The Sanctification of Yiddish among Hasidim

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Abstract: *The sanctification of Yiddish in hasidic society occurred primarily in the first half of the twentieth century and intensified in the wake of the Holocaust. The roots of this phenomenon, however, lie in the beginnings of Hasidism in the eighteenth century. The veneration of Yiddish is linked to the hasidic attitude towards vernacular language and the status of the ẓaddik "speaking Torah." Hasidism represented— and represents—an oral culture in which the verbal transfer of its sacred content sanctifies the language spoken by its adherents, in this case, Yiddish. This article presents a theological and sociological examination of the various stages of the sanctification of Yiddish among Hasidim from the movement's early stages to the late twentieth century.*

To understand the sanctification of Yiddish, one must first note its relation to Hebrew, known in rabbinic literature, and later in Yiddish, as *loshn koydesh* (or in Hebrew, *leshon ha-kodesh*), the holy tongue. Hebrew is the canonical language of Jewish religious texts, such as the Bible, a large portion of the mishnaic and talmudic teachings, the prayer rites, as well as rabbinic literature from the medieval period until the present day. Yiddish, meanwhile, is a Jewish language that appears to have begun to develop during the period of Jewish settlement in Ashkenaz, that is, France and Germany, beginning in the ninth century.[1] Modern Yiddish, which dates back to the eighteenth century, includes a broad component of medieval German, in addition to Hebrew, Aramaic, and Slavic elements.

Jewish society in late medieval and early modern Europe was a trilingual society that simultaneously employed several languages: the language of the surrounding society, *loshn koydesh*, and Yiddish.[2] These languages were not held in the same regard: Ashkenazic society attributed sanctity to Hebrew, while Yiddish,

1. See Neil G. Jacobs, *Yiddish: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2–3.

2. Concerning the history of Jewish multi/bilingualism in general, and the relations between Yiddish and Hebrew in particular, see Israel Bartal, *Cossack and Bedouin: Land and People in Jewish Nationalism* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: ʿAm ʿOved, 2007), 247–314; Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, ed. P. Glasser, trans. S. Noble and J. A. Fishman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 1:247–314; Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 8–24; Joshua A. Fishman, "'Holy Languages' in the Context of Societal Bilingualism," in *Opportunities and Challenges of Bilingualism*, ed. Li Wei, Jean-Marc Dewaele, and Alex Housen (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), 15–24.

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by contrast, generally did not receive an elevated cultural status and was not accorded any degree of holiness.[3] However, these were not pure or unassailable distinctions. Both Hebrew and Yiddish were used for holy topics as well as secular ones throughout the medieval and early modern period. The main distinction between them seems to have been the desired addressee rather than the content of the material. Indeed, written Hebrew was historically used for mundane concerns, such as receipts, contracts, and community regulations. It also served as a language connecting Jewish communities in eastern and western lands, both orally and in writing. Similarly, sacred literature was composed in Yiddish for those unfamiliar with the richness of the holy tongue (such as women and the uneducated);[4] so too it was used for sermons in synagogues and even became the language used by students in the *beis midrash*, the study house.[5]

3. Israel Bartal has demonstrated that the Haskalah literature written in Yiddish was nevertheless paradoxically the sworn enemy of Yiddish. See Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe 1772–1881* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 98–101. Over the years, the Yiddish language achieved cultural recognition in its own right, in particular in the wake of the literary works of the three classic Yiddish writers, Mendele Moykher Sforim (Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, 1835–1917), Sholem Aleichem (Shalom Rabinovitz, 1859–1916), and Y. L. (Yitskhok Leybush) Peretz (1852–1915), known as the grandfather, father, and son. See Avraham Novershtern, "Ha-sifrut ve-ha-ḥayim: Ẓemiḥatah shel sifrut yidish ha-ḥadashah," in *Le'an? Zeramim ḥadashim be-kerev yehude mizraḥ-ʾeropah* (Tel Aviv: Open University, 2000), 35–44. See David E. Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005).

4. In many religious books in Yiddish, such as *Brantshpigl* (1596), *Tsene-rene* (1616), and *Lev-tov* (1620), the title page includes explicit statements that they are intended for women, and sometimes that they are also for uneducated men ("men who are like women"). See Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 11–39; Chava Weissler, "'For Women and for Men Who Are Like Women': The Construction of Gender in Yiddish Devotional Literature," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5, no. 2 (1989): 7–24. Much later, in the twentieth century, there was a deliberate use of Yiddish in publishing hasidic texts, so that they would be more accessible to women. This phenomenon is found especially in Chabad but also in other hasidic dynasties. In Satmar, for example, given the stricture against study of *loshn koydesh* for women, ostensibly because of the rabbinic warning against teaching women Torah (B. Sotah 20a), but more likely so that they would not have access to Zionist literature, a new genre of Yiddish books of religious instruction for girls has evolved. In addition, a more recent phenomenon is the creation of a library of story books in Yiddish for Satmar (and other) hasidic girls. This is a significant area of inquiry, but cannot be treated in this article. For more on Yiddish and women in modern Hasidism see Naftali Loewenthal, "Women and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism," in *Within Hasidic Circles, Studies in Hasidism in Memory of Mordecai Wilensky*, ed. I. Etkes et al. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1999), *42–*52; Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of Habad School* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 200–205; Ada Rapoport-Albert, "From Woman as Hasid to Woman as 'Tsadik' in the Teachings of the Last Two Lubavitcher Rebbes," *Jewish History* 27, nos. 2–4 (2013): 435–73; Rapoport-Albert, *Hasidic Studies, Essays in History and Gender* (Liverpool: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in association with Liverpool University Press, 2018), 439n43.

5. Chava Turniansky has demonstrated that the distinction between *loshn koydesh* and Yiddish is not one between holy and secular but rather between texts for the educated or the masses. The addressee is the defining factor in determining the language of the composition. See Chava Turniansky, *Language, Education and Knowledge among East European Jews* [in Hebrew], unit 7 of *Polin*,

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As noted by Max Weinreich, hasidic Yiddish may be considered a unique dialect with its own distinguishing attributes.[6] Weinreich observes that both higher and lower linguistic registers of Yiddish frequently coexist within the same hasidic court, as the *shayne yidn* who serve religious functions (*kle kodesh*), meaning rabbis and scholars,[7] principally employ the higher register, and their Yiddish contains a larger Hebrew component than that spoken by the general population.[8] In addition, he claims that Yiddish, in general, preserved Hebrew words for religious purposes, as distinct from the German and Slavic components of the language, thus placing them within a firmer traditional context. This, argues Weinreich, enabled the vernacular language to preserve tradition, identity, and ideals in daily life.[9]

The unique Yiddish style of the hasidic sermon is characterized by broad use of *loshn koydesh*, which is manifested in three distinct ways:

1. The use of Hebrew and Aramaic expressions, alongside entire quotations of biblical verses and rabbinic midrashim in Hebrew or Aramaic, without translation into Yiddish.[10]

The Jews of Eastern Europe: History and Culture (Tel Aviv: The Open University of Israel, 1994), 61–76. See also Tsippi Kauffman, "Theological Aspects of Bilingualism in Hasidic Society" [in Hebrew], *Gal-Ed 23* (2013): 155–56. Concerning prayer books in Yiddish from the start of the eighteenth century, and popular Yiddish books on topics of correct behavior and ethics, see Zeev Gries, *Conduct Literature (Regimen Vitae): Its History and Place in the Life of Beshtian Hasidim* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1990), 11–21.

6. Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, 1:189–92. Weinreich discusses the special connotations of the word *rebbe* in hasidic society, the use of the second-person singular between members of the same hasidic group in contrast to the accepted Yiddish usage of the second-person plural, and more.

7. The literal translation of *shayne yidn* is "beautiful Jews." The term *kle kodesh*, which is commonly used within religious society in Israel, derives from the Yiddish *klekoydesh*. See Uriel Weinreich, *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary* (New York: Yivo, 1968), 581; Yitskhok Niborsky, *Verterbukh fun loshn koydesh shtamike verter in yidish* (Paris: Bibliothèque Medem, 2012), 218–19.

8. Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, 1:230. Regarding high and low registers of Yiddish, see the concept of "component consciousness," which Weinreich developed, ibid., 2:656–57.

9. Ibid., 1:188–96. The chapter "The Language of the Way of the *Shas*" (ibid., 1:175–274) is devoted to this topic.

10. Ibid., 1:240–41. See, for example, the extensive Hebrew component in the sermons of R. Aharon of Karlin, in his book *Beit Aharon*, as well as those of Chabad rebbes R. Yosef Yiẓhak Schneerson, in his books *Likute diburim*, and R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson's *Likute siḥot* and *Siḥot kodesh* (a massive literary corpus in its own right). The framework of this paper does not allow for an examination of instances of this phenomenon. However, among the many examples are the following quotations from sermons by R. Yosef Yiẓhak Schneerson, *Likute diburim* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1992) (Yiddish edition), *likut 7*, Festival of Shavuot, 1934. In the following translations, words in the *loshn koydesh* are indicated using italics: "In Hasidism there are *pieces of advice* about *a number of matters, both in matters of moḥin* [intelligence] *and in matters of midot* [morals] … one of the things that *our people and upright scholars* must *become accustomed to* is *ẓiyur* [imagery]" (p. 314); "*In every generation* the hasidic farbrengens were one of the *supporting pillars* in the *edifice* of *hasidic education and guidance*" (p. 318). His Yiddish is characterized by an extensive

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2. The preference for existing Hebrew terms over other parallels.[11]
3. The creation of new verbs that use a Hebrew word within the linguistic and syntactic framework of Yiddish grammatical rules.[12]

While Hebrew is widespread in hasidic Yiddish, the opposite is also true: hasidic literature written in Hebrew often integrates a substantial number of sentences and even entire paragraphs in Yiddish. The use of spoken Yiddish in hasidic sermons and the recording of oral hasidic homilies in writing (mainly in the nineteenth century) played a significant role in transforming Yiddish into a language of books, and, consequently, into a literary language that possesses and expresses a range of meaningful cultural consciousness.[13]

Some hasidic circles were not willing to simply accord spoken Yiddish the status of a literary language. The language of the hasidic story and oral instruction, Yiddish is spoken by the ẓaddik (the spiritual leader) with sanctity; in this tongue, he conveys his teachings and holy words. Therefore, for Hasidim, Yiddish did not become merely a literary language but was transformed into a holy language as well. Historical events beginning in the mid-nineteenth century led to the

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Hebrew component and differs from customary literary Yiddish. Every sentence is half Hebrew, to the extent that it is unclear whether the Hebrew is a linguistic component of the Yiddish or vice versa! Concerning the Hebrew component in spoken Yiddish in modern Israel, see Dalit Assouline, *Contact and Ideology in a Multilingual Community: Yiddish and Hebrew among the Ultra-Orthodox* (Boston: de Gruyter, 2017); Assouline, "Verbs of Hebrew Origin in Israeli Haredi Yiddish," in *Hebrew: A Living Language* [in Hebrew], ed. R. Ben Shahar, G. Toury, and N. Ben-Ari, vol. 5 (Haifa: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me'uḥad and the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University, 2000), 27–45; Miriam Isaacs, "Yiddish in the Orthodox Communities of Jerusalem," in *Politics of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Literature, and Society*, ed. Dov-Ber Kerler (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998), 85–96; Isaacs, "Yiddish 'Then and Now': Creativity in Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish," *Studies in Jewish Civilization* 9 (1998): 165–88; Isaacs, "Contentious Partners: Yiddish and Hebrew in Haredi Israel," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 138 (1999): 101–21; Isaacs, "Hebrew-Yiddish Bilingualism among Israeli Hasidic Children," in *Issues in the Acquisition and Teaching of Hebrew*, ed. Avital Feuer et al. (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2009), 139–54. See also further articles in M. Isaacs and L. Glinert, eds., *Pious Voices: Languages among Ultra-Orthodox Jews* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999).

11. Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, 1:219–23.

12. In hasidic sermons we encounter words such as *meyage zayn* or *mekhabe zayn*, which are not found in general Yiddish usage. Sometimes these expressions developed from proximity to Hebrew verses, such as Song of Songs 8:7, "Many waters cannot quench [*lekhabot*] love." The verse uses the verb *lekhabot*, and, in order to maintain the language of the original verse, the Yiddish preacher uses the same root: *mekhabe zayn*. This phenomenon can be found until the present day in Yiddish-speaking ultra-Orthodox societies. For a list of verbs in the verbal stems hiph'il, pa'il, and hitpa'el that have been introduced into the language, see Dalit Berman-Assouline, "Yidish ḥaredit, loshn-koydesh ve-'ivrit yisra'elit: Tofa'ot leksikaliyot shel mifgash ben leshonot" (MA thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2000), 63–66. A number of newly introduced verbs are: *maklit zayn, masrit zayn, mekazez zayn*, and *zikh mitḥamek zayn*.

