One of the most meaningful landmarks in Arnold Band’s long academic career is, I believe, the volume dedicated to the tales of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, including an introduction, translation, and commentary on one of the most intriguing Jewish literary and mystical texts. Band succeeded in finding the right tone in English to present these tales, reflecting the folk-tale character of the text and at the same time retaining the intellectual weight that they include. He avoided the temptation to rewrite and “improve” Rabbi Nahman’s work, as several important writers, from Martin Buber to some contemporary figures, have done. Band’s text is one of the rare cases in which reading a translation is very nearly as good as reading the original. Thanks to Band’s work, one can offer a close reading of a section from Rabbi Nahman’s tales in a study in English, without constantly referring to the Hebrew (or Yiddish) original.

One of the best-known sections in these narratives is the story of the third beggar in Rabbi Nahman’s thirteenth (and last) tale, “The Seven Beggars.” Part of it was included in S. Ansky’s immensely popular play, The Dybbuk, and in many anthologies and collections. The combination of mystery with fantasy that characterizes it fascinated

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2 Bibliography concerning Bratslav Hasidism, Rabbi Nahman, and the stories is now one of the most accessible in Jewish Studies. The recent publication of David Assaf’s volume Bratslav Bibliography (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 2000) is a landmark. It includes exhaustive annotated references to sources, studies, reviews, newspaper articles, etc., arranged by subject. A few months earlier the Catalogue of the Gershom Scholem Library of Jewish Mysticism, ed. J. Dan and E. Liebes (Jerusalem: The Jewish National and University Library Press, 1999) was published. It includes a detailed chapter on Bratslav (1:661–96, items 8499–8925). The comprehensive list of Bratslav sources was published in G. Scholem, Quntres elleh shemoth (Jerusalem: Azriel, 1925). Rabbi Nahman’s Sefer sippurei ma’asiyot was published first in Ostraha, 1815, in Hebrew and Yiddish, edited by his disciple, Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov.
readers and listeners, even though it lacks any clear literal meaning. It seems that it is appropriate to read it again and view it as a fusion of literature and mysticism, using profound concepts drawn from Kabbalah and Hasidism.

The story of "The Seven Beggars" is unfinished, like the first tale, the story of "The Lost Princess." Its outlines are well known. The first segment of the story narrates the spiritual fall of a king's son "who fell from faith." Then the story moves, without any apparent connection, to an upheaval in a certain country that caused many people to flee from their homes. Among them were two children, a boy and a girl, who wander as beggars in the forests and towns. During their wandering they meet, in seven separate episodes, seven beggars, each of whom suffers a physical defect—a blind one, a deaf one, a stammerer, and so on. These beggars feed and assist them. When the children grow up, the beggars decide that they should marry each other and prepare a wedding feast in a hole in the ground covered by weeds and garbage. During this celebration the bride and groom crave the presence of the beggars. Each of them appears, in the order of their original meeting, and narrates a story in which he himself is the main hero who possesses supernatural abilities that correspond to his particular disadvantage—the blind one, for example, sees better than anyone else. Each beggar then gives his unique powers as a wedding gift to the children, thus allowing them to become masters of all the supernatural abilities of the whole group of beggars. The story ends with the narrative of the sixth beggar, so that the part that Rabbi Nahman never told included at least three segments: the story of the seventh beggar, who was legless (and, according to tradition, a wonderful dancer); the conclusion of the story of the wedding of the children and their ultimate fate; and the conclusion of the story of the prince "who fell away from faith" and of the narrative as a whole.

This structure can be explained as reflecting Rabbi Nahman's concept of the present moment in cosmic history, in the movement between creation and redemption according to the Lurianic messianic myth, which Rabbi Nahman internalized and absorbed as his own biography: the story of the fate of the soul of the Messiah. The time of the final

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3 A detailed analysis of these two stories and the messianic meaning of the missing conclusions is included in my monograph, The Hasidic Story [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 132–72. Arnold Band was kind to include my suggestions in his presentation of these stories.

