THE WAR ON MODERNITY OF R. HAYYIM ELAZAR SHAPIRA OF MUNKACZ

INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of the Zionist movement across central and eastern Europe in the first decades of this century spawned a broad spectrum of responses from Orthodox Jews, ranging from the enthusiastic embrace of the Rabbinic leaders of the Mizrachi movement to unequivocal condemnation by dozens of communal Rabbis, Roshei Yeshiva and hasidic Rebbes. Some of the harshest Jewish criticisms of Zionism came from the ultra-conservative hasidic leaders of Transylvania and Carpathian Ruthenia. Among the many Rabbis from those regions who protested the expansion of the Zionist movement into their communities, by far the most vehement and extreme hostility was voiced by the ultra-conservative hasidic Rabbi of Munkacz, Hayyim Elazar Shapira (1872–1937).

Shapira's opposition to the Zionist enterprise was not only more militant than that of any other Rabbi of his day; it was by far the most consistent, and finally became a veritable obsession, particularly in the last decade of his life. His virulent denunciations, often in the form of curses, of what he considered to be the demonic triad of this era—"Zionists, Mizrachists and Agudath Israel colonists"—permeated almost all of his writings. His attacks on these perceived heretics became especially fierce in the aftermath of Shapira's brief visit to Palestine in 1930. Hardly a sermon, homily or letter issued by him from that year until his death in 1937—regardless of their original context—was free of Shapira's uniquely violent and extensive anti-Zionist tirades.

Shapira's obsessive anti-Zionism was, however, but the most conspicuous element of a broader theology of ultra-conservatism, and was entirely consistent with his general religious demeanour, which can best be described as the most extreme version of Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy and Jewish political reactionism. He fought not only the rise of modern Jewish nationalism, but applied widely and very literally the motto of R. Moses Sofer of Pressburg, "hadash asur min..."
ha-Torah” (“all that is new is Biblically prohibited”) in combating any perceived novelties in Jewish life, even those of a strictly halakhic nature.

Shapira was the scion of a great hasidic family and came by his religious conservatism quite honestly. His great-great grandfather, Zevi Elimelekh of Dinov (who was the Rabbi of Munkacz from 1825–29) was one of the earliest and staunchest hasidic opponents of the haskala in Galicia.7 Although best known for his seminal kabbalistic and hasidic works, Zevi Elimelekh was also the author of a remarkable and highly influential anti-haskala polemic, Ma’ayan Ganim and bequeathed a legacy of hasidic ultra-conservatism to subsequent generations of the Shapira dynasty.  Hayyim Elazar’s father, R. Zevi Hirsch, a noted halakhic authority who was the hasidic Rabbi of Munkacz from 1893–1913, devoted much of his Rabbinic career to limiting the attempts by the Hungarian government to modernize the Jewish educational system with the introduction of secular studies and foreign language instruction.8 A staunch opponent of even the slightest modifications of strict Orthodoxy, Zevi Hirsch Shapira also combatted the proposals to integrate the modern-Orthodox (or “status quo”) and ultra-Orthodox factions into a united community, modeled after the German “Freie Vereinigung fur die Interessen des Orthodoxen” which had been established in 1885 by R. Solomon Breuer.11

Aside from the apparent influence of his own ancestors, Shapira’s community of Munkacz had also long been a stronghold of extreme ultra-Orthodoxy. The Chief Rabbi of Munkacz during the years 1867–79 was R. Hayyim Sofer, one of the most distinguished students (though not a relative) of R. Moses Sofer and a spiritual founder of Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy.12 Sofer was an outspoken opponent of the haskala and Reform movements, and advocated the total separation of the Orthodox community from all Jews or Jewish organizations advocating any changes whatsoever to traditional Jewish ritual:

The central principle is to distance oneself from the innovators; we must form a strong fortress to assure that the community is divided into two camps, so that the separation between the Jews and the innovators will be as great as the distance between heaven and earth. Only in this way shall we succeed . . . 15

As this strong statement suggests, Sofer did not consider the “innovators” as authentic Jews, and he accordingly went so far as to ban “intermarriage” between ultra-Orthodox and Neolog Jews and refused the latter burial in his community’s cemetery. He further prohibited all contact with the “modernizers,” including visiting their sick in the hospital or attending their funerals and week of mourning (shiva).14 Along with R. Hillel Lichtenstein of Kolomea and R. Akiva Yosef Schlesinger, Hayyim Sofer was one of the authors of the historic halakhic manifesto of Michalowce issued in 1865, banning synagogues which had dared to introduce even the slightest structural or liturgical innovations.15 Remarkably, despite his extreme antagonism to all but the strictest adherents of Orthodoxy, Hayyim Sofer was pressured to leave Munkacz because of the hostility to him on the part of the local hasidim who sensed that he was too “modern.” Among the Munkacz Jews’ complaints was that Sofer did not adhere to hasidic customs and maintained a “modern” appearance, rather than wearing the traditional hasidic garb.16

While zealotry was then an integral part of the legacy of the Shapira rabbinic family, and an extreme, segregationist form of ultra-Orthodoxy had long been entrenched in Munkacz, religious monomania was nonetheless taken to unprecedented levels by Hayyim Elazar Shapira. By his time, the rejection of haskala values had generated effective social and institutional strategies within the Orthodox community to shield it from the influences of modernity. Nonetheless, Shapira continued energetically to wage the religious wars of his ancestors, initiated in Munkacz by Zevi Elimelek of Dinov, as if the haskala was a previously unheard-of outrage and an imminent threat to traditional society. He fought to protect the traditional heder and yeshiva curricula against even the slightest modifications, and was quick to censure any innovative trends in Jewish intellectual and educational life.17

The Munkaczer Rebbe did not however limit himself to resisting the integration of secular studies into the curriculum of the heder and yeshivas of Munkacz and other nearby communities.18 Beyond protecting the traditional order of study, Shapira was generally opposed to the introduction of any scientific innovations or technological advances to Jewish life. Convinced that true wisdom could be found only in the traditional texts of Rabbinic Judaism, the Munkaczer Rebbe saw precious little advantage—indeed he saw a great deal of danger—in the pursuit of any scientific disciplines by Jews.

So opposed was he to conceding any merit whatsoever to secular studies that Shapira even contested the classical Rabbinic view that the Greek philosophers derived their wisdom from the Jewish prophets, since it implied a relationship between the Torah and the secular disciplines of the gentiles:

I am shocked that the erudite author of Nishmath Hayyim19 could believe the uncircumcised ancient Greeks’ claim that the holy prophet of God, Jeremiah, would have violated the law, heaven forbid, by teaching Torah to the unclean and uncircumcised Plato.20
The Munkaczer Rebbe engaged in a particularly lengthy polemic against modern medicine and its practitioners. Insisting that the Talmudic Sages were imbued with the most comprehensive medical knowledge imaginable, Shapira railed against the pretensions of the doctors of his day:

The doctors of our generation arrogantly believe that our Sages did not have a proper understanding of medical science, and they now ridicule the treatments [prescribed by the Talmud]. This, despite the fact that we find today that modern medicine is returning again to embrace many of those very treatments. Take, for example, the therapy of “bleeding” which the Sages so often promoted. The doctors of previous generations laughed at all of this, and insisted that it was not wise to draw blood from a sick man, even from those who suffer from lung disease, for [they thought] it would only make the patient even weaker.

But behold how the crown has now been restored to its former glory, and the doctors are again recommending that much blood be drawn, using the special apparatus designed for this purpose, just as the talmudic Sages had always insisted.

Even when the contents of a new pedagogical departure in Jewish life were strictly within the bounds of tradition, the very appearance of novelty was sufficient to evoke Shapira’s strong censure. To take an extreme example, in 1924 he denounced the introduction by Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin, of an organized international program for the daily study of a folio of Talmud as a deviation from the accepted modes of traditional Jewish learning. According to his biographer, David Kahane, Shapira broke with his own family traditions when he established an autonomous school system for the Munkaczer hasidim because of the rising influences of modernity and deviations from traditional learning which he perceived in the existing yeshivas.