13. For a more detailed discussion see Daniel Reiser and Ariel Evan Mayse, *Sefat ʾemet be-sefat ha-ʾem: Derashotav shel R. Yehuda Arye Leib Alter be-yidish* (Jerusalem: Magnes, forthcoming, 2020).

conferment of holiness to Yiddish. However, as we will see, the roots of this sanctification can be traced to the earliest days of Hasidism.[14]

EARLY HASIDISM

To the best of my knowledge, the first person to explicitly attribute a measure of holiness to Yiddish was Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of Chabad Hasidism. In a collection of homilies delivered between the years 1795 and 1812, first printed in Kopys in 1837, he expounded upon the idea that one might "elevate" any language to the status of a holy tongue. Yet, Rabbi Shneur Zalman did not leave it at that and went on to mention those foreign languages that had achieved holiness: Aramaic and *leshonenu leshon la'az*, that is, Yiddish. He claimed that the use of Yiddish in homilies, similar to the use of Aramaic in the tannaitic and amoraic eras, endowed Yiddish with the status of a "holy language":

> The people of Israel went into exile in order to further the elevation of the seventy languages [i.e., all languages] to that of a holy tongue, as it is said, "'I am a wall' [Song of Songs 8:10]—this [wall] is Torah" [B. Pesaḥim 87a], for from the letters of the seventy languages the aspect of wall is formed. And as we find among the Tannaim and Amoraim who spoke Aramaic in the Talmud … so are we translating the Torah into our Yiddish language, which is a matter of elevating the vernacular to become a holy tongue.[15]

Indeed, Tsippi Kauffman claims that Hasidism always understood Yiddish as possessing a religious theurgical status, receiving a degree of holiness from Hebrew and existing alongside it as a language of devotion and mystical piety. She argues that Yiddish was ranked second in sanctity, and as such differed significantly from other languages. The hasidic ẓaddik used both Hebrew and Yiddish—the latter was the spoken language as well as that used for personal prayer—to change the surrounding reality. Ascribing Yiddish a dimension of holiness and magical powers accords with the blurring of boundaries and hierarchy between holy and secular on various plains that, in her opinion, characterized the early days of Hasidism. She further argues that "a world view [such as Hasidism] according to which any speech can be pronounced from complete devotion, just as it attributes less

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14. See Ariel Evan Mayse, *Speaking Infinities: God and Language in the Teachings of Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritsh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

15. R. Shneur Zalman of Liady, *Torah ʾor* (New York: Kehot, 1992), *parashat mishpatim*, 78b. Concerning the relation to Aramaic as a second holy language, see Yehudah Liebes, "'Ivrit ve-ʾaramit ke-leshonot ha-Zohar," http://liebes.huji.ac.il/files/ivrit.pdf. Kauffman, in "Theological Aspects," 148–52, claims that hasidic literature, until the twentieth century, does not directly discuss the status of Yiddish. Moreover, there are no written sources that endow Yiddish with any status of holiness. In her opinion, this is unsurprising, because "as long as Yiddish did not compete with any other alternative vernacular, such as Hebrew, upon its revival, and English, upon the migration of Yiddish speakers from eastern Europe across the sea, there was no need to discuss its holiness or to justify its use" (ibid., 152). By contrast, the source to which we refer demonstrates that the students of the Maggid of Mezritsh already discussed the status and sanctification of Yiddish.

importance to the content of the speech, can also accord less significance to the language in which this speech is uttered."[16]

The status of Yiddish in early Hasidism is similarly discussed by Dovid Katz, who defines Hasidism as a holistic religious culture and a way of life encompassing all aspects of being, from dress to language and everything between.[17] Katz highlights the link between the hasidic movement and the attribution of religious significance to Yiddish,[18] claiming that two conditions were necessary in order for Yiddish to be endowed with religious import, imbued with spiritual meaning: "For Yiddish to be associated with any kind of quasi-religious value would have to wait for a place where the language was not co-territorial with German, and for a time when a new revolutionary but masses-based religious movement would arise in opposition to contemporary rabbinic hegemony over life."[19] In eastern Europe, Yiddish—a Germanic language spoken in a region dominated by Slavic languages—was more isolated than in western Europe. This allowed the language to be viewed as more unique and sacred in eastern Europe than in the West, where it was considered a "jargon" version of the German tongue. As for Katz's second condition, although the portrait of Hasidism as a popular movement rebelling against hegemonic rabbinic authority is a romantic reading, and to a certain extent historically inaccurate,[20] Katz's arguments are nevertheless thought provoking.

Another possible explanation for the sanctification of Yiddish in early Hasidism is the oral character of the movement, since the Hasidim attributed great importance to spoken language,[21] as noted by David Roskies. In his discussion of the tales of R. Naḥman of Bratslav, Roskies emphasizes the oral dimension of the bilingual edition of *Sipure maʿasiyot* (1815), which preserved the original Yiddish text as spoken by R. Naḥman alongside a Hebrew translation.

16. Kauffman, "Theological Aspects," 148. Writing within the context of Chabad Hasidism, Naftali Loewenthal claims that the dissemination of hasidic teachings in Yiddish accorded Yiddish a status of holiness that did not exist before the advent of Hasidism. See Naftali Loewenthal, "Hebrew and the Habad Communication Ethos," in *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile*, ed. Lewis Glinert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 167–68.

17. Dovid Katz, *Words on Fire: The Unfinished Story of Yiddish* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 157–63.

18. Dovid Katz, *Yiddish and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 203–22.

19. Ibid., 205. Regarding the first component, see Natan Ziskind, "'Iyyunim be-toldoteyah shel yidish," *Ḥuliot 6* (2000): 385–95. Ziskind (ibid., 393–94) discusses how the Jewish population in eastern Europe was rooted in a multilingual world, where Yiddish was one language among many different ones in the Slavic space. These Jews did not feel any significant pressure to assimilate linguistically, and Yiddish formed a critical component of their Jewish identity vis-à-vis other ethnic or religious groups, which adopted other languages. At any rate, we can understand from his remarks the importance of Yiddish and its status among eastern European Jews in general, and Hasidim in particular, as a form of religious and cultural identity.

20. See Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Baal Shem Tov* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 159–86.

21. For a detailed discussion see Ariel Evan Mayse and Daniel Reiser, "Territories and Textures: The Hasidic Sermon as the Crossroads of Language and Culture," *Jewish Social Studies* 24, no. 1 (2018): 127–60.

He argues that in Jewish tradition, the transcription and subsequent transformation of Oral Torah into Written Torah endows the former with canonical status. Accordingly, Roskies believes that the printing of Rabbi Naḥman's stories was a critical moment that changed the cultural meaning of the stories and the status of Yiddish, the language in which they were told.[22] He asserts that Yiddish had previously been intended for the simple people, while Hebrew was the prerogative of the educated. This is evident in any survey of pre-twentieth-century eastern European publications. But in the case of Rabbi Naḥman, Roskies notes that "for the first time, the oral quality of the text was the measure of its authenticity."[23] The attempt to preserve Rabbi Naḥman's original words and vocal style forced the scribe to reduce the register of the Hebrew from a high literary style to a simple language capable of reflecting the oral original. At the same time, the Yiddish text was not intended merely for "simple people," but rather to be a record of R. Naḥman's original words. The centrality of the authenticity present in the oral style consequently elevated the status of the language in which the ẓaddik spoke, in this case, Yiddish.[24]