4 It is remarkable that Rabbi Nahman began to tell these stories in 1806, after his only son died, an event that intensified his messianic pretensions (as pointed out by M. Piekarz, "Hamifneh bederekh haba'ato shel Rabbi Nahman miBratslav
revelation of the Messiah and the implementation of the redemption on earth has not arrived yet, so the first story, as well as the last, could not be concluded. Traditional Bratslav commentators identified the last, seventh beggar with King David, who danced in front of the holy ark when it was moved from Shiloh to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where the Temple was to be built by Solomon—a clear indication of the completion of the messianic process. The catastrophes with which both the first and the last narratives begin can be understood as representing the myth of tsimtsum and shevirah, the primordial catastrophes within the Godhead in the Lurianic mystical-messianic myth.\(^5\) It seems that the bride and groom, in the hole in the ground covered by garbage, are in the process of accumulating the powers of the divine manifestations, the sefirot, which they receive as wedding gifts from the beggars who represent these divine entities. They are preparing themselves for their imminent role in the messianic event, of which the marriage ceremony, this hieros gamos, is a high point. From this ceremony the process of tiqqun, the mending and correction of the mythical catastrophes, can reach its ultimate conclusion. Unfortunately, this is also the point in which Rabbi Nahman forsakes the mundane world, and the completion of the messianic process is delayed until his return, according to the belief of his followers.\(^6\)


\(^6\) It is thus incorrect to present the expectation of many Habad Hasidim that Rabbi Menahem Mendel Shneersohn will return and redeem the world as a “first” in Jewish messianic thought. These Lubavitch believers are joining now the Bratslav Hasidim, who adopted this belief 190 ago. The Bratslav Hasidim were called by other groups “dead Hasidim,” because of their faithfulness to a dead leader. There are now tens of thousands of new “dead Hasidim” of the Lubavitch kind. Early Bratslav believers were encouraged by computations concerning the date of Rabbi Nahman’s return, in twelve years, then forty years, and so on.
The tale of the third beggar is placed in the middle of the story. It is suggested that it serves as the turning point in the narrative between the segments dedicated to the myth of the creation and the primordial catastrophes and the segments leading toward the correction and the redemption. It is neither “past” nor “future,” but rather the description of the extended present, the situation in a universe that is in balance, though a tenuous and temporary one:

There is an entire tale about this. The True Man of Kindness\(^7\) is indeed a very great man. And I (the stutterer) travel around and collect all true deeds of kindness and bring them to the True Man of Kindness. For the very becoming of time—time itself is created—is through deeds of true kindness. So I travel and gather together all those true deeds of kindness and bring them to the True Man of Kindness. And from this time becomes.

Now there is a mountain. On the mountain stands a rock. From the rock flows a spring. And everything has a heart. The world taken as a whole has a heart. And the world’s heart is of full stature\(^8\) with a face, hands, and feet. Now the toenail of that heart is more heart-like than anyone else’s heart. The mountain with the rock and spring are at one end of the world, and the world’s heart stands at the other end. The world’s heart stands opposite the spring and yearns and always longs to reach the spring. The yearning and longing of the heart for the spring is extraordinary. It cries out to reach the spring. The spring also yearns and longs for the heart.

The heart suffers from two types of languor: one because the sun pursues it and burns it (because it so longs to reach the spring); and the other because of its yearning and longing, for it always yearns and longs fervently for the spring. It always stands facing the spring and cries out: “Help!” and longs mightily for the spring. But when the heart needs to find some rest, to catch its breath, a large bird flies over, and spreads its wings over it, and shields it from the sun. Then the heart can rest a while. And even then, during the rest, it still looks toward the spring and longs for it.

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\(^7\) The name of this person can be understood also as “the Man of Truth and Kindness.” The terms are part of the usual kabbalistic list of divine powers—see below.

\(^8\) Qomah shelemah, a reference to the concept of the divine world in anthropomorphic terms as a complete human stature, when every aspect and power is represented as a limb. It is derived from the ancient, prekabbalistic text known as Shi’ur qomah (The Measurement of the Height). See G. Scholem, On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead (New York: Schocken, 1991), 1–45; J. Dan, Jewish Mysticism (Northvale, N.J.: Aronson, 1998), 1:205–16.
Why doesn’t the heart go toward the spring if it so longs for it? Because, as soon as it wants to approach the hill, it can no longer see the peak and cannot look at the spring. (When one stands opposite a mountain, one sees the top of the slope of the mountain where the spring is situated, but as soon as one approaches the mountain, the top of the slope disappears—at least visually—and one cannot see the spring.) And if the heart will no longer look upon the spring, its soul will perish, for it draws all its vitality from the spring. And if the heart would expire, God forbid, the whole world would be annihilated, because the heart has within it the life of everything. And how could the world exist without its heart? And that is why the heart cannot go to the spring but remains facing it and yearns and cries out.

