

# Holy Kugel: The Sanctification of Ashkenazic Ethnic Foods in Hasidism

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There are many incredible Hasidic tales of the sort that one will not find in the renderings of Yehudah Leib Peretz, Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, Martin Buber, Elie Wiesel or in any of the other well-known, romantic reconstructions of Hasidism. Nor have the academic historians and theologians of Hasidism taken account of the most internally popular genre of primary Hasidic sources. This is quite understandable. Those studying, or romancing, Hasidism from a respectful distance would almost certainly find these tales to be disconcertingly grotesque. Many—like some colleagues with whom I've discussed these materials—would insist that the sources dealt with in this paper cannot possibly be authentic and are probably in fact anti-Hasidic satires. They are not. They abound in Hasidic writings since the mid-nineteenth century. The examples immediately below, just the tip of the iceberg of a vast popular Hasidic literature dealing with the most mundane of things, are all narrowly concerned with a single, apparently trivial subject: the praise of kugel, the humble potato or noodle pudding commonly eaten by eastern European Jews on the Sabbath:

The zaddikim proclaim that there are profound matters embedded in the kugel. For this reason they insisted that every Jew must eat the Sabbath kugel. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov recalled that once, when he went out for a walk with the holy rabbi of Ropshitz, all that they talked about for three hours were the secrets that lie hidden inside the Sabbath kugel.<sup>1</sup>

The Seer of Lublin taught that just as one's respective mitzvot and transgressions are weighed in the balance in the process

of our final judgment in the heavenly courts, so too they weigh all of the kugel that one ate in honor of the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup>

Reb Shmelke of Selish used to immerse himself in the mikvah [ritual bath] after the Mussaf service, before the eating of the kugel.<sup>3</sup>

Reb Itiskel of Pshevorsk taught that there is a special chamber in the heavens in which the particular reward for eating kugel on the Sabbath is distributed; even one who ate kugel only out of base material motives, because he craved it, would receive his reward.<sup>4</sup>

Rabbi Aaron Roth of Meah She'arim, revered throughout the Hasidic world as Reb Arele, in a work devoted entirely to the "Sanctity of the Table," establishes the eating of kugel as a theological imperative deriving from Judaic monotheism. For Reb Arele's Hasidim, as they are known throughout contemporary Israel, kugel has become a veritable sacrament to the oneness of the God of Israel:

Kugel is the one special food that all Jews eat, one food in the service of the one God [*ma'akhal ehad, ve-ovdin bo le-Eyl ehad*], so that anyone who does not eat kugel on the Sabbath in this country [Israel]; should be investigated [for heresy].<sup>5</sup>

Finally, in one of the most disturbing of these tales, the power of kugel is proclaimed to be so great that it served, for the Belzer rebbe, to be an effective antidote even for the extreme horrors of the Holocaust:

The Rachmastrivker rebbe, who now lives in Jerusalem, recounted an awesome tale about the Holy rebbe Arn of Belz. When Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, of blessed memory, visited the Belzer rebbe after the Second World War, among the things he asked him was how he passed the years of horror. The Holy Belzer rebbe—who lost his wife and all of his children and grandchildren and all who were dear to him and remained alone, naked and stripped of everything that had been his and had endured years of wandering and terribly difficult homelessness—(the rebbe) answered R. Isser Zalman joyfully and serenely with the following words: "Thank God, I had kugel to eat every Shabbes."<sup>6</sup>

## THE HASIDIC TISH: THE REBBE'S TABLE

What is going on here? In order to understand this bizarre sanctification of potato or noodle pudding, among many other traditional Eastern European Jewish foods, one must begin with the Hasidic rebbe's sacred meal, or tish, which has long been the unique central ritual of Hasidic communal life. The Sabbath table of the zaddik—the rebbe's tish—is the most enduring and significant public ritual in Hasidic life. The tish originated, in embryonic form, with the followers of Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, or the Baal Shem Tov [Master of the Good Name, also familiarly called The Besht], the founder of Hasidism, who held court regularly at the third Sabbath meal.<sup>7</sup> It remains to this day the most important communal gathering for most Hasidic groups, one that allows for a unique spiritual encounter between the rebbe and his followers.

The specific rituals of the tish showcase the central myths that animate Hasidic society: the charisma and spiritual powers of the rebbe are on public display at the Sabbath table, as is his followers' adoration of him. The monarchical status of the rebbe is symbolized by his throne-like chair at the head of the tish and by his royal, gold-laced *tish-bekeshe* [table-robe] worn only on this special occasion. Even more dramatically, the rebbe's priestly powers are manifested during his administration of the sacramental rites of sanctifying, eating and then distributing to the assembled the *shirayim* [remains] of his Sabbath meal. The status of the zaddik [righteous man] at his Sabbath table, as the equivalent of the ancient Israelite priest offering sacrifices in the Temple, is a regular motif in Hasidic accounts of the tish. An illustrative example is the following description of the tish of the leader of the Belorussian Hasidic sect of Karlin:

Once, R. Monele Karliner entered the tish of R. Shmuel of Karlin and the Ratner Maggid was cutting the meat for him. His face was burning like a torch, and he took a piece of meat and put it in his mouth and said: I eat this with the same intent as the High Priest in the Holy Temple would eat the sin offering; then he took another piece and said, this one, as a burnt offering etc.<sup>8</sup>

The intense interaction between the rebbe and his Hasidim that takes place at the tish serves as a demonstration of yet another classical Hasidic notion: the descent of the zaddik to the masses and the deeply personal relationship he enjoys with each and every one of his disciples. Tales of the ability of the rebbe to see into the hearts and divine the

thoughts of individual Hasidim assembled around the tish abound. While the specific rituals vary widely among different Hasidic sects, the custom at most tishen is for each Hasid to "receive a *le-Hayyim*"; that is, to raise a glass of wine with the rebbe in order to receive his personal benediction.<sup>9</sup>

This focus on the ritualized consumption of food reflects the early Hasidic practice of *avodah be-gashmiyouth* [serving God through earthly pleasures]. In the context of the tish, the rebbe engages in this corporeal worship on behalf of his entire community by elevating the sparks of holiness embedded in his food back to their divine source and then sharing his sanctified meal with the assembled. Beyond the doctrinal significance of the specific rituals of the tish, some of the most celebrated aspects of Hasidic folklore—particularly Hasidic music and dance—<sup>10</sup> are on public display here as in no other arena of Hasidic life, as is the Hasidic emphasis on *dibbuk haverim* [spiritual intimacy within the Hasidic fraternity].<sup>11</sup>