Shapira then harbored profound anxieties that Orthodox Judaism was under siege from the many subversive components of modern culture, education, and science. But his deepest fears were aroused by the threat to traditional Jewish society posed by the enthusiastic embrace of modern politics, chiefly Zionism, by the Jews of his generation. Occasionally, his dread of the various political and intellectual trends of modernity coincided. A striking illustration of such a convergence is to be found in Shapira’s disapproval of Jews who engage in the study of engineering or architecture. While conceding that there might be nothing religiously subversive per se in the pursuit of these disciplines, he insisted that they have no particular value for Jews, primarily since neither of them would play any role in the final redemption, as the land of Israel and the third Temple in Jerusalem would be designed and built exclusively by God Himself:

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The Munkaczer Rebbe’s religious zealotry was most evident in his fierce responses to the penetration of modern politics, Zionism in particular, into the Jewish communities of Carpathian Ruthenia and Transylvania after the First World War. The tone of Shapira’s polemic against the nascent Jewish political parties, especially the religious-Zionist Mizrachi and Agudath Israel—both of which he perceived to be even greater threats to tradition than secular Jewish nationalism—were outlandish even by the impressive standards set by Hungarian ultra-orthodox leaders of earlier generations.

Deeply alarmed by the rapid politicization of European Jewry following the traumas of the First World War, Shapira insisted that his followers must have absolutely nothing to do with any of the numerous Jewish parties and organizations which had emerged in the interbellum period. Shapira clung to a romantic and thoroughly pre-modern view of the idyllic Jewish past, in which the faithful Jew’s only concern supposedly had been his direct relationship with God, and his sole activity was to serve Him through prayer and repentance. Sensing that the pristine traditional life of simple faith which he believed had once totally governed European Jewish life was quickly collapsing under the weight of contemporary political developments, he became increasingly possessed by the belief that he was living on the very brink of the apocalypse, and that the traumas of his day were sure signs of the “birthpangs of the messiah.” Although hostile to any form of messianic activism, Shapira was not averse to speculation regarding the timing of the apocalypse. In fact, he calculated and publicly predicted that the messiah would arrive in the fall of 1941.

Shapira’s conviction of the imminence of the messianic era was
expressed in boldly dualistic, often cosmic, terms. He interpreted the political tribulations of his age, beginning with the First World War, as indicators of a rapidly approaching universal showdown between the forces of good and evil. In his Manichean messianic scheme, Zionism was the brainchild of the devil himself, the most dangerous form of false messianism ever to rear its head in Jewish history. The true redemption would emerge with the triumph of the cosmic forces of good which could only be aroused by the intense spiritual efforts and prayers of the tiny remnant of authentic Orthodox Jews: namely, his own followers.

Lurking at the very heart of the Zionist enterprise was, in Shapira's view, a renunciation of faith in the absolute divine governance of the world, and particularly in God's thorough control of Jewish destiny. Zionism represented to him the Jews' abandonment of the messianic promise, and the abdication of their status as God's chosen people. As such, it was not merely a misguided political initiative; rather, as Shapira wrote hundreds of times, Zionism was a fundamental repudiation of one of the thirteen principles of the Jewish faith—the belief in miraculous messianic redemption. And, as his biographer makes very clear, it was Shapira's own messianic obsession which continued to fuel the ferocity of his responses to any political alternatives to miraculous redemption.

It is well known about our Rebbe that all of his days there burnt within him a strong and loving desire to hasten and realize the coming of the Messiah. He expressed this deep desire through his lamentations and terrible weeping over the exile of the divine presence and the concealment of God in his days. He insisted that the sole purpose of the existence of the cosmos, and the sole purpose of all of man's activities on earth, must be only to hasten the revelation of the son of David, King of Israel and the re-building of the Temple on the holy mountain in Jerusalem. He was virtually alone in his generation in this regard, and really dedicated his career and sacrificed his life for the redemption of Israel...

Given the theological depth of his objection to Zionism, it is not surprising that Shapira could not limit himself to a rationally argued political critique of the Jewish national platform. In countless sermons, homilies and essays, he reviled and cursed Zionism as a thoroughly demonic force and a threat to all that is good and sacred not only in Jewish life, but in the cosmos. At times, his denunciations of the Zionists eerily echoed the rhetoric of classical anti-Semitism, as when he blamed them for the spread of the typhus epidemic in Czechoslovakia in 1934. Shapira called repeatedly for a total ban on any Jews—Zionist or not—who associated themselves with the contemporary settlement of the land of Israel.

Shapira strongly opposed not only the advent of modern Jewish nationalism and resisted the emergence of parties whose main agenda was to represent Jewish collective interests; he fought the establishment of new Jewish organizations of any sort, and combatted all innovations in Jewish communal and institutional life, even those of a purely Orthodox religious nature. Underlying Shapira's resistance to these institutions and innovations was his accurate sense that they were primarily dedicated to the amelioration of the material condition of European Jewry, rather than its spiritual refinement. He maintained that any social and political efforts to alleviate the harsh conditions of Jewish life reflected a lack of trust in absolute divine providence and would only serve further to delay the final salvation.

Until the very last days of his life, Shapira constantly warned his followers against involvement in social or political activities of any sort, and insisted that they must rely solely on direct, miraculous divine salvation to solve all of their problems. In his ethical will, he accordingly implored his children and disciples to steer clear of the political turmoil of the day:

To my dear sons and my daughter, my friends and students, may you live long! Please be very careful to walk in the traditional path of our ancestors, without, God forbid, being influenced in any way by the innovators. Adhere simply to the fear of heaven all of your days and do not ever join any group or organization, including those who exhibit split-hoofs [i.e. who, like the pig, show a false external sign of being kosher], the tainted hypocrites such as the Agudists, and Yishuvniks, and their ilk. For their end will be a bitter one, may heaven save us, and they are all infected with heresy [may God protect us from their ideas], and they are delaying the final redemption, through the multitude of their sins.

Shapira was convinced that the most deceptive and "pig-like" of all the new Jewish political parties was Agudath Israel, for which he reserved his most biting condemnations.

### The Struggle Against Agudath Israel

Over the years of his Rabbinate in Munkacz, Shapira's anti-Zionism became increasingly extreme and came eventually to include the non-Zionist Agudath Israel party, which he condemned as a subversive cabal of crypto-Zionist heretics, parading as Torah-faithful Jews. His
opposition to Agudah led Shapira into a major, extended conflict with the most influential hasidic Rebbe of the day, R. Abraham Mordechai Alter of Gur, who was one of the movement’s founders. Although the May, 1912 founding conference of Agudath Israel in Katowicze, Poland, was not attended by any major hasidic Rebbes, many of them sent their blessings, most notably R. Abraham Mordechai, whose letter greeting the establishment of this new Orthodox organization was read aloud before all the participants.

In 1920, Shapira initiated an extensive correspondence with the Gerer Rebbe in which he respectfully, but very candidly, expressed his deep objections to Agudath Israel and challenged the latter to withdraw his own support for the movement. The correspondence was fully recorded in a volume published in Munkacz in 1936 by Shapiro’s hasidim, entitled Sefer Tikkun Olam. The polemical exchanges between the Gerer and Munkaczer Rebbes endured for more than three years, largely because of the latter’s incredible tenacity. When however Shapiro’s various proposals to the Gerer Rebbe—which included convening a joint colloquium on Agudath Israel, consisting of ten representatives each of Polish and Hungarian/Carp-

The Munkaczer ultra-Orthodox—all failed, Shapiro organized a Rabbinical conference in the Slovakian town of Tshap in 1922 for the expressed purpose of challenging the authority of Agudah’s Rabbinical leadership. The central focus of this assembly of ultra-Orthodox Rabbis from the Transylvanian and Carpathian regions of Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia was to denounce publicly the politics of Agudath Israel and to discredit its Rabbinical council, the “Moetzeth Gedolei ha-Torah.” But its real effect was the division of the European, non-Zionist rabbinate into two distinct camps: the mainly German and Polish supporters of the Agudah, which included many of the major Polish hasidic leaders, and the ultra-conservative segregationist Hungarian, Rumanian and Czechoslovakian Rebbes.

While he no doubt understood that Agudath Israel did not in fact embrace Zionist ideology and was established largely to serve as a non-nationalist Orthodox antidote to the religious Zionist Mizrachi party, Shapiro felt that it nonetheless embraced the basic subversive values of Zionism, particularly the agricultural colonization of Palestine by Jews. Moreover, because it “paraded” as an ultra-Orthodox movement, Agudah was far more dangerous and seditious than the mainstream Zionist parties. Consistent with his profound fear of the ubiquitous deceptions of the demonic forces in the universe, and his view that they were represented by a falsely Orthodox Jewish proletariat—the “erev rav” who masquerade as pious Jews—Shapiro maintained an extreme and uncompromising hostility to the movement. He insisted that, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding,

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passively for the redemption, including the redemption of the soil of Israel. The Agudists' agricultural initiatives in Palestine suggested that they believed that the messianic era could be hastened by human initiative, when in fact salvation would be totally miraculous. In its domestic program too, Agudah was seen as rejecting the traditionally passive faith mandated of the Jews in exile. For the establishment, by European Jews, of a political party to represent Orthodox interests was, in his view, a dangerous deviation from the traditionally passive politics of shidduchim on which the Jews had relied for centuries.

