head of the Ringelblum Archive Division, for bringing the existence of the catalog to my knowledge.

56 Duvdevani claimed that he first discovered and identified the *Rebbe's* sermons while searching through unsorted material at the Institute. See Duvdevani, "Unearthing the Writings," and his testimony at the Eichmann trial, in which he mentions the year 1956: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elbFXQFTcAY> (starting at 8:30). This testimony is factually problematic. For example, Duvdevani related that he had found nothing while searching the archive, until "one day" a milk can was brought in by a Pole. This implied that the milk can had been delivered while he was there, whereas it had been discovered in December 1950. He also said, "I found this book in the can," whereas the can's contents had been emptied immediately upon its discovery and the preservation, sorting, and cataloging work of the findings were begun then; plainly Duvdevani had had no opportunity to discover anything "in" it.

57 I was unable to corroborate Unger's claim cited above that Prof. Ber Mark, head of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, forwarded a copy to "a scientific institute in the State of Israel in Jerusalem." There is no such copy in the National Library in Jerusalem or in the libraries of the Hebrew University; a copy of the microfilm in the possession of the Yad Vashem Archives (M.10/AR2/370, "Sabbath Sermons of Rabbi Shapira Kalonymus") was transferred directly from the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw to the Yad Vashem Archives on May 26, 1980, together with all the other writings of the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno that had been in the Ringelblum archive. I thank Lital Beer, director of the Reference and Information Department of the Yad Vashem Archives, for helping me track down the records of the incoming material, and Yehudit Kleinman, director of the Administrative Archive at Yad Vashem, for helping me to identify the records of the incoming items.

58 In regard to these books and their redaction, see my introduction to the new edition.

earliest ones were copied.<sup>59</sup> Herein lie the failures of this collection of sermons. The other books were published on the basis of the copyists' clear handwriting and were therefore error-free. The collection of Holocaust-era sermons, in contrast, is largely predicated on the *Rebbe's* handwriting, which is difficult to read and decipher. Therefore, misreadings and mistakes occurred, as will be illustrated below.

The redaction of this collection of sermons proceeded in several stages. After the microfilm was brought to Israel, it was converted into photographs on small (half-A4) pages and turned over to a devoted team of four editors: R. Eliahu Hammer and his son, R. Avraham Hammer, then a *yeshivah* student in Jerusalem; R. Elimelech ben Porat; and R. Elazar Bein. The work was supervised by the *Rebbe's* nephew R. Elimelech Shapira, son of R. Yeshayahu Shapira, "the pioneer *Rebbe*." The team divided up the photographs of the manuscript, each member working on a different portion.<sup>60</sup> They met fortnightly to discuss questions arising from difficulties in deciphering the *Rebbe's* handwriting. The group regarded R. Elazar Bein, a Torah scribe by profession, as authoritative in reading and deciphering handwriting; therefore, his decisions on the questions prevailed.<sup>61</sup>

However, not only the *Rebbe's* handwriting was difficult to decipher, but photos that the editors used — black-and-white prints converted from microfilm — were small and of poor quality. Today we have much more sophisticated tools to decipher handwriting than the editors could then call upon. In my examination of the original manuscript in Warsaw, I availed myself of electronic photography that allowed me to magnify the text hundreds of times. Thus, I was able to decipher earlier illegibilities accurately, clear up doubts, and identify erasures, among other things.

59 The copied sermons are the following: from *Rosh Hashanah* 5700 to the Portion of the Week *Pequdei* 5700 (September 14, 1939–March 9, 1940), not including portions *Chayei Sarah*, *Toledot*, and *Va-yetse* (November 1939), which appear in the *Rebbe's* handwriting. The entire text from the sermon for the Portion of the Week *Va-yiqra* 5700 to his last sermon from *Devarim-Hazon* 5702 (March 16, 1940–July 18, 1942) exists in the *Rebbe's* handwriting.

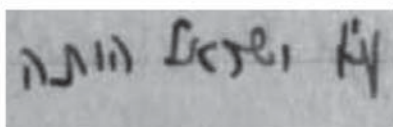
60 This explains inconsistencies in the published edition. In the 1939/40–1941/42 sermons, for example, the word *Elohim* is written without the vowel *vav* (the *mater lectionis*), whereas in those for 1942/43 the *vav* appears. In the manuscript the *vav* is always omitted.

61 Interview by author with R. Avraham Hammer, 2014.

## Redeciphering the Sermons

The redactors of the 1960 edition edited the manuscript, revised its wording, corrected the use or non-use of *matres lectionis*, masculine and feminine gender, singular and plural, added connectives, and so on. A subsequent edition of *Esh Kodesh* appeared in 2007; based on the 1960 version,<sup>62</sup> it is essentially unchanged except for a new font, reformatting of paragraphs, expansion of abbreviations, and references to primary literature.<sup>63</sup> However, study of the manuscript points to substantial errors in deciphering and identifying words, some of which affect the content of the sermons radically. Several examples follow.