Finally, and most importantly for the history of Hasidic literature and thought, the tish (again, specifically at the third Sabbath meal) has been since the earliest years of Hasidism the principal venue for the public discourses of the rebbe, and thus the main source for the dissemination of Hasidic doctrine. The bulk of the classical texts of Hasidic theology emerged from the Hebrew renderings of the oral Yiddish discourses of the zaddikim at the third meal. The timing of this meal, at the Sabbath's twilight, lent itself to the task of remembering the rebbe's sermons and faithfully committing them to writing. The fact that Hasidim tend to extend this ritual well into the evening, past the normative time for the Sabbath's end, often allowed for designated individuals, who had already recited the evening prayers proclaiming the end of the Sabbath in advance of the rest of the community, to take notes discretely (or, as is the practice today in many Hasidic courts, to record) the rebbe's discourses.

Given the obvious importance of the tish in hasidic life and the doctrinal centrality of the mystical beliefs and myths reflected in its rituals, it is particularly odd that it has not yet been systematically explored either by critical scholars or even in traditional hasidic writings.<sup>12</sup> Although there are many hasidic books and pamphlets that explain and justify unique hasidic customs and despite the fact that the tish is regularly referred to in the Hasidic literature, most particularly in the tales of the zaddikim, the tish itself is almost always merely the

mise-en-scène for some other hasidic doctrine or miraculous occurrence and is rarely treated as a significant subject in itself. One thing I have found particularly surprising is the absence from Hasidic sources of any systematic treatments of the central, most striking and repercussive ritual of the Hasidic tish; namely, the distribution of the *shirayim*, whereby Hasidim share the remains of the rebbe's Sabbath meal. Most hasidic sources that discuss *shirayim*, as well as other aspects of the tish, are found scattered in the liturgical pamphlets for the Sabbath table songs, or *zemirot*, published by the various Hasidic sects<sup>13</sup> or in general compendia of customs specific to each of those sects.

There were some attempts by later Hasidic authorities to find a normative basis in halachic—rather than mystical or Hasidic—literature for the practice of *shirayim*. So, for example, the Munkaczer rebbe, Hayyim Elazar Shapira, suggested a classical Rabbinic source as its basis:

Regarding the custom of Hasidim to take *shirayim* from the food of their rebbes: I have found its source in the story in the Jerusalem Talmud of how Rabbi Yochanan used to gather crumbs left over [from the meal on the eve of the New Moon] and eat them.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly that is not the immediate source for the Hasidic practice of *shirayim*. Similar attempts to justify this uniquely Hasidic custom by reference to normative rabbinic sources are occasionally found in contemporary Hasidic literature. It is not simply that the source for the custom of *shirayim* is in some doubt; the chronological origins in hasidic history of what has become the most evident, and in many ways the most grotesque, practice of Hasidism remain obscure.

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE COMMUNAL SABBATH MEAL IN HASIDIC SOCIETY

Some form of a communal tish at the third Sabbath meal was apparently already instituted by the Baal Shem Tov himself. An early Hasidic source describes the alleged origins of the Besht's public celebration of the third Sabbath meal in a deliciously populist way:

Once, the Besht and his minyan spent the Sabbath in a certain village. When the time for the third meal arrived, the village's proprietor gathered numerous people from the nearby farms and sat and ate and drank together with them, in song and celebration. And the Besht perceived that this found great favor in the heavens. So he called that farmer after the meal and

asked him the reason that he invested so greatly in the third meal. And the farmer answered the Besht: for I have heard the verse quoted: let my soul depart while I am among my people Israel; and I have heard furthermore that on the Sabbath each Jew possesses an additional soul [*neshama yeterah*] which departs from him at the termination of the Sabbath. So I said: let my additional soul also depart while I am in the company of the people of Israel. That is why I gather these Jews together.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever its source, the third Sabbath meal conducted by the Besht and his disciples was apparently a genuine communal gathering, a celebratory feast that emphasized the significance of the gathering "in the company of the people of Israel," as indicated in this story as well as many other Hasidic legends. Both the early Hasidic sources and the classical Mitnagdic [rationalistic] polemics indicate that, for the Hasidim, the communal third meal was primarily an occasion to indulge together with the rebbe in much food, hard drink, and merriment, and then to hear the rebbe's discourse. The description of the early Hasidim's celebration of the third meal by the enlightened Galician satirist of Hasidism, Joseph Perl, in his notorious work *Vesen Der Sekt Hasidim* (ca. 1816), is fairly typical of the early external accounts of the Tish by many other critics and opponents of Hasidism:

Though the entire Sabbath is considered a time of special divine favor which is best spent in the rebbe's court, it is the period of the third meal which is thought to be the most desirable time for the bonding of the Hasid with his rebbe. On each and every Sabbath, following the afternoon prayers, the local Hasidim, along with visitors from other places, gather in the home of the rebbe; and when there is no rebbe present in the city, they gather in the home of a prominent Hasid, for the third meal. There they eat and drink a lot of wine, sing and dance. And it is during this time that the zaddik delivers before the assembled his interpretations of the Torah and Talmud.<sup>16</sup>

Though these early gatherings included many of the basic elements of the tish that have endured to this day, some obvious changes have occurred. The most conspicuous of these changes has been the development of the custom of *shirayim* [the remains of the rebbe's meal]. The introduction of *shirayim* symbolizes the gradual transformation of the tish from a genuinely communal meal into a symbolic sacrament, in which the masses of Hasidim no longer really feasted but rather

ended up nibbling on tiny, symbolic morsels of food provided for them by the rebbe. Not entirely unlike the Eucharist, *shirayim* constitute the sacrament that allows the Hasid to attain intimacy with the Divine. Many Hasidic sources discuss the concentration of divine powers in the most minuscule portions of the most common foods that had been sanctified by the rebbe. The following tale is illustrative of this phenomenon:

I heard this from the Holy rebbe, Benzion of Bobov. When his holy grandfather, the author of *Divrei Hayyim* [Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam of Zanz], was visiting the Ropshitzer rebbe together with rabbi Shmuel of Kaminka, the two of them split and shared a single grain of kasha that had come to them from the *shirayim* of the Ropshitzer rebbe.<sup>17</sup>