The oral culture at the center of Hasidism thus empowered the language of conversation, granting Yiddish twofold importance. The emphasis on "speech" in hasidic thought and culture clarifies several points: The integration of isolated Yiddish sentences within Hebrew hasidic sermons and stories—that is, the integration of the spoken language within the written language—exemplifies the living dialogue present within the text, as well as the importance accorded to this dialogue within hasidic culture. Moreover, hasidic literature, which preserved oral language during the process of recording texts in writing, was viewed by its producers, writers, editors, and printers as a holy corpus. Hasidim regard the "words" of the ẓaddik as akin to the Torah; the rebbe's sermon, in which he imparts "Torah" to his listeners, was considered an event commensurate to the moment of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, thus endowing Yiddish with a level of holiness.[25] Even after hasidic sermons began to be set down in writing at the end of the eighteenth century, hasidic oral culture remained vital and continued to exist alongside the newfound textual activity. The writers of

22. David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 29–31.

23. Ibid., 31.

24. Ibid.

25. On the comparison of the hasidic sermon to the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, see Gadi Sagiv, *Dynasty: The Chernobyl Hasidic Dynasty and Its Place in the History of Hasidism* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2014), 182–200; Arthur Green, "The Hasidic Homily: Mystical Performance and Hermeneutical Process," in *As a Perennial Spring: A Festschrift Honoring Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm*, ed. B. Cohen (New York: Downhill Publishing, 2013), 237–65; Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 473–78. Among Chabad Hasidim, the sermons given by ẓaddikim are known as DA"Ḥ, the first letters of the words *divreʾ Elohim ḥayim* (the words of the living God). This title was given to sermons already in the days of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of Chabad Hasidism. See Immanuel Etkes, *Baʿal Ha-tanya: Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady and the Origins of Habad Hasidism* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2011), 8–89.

these texts were primarily students attempting to preserve the "words" of the ẓaddik as they heard them uttered by him. The sanctity attributed to the ẓaddik and his words suffused his speech, a blend of Yiddish and *loshn koydesh*. Indeed, it may be stated that the conception of the ẓaddik in Hasidism led to the sanctification of his language.[26]

ELEVATING YIDDISH TO SEGREGATE FROM MODERNITY

Historical events beginning in the mid-nineteenth century furthered the sanctification of Yiddish, both among Hasidim and the broader nonhasidic ultra-Orthodox population. The rise of the Liberal and Neolog movements in mid-nineteenth century Hungary, which advocated for the use of German, and later Hungarian, in place of Yiddish, precipitated the rise of ultra-Orthodoxy. The latter argued for a strict separation from modern society alongside the vigilant preservation of the traditional Jewish way of life. One of the leaders of Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy was Rabbi Akiva Schlesinger (1827–1922), a student of the disciples of Rabbi Moshe Sofer (the Ḥatam Sofer, 1762–1839), the early leader of the zealous Hungarian Orthodoxy that sought to counter the winds of the Haskalah movement.[27] As described by Michael Silber, a number of converging factors led Hungarian rabbis, with Schlesinger at the helm, to call for devout conservatism and condemn any tendency towards change, including linguistic adjustments.[28] Inspired by the words of the Ḥatam Sofer, who wrote in his spiritual will, "Be careful not to change your Jewish name, language, and dress,"[29] Schlesinger proclaimed in 1864:

26. The writers of the Haskalah identified this conception on the part of the Hasidim and consequently endeavored to demonstrate the source of their linguistic sin—the ẓaddik and his defective language. For an example of this type of maskilic criticism, see Josef Perl's *Megale temirin*, Jonatan Meir's edition, *Sefer megale temirin* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2013), 35–38. Perl himself attempted to imitate the defective language of the ẓaddikim. See Meir, *Imagined Hasidism: The Anti-Hasidic Writings of Josef Perl* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2013), 77–78.

27. Concerning Rabbi Akiva Schlesinger, see Alter Yaakov Shachrai, *Rabi ʿAkivaʾ Yosef Shlesinger* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1942); Michael Silber, "A Hebrew Heart Beats in Hungary: Rabbi Akiva Joseph Schlesinger—Between Ultra-Orthodoxy and Jewish Nationalism" [in Hebrew], in *A Hundred Years of Religious Zionism: Figures and Thought*, ed. Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003), 225–54; Yosef Salmon, "Akiva Yosef Schlesinger: A Forerunner of Zionism or a Forerunner of Ultra-Orthodoxy," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 15, no. 2 (2016): 171–87.

28. See Michael K. Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity since Emancipation*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 23–84. Much of the significance of Schlesinger is his role in the 1865 *pesak din* of Michalowce. The first of the nine articles of this halakhic decision is "not to preach in the language of the nations of the world [i.e., German or Hungarian etc.]." Instead, the sermon in a synagogue must be given in the "language of Judaism" (i.e., Yiddish). See ibid., 50–59.

29. "Hatam Sofer's Last Will and Testament," trans. Dov Weiss, in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 196.

"Be careful not to change your name" … not to do as they do, that a person named Aharon calls himself Adolf, or Moshe [calls himself] Martin, etc. …; "Be careful not to change your language": the law for our Jewish language [Yiddish] is the same as for the holy tongue …; and the wearing of non-Jewish dress, God forbid, is prohibited by the Bible … [all of this is] indicated by the verse, "And Jacob came *ShaLeM* [i.e., in peace]," [Genesis 33:18] the first letters of which are [*shin*, *lamed*, *mem*, which spell out] *shem* [name] *lashon* [language] *malbush* [dress].[30]

According to Schlesinger—inspired by the rabbinic midrash according to which there were "three things [which] Israel did not change in Egypt: their names, their clothes, and their language"[31]—one is sanctified by means of conservatively safeguarding these three elements. In his explanation of the prohibition of adopting the local non-Jewish vernacular (German), he notes that Yiddish has been sanctified and that "its law is the same as that of the holy tongue":

Even though our holy predecessors [fathers] were unable to speak the Hebrew language, they resisted by changing the language of the nations to the language of the Jews, as our Rabbi of blessed memory [the Ḥatam Sofer] explained, "And their customs are different from those of all other people" [Esther 3:8], the customs of Israel are to be always separated and differentiated from "all nations and tongues" … and thus we understand what our Rabbi commands here, that they should be careful about changing their language, for our Jewish language [Yiddish] is of the same status as the holy tongue [Hebrew] … and indeed, I heard and saw in the name of the Holy Ari [R. Isaac Luria] of blessed memory … who said that the language which the Jews share and is distinguished among them possesses holiness and its status is similar to the holy tongue. Therefore, our Rabbi of blessed memory commands that [the Jews] should not change their language in these days, and this means our Jewish language [Yiddish].[32]

As we have seen, the rise of the Haskalah movement and the phenomenon of secularism triggered conservatism that eventually sanctified the Yiddish language.[33] Among the students of the Ḥatam Sofer, Yiddish was sanctified not because it was a tool for studying Torah, as we will see it did in the writings of the later Chabad rebbes as well as Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. For Schlesinger, Yiddish was holy because it served as a barrier, shielding the Jews from the changing surroundings

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30. Akiva Yosef Shlesinger, *Lev ha-ʿivri* (Ungvar: 1865), 1:20–22.
31. Bamidbar Rabbah 13:20.
32. Shlesinger, *Lev ha-ʿivri*, 21b.
33. On occasion this conservatism even pushed aside Hebrew. See Iris Parush, "Another Look at 'The Life of "Dead" Hebrew': Intentional Ignorance of Hebrew in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society," *Book History* 7, no. 1 (2004): 171–214. Parush argues that during the nineteenth century, Orthodox society in eastern Europe intentionally prevented its members from obtaining an education in the holy tongue to safeguard the youth from Hebrew maskilic literature, thus avoiding its detrimental and undermining influences on traditional society.

and modern Jewish society in the Austro-Hungarian Empire that had already aban-
doned Yiddish in favor of local vernaculars (German and Hungarian).[34] This ethos
of vigilant self-segregation, which arose among nonhasidic ultra-Orthodox Jews in
Hungary during the nineteenth century, would later spread to hasidic society in the
wake of the upheaval of the First World War, intensifying as the twentieth century
progressed.