And the spring has no time; it does not exist in time. (The spring has no worldly time, no day or moment, for it is entirely above time.) The only time the spring has is that one day which the heart grants it as a gift. The moment the day is finished, the spring, too, will be without time and it will disappear. And without the spring, the heart, too, will perish, God forbid. Thus, close to the end of the day, they start to take leave one from the other and begin singing riddles and poems and songs, one to the other, with much love and longing. This True Man of Kindness is in charge of this: As the day is about to come to its end, before it finishes and ceases, the True Man of Kindness comes and gives a gift of a day to the heart. And the heart gives the day to the spring. And again the spring has time.

And when day returns from wherever it comes, it arrives with riddles and fine poetry in which all wisdom lies. There is a distinction between the days. There is Sunday and Monday; there are also days of New Moon and Holidays. The poems which the day brings depend upon what kind of day it is. And the time that the True Man of Kindness has, all derives from me (the stutterer) because I travel around, collecting all the true deeds of kindness from which time derives.

Consequently, the stutterer is wiser even than the wise one who boasted that he is as clever as whichever day you wish. Because all of time, even the days, come about only through him (the stutterer) for he collects the true deeds of kindness from which time derives and brings them to the True Man of Kindness. He in turn gives a day to the heart. The heart gives it to the spring, through which the whole world can exist. Consequently the actual becoming of time, with the riddles and poems and all the wisdom found in them, is all made possible through the stutterer.

9 The term “riddles” (hidot) should not be understood in a narrow sense. This Hebrew term was used by the Tibbonite translators of Jewish philosophical texts from the Arabic to Hebrew in the late twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries also to represent narratives in general, tales that often carry ethical or ideological messages.
I have an affidavit from the True Man of Kindness that I can recite riddles and poems, in which all wisdom can be found, because time and riddles come into being only through him. And now, I give you my wedding gift outright that you should be like me.

Upon hearing this, they had a joyous celebration.\(^{10}\)

It is remarkable that the basic terminology and processes described in this section of the narrative are rather simple, well known, even mundane, zoharic ones, expressing the mainstream, pre-Lurianic concept of divine providence. Upon this foundation Rabbi Nahman constructed in this parable the modifications resulting from his Hasidic and his personal worldview.

The spring, obviously, is the third divine power in the kabbalistic system, *binah*, which is consistently described as the spring and the source of all existence, first and foremost that of the divine realms. The first two *sefirot* are conceived as potential rather than actual existence—divine will (*keter*) and divine wisdom (*hokhmah*). Real existence begins with the third *sefirah*, which is the springboard of all that is. Like a spring, it is half hidden within the realm of divine potentiality, and only its outer aspects flow forth into existence like a spring’s waters. The “water” is the divine flow (*shefa*) that sustains all existence; if it is stopped, the world ceases to exist; if it is diminished, misfortunes and suffering come to the world.\(^{11}\)

The heart is another obvious, simple term, relating to the sixth *sefirah*, *tiferet*, which is conceived as the center of the “construction *sefirot,*” the ones that support and direct all the affairs of the higher and lower realms of existence. The dependence of the “heart” on sustenance received from the third *sefirah*, the “spring,” is a basic kabbalistic concept that is illustrated graphically by Rabbi Nahman in orthodox terms.

The dynamic aspect of this picture is supplied in this narrative by another basic kabbalistic concept, that of the impact of human deeds on the stature of the divine powers. In order to exist, the universe has to be sustained by divine flow, coming from the hidden, supreme, and innermost realms of the divine powers. At the same time, this flow cannot come into being without being triggered by an upward flow of power, resulting from human rituals, ethical behavior, and piety. The ancient belief that the world is sustained by the righteous, that the Zaddik is the foundation of the world (Proverbs 10:25), has been extended in the Kabbalah into a detailed relationship between righteousness and

\(^{10}\) Band, *Nahman of Bratslav*, 268–70.

existence. In Rabbi Nahman’s parable, this concept is described as the one giving the spring “time.” The spring tends, according to the narrative, to disengage from existence and recede into the realm of eternity, which is timelessness, in which reality cannot exist. In other words, without the “time” given to the spring, “one day at a time,” God recedes into precreation eternity, in which the world does not exist. The flow from existence toward the spring is therefore necessary to keep God loyal to his own creative endeavor for one more day.

