"SUCH THINGS HAVE NEVER BEEN HEARD OF": JEWISH INTELLECTUALS AND HASIDIC MIRACLES

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> "As everyone knows, the main ingredients of Chassidic tales are *tzaddikim* and miracles."[1]

Among the first non-Hasidic Jewish intellectuals to pay close attention to the Hasidic movement were the Eastern European *maskilim*, advocates of enlightenment and rationalism, who denounced and ridiculed Hasidic belief in magic and miracle.[2] Even sympathetic observers among the *maskilim* and their intellectual heirs, Jewish writers and historians of the early twentieth century, remained convinced that Hasidic miracle stories were false, the product of fraud and superstition. This intellectual climate seems to have affected even traditional Jews within, or close to, Hasidic circles.

By the late twentieth century, however, the intellectual climate had changed. Jewish writers and historians today are far from the scepticism of earlier generations and some have forthrightly affirmed the reality of Hasidic miracle-working. This paper offers a sketch of this paradigmatic process of embarrassment and re-embracement.

Rabbi Israel Berger of Bucharest, a Hasid and Kabbalist, published his hagiographical compilation *Eser Orot* in 1907. It is part of a four-volume collection of teachings and tales of Hasidic masters connected with Berger's family

1 Brawer, *Something from Nothing* (a booklet on Hasidic thought by an author associated with Habad-Lubavitch), 81.

2 This paper will not distinguish between "miracles" and "magic" in the Hasidic context. Though some scholarship on Hasidism does make such a distinction ("Miracles are not the same as magic" — Lamm, *Religious Thought of Hasidism*, 418 n. 15) it strikes me as theological rather than historical.

tree, under the collective title *Zekhut Yisrael,* which has been reprinted often in Hasidic communities, into the twenty-first century. [3]

These volumes can be seen as part of the Hasidic project of resistance to modernity.[4] Eastern European Jewry was in a time of upheaval and transition as Berger wrote. His hagiographical books are family chronicles in a time of generational strife; they are focused on the past, in a time of intense hopes and fears for the future; all their narratives claim factual truth, in a time of burgeoning Jewish creativity in literary fiction; they are written not in the nascent modern Hebrew but in rabbinic Hebrew mixed with Yiddish, a literary dialect hardly accessible beyond the religious Ashkenazi context. Collaborative works which constantly refer to their sources in oral tradition, earlier texts, and correspondence with other rabbis, Berger's books present themselves as products of a trans-historical religious culture that excludes the growing number of Jewish religious liberals or secularists.

In this anti-modernist context, it is surprising that *Eser Orot* includes a long introduction acknowledging and addressing readers' doubts about the "signs and wonders" (*otot umoftim)* which fill the book. Berger emphasizes that he is not addressing the scepticism of heretics or non-observant Jews, only that of "kosher souls who wonder at these matters in all innocence". First among these areas of doubt is "the reality of the wonders and awe-inspiring deeds that are told of our Rabbis (whose souls are in Eden), which are supernatural and beyond the limits of the order of Creation; [the doubters] think that such things have never been heard of."[5]

Berger's books are intended for an audience of learned men. They are written in rabbinic Hebrew rather than the Yiddish vernacular, printed in Rashi script rather than the easier-to-read square script or "big letters", and prefaced with approbations by rabbis. His response to the doubts he cites involves page after page of citations from the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. His in-

3 Berger's hagiographical works are a major subject of my book *Imagining Holiness* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).

4 See Ira Robinson, "Hasidic Historiography and Jewish Modernity."

5 Berger, *Eser Orot*, beginning of *Petihta Rabata* and author's footnote there.

troduction thus testifies to a sense of embarrassment about Hasidic miracles among Jewish intellectuals steeped in traditional piety.[6]

Berger's acknowledgment of such embarrassment appeared after nearly a century of attacks on Hasidic gullibility by less sympathetic intellectuals. At least since the publication of the first book of Hasidic tales, *Shivhei HaBesht* (Praises of the Baal Shem Tov) in 1814, opponents of Hasidism had been ridiculing and bitterly denouncing miracle stories.[7] For *maskilim*, in particular, Hasidic belief in the wonder-working powers of the Rebbes was a leitmotif of anti-Hasidic polemic.[8]