1. In the *Rosh Hashanah* 5700 sermon (September 14, 1939), the published edition states: “For today is the birthday of the world and all of Creation, to reveal [blessed God’s] kingship ‘*al Yisrael*,” i.e., over Israel. Study of the manuscript, however, reveals a minor change – not ‘*al Yisrael*, “over Israel” but rather ‘*ayin-yod* [abbreviation of *al-yedai*] *Yisrael*, “by Israel.” The revision is small but hugely important, because it overturns and completely changes the meaning. According to the published edition, the purpose of all of Creation is that God’s presence “over” the Jewish people should be revealed; i.e., the focus is national. According to the manuscript, however, the purpose is universal: the goal of Creation is to reveal His presence to everyone through the medium of (“by”) the Jewish people.



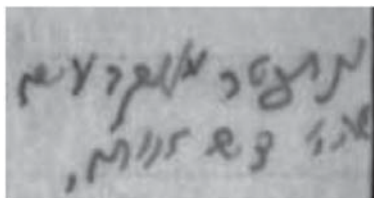
YVA, M.10.AR.2/370

2. In the sermon for Portion of the Week *Va-yishlah* 5700 (November 25, 1939), the published editions state, “and rid himself *mi-‘iqvi’im* that he trampled,” the word *mi-‘iqvi’im* (of ‘*iqvi’im*) is muddled both per se and relative to its context and the content of the sermon. Study of the handwriting shows that the word was misconstrued due to difficulty in deciphering the handwriting. In fact, the *Rebbe* wrote *me-‘aqev Esav*, from the heel of Esau; i.e., Jacob rid himself of

<sup>62</sup> *Esh Kodesh* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2007).

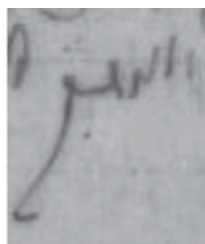
<sup>63</sup> However, perceptible errors also crept into the 2007 edition in both explanations of abbreviations and in the references.

being pursued by his brother Esau. Thus, the sermon states: “And all [Jacob’s] deliverances thus far came after Esau trampled him with his heel, and he rid himself of Esau’s heel, which had trampled him.”



YVA, M.10.AR.2/370

3. The *Qedoshim* 5700 sermon (May 10, 1940) ends in the published editions as follows: “And this, ‘And you shall sanctify yourselves’... Always thirst to sanctify yourself...and then ‘because I am the Lord [your *Elohim*]’ because even *Elohim* [the Name of God that denotes judgment], will be drawn down [*yumshakh*] to the aspect of the God of mercy.” The word *yumshakh* is difficult to understand, both in this sentence and in the overall context of a sermon that deals with *hamtaqa*, the “sweetening of judgments.” *Hamtaqa* and *hamshakha* are different kabbalistic concepts. The latter is a human action in which a person “draws” Divine abundance downward, to the present world. *Hamtaqa*, in contrast, is an act of Divine clemency.<sup>64</sup> Intimate familiarity with the *Rebbe*’s handwriting shows that he had written *yumtaq* and not *yumshakh*, effectively saying that the more the Jews thirst for sanctity, the more clemency God will give.<sup>65</sup>



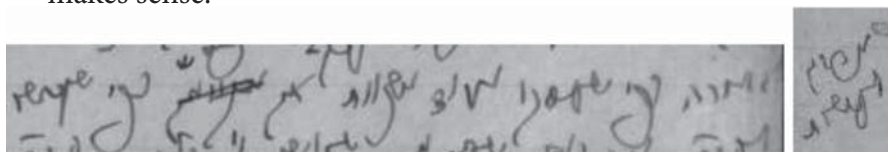
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4. In his sermon for Portion of the Week *Emor* 5700 (May 11, 1940), the *Rebbe* describes the slackening of Torah study and observance

64 See R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah, Portion Huqqat*, “Interpretation based on ‘Zot Huqqat’” (Hebrew) (New York: Kehat, 1999), pp. 57b-60a.

65 Furthermore, the *Rebbe* renounced this sermon and deleted it by running two lines through it. In print there is no mention of this deletion; see below.

of commandments that the wretched state of Warsaw Jewry had caused. In this context an unfocused and incomprehensible sentence appears: “Indeed, on the contrary, they do not engage in Torah as they used to and, what is more, they do not *mekhavin* to observe the commandments as they used to.” What does *mekhavin* mean in this context? Is it *mekhavnin*, as in people in the third-person plural who have an intent, in which case a letter was omitted? Or is it *mekhuvin*, the Jews not being *guided* toward observing the commandments, in which case the syntax of the sentence falters? Study of the handwriting shows that it was misread. Initially, the *Rebbe* had written, “Furthermore, they do not observe [*meqaymim*] the commandments.” Then he erased the word *meqaymim* and added over it a downward-pointing arrow that refers to a marginal note in which he wrote, *marbin la’asot*, “they do [it] abundantly.” Thus, the complete sentence reads: “Indeed, on the contrary, they do not engage in Torah as they used to and, what is more, they do not observe the commandments as abundantly as they used to.” Now it all makes sense.



