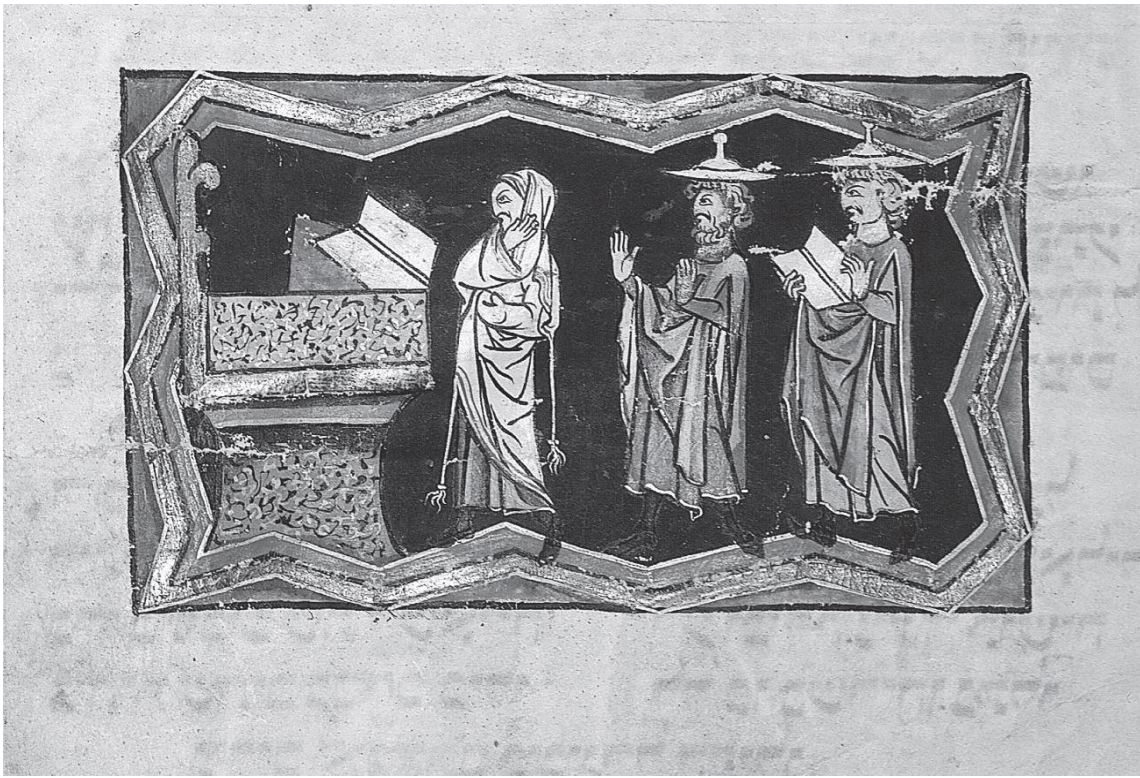


## Unit 8: Conclusions

# A Hasid in Medieval Garb Piety and Popular Religion in Ashkenaz and Beyond



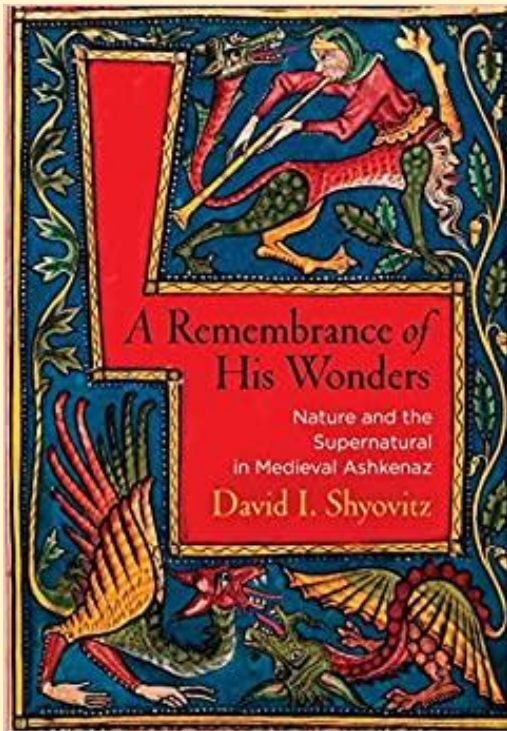
Dr. Rachel Furst  
Drisha, Spring 2023



From *Leipzig Mahzor*. Leipzig University Library. 1102, Kennicott 665, fol. 27r. Mahzor, Worms, ca. 1310.