Thus, Joseph Perl (1773-1889), whose satire *Megaleh Temirin*, which has been called "the first Hebrew novel",[9] was provoked by *Shivhei HaBesht* and the tales of Rebbe Nahman of Breslov, mocked miracle stories throughout his work. As Immanuel Etkes notes,

> Underlying Perl's satire is the assumption that no one — at least, among his enlightened readers — doubts the ridiculous and contemptible nature of magic in general and of the belief in the magical powers of the Hasidic leaders in particular. Hence the mere description of various instances of this belief among the Hasidim should suffice to provoke derision and revulsion.[10]

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6 There are many Hasidic sources which indicate embarrassment about the telling of miracle stories, especially critiques of particular books deemed to be exaggerated or distorted. See Assaf, *The Regal Way,* 24-25. This is different from scepticism about the very possibility of such miracles (at least in our times) such as Berger is acknowledging.

7 Moshe Rosman, "Shivhei ha-Besht: document historique, ouvrage de propagande ou programme théologique?", 22-23, argues that the popularity of Shivhei HaBesht declined precipitately after its initial appearance, because mitnagdim, *maskilim* and even non-Jews were scoffing at its miracle stories, as well as its depiction of the Baal Shem Tov as other than a Talmudic scholar.

8 Immanuel Etkes has analyzed the importance of this theme in Haskalah literature and its role in buttressing the enlightened self-image of *maskilim*: "Magic and Miracle Workers in the Literature of the Haskalah", in *The Besht*, 259-271. For further examples see Gloria Wiederkehr-Pollack, *Eliezer Zweifel,* especially 146 (on Isaac Erter, 1791-1851), 158 and 160 (on Isaac Baer Levinsohn, 1788-1860), and the anthology of maskilic descriptions of Hasidism in Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hasidism*, 259-263, 279-280.

9 See Dov Taylor's annotated translation *Joseph Perl's Revealer of Secrets: The First Hebrew Novel*.

10 Etkes, *The Besht*, 261.

This firm assumption — that Hasidic miracle stories were lies propagated among superstitious followers by unscrupulous Rebbes — was sometimes expressed by *maskilim* in ways that can still shock a reader with any sympathy for Hasidism. Thus, Jakub Tugendhold (1794-1871) presented the government of Lublin Province with the following report on the Trisker Maggid, Abraham Twersky (1806-1889), a highly respected figure in Hasidic memory and one of the ancestors of the important Chernobyl dynasty:

> I can in all conscience report that Abraham Tweryskier is one of those roguish fanatics who, pretending to work wonders, take advantage of the credulousness of unenlightened persons of the Mo[saic] fai[th] and inveigle contributions out of them.[11]

The creative and thoughtful philosopher of Judaism, Nahman Krokhmal (1785-1840) wrote as follows about the beloved Rebbe Levi Isaac of Berdichev:[12]

> The scoundrel and sinner of Berdichev sits and narrates stories to his congregation… [T]hey stand trembling: "How many fortresses did he conquer today with his prayer, and how many worlds are subject to him!"

Even a later maskil distinguished by his unusual sympathy for Hasidism, who has been called "the forgotten father of modern scholarship on Hasidism",[13] Eliezer Zweifel (1815-1888), "criticizes the Hasidic rage for fabricated wonder tales — 'matters that are totally incomprehensible and which never even occurred to the founders of Hasidism.'"[14]

While by the time Rabbi Israel Berger was writing, "a decisive trend [had been] established in Hebrew literature, beginning in the 1890s, in favor of the positive evaluation of Hasidism which had begun among the later *maskilim*",[15] Hasidic belief in miracles remained a matter of embarrassment. This was the

11 Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hasidism*, 287.

12 Krokhmal, *Moreh Nevukhei Hazman* 217, trans. in Wiederkehr-Pollack, *Eliezer Zweifel*, 151.

13 Wiederkehr-Pollack, "Eliezer Zvi Hacohen Zweifel: Forgotten Father of Modern Scholarship on Hasidism".

14 Zweifel, *Shalom al Yisrael* I:1:28, as cited in Wiederkehr-Pollack, *Eliezer Zweifel*, 212-213.

15 Jacobson, *Modern Midrash*, 19.

case even among the several non-traditional Eastern European Jewish authors who were publishing retellings of Hasidic tales contemporaneously with Berger and his traditionalist colleagues: Micha Yosef Berdyczewski (*Sefer hasidim*, 1900), Yehuda Steinberg (*Sippurei hasidim* and *Sihot hasidim*, both 1904), and I.L. Peretz (*Khsidish,* 1901).[16] By presenting their tales as fiction or as quaint folklore, these authors distanced their projects from those of Hasidic compilers like Berger, who believed in the factuality of his stories, and distanced themselves from any belief in their contents.