It is not difficult to extend this interpretation to include the other elements of the picture presented by Rabbi Nahman: the sun threatening the heart (probably the fifth sefirah, din, the harsh law and the source of evil), and the great bird (probably the fourth sefirah, hesed). Yet the text should not be regarded as a textbook allegory, to be mechanically interpreted detail for detail. Even the most mundane kabbalistic concepts have undergone some transformation in Rabbi Nahman’s personal world and are presented according to his own individual vision.

The process of providing one more day each day to the universe’s existence as presented in this vision is different in a meaningful way from the dominant character of Rabbi Nahman’s narratives. In most cases, his stories include elements of a catastrophe that is in the process of being mended, leading toward an expected final salvation. This is the basic structure of the story of the beggars as a whole and of several of the stories of the individual beggars. This structure, as noted above, reflects the basic myth of Lurianic Kabbalah: the road from the tsimtsum and shevirah to the final tiqqun and redemption. In the story of the third beggar this element is absent. It is a description of a continuous, basically static, situation repeated unchanged every day. The processes described here do not contain any intrinsic crisis that demands radical change. It can continue indefinitely. This is a zoharic myth, reflecting the mainly nonmessianic aspects of the early Kabbalah, rather than the revolutionary, intensely messianic Lurianic myth, which serves as the foundation of Rabbi Nahman’s worldview and his concept of his own place in the world.

Understanding this unusual characteristic of the third beggar’s story seems to be closely connected with the nature of the hero of the narrative, the stutterer himself. He portrays himself as the wandering collector of deeds of charity and righteousness, who gives these treasures to the “True Man of Kindness.” This True Man, in turn, uses this spiritual power to give another day of existence to the universe. It seems that we have here one character, divided into celestial and earthly entities, which

together fulfill this crucial role. They embody the process of delivering the life-force, derived of human observance of divine commands, to the supreme powers that sustain the world. The supernal part, the “True Man of Kindness” or “Man of Kindness and Truth,” seems to be a combination of the characteristics of two sefirot, the fourth, ḥesed (usually rendered in English as “lovingkindness”), and the sixth, tiferet, which is described in standard kabbalistic terminology by the terms emet (truth) and rahamim (love, mercy, caring). It seems that Rabbi Nahman created in this character a dynamic figure who supplies “the spring” with all the good qualities of the these two sefirot combined. They are represented in the lower realms by the “stutterer,” who actually fulfills the most important role of collecting the deeds of kindness that sustain the existence of the universe.

This is not a routine kabbalistic concept. It seems to be based more on the Hasidic doctrine of the role of the Zaddik than on traditional kabbalistic teachings. The most meaningful innovative idea that Hasidism introduced into Jewish thought is that of the intermediary power who stands between humanity and God. In the process of development of this central concept, which dominated Hasidism from the early nineteenth century to the present, Rabbi Nahman has a unique role. On the one hand, he contributed more than most other Hasidic thinkers to its development, and on the other, he is responsible, in thought and deed, for the emergence of an exception to the rule: the concept of the one-and-only Zaddik, the true Zaddik, who is the redeemer of the whole world, identified with the Messiah himself.

The doctrine of the Zaddik was developed mainly by the generation of Hasidic leaders who created their communities after the death of Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirich, in 1772, and it became the norm of Hasidic organization, theology, and daily behavior in the first half of the nineteenth century. Among the first leaders to formulate the theory we find Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk, Rabbi Jacob Isaac the “seer” of Lublin, and Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav himself. The most prominent example of leadership modeled according to this doctrine is the figure of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, the founder of the Sadagora dynasties. While the first leaders who established communities based on this doctrine were charismatic ones who achieved their position by their unique spiritual impact, the next generation who assumed the leadership relied first and foremost on the concept of dynastic destiny. Most of the Hasidic communities today are led by Zaddikim who are sixth, seventh, and eighth generation, descended directly from the charismatic founders (thus, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Shneersohn, the last leader of Habad, was the seventh-generation descendant of the founder, Rabbi Shneour Zalman of Lyady). Charismatic leadership was replaced by a dynastic one, expressed by the formulation: “there is no Zaddik but the son of the Zaddik.”