YVA, M.10.AR.2/370

5. Sometimes a word is omitted or modified in the printed edition because it or its placement in the text is misunderstood. In his sermon for *Rosh Hashanah* 5702 (September 22, 1941), the *Rebbe* states ruefully that people are praying for their own needs only. Mindful of the unbearable situation in the ghetto, however, he justifies such prayer:

But at a time when one is battered by severe torments — one can hardly refrain from crying out about one’s agonies... Therefore, for people of our values, particularly amid bitter woes such as these, it is impossible that we should not cry out and pray to God even on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* about our sufferings and pains.

Still, the *Rebbe* laments such prayer and concludes by saying that in this case one should pray for prayer itself; i.e., that one should pray

to be privileged with praying at a high enough level as to concern oneself not solely with man's needs but with God's as well:

But *'va-yiz'aku* [the Israelites under Egyptian bondage cried out] that their prayer should ascend to God from the labor; it is for this itself that they prayed, that they should pray for God's needs and not [for]the needs of [His] service.

The *Rebbe* concluded the sermon by stressing the need to pray for prayer:

And this [is the meaning of the verse], “Out of my straits I called upon the Lord”: now I call from a strait about my troubles, but “the Lord responded with great enlargement” [Psalms 118:5]: but I hope that I will be able to call You with a vast expanse, from a “wideness” mental state , and I pray that I will pray a good, exalted prayer, in the Lord's Name alone.

Unlike the manuscript, in which the *Rebbe* expresses no doubt whatsoever, the printed edition switches “**and I pray** to pray a good and exalted prayer to “**also** to pray a good and exalted prayer” (emphasis added) – thereby missing the point of praying for prayer.

6. In the sermon for Portion of the Week *Va-yakhel* (March 2, 1940), two clauses that were reversed by mistake in the first published edition and the revised 2007 edition only made things worse. In a nutshell, the 1960 edition presents the following: “If only in that they do not perform labor that they perform on the six weekdays, since the Sabbath also derives sanctity from the weekdays.” In the 2007 edition, the redactors replaced the comma between these clauses with a period and moved the second clause – “since the Sabbath also derives sanctity from the weekdays” – to a new line, where it begins a new paragraph. In the manuscript, however, the clauses appear in the opposite order, which obviously affects the way the sermon is understood: “The Sabbath also derives sanctity from the weekdays, if only in that they do not perform labor that they perform on the six weekdays.”

There are many other examples, but this is not the place to list them. The published editions omit not only words throughout the book but also one full sentence and one entire paragraph. In the sermon for

Portion of the Week *'Ekev* 5701 (August 16, 1941), the following is omitted: “The Torah and the Hasidism that they acquired over several years in *chadarim* and *yeshivot* they have forgotten.” This sentence appears in handwriting on the top margin of the page, as an addendum to the text, by means of a reference numbered with the letter *alef*; the redactors of the published edition appear to have overlooked it. In the sermon for Portion of the Week *Bo* 5702 (January 24, 1942), an entire paragraph at the beginning of the text is omitted or, perhaps, deleted. In the edition that I prepared, I restored all the deletions to the text proper.

### Demarcation and Order of the Sermons

In the manuscript it is not always clear where the sermons begin and end. The *Rebbe* sometimes gives a sermon a title that refers to the Sabbath to which the sermon is devoted; elsewhere he launches into the sermon and lets the reader identify the Sabbath at issue on the basis of the opening verse or the contents. In the published version the editors attach a title to each sermon without identifying whether it is theirs or the *Rebbe's*. Study of the manuscript shows that some sermons may be framed differently from the published account. Sometimes, too, two sermons are merged, or one sermon is split. Following are the changes.

**Sermon for *Yom Kippur* 5700** (September 23, 1939): The *Shabbat Shuva* sermon (September 16, 1939) is untitled; it begins with the verse “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity” (Hosea 14:1). Afterward there appears a sermon beginning with the last Mishnah in Tractate Yuma. (“Rabbi Akiva says: ‘Happy are you, O Israel. Before whom do you purify yourselves? And who purifies you? It is your Father in heaven.’”) In the published editions the two sermons are presented together under the heading “*Shabbat Shuva*.” Philological examination of the manuscript, however, as well as the contents of the second sermon make it clear that this is a new and separate sermon, evidently delivered on *Yom Kippur*, which fell that year on the Sabbath, a week after *Shabbat Shuva*. In the manuscript one may see that when several sermons exist for the same Sabbath, they are always separated by only one line. The interval between the *Shabbat Shuva* sermon and this one, in contrast, is four lines,

indicating the beginning of a new sermon. Furthermore, the *Shabbat Shuva* sermon was written in blue ink, and the second sermon in black ink, suggesting that they were not written at the same time. The second sermon concerns purification, which, along with atonement, is the main concept of *Yom Kippur*. Furthermore, the source on which it rests is the last Mishnah in Tractate Yuma, which deals with *Yom Kippur*. By inference, then, this sermon was delivered on *Yom Kippur*.