The best known of these reworkings of Hasidic lore are probably those of Peretz. His Hasidic tales, written with an agenda "of transforming a negative perception of Hasidism into a positive one by seeing beyond the outer shabby appearance of Hasidism to the reality of its inner contents",[17] introduce miracles only through a complex web of heightened folksiness and literary irony. There is never any hint that the author believes in them, even if the narrator does; they are part of "the outer shabby appearance of Hasidism." The best-known of these tales, *Oyb nisht nokh hekher* ("If Not Higher"), succeeds in mocking Hasidic belief in miracles — the rebbe's putative ascents into heaven when he "disappears" before the Days of Awe — even as it celebrates Hasidic ethics — the rebbe's anonymous charitable visits to the poor, the real cause of his "disappearance."

Martin Buber, the great historian and popularizer of Hasidism in Western Europe and beyond, published his first work in this field in 1906.[18] In his major compilation of reworked Hasidic narratives, *Tales of the Hasidim,* stories with a supernatural element are inevitably introduced with "es wird erzählt" ("it is told"), as an indication of the author's own disbelief. Scholars have drawn attention to the extent to which Buber downplayed miracles altogether in his volumes on Hasidic tales and teachings. This was noted by Gershom Scholem

16 See Jacobson, "Neo-Hasidic Tales", in *Modern Midrash*, 17-43. Peretz wrote other neo-Hasidic tales not included in this compilation, such as *"Droshe-geshank (a mayse fun bal-shem)"* and *"Der bal-shem firt oys a shidekh*", both included in the collection *Geshikhtn un stsenes.*

17 Jacobson, *Modern Midrash*, 30.

18 *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman*.

in his critique of Buber's approach to Hasidism,[19] and has been demonstrated by Steven T. Katz in a thorough study of Buber's treatment of the Baal Shem Tov: "When we compare Buber's anti-kabbalistic… anti-magical… Besht to the image of the Besht that emerges from the original sources… there is little doubt that Buber's presentation is eccentric."[20]

In this intellectual climate, it is not surprising that embarrassment about Hasidic miracle tales had penetrated the traditional Jewish community as well, as registered by Israel Berger. This embarrassment remained the norm for decades. Thus, Louis I. Newman's *Hasidic Anthology*, first published in 1934 and often reprinted, though a celebration of Hasidic "lore and wisdom",[21] calmly maintains the maskilic assumption that there are no real miracles. Newman takes the liberty of ascribing this outlook to the best of the Rebbes themselves, of whom he speaks, typically for the scholarship of this time, as figures of the past. "The more learned Hasidic Rabbis cared little for miracles, and explained the true facts when among their own group. They permitted, however, the circulation of tales of wonder-working among the common people in the belief that thereby they might become attached to an ethical life."[22]

Historians of Hasidism maintained similar attitudes. Etkes has noted the ongoing influence of maskilic ideas about Hasidism and magic on the historiographical work of Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891),[23] Saul Israel Hurwitz (1861-1927),[24] Samuel Abba Horodezky (1871-1957),[25] and "Simon Dubnow (1860-1941) who laid the foundations for the critical historical treatment of Hasidism".[26] Dubnow saw miracle tales as integral to the strength and growth of Hasidism — and, without any qualification, as false:

19 Scholem charges that Buber neglects "the magical element" of Hasidism: "Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism," 230. See Etkes, *The Besht*, 269.

20 Steven Katz, "Martin Buber's Misuse of Hasidic Sources," pp. 25-39 in *Post-Holocaust Dialogues,* 37.

21 Newman, *Hasidic Anthology*, title page.

22 Newman, *Hasidic Anthology*, 261.

23 Etkes, *The Besht,* 265-266.

24 Etkes, *The Besht,* 267-268.

25 Etkes, *The Besht,* 266-267.

26 Etkes, *The Besht,* 268.

> Granted… Chassidism used the phantasms and superstitions of the legends and wondrous stories, and particularly the cult of the miraculous 'Zaddikim' who mediated between God and man… Yet, just this… enabled Chassidism to capture the greatest number of people, to revolutionize the souls profoundly and to revitalize their minds with new hope.[27]

