NAHMAN OF BRATSLAV (1772–1810), hasidic admor (*master, rabbi, and teacher*) and fertile thinker in the fields of philosophy and literature. His personality and his work resonate to this day far beyond the boundaries of the hasidic stream he founded.

On his mother's side, Nahman was the great-grandchild of the Ba'al Shem Tov, Rabbi *Israel ben Eliezer, considered to be the founder of hasidic Judaism. His mother, Feiga, was the daughter of Adil, daughter of the Ba'al Shem Tov. On the side of his father, Rabbi Simhah, Nahman was the grandson of *Nahman of Horodenka* (Gorodenka), a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov and part of the first group of Hasidim headed by the Ba'al Shem Tov.

Nahman was born in Medzhibezh, in the Ukraine, the town where the Ba'al Shem Tov worked and was buried, and where Nahman's uncle and the grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, Rabbi Baruch of Medzhibezh, continued to work. Nahman therefore grew up in the heart of the hasidic world, and from a young age already saw his destiny as being a hasidic rabbi. He was betrothed as soon as he reached bar mitzvah age, and married a year later, at the age of 14. At his wedding he met Rabbi Simeon, who became a student and loyal friend and accompanied him throughout his life. After his wedding, as was the custom at that time, he went to live in the home of his father-in-law, Rabbi Ephraim of Ossatin, in the Kiev district of Podolia. The rural nature of this place attracted Nahman, and he often wandered among the fields and went off by himself to the caves and forests, to commune with God. He used to go out rowing by himself on the river, although he was not a very good oarsman. His life during this period had a considerable influence on the life he encouraged his disciples to live. Seclusion, walks in the countryside, and conversations with the Maker as if conversing with a friend, are the salient features of Bratslav Hasidism to this day.

After Rabbi Ephraim became widowed and remarried, Nahman did not get on with his father-in-law's new wife and moved to the town of Medvedevka, in the Kiev district. There he began to gather his first disciples around him, and embarked on the path of a hasidic leader.

In 1798 Nahman set out on a journey to Erez Israel. He traveled anonymously, and only his friend Simeon accompanied him and knew his identity. On his way to Erez Israel he acted childishly, playing soldiers with youngsters and unnecessarily provoking other Hasidim traveling with him on the boat. These actions could be interpreted in various different ways. In Erez Israel he met the local hasidic leadership, who received him with great honor and respect, as befitting the great grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov. He visited Acre, Safed, and Tiberias, as well as other places, but after a few months, when Napoleon's army began to arrive in the country, he fled back home. His return journey was also accompanied by various adventures, since he mistakenly boarded a Turkish warship and was only released after payment of a large ransom.

After his journey to Erez Israel he returned to Medvedevka and to leadership of his hasidic community. During this period, the first disputes also began to take place with other hasidic leaders in the same area. At the same time, Nahman began to develop his view of disputation as a source of growth and development and as something with positive aspects, arising in places where new paths are broken in the worship of God.

In Elul 5560 (1800) Nahman moved to Zlatopol, in the Kiev district, not far from the town of Shpola, home of Reb *Aryeh Leib, known as the Shpola Zeide* ("the Grand Old Man of Shpola"), who was the oldest of the hasidic *admorim* in the region and whose authority also extended to Zlatopol. Shortly after Nahman arrived in the town, a serious disagreement broke out with the Shpola Zeide, who apparently saw Nahman's arrival in town – which had not been coordinated with him as was customary – as an encroachment and an affront. In due course Baruch of Medzhibezh and other *admorim* in the Ukraine joined the dispute against Nahman.
From a series of meetings that he had with hasidic rabbis in the area on his return from Ereẓ Israel, it appears that Nahman did not conceal his criticism of the *admorim*, most of whom were many years older than he. Nahman told them bluntly that the revelations of which they were so proud were false, and frequently attacked the “erroneously famous” rabbis who did not know how to lead themselves, but wanted to lead others.

Nahman saw himself as the greatest *zaddik* of his generation, and as a true saintly man. He considered his rank to be incomparably higher than that of the other rabbis of his generation, and also of *zaddikim* of previous generations, including the Ba’al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism. Nahman even hinted that he was higher in rank, at least in some respects, than all the outstanding Jewish figures throughout the generations, from the creation of the world and the first man and right up to the days of the Messiah. This is the message that comes across from the conversations, sermons, and stories of Nahman, and more explicitly from the esoteric material discovered and published only at the beginning of the 21st century, in particular from those parts that were censored and omitted in the printed version of the book *Hayyei Moharan* (“The Life of our Teacher Rabbi Nahman”), but preserved in the manuscript version.

These bold pretensions naturally aroused opposition, which came as no surprise to Nahman; he even said: “How could there not be disputes around me, since I am taking a new path that no one has ever taken before, not even the Ba’al Shem Tov, nor any being since the Torah was received, even though it is a very ancient path and even though it is completely new” (*Hayyei Moharan*, Jerusalem 5760, p. 338). Nahman even saw himself as a potential messiah, and as the trailblazer for the coming of the Messiah, who would lead the world with the help of the tools and the advice that Nahman had prepared and renewed, and the whole world would become Bratslav Hasidim.

As a result of the dispute, Nahman was forced to move to Bratslav (1802). At this stage he was joined by Rabbi Nathan Steinhardt (1780–1845), who soon became Nahman’s scribe and the disseminator of his doctrine. Nahman stayed in Bratslav for some eight years, until the last year of his life, and there he established and expanded his work as a hasidic rabbi and teacher. Even then, the disputes did not abate, accompanying Nahman until his final days. The most notable of the hasidic rabbis who supported Nahman during these difficult times was Rabbi Levi Isaac of Berdichev, who stood by him until his own death, about a year before Nahman’s.

In 1805 Nahman’s son Solomon Ephraim was born. Nahman had messianic hopes for the infant, which increased in fervor during 1806. In the summer of 1806 the “Holy Child” died, and with him the hopes of coming redemption. Shortly afterwards Nahman first revealed the *Megillat Setarim*, an esoteric discourse describing the “order of the coming of the righteous redeemer.” This scroll, to which Nahman returned in 1809, was encompassed by walls of stringent secrecy, and Bratslav tradition claims that only one person in each generation should know it. The scroll was set out in writing but only in brief hints and acronyms. In the book *Yemei Moharan*, which is Reb Nosen’s autobiography, it was claimed by the publisher that the scroll was lost. However it emerged that contrary to what was declared, the scroll is still in existence and is preserved by the Bratslav Ḥasidim. Recently, the scroll has also been exposed to research.

Nahman regularly traveled between the towns where his supporters lived. One important journey that left an impression on him was his journey to Lemberg (Lvov). At the time, there were important doctors staying in Lemberg and Nahman went to see them because he was suffering from tuberculosis, the disease from which he would eventually die. However, apart from the medical aspect, the encounter with the doctors in Lemberg, which continued for some eight months, was significant for Nahman in that, for the first time, he came into lengthy and intensive contact with educated Jews. Nahman also made other journeys, some of them incognito, whose purpose and meaning he did not explain.

Some six months before his death, in the spring of 1810, when he was already well aware that his days were numbered, Nahman moved to the town of Uman. There were a number of reasons for the move. Nahman, who had prayed for a long time for the privilege of dying a martyr’s death, apparently wanted to be buried in the cemetery in “Uman, where many Jews martyred in the 1788 Gonta massacre were buried, and in this context declared that he had come to engage in *tikkun neshamot*, the perfection of souls. Nahman was also interested in meeting with the Uman intellectuals. To the amazement of his disciples, he preferred to live in a house previously occupied by one of the important intellectuals of the town, Nahman Nathan Rapaport, and not in the home of one of his followers. Nahman even used to meet with prominent members of the circle of Uman intellectuals, and had a special connection with Hirsch Be’er Horowitz, who some time later immigrated to England, changed his name to Herman Bernard, and became a professor of Oriental languages at Cambridge University. It is not clear what they talked about at these meetings, but we know that the meetings were social in nature and that they played chess together. Nahman saw them as an important mission and found them very interesting, even though they prompted surprise among his disciples. Bratslav tradition tells that these intellectuals “almost” returned to their religious roots, and had Nahman not died an untimely death they would certainly have fully returned to the fold.

Bratslav Hasidism was never a large sect, and after the move to Uman it became even smaller, with only a few hundred loyal Ḥasidim remaining and not put off by the disputes and persecution, or by the strange actions of the rabbi.

The tuberculosis from which Nahman was suffering for a third year become worse, and any conversation or speech cost him great effort and severe pain. Nonetheless, to his last days Nahman continued his homiletic and literary activities, and even expounded doctrine to his congregation of disciples,
and some of his most complex and interesting teachings were given during this difficult period. During Ḥol ha-Mōed Sukkot of 1810 Nahman died and was buried in Uman.

Nahman of Bratslav’s Spiritual Work and Character
Nahman of Bratslav is one of the most original creative minds of hasidic contemplation and oration and the most notable writer in the field of hasidic literature. His book Likkutei Moharan (1808) contains theoretical homilies which were, for the most part, written down by his disciple Reb Nosen, with a few written by Nahman himself. In terms of genre, the book clearly belongs to hasidic homiletic literature, containing Nahman’s teachings presented in a manner that is full of imagination and vision. The innovation and imagination can be seen both in the content and the penetrating way in which the theological and existential problems are presented, and at the level of the literary qualities of the homilies, such as the surprising linking of characters and the unexpected way in which Nahman quotes sources in order to build his sermon. Although on first reading the homilies appear to document Nahman’s disorganized flow of associations, at the end and on second reading it becomes clear that Nahman has woven a colorful and changing tapestry into a tale whose end lies in its beginning, and which has both structure and a point to make.

The book Sippurei Ma’asiyyot (1815) presents 13 stories told by Nahman during the last three years of his life, written down by his disciple Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov (Reb Nosen). The stories were published, on Nahman’s instructions, in a bilingual edition – Hebrew and Yiddish, with the Hebrew version above and the Yiddish version below. These stories represent an independent division in hasidic literature, and there is nothing else like them in the field. Unlike most hasidic stories, these were told by the rabbi and not by the disciples. However, a more important characteristic lies not in the identity of the author but in the character and content of the stories. Unlike other hasidic literature, which is entirely hagiographic, the tales of Nahman are not paens of praise dealing with an exemplary figure, and only one of the 13 deals with the hasidic world, while most of them make no mention at all of the Jewish world. The stories in Sippurei Ma’asiyyot are told about the daughter of a king captured by the Evil One, about a gang of pirates, about dust that makes anyone who steps on it mad, about the heart of the world and its pining, and about the love of birds, lovers’ yearnings and their song. In addition to the tales collected in Sippurei Ma’asiyyot, there are dozens more short stories by Nahman published in Bratslav literature down the generations. A group of stories was written down by Reb Nosen and disseminated in his various writings (mainly in Hayyei Moharan), while the other stories are scattered through later Bratslav literature. These stories are not all the same in character; they include parables and tales of praise, dreams and visions.

Other than the sermons and stories, Reb Nosen also collected conversations and short sayings of Nahman which, although they are not as complex and well developed as his homiletic and literary work, contain a clarity of thought and a directness that are not to be found in the work that is clad in literary and homiletic dress.

Nahman attributed great importance to the rituals he established with the aim of amending man’s sins and defects. He instituted a Tikkan le-Mikra Laila (nocturnal pollution), which mainly involved reciting ten psalms; the Tikkan Kelali (General Remedy), which does not deal with a specific sin but is intended to amend entire areas where man is defective, such as the subject of speech, money, and particularly eroticism; and a third tikkan which is visiting his grave after his death, and which also allows general amendment of all man’s sins, and to which we will relate below.

The figure of the zaddik is very important in Nahman’s work, and he emphasized rank and virtue and the importance of believing in the zaddik. And yet, Nahman’s teachings and conversations were spoken and written in a personal and confessional tone, including the reader not only in the zaddik’s moments of elation but also in his moments of crisis. Nahman often refers in his conversations to his struggle with evil inclinations and his times of weakness, bordering on despair and depression. Even questions of belief and denial are presented in all their seriousness, and the feelings of helplessness that even a zaddik feels when faced with the skepticism which has no answer are brought up openly. Despite the noticeable presence of the threat of skepticism, weakness, and despair, it would not be correct to say that the Bratslav climate is pessimistic. Nahman declared war against sadness and despair in a unique way. He called upon his disciples not to ignore and escape sorrow and anguish but to draw them too into a joyous dance and turn pain and suffering into a source for the awakening of life, elation, and happiness. In Nahman’s work there is a rare combination of a pessimistic sense of reality and a positive and optimistic response to the question of what a man can accomplish in life and whether it is given to a man to achieve joy in his life. These extremes are also expressed in Nahman’s theological world and in his sermons, which place side by side the strong feeling of distance and absence of God on the one hand, and at the same time the ability to sense the divine in everything. The role of the zaddik, according to Nahman, is to know the hasid standing before him and to adapt his words accordingly. With a spiritually arrogant hasid, the feeling of distance and the question “Where is God’s place?” should be emphasized, whereas with a hasid who is feeling distant from God, it is the divine presence that should be stressed, and the saying that “The earth is filled with the Lord.”

Nahman is one of the greatest of the mystics of the Jewish people who have left written records of their mystical experiences. He gave voice to his mystic world in his sermons, in stories, and in direct documentation of the revelations he experienced, both while awake and when dreaming. One of these intense experiences, which undoubtedly had considerable weight in shaping Nahman’s self-awareness, was documented in the secret tale called “Ma‘aseh me-ha-Lehem.” In this tale, Nahman describes a mystic experience in which he
received a new Torah, with a re-statement of the ten commandments and the Torah as a whole. This story was kept secret for over 200 years, and only in recent years has it been published. In the published Bratslav literature there are also reports by Nahman of various revelations he experienced and teachings he developed as a result. Nahman’s self-confidence in this respect was so great that he even dared to attack other zaddikim, even those who were many years older than he, who claimed to have seen revelations and angels, saying to them: “This is not how Metatron appears … many have anticipated expounding on the Chariot, but have never actually seen it” (Hayyei Moharan, 113, p. 148).

When Nahman’s disciples raised doubts as to the ability of zaddikim to experience revelations such as Ezekiel’s chariot, Nahman replied: “Why are you so surprised? Ezekiel was only human” (Hayyei Moharan, 553, p. 437). In his sermons and conversations, Nahman often related to devotion to God and to the states of awareness that are derived from this. He dedicated long sermons in clarification of the issue of devotion, the Holy Spirit, and prophetic visions. Belief and prophecy, for Nahman, are part of a single spiritual realm whose basis is man’s simple faith and whose highest point is the prophetic experience. Both belief and prophecy, each at its own level, require man to be willing to cast aside his intellect in order to reach a state of awareness without knowledge, in which the power of imagination, which is an active and vital part of belief and prophecy, is the central and dominant power at work in his consciousness. Nahman considered mystic devotion to be a main aim, and all Bratslav work and customs are directed towards helping man to achieve it. Secrecy and conversing with the Creator, shouting and clapping hands, paying attention to the song of the wild grass and searching for hints – all of these modes lead to devotion to God.

**Bratslav Hasidism after the Death of Nahman**

Nahman’s view of himself as the Zaddik le-Dorot, the likes of whom would not be seen again until the coming of the Messiah, left no room for the appointment of a successor after his death, and the Bratslav Hasidism remained a hasidic community without a living rabbi. This phenomenon, which had not been seen before in Hasidism, provoked astonishment and mockery, manifested in the nickname that adhered to the community: the Toete Ḥasidim – the Dead Hasidim. It was Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov (Reb Nosen), Nahman’s disciple and scribe, who took it upon himself to lead the community and ensure its continuity. At first the older Ḥasidim objected, but Reb Nosen’s leadership gradually took shape. Although Reb Nosen did not try to take the place of Nahman, he played a central role in shaping Bratslav literature and customs for the following generations. Apart from the fact that all the Bratslav literature about Nahman was written by Reb Nosen, he also continued his own creative momentum, following in the spirit and footsteps of Nahman, especially in his greatest work, Likkutei Halakhot. Reb Nosen set up an independent printing press and ensured that the writings of his rabbi would be published and distributed, while completely neglecting his own affairs. Reb Nosen wandered among the disciples and encouraged them to continue adhering to the path of their rabbi even after his death, and even succeeded in attracting new disciples and infusing a new spirit into the community, which had been in deep crisis after Nahman death. Reb Nosen initiated the construction of a new bet midrash for the Bratslav Ḥasidim in Uman, and also established the Rosh Ha-Shanah gathering at Nahman’s grave. During this period the dispute over Bratslav Hasidism was rekindled, with Reb Nosen at the center of the disputes and persecution this time, the persecutor being Rabbi Moses Zevi of Savran. At the height of the dispute, many left the path of their master and did not return even after the dispute died down. After the death of Reb Nosen, the unofficial leadership passed to Rabbi Nahman of Tulchin (1814–1884), who acquired this status as Reb Nosen’s student and right-hand man. In the next generation, the outstanding figure accepted as having authority and continuing the Bratslav tradition was his son, Rabbi Abraham Ḥazan (1849–1917), who was a prolific writer. In addition to expositions on the work of Nahman, he and his students wrote up many Bratslav traditions which until then had been preserved only orally. After his death, Rabbi Levi Isaac Bender (1897–1989) achieved prominence and was considered by many as the main channel for passing on the Bratslav tradition to the next generation, and as the most devoted student of Abraham Ḥazan. From the beginning of the 20th century and until World War I, there was an improvement in the standing of Bratslav Hasidism, and Bratslav centers also sprang up in Poland alongside those in the Ukraine. However, the instability in Eastern Europe, World War I, the Holocaust, and then Soviet rule all had a serious effect on this small hasidic community and the only center that survived was a small group of Ḥasidim in Israel.

Since the 1970s there has been a surprising renaissance in the strength and scale of Bratslav Ḥasidism and the status of Nahman in Israeli culture. Thousands of new disciples joined the community, and wider circles of students and admirers of Nahman also developed who are not counted as his disciples. Bratslav Hasidism split up into a number of factions, some of which have a very tense relationship with each other. During this period, from being a small and persecuted group Bratslav Hasidism became a large and influential community. Most of the outstanding figures of this generation were students of Rabbi Levi Isaac Bender.

The following are the different factions of Bratslav Ḥasidism at the turn of the 20th century:

The main faction, also known as Bratslav Me’ah She’arim, comprises veteran Bratslav families, a small minority of them the descendents of Nahman and Reb Nosen and the majority the descendents of families which joined Bratslav Ḥasidism in later generations. This sect does not have a single leader, and has a number of influential rabbis, including Rabbi Yaakov Meir Schecter, Rabbi Shemu’el Moshe Kramer, Rabbi Nathan Libermnush, and others. The head of the World Bratslav Ḥasidism Committee, which constitutes the official leadership
of this sect, is the elderly hasidic rabbi Mikhail Derfman, head of the Bratslav yeshivah Or ha-Nêelam in the Meâh She'arîm neighborhood of Jerusalem.

Unlike this sect, the majority of members of the other Bratslav factions are new Hasidim with no previous family connection to Bratslav Hasidism. The vast majority are baalei teshuvah from secular families, and a minority are from an ultra-Orthodox or religious Zionist background. A large number of them are from Oriental communities.

The largest faction is led by Rabbi Eliezer Berland, the head of the Shuvu Banim Yeshivah, and his student Rabbi Shalom Arush, head of the Hut shel Hesed institutions. The center of this sect is in Jerusalem, on the outskirts of the Meâh She'arîm neighborhood, and its communities are scattered throughout Israel.

Another sect is led by Rabbi Eliezer Chik (Moharash), who travels between the two main centers of his followers in the town of Yavniel in Galilee and in New York City. Rabbi Chik's literary activity is extensive and includes free distribution of his booklets. It is worth noting his correspondence, which includes over 40 volumes of letters to his disciples. In his writings there are hints that indicate that he sees himself as a kind of incarnation of Naḥman and as continuing not only his path but also his personality.

A faction that is small in number but has a large public presence in Israel are the followers of Rabbi Yisroel Ber Odesser, known as the "Na Naḥim." Odesser (1888–1994) claimed to have found a note personally sent to him by Naḥman of Bratslav. Among other things, the note contained the expression "Na Naḥ Naḥim Naḥman mi-Uman," which became the mantra and charm of Reb Yisroel's disciples. These Hasidim believe that repeated chanting and dissemination of this phrase play a key role in speeding up redemption, which is why they spread it by means of stickers and graffiti and in any other way they can. White knitted yarmulkes with this phrase embroidered on them have become the dress code of this faction. After the death of Reb Yisroel "Ba'ali ha-Petek," his followers split up and have no agreed leadership, and their main occupation is spreading word of the note and Bratslav literature.

One of the main characteristics of these factions, as opposed to the mainstream, is the considerable status accorded to their living zaddik leader. For the first time in Bratslav tradition since the death of Naḥman, the respect and honor given to the leader is not significantly different from that given by other hasidic communities to their living rabbi. However, it is still the case among these factions that the figure of Naḥman is the unequivocal center of the hasidic experience.

The great expansion of Bratslav Hasidism is part of broader processes that took place in the second half of the 20th century, one of which is the increasing resonance of the figure of Naḥman in Israeli culture outside Bratslav hasidic circles. Both in secular circles and in national religious and traditional circles there is increasing interest in the works of Naḥman, manifested among other things in study of his writings in the national religious yeshivah framework and in informal secular frameworks, and in the ever-increasing presence of his personality and writings in Israeli literature and culture. This phenomenon in itself is part of the wider phenomenon of the rise of mysticism in Israeli and Western cultures as part of the "New Age" phenomenon. Yet even against the background of the New Age, the Bratslav renaissance provokes astonishment in its scale and power, and it seems today (2006) that we are still in the midst of the process and that it is too early to summarize it and predict its future.

The main and most significant event in Bratslav Hasidism, bringing together all the different factions, is the Rosh Ha-Shanah pilgrimage to Naḥman's grave in Uman. Naḥman felt a special connection with this holiday and instructed all his disciples to gather together every Rosh Ha-Shanah, even if this involved great effort and devotion. Not directly connected to this matter, Naḥman also expressed his wish that his followers come to visit him even after his death, and in preparation for this he laid down a special ritual for the pilgrims visiting his grave, offering great benefits in return: Naḥman promised anyone who comes to his grave, no matter who he is and what his sins are, providing he undertakes not to repeat his sins, gives charity for the elevation of Naḥman's soul, and says 10 particular verses of Psalms, that he will intercede on his behalf and will drag him up from the depths of Hell by his sidelocks. After his death, his followers put these two dictates together and, under the leadership of Reb Nosen, made Rosh Ha-Shanah the holiday when all the Bratslav Hasidim gather in Uman at their rabbi's graveside. And indeed, throughout the generations the Bratslav Hasidim made great efforts to maintain this tradition. When they were not able to reach Naḥman's grave in Uman, the Hasidim gathered in Lublin, Jerusalem, or Meron.

In the 1990s, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the gathering in Uman was reestablished and the number of participants gradually increased. In 2004–05 over 20,000 people arrived in Uman for Rosh ha-Shanah. The vast majority came from Israel, by air, on the eve of the holiday, and a minority came from the United States, Canada, and France. A new synagogue was built. On the top floor and in the surrounding courtyard over 4,000 people pray in the traditional Bratslav manner, and on the ground floor some 2,000 people pray in Mizrahi style. The other worshipers pray in smaller minyanim nearby. On Rosh Ha-Shanah it is not only Naḥman's Hasidim who come to Uman but also people who clearly belong to other streams of Judaism, both religious and secular, and yet take an interest in this gathering. Only men are allowed in Uman on Rosh ha-Shanah. Not all Bratslav hasidism are able to join the gathering on Rosh ha-Shanah and various Bratslav gatherings are held in parallel in Israel and other parts of the world. Due to the fast-changing dynamics of the movement, it is difficult to estimate the number of Bratslav Hasidim in the different factions. It is harder still to estimate the scope of the widening circles of people who see Naḥman as a figure of authority and inspiration with a significant influence on their lives but who do not belong to any particular Bratslav community. The processes of change
in Bratslav Hasidism are still in formation and it is too early to speculate on the future of this lively branch of Hasidism.


NAHMAN OF HORODENKA (Gorodenka; d. 1780), disciple of *Israel b. Eliezer Ba‘al Shem Tov; his son married Feige, the granddaughter of the Ba‘al Shem Tov, and their son was *Nahman of Bratslav. Little information is available on the personality of Nahman of Horodenka and his teachings. From the scattered quotations in the early hasidic literature attributed to him, it appears that he occupied himself essentially with practi- cal questions on the method of divine worship. His encounter with the Ba‘al Shem Tov became the turning point of his life, as he himself confirms: “When I was a great pietist I immersed myself every day in a mikveh, so cold that nobody else could bear. When I came to my house and found the place so warm that the walls were almost burning, I did not feel the warmth for almost an hour. Even so, I could not rid myself from impure thoughts until I was compelled to seek the wisdom of the Besht [Ba‘al Shem Tov]” (Shivhei ha-Besht [1961], 112). This change of attitude expresses the complete reversal of his world outlook from ascetic to non-ascetic Hasidism. In 1764 Nahman emigrated to Erez Israel with *Menahem Mendel of Peremyshlany at the head of a group of Hasidim and settled in Tiberias.

His journey was described by Simḥah b. Joshua of Zalozhtsy in Ahavat Ziyyon (Gorodnya, 1790; published a second time under the title Doresh Ziyyon, Jerusalem, 1887).

Some teachings are recorded in his name by his father-in-law *Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sudyklow in Degel Mahaneh Efrayim, as well as in the Toledot Yaaqov Yosef by *Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye.


NAHMAN OF KOSOV (d. 1746), kabbalist and one of the early Hasidim. A wealthy land contractor and grain dealer, he lived for a time in Ludomir (Vladimir *Volynsky) where he built a bet midrash with adjoining bathhouse; Nahman was associated with a group of Ḥasidim in Kutow (Kuty) which was active even before the appearance of *Israel b. Eliezer Ba‘al Shem Tov and possibly remained independent of him later. At first Nahman was opposed to the Ba‘al Shem Tov, refusing to accept him as a religious leader. Even after recognizing the latter’s authority Nahman preserved his spiritual independence, and his connections with the Ba‘al Shem Tov were apparently weak. It is known that among the Kutow group “there was a condition that none of them should prophesy” (Shivhei ha-Besht) but Nahman did not always observe this condition. He was considered a “man of the spirit,” possessing contemplative power and known for his ecstatic manner of praying; he was one of the first to introduce into public prayer the Nosaḥ ha-Ari (prayer rite of Isaac *Luria).

Nahman was among the foremost teachers of devotion (*devekut), emphasizing constant contemplation of God; devekut, according to him, does not contradict the requirements of social life and is not confined to moments of spiritual concentration or a propitious occasion. It is carried out by a visual technique, the letters of the Tetragrammaton and the other names of God appearing before the eyes of the person meditating (the visual method of seeing letters). Nahman recognized the importance of the dialectical fabric of a society composed of “men of matter” (the masses) and “men of form” (i.e., of the spirit), holding that man’s spiritual elevation from his lowliness will take place by his association with the great