The second obligation was mainly economic in nature. The Agudah had established a separate fund for their colonizing efforts in Palestine, called “Keren ha-Yishuv.” Shapira accused this fund, together with the general Zionists' “Keren ha-Yesod,” of deliberately draining away support from the traditional endowment of R. Meir Baal ha-Nes, upon which the ultra-Orthodox Yishuv and its yeshivas, including the Munkaczer Yeshiva and Kolel in Jerusalem, were so dependent.39

Finally, Shapira assailed the pedagogical approach of Agudah's educational institutions. He suspected that the schools established by the Agudah—particularly the Rabbinical Seminary in Warsaw—were teaching various secular studies which are prohibited by Jewish law. Action on this suspicion and an invitation from the Gerer Rebbe to come and see the Rabbinical Seminary firsthand, Shapira travelled to Warsaw for an "inspection" of the school, which, he claimed, revealed that his worst fears about its deviancies from traditional learning were confirmed.40 Shapira objected not only to the Seminary's curriculum; he even found the institution's official name—"The Rabbinical Seminary of Poland" to be offensive, and considered the Polish-language sign bearing that name on the front door a "public desecration of the Divine name, alien to our holy faith."41

For all these reasons, Shapira was one of the two most outspoken Rabbinic opponents of Agudath Israel in Eastern Europe, the other being the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, R. Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson.42

THE POLEMIC AGAINST THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Hayyim Elazar Shapira succeeded his father as the Chief Rabbi of Munkacz in the fall of 1913, less than a year before the outbreak of the First World War. Much of the early period of his rabbinate in Munkacz was, naturally enough, overwhelmed by the turmoil and political instability which took hold of the city during the war, and in its immediate aftermath. Although Russian troops never entered Munkacz, they came perilously close, and the city was for a short time bombarded by Russian artillery. Despite the threat of an imminent Russian invasion, Hayyim Elazar called, predictably enough, for passive faith in God and instructed his hasidim not to desert the city. As it turned out, Munkacz was spared serious devastation, and after the war Shapira recalled his advice with obvious self-satisfaction:

...I announced and warned that not a single one of us should dare try to escape our city, and assured everyone that the evil enemy that was then approaching, the Russian army [may the name of the wicked be blotted out] would not enter the city, and the fear of the Russians was an unnecessary panic, for God would scatter the bones of the enemies who surround us. And so it was! And I have recorded this incident so that it be a reminder for this and future generations that we must place our full faith in God.43

This insistence upon complete, passive trust in Divine providence in times of political turmoil was to become the central guiding principle of Hayyim Elazar's leadership and the leitmotif of his writings after the First World War. Responding to the furious pace of the politicization of Jewish life in this period, he insisted that all human attempts to ameliorate the situation of the Jewish people were not only futile: they reflected a lack of proper faith in God's control of human affairs.

While the main targets of Shapira's critique of all Jewish political and social activism were, as we have already noted, the Zionists and Agudath Israel colonists, in the aftermath of the war he repeatedly and forcefully condemned the organized efforts of European Jewry to find relief for its plight as a persecuted minority through the agency of the newly established League of Nations.

After centuries of being treated purely as a religious minority, and remaining at the mercy of local authorities, the Jews were, for the first time in their history, now being accorded by the League of Nations the status of a legitimate member of the community of nations. Despite not having a land of their own, the Jewish delegates to the League were treated in much the same way as delegates of other national groups, and their grievances were taken up with the same seriousness and respect as, say, those of the Poles and Czechs. The Jews' participation in the League then represented a radical departure from the traditional politics of shidduchim, through which Jewish concerns had always been brought before the local authorities in the spirit of a merciful petition of the powerless before their beneficent rulers.

Across the world, most Jews greeted the legitimation by the league of their status as a bona fide nation, deserving of the protection of the international community, with great optimism and enthusiasm. No longer would the Jews be reviled as the pathetic practitioners of
a fossilized faith, and oppressed as helpless, scattered remnants of a people which had long ago forfeited its national legitimacy and power. It comes as little surprise then that Jews played a significant role in the activities of the League, and that many Jewish “Societies for the League of Nations” were established across Europe, in America and in Palestine.\(^4^4\) Such a society was established in Czechoslovakia, into which Munkacz had been incorporated after the war, as early as 1924.\(^4^5\) Shapira was deeply upset by the conspicuous Jewish presence at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919–20, and absolutely scandalized by the establishment of local Jewish societies to benefit the League of Nations.

Shapira was apparently well aware of the monumental historical shift signified by the League of Nations’ entire approach to the “Jewish Question.” He displayed great contempt for the widespread Jewish support for the League, and attacked in particular those who were instrumental in establishing the Jewish Societies. His harsh criticism of these societies, which he referred to contemptuously as the “shalmonim” (pacifists) and the “kath ha-Friedistn” (the sect of peaceniks), was threefold.

First, Shapira rejected the naive optimism of Jewish leaders who put their trust in the international community to resolve their problems. The problems of the Jews could, after all, genuinely be resolved only through the agency of the Messiah in the final, miraculous redemption. All other solutions were not only ephemeral, but deeply deceptive. He therefore ridiculed those who expected the conditions of Jewish life to improve in the wake of world peace. Shapira insisted that all initiatives by Jews to help realize social harmony and international peace in war-devastated Europe represented, not unlike Zionism, an abandonment of the traditional, passive Jewish reliance upon messianic salvation. All political efforts by mere mortals to achieve harmony between nations, and thereby attain tranquility for the Jews living in their midst, were then both futile and heretical:

> From this our faith [in the messianic redemption] there is a unerring repudiation of the sect of peaceniks and those who chase after the peace of the nations. Their leaders tell them not even to mention the idea of redemption, but to focus only on attaining peace and repose in our exile... On account of these ideas, they will never repent, and they will actually cause the destruction of the world, God forbid, for they are sinners who cause others to sin and lead them astray.\(^4^6\)

Second, Shapira’s strong opposition to the quest for political peace, while rooted in a profound faith in Divine providence, was also motivated by his firm understanding of the specific way in which redemption would unfold. In diametrical opposition to those who believed that the utopian era would emerge gradually, and only once the nations of the world will have managed to attain international peace and harmony, he envisaged a dramatically different scenario. Shapira insisted that salvation would materialize suddenly and miraculously precisely at a time when the nations are embedded in such intense conflict that the forces of evil will appear to have nearly overcome the world. And he was absolutely convinced that the years of strife and unrest during the First World War and its immediate aftermath constituted precisely such an absolutely dark era, setting the stage for the sudden advent of the messiah. As already mentioned, he was possessed by the belief that he was living in the terrible days characterized in Rabbinic literature as “birth-pangs of the Messiah.” Right up to the very last days of his life Shapira saw nothing but mounting heresy and evil wherever he looked.\(^4^7\) The Munkaczer Rebbe shouldered a heavy sense of being tested by the mounting evil which surrounded the Jews:

> Behold, these are the terrible trials which we are suffering during this epoch of divine concealment, which precedes the redemption. For we are compelled to wage battle with the evil forces which threaten us from every side; and we must be ready to sacrifice our lives [in this battle]... It is so very difficult to have to fight anew each and every day against these awesome trials which confront us like steep mountains. But we must be ever-vigilant in this our service of God...\(^4^8\)

Shapira’s perspective on the nature and timing of the apocalypse was nicely summed up by his disciple R. Shlomo Zucker, in a monograph on the theme of redemption commissioned by the Munkaczer Rebbe himself:

> In any event, it is abundantly clear that the arrival of our righteous Messiah will only occur during a time of great suffering and warfare... Indeed, it is from the midst of the greatest hardships that redemption will spring forth... And this is, in my opinion, the meaning of the verse: “It is a time of great tribulation for Jacob, but from it shall he be saved.” (Jeremiah 30:7). That is, salvation will emerge out of the worst pain and suffering. We then find that affliction is the true source of the final redemption.\(^4^9\)