> By such nursery tales the Chassidim managed to calm down the excited masses [in times of persecution]. The… overcoming of reality by fantasy, even in the area of political life, was the main source of strength of the new movement.[28]

Yet, like Berger's works, most of the collections of Hasidic tales published in traditional circles from his time till the present day stubbornly persist in celebrating the miracles of the Rebbes.[29] This insistence on miracle — even in the face of embarrassment among learned and pious readers — can be seen as part of the Hasidic project, often conscious and deliberate, of resistance to modernity. These conflicting approaches played a part in the disconnection between non-traditionalist Jewish intellectuals, even those positively inclined towards Hasidism, and Hasidim themselves, well into the twentieth century.

The later twentieth century, however, saw the beginnings of a re-embracement of miracles by non-Hasidic Jewish intellectuals. Gershom Scholem, the great scholar of Kabbalah, took a significant step in this direction in his article on the Hasidic sources on the life of the Baal Shem Tov, published in 1960:

> Where is the boundary which separates the imaginary virtues from the real (even if para-normal) ones in a certain person? — this is far from clear. Yet I must say outright that in my humble opinion not only would the history of religion greatly benefit by an investigation of supra-normal, or para-psychological, visions, but that even the conventional use of the terms "imagination", "suggestion", and "auto-suggestion" does not convey the whole truth of the matter, and to the extent that it explains anything does not explain it fully… It would seem that the interaction between the charismatic person and the public, while at

27 Dubnow, *A History of Hasidism,* vol. I p. 13.

28 Dubnow, *A History of Hasidism*, vol. 2 pp. 2-3 (ch. 5 par. 27).

29 The major work on the literary history and themes of Hasidic hagiography, Gedaliah Nigal's *The Hasidic Tale*, is now available in English translation (Littman, 2008)..

> times it gives rise to what are called miracles, is of a nature more complex than is commonly supposed.[30]

Though in context he is dealing primarily with visions, Scholem's statement has broader implications. As Etkes notes, "Scholem… is challenging the rationalist perspective, according to which every instance of the phenomenon of the supernatural is treated as a product of the imaginations of the ignorant."[131]

One of the points at issue between Scholem and his disciple and critic Moshe Idel has been Idel's call for greater attention to experiential aspects of Jewish mysticism, critiquing Scholem's textual emphasis.[32] In the context of this experiential emphasis, it is not surprising that Idel takes a positive stance toward magic and miracle. This is indicated even by the title of his major work on Hasidism, *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic* (1995). In Idel's words,

> Although the activity of the Besht has been analyzed on several planes by scholars… it is strange that their academic analyses give no detailed account of magic… [T]he following discussion gravitates around the theory of magic… [T]he details of his practical magic, his use of clairvoyance, amulets, and healings, are beyond the scope of this work. [But their] omission should be understood neither as a rejection of the Besht's involvement in practical magic nor as an assumption that this is not an important domain of investigation.[33]

In more recent work on Hasidism, the kind of scepticism toward miracles that was taken for granted in earlier scholarship becomes difficult to find. Thus, while Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome Mintz in their annotated translation of *Shivhei HaBesht*, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov,* published in 1970, still assumed a contrast between "the mythical and realistic levels" of tales which "contain both supernatural and realistic elements,"[34] no such dichotomy can be found in the penetrating critical examination of *Shivhei HaBesht* in Moshe Rosman's *Founder of Hasidism* (1996). Rosman notes the historical problems

30 Scholem, *"Demuto hahistorit shel R. Yisrael Baal Shem Tov"*, as cited in Etkes, *The Besht*, 211.

31 Etkes, *The Besht*, 211.

32 See Idel, *Kabbalah,* 25-29.

33 Idel, *Hasidism*, 75.

34 Ben-Amos and Mintz, *In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov*, xxiii.

in relying on a text permeated with legendary motifs and shaped by the agendas of its editors, but neither in this discussion[35] nor in his reconstruction of the Baal Shem Tov's career[36] does he treat supernatural elements as *ipso facto* unreliable. In summarizing his own conclusions about the historical Baal Shem Tov, Rosman writes, with no overt expression of scepticism,

> the Besht… was expert in amulets, exorcisms, and other techniques of shamanesque magical defense… Bringing the privileged information he gained during his soul's ascents to the attention of those who did not have such experiences was a means of involving them in the secrets of the supernatural realm.[37]

