

Subject: Hasidim and Mitnagdim Between the Wars in Northeast Poland

October 20, 2009

JSM 2009's **Point/Counterpoint** articles about a comfortable symbiosis between the Hasidic and Mitnagdic communities in Vilna during the 1920s and 1930s concurs with what I read recently in an Internet *Yizkor Book* from Zambrow, in the Bialystok province of Northeast Poland. Pages 220 and 256-258 show that the Rebbe of the Habad Hasidim had earlier "Judaized" an old Ukranian folk song's mocking condemnation of a doltish peasant who neither bought nor sold anything at market. In the Rebbe's version, the ne'er-do-well becomes the *yeitser ha-ra* (evil inclination) and the general populace who shun him are Jews from various communities. The Ukranian lyrics have been replaced by a Hebrew refrain from Psalm 42:3, with Yiddish verses that unite all Jews against the allure of evil:

Neither the Hasidim nor the Mitnagdim—
Whether dwelling in Jerusalem or Babylon
Will follow you—O evil inclination—
Or listen to your covetous enticement;
Instead, their bodies thirst for the Holy One—
Their souls yearn for the World's Radiance!

The Rabbi of Zambrow, in his 90s during the 1930s, was a Litvak (Lithuanian), but no flaming opponent of Hasidism. In fact he never distinguished between Hasidim or Mitnagdim, but gathered to him all who feared and adhered to God's word. He demonstrated this love for all Israel by singing and dancing the Habad Rabbi's Niggun with *Yeshiva bakhurim* on every *yom tov*.

Moderato Dem Rebbn's Niggun (Zambrow Yizkor Book, image 232)

REFRAIN: Hoy-- tsom-oh, tsom-oh, tsom-oh, tsom-oh (k'cho) naf-shi;
Kom-hah, Kom-hah, Kom-hah, Kom-hah, Kom-hah (k'cho) b'so-ri

VERSE 1: AKA! du, yet-ser ho-ro, gey dir vai-ter ker dir vi-der;

VERSE 2: ~~Hasidim-lekh, Mitnagdim-lekh, Yeru-shal-mim-lekh, Bav-lim-lekh;~~

(UKRAINIAN: EKH-TA DU-REN HAR-RU TSHISHO-TI RUB-YASH NA YAR-MOR-KU.)

1. gey dir tse-dai-ne lib-ste bri-der.
2. ve-~~ln~~ dir nit-fol-g'n, ve-~~ln~~ dir nit-be-r'n.
(UKR. NYI' KOP-LYAYESH NYI-PRO-DA-YESH, SHOL-KO RAB-YISH SHAR-KA.)

6

Thanks to Cantor Joseph Levine for providing his analysis, translation and musical transcription of the music that I found in the Zambrow Yizkor Book.

Helen Winkler