A further historical development during the nineteenth century, nationalism,
would lead to a change in the status of Yiddish among traditional Jews, including
members of the hasidic movement. Israel Bartal discusses the linguistic changes
that took place in Europe in the nineteenth century and their ramifications for
the Jewish bilingual culture that previously encompassed *loshn koydesh* and
Yiddish. Among the broad changes that occurred in this period throughout
Europe, Bartal highlights the European nationalist movements that advocated
for one "national language," an outlook that sought to alter the reality of multilin-
gual cultures. This ideology called for the use of one specific dialect that in the
future would become the official language of the state, or, in certain instances, sup-
ported the language of a marginalized minority or ethnic group, calling for national
renewal by means of this "one" unique language. Indeed, in many cases languages
and various jargons were excluded in favor of the chosen "national language."[35]

Modern nationalism gave rise to Jewish nationalist movements that, in con-
trast to the Haskalah, sought to abandon traditional bilingualism in favor of "one
language and one speech" (cf. Genesis 11:1) for the Jewish people. In Bartal's
words, "Modern Jewish nationalism imparted an idea that was alien and strange
to members of the traditional Jewish corporation: *one* language for a nation,
which fulfills all the functions. In other words, *cancellation* of diglossia."[36]
Modern Hebrew, which had been in various stages of development from the
days of the Haskalah, served the Zionist movement as the single language that
would represent the Jewish nation. Alongside Zionism, various Yiddishist move-
ments sought to instate Yiddish alone as the language of the Jewish people.[37]

Traditional Orthodoxy declared war on monolingualism, primarily aimed at
the Zionist proponents of Modern Hebrew, who exerted a more significant influ-
ence on eastern European Jewry than the combined forces of all Yiddishist move-
ments. An example of this struggle can be found in the anti-Zionist teachings of
Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1887–1979),[38] the Admor of Satmar, and, before him

34. See also Katz, *Yiddish and Power*, 214–23.

35. Israel Bartal, "From Traditional Bilingualism to National Monolingualism," in Glinert,
Hebrew in Ashkenaz, 141–50.

36. Bartal, *Cossack and Bedouin*, 37. Emphasis in the original.

37. Concerning the war of languages between Hebrew and Yiddish at the beginning of the twen-
tieth century see Daniel Reiser, "Ha-gevirah ve-ha-shifḥah: Be-ʿikvot veʿidat Tsernovits 1908," *Segulah*
46 (2014): 38–45. Regarding the various Yiddishist movements see Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renais-
sance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2009). In particular,
see 29–30, 54, 310n15, 325n15 on the battle between Yiddishists and Hebraists regarding which lan-
guage should take precedence.

38. Yoel Teitelbaum, *Ve-yoʾel Moshe: Maʾamar leshon ha-kodesh* (New York: Sender Deutsch,
1961), 401–53.

Rabbi Sholem Ber Schneerson (1860–1920), the fifth Chabad rebbe.[39] These two rabbis, in contrast to other figures discussed in this paper, made no effort to sanctify Yiddish and did not endow it with a special status. Rather, they made a clear distinction between the holy tongue, Hebrew, which is intended for holy matters alone, and other languages, to be used for day-to-day matters. Schneerson wrote,

> The holy tongue is the language of the Torah and not the language of the people … [the holy tongue] is the language that the Holy One, blessed be He, [used] when He created His world … and therefore the holy language is devoted to the Torah and holy matters and must not be used for secular topics…. Look now, does it make sense that people may talk about day-to-day matters which might be also repulsive and forbidden using the same language in which the Holy One, blessed be He, said "I am the Lord your God"?[40]

Both of these figures claimed that a bilingual culture had existed throughout almost the entire history of Israel: one language for holy matters and another for secular topics. Schneerson, again, noted,

> And behold, the world believes that in the early days, in the days of the sages of the Talmud, everyone spoke the holy tongue [Hebrew], but this is a mistake … for all the days of the Second Temple and in the time of the Tannaim and the Amoraim, the sages spoke the holy tongue and the masses of the people were speaking in the Aramaic language in Babylon and in the Syrian Aramaic language in the Holy Land, which is the same language … but, after this, even among the sages the holy tongue was not used.[41]

The secularization of the holy tongue and its transformation into Modern Hebrew—which began at the onset of the Haskalah period when writers penned Hebrew works of a secular nature—and the transformation of the holy tongue into a spoken language for day-to-day activities, as later advocated by Zionism, were perceived as a profanation of the holy. In addition, the Orthodox understood that abandoning bilingualism in favor of Hebrew was the result of modern nationalist conceptions that advocated for the idea of one language for one nation. Modern Hebrew was thus not only a theological threat, but also a political one, and therefore utterly prohibited:

> Everyone admits that the sanctified language must not be used for secular matters, and even more so for day-to-day affairs [literally: for evil matters], and no one who has a brain in his head will suggest otherwise. However,

39. "Admor" is a title used for a hasidic master, the leader of a hasidic court.

40. R. Sholem Ber Schneerson, "Leshon ha-kodesh ve-ha-dibur bah," in *Migdal ʿoz: Maʾamare torah ve-ḥasidut meʾet rabotenu ha-kedoshim nesiʾei HaBaD*, ed. Yehoshua Mondshein (Kefar ḤaBaD: Machon Lubavitch, 1980), 17–18. See also Teitelbaum, *Ve-yoʾel Moshe*, 418–21.