David Assaf's biography of Rebbe Israel of Ruzhin, *The Regal Way* (Hebrew 1997, translation 2002), similarly lacks any expression of scepticism about miracles even when this might be expected.[38] Further, Assaf harshly criticizes the value judgments of earlier scholars in this area:

> For some researchers of Hasidism, the performance of miracles has become a kind of touchstone: if zaddikim are "wonder-workers," they are automatically categorized as "practical" or "popular" (euphemisms here for hallucinatory, fraudulent, or primitive); if they question wonder-working, they may be considered expressions of rational, intellectual trends in Hasidism…. [Such categorizations] are outcomes of simplistic reasoning and generalization.[39]

Noteworthy is Assaf's implicit distancing of his own views from those of scholars who assume that miracles are "hallucinatory" or "fraudulent".

As with Idel's book on Hasidism, the title of Immanuel Etkes' biographical study of the Baal Shem Tov, *The Besht: Magician, Mystic, and Leader* (Hebrew 2000, translation 2005), indicates the author's positive outlook toward magic

35 Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism,* 143-155.

36 Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism,* "A Person of His Time", 173-186.

37 Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism,* 180-181.

38 E.g. in his discussion of the use of Hasidic tales as historical sources (23-27) or the Rebbe of Ruzhin's own reserved attitude toward miracles (261-264).

39 Assaf, *The Regal Way*, 261.

and miracle. In this important study, Etkes goes as far as anything yet published in the scholarly realm in affirming the historical reality of such wonders:

> Should we lend credence to claims that the Besht healed the sick and exorcised dybbuks and cleared demons out of houses?… And what about his performances in the Upper Worlds and the powers of seeing and hearing from afar? Is the critical scholar to believe in all of those too? Well, why not?[40]

Etkes continues:

> There is no doubt that the Besht himself believed he had such powers. This fact is clearly indicated by his letters. Nor is there any doubt that the Besht's associates and admirers believed in these powers as well. Consequently… the "wonders and miracles" of the sorts we have been listing are ensconced in the form of life within which the Besht lived and in the cultural and social reality of those who surrounded him. Given that this is the case, the miraculous elements in the tales of *Shivhei Habesht* are not only to be considered a reality the veracity of which the historian is permitted to acknowledge, but one that he is in fact required to recognize…
>
> For his part, the historian must ask of himself and of the sources available to him, What was it about the Besht that so fascinated the people surrounding him? And the conclusion one is forced to is: this was an effect, among other things, of the marvelous powers he was graced with.[41]

Alan Brill's significant article "The Spiritual Worlds of a Master of Awe" (2001) focuses on "the magical elements of a single work, the *Degel Mahaneh Ephraim*, whose author Rabbi Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sudylkow… is a representative example of the wonder-working *zaddik*."[42] Brill strongly affirms the reality of at least one category of Hasidic miracle, that of physical healing by spiritual means. In his section on "Shamanistic Ascents and Faith Healing," he writes,

40 Etkes, *The Besht*, 243.

41 Etkes, *The Besht*, 243.

42 Brill, "The Spiritual World of a Master of Awe", 28.

> These healing abilities have generally been relegated, in twentieth century academic scholarship, to the realm of magic and superstition, meaning that they were false, primitive, or deceptive. A more tolerant and less condescending view of these matters has led to a more balanced view of these as literary records of folklore and oral tales. They were and are primarily stories, based on set genres and motifs… Currently, scholars are willing to consider [such] healing an actual diagnostic and healing process employing altered states of consciousness.[43]

The current scholars Brill cites, however, as well as the nineteenth-century predecessors of this affirming view whom he adduces, such as William James, are not dealing with Hasidic rebbes or other Jewish healers. Brill's view, like Etkes', is striking in the context of scholarship on Hasidism.

More recent work by other scholars, however, while not going as far as Etkes' and Brill's outright affirmation of the historical reality of miracles, remains at a vast distance from the scepticism of earlier generations of scholars and *maskilim*.