Given such a scenario for redemption it is understandable that Shapira was convinced that all human efforts dedicated to resolving the overwhelming problems afflicting the European community and world Jewry would certainly be of no avail. Worse than that, these initiatives actually threatened to delay even further the messianic era by removing, even in part, the extreme distress and abysmal suffering
which are the necessary pre-conditions for the sudden flowering of the final redemption. Only miraculous divine salvation could possibly transform a world which had reached such an abysmal state. In refuting the naive notion that political and humanitarian activism could help usher in the utopian era, or that salvation would draw nearer as the socio-political and economic conditions of the Jews of Europe improved, Shapira cited—as a paradigm of the redemptive process—the Talmudic statement that the Jews were redeemed from the misery of their bondage in Egypt only by virtue of their repentance and entreaties to God for salvation:

This [talmudic tradition] is a refutation of those who err and cause others to stray in the belief that before the Messiah can come, there will have to be peace among the nations. This is nothing but the temptation of the evil instinct which tries to trap the Jews' hearts and prevent them from returning to God.30

The third basis for Shapira's objection to Jewish support for the League of Nations had to do with the very conception of Jewish identity which was implicit in the League's entire approach to the "Jewish problem." Rather than being perceived primarily as a religious tribe, as in the past, the Jews were now granted recognition by the League as a people like all others, with legitimate national aspirations and territorial rights. This, Shapira knew, would in the end only help advance the Zionist agenda. As the League, through its Permanent Mandates Commission, turned its attention increasingly to the implementation of the Balfour declaration (which it officially endorsed on July 24, 1922), Shapira's worst fears were in fact realized. The League of Nations had indeed become an instrument of the Zionist "demon," yet another "implement of Satan" in the cosmic battle preceding the apocalypse. The Munkaczer Rebbe railed over and again against the Balfour declaration, which he always referred to utilizing the clever pun, "Baal Peor."

Shapira concisely summed up his rejection of the two prevalent political approaches to solving the Jewish problem of his day—Zionism and Jewish pacifism:

My dear friends, brothers, and teachers! The essence of repentance is the hope of sons to return to their Father in Heaven, and that is the true desire for a complete redemption, speedily and in our day. But in these trying times, which are the birthpangs of the Messiah, there have risen against us [and against our Torah] two sects, from the right and from the left.

The first is the sect of Zionists who claim that the most important principle is nationalism and the return to the land of Israel to inherit the fields and vineyards there; that the observance of the faith of our holy Torah is not important. These are the destroyers of Israel, and particularly of the holy city of Jerusalem.

The second is the sect of pacifists who tell us not to appeal for the redemption in these times of the birthpangs of Messiah, but instruct us that we must first pursue the peace of the nations. They and their leaders have thereby caused Israel to go astray in this false faith and in their heresy against the obligation to anticipate the arrival of the Messiah each and every day.

And we who still adhere to the faith of our ancestors are crushed between these snakes and scorpions... So that, on the one hand there is the sect of the Zionists whose desire is to inherit the land of Israel only by grace of the goodwill of the monarchies and the active support of the nations; but they revile the Torah and the laws and commands of our heavenly Father.

On the other hand there is the sect of the Friedists who claim that they prefer to stay outside of Israel and live in peace among the nations; this [i.e., achieving world peace] is therefore their main objective.

But the true children of Jacob desire with neither of these. Rather we pray that God will sound the Shofar for our freedom and raise the banner—that is, the miracle [a play on the Hebrew homonym "nes"] for the ingathering of our exiles. For only by virtue of divine miracles will we be redeemed.31

Although the tendencies betrayed respectively by the Jewish pacifists and the Zionists represented two different and, to a large degree, competing agendas in Jewish political life—i.e. the desire for the peaceful integration of Jews in the European diaspora on the one hand, and the disengagement of Jews from Europe via the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine on the other—Shapira saw a clear connection between them. After all, both of these factions used the arena of the League of Nations practically to advance their cause, and both shared an optimistic view of historical progress towards an idyllic, or messianic, era. He therefore linked his polemic against the League's pursuit of world peace with its efforts with regard to Palestine.32

Most pertinently for Shapira, both the quest for universal peace and the intent of the world community to establish a national Jewish home in Palestine constituted a rejection of God's mastery over world affairs, particularly His control over the destiny of the Jewish people. Any quest to achieve political utopia, or even mere social progress, through human agency, regardless of its specifics, was in effect a dismissal of the divine hand in history. In a sermon delivered on the Jewish New Year, after reviewing at great length the political follies of the contemporary Jewish leadership, Shapira concluded that Torah-faithful Jewry must abstain completely from political involve-
ments of any kind, and maintain a passive posture of total reliance on providential salvation:

Therefore, the only true and correct approach left to us is to expunge from our hearts all of the vanities of the politics of the nations. For that is not our place, and politics will not save us, as there is no true salvation other than the messianic era. So, when approaching God in prayer during this sacred time of Rosh Ha-hashanna, and in sounding the shofar, we must dismiss all traces of any other thoughts, so that all of our hopes, wishes and prayers are dedicated only to the complete redemption of the Messiah. 55

Aside from the removal of God from the center stage of Jewish history, the fundamental error shared by the Jewish pacifists and the Zionists was that both viewed the advent of the utopian era as the culmination of a gradual historical process directed as ameliorating the Jewish condition. Convinced that salvation would emerge suddenly and miraculously precisely when the Jewish problem was most acute, Shapiro was particularly incensed by the notions, made popular in religious-Zionist circles by Rabbi Abraham Isaac ha-Kohen-Kook, that Jewish history was steadily evolving towards the redemptive era, and that messianic salvation was a dialectical-historical process in which the secular pioneers of Ereẓ Yisrael were the main, if unknowing, protagonists. 56

Shapira’s harsh criticisms of all temporal, political solutions to the “Jewish problem” in Europe were not only addressed to the Jews themselves. His conviction that only God could extricate His chosen people from their torments in Europe was rooted in a profound contempt for gentiles and their governments. This contempt was often expressed in strikingly nihilistic terms. So, for example, in a Rosh Ha-shanna sermon delivered in 1917, the Munkaczer Rebbe cursed all the governments of the world and their leaders, and prayed for their imminent downfall as a pre-condition for the messianic era:

Down with all of the leaders of the nations of the world! Down with them all! How dare these evildoers retain their power on high, while we Jews remain so low? 57

THE RADICAL REJECTION OF OTHER JEWS

The Munkaczer Rebbe’s disdain for those who dedicated their efforts to the pursuit of peaceful co-existence was not limited to the arena of international politics. Within Jewish communal affairs, he consistently rejected appeasement as a legitimate tactic of religious leader-ship, and called instead for open condemnation—even all-out war—against those Jewish leaders whose views he did not share. In Shapiro’s view, the rabbis and other Jewish authorities of his day who tried to foster harmony between the divergent factions of the community “for the sake of social peace” were seriously misguided. He insisted that true and final peace would be secured for Israel not through the appeasement of sinners but only by the likes of the biblical zealot Phinehas b. Elazar, who was rewarded God’s covenant of peace for having slain the Israelite man and Midianite women in the midst of their carnal encounter. 58 Accommodating those who violate the divine covenant will lead not to peace, but contribute instead to the triumph of the forces of evil, and the ultimate downfall of the pious. His frequent, rigorous denunciations of other, more moderate Rabbis earned Shapiro the rather odd honor of being celebrated by his hasidim as “the most fanatical rebuke in all of our generation.” 59 He took pride in claiming that he was the first of the European Rabbis to call for open public protests against all Jewish pioneering activities in Palestine. 60 In his speech at the opening session of the Munkacze Yeshiva in the summer of 1926 Shapiro railed at length against those who were seeking to achieve harmony among different factions of his community:

Behold my brothers and friends, my masters and teachers, do not believe that any good will greet those who seek conciliation with evildoers instead of standing firm like a solid wall in the war for God and His Torah, and who wraps himself in the false garb of peace, and exhorts the evildoers to take hold of his hand so that there will be peace on all sides of the community. This is not so. For as our Sages proclaimed in tractate Sotah: “He who appeases the evildoer is destined to fall into his hands.” ... this will be the fate of all those who today straddle the fence ... 61

True to his rallying call for all-out war against any Jew who dared to deviate even in the slightest from his particular form of ultra-Orthodoxy, Shapiro was embedded, for most of his life, in bitter disputations with those Rabbis with whom he did not fully agree. As already mentioned, he engaged in a lengthy polemic against the Gerer Rebbe on account of his support for Agudath Israel. 62 Shapiro’s conflicts with his rabbinical colleagues were not however limited to those who were clearly identified as his main nemeses—the Religious Zionist and Agudath Israel parties. His long hit-list of heretics included other ultra-Orthodox, anti-Zionist rabbis and communal leaders as well. Shapiro was deeply alienated from many of the leading hasidic Rebbe’s of his day, including those who shared his contempt for Zionism, such
as R. Isaachar Dov Rokeach of Belz. When, in the wake of the war, the latter sought refuge in Munkacz in 1920, Shapira openly proclaimed:

There is no room for the two of us in this one place.\textsuperscript{61}

Shapira also harshly criticized numerous other hasidic Rebbes for engaging in particular customs and practices of which he did not fully approve, often castigating them as fraudulent religious leaders. He frequently accused the hasidic Rebbe who had emigrated to America of heretical, modernizing tendencies.\textsuperscript{62} Particularly offensive to Shapira was the custom of many hasidic Rebbes, both in Europe and America, of accepting \textit{pidyonot} (cash gifts made to the Rebbe in exchange for his blessings) from non-hasidic and non-Orthodox Jews. He repudiated their justification for this practice—that the acceptance of tangible support from “evildoers” forges a closeness to the Rebbe’s court and will finally lead to their return to the fold of traditional Judaism.\textsuperscript{63} Deeply pessimistic about the chance that “evildoers” might ever repent, Shapira consistently prohibited any association with Jews who were not strictly Orthodox, and he spoke with great bitterness and cynicism about the true motives of hasidic leaders who ignored the allegedly strict prohibition against keeping company with the wicked:

The desire of those [Rabbis] who seek to appease the evildoers is wrong, despite their claims that they are thus increasing the peace of the world by this openness to the non-Orthodox. We must all lament the behavior of the hasidic Rebbe whose task it really is to establish the faith of the Torah and proudly raise its banner; but in fact they are doing the very opposite. For they ingratiate themselves to the wealthy Jews even if they are complete sinners and Sabbath desecrators. They do this only in order to accommodate them and thereby receive their large donations (“\textit{pidyonot”). They thus enhance the glory of their households and courts and augment their own wealth, while diminishing the glory of heaven and lowering the prestige of the Torah. As for their claim that through this [i.e., the acceptance of such non-Orthodox Jews] they will cause them to return to Judaism, this is an evident lie, for not a single one has ever returned in this way. Still, the Rebbe are afraid to rebuke them for their evil ways, lest they stop bringing their donations . . . \textsuperscript{64}

Shapira’s insistence on distancing himself completely from all Jews who had deviated in any way from his version of strict Orthodoxy represented both an extension and a deepening of the schism which had already developed in Hungarian Jewry during the course of the nineteenth century, particularly after the ultra-Orthodox were allowed to establish an autonomous community in 1871. Although his ultra-Orthodox predecessors were certainly extreme in their condemnation of and dissociation from the non-Orthodox, Shapira broke new ground in the art of intolerance. To begin with, he categorically rejected any possibility that these “wicked” Jews might ever return to traditional ways, and thus prohibited any contact with them, even for evangelical purposes. He often expressed the sentiment that the non-Orthodox were far worse even than idolators, and actually ruminated that life would be so much easier if those Jews who were not fully Orthodox would simply abandon the Jewish religion altogether:

If only they would completely change their faith we would at least enjoy some respite from the masses of Jewish evildoers and their many wicked conspiracies.\textsuperscript{65}

Shapira also extended the parameters of the earlier ultra-Orthodox hostility to other Jewish groups. While zealous Rabbis such as Hayyim Sofer, Hillel Lichtenstein and Akiva Yosef Schlesinger had already called for a total separation of the Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities and condemned the neo-Orthodox faction as an “	extit{erev rav},” Shapira’s expressions of contempt for other Jews reached new extremes. Consistent with his sense that his generation was enduring the birthpangs of the messiah, Shapira viewed the divisions within the contemporary Jewish community in dramatically dualistic, cosmic terms, signifying the domestic Jewish element of that final great cosmic battle between the universal forces of good and evil. So far as he was concerned, there was no more demonic or subversive force in the universe than those who masquerade as being pious Jews, but are in fact nothing of the kind. Though similar ideas are to be found in the writings of some earlier Hungarian Rabbis, Shapira’s real innovation was that he went so far as to classify many leaders of the ultra-Orthodox and hasidic communities as belonging to the demonic forces as well:

Behold how in our own days some of the leading hasidic Rebbes—\textit{who are in fact false prophets}, may God protect us from them—have led the community of Israel astray regarding the re-building of our Holy Temple. For they have joined forces with the innovators and “builders,” even with the Zionists. These [rabbis] have sinned greatly, and in an extraordinary fashion.\textsuperscript{66}

\textbf{THE HERMENEUTICS OF ZEALOTRY}

One of the ironies of ultra-Orthodox Jewish thought in Hungary is the extent to which it was compelled to offer novel, and often forced,
interpretations of Jewish law, and place new emphases on formerly obscure and non-normative sources, in order to justify its conservative rejection of all that was perceived to be innovative in Jewish life. Shapira’s writings are filled with such contrived interpretations, which are usually employed to support his radical rejection of other Jews. No doubt cognizant of the originality of his own readings of many Rabbinic traditions, Shapira warned against alleged misinterpretations of traditional texts by others, which seem to call for tolerance and the inclusion of wayward Jews.

The creative re-interpretation of normative Rabbinic texts and the re-casting of long accepted doctrines, in the service of Orthodoxy’s new zealousy, by the Munkaczer Rebbe and others of his ilk, is a large subject which merits separate study. The following three surprising, yet representative, interpretations are among the many examples of the innovative hermeneutics employed by the Munkaczer Rebbe to justify his extremism:

I

A central principle of Rabbinic law, at least since the high middle ages, instructs that all born Jews, even when they stray from the faith, are eternally considered to be Jewish. During the crusades, the comforting Talmudic epigram regarding the exiled Jewish nation, “Israel, though it has sinned, remains Israel,” was cited and personalized to justify the retention of individual apostates within the community of Israel. Through his own writings, Shapira insisted that those who had deviated from strict ultra-Orthodoxy were not to be considered Jews at all. He was thus pressed to re-interpret and neutralize the Talmud’s principle of inclusion by arguing that it is governed by the broader and more powerful principle of exclusion of all “heretical” Jews who had deviated fundamentally from the Jewish faith—namely, the Zionists and Agudists:

These evil doers do nothing but sin and cause others to sin, through their schools and their houses of heresy. They come to the land of Israel by way of infidelity, without faith and without Torah, and they are certainly frustrating the redemption and bringing chaos into the world and contaminating both the land and the people of Israel. Moreover, God only weeps and laments for those children of Israel who, even if they have sinned, remain part of Israel. This does not however include the heretics and infidels about whom scripture proclaims: None of them who go that way shall ever return.

II

One of the most celebrated legends in the Talmud is the story of how Beruriah, the saintly wife of the Sage R. Meir, rebuked her husband when she overheard him praying for the demise of the wicked. Citing the scripture: “May sins disappear from the land, and there be sinners no more” (Psalms 104) Beruriah noted that “the verse says that “sins”—not “sinners”—should disappear, and she thus insisted that R. Meir pray for the repentance and return of the wicked to the fold of the righteous, rather than hope for their downfall.

Shapira struggled with this Talmudic story, since it stood in flagrant opposition to his entire approach to non-Orthodox Jewry. After citing some harsh Biblical verses to counter Beruria’s sentiment, he still felt constrained to explain the Talmud’s apparent endorsement of her view. He tried to achieve this with the following, stunningly sexist remark:

Since it is both obvious and certain that the Talmud did not take seriously the opinions of a woman, it did not bother to present any opposing opinions [to that of Beruria]. For there is no wisdom in women... and therefore no-one ever paid any attention to Beruria’s statement here.

III

The central set of benedictions of the daily, Sabbath and festival liturgies (i.e. the “Amidah”) concludes with a prayer for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, which reads:

May it be thy will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, that the Temple will be built speedily and in our own days...

Shapira had a problem with the phrase, “will be built,” in this most familiar and popular of Jewish supplications, for it leaves open the question of who the builder of the Temple would in fact be, thus allowing for the possibility of human construction. As we have seen, Shapira insisted that God alone would be the architect and constructor of the third Temple. He thus suggested that the correct reading of the phrase should be:

May it be thy will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, that You will build the Temple speedily and in our days.

