

Source Sheet Class 15-“2000 Years of Jewish History”-Rabbi Menachem Levine

Source 1

An apprentice blacksmith, after he had learned his trade from the master, made a list for himself of how he must go about his craft. How he should pump the bellows, secure the anvil, and wield the hammer. He omitted nothing. When he went to work at the king's palace, however, he discovered to his dismay that he could not perform his duties, and was dismissed. He had forgotten to note one thing-perhaps because it was so obvious-that first he must ignite a spark to kindle the fire. He had to return to the master, who reminded him of the first principle which he had forgotten.

(Raphael Jospe, ed., *Great Schisms in Jewish History*, (Ktav Publishing House, 1981), p. 129)

Source 2

Our brethren, sons of Yisroel...as you know, new people have appeared, unimagined by our forefathers....and they associate amongst themselves and their ways are different from other children of Yisroel in their liturgy...they behave in a crazed manner and say that their thoughts wander in all worlds...And they belittle the study of the Torah, and repeatedly claim that one should not study much, nor deeply regret ones' transgressions...Therefore, we have come to inform our brethren, Children of Yisroel, from near and far...and top sound to them the voice of excommunication and banishment....Until they themselves repent completely....

From the excommunication of Hassidim (April 1772) signed by the Vilna Gaon: (Paul Mendes –Flohr & Yehuda Reinharz ed., *The Jew in the Modern World*, (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 390.)

Source 3

“The Admor, Rav Aharon of Belz quoted his father as having said, “there is no greater *Chassidus* than the debates of Abaye and Rava, All *Chassidus* can be found in the Gemara, Rashi, Tosfos...You will find fear of Heaven in the Tur and Beis Yosef, and also in the Shulchan Aruch, Taz, Magen Avraham...The Beis Yisrael of Ger said, “Studying

Chassidus is all well and good, on condition that it follows the in-depth study of Gemara and Tosfos.”...The Pupa Rebbe was of the opinion that there is no longer any reason for the quarrel between Chassidim and Misnagdim...most of the differences no longer exist, except for semantics...’All we have left is this Torah,’ studying and teaching, in the plain sense; straightforwardly guarding, carrying out, and upholding everything written in the Shulchan Aruch and the poskim.

Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, “In Their Shadow II” preface xxxii

Source 4

“Chassidism uplifted the masses, but it would be wrong to suppose that its teachings were designed solely as a kind of spiritual medicine, necessary when one is ill, but of no value for the healthy. An important teaching of Hassidism is that its insights are important to the spiritual well-being of every Jew. Although its masters aimed much of their energies at helping poor, illiterate Jews, it would be incorrect to say that this was the main characteristic of Hassidism, since the movement also brought new vision and depth to the entire body of Jewish thought.”

Aryeh Kaplan (in his essay “A World Beyond” in *Chassidic Masters: History, Biography and Thought* p. 4):

Source 5

“The Chassidic movement also arose from this claim for spiritual inspiration that had become dormant. ...after all this there was the great peril that the nation might spurn altogether every vestige left it from the treasure of living spiritual inspiration. The result would have been sole dependence on a study of texts and the zealous performance of actions, the mitzvos and the customs. The people would have become bowed in body and crushed in spirit. In the end they would have been unable to survive from a lack of vitality and uplifting of spirit” Rav Kook continues,

“Future generations might well have lost the blessings of revival in Chassidism had it not been purified by suffering as a result of the fiery opposition from the shining light of

Yisroel's tradition of talmudic learning centering in the practical disciplines of life. He himself felt the living force of inspiration but for him this was peripheral to his primary concern, textual study. I am referring to the school of thought of Rabbi Eliyahu, the Gaon of Vilna. He fought the spread of the divine inspiration of the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov, which had not been sufficiently grounded in textual study, thus creating the danger that it might become estranged from its roots in the Jewish tradition in the course of time."

Rav A.Y. Kook (1865-1935), the first Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisroel, in Derech HaTehiya

Source 6

"Our wholly devoted people (the Chassidim) do not know and are unable to appreciate the very great benefit and immense kindness in what the Vilna Gaon did for us by quarreling with us. They are not on a level of spiritual development to attain a proper conception of the tremendous gratitude we owe him and those who waged the battle - we, our children, and the generations after us. For if not for that fierce controversy, there would really have been a basis and a reason to worry and suspect that the new doctrine we developed for us, or rather that our fathers developed for us, in storm and stress, would slowly, slowly lead us, step by step, gradually further and further away from the limits set for the authentic tradition of Torah and religious observance. And there would have been a great anxiety not without foundation, that according to the force of the enthusiasm, exaltation and elevation of the spirit in the progress of the new doctrine that captured by storm the hearts of its creators and makers, originators and founders, in the end Talmudic learning would be charred by the fire of Kabbalah; that the hidden Torah of mysticism would diminish most of the stature and eminence of the overt, visible Torah; and the actual mitzvos to be observed in deeds would come to be held in low esteem in the face of the blazing emotions evoked by the mystic intentions in one's religious devotions...."

"Had all this come true, we would have been lost on our road, Heaven forbid. The controversy was therefore like a barrier against catastrophe for us, like a cast-iron fence against a raging sea. Moreover, the halachic compendium (known as the Shulchan Aruch HaRav) written by my grandfather R. Shneur Zalman of Liady, the author of the Tanya - I know with certainty

that it was created only on account of the controversy - in order to draw the hearts of our faithful people closer to a way of life according to the doctrine of halacha and thus to increase and magnify the prestige and honor of the overt non-mystic Torah; to influence them to devote their time and energy to a preoccupation with the laws of the Torah, with proper attention and concentration, with an attitude of reverence and appreciation. To this controversy we must give thanks for the revelation of this treasure of illumination. If the controversy came only so that we should be granted these volumes, it would have been beneficence enough for us....”

R. Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch known as the Tzemach Tzedek (after the halachic work he wrote by the same name) and third in the lineage of Chabad Rebbes. He writes (As recorded in Mekor Baruch by R. Baruch Epstein (the “Torah Temima”) in the name of his father R. Yechiel Michael haLevi Epstein, author of the renown and authoritative Aruch haShulchan)