This course will examine the lives, teachings and influence of three modern masters of the hasidic movement. We will study the careers and representative writings of each of these figures, comparing and contrasting their respective approaches to the challenge of modernity within the rich world of Hasidism.


Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Post messianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson* (Columbia)


Dovid Meisels, *The Rebbe: The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum The Satmar Rebbe*

A very helpful resource is *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, (YIVO/Yale, 2010) available in hardcover at our library, as well as online with free access. This is a comprehensive and authoritative reference work on all aspects of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, including Hasidism. Note, for example, the excellent article on “Satmar Hasidic Dynasty.” The extended essay under “Hasidism” is an unparalleled introduction to this topic and will give you essential background information. See also “Lubavitch Hasidism.”

**Course requirements:** Brief oral presentations on each master; final paper. Note that each of the three hasidic leaders we are studying was called upon to respond to modernity—its allures, opportunities and perceived dangers—in varying ways. Each of the three was deeply learned in the entire legacy of Rabbinic Judaism, Kabbalah and Hasidism, and the practices and culture of their respective family lineages. Each suffered (in different ways and to different degree) in the traumas of the world and the Jewish people in particular of the twentieth century. Two of the three survived the war and directed an astonishing rebirth of their community; the third did not survive but his writings have seen a great efflorescence of interest and influence.
Your paper topic is yours to choose—in consultation with the instructor—but each paper should explore some aspect of the interaction of these forces: the spiritual legacy of the past; dislocation, destruction and opportunity visited by the twentieth century; and the power of charismatic leadership.


Suggested readings:
Nehemia Polen, “Rebbetzins, Wonder-Children and the Emergence of the Dynastic Principle in Hasidism.”

Week #2. Hasidism and the challenges of modernity. The Hasidic movement, founded in the backwaters of Poland and Russia, went through unprecedented changes in the twentieth century: migration from shtetl to large cities, along with ideological challenges of secularization and politicization of the Jewish masses. In addition, Hasidism was utterly devastated by two world wars and the Holocaust. The survival and eventual revival of the hasidic movement in the face of these crises was due in no small measure to the role of its leaders, the zaddikim or rebbes. We shall begin this unit by tracing the origins of Hasidism in Poland and the role of the Kozione lineage.

Reading: Polen, The Rebbe’s Daughter.

Weeks #3-5. Rabbi Kalonymos Shapiro of Piaseczna (1889-1943) was a pioneer educator who combined classic hasidic mysticism with a modern emphasis on personal growth and the uniqueness of the individual. His techniques for developing inner spiritual resources include meditation, quieting of the mind (hashkatah), visualization and niggun. His spiritual heroism and profound theology written in the midst of the destruction have made him famous as “the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto.” His contemplative teachings sought to return to Hasidism’s roots as a reflective and transformative pathway to awareness of the Divine presence in the world. In the dark days of the Holocaust, Rabbi Shapiro produced some of his most powerful teaching and writing. We shall study selections from his works, including A Student’s Obligation; Conscious Community; Derekh ha-Melekh (“The King’s Highway”); and the Holocaust writings.

Weeks #6-10. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) transformed Lubavitch Hasidism into an outward-facing movement whose emissaries staff “Chabad Houses” throughout the world. Rabbi Schneerson’s massive legacy of oral discourses and written correspondence reveals a charismatic personality and a mind of great power and reach addressing every point of contact between Hasidism and modernity. We will examine his theology, social thought and political activism, including the focus
on messianism. To introduce this unit (week #6) we will study the teachings of Habad’s founder, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, especially his core text, known as Tanya.

Weeks # 11-13. Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1887-1979) established postwar enclaves aiming to resist the encroachments of modernity and revive the pietistic purity (as he saw it) of prewar hasidic Hungary. Seeming to relish the controversy engendered by his vocal opposition to Zionism as well as disputes with other hasidic figures including Rabbi Schneerson, he was revered by his followers as a Talmudic genius and compassionate leader and community-builder. We will read selection from his writings in translation. As with the other masters, we will begin this unit by discussing the early years of Hasidism in Hungary.

Bibliography of the Works of Rabbi Kalonymos Shapira; English Translations; and Related Works


**Bibliography on Habad Theology**


_____.”HaBaD: The Contemplative Ascent to God", Jewish Spirituality II, ed. Arthur Green.


Green, Arthur. "Hasidism: Discovery and Retreat", in Peter Berger, ed., The Other Side of God.


Jacobs, Louis. Seeker of Unity.

Loewenthal, N. Communicating the Infinite.


Steinsaltz, Adin. The Long Shorter Way: Discourses on Chasidic Thought (Aronson, 1988). (The numbered discourses in this work are reflections and commentaries upon the Tanya, each discourse corresponding to the identically-numbered chapter of Tanya.)

Habad Hasidism and Contemporary Lubavitz


**Hasidism in the Modern World: Crisis and Response**

David Assaf, *Untold Tales of the Hasidim* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press), esp. ch. 7—The World of Rabbi Yitshak Nahum Twersky of Shpikov

**The Interwar Period**


**Religious Responses to the Holocaust in the Traditional Community**


**Postwar Hasidic Leadership and Reconstruction**


**Satmar and Hungarian Hasidism**

Dovid Meisels, *The Rebbe: The Extraordinary Life and Worldview of Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum The Satmar Rebbe*

David Weiss Halivni, *The Book & the Sword: A Life of Learning in the Shadow of Destruction*


Allan Nadler, “Piety and Politics: The Case of the Satmar Rebbe” *Judaism* 31.2 (Spring 1982): 135–152