Being so deeply conservative, however, Shapira did not recommend that his followers actually change the established liturgical formula-
CONCLUSION

In his study of Polish hasidism in the twentieth century, Mendel Piekarz has painstakingly documented the degree to which it had, by the inter-war period, effectively retreated from most of the radical mystical and social ideas of the movement's founders and had become thoroughly conservative in its religious ideas and practices. An examination of the theology of the Munkaczer Rebbe, particularly when compared to early hasidic traditions, indicates that Piekarz's thesis applies in equal, if not greater, measure to the leading hasidic rabbis of Carpathian Ruthenia and Transylvania.

To be sure, the Munkaczer Rebbe saw himself as part of the unbroken chain of hasidic leadership, and as a spiritual heir of the Baal Shem Tov and Maggid of Mezerich. His writings are filled with learned references to hasidic texts and traditions. He exhibited great pride in his hasidic ideology, traditions and lineage and occasionally mocked the cold, unfeeling religiosity of the “Ashkenazim” (as the mithnagdim were known in Hungary). Nevertheless, he consistently applied hasidic doctrine in a most cautious and conservative manner, most often depleting it of its original bold theological implications. At times, Shapira openly rejected classical hasidism’s more radical, or controversial, tendencies. For example, in referring to the hasidic practice of delaying the daily prayers beyond the Talmudically mandated times, he insisted that this was legitimately practiced only by the great Zaddikim of earlier generations. Shapira actually cautioned his followers against being unduly influenced by the maverick leaders of early hasidism about whom he warned: “Do not try to learn from them, neither be thou critical of them.”

Regarding the Besht’s rejection of asceticism and his advocacy of “returning to God by mending a broken heart with joy . . . and not to weaken the mind and body through the torments of fasting,” Shapira maintained:

As for us, we are in no position to maintain this as a fixed principle for the masses, that every person who wishes to return to God should follow this path (of the Besht), or that this is the appropriate path for all who return to God.

Despite early hasidism’s emphasis on celebrating the presence of God in the earthly here and now, Shapira maintained— as did the early mithnagdim—that, due to the precipitous spiritual decline which had overtaken his generation, the most effective way to fortify one’s

religiosity is to engage in self-denial and focus constantly on human limitations and mortality:

. . . and although it is written in the Torah that we must “serve God with joy,” and we are warned in the Biblical rebuke (that God’s punishment will be meted out) “because you have failed to serve God with joy and a happy heart” [Deuteronomy 28:47], the truth is that on account of the ascendancy of evil forces and the evil instinct, particularly in our own days and on account of our many sins, the spiritual advice of earlier times will not help . . . and we need to remind ourselves of the day of death, for only in this way will we defeat the evil instinct and return to God.

Of course, the most celebrated and influential of early hasidism’s radical theological notions was the tactical embrace of evil—and evil-doers—for the sake of uplifting and restoring them to their divine source, and the related practice of descent into the evil realm of the kefillot for the sake of ultimate spiritual ascent. Hasidism’s founders maintained a supremely optimistic conviction that all of the evil which man beholds in the world is a mere apparition, a masking of the divinity which actually lies beyond his normal, limited sense perceptions. That optimism was in turn rooted in a powerful belief in the immanence of God throughout the created universe. This monistic view of the universe and mystical optimism regarding the saturation of the world by God led to a remarkable social pluralism in early hasidism; a willingness to embrace alienated and apparently wicked Jews with the goal of restoring them to God. This populism was in fact one of the most conspicuous social features of early hasidism, and was for that reason widely celebrated by romanticists of the movement, such as Horodetsky, Peretz and Buber.

In the deeply conservative theology of the Munkaczer Rebbe we find that hasidism’s monistic view of the world was totally transformed, and its mystical optimism and social populism completely rejected. Far from embracing hasidism’s optimistic mystical monism, Shapira viewed the contemporary world in apocalyptically dualistic and deeply pessimistic terms. He perceived the forces of good and evil to be pitted against each other for the final cosmic battle leading to the imminent messianic redemption. So that, unlike the theoreticians of classical hasidism for whom the messianic impulse had been somewhat neutralized by mystical faith in the immediate presence of God and redemptive power of the Zaddik, Shapira obsessed about the birthpangs of the Messiah from which he believed he and his faithful were suffering terribly.

Rather than dedicating his spiritual life to uncovering the Godliness hidden in all things, regardless of how apparently evil, Shapira
dedicated his Rabbinic career to finding the evil hidden in all Jews, no matter how pious they might appear. Thus he implored his followers to see through the deceptions of the religious Zionists and Agudists, and to perceive the evil lurking behind their mask of piety:

All who have perceptive eyes and have not been struck with blindness by their desire for wealth and horror will see that these parties have no standing and no future. But alas, the masses of our people are unable to discern and to separate the pure from the unclean and the holy from the profane . . .

In the religious thought of Hayyim Elazar Shapira we then have a severe and stunning example of the degree to which hasidism—by the eve of the Holocaust—had been transformed from a populist, optimistic spiritual revolution into the most pessimistic, elitist and reactionary religious movement in Jewish life.

There were, in the end, tragic consequences to the profound conservatism of the Munkaczer Rebbe. His bottomless hostility to Zionism, combined with his disdain for America and its Jews, led him to insist that his followers not emigrate from Europe. He referred to the coveted "certificates" for emigration to Palestine in the 1920s as "shmad-tzetlekh" (certificates of apostasy) and "toytan-shayn" ("death certificates"), and predicted that Jews who followed the Zionists would all meet a violent death in the holy land. At the same time, he assured his own followers that by enduring the European exile they would remain safely in the protective hands of Providence. Ultimately, Shapira's forceful rejection of all political solutions to the Jewish problem in pre-Holocaust Europe, rendered virtually all of his followers vulnerable only to the "final solution" which the Nazis were to visit upon them.

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NOTES


On the spiritual roots and early history of Zionism in central Europe, Hungary in particular, see Y. Z. Zahavi, Me-ha-Hatam Sofer ad Herzl (Jerusalem, 1972); on the first Mizrachi conference in Hungary, see chapter 17.

War on Modernity of Rabbi Shapira

Regarding Zahavi's book, the reader is warned that while it includes much helpful historical and bibliographical data, its analysis is essentially flawed by a strongly apologetic agenda. The author clearly is intent on interpreting any signs of a positive orientation to the land of Israel or the mitzvah of aliyah as signs of proto-Zionist proclivities. He thus intentionally downplays the very strong anti-Zionism of a great many European Rabbis. In fact, in this extensive treatment of the history of Hungarian, Rumanian and Carpathian Zionism, the Munkaczer Rebbe is never even mentioned.

2. The many epistles and responsa issued by the leading Rabbis of central and eastern Europe denouncing the Zionist movement were collected in the following volumes: S. Z. Landau & Y. Rabinowitz (eds.), Or la-Yesharim (Warsaw, 1900); A. B. Steinberg (ed.) Daat ha-Rabanim (Warsaw, 1902); and Hayyim Bloch (ed.) Derev Siftei Yesharim, 3 Vols. (New York, 1959).


3. A richly documented, if somewhat apologetic, account of the hasidic response to the Zionist movement and the history of hasidic aliyah to Israel in the modern period is Yitzhak Alfasi, Ha-Hasidut ve-Shivvah Zion (Tel Aviv, 1986). Alfasi's book includes appendixes reproducing many of the most important primary sources of the leading hasidic Rebbe's responses to the rise of Zionism.

4. Despite his role as the leading Orthodox opponent of Zionism in Europe, Shapira has attracted precious little scholarly attention. See, however, Shmuel ha-Kohen Weingarten, "ha-Admor mi-Munkaczb Rabi Hayyim Elazar Shapira—Baal Techusha Bikorrit," Shana be-Shana (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 440-449; and Aviezri Ravitsky, Ha-Ketz ha-Meguleh u-Medinath ha-Yehudim (Tel Aviv, 1933), pp. 60-74. Shapira's disciple, David Kahana, authored two hagiographies of his Rebbe, Toledot Rabenu & Seder Shana ha-Acharonah (Munkacz, 1937). The latter work deals exclusively with the last year of Shapira's life. Yekhiel Mikhail Gold's anthology, Darkhei Hayyim ve-Shalom (Brooklyn, 1979), while primarily concerned with the religious and liturgical customs of the Munkaczer Rebbe, also includes much biographical material.

5. Shapira was a prolific writer. His published works are: Sheelo't u-Teshuvot Minha'h Elazar (Munkacz & Pressburg, 1902-1938), 7 volumes.