41. Schneerson, *Migdal ʿoz*, 18–19.

those who decided to turn the holy tongue into a spoken language and cling to this approach, transferring it from holiness to secularity, have therefore changed its name and call it *sefat ʿever* [i.e., the Hebrew language; instead of *loshn koydesh*, the holy tongue] in order to divest it of its holiness.... The instigators of the Zionist idea … replaced the entire Torah with the national idea and declare that this is "your nation" Israel, that they are a nation as all peoples and languages … and for this reason they held onto this language, because there is no respectable nation without a language … and they pay no attention whatsoever to the value of its holiness, and turn it into a spoken language for the entire nation and for every spoken matter … and therefore the pious, and those who fear God's word, view this as a frightening profanation of the holy and believe that it is completely forbidden.[42]

Here we encounter a most fascinating phenomenon. Eastern European Orthodoxy, which sought to maintain the traditional bilingual situation, eventually endowed both the holy tongue and Yiddish with new significance.[43] It is impossible to understand the status of language in Orthodoxy without considering the social changes and the status of language in modern thought. The distinction between the holy tongue and the language of the people, ostensibly a division between holy and secular—the holy tongue intended for holy matters alone, with the language of the people used for secular affairs—does not withstand the test of historical reality. As mentioned above, Hebrew had long been used for secular matters, while original religious literature had been composed in Yiddish. We cannot understand the new significance attributed to the holy tongue outside the context of the battle against modern nationalism. The Zionist threat of employing Modern Hebrew for everyday affairs led Orthodox thinkers to sequester the holy tongue, which was to be used for holy matters alone.

This battle, paradoxically, also led to some degree of sanctification for Yiddish.[44] According to the distinction drawn by these Orthodox leaders, the vernacular Yiddish should have been accorded secular status alone. Orthodoxy had no declared interest in sanctifying Yiddish. However, the restrictions placed on the use of Hebrew, as well as the competition with its modern manifestation, led, in certain hasidic courts, to increased punctiliousness in speaking Yiddish and a

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42. Ibid., 21–22. Concerning the feeling of theological and political threat, see also *Ve-yoʾel Moshe*, 427: "And how wretched must be the dough when the baker himself testifies to it, that the great professor among them who studied history of Hebrew literature himself wrote that this language has been made to gore the pious." The ruling against it is found on p. 429: "Thus, one must devote himself to avoid this [speaking Hebrew] even more than objects of idolatry." On ultra-Orthodoxy's opposition to Modern Hebrew see Iris Brown, "From Ideology to Halakhah: Ultra-Orthodox Opposition to Modern Hebrew," *Studies in Judaism, Humanities, and the Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2018): 33–58.

43. Bartal, *Cossack and Bedouin*, 39–40.

44. See also: Lewis Glinert and Yosseph Shilhav, "Holy Land, Holy Language: A Study of an Ultraorthodox Jewish Ideology," *Language in Society* 20, no. 1 (1991): 59–86.

consequent elevation of its status. "Impure"[45] Modern Hebrew thus transformed Yiddish into a second holy tongue, a phenomenon that, as we will see below, would further intensify following the Holocaust.

An additional element of the story of the sanctification of Yiddish among Hasidim is the larger breakdown of traditional eastern European society in the wake of the upheavals of the First World War. This process led to greater linguistic assimilation, and, consequently, more pronounced traditionalist efforts to preserve Yiddish. During the war, many ẓaddikim fled from frontline cities in Galicia and Bukovina and settled in the cities of Hungary, Austria, and Romania, mainly Vienna and Budapest, where they rebuilt their courts.[46] Hasidic centers developed in Hungarian provinces such as Hajdú and Bihar, as well as those of Slovakia, Transylvania, and Wallachia (mainly in Bucharest). These hasidic sects formed enclaves of Yiddish speakers within a broader Jewish space that did not employ Yiddish as the vernacular. This departure from the shtetl and migration to cities during and following the war intensified the ongoing process of urbanization. Until World War I, the little town (shtetl) preserved traditional ways of life and constituted a partial shield against modernization. By contrast, the migration of hasidic centers to major European cities and the increasing exposure to Western culture posed new challenges for the hasidic movement.[47] The feeling that a threat was looming grew steadily, and Hasidim sought to separate themselves accordingly. Yiddish, which distinguished the Hasidim who dwelled in these new regions, became one of their defining characteristics as well as a leading means of social and cultural differentiation and self-segregation.[48]

Indeed, the growing numbers of hasidic leaders at this time who attributed holiness to Yiddish were primarily active in locales where speaking Yiddish separated Hasidim from the surrounding Jewish society. Thus, R. Ḥayim Elazar

45. *Ve-yoʾel Moshe*, 427: "Their impure language, which they call Hebrew," 428: "It [Hebrew] is despised and abominable and impure. It should be 'cried out: impure impure' [Leviticus 13:45]—and it is worse by thousands and multitudes of levels than the rest of the languages of the nations."

46. Concerning Jewish migration from eastern Europe following World War I, see Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia 1914–2008* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 3:5–55; Egmont Zechlin, *Die Deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969); Frank Schuster, *Zwischen allen Fronten: Osteuropäische Juden während des Ersten Weltkrieges 1914–1918* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004). Regarding the flow of Hasidim from Galicia and Bukovina to Vienna, see Moshe Ungerfeld, *Vina* (Tel Aviv: Nahum Dreemer, 1946), 120–24; David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 67–100; Abraham J. Heschel, "The History of Hassidism in Austria," in *The Jews of Austria: Essays on Their Life, History, and Destruction*, ed. J. Fraenkel (London: Vallentine, 1967), 354–55. Regarding the impact of this migration on hasidic geographic space, see Marcin Wodziński and Uriel Gellman, "Towards a New Geography of Hasidism," *Jewish History* 26, no. 2–4 (2013): 171–99.

47. On the process of urbanization that occurred among the hasidic courts following World War I, and the challenges this posed to them, see Marcin Wodziński, "War and Religion: or, How the First World War Changed Hasidism," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 106, no. 3 (2016): 283–312.

48. Hasidic attempts to insulate were only partially successful and Hasidism changed rapidly and significantly in this interwar period; see Marcin Wodziński, *Historical Atlas of Hasidism*, cartography by Waldemar Spallek (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 152–68.

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Shapira, the Admor of Munkács, renowned as the great warrior against moderni-zation, secularization, and the Zionist movement, accorded some degree of holi-ness to the Yiddish language. As he wrote in 1922, because "our fathers and rabbis" used Yiddish, "they brought" this language "within the bounds of holi-ness": "We too shall learn from the ways of the ẓaddikim, our rabbis, to cleave to them and the meaning of their words in every respect, including the Jewish spoken jargon language [i.e., Yiddish], which is customarily spoken among our brothers, the holy children of Israel. For even though it is a secular language, our fathers and rabbis, may their merits protect us, by means of their *kavvanot* [kabbalistic intentions or directions] and *yiḥudim* [acts of unification] brought each and every utterance within the bounds of holiness."[49]