No eighteenth-century sources that describe the Hasidic gatherings at the third meal refer to the custom of *shirayim*. Moreover, when this practice is first alluded to, so far as I have been able to discover, it takes place not at the third meal, but at the first Sabbath meal on Friday evening. The tale I have in mind refers to the interaction between the Yehudi of Pershsyzcha (d. 1814) and the Maggid of Koznitz (1733-1814), as narrated by the latter's grandson, Hayyim Meir of Mogielnica:

The Yehudi visited the Maggid of Kozhnitz several times, and it was his custom not to partake of the food at his table, since he used to recite the *Kabbalath Shabbat* prayers after the meal of the holy Maggid. But it was the Maggid's practice to seat the Yehudi next to him and to hand to him the *shirayim* to distribute to the assembled. So once, when the Yehudi came to Kozhnitz, they complained to the holy Maggid about the fact that he did not partake of the anything from his table, and that this was a sign of disrespect....Later that night, the Yehudi paced back and forth and wondered aloud: What does the Maggid think, that I have come to "get Hasidism" from him? No, no, it is only because he is a weak man, that I come to help him with his worship.<sup>18</sup>

As the story of the contention between the Maggid of Koznitz and the Yehudi indicates, the practice of *shirayim* was not immediately universally accepted. A similar tale by R. Hayyim Meir of Mogielnica, this one involving the Yehudi and the Seer of Lublin (1745-1815), illustrates the fact that the Yehudi was not terribly impressed with the importance

of *shirayim* or more generally with the role of eating in the spiritual life.<sup>19</sup>

It is therefore not until the early nineteenth century that we find evidence of two significant additions to the original Hasidic celebration of the third meal, neither yet universally practiced by Hasidic rebbes. The first was a public meal, or tish, with the rebbe on Friday night, in addition to Saturday evening; the second was the practice of distributing *shirayim* to the assembled Hasidim, which developed into a sacred ritual instead of a genuine communal meal. I believe that these two developments are closely related. The earliest references to the Friday night tish and the *shirayim* are vague. However, in the later sources there is evidence of an increasing, almost magical concern with the specifics of the rebbe's meal, the exact nature of the food he distributed, and the techniques by which he ate and handed out his *shirayim* on Friday night. Along with this, there is both a quantitative diminishment of the meal itself and an increasing emphasis on the Torah discourse delivered by the rebbe at the table.

These changes directly correspond to the increasing conservatism of Hasidism over the course of the nineteenth century regarding the boldest mystical teachings of the movement's founders. The ideal that each and every Jew serve God through eating and drinking—which is, after all, the theoretical basis for the tish—was quite prominent among the disciples of the Besht and the Maggid of Mezeritch. In his treatment of this aspect of the doctrine of *avodah be-gashmiyouth* [serving God materially], for example, Levi Isaac of Berdichev (d. 1810) presents the practice democratically, as accessible to every Jew, requiring only that he maintain the correct spiritual attitude towards food and drink. Moreover, Levi Isaac and his contemporaries instructed that each Jew is providentially led to eat specific food whose divine sparks correspond to the spiritual needs of his own soul.<sup>20</sup>

A similarly populist view of sacred eating can be found in the writings of Menachem Nahum of Tchernobyl (1730-1787), who writes:

When a man fully believes with a true and complete faith that this is holy food in which the Lord our God Himself is to be found, truly robed therein, and when he focuses his heart and mind on the internal holiness of the food, then he is able to raise the holy spark that was until then in a state of brokenness and exile back up to God, may He be blessed, and he will derive deep pleasure from it. For this is the very essence of our

divine service. Therefore, every servant of the Lord must delve into the interior of each physical matter so that all of his actions will be for the sake of heaven, especially when it comes to eating and drinking, in order to rescue and elevate the holy sparks from their broken state.<sup>21</sup>

During the nineteenth century, however, as Hasidism became more elitist, there was a clear tendency to limit the mystical activity of sanctifying of food and drink to the zaddikim. Rabbi Israel of Rizhin (1797-1850), for example, spoke often of the great difficulty of serving God through eating. R. Israel went so far as to suggest that this form of worship is more sublime, esoteric, and difficult than either prayer or Torah study and must therefore be limited to a small number of the spiritually gifted:

The worship of God through eating and drinking and all similar matters where some physical pleasure is involved, in which one must pierce through the pleasure in all these things in order to find therein the divine vitality and the power of God who animates it and dwells therein, and then one must extricate the divine essence and return all of it to its holy sources; this kind of worship is far more difficult than the divine worship of prayer and Torah study. Not every Jew is capable of this, and it is to be limited to the chosen few.<sup>22</sup>

The trend towards restricting the practice of sacred eating to the religious elite naturally led to the practice of the rebbes' sanctification of the food on behalf of the masses of their followers, to whom the necessary mystical techniques were allegedly inaccessible. Moreover, it is now the rebbe who is said to have the ability to direct specific morsels of food to specific Hasidim gathered around his table, based on his divination of their individual spiritual needs.

Whereas in the earliest accounts of hasidic feasting—particularly those found in mitnagdic sources—the Hasidim are portrayed as engaging in gluttonous behavior, in later hasidic sources, along with the restriction of "holy eating" to the zaddik, there is a glorification of the smallness of the portions of food involved in the *shirayim* that each Hasid received. R. Hayyim of Zanz (1793-1876) is reported to have taught that the zaddik transforms all of the food from which he partakes into a highly concentrated form of purity, in which the tiniest amounts have the same sustaining power as large quantities of food that had not been so transformed. That is why "even the tiny morsel that a person

eats accomplishes for him an enormous amount of good."<sup>23</sup> Phinehas of Cracow adds to this the idea that the tiny crumbs of *shirayim* that the Hasidim eat at the tish can retroactively transform and raise the sparks of the substantial meal the Hasidim had "mundanely consumed" at home earlier that evening.<sup>24</sup> *Shirayim* were also used for other medicinal and magical purposes. It is told of R. Hayym Zanter that he wrapped *shirayim* in cloth and used them as a salve for an inoperable brain tumor.<sup>25</sup>

As the portions of Sabbath foods that reached the common Hasidim assembled at the tish continued to diminish, the parallel phenomenon of gluttonous, sometimes obese zaddikim emerges in Hasidism. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta, who was known, and often mocked, for his gluttonous behavior, is reported to have justified it as follows:

Some serve God through Torah study and prayer. But others serve God through eating, drinking and other material pleasures. There are those who criticize the latter conduct. But why did God create such a zaddik [who serves God through eating]? Because most people fail in this and become distracted and corrupted by the earthly pleasure. But when the true zaddik worships God in this way, he raises up all of the people of Israel...Such a zaddik, insofar as he is connected with the "hidden world"...can serve the Lord through much eating and drinking.<sup>26</sup>

#### THE SANCIFICATION OF THE REBBE'S "MENU"

The focus on the rebbe's eating, the idea that the divine sparks of the entire community are concentrated in his food, and the vicarious nature of the tish eventually led to a very narrow focus on, and obsessive interest in, the specific items on the rebbe's plate. In the many compendia of customs [*sifrei minhagim*] issued by individual Hasidic sects, while there is scant, if any, theological explanation of the general concept of *shirayim*, there is a virtually totemistic focus on the specific items on the rebbe's plate. Every dish on the menu, how it was prepared, and the specific way in which the rebbe ate it became the subject of elaborate kabbalistic speculation. For example, intense speculation concerns the fish eaten at the tish.

While there is a rich history of Rabbinic and kabbalistic expositions on the importance of eating fish on the Sabbath, this interest was taken to unprecedented extremes in later hasidic thought.<sup>27</sup> Stories abound regarding various Hasidic rebbes' obsession with fish; some insisted on

seeing the live fish before the Sabbath and choosing the "holiest fish" for the tish. Others, such as R. Aaron of Belz, would be presented with a silver plate filled with fish on Erev Shabbat, from which they would choose the holiest one.<sup>28</sup> Some tales relate how the rebbes would remove the eye of the fish and eat it first,<sup>29</sup> while Rabbi Yosef Meir Weiss, the Spinker rebbe, is described as removing the eye and placing it in his pocket.<sup>30</sup> Kalonymous Kalman Epstein, the author of the popular Hasidic biblical commentary, *Maor Va-Shemesh*, and apparently a man of fine taste, proclaims that the holiest fish of all is lox, since salmon has very large scales: a sign of its kashrut.<sup>31</sup>

Many Hasidic tales refer to the esoteric, mystical power inherent in the rebbe's every move during the course of his meal. Take, for example, the description of the Bialer rebbe's consumption of his fish-chowder:

Before the end of the *zmira* [song], they brought before him two bowls, one with his fish and the other with soup. And it was tangibly evident that there was here a most exalted service. And who can enter into the secrets of the Holy? For he would break up the little challa into seven pieces and put it in the soup and then he engaged in a great and holy service with the spoon in the bowl while he was completely absorbed in angelic contemplation. So that even those who couldn't enter into his secret realm, behold they saw before them a glorious worship. In the same way he would mix the crumbs from the challa into the holy fish broth.<sup>32</sup>

#### OTHER DISHES

Garnishes and side dishes were not exempt from being imbued with intense kabbalistic symbolism.<sup>33</sup> So, for example, R. Yechiel of Komarno (1806-1874) taught that, because the gematria [the numerical value of the Hebrew letters] of onions [*beza'im*] is equivalent to *ehey'e elohim adonai* [I will be the Lord, your God], it is important to mix onions into the fish so as to spice them with the divine presence.<sup>34</sup> Fanciful speculation regarding the significance of the food at the tish is by no means limited to fish; each and every item on the menu became subjected to intense, elaborate kabbalistic interpretations by the Hasidim. The changing interpretation of the rituals of the tish reflect its narrowing from a genuine feast to a symbolic mystical sacrament.

Particularly important in this shift was the increasing focus on every item of the rebbe's menu as specific emanations of the different



kabbalistic *sefirot* [cosmic divine orbs]. This notion is clearly expressed by R. Shalom of Koidonov:

I will now reveal to you the secret of the Sabbath foods, for in my humble opinion they hint at the ten holy *sefirot*. My source for this is holy wonder of our generation, Israel of Rizhin, who taught that eating kugel symbolizes the *sefirah* of Yesod. So that I say that each of the foods is symbolic of one of the ten *sefirot*. The fish we eat symbolize the first three *sefirot*, as is well known; onions in oil and other things that sweeten the onions symbolize *hesed* & *gevurah*; for onions which have a sharp taste refer to *gevurah* while the oil and other things that sweeten them refer to *hesed*. The [chicken] leg we eat symbolize *nezach* & *hod*, as is known. The tchulent [*maaseh kederah*] hints at *malkhuth*...while the food in the pot along with the sauce contains the secret of the scripture, "blessed be the glory of God's Holy name forever and ever."<sup>35</sup>

#### THE HOLY KUGEL

Of all the Sabbath foods, the greatest significance was attached to the kugel. Employing very eclectic exegesis and imaginative kabbalistic hermeneutics, the Hasidic theoreticians "figured out" that kugel corresponded to the *sefirah* of *yesod*. Some important, and startling, conclusions were derived from this association. Since, in most systems of kabbalistic symbolism, the *sefirah* of *yesod* corresponds to the phallus of Adam Kadom, or primordial man, kugel was believed to harbor generative, or creative, powers. More to the point with regard to the powers on display at the rebbe's tish was the longstanding Hasidic association of *yesod*—manifested in the Sabbath kugel—with the zaddik, based on the biblical verse, "And the righteous man [zaddik] is the foundation [*yesod*] of the universe" (Prov 10:25).

For this reason, many Hasidic sources assert that the rebbe achieves the height of his powers of leadership during the distribution of the *shirayim* of the kugel at the tish. The following story about the last rebbe of the Slonimer dynasty, Rabbi Solomon David Joshua, who was murdered by the Nazis in 1941, is fairly typical:

He would distribute the kugel to all of the assembled from his own hand, specifically indicating and directing which person should receive each and every piece of kugel. It was evident to the assembled that he was involved in a very high form of

worship, in that he had a deep spiritual connection with each and every person to whom he sent the kugel, and he would often at that moment tell them what they had to fix in their lives. Many waited all week long for this very moment, particularly if they were confused or lost. Now, with one word, he made it right and they knew what they must do....Is it even possible to describe the holiness with which they then ate the kugel?<sup>36</sup>

This attribution of sanctity to the specific Sabbath dishes was more than merely symbolic; it was often taken quite literally and applied practically, thus affecting the actual etiquette of the tish (to the extent that it existed at all). Take, for example one of the truly grotesque Hasidic tish stories, regarding Rabbi Aaron of Koidonov:

I once asked [Rabbi Aaron] why he eats all of the Sabbath foods with his hands instead of a fork; yet the kugel he always eats with a fork. He answered that it is said in the name of R. Israel of Rizhin that all of the Sabbath foods correspond to the supernal orbs [*sefirot*], as it is written in the holy book *Tikkunei Zohar*. Now kugel, since it is the principal additional dish in honor of the Sabbath, contains the mystery of *mussaf* [addition or procreation]; now since *mussaf* corresponds to the *sefirah* of *Yesod*...therefore it is forbidden to touch the kugel with one's hands since, as is well known, one is not allowed to handle one's own *Yesod* [penis].<sup>37</sup>

The question of how to handle kugel appropriately is addressed in numerous other hasidic texts. A somewhat sanitized variation on this story is found in the following exchange between two of the leading Hasidic rebbes of the late nineteenth century:

It is told that the Holy rebbe of Aptá [R. Abraham Joshua Heschel of Opatow], may his merits protect us, once asked the holy Ruzhiner [R. Israel of Ruzhin] if it is true that he ate the kugel with his bare hands. The Ruzhiner retorted by asking him, Well, how do you eat the kugel? The Apter rebbe responded: It is my custom to eat all the [Sabbath] dishes with my hands, except for the kugel, which I eat with a fork. He then went on to explain the reason for this: You see, the kugel is the most important Shabbes dish, and it is symbolic of the spiritual influence of the Sabbath, something that comes directly from the hand of the Holy One, Blessed Be He. So it says in

the holy Zohar; namely, that from the Sabbath all the other days of the week are blessed. If so, how can anyone dare to take [kugel] directly from the hands of God, and so I eat the kugel with a fork. To this the Rizhiner responded: If indeed we have this opportunity only once in the course of the week when the Holy One extends to us his spiritual influence directly with His hand, why should we not take it directly with our hands rather than use a medium?<sup>38</sup>

The difference between the Apter and Ruzhiner rebbes on the appropriate etiquette pertaining to handling the kugel clearly reflects more general spiritual tendencies. The Apter's modesty and reticence contrast with the famously bold and independent Ruzhiner's personal confidence and iconoclastic approach to the realm of the Divine.<sup>39</sup>

As for the fact that many hasidic rebbes handle the food at the tish with their hands, it would appear that this is the natural outcome of the belief that it is in the intimate physical handling of the food, as well as in its consumption, that the zaddik sanctifies it and elevates the holy sparks within. A tale regarding the founder of Hungarian Hasidism, R. Moshe Teitelbaum (1759-1841), illustrates this point:

Once, Rabbi Zevi Hirsch of Zidichov was sitting at the meal of the holy Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, and the latter picked up a fork in order to take a piece of meat. The Holy Rabbi of Zidichov then told him: Rabbi! Is there not more holiness in your ten fingers than in that piece of metal? R. Moshe immediately let go of the fork and took the meat with his bare hands.<sup>40</sup>

Clearly then particular holiness was attributed to the kugel that the rebbes distributed to their Hasidim at the tish. Whereas the sanctity of fish is not new to Hasidism and has many earlier kabbalistic sources, the specific attribution of holiness to kugel, and to other ethnic dishes specific to Eastern European Jews, is as original as it is remarkable.

The revolutionary nature of Hasidic leadership represented by the rebbe is perhaps most graphically illustrated in the distribution of the kugel to particular Hasidim at the tish. Often in Hasidic descriptions of the rebbes's officiating at the tish, and particularly with regard to the kugel, the rebbes were, as we have seen, compared to the priests officiating in the Jerusalem Temple. This veneration of kugel in particular is clearly captured by the following tradition ascribed to the post-Holocaust Hasidic rebbe of Antwerp: "The distribution of the kugel

was, for Reb Itsikl, just like the most difficult and exalted forms of priestly worship in the Holy Temple."<sup>41</sup>

Of course, kugel was not the only Sabbath delicacy that was sanctified in Hasidic culture. Hasidic sources attribute mystical attributes to a stunning array of dishes. Aside from eating fish on the Sabbath, a custom long sanctified in pre-hasidic kabbalistic lore, special holiness is ascribed to each of the Sabbath delicacies including *lokshen*, soup, farfel, liver, *tsimmes*, and *tchulent*. Examples of the attribution of spiritual significance to these foods abounds.<sup>42</sup> Still, kugel receives by far the most attention and is credited with the most power and spiritual benefits.

A recent Yiddish anthology of Hasidic Sabbath customs, compiled by a widely respected Satmar Rabbi, devotes an entire section to the glorification of the various Sabbath dishes, with by far the greatest attention—more than fourteen pages—accorded the holy kugel.<sup>43</sup> Aside from itemizing the various benefits of eating kugel, which range from health and financial security to messianic redemption, this anthology includes an array of tales intended to illustrate the degree to which the zaddikim venerated kugel.

It is well known that rebbes from different Hasidic courts argued about many "exalted" things, and kugel was no exception. While the majority seemed to hold that potato kugel was the real deal, some zaddikim insisted that the only true kugel was *lokshen*, or noodle, kugel. Reb Itsik of Psheworsk, a kugel pluralist who nonetheless preferred the noodle form, resolved the dispute with the following fair-minded formulation: "*Lokshen* kugel is the principal kugel, while potato kugel is just another Shabbes food." One major Hasidic authority was most forcefully unilateral in his preference, going so far as to imbue the *lokshen* kugel with Biblical authority: "Rabbi Meir of Premyshlan declared: *lokshen* kugel was ordained at Mount Sinai."<sup>44</sup>

How are we to understand the unique importance that these many Hasidic rebbes attached to the kugel? Why would they engage in these tortuous mystical hermeneutics in order to arrive at the conclusion, for example, that kugel corresponds to the Divine phallus, or *yesod*? There are two approaches to this question. One would be to take the Hasidic claims about the kabbalistic significance of this simple food at face value and search for oblique references to kugel in the earlier kabbalistic literature. Perhaps some messianic significance to kugel might be unearthed in a medieval manuscript of Moses de Leon or Abraham



Abulafia. We will leave this unpromising avenue of research to other scholars.