10. Ma'amor Hilel de-Hespeda (Pressburg, 1932).

11. Divrei Torah (Munkacz, 1929-36), 9 volumes.

12. Darkhei Teshuva 'al Hilkhot Mi'kvaot (Munkacz, 1936).

13. Ma'amor Adon Kol (Munkacz, 1936).

An anthology of Shapira's thoughts on the theme of Messianic redemption was published by the Munkaczer community in Israel: *Kunteres Yemoth ha-Mashiahh* (undated). The letters and epistles of the Shapira hasidic dynasty, from R. Zevi Elimelekh of Dinov until R. Hayyim Elazar of Munkacz are found in *Iggeroth Shapira*, ed. Berish Weinberger (Brooklyn, 1983).

6. Shapira visited Palestine at the invitation of the ailing mystical and Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, Solomon Eliezer Alfandari (widely known as the Saba Kadisha: 1829–1930), and was at his bedside when he died. The trip elicited tremendous fascination at the time, and is recorded in great detail in a daily chronicle, *Mas'ah Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem, 1963) written by his disciple Moshe Goldstein, who accompanied Shapira from Munkacz to Palestine.

The visit of the Munkaczer Rebbe to Palestine was followed closely and with great interest by his hasidim in Europe, and was the subject of regular reports in the ultra-Orthodox newspaper in Munkacz, *Yiddishe Zeitung*. On the occasion of this trip, the paper, whose editorial policy was controlled by the Munkaczer hasidim, also published a feature story on the Saba Kadisha ("Der Elster Yid in Der Velt," May 3, 1930). Soon after the Rebbe's return, he offered the *Yiddishe Zeitung*'s editor a rare opportunity to question him on his impressions of the visit to Palestine ("An Intervyoo mit'n Munkaczer Rov, Shlita," June 13, 1950).


8. R. Zevi Elimelekh Shapira's most important works are:
   - *Agra De-Kala* (Munkacz, 1942).
   - *Agra De-Pirka* (Lemberg, 1910).
   - *Derekh Pkedekha* (Lemberg, 1914).
   - *Sefer or ha-Hayyim im Peyrush Ma'ayan Ganim* (Lublin, 1912).


One of the earliest anti-haskala polemics, *Ma'ayan Ganim* (Lublin, 1912) is not only important for its intellectual content; it is also remarkable for its literary form. Shapira wrote the book as a commentary to *Or ha-Hayyim*, the famous fifteenth-century assault on Maimonidean philosophical rationalism by Joseph Yaavetz, which had been written in the wake of the Spanish expulsion. Deliberately oblivious to the very specific historical context of his utext, Shapira used Yaavetz's polemic as a springboard for his own attack on the "rationalists" of his day—i.e., the maskillim.

Hayyim Elazar Shapira often cited this work, and drew a direct parallel between the "heresies" of medieval philosophy, the haskala, and the perfidies

**War on Modernity of Rabbi Shapira**


11. Zevi Hirsch argued that while such unions might be necessary in Germany, in Hungary the ultra-Orthodox were far more powerful and therefore had no need to resort to combining forces with the more moderate Orthodox groups. See, David Gelb, *Beit Shlomo: Zevi Tikveth*, part II, p. 70.

Some years later, his son, Hayyim Elazar, also pointed to the different spiritual needs of the German and Hungarian Orthodox communities, going so far as to concede that the Zionist parties might even have some value for German Jewry:

I have spoken at length in many of my sermons against the organizations and political parties, such as the Zionist Agudists and Mizraitchists, which perhaps do not cause so much harm there (in Germany), and might even serve a good purpose; but for us, they are a terrible poison whose source is the primordial snake, and they violate the bounds of law, and deviate from the ways of our ancestors. (*Divrei Torah*, 4:93)


13. *Kan Sofer*, #39, p. 38. (Excerpt from an 1872 epistle to R. Joseph Saul Nathanson of Lvov, regarding the appropriate posture of the ultra-Orthodox community vis-a-vis the spread of Reform Judaism to eastern Europe).

14. See *Kan Sofer*, #49 (pp. 44–45), where Sofer, in an epistle to R. Moses Shick, enacts twenty prohibitions against the non-Orthodox, all intended to separate them completely from his community. In 1869, in response to the public desecration of the Sabbath by two Jewish doctors in Munkacz, Sofer published a work on the severity of Sabbath violations, entitled *Sha'arei Hayyim* (Munkacz, 1869). In it he argued that Sabbath violators are to be completely removed from the Jewish community. The last two chapters of the book (nos. 25 & 26) set forth the basic principles to ensure the complete isolation of Orthodox Jewry from those who deviate from halakhic observance.

16. See Shmuel ha-Kohen Weingarten, “Munkacz,” in Arim ve-Imamoth be-Yisrael, ed. Y. L. ha-Kohen Maimon, p. 354. When he first accepted the position of Chief Rabbi of Munkacz, Sofer’s close colleague, R. Hillel Lichtenstein of Kolomea, advised him to familiarize himself with hasidic thought and custom by regularly studying the popular hasidic work Be’er Mayyim Hayyim, by Hayyim Halberstam, the hasidic Rabbi of Zanz. (The Munkacz hasidic sect was an offshoot of the hasidic dynasty of Zanz-Sienawa, and in his youth Shapiro’s father took him to visit with Halberstam on numerous occasions. On this relationship, see, Toledoth Rabenu, pp. 7–9. See Lichtenstein’s letter to Sofer in Kan Sofer, #20 (pp. 19–20). Hayyim Halberstam himself rose to defend Sofer against his hasidic critics in Munkacz, who were claiming to act on his authority; see his letter to the hasidim of Munkacz in Toledoth Sefrim, p. 126. The dissensions within the Orthodox community of Munkacz are alluded to in Sofer’s letter addressed to the city’s Orthodox communal leaders. See, Kan Sofer, #104 (pp. 114–116).

17. On the zeal with which Shapiro resisted any innovations to the traditional system of religious education, see Toledoth Rabenu, p. 44.

18. The inclusion of limited secular studies in the curriculum of the Orthodox Rabbinical school in Warsaw was one of Shapiro’s major complaints to the Gerer Rebbe, Abraham Mordechai Alter of Gur, in the course of their polemical exchange on Agudath Israel and Zionism. See, Tikun Olam pp. 11–13.

19. The reference is to the famous work on the eternity of the human soul by Menasseh b. Israel.

22. Tikun Olam, p. 106.
23. Toledoth Rabenu, p. 72.
24. Divrei Torah, 4:67. Cf. Divrei Torah, 3:72 & 5:44; Olath Tamid, #33., where Shapiro again insists that the third Temple will be built, not by man, but by God alone. This view is consistent with Shapiro’s general conviction that the redemptive process will be totally supernatural, and entirely unabated by human agency.

25. The innovative extremes of Hungarian ultra-Orthodoxy have been masterfully described by Michael K. Silber, in the above-cited article.

26. The conviction that he was living through the “birthpangs of the Messiah” permeates all of Shapiro’s works. See, in particular, Shaar Isaacchar, p. 18, Divrei Torah 2: #95–96. Shapiro’s official biographer, David Kahana, claimed that his messianic impulses began during Shapiro’s early adolescence. See, Toledoth Rabenu, p. 11. On Shapiro’s messianic obsession in his later years, see Toledoth Rabenu, pp. 32–3, 60, 64. The deaths of his father and mother each occasioned heart-rending appeals by Shapiro for the immediate revelation of the Messiah; Toledoth Rabenu, pp. 36 & 80.

28. Shapiro was convinced that the First World War was, in fact, the apocalyptic battle of Gog and Magog. See Toledoth Rabenu, p. 56.
29. Toledoth Rabenu, p. 64.
30. See Toledoth Rabenu, p. 89.

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31. In Shapiro’s opinion, it was precisely because of their “pig-like,” deceptively Orthodox appearance that the religious Zionists and the Agudah were far more subversive and dangerous than the secular Zionists. He applied the pig-metaphor to Agudath Israel on numerous occasions. See, for example, Divrei Torah, 4:22:

The slippery ones such as the Agudists and [religious] Yishuvists and their ilk, who incline even in the least to the corrupting colonizing of Palestine by the Zionists are the destroyers of the holy city and contaminants of the land of Israel who are not helping to strengthen the legitimate settlement of the land in the ways of our ancestors, and they are therefore far more dangerous, for the true believers can easily and unwittingly fall into their traps, since they exhibit hoofs to display their piety . . .