The term “Zaddik” in this concept is based on kabbalistic tradition, which identified it with the ninth sefirah, yesod, following the verse in Proverbs 10:25. This power is portrayed in the classical Kabbalah as the pipeline connecting the divine world with the earthly one, delivering the divine flow of sustenance to the world and uplifting the spiritual power of human beings back to the celestial realms. When the leaders of Hasidism were identified with this power, they assumed the role of serving as intermediaries between the divine and the human spheres, a mystical role in which the actual meaning of “righteous” was marginalized, replaced by the belief in the Zaddik’s unique spiritual-divine capabilities, with which the Zaddik’s dynasty is endowed. The vehement insistence of Hasidism on dynastic leadership—the exact opposite of a charismatic model—was the reason that great thinkers, scholars, and leaders were replaced by direct descendants of previous Zaddikim.

14 Eyn tsaddiq ella ben tsaddiq.
15 Vetsaddiq yesod olam (“but the righteous is an everlasting foundation”), which could be read also as “foundation of the world,” axis mundi.
16 Some of the famous examples of this process are the rejection of Rabbi Aharon haLevi, the great disciple of Rabbi Shneour Zalman of Lyady, in favor of the son, Rabbi Dov Baer in Habad Hasidism; and, on the other hand, the appointment of Israel of Ruzhin, an ignorant teenager, but the great-grandson of the Maggid of Mezhirich.
Rabbi Nahman, however, represented the two directions equally. He certainly was charismatic, and his unique personality attracted to him a small group of adherents, which, even though it was inferior numerically compared to other emerging Hasidic communities, was extremely loyal and deeply connected to him. On the other hand, no one had stronger dynastic credentials. He was the direct descendant of the founder of Hasidism, the Besht, both on his mother’s and his father’s side.

The Hasidic doctrine of the Zaddik is based on the belief in a mystical spiritual bond that unites the soul of the Zaddik and the souls of his adherents on two levels, the spiritual and the physical. The Zaddik guarantees the spiritual welfare of the Hasidim, lifting their prayers to the divine world and assuming responsibility for the divine acceptance of their repentance in case they have sinned. A typical element in this concept is the belief that a Hasid’s sin appears as an evil thought in the mind of the Zaddik, who lifts it to its sacred origin and transforms it into goodness, thereby acquiring the acceptance of the Hasid’s repentance. The mystical bond with the Zaddik assures the Hasidim everlasting life in heaven after they depart from this world. The Hasidim are required to have complete faith in the Zaddik and direct their religious endeavors toward him, thus enabling him to serve as the focus of the spiritual force of the whole community and to use this force to achieve their common religious aims. The Zaddik, in turn, is responsible for supplying his adherents with banei, hayei, mezonei—a legal formula meaning “sons, health, and livelihood.” This puts the Zaddik in the center of a Hasid’s life, having the last word on his choice of a bride and a profession. The need for frequent contact with the Zaddik causes the geographic concentration of the community around his court. Some of the adherents actually live there, and others visit several times a year, to be inspired by the Zaddik and to receive his instructions. Furthermore, the Hasidim are responsible for the physical welfare of the Zaddik and his family, providing by their donations for all his earthly needs.

Some of the main components of this doctrine have been derived from the messianic teaching of Nathan of Gaza, the prophet of Shabbetai Tzevi. According to Nathan, the Messiah can achieve the correction of all evil in the world and bring forth the redemption both by his own power, being the incarnation of the sixth sefirah, and especially by the power of the faith of all the people of Israel in him. He serves as the focus of this power and directs it to the struggle against the forces of evil. The Hasidic thinkers have broken down the universal doctrine of Nathan of Gaza and endowed the Zaddik with similar powers for a limited time and a limited community. The Zaddik is a messiah, but only for his adherents who believe in him, and only for his own lifetime. Afterwards his endeavors will be continued by his son. Each Zaddik
can be conceived, therefore, as a sliver of the Messiah, a minute redeemer for his community.

Many of Rabbi Nahman's homilies, collected in the two volumes of his *Liqqutei moharan*, develop and express the concept of the Zaddik as the spiritual savior of his own community, the people faithful to him. Others, however, develop a novel idea in Hasidism: there is a true Zaddik (*tsaddiq ha'emet*) who is responsible for the whole people of Israel, the whole universe, and it is his role to be the redeemer of all and everything. This concept is almost indistinguishable from Nathan of Gaza's doctrine of the Messiah. This explains why Rabbi Nahman's disciples did not, and could not, nominate another Zaddik to replace him when he died. They believed Rabbi Nahman was not just their own Zaddik, bound by the limitations of time and place, but also the eternal, ultimate redeemer of all the people and of the universe as a whole. The absence of an heir to Rabbi Nahman was understood as the proof of his messianic role. If he were just a Zaddik, there must be a dynasty that will continue his responsibility to his particular community. They have remained loyal to their faith for 190 years so far, despite the persecutions and ridicule that they suffered, and they are still going strong. This is the reason why Bratslav Hasidism has always been open to all Jews, while most other Hasidic communities are almost completely closed, adhering mainly to families of a certain geographic area. Rabbi Nahman was the redeemer of all Israel.  