A simpler and more obvious, if somewhat disappointing, answer readily suggests itself. Kugel was, quite simply, the most popular and common of the Sabbath dishes. Hasidism's task, since its very inception, was precisely to imbue the most common experiences of the simple masses of Polish Jewry with spiritual significance. In many respects, the sanctification of the kugel can serve as a metaphor for the manner in which the Hasidic movement read holiness into the most common of mundane things. And there is little question but that kugel was the most common and popular of the Sabbath victuals. Moreover, unlike many other dishes originating in the cuisine of their gentile neighbors that eventually became staples of the Eastern European Jews' diet, there is evidence that kugel was always viewed as a uniquely Jewish food with no equivalent to be found on Christian tables. In fact, a book published under Polish Jesuit auspices in both Warsaw (1724) and Vilna (1728) – just prior to the emergence of the Hasidic movement – banned Christians from “eating kugel and other such Jewish dishes.”<sup>45</sup>

In his decidedly non-mystical ethnographic study of Jewish foods in Eastern Europe, *Yiddishe Maykholm*, the Yiddish scholar Yehuda Elzet devotes several pages to describing the rich varieties of Sabbath kugel. Elzet begins this discussion as follows: “Now we come to the crown of all the Sabbath foods, to the kugel.”<sup>46</sup>

Elzet describes the variety of kugel and cites numerous Yiddish authors who sing the praises of kugel. He also refers to a number of folk customs and Yiddish expressions regarding kugel that suggest just how central, and respected, a place it occupied not only in the Jewish diet, but also in Eastern European Jewish folklore generally:

When the kugel rises in a Jewish woman's [stove] it is said that a hot angel has baked a kugel for her. A Jewish woman therefore spares no wood for the oven, so as to assure that she will have a hot angel in honor of the holy Shabbes. And the neighbor, Trayne, will say of her that she is a *koshere yidene*, [a kosher Jewish woman] and that a hot angel has cooked for her a kugel in honor of Shabbes.<sup>47</sup>

Elzet further cites an abundance of folkloric expressions regarding kugel. For example “*A Shabbes on Kigel iz vee a faigel on a fligel*” [The Sabbath without kugel is like a bird with no wings]. Or “*Az a yidene ken kayn kugel nisht makhn kunt ihr a get*” [A Jewish wife who cannot make kugel

deserves to be divorced]. Of a Jew who tries in vain to hide his identity and pass as a gentile, it is said: “*Der kugel ligt im af'n ponim*” [You can see the kugel on his countenance].<sup>48</sup>

Elzet's extensive folkloric descriptions of the centrality of kugel both to the Sabbath diet and even to the very identity of the average Eastern European Jew go a long way in explaining how kugel came to acquire pride of place in Hasidic ritual life and mystical doctrine. In fact, some Hasidic traditions overtly explain the importance of kugel as deriving from its universal popularity among Jews. In that spirit, the Shinever rebbe applied Rashi's commentary to Deut 33:19 to kugel:

Rashi interpreted this verse to mean: The nations of the world will be attracted to the mountain [of God] by the industriousness of Zevulun. The merchants of the idolatrous nations will travel to Jerusalem to see why this nation inspires such fear and what are its deeds. Then they will see how all of Israel worships a single God and eats the same food. Not like the idolatrous nations who have different gods and eat different foods. Then they will say, there is no more righteous nation than this one, and they will immediately convert [to Judaism]. The reference here is clearly to the kugel that all Jews eat on the Sabbath.<sup>49</sup>

This Hasidic tale, clearly establishes kugel as the universal and distinctive Jewish food, thus confirming Elzet's definition of kugel as “the unique and quintessential Jewish food.”

That the most common and simple of all the Sabbath foods—kugel—became the most elevated and imbued with mystical significance in Hasidic lore is entirely consistent with Hasidism's original nature as a populist movement that sanctified the mundane experiences of the simple, untutored Jewish masses. In discussing the Sabbath foods, R. Yitzhak of Komarno establishes the principle that every custom of the tish, even the way the fish is salted, contains deep secrets. This principle applies to every food and by extension to all of the physical activities, no matter how apparently trivial, of the zaddik: all of them are saturated with the very deepest of mystical secrets.<sup>50</sup>

It is difficult, when reading these Hasidic texts about the sanctification of food at the tish, not to think of a wide array of parallels to this literal conception of certain foods as the embodiment of the divine. Such parallels run a wide spectrum, from the totemist practices of the primitives studied by anthropologists like Claude Levi-Strauss<sup>51</sup>

and Raymond Firth<sup>52</sup> to Mary Douglas's anthropological re-casting of the traditional Christian understanding of the Eucharist.<sup>53</sup>

While I am not engaging in this paper in a comparative anthropological study of the religious phenomenology of the tish, such parallels, of the kind that emerge by way of rather casual or random association, are often quite striking in their details. To take but one example, the question raised in several Hasidic tales about the appropriate way in which to handle food at the tish brings to mind the mid-twentieth century controversy in the Roman Catholic Church regarding the handling of the wafer of the Eucharist. The belief that, through the priest's sacrament, the wafer becomes the body of Christ influenced the eventual liturgical mandate that the priest not touch the host with his hands and that communicants receive it on the tongue, restrictions that since the 1960s have been relaxed in most Roman Catholic churches.

## CONCLUSION

The Hasidic tish originated as a public feast—a tangible communal manifestation of the early Hasidic ideal of serving God joyfully and through material indulgences. The earliest accounts of these Hasidic gatherings suggest a sumptuous third Sabbath meal in which all the Hasidim sated themselves together with their rebbe and received his teachings. Over time, as Hasidism became more conservative and limited the application of its more radical mystical doctrines to the exclusive prerogative of zaddik, the communal eating at the Hasidic table diminished, becoming more symbolic than real and focusing increasingly on the rebbe's plate as a symbolic sacrament.

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Friday night tish emerged, and this meal lent itself naturally to symbolic and derivative, rather than active, "holy eating" on the part of the Hasidic masses. For, on Friday night, the Hasidim would have their actual meal at home and later that evening become vicarious participants in the rebbe's mystical meal, partaking only of the smallest morsels of his food, which served to sanctify all they had mundanely eaten before. This movement from the horizontal to the vertical, from the tish as communal feast to the restricted focus on the rebbe's food led in turn—inevitably, I believe—to an intense fascination with the specific symbolism and mystical significance of every portion of his meal. The Hasidic leaders themselves viewed their role less as hosting a communal

meal for their followers than as priests officiating at a mystical sacrifice on their behalf.