## Pious practices and modes of behavior highlighted in *Sefer Hasidim*:

- **Prayer**
- **Penitence**
- **Dress**
- **Sexuality**
- **Charity**
- **Shame and Humiliation**



Texts like *Sefer Hasidim* depict the Hasidei Ashkenaz as an insular and idiosyncratic “sect,” whose members were despised and even persecuted by the broader Ashkenazic community. Generations of scholars accepted this self-image at face value and assumed that their “extreme patterns of behavior” and “pungent and acrimonious” rhetoric set the Pietists apart from their more moderate coreligionists, who considered them “saintly pests, or worse yet, reprehensible snobs.” But it is increasingly apparent that the contents of Pietistic writings represent not the communal fringes, but rather central spiritual and devotional trends in Ashkenazic culture as a whole.

Recent studies by Joseph Dan and Ivan Marcus have persuasively argued that there never existed socially or institutionally discrete Pietistic groups— the Pietists’ social marginality and communal distinctiveness was a literary conceit rather than a reflection of lived reality. Ephraim Kanarfogel, meanwhile, has shown that elements of supposedly “Pietistic thought” in fact pervaded the writings of contemporary Ashkenazic authors; even the Tosafists— traditionally conceived of as bitter rivals of the Hasidei Ashkenaz— knew of and often embraced the asceticism, mysticism, and magic typically associated with the German Pietists.

Thus, although circumscribed Pietistic communities were never present within Jewish society, characteristically Pietistic ideas were omnipresent. Such widespread influence might account for the traces of Pietistic doctrines that scholars have located within an array of Ashkenazic literary and artistic texts, and helps explain why Pietistic figures like Judah and his father, Samuel b. Judah he- Hasid, subsequently emerged as archetypal folk heroes in Ashkenazic legends and exempla.

**David Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders***

Immediately the pious woman got up and ran out of the room where they had killed them, and cried out. The abominable ones (*hameto'avim*) followed her and struck her on the head to the windpipe and on the shoulder, and from the shoulder to the waist, across the width of the back and her front, and the righteous woman fell dead. And I, the miserable, secured the door, and we cried out until help should come to us from on high. And I cried out over this pious woman, seeking revenge. And thus it happened. For after a week they caught the murderer who had killed her, and who had killed my two daughters and wounded myself and my son, and they killed him. I was left in want of everything and in great affliction and overwhelming suffering.

**Eleazar b. Judah of Worms (d. 1232) – *in memory of his wife Dulcia and two daughters, Bellette and Hannah, aged 13 and 6, murdered on 15 November 1196***

Who can find a woman of worth? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts in her, and he shall have no lack of gain. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool, and flax, and works willingly with her hands. She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar. She rises also while it is yet night, and gives food to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considers a field, and buys it: with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girds her loins with strength, and she makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is good: her candle does not go out by night. She lays her hands to the distaff, and her palms hold the spindle. She stretches out her palm to the poor; yea, she reaches forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She makes herself coverlets; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes garments, and sells them; and delivers girdles to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing; and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom; and on her tongue is a Tora of steadfast love. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her deeds praise her in the gates.

אשת־חיל מי ימצא ורחק מפנינים מכרה: בטח בה לב בעלה  
 ושלל לא יחסר: גמלתהו טוב ולא־רע כל ימי חייה: דרשה  
 צמר ופשתים ותעש בחפץ כפיה: היתה כאניות סוחר  
 מִמְרוֹחַק תביא לחמה: ותקם בפֶּעוֹד לילה ותתן טרף לביתה  
 וְחֶזֶק לנערתיָה: וממה שדה ותקחהו מפרי כפיה נטע פרס:  
 חגרה בעוז מתניה ותאמץ זרועותיה: טעמה כִּי־טוב סחרה  
 לא־יכבה בליל נרה: ידיה שלחה בפישור וכפיה תמכו פלך:  
 כפה פרשה לעני וידיה שלחה לאביון: לא־תירא לביתה  
 משלג כי כל־ביתה לבש שנים: מרבדים עשתה־לה שש  
 ואדגמן לבושה: נודע בשערים בעלה בשבתו עם זקני־ארץ:  
 סדין עשתה ותמכר וחגור נתנה לפנעני: עוזוהדר לבושה  
 ותשחק ליום אחרון: פיה פתחה בחכמה ותורת־חסד על־  
 לשונה: צופיה הילכות ביתה ולחם עצלות לא תאכל: קמו  
 בניה ויאשרוה בעלה ויהללה: רבות בנות עשו חיל ואת  
 עלית על־כלנה: שקד החן והבל היפי אשה יראת־יהוה היא  
 תתהלל: תנור־לה מפרי ידיה ויהללוה בשערים מעשיה:

כְּאִשְׁתֵּי הַחֲסִידָה סֶרַת הַדּוֹלְצָא

אִשָּׁת חֵיל מִי יִמְצָא

אִשָּׁת חֵיל עֲמֶרֶת בְּעֵלָהּ בַּת גְּדִיבִים  
אִשָּׁה יָרְאֵת־הַשֵּׁם הַמְהַלְלֵת בְּמַעֲשֵׂיהָ הַטּוֹבִים:  
בְּטַח בָּהּ לֵב בְּעֵלָהּ, הָאָכִילָתוּ הַלְבִּישְׁתוּ בְּכָבוֹד  
לִישָׁב עִם־זַקְנֵי אֶרֶץ מִוְרָה וּמַעֲשִׂים לְזָבֵד:  
גָּמְלָתָהּ טוֹב וְלֹא־רָע כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֹּתָהּ עָמָה  
עָשְׂתָה לּוֹ סְפָרִים מִעֲטָלָה וּשְׂמָה נְעִימָה:  
דָּרָשָׁה צֶמֶר לְבֹן לְצִיצֵת טוֹתָהּ בְּחַפֵּץ בְּפִיָּה  
וּמָמָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מִצְוֹת וַיְהִלְלוּהָ כָּל־צוֹפֵיהָ:

***What a rare find is a capable wife (31:10) – such a one was my saintly wife, Mistress Dulcia.***

*A capable wife (31:10) – the crown of her husband, the daughter of community benefactors. A woman who feared God, she was renowned for her good deeds.*

*He husband put his confidence in her (31:11) – she fed him and dressed him in honor to sit with the elders of the land (31:23) and involve himself in Torah study and good deeds.*

*She was good to him, never bad, all the days of (31:12) his life with her. She made him books from her labor; her names [signifies] “Pleasant.”*

*She looked for white wool for fringes; and set her hand to them with a will (31:13). She set her mind (31:16) to fulfill divine commandments, and all who observed her praised her.*

הִיְתָה קְאָגִיזוֹת סוֹחֵר לְהֶאֱכִיל בְּעֵלָה לְהַעֲסִיק בַּתּוֹרָה  
רְאוּהָ בְּגוֹת וַיֵּאֱשְׂרוּהָ כִּי טוֹב סָחֲרָה:  
וַתִּתֵּן טָרֶף לְבֵיתָהּ וְלַחֵם לְנָעָרִים  
הֵן כְּפִיָּה תִּמְכּוּ סֵלָה לְטוֹת חוֹטִים לְסָפְרִים:  
זְרִיזָה בַּעַל טוֹתָהּ לְתַפְלִין וְלַמְּגִלּוֹת וְלַסָּפְרִים זְיָדִים  
קָלָה כְּצִבִי לְבָשָׁל לְבַחֲזֵרִים לְעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן הַתַּלְמִידִים:  
תְּגַרָה בְּעוֹ סְתָנֶיהָ וְתִסְרָה כְּאַרְבָּעִים סָרִי תוֹרָה  
טְבַחָה טְבַחָה עָרְכָה שְׁלַחְנָה לְכָל־הַחֲבוּרָה:

*She looked for white wool for fringes; and set her hand to them with a will (31:13). She set her mind (31:16) to fulfill divine commandments, and all who observed her praised her.*

*She was like a merchant fleet [bringing her food from afar] (31:14) to feed her husband so that he might immerse himself in Torah. Her daughters saw her and declared her happy (31:29) for her merchandise was excellent (31:18).*

*She supplied provisions for her household (31:15) and bread to the boys.*

*How her hands worked the distaff (31:19) to spin thread for books. Vigorous in everything, she spun thread for phylacteries and [prepared] sinews [to bind together] scrolls and books; she was as swift as a deer to cook for the young men and to fulfill the needs of the students.*

חָגְרָה בְּעוֹ סִתְנִיָּה וְתַסְרָה בְּאַרְבָּעִים סִפְרֵי תוֹרָה  
סָבְחָה סָבְחָה עָרְכָה שְׁלַחָנָה לְכָל־הַחֲבוּרָה:  
טָעָמָה טוֹב קִשְׁטָה בָּלוֹת וְהִבְיָאתָן בְּכַבּוּדִים  
נָעִימָה סְרַחֲצַת מַתִּים וְתַסְרָה לָהֶם בְּנָדִים:  
יָדִיהָ תָּסְרוּ בְּנָדֵי תַלְמִידִים וּסְפָרִים קְרוּעִים  
הִגְיָה מְעַמְלָה מְחַלְקִים לַהֲגֵי שְׁעֵשׂוּעִים:  
בָּשָׂה פָרָשָׁה לְעֵנִי וְהִאֲכִילָהּ בְּנִיָּה וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ וּבַעֲלָהּ  
עֲשָׂתָה רְצוֹן בּוֹרְאָהּ בְּחֶמֶץ יוֹסֵם וְלֵילָהּ:

*She girded herself with strength* (31:17) and stitched together some forty Torah scrolls. She prepared meat for special feasts and set her table for all of the community.

