 CHAPTER THREE

THE DUAL PERSONALITY OF THE TZADIQ:
MOSES AND JOSEPH

Introduction

So far we have explored how the ‘good points’ and their association with music facilitate the spiritual transformation which Nahman requires of every individual. We shall now turn to the function of the ‘good points’ and their associative musical creativity in the spiritual life that is unique to the tzadiq alone.1 Nahman ascribes to the tzadiq, referred to as “messenger of the people”, the ability to draw the ‘good points’ out of every individual, and to incorporate them in his own soul so that they become an integral part of him.2 However, the tzadiq in Nahman’s teachings does not appear to be a homogenous figure, and some aspects of his personality seem to contradict others. The present section explores Nahman’s multi-faceted perception of his own role as a tzadiq and its relationship to the doctrine of the ‘good points’.

As has often been observed, Nahman saw himself as the only genuine tzadiq, not only of his own generation, but also of all the generations of the past, and even of the future.3 He held fast to this conviction in spite


2 LM I, 282: “This is the meaning of ‘messenger of the people’”. Thus he must have within him this exalted quality, as a result of which all the points are drawn to him and become merged within him”.

3 For the tension between Nahman’s notion of his greatness as a tzadiq and the
of his failure to achieve popularity as a hasidic leader. His pedigree as the Besht's great grandson notwithstanding, he attracted the opposition of other hasidic leaders, and while his followers were devoted to him, they never numbered more than a few hundred, even at the peak of his success.

Naḥman spoke openly about the unique nature of both his personality and his leadership, and many of his statements to this effect were recorded by his disciples. The singular nature of ‘the true tzadiq’—usually referring to himself—also features in significant portions of Liquetei Moharan. A further source for Naḥman’s ideas on the subject is his Sefer Hamidot. The book contains no less than 209 entries for ‘tzadiq’, providing an insight into Naḥman’s conception of the tzadiq and his relationship with his followers.

As a sample of Jewish homiletics, Liquetei Moharan features many biblical figures who are often employed as representations of certain aspects of Naḥman’s own personality. The figures of Moses and Joseph are particularly prominent, and Naḥman refers to both as ‘tzadiqim’, exploring at length their roles as spiritual leaders while drawing on their depiction in the midrashic and kabbalistic sources.

Green identifies Moses and Joseph as two distinct prototypes of the hasidic tzadiq. Moses enjoys a unique and supreme status as “a wonderman from birth”, while Joseph, by comparison, is ordinary, and his attainment of the level of tzadiq is the outcome only of his moral restraint in the face of sexual temptation. The implication of Green’s typology is that the unique quality of Moses is inborn, while the path of ‘Joseph’ is open to everyone to accomplish.

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4 See Weiss, Mehqarim, p. 222.
5 See Green, Tormented Master, pp. 135–144. Other, more successful hasidic leaders are known to have attracted many hundreds and even thousands of followers. Naḥman himself referred to Shneur Zalman of Liadi as “a ruler of a thousand” [Ex. 18:21] (Avanehah Barzel, 34, § 46, cited in Rapoport-Albert, “Hasidism”, p. 117).
6 Weiss regarded all of Naḥman’s teachings and tales as his commentary on his own life, and all references to the tzadiq as self-referential. See Weiss, Mehqarim, pp. 108 and 151.
7 On this book, see above, Introduction, n. 36.
10 See Gen. 39:7–12.