Another factor at play here is the tendency, beginning in nineteenth century Hasidism, towards narrower, literal applications of classical, grand Hasidic concepts, such as the immanence of God in all things and the mystical imperative to raise the sparks of the Divine hidden in the material universe. From a manifestation of the general panentheistic idea in early Hasidism that all Jews can serve God through feasting and celebration of the material world, the tish eventually became a perfect illustration of the deepening conservatism of Hasidic thought and the growing elitism of the institution of the zaddik. It also reflects the narrowing and marginalization of genuine mystical experience in Hasidic society since the early nineteenth century. At the same time, the intense interest in and sanctification of the most common Ashkenazic ethnic foods remain perfectly consistent—albeit in the most trivialized fashion—with the Hasidic doctrine of panentheism. The circle of the Besht emphasized the presence of God in all things and encouraged mystical consciousness based on a heightened awareness of divine immanence. By the middle of the nineteenth century, this originally sublime mystical conception came to be so narrowly focused and so literally—some might argue primitively—applied that Hasidim feared handling a piece of kugel lest they be violating the divine phallus.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David-Dov Meiseles, ed., *Oytser Ha-Shabbes* (Yiddish; Brooklyn: Yofi Publishing, 2000), 273.

<sup>2</sup> Haym Grunfeld, ed., *Sefer Pardes Ha-Melekh* (Manchester: privately published, 1999), 445. This anthology of the customs emanating from the Hasidic sect of Ruzhin-Sadigura includes an entire section devoted exclusively to the religious significance of kugel, titled, "*Kuntres Ma'achal Ha-Meyuhad Le-Shabbat Ha-Nikra Kugel*," 439-53. It is one of many Hasidic anthologies with such extensive "theological" discussions of specific food eaten in the context of the "rebbe's tish," or holy table.

<sup>3</sup> *Sefer Pardes Ha-Melekh*, 443.

<sup>4</sup> *Sefer Le-Atar Petura: Zemiroh Beit Shineve* (Brooklyn: privately published, 1988), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Roth, *Shulhan Ha-Tahor*, (9<sup>th</sup> ed.; Jerusalem, 1989), sect. 177, par. 3. Hebrew: "*bodkin aharav*."

<sup>6</sup> *Sefer Pardes Ha-Melekh*, 445.

<sup>7</sup> The Third Sabbath Meal was accorded unprecedented importance in Hasidic rheology, a status that began during the Besht's lifetime. Legends regarding the unique holiness of the Third Meal are scattered throughout *Sefer Shivhei Ha-Besht*. For some of the more striking of these legends see in particular, *Shivhei Ha-Besht* (Kopys, 1814), nos. 101, 124, 153, 173, 234, and 238. Subsequent Hasidic lore is replete with odes to the special holiness of the Sabbath twilight, which in Hasidic thought is generally considered *eyt ratson* [a time of unique divine favor].

<sup>8</sup> Moses Midner, *Kitvei (Kodesh) Ramam* (Jerusalem: undated), 158.

<sup>9</sup> For a full treatment of the various customs relating to the *Le-Hayyim* ritual in Hasidism, see Hanina Yom-Tov Lipa Braun, *Sefer Berakha Le-Hayyim* (Jerusalem, privately published, 1954). An interesting discussion of the details of this custom can be found in Moshe Aryeh Freund, *Zmirot Le-Shabbat Kodesh: Ateret Yehoshua* (Brooklyn: privately published, 2001), 108. This compendium of Sabbath songs and customs contains one of the most vivid general descriptions of the rebbe's tish; see 93-123.

<sup>10</sup> Although there is a wealth of material about Hasidic musicology, very little has been written about Hasidism's internal mystical interpretations of the significance of the singing that takes place at the rebbe's table. An unusually rich source for such material, from the court of Jerusalem's R. Arele Roth is *Perush Gaaguay Nefesh: Al Ha-Nigunim She-Yasad Maran Rabenu Be-Vet Midrasheynu*, (Jerusalem: privately published, 1993). For a traditional explication of many aspects of Hasidic song and dance, see Yeshaya Meshulem Rottenberg, *Sefer Zamru Lishmo* (Jerusalem: Or Chadash, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the concept of *dibbuk haverim* in early Hasidism, see Joseph Weiss, *Studies in East European Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman, 1985), 154-69. See also the remarkable description of the practice of this ideal within the Hasidic fraternity by the Hasidic rebbe of Piasecne, Kalonymous Kalman Shapira in *Hachsharat Ha-Avreichim* (Jerusalem: 1962), 58b-63a. A contemporary hasidic treatment of the importance of *dibbuk haverim* can be found in the work of the late Slonimer rebbe, Shalom Noah Beresovsky, *Netivot Shalom*, (Jerusalem: 1982), 305-14.

<sup>12</sup> The only scholarly treatment of the sanctity of food in Hasidism is Louis Jacobs, "Eating as an Act of Worship in Hasidic Thought," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altman on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (ed. S. Stein and R. Loewe; University of Alabama Press, 1979), 157-66. Jacobs refers to the tish and the custom of *shirayim* only in the very last paragraph of this essay, which deals mainly with the early treatment of this concept in the writings of Rabbi Levi Isaac of Berditchev.

<sup>13</sup> In preparing this article, I have consulted the following Hasidic collections of *zmirot*, all privately published by the respective Hasidic sects, as indicated: Hayyim Halberstam, ed., *Seder Zmirot Le-Shabbat Kodesh: Bet Tsanz* (Bnai Berak, 1996); Hayyim Yosef Biderman, ed., *Zmirot Shabbat Mi-Darkhei Moshe* (Lelov; Bnai Berak, 1988); Meir Wiener, ed., *Sefer Shirat Ha-Shabbat* (Biala; Bnai Berak, 1988); *Sefer Le-Atar Petura: Zmirot Le-Shabbat Kodesh* (Shineve/Tseshinov; Brooklyn, 1988); Moshe

Aryeh Freund, *Zmirot Le-Shabbat Kodesh: Ateret Yehoshua* (Brooklyn, 2001); Gedalia Apfel, ed., *Zmirot Simkha Ve-Ora Le-Shabbat U-lekhol Moadei Ha-Shana* (Satmar; Kiryat Yoel, 1980); *Zmirot Avodat Ha-Levi: Tosh* (Boisbriand, Quebec, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Hayyim Elazar Shapiro of Munkacz, *Sefer Darkhei Hayyim Veshalom* (Munkacz, 1940), 123. Compare *Sefer Divrei Torah* (Munkacz, 1933), pt. 3, sect. 42.