Cf. Shaar Isaacchar, p. 31.
32. Tsava’oth R. Hayyim Elazar Shapiro, par. #2.
33. Tikun Olam (Munkacz, 1936), pp. 6–9. The volume also includes anti-Zionist epistles from many of Shapiro’s contemporaries. A narrative account of the exchange between Shapiro and Alter, from a decidedly Munkaczer perspective, is found in Toledoth Rabenu, pp. 71–72.

34. The proceedings of the conference in Tshap are recorded in Tikun Olam, pp. 31–39. The final resolutions of the conference were reprinted by Y. Alfasi in Ha-HaSiiduth ve-Shivuth Zion, pp. 130–131. Among the most important participants in the conference were R. Jonathan Shieff of Ungyar, who was later to become the Orthodox chief Rabbi of Budapest, and the legendary Joel Teitelbaum of Orshiva, who later became the Satmar Rebbe and the spiritual heir of Shapiro’s zealous anti-Zionism. On Teitelbaum’s radically anti-Zionist political philosophy, see Allan Nadler, “Piety and Politics: The Case of the Satmar Rebbe,” Judaism (Spring 1982). In the course of his discussion of the Munkaczer Rebbe’s anti-Zionism, Aviav Ravitsky also analyses at some length the proceedings of Tshap Conference. See Ha-Ketzet ha-Meguleh u-Medinath ha-Yehudim, pp. 63–67. Ravitsky correctly sees Shapiro as a major, though deliberately unacknowledged, influence on Teitelbaum’s anti-Zionist theology.

35. Shapiro frequently attacked the Agudah’s farming initiatives in Palestine. See, in particular, his seminal responsa on the contemporary halakhic status of the Biblical imperative to settle the land of Israel, Minhath Elazar, Volume 5, #16, where he characterizes the Agudah’s agricultural activities as a “cross-fertilization of hasidism with Zionism.”

36. Shaar Isaacchar, p. 27. The theme of exposing fraudulent Rabbis occupies a large part of the section of this work entitled “Maamar Agaddah de-Pisqha.” See especially, Shaar Isaacchar, pp. 24–36.

37. A lengthy attack upon the “erev rav” which according to Shapiro included “the vast majority of the people of Israel of our day,” can be found in Darkhei Hayyim ve-Shalom, p. 8. On the applications of the term “erev rav” in earlier Hungarian ultra-Orthodox thought see, Michael Silber, op. cit., pp. 78–82.

38. See, for example, Kunteres Yemoth ha-Mashiah, pp. 10–11.
40. For the exchanges between the Munkaczer and Gerer Rebbe on the Warsaw Seminary, see Tikkan Olam, pp. 10–15.
42. Some of Schneerson’s anti-Zionist epistles were included in Tikkan Olam, pp. 41–55, 74–76, 89–91. See also, Alfasi, Ha-Hasiduth ve-Shivvot Zion, pp. 143–148.
45. Feinberg, op. cit. p. 33.
47. In his sermons Shapira often referred to the Talmudic passages which identify the three “gates of hell” as being located in the desert, the sea, and Jerusalem. Applying this to his own day, he identified the three contemporary gates of hell as: 1) the desert of atheistic communism which covered Russia; 2) the godless secular materialism across the sea, in America, and 3) the heresy of Zionism and Jewish colonialism which has contaminated the holy land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem in particular. See Divrei Torah, 6:16.

Elsewhere in the same work, Shapira refers to the same three gates of gehennom, with a slight variation: “The desert.” This refers to the vulgarity of the inhabitants of our own country.

“The sea.” Refers to the land over the sea—America—where there is money and total abandon [. . .] and great heresy.

“Jerusalem.” Refers to the evil deeds and machinations of the Zionists [. . .] (Divrei Torah, 4:31).

48. Seder Shanna ha-Aharonah, p. 15. 49. S. Zucker, Seder Mashniach Yeshua: Acher Nikhtoo bi-Ekukadath Haym Elazar Shapira (Szigligyomlo, 1919), p. 14b. The notion that the redemption will appear only out of the deepest desperation is the central thesis of this work. This thesis is echoed in many of Shapira’s writings. See, for example, Shaar Isaacahar, pp. 166; Divrei Torah, 1:41, 3:32.
50. Divrei Torah, 1:41.
51. Shaar Isaacahar, p. 244.
52. Shapira’s contempt for the “Nations of the World” and his conviction that they could, and would, do absolutely nothing to help the Jews is nicely captured in an anecdote in Toledoth Rabenu, pp. 59–60, according to which he prayed for the downfall of all the governments of the world as a prelude to the messianic redemption. Shapira’s prayers, in 1916, for the downfall of the Russian Czar are given by the editors of this volume as the “real” reason for the collapse of the Czarian government a year later. Cf. Kunteres Yemoth Ha-Mashiach, pp. 64–65.

54. On Rabbi Kook’s dialectical view of Jewish history, see Aviezer Ravinsky, op. cit., pp. 142–152.
55. Kunteres Yemoth ha-Mashiach, p. 65. Shapira apparently learned his contempt for gentile authority from his father. This hostility is reflected in a tempt for the Jewish community to challenge the remarkable account of R. Zevi Hirsch Shapira’s chance encounter with the Kaiser Wilhelm during a visit with his son to Berlin. Not only did R. Zevi Hirsch refuse to invoke the traditional blessing for royalty; when the Kaiser’s entourage had passed, he immediately pronounced the blessing as “insane” and “idolatrous”.
56. See Divrei Torah, 3:95.
58. Divrei Torah, 6:25.
59. Divrei Torah, 1:2. Elsewhere Shapira rejects the application of the halakhic principle which allows for certain leniencies “for the sake of the paths of peace”:

... but to appease the evil doers is not permitted for the sake of the paths of peace, particularly since, “there is no peace for the wicked, says the Lord.” (Divrei Torah, 1:57).
60. Shapira’s dispute with the Gerer Rebbe and other Polish Orthodox Rabbis is summarized in Toledoth Rabenu, pp. 70–72.
62. The perfidy of American Jewry was yet another of Shapira’s obsessions. He regularly warned his followers against emigrating to that land which he viewed as entirely inhospitable to maintaining Jewish tradition, often referring to America as “one of the three gates of gehennom.” He was also particularly harsh in his judgment of American rabbis, especially the few hasidic leaders who had settled there. For some examples of his denunciations of American Judaism see, Iggeroth Shapirin, #238 & #291; Divrei Torah, 4:30–31; 5:38; 6:16. On the alleged corruption of the American hasidic rebbe, see Divrei Torah, 9:37. Despite his dim view of the United States and its Jewish inhabitants, Shapira did not hesitate to encourage the Jews living there to send him money to support the Munkacz religious institutions in Europe and Israel. An example of such an appeal is found in Iggeroth Shapirin, #221.
63. Shapira’s own refusal to take “pidoynoth” from those who were not his hasidim is documented in Toledoth Rabenu, p. 48.
64. Divrei Torah, 1:57. Cf. Divrei Torah, 9:37, where Shapira directs a similar criticism at the few hasidic Rebbes who were then functioning in America. Many of Shapira’s writings contain lengthy attacks on other hasidic Rebbes and Orthodox Rabbis with whose politics he disagreed. See, for example, Shaar Isaacahar, p. 27, where he mercilessly attacks such rabbis as “sinners” and “evildoers.”
65. Shaar Isaacahar, 339.
67. On the early ultra-Orthodox figures use of marginal and non-
normative sources to justify their novel, extreme positions, see Michael Silber, *op. cit.*, pp. 59–62.

68. See, for example, *Divrei Torah*, 3:24, where he disputes the Talmudic tradition that, before the redemption, all Jews will repent. This cannot be accepted literally, he insists, for there is no hope for the truly wicked ever to repent.


71. B. T. Berakhoth, 10a.

72. *Divrei Torah*, 2:46. Shapira’s contempt for women is evident in many of his writings, and was particularly manifest in his strong denunciations of the founding of the orthodox Beth Jacob schools for Jewish girls. See *Tikkun Olam*, p. 148.


75. Shapira proudly traced his hasidic dynasty directly back to the Maggid of Mezeritch. See, *Toledoth Rabenu*, p. 23.

76. See, for a colorful example of Shapira’s typical hasidic contempt for the mithnagdim, *Shaar Isaachar*, p. 164, where Shapira mocks the prayers of the “frigid Ashkenazim” as,

...a cry without tears and without heart, sung coldly in their unemotional voices and completely lacking in any feeling or intention...the only reason they pray at all is that they follow mechanically after the traditions of their ancestors, like monkeys...


81. See *Toledoth Rabenu*, pp. 90–91.