It is my suggestion that this is the background that enables us to understand the image of the True Man of Kindness presented in the third day of the wedding of the two children in Rabbi Nahman's last narrative. This story, like all the others, is motivated by a strong messianic drive. Hasidic messianism (and Rabbi Nahman's) has two aspects. The first is a modest, limited one, described by the Hasidic doctrine of the Zaddik and supplying the Hasidim with individual redemption for their souls and a minimal guarantee of sons, good health, and livelihood in this world. The other—the one first formulated by Rabbi Nahman—is a return to the concept of a universal savior, the ultimate Messiah. This duality is reflected

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17 This is expressed today by the openness of Bratslav Hasidism to bohemians, artists, and individualists who are not accepted by other segments of ultra-Orthodox Judaism. Because of this, leaders of the Israeli Sefardi ultra-Orthodox (especially the rabbis and leaders of the Shas party) make the pilgrimage to Rabbi Nahman's tomb in the Ukraine. It is unthinkable that a Sefardi rabbi will go to the grave of any other Hasidic Zaddik.

18 I described these two aspects and analyzed their interrelationship in the study "The Two Meanings of Hasidic Messianism," in Jodi Magness and Seymour Gitin, eds., *Hesed Ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs* (Atlanta: Scholars Press,
in Rabbi Nahman’s narratives as well as in his homiletical-theological writings. Some of them describe everyday redemption, while others emphasize the final transformation of the world.

There can be little doubt that the final sections of the story of “The Seven Beggars” concern the ultimate messianic redemption. There can also be little doubt that the first segments of the story deal with the processes of creation, the catastrophes in the early history of the divine world, and the nature of the supreme sefirot that are not directly affected by worldly events. The story of the third beggar is placed between these two parts. It can be conceived as a moment of balance between creation and redemption, a state of equilibrium or stasis that separates the two great myths of the beginning and the end. The Man of True Kindness and the third beggar who supplies him with deeds of kindness performed in the world every day are together the expression of the ordinary Hasidic doctrine of the Zaddik. The divine fourth sefirah, hesed, connected with the sixth, tiferet, supply the universe with the spiritual power to exist another day, thus creating time. The person who collects the deeds of kindness gives the divine powers the spiritual sustenance they need in order to fulfill their role. This corresponds to the daily responsibilities of the Zaddik, who lifts up the prayers and good deeds of his community to the divine world, thus sustaining it and at the same time receiving the divine flow that enables the community to exist another day. This state is dangerous and the balance precarious. It is threatened by the burning sun (probably representing the harshness of divine justice, the fifth sefirah, gevurah) and by the unstable state of the whole process. In the segments of the narrative that follow, the emphasis is shifted to ultimate redemption.

The great scholar of Bratslav Hasidism, Joseph Weiss, suggested that Rabbi Nahman’s stories should be viewed as the author’s spiritual biography, which he identified with the Lurianic myth of the history of the universe and the myth of the Messiah as formulated by Nathan of Gaza.19 I believe that this is the correct way to read and understand Rabbi Nahman’s teachings in all literary genres. Yet between the two great myths there is an interim period—all of what we call history—in which the Zaddik, assisted by his adherents, supplies the world with one day at a time, sustaining the divine world by the good deeds of

1998), 391–408. See also J. Dan, Modern Jewish Messianism, 150–77; and J. Dan, Apocalypse Then and Now [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Aharonot, 2000), 247–64.

human beings and causing the divine flow that gives existence to the universe. This epoch of stasis, which the normative Hasidic doctrine of the Zaddik regarded as everlasting, is too frail, according to Rabbi Nahman, and is replaced by the unfolding messianic drama that has not yet reached its end in the unfinished story and the untimely death of Rabbi Nahman. The author is the hero of the three stages of existence: he was present in the beginning and suffered the primeval catastrophes that befell the divine world, he is destined to bring the messianic process to its successful end, and between the beginning and the end he stutters along each morning creating another day.