<sup>15</sup> *Keter Shem Tov* (Lemberg, 1823), pt. 2, no. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Perl, *Über Das Wesen Der Sekte Chassidim* (ed. from the mss. by Avraham Rubenstein; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of the Sciences and Humanities, 1977), 111.

<sup>17</sup> Abraham Chaim Frankel, ed., *Shabbat Beyt Rophsit* (vol. 1; Jerusalem: privately published, 1994), 181.

<sup>18</sup> Hayim of Mogolience, *Sefer Sihot Hayyim* (Lublin, 1926), 8b.

<sup>19</sup> *Sefer Sihot Hayyim*, 24a.

<sup>20</sup> See Louis Jacob's discussion of R. Levi Isaac's ideas on this issue in "Eating as an Act of Worship."

<sup>21</sup> Menahem Nahum Twersky of Tchernobil, *Me'or Eynaim* (Polnoe, 1816), 43a.

<sup>22</sup> Israel of Ruzhin, *Irin Kadishin* (Warsaw, 1885) commentary to *Haazinu*, 74. See *Irin Kadishin Tinyana: Likkutim* (Bartfeld, 1907), 46. On Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, see the excellent biography by David Assaf, *The Regal Way: The Life and Times of R. Israel of Ruzhin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Assaf discusses R. Israel's uniquely materialistic approach to Hasidism at great length, especially in chapters 10 and 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Sefer Le-Atar Petura: Beyt Shineve Ve-Tseshinov*, (Brooklyn, privately published, 1988), 45-46.

<sup>24</sup> See *Sefer Beit Pinhas* (Jerusalem, privately published, 1978), sermon on *Parshat Noah*.

<sup>25</sup> *Sefer Halikhot Hayyim* (Brooklyn, Munkatch Yeshiva: 1983), 151. See also the article in this volume, Joel Hecker, "The Blessing in the Belly: Mystical Satiation in Medieval Kabbalah," in *Food and Judaism* (vol. 15 Studies in Jewish Civilization; ed. L. Greenspoon, et. al.; Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> *Irin Kaddishin*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> The fullest treatment of the importance in the Jewish tradition, of eating fish on the Sabbath is Moshe Haramish, "Achilat Dagim Be-Shabbat: Ta'amim Upishreyhem," in *Alay Shefer: Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought* (Bar Ilan University Press: Ramat Gan, 1990), 67-87.

<sup>28</sup> *Minhagei Kevod Kedushat Rabotaynu Mi-Belz* (Jerusalem, Belz Publishing, 1974), 22.

<sup>29</sup> This was the custom of Rabbi Eliezer Zeev, founder of the Kretshinev Hasidic dynasty. See *Raza De-Uvda* (Jerusalem, privately published, 1972), 31.

<sup>30</sup> *Sefer Minhagei Spinke* (Bnai Berak: Spinker Yeshiva, 1981), 25.

<sup>31</sup> Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, *Maor Va-Shemesh al ha-Torah* (Krakow, 1842), 76b.

<sup>32</sup> Meir Viner, ed., *Sefer Shirat Ha-Shabbat* (Bnai Berak: privately published, 1988), 8. Rich material regarding the various customs of other Hasidic rebbes regarding

eating fish on the Sabbath can be found in vol. 2 of Y. Z. Moskowitz, *Sefer Oytser Ha-Shabbes* (Brooklyn: Beir Yehidah Publishing, 2000), 66-77.

<sup>33</sup> See Hecker, "The Blessing in the Belly."

<sup>34</sup> Yitzhaq Isaac Yehuda Yechiel Safrin, *Netiv Mitzvotekha* (Lemberg, 1858), 61.

<sup>35</sup> *Sefer Mishmereth Shalom* (Warsaw, undated), 40b. The highly personalized distribution of *Shirayim*, where by each and every morsel that left the rebbe's plate was specifically directed to the soul of one of his Hasidim, is described in great detail as a fundamental principle that guided the practice of this ritual by the Hasidic rebbe Elizezer Zeev of Kretchinev in *Raza De-Uvda* (Jerusalem, 1972), 32-33.

<sup>36</sup> Yair Shvartzman, ed., *Sefer Yehi Or: Elu Maaseyhem Shel Tsadikim* (Jerusalem, 1998), 394-95.

<sup>37</sup> Shalom Aryhe Shtam of Horodok, *Zekher Zaddik* (Vilna, 1908), 9b.

<sup>38</sup> *Sefer Pardes ha-Melekh*, 455. See vol. 2, *Oytser Ha-Shabbes*, 277.

<sup>39</sup> On the complex nature of the relationship between these two men, see Assaf, *The Regal Way*.

<sup>40</sup> Zvi Hirsch Friedman, *Sefer Darkhei ha-Yashar Veha-tov* (Munkacz, 1909-10), 23.

<sup>41</sup> *Shabbes Bey Ropshitz*, I. P., 276.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, vol. 2 of *Sefer Oytser Ha-Shabbes*, 299-311, for discussions of the mystical significance of various traditional Sabbath foods such as egg salad with onions, tsimmes, chicken fat and tchulent.

<sup>43</sup> See the extensive discussions of the mystical symbolism of the traditional Sabbath foods kugel in the recently published Yiddish compendium of Hasidic lore by Rabbi David Dov Meisels, *Sefer Oytser Ha-Shabbes* (vol. 2; Brooklyn, 2000), 39-90 and 259-80. On kugel specifically, see 83-84 and 271-79.

<sup>44</sup> *Sefer Pardes Ha-Melekh*, 443.

<sup>45</sup> See Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 63.

<sup>46</sup> Yehuda Elzet, *Yiddishe Maykholim* (Warsaw: Lewin Epstein Press, 1920), 35.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>49</sup> *Sefer Le-Atar Peturah*, 81.

<sup>50</sup> *Netiv Mitzvotekha* (Jerusalem, 1995), 61.

<sup>51</sup> See Claude-Levi Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

<sup>52</sup> See the extensive discussion of the symbolism of native foods in Raymond Firth, *Symbols, Public and Private* (Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press, 1975).

<sup>53</sup> The fullest treatment of Mary Douglas's reinterpretation of the Eucharist is found in Michael Jindra, *Reading Mary Douglas: The Radical Cultural Theory of a Catholic Anthropologist* (London: Routledge, 1999).

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