Sarah Schenirer, a descendent from a family of Belz Hasidim and the founder of the Beys Yankev institutions for the education of ultra-Orthodox girls, went even further in this regard. Schenirer viewed Yiddish as more than a secular language that borders on holiness, rather regarding it as a holy tongue, as she stated unequivocally in 1931: "For us Yiddish is so holy because many ẓad-dikim and great men of the generation spoke it over the course of hundreds of years and still speak this same language [today]. If so many ẓaddikim speak Yiddish, it consequently is holy. This language is the clothing of the soul. We have already spoken many times about the fact that, among Jews, the external must be connected to the internal."[50] This nostalgic sentiment, close to the words of the Admor of Munkács, views Yiddish as a holy language because the hasidic masters spoke it and continued to speak it. In a similar manner, R. Men-achem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh rebbe of Chabad, known to many as the Lubavitcher Rebbe, later wrote, following the Holocaust, that the ẓaddikim—from the Baal Shem Tov (Besht) to his father-in-law, R. Yosef Yiẓḥak Schneer-son—sanctified Yiddish by giving sermons concerning hasidic matters in this tongue:

> As we saw in the case of R. Yosef Yiẓḥak Schneerson, who continued to reveal the secrets of the Torah not only in the holy tongue [Hebrew], but also in Yiddish, for this language has been sanctified through its use for Torah and commandments, as well as by the light of the Torah, beginning with the Besht, who would talk about hasidic matters in the Yiddish language, [as we see in] *ʾIgrot ha-kodesh* [25], "The Besht, of blessed memory, would pronounce teachings in the language of Ashkenaz [Yiddish] and not in the holy tongue [Hebrew]."[51]

49. R. Chaim Elazar Shapira, *Divre Torah II* (Jerusalem: Or Torah Munkács, 1998), section 7, 170.

50. Sarah Schenirer, "Yidish un yidishkeyt," *Beys Yankev Zhurnal*, Warsaw-Cracow-Lodz, 1931.

51. R. Menahem Mendel Schneerson, *Torat Menaḥem*, vol. 17 (1955/6), third part, 95. More on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's approach to Yiddish and his radical project to recast Yiddish as the "language of redemption," see Eli Rubin, "A Linguistic Bridge between Alienation and Intimacy: Chabad's The-orization of Yiddish in Historical and Cultural Perspective," *In geveb* (January 2019).

A similar sentiment was expressed following the Holocaust by R. Joseph B. Solo-veitchik (1903–1993), one of the leading figures of American Modern Orthodoxy, who published a newspaper article claiming that Yiddish possesses the status of a "holy object." To explain, he made a sharp halakhic distinction between *gufe kedushah*, meaning items that possess intrinsic sanctity, and *tashmishe kedushah*, the "accouterments" associated with such items. The Yiddish language is such an accouterment. Although its holiness is less than that of an item with intrinsic sanctity, the accouterment too must be placed in a *genizah* when no longer in use. This is evidence of its value and its role as an inseparable part of the system of holiness:

> I am not a Yiddishist who believes that the language alone represents an abso-lute value. But I am indeed a Jew of the Talmud, and I know that holiness and absoluteness are not always the same thing. The halakhah articulated two con-cepts of holiness: (1) items with intrinsic sanctity; (2) accouterments. It ruled that one must not only save the Torah scroll from a fire on the Sabbath but also the mantle that covers it; not only the tefillin [phylacteries] but also the bag containing them. At any rate, Yiddish as a language, even though it is not among those items possessing intrinsic sanctity, certainly falls into the cate-gory of accouterments, which are holy as well and must be protected with all our might. Is there a more beautiful "bag," which covered and still contin-ues to cover the most holy Torah scrolls, than Yiddish? The Rama [R. Moshe Isserles], the Maharshal [R. Shlomo Luria], the Gaon of Vilna [R. Eliayhu ben Shlomo Zalman], R. Chaim of Volozhin and other great scholars in the nation of Israel studied Torah with their students in this language. Masses of Jews expressed their faith, their true love and their loyalty in this simple mother tongue. To this day, great heads of yeshivot give lessons in Yiddish. Such a "cover" is certainly holy, although its holiness is not absolute, rather only that of an accouterment. It is a great merit to preserve this "cover"![52]

The above quotations convey that Yiddish is holy because of its speakers, who sanctified it. However, we cannot ignore the historical context in which these state-ments were made. Indeed, we can discern a direct link between the decline in the use of Yiddish among secular Jewry and the increased sanctity of the language among religious speakers. As circles of secular Yiddish speakers continued to dwindle, Yiddish was further sanctified by its ultra-Orthodox speakers. In hasidic society—which is among the most conservative sectors of ultra-Orthodox society today—Yiddish has become a cultural signifier distinguishing the Hasidim, serving as a cultural shield between traditional culture and its Western secular counterpart. Endowing Yiddish with sanctity because "our fathers and our rabbis spoke it" can occur only among a conservative minority society that

52. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Vegn yidish," *Tog morgen zhurnal*, Feburary 24, 1961. Reprinted in David Eliyahu Fishman, ed., *Droshes un ksovim me'otsar harav: Geklibene ksovim fun harav Dov Halevi Soloveytshik* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2009), 321–22. On Soloveitchik's Yiddish see Ariel Evan Mayse, "Yokhed ve-tsiber: Individual Expression and Communal Responsibility in a Yiddish Droshe by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," *In geveb* (February 2019).

seeks to preserve the traditions of its forefathers. The Admor of Munkács lived in a time and place where most Jews spoke Hungarian and German; Sarah Schenirer witnessed growing numbers of students studying in Polish state schools and speaking Polish; and in the United States, where the Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote the words quoted above, a clear trend of Americanization was already well under-way, to the detriment of Yiddish.

Another approach that emerged from the Holocaust sanctified Yiddish by attributing mystical powers to the language, as expressed in the kabbalistic teach-ings of Rabbi Arele Roth of Jerusalem.[53] Roth was the founder of the group Shomer Emunim, a predecessor of later Jerusalem-based hasidic groups such as Shomer Emunim, Toledot Aharon, and Toledot Avraham Yizḥak. Tamir Granot points to Roth's belief that speaking Yiddish "uplifts the sparks"[54] from German, thus weakening Germany's powers. According to rabbinic tradition, the descendants of Esau, the Edomim, are the sons of Germamia. This nation is so strong that it can destroy the world: "Jacob said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the World, do not give to the evil Esau the desire of his heart … this is Germamia of Edom. For if you do so, his descendants will destroy the entire world."[55] Based on R. Isaac Luria's teaching concerning uplift-ing the sparks, and on the accepted exegetical presumption that Germamia is Germany, Roth suggested a radical mystical interpretation, namely, that the use of Yiddish is an act of capturing the German language in order to uplift the sparks held within it. In this way, Yiddish might dull the power of the Germans. According to his remarks, which were published in 1942, during the Holocaust:

> Whoever has been granted by God with a little reason and intellect knows that God caused us, for a good reason, to choose the jargon language [Yiddish], which is the secular vernacular among the Ashkenazic Jewish community. For even a little thing such as lifting a finger takes place under the supervision of the highest divine authority, all the more so a thing [language] which the people of Israel use. Since it was revealed to the merciful Creator what would befall us, who knows if this spoken language [Yiddish]—which was formed and influenced by that language [German], having corrupted its essence and mixed in with it many words from the holy tongue—[was formed] in order to subdue the divine angels [*sare maʿalah*], and without it [Yiddish] who knows if there would have remained for us any remnant, because of our many sins.[56]

53. Gershom Sholem regarded Roth as a sui generis mystic. See Sholem, *Devarim be-go: Pirke morashah ve-teḥiyah* (Tel Aviv: ʿAm ʿOved, 1990), 76.