This conclusion is not merely technical; it has research implications. The failure to identify this as a *Yom Kippur* sermon and the reliance on the published editions alone, without studying the original manuscript, led researchers to conclude that the *Rebbe* stopped giving sermons after *Shabbat Shuva* for around two months, resuming only on Shabbat *Chayei Sarah*, due to the deaths of his son, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, and mother.<sup>66</sup> Why, however, did the *Rebbe* not deliver a sermon on *Yom Kippur*? After all, his woes began after that date; his son sustained injuries on September 25, and died on September 29. In fact the *Rebbe* did give a sermon on *Yom Kippur*; his moratorium began only after his son was injured. As his thirty-day period of mourning wound down, he resumed speaking on *Shabbat Chayei Sarah*.

**Sermons on the Passover *Haggadah*:** The *Rebbe's* sermons on the *Haggadah* for Passover 5700 (April 23, 1940) and 5701 (April 12, 1941) were rearranged in print according to the sequence of the *Haggadah*. Study of the manuscript, however, shows clearly that the sermons do not adhere to this sequence. Moreover, their internal order is important, because each sermon is built atop its precursor and on its foundations.<sup>67</sup> For Passover 5701, for example, there are several sermons. The first begins with an exposition on the *Ve-hi she-‘amda* passage. In this sermon the *Rebbe* takes up the concept of deliverance and claims

66 See Tydor-Baumel, “*Esh Kodesh* by the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno,” p. 175: “We do not find sermons for the Sabbaths between *Shabbat Shuva* and the Portion *Chayei Sarah* 5700 (September 15–November 4, 1939) in the book because his son, sister-in-law, and daughter-in-law were killed at that time.” See also Polen, *The Holy Fire*, pp. 15–16. Influenced by the publishers who connected the *Yom Kippur* sermon together with that for *Shabbat Shuva*, Tydor-Baumel and Polen slightly broadened the moratorium on sermons, which in fact lasted from September 28 to October 28, 1939 — portions *Bereshit*, *Noah*, *Lekh-lekha*, and *Va-yera*.

67 A study of the internal order of the *Haggadah* sermons as they appear in the manuscript and an assessment of the importance of the order in understanding the contents of the sermons require a separate article.



that hope for deliverance remains even when the Jews are in their oppressors' clutches: "With this, we should strengthen our hope that even when it seems to us that we are in their clutches, Heaven forbid, even so [God] will save us." In his next sermon, on the son who does not know how to ask – the second in the order of the manuscript – the *Rebbe* argues that, although deliverance and redemption are not overtly evident, they exist in potential; the individual need only discover and actualize them.

And since Passover is of course the source of all deliverances and redemptions but these are only potential and need to be drawn out to be discovered, one is commanded in this matter to attain the deliverance and redemption that has not yet revealed itself, to draw it out, and to reveal it.

By means of the "Four Questions" in the *Haggadah* – which express Torah study, as his second sermon indicates – the individual can bring the potential redemption and deliverance to fruition. In the third sermon, based on the anecdote of Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva in the *Haggadah*, the *Rebbe* presents his view on the correct characterization of Torah study.

The order of the sermons in the manuscript reflects a systematic, step-by-step structure: first, developing hope for deliverance even at this time of woe; followed by the argument that this deliverance will be effectuated by human striving at Torah study; and then characterizing this Torah study (this not being the place to elaborate on it). In the published versions, however, the sermons are presented in the order of the *Haggadah*, positioning the third sermon in the manuscript first and the first in the manuscript third – which is the exact opposite. In this manner of presentation, the phased structure of one sermon built atop its predecessor is lost.

**The *Rosh Hashanah* 5702 (September 22, 1941) Sermon:** When the *Rebbe* gave several sermons for the same Sabbath, they are separated in the manuscript by a one-line space. From this fact one may infer the counterfactual; i.e., if there is no space, and the text runs consecutively, it denotes one sermon. However, one of the sermons for *Rosh Hashanah* 5702 that appears in the published editions as a separate sermon is actually the continuation of its precursor. It begins by quoting the verse, "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand?" (Psalms 130:3), and concludes with the following words and syntax as they

appear in the manuscript: “And the Talmud states that our Patriarch Abraham read it [thus], ‘I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word do I place my hope’ [Psalms 130:5]. My hope is that all of reality is solely with Israel [and] therefore ‘Israel, put your hope in the Lord... and He will redeem Israel from all his sins’” (Psalms 130:7–8).

This conclusion flows continually in the manuscript. The comma after the expression “our Patriarch Abraham read it” proves it clearly. It seems, however, that the redactors, struggling to understand the connection between the segments of this concluding sentence, lifted it from the flow, and began a new sermon that starts with the verse fragment, “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,” and runs to the end of the paragraph. Thus, one sermon is split into two, whereas the philological examination of the manuscript reveals it to be one sermon and not two different ones. This necessitates a new explanation of the conceptual continuity.