A journalistic study of Habad-Lubavitch, Sue Fishkoff's *The Rebbe's Army* (2003) expresses openness to the reality of Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson's supernatural powers as celebrated in stories told by his Hasidim and admirers:

> The stories go on and on… Certainly, many of the miracle tales involve the creative interpretation of vague statements made by the Rebbe, statements that might have been taken several ways. But the sheer number of such "miraculous" interventions and predictions suggests to many people, including non-Lubavitchers, that Schneerson had tremendous insight, at the very least, and *perhaps something more*.[44]

An outstanding example of recent scholarship on Hasidism, combining the approaches of intellectual and social history, Glenn Dynner's study of Hasidism in Poland, *Men of Silk* (2006), takes a nuanced approach to the matter of miracles:

43 Brill, "The Spiritual World of a Master of Awe", 42.

44 Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army*, 83 (emphasis added).

> Polish zaddikim… seem in many cases to have sold magical services that they believed they could really render… If credulous petitioners had not conceived children, regained their health, prospered in business ventures, and felt empowered despite their unemancipated status, a zaddik's popularity could not have been sustained. When it comes to the potency of hope, faith, and a sensation of empowerment, the historian must withhold judgment. At the same time, perhaps we ought to be open to the possibility that deception did occur.[45]

Dynner's formulation is striking. He stops short of actually acknowledging a supernatural element in Hasidic miracles, and there is a note of scepticism in his reference to petitioners as "credulous" even while acknowledging that their petitions were often fulfilled. In stating, however, that "the historian must withhold judgment", he places the realm of miracles outside the domain of scientific investigation.[46] Dynner's line of thought is similar to that of Etkes with regard to the Baal Shem Tov: Rebbes believed in their own miracle-working power, Hasidim believed in their miracles and saw themselves as helped by them, and historians are not in a position to contradict this consensus.

Dynner goes on to use his most hesitant wording — "perhaps we ought to be open to the possibility" — regarding any actual faking of miracles. That is, the very possibility that was obvious to maskilic critics, that Hasidic miracles were fraudulent, is treated by the contemporary scholar as inherently unlikely.

Thus one of the barriers between Jewish intellectuals and Hasidim appears to be disappearing. This development arises from the contemporary intellectual situation, in which the authority of rationalism has been weakened. Sadly, this does not appear to be due to any increase in miracles in the world. Rather, it has much to do with a catastrophe during which miracles were notably absent: the Nazi Holocaust. "The seminal thinkers of postmodernism… have each insisted that the Holocaust marks a break in the trajectory of the West,

45 Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 194.

46 Earlier, Dynner does briefly endorse a psychological reading of dybbuk possession in the course of a long discussion of this phenomenon and Hasidic Rebbes' approaches to it: "Demonic possession was a socially acceptable way to express anxiety among unmarried women and pre-Bar Mitzvah boys" (142).

one which impels us to rethink the implications of the project of modernity."[47] As Moshe Idel spells this out with regard to Hasidism,

> The "warm" cosmology of Hasidism… was confronted with one of the reverberations of the "cold" scientific approach…: Nazism. The results are well known. They raise the problem of what is finally the more dangerous, magical lore that cares and is responsible, though the object of this care is a small community, or… a scientific-technological approach that is apparently more powerful but, at the same time, radically hostile to other human beings. When comparing the two worldviews, scholars must take the historical repercussions into consideration.[48]

In an intellectual climate where rationalism and attempts to maintain a single truth are tarred with the brush of Nazism, and in which truth is newly understood as plural and unstable, stubborn scepticism about non-rational phenomena has itself become embarrassing to the academic scholar.

On the other hand, the Hasidic movement's allegiance to its own truth continues unabated. "They're unswerving… They have the right answer and they're passionate about it."[49] The ambitious project of resistance to modernity continues. Dramatic miracle tales are told of contemporary Rebbes,[50] and collections of Hasidic tales continue to be printed and reprinted for readers who believe in them.[51]

In this ambiguous context, the postmodern scholar meets the anti-modern Hasid in (re)embracing the possibility of miracles.

47 Milchman and Rosenberg, *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, 2.

48 Idel, *Hasidism,* 221.

49 Characterization of Chabad-Lubavitch by Conservative rabbi Jerome Epstein, cited in Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army*, 126.

50 See, for example, the stories of the Tosher Rebbe of Boisbriand, Québec, on William Shaffir's website, http://www.kiryastash.ca/tasher_rebbe.html.

51 A recent example available in English is the two-volume *Wonders and Miracles: Stories of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.* See Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army*, 82-83. Israel Berger's own compilations were reprinted in new, embellished editions in 2000.

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