54. On the kabbalistic notion of uplifting the sparks see Louis Jacobs, "The Uplifting of Sparks in Later Jewish Mysticism," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present*, ed. A. Green (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 99–126.

55. B. Megillah 6b.

56. Aharon Roth, *Kontres ʾahavat ha-boreʾ, maʾamar ẓahali ve-roni* (Jerusalem: Bet Yetomim Diskin Print, 1942), 404. See, as well, Tamir Granot, "'Galut Yisraʾel be-ʾereẓ ha-kodesh': Ha-yidish ve-ha-mivtaʾ ha-ʾashkenazi be-pesikah u-be-hagut ha-ḥaredit be-zamenenu," *Mayim me-delav 18* (2008): 371–402.

The Sanctification of Yiddish among Hasidim

After the Holocaust, Yiddish came to be identified with the lost culture of eastern Europe and was glorified and sanctified on the part of Hasidim as a nostalgic link with the past. The holiness of Yiddish derived from its identification as the language spoken by the victims of the Holocaust:

> The secret of the magic of Yiddish lies in its power to permeate the soul of the child and delineate his future life. Indeed, it is no secret that a language can plant roots in the heart and, when the language is positive and clean, these roots will bear positive fruits, and the opposite, God forbid. The fact that the Yiddish language has been sanctified by millions of Jews calls for an answer … is there not in this some kind of mission for the generations, with the grace of God, blessed be He, to give a foothold and identify with the holy souls of the perished, and even if only by means of the language which they spoke, with all its variations and the meanings?[57]

Hasidism was not unique in this approach.[58] But ultra-Orthodox society in general, and hasidic society in particular, has held an almost complete monopoly on the Yiddish language following the destruction of eastern European Jewry. In the second half of the twentieth century, Yiddish became the spoken language and cultural symbol of many of hasidic courts in Israel and in the United States. The language, a key cultural element, was sanctified to the same level as other hallowed customs; speaking Yiddish became a holy practice to be devotionally held and not forsaken.[59]

After the establishment of the State of Israel, Yiddish became a symbol distinguishing the hasidic courts, which began to reestablish themselves in the young country, from the surrounding secular, Hebrew-speaking society. In the new reality of the State of Israel, in which Hebrew became the spoken vernacular,

57. Miriam Vinshtok, "Mame loshn," 9, supplement to *Hamodiʿa*, 18 Tammuz 1999.

58. See, for example, the poem by Bunem (Bini) Heler, "Mayn shvester khaye" (My sister Ḥaya), which sanctifies Yiddish as the language of the murdered (in this case his sister who cared for him in his childhood and now sits next to God): "For her I write in Yiddish my songs / in the worst days of our time / for God alone she is an only daughter / she sits in heaven by His right side." In his poem "Yiddish, My Beloved Language," Heller depicts the role that Yiddish assumed after the Holocaust: "I carry you on my lips / You live and your blood still burns / there will yet remain enough for a remnant—of madness and horror / I carry you with me in the world, searching for a place where you can / tell the story of the destruction / in Jewish-Yiddish letters to impart." Regarding this, see http://www.yadvashem.org/he/articles/general/yiddish-after-holocaust.html. On the holiness of Yiddish following the Holocaust among Orthodox and non-Orthodox circles, see Joshua A. Fishman, "The Holiness of Yiddish: Who Says Yiddish Is Holy and Why," *Language Policy* 1, no. 2 (2002): 123–41.

59. During my studies at Yavneh High School in Haifa, when we shared the school building with the Talmud Torah Yahel Yisraʾel of Ḥaside Seret-Vizhnitz in 1993, I saw posters in which the rebbe, R. Eliezer Hager, called for the Hasidim to speak only Yiddish among themselves, claiming that this was the tradition of the holy ancestors, and citing the verse "Do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Proverbs 1:8).

a fascinating role reversal ensued. The once-popular Yiddish assumed the role of a cultural safeguard against modern culture, represented by Hebrew. It became a tool for social isolation and the language employed by the hasidic elite. Hebrew, which in the past possessed the status of a holy language, became the "language spoken on the street," while Yiddish, which in pre-Holocaust eastern Europe had played that same role, became the holy tongue. Rabbi Shmuel Halevy Wosner (1913–2015)—the most prominent hasidic halakhic decisor in the State of Israel during the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century—explicitly stated that, in addition to the importance of preserving the linguistic tradition of our "rabbis and fathers," it is necessary to speak Yiddish because it separates its speakers from "today's spirit of the street," meaning the secular cultural spirit of Modern Hebrew:

> Regarding the Yiddish language, I believe I already responded to you that there is no doubt that it is a mitzvah if you can [speak it], since our rabbis and fathers studied and educated generations speaking it…. Regarding the fundamental question about studying [Torah] in Yiddish, instead of in Hebrew, there is no doubt that education at home in Hebrew alone is a great disadvantage, because it connects—whether one wishes it or not—to the spirit of today's street; in contrast, the Yiddish language, in particular in our generation, has a value that links us to the tradition of our fathers.[60]

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The phenomenon of the sanctification of Yiddish in hasidic society occurred in three main historical stages:

1. Already in the beginning of Hasidism, at the end of the eighteenth century, Hasidim attributed great importance to the spoken language (i.e., Yiddish). A culture based on orality and the verbal transfer of its holy content sanctifies the language that is on the lips of its speakers and bearers. Moreover, the notion of the ẓaddik, whose words are equivalent to the words of Torah, led to the sanctification of the language in which he spoke and preached.

2. The outcomes of World War I intensified the ongoing process of urbanization. Many hasidic courts left the shtetl and immigrated to major European (and American) cities. The increasing exposure to Western culture led Hasidism to use Yiddish as a self-segregating tool in response to modernity. Yiddish, which distinguished Hasidim from their new surroundings (including the Jewish communities), became one of their defining features as well as a leading means of social and cultural differentiation. The struggle of Hasidism with modernization, secularization, and Zionism accorded Yiddish a degree of holiness. Indeed, this phenomenon has its roots in the formation of ultra-Orthodox Judaism

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60. Shmuel Halevi Wosner, *Responsa shevet Halevi* (Bene Berak: 2002), part 10, paragraph 237.

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in mid-nineteenth century Hungary, yet it intensified within Hasidism, especially after World War I.

3. Following the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, Yiddish was identified with the lost culture of eastern Europe and was glorified and sanctified as a nostalgic link with the past. This sanctification was also a clear reaction to the elevation of Modern Hebrew as a national language, and in some extreme cases the holiness of Yiddish exceeds Hebrew due to these languages' role reversal in modern Israel.

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