In the sermon for the *Zakhor* reading on February 28, 1942, in contrast, two sermons are adjoined in the published versions. The first, expounding on “Remember what Amalek did to you” (Deuteronomy 25:17),” ends near the bottom of a page and is followed by six blank lines. The next sermon, “[God’s] Name is not complete and His throne is not complete,” appears at the top of the succeeding page. The space between the sermons indicates that the latter is a totally new sermon and not the continuation of its predecessor. This affects the way the content of these sermons should be understood, each expressing an idea of its own independently of the other.

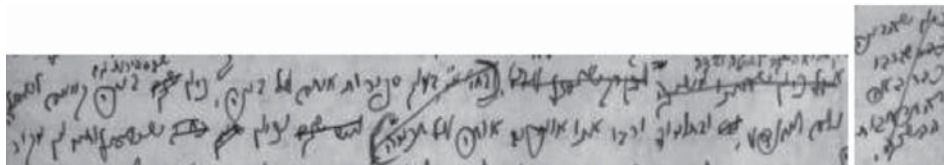
## Deletions

Several types of deletions are marked in the manuscript: a cross-through of a word, several words, or an entire sentence in a way that leaves the writing legible; scribbling over a word or a sentence so that what is written cannot be read; and parentheses (as opposed to brackets, within which the *Rebbe* inserted added explanations).<sup>68</sup>

In the printed editions entire passages that the *Rebbe* deleted are

68 The use of parentheses to mark a deletion is reserved for words that carry sacred or near-sacred meaning, such as the names of God, holy books, Biblical heroes, and any reference to them. The *Rebbe* was evidently very stringent about deleting such expressions and did not wish to strike them out.

included with no reference to the fact that he had deleted them. This is immensely important. In his Passover 1941 sermon (April 12, 1941), the *Rebbe* placed a certain sentence in brackets, indicating his wish that it be printed in parentheses. Afterward, however, he marked it in parentheses, signaling a deletion, and, in order to eliminate all doubt, he drew a line from one parenthesis to the other. He crossed out a note that he added to this sentence in the margins of the page, marked with a small arrow, undoubtedly signaling a total deletion. The deleted text, however, was nonetheless inserted into the printed edition of the sermon<sup>69</sup> in parentheses, and the fact of the deletion was left unmentioned. In other cases parentheses were removed in the printed editions, leaving the reader no way of knowing whether the *Rebbe* had recanted the word or clause at issue.<sup>70</sup>



YVA, M.10.AR.2/370

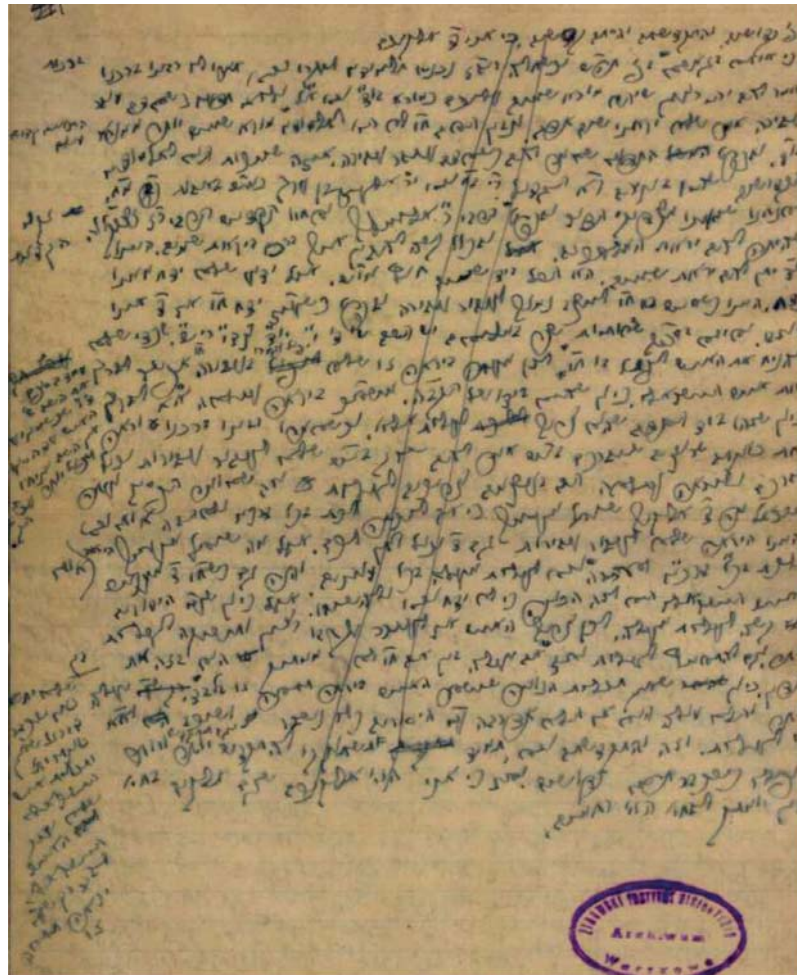
Furthermore, four entire sermons — for Portion of the Week *Bo* 5700 (January 13, 1940); Passover 5700 (April 23, 1940) (“And we cried out to God”); Portion of the Week *Qedoshim* 5700 (May 4, 1940); and Passover 5701 (April 12, 1941) (“In *Nishmat*, we say...”) — were totally deleted by their author. Yet these sermons appear verbatim in the printed editions, with no indication that the author had deleted them; only study of the manuscript itself reveals this.

The *Rebbe*’s renunciation of certain perceptions that he had presented and his decision to delete them are crucial for our understanding of his thinking, vacillations, and change of heart during the Holocaust years. This is even more pronounced in respect to the theology of suffering on which the sermons in this book center — a unique theme

69 See *Esh Kodesh*, 1960, p. 95. See also *ibid.*, p. 155 (Portion of the Week *Yitro* 5702; February 7, 1942), where the deleted clause “that by means of Moses they observed the Sabbath while still in Egypt,” is inserted into the sermon.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 142: “When he does not pray randomly or solely out of habit, just approach and draw close to him.” The last expression, “and draw close to him” was deleted by the *Rebbe* by means of parentheses (because it relates to God and therefore, true to his stringency, he did not obliterate the word by crossing it out), but it was included in the printed editions as if the deletion had never been made.

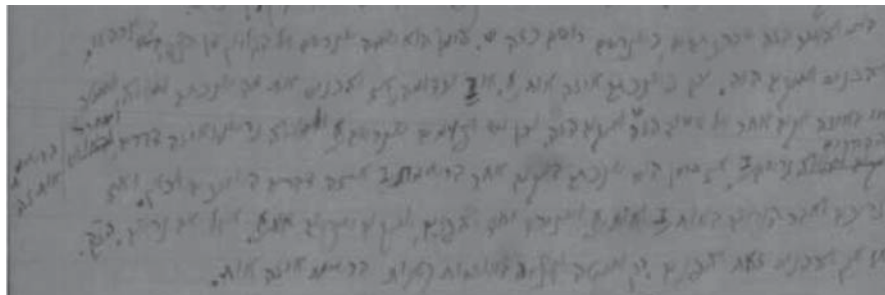
in the middle of the Holocaust. In his sermon for Portion of the Week *Qedoshim* 5700 (May 4, 1940), for example, the *Rebbe* deals with the human condition of spiritual decline and transgression. In discussing the matter he broaches the possibility that sufferings visited on a person are Divine punishment for his or her sins and a deliberate act by God to induce repentance: “And here, even when Heaven forbid God **punishes** a Jew, it is with the intent of keeping him from straying and **bringing him back**” (emphasis added). Study of the manuscript shows that at some point the *Rebbe* re-read the sermon, made deletions and modifications, and added marginal notes. At a later stage, however, he appears to have renounced the sermon altogether by running two lines through it from start to end. He probably did this due to the clear connection in the sermon between suffering as punishment and suffering for repentance.



YVA, M.10.AR.2/370

### Proofing and Layers of *Esh Kodesh*

Study of the manuscript shows that the sermons were produced layer by layer, one proof succeeding another. Further evidence of this appears in the *Rebbe's* instruction to publish all his writings, in which he explains the various types of proofing marks, presented here for the first time:

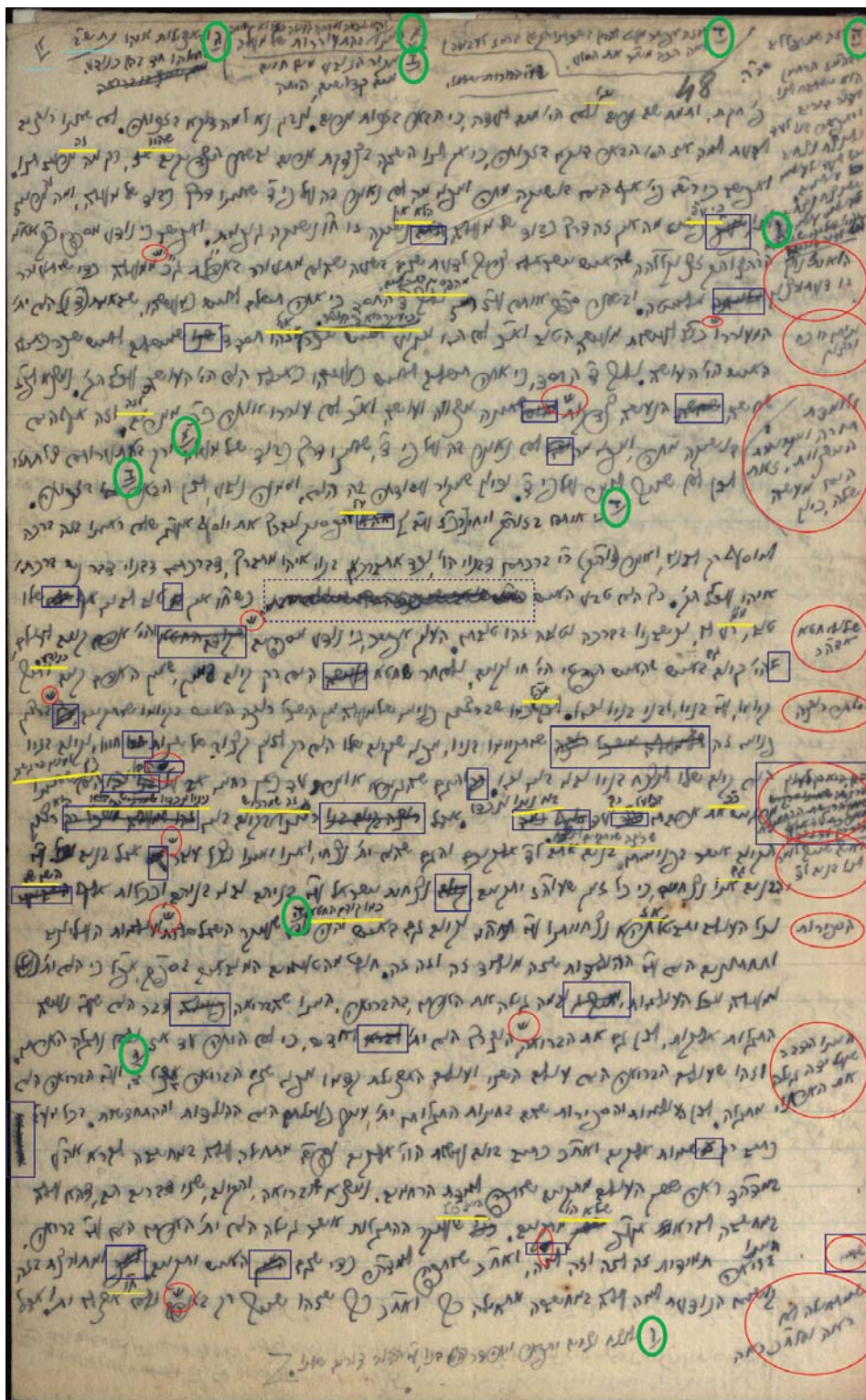


YVA, M.10.AR.2/370

I note herewith that in the writings, wherever a mark such as this  $\hat{O}$  appears, it means that what is written on the side of the page at this line should be inserted at this location. And also when a letter such as *alef* or *bet* and the like appears, then what is written above, below, or somewhere else on this page should be inserted at this location where *the notation  $\hat{O}$  is recorded*. And sometimes an *alef* is recorded and words appear over it, after which the letter *bet* is written. This indicates that written elsewhere in the text marked by *bet* are remarks that belong here. Then what is written at the letter *bet* should be connected to the letter *alef* and both should be inserted together at the place where the letter *alef* appears. But if the word *hagaha* is written, then the text should not be inserted; it should only appear below in small letters and should be marked by some letter.<sup>71</sup>

In fact, initial proofing appears in the body of the manuscript text; words are deleted by being crossed out, and added words and sentences are placed atop existing or deleted words. Further proofing is done by adding arrows to indicate supplemental text in the margins of the page. Sometimes the *Rebbe* decides to delete an “add” mark by crossing the words out; wherever this is done, the arrow is deleted in the same

<sup>71</sup> Manuscript, (ŽIH), Ring. II/370.



YVA, M.10.AR.2/370

manner. This deletion is evidence of an additional round of proofing in which the *Rebbe* reviewed his comments and decided to delete some of them.

A further stage of proofing is accomplished by adding letters to the body of the text, inscriptions in square (Assyrian) Hebrew letters, and underlining for emphasis. Each such letter is a reference to a note on the upper or lower margin of the page — not on the side margins as with the arrow marking. The reference in the text proper appears again next to the added text (upper or lower), so that the proper location for each added text may be identified.

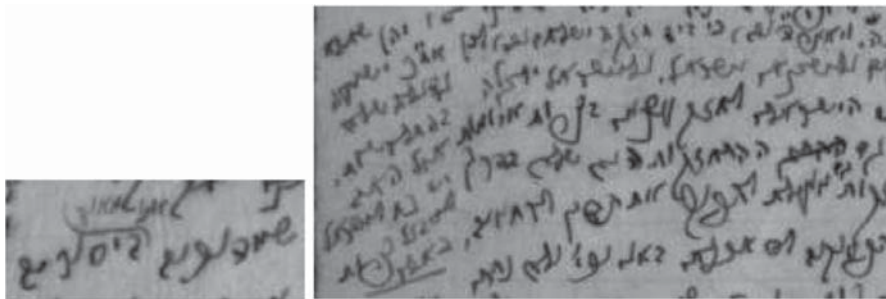
Generally one may state that the notes marked with arrows are older than those marked with letters, because many marginalia that are referenced by arrows end with the appending of a letter that leads to an additional remark on the top or bottom margin. Admittedly, the opposite sometimes occurs as well — a comment marked by a letter is added at the top or the bottom of the page, at which location an arrow directs the reader to an additional supplemental text alongside the first comment. This is but another stage of proofing, in which the *Rebbe* reviewed the remarks that he added with letters and corrected them as well.

The argument that we presented at the beginning of this article, that *Esh Kodesh* reveals evolution in the *Rebbe's* concept of suffering, rests on the premise that the sermons from 1939/40, aggregated in the printed edition under the heading “5700,” were in fact produced that year and so on up to 5702 (1941/42). Notably, however, much content in the sermons, from one word up to whole paragraphs, is of later provenance, as the *Rebbe* added them between the lines or on the margins. This being the case, each and every sermon should be reexamined.

In the sermon for *Rosh Hashanah* 5701 (October 3, 1940), the *Rebbe* writes: “who are oppressed by suffering” and then adds, over these words, “That **we** are **severely** oppressed by suffering (emphasis added)<sup>72</sup> — a terse supplement that amplifies the suffering and the personal aspect. This addendum may be indicative of later content that was layered atop early sermons. Two weeks previously, in his sermon

72 See also sermon for Portion of the Week *Mishpatim-Sheqalim* 5702 (February 14, 1942): “Indeed, it is very difficult to learn at a time of great woes” — the word “very” is a subsequent addition, meant to intensify the experience of suffering and hardship.

for Portion of the Week *Ki Tavo* 5700 (September 21, 1940), the *Rebbe* wrote that “deliverance in an unnatural revelation”; i.e., miraculous salvation is expected. He added to this statement a proofing mark, a small arrow, directing the reader to the following added text in the margin: “Indeed, a great deliverance, not by enclothemment,[i.e. not by natural forces] will occur afterward, but do the Jews have the strength to endure such agonies?” It appears to me that this addendum — an outcry, suggesting that even if a miraculous deliverance unfolds in the future, it can no longer be awaited because the human capacity to suffer has expired — was added by the *Rebbe* at a later time and attests to a different layer of writing.



YVA, M.10.AR.2/370

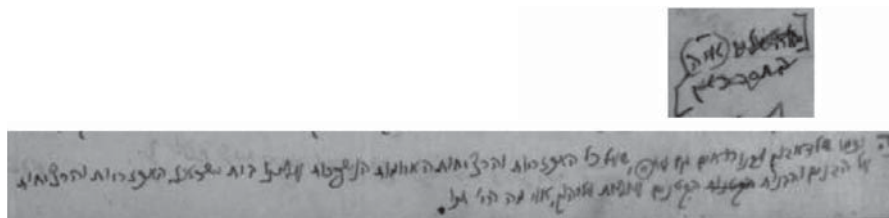
In the sermon for Portion of the Week *Huqqat* 5702 (June 27, 1942), less than a month before the Great *Aktion* (beginning July 22, 1942), the *Rebbe* wrote about the brutal treatment of children:

Indeed, it is always the cruelty of the antisemites to be particularly cruel to Jewish children, either Heaven forbid to kill them or to force them into apostasy, as is known from the decrees that occurred centuries ago, Heaven forbend.

Next to this sentence appears a proofing mark, an arrow, and the following in the margins: “Fill in, with God’s help, what is missing here.” Thus, among the marginalia that he introduced some time after he wrote the sermon, the *Rebbe* left a mark indicating that here he wishes to fill in something. Indeed, he found this *modus operandi* helpful, and in a further stage of proofing he deleted this remark in the following way: “~~Fill in, with God’s help, what is missing here~~” and added a letter referring to another note — “And as we now see to our misfortune, the cruelties and murders of the young sons and daughters surpass all the cruelties and ghastly murders that have been visited on us Jews. Oh, what has come



upon us” (cf. Lamentations 5:1). This addendum may have been written with the Great *Aktion* already in progress; if so, it is historical testimony to the transports and the suffering of the children that they caused.



YVA, M.10.AR.2/370

Given the layered nature of the entire manuscript, it is virtually impossible to attempt to date each and every sermon. This realization has critical implications for the research effort invested thus far to demonstrate one evolution or another in the *Rebbe's* theory of suffering. Accordingly, I prefer to avoid any discourse about “meaning” and to propose a different research approach. Instead of seeking development and meaning, this views *Esh Kodesh* as a work that re-expresses the question of suffering in phenomenological terms and takes its readers on a jarring religious journey.

## Conclusion

Philological examination of the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno's Holocaust sermons in manuscript yields new insights unknown to the research thus far — and which may even shake existing research to its foundations. To the best of my knowledge, all scholars — without exception — who have addressed themselves to this collection of sermons have based themselves on the published editions only and have not studied the manuscript.

Perusal of the manuscript demonstrates that the published editions are unreliable in many respects: deciphering the handwriting; determining the beginning, end, and order of the sermons; inserting deletions; and deleting sentences. The most complex finding in this examination is that *Esh Kodesh* was built layer by layer, indicating that the dating of the sermons that appears in print cannot be trusted. Thus, new and more complex research is required in order to reach more decisive implications in understanding the *Rebbe's* outlook on suffering.

*Translated from the Hebrew by Naftali Greenwood*

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