*Judging wisely* (31:18) she adorned brides and brought them [to the wedding] in appropriate [garments]. “Pleasant” bathed the dead and sewed their shrouds.

*Her hands* (31:19) stitched the students’ garments and torn books. From her toil she often contributed to Torah scholars.

*She gave generously to the poor* (31:20) and fed her sons and daughters and her husband. She enthusiastically fulfilled the will of her Creator day and night.



לֹא יִכָּבֵה בַּלַּיְלָה נֵרָה עֲשָׂתָה פְּתִילוֹת  
לְמִקְדָּשֵׁי־מַעַם וּלְמִדְרָשִׁים וְאוֹמֶרֶת תְּהִלּוֹת:  
מְשׁוֹרְרֵת זְמִירוֹת וּתְפִלָּה וּמְדַבֶּרֶת תְּחִנוּנִים  
וַיְדִיָּה בְּכָל־יוֹם לְנִשְׁמַת כָּל־חַי וְכָל־מְאֱמִינִים:  
נוֹאֶמֶת פְּטוּם הַקְּטָרֶת וְעֲשָׂרֵת הַדְּבָרִים  
בְּכָל־הַמְּדִינּוֹת לְפָנֶיהָ נָשִׁים וּמְנַעִימוֹת זְמָרִים:  
סִדְרֵי תְּפִלָּה בְּבִקְרָוּ וּבְעָרֵב סוֹרְרֵת  
וּלְבֵית הַבְּנֵסֶת מְקַדְּמֵת וּמְאַחֶרֶת:

*Her lamp never went out at night (31:18)* – she prepared wicks for the synagogue and the study rooms and she said psalms.

She said hymns and prayer and recited supplications. Every day she extended her hands to say the prayers beginning “*Nishmat kol hai*” and “*Ve-khol ma’aminim.*”

She invoked “*Pitum ha-ketoret*” and the Ten Commandments. In all the cities she taught women, enabling their “Pleasant” intoning of songs.

She knew the order of morning and evening prayer; she came early to the synagogue and stayed late.

עֹמֶדֶת בְּכָל־יוֹם־כְּפוּר וּמְשׁוּרָרֶת וּמְתַקְנֶת הַגְּרוֹת  
הַשַּׁבָּתוֹת וַיְמִים מֵזָבִים מִכְּבֻדַּת לְעַמְקֵי הַתּוֹרוֹת:  
פִּיהָ פְּתֻחָה בְּחֻקָּמָה וְאִסּוּר וְהִתֵּר יוֹדַעַת  
אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת יִשְׁבֶּת הַרְשָׁת בְּעֵלָה שׁוֹמְעַת:  
צְנוּעָה מְכַל וְחֻקָּמָה וְנֶאֱמָת, בְּרוּךְ סוּדָה,  
בְּכָל־מִצְוֹת זְרִיזָה חֲסִידָה וְחַסוּדָה:  
קָנְתָה חֵלֶב לְלוּמְדִים וְהַשְׁפִּירָה מְלֻמְדִים מְטָרְחָה  
יְדוּעָה וּמְשַׁכְּלֵת וְעֹבְדַת בְּרָאָה בְּשִׂמְחָה:

She stood throughout the Day of Atonement and chanted; she prepared the candles. She honored the Sabbaths and festivals for those who devoted themselves to the study of Torah.

*Her mouth was full of wisdom* (31:26) – she knew what was forbidden and what was permitted. On the Sabbath she sat and listened to her husband’s preaching.

Outstanding in her modesty, she was wise and well-spoken. Whoever was close to her was blessed. She was eager, pious, and amiable in fulfilling all the commandments.

She purchased milk for the students and hired teachers from her exertions. Knowledgeable and wise, she served her Creator in joy.

רצו רגליה לבקר חולים ולעשות מצוות בזרעה  
מאכלת בניה ולחקתם ללמד ועובדת ה"ת ביראה:  
שמחה לעשות רצון בעלה ולא הכעיסהו מעולם  
נעימה מעשיה וזכר לה צור העולם:  
תצורר נפשה בצרור החיים להתעדין  
תנו לה מפרי יריה בגן עדן:

Her legs ran to visit the sick and to fulfill her Creator's commandments. She fed her sons and urged them to study, and she served the Holy One in reverence.

She was happy to do the will of her husband and never angered him. Her actions were "Pleasant." May the Eternal Rock remember her.

May her soul be enveloped in the wrappings of eternal life. *Extol her with the fruit of the hands* (